



ARTWORK: VINYLDOGG ARTWORK

NEW BEGINNINGS

OR: THE SUM OF ALL THE SHADOWS

For Thomas - thank you
For David - we survived

Prologue

The gold of the whisky, my oldest notebook, my laptop: this is how I sit at my desk, an alchemist of language who can create words from my silence, from the silence of others. I carry the secret of this text around with me. Again and again. For weeks – months – fragments have been rising to the surface. Words have formed thousands of times in the meantime.

I start again.

I saw L'Âme Immortelle live for the first time in Basel in 2025. It was a coincidence that the date fell on the night before my birthday and that the after-show party moved into it. The first thing I did that night was to dance backwards and almost bump into Thomas^[1] – let's just officially record that here and my apology too.

I'll start again.

The band has been with me for countless years. In 2004, I heard 'Gezeiten'^[2] for the first time and bought the album, whose cover still amazes me today. Anyone who has known me long enough knows that it is also an album that accompanied me into the future. Let that also be officially noted here, because the fact that I am writing these lines at all is thanks to the people behind this album, who strike so many chords with the lyrics of these songs. Still.^[3]

I'll start again.

Why is this text so difficult for me? My present self and my fear of my former self are intertwined within me. I know that when I write, I will embark on a journey that will not only remind me of the beguiling magic of the music I hear, but also, inevitably, of what came before, during and after. A deep darkness spreads inside me.

I start again.

Dance of the shadows

*Ich flehe jede Nacht aufs Neue
Um Vergebung, Absolution.*^[4]

The world around me has long since fallen into a deep sleep, but I sit with my legs bent on the sofa in my room. Inside me, it is as quiet as it is outside the window. ‘Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch'intrate,’^[5] I think, and yet I embark on a journey of the soul.

It is a journey where there is no first class and no lounge access. Like everyone else, I know that at some point I will have to face myself, especially those stages that I would all too gladly skip. Every night I replay my thoughts over and over again and seek forgiveness. The piece by L'Âme Immortelle accompanies me on this journey, and I suspect that I cannot count on spiritual absolution.

At the heart of the song is the lyrical narrator's plea for forgiveness. He wishes for absolution for the sins that define these people, but which he himself does not know. If one understands the principle of absolution in its literal sense, namely from its Latin origin *absolvere*, then someone is acquitted of a sin. The prerequisite for this is confession. Only a priest can grant absolution. A further condition is that the sinner must also show remorse, otherwise forgiveness is not possible.

A related principle can be found in the art of storytelling. Here, catharsis is understood as the purification of the soul, which is achieved through empathy with others, or more precisely with characters in a story. However, if a confession is filled with «totale[r] Gleichgültigkeit»^[6], the only conclusion is: *Aus meinem Erzählen kann kein/Neues Wissen herausgeholt werden*^[7]. Consequently, the play referred to does not end with redemption, but with punishment. Both songs are mirroring each other, and they are relatives of each other.

The desire for forgiveness requires memory – but who knows the sum of their shadows? The ego searches in the fog for guilt that bears no name. Perhaps guilty only in thought, marked by gestures that never happened. What we do not know weighs heavier than what we admit to ourselves, for what is hidden burns more quietly within, but more deeply. And so no one forgives themselves who does not know what for.

The lyrical narrator sits on *[s]einem Dornenthron*, which causes suffering. It is easy to see the crown of thorns with which the Romans mocked Jesus. The narrator of the piece is also trapped in his situation and questions his existence in an almost grotesque way: *Vergibst du mir für alles, was ich bin?* When I heard this verse for the first time, two different levels of interpretation opened up in my mind. Although the obvious interpretation – supported by other pieces on the album – places the relationship between two people at the epicentre of an earthquake, it is also possible to assume that it refers to two poles of a single person. For just as Harry Haller carries within him the emptiness of the average bourgeois, he also feels deep within himself the soul of the wolf, which ultimately carries him into the magical theatre of his being, where dissociation becomes reality.

The middle-class Harry longs for recognition and adapts himself. Only Hermione awakens his second, deeply rooted personality: *Warum wurde ich in diese Welt/Mit diesem Fluch gebor'n?* This question is not only asked by the protagonist of Hesse's novel, but is probably one that preoccupies every human being. Excess drives Harry into the chambers of madness, and he commits unspeakable acts. His remorse could be expressed as in the song:

*Vergibst du mir alle meine Sünden?
Vergibst du mir für alles, was ich bin?*

On the other hand, we are often willing to forgive others for many things, especially when we believe we recognise their sincerity and they tell us about a mistake or transgression they have made. Not every misstep can be forgiven equally, and we all have limits beyond which we could never forgive even those closest to us.

The question of whether the other person will forgive you is therefore directed at your own self as the opposite pole. So how can you forgive yourself when you are destroying yourself? While the eyes of others seem to be constantly focused on us, we may nevertheless be indifferent to their judgement. Jean-Paul Sartre expresses the opposite view in *Huis Clos*: 'L'enfer, ce sont les autres.'^[8] I, at least, call them: myself. The lyrical self asks for forgiveness for what it is and for its lostness. I ask for forgiveness – for what I am. Others may grant me this forgiveness. But I know that I will never grant it to myself. Compromises are foreign to me. They always have been.

I dare to enter the room of my former self. Immediately upon entering, I realise that the strange silence is not only coming from outside in the night, but that it exists within her... within me. Fragments of an existence that is no longer part of the present reach me. My face contorts in pain as my former self touches my arm. From my courage, new roses grow on the parchment of my skin. They have long since become a web of the past, and yet only they allow for the beauty of today's moments.

Vergibst du mir? Heile meine Wunden.

The wounds that are to be healed in this beguilingly hypnotic piece eventually turn into scars. It therefore seems ironic that the lyrical narrator asks for absolution. For healing never means that something is undone. Neither sin nor trauma. But the slightest word revives hope. And it is precisely this that guides us all.

Back then, I chose a supposedly easy path. The mirror of time reflects me, weaving catharsis and absolution into one – punishment and acquittal. I know that forgiveness is a concept that must remain foreign to me, because although I have rediscovered hope in music, in art, somewhere in the twilight of the in-between, this time must remain a part of myself.

Vergibst du mir?

Even if there is no hope of forgiveness for what I do to myself, what we all do to each other, there is still the possibility for me to remember all those things. It is this memory that gives us

access to the journey of the soul that can heal us. It is not a holiday trip, it is neither enchanting nor relaxing. But it is necessary. So we can only heal ourselves. We can only send ourselves on the journey. Perhaps we will not return. Perhaps we will no longer be the people we were when we set out on the journey.

It is a journey that we should not postpone.

Epilogue

*Ich hab' schon lange aufgehört zu träumen
Meine Hoffnung in der Nacht verlor'n*

While the others are asleep, I am still sitting on the sofa. I am sitting in my childhood and teenage bedroom. A place I haven't wanted to be in for some time – but in my memory, I have travelled here. While the me of today sits at a desk in a different time and a different room, the same notebook open, the me of yesterday sits on the sofa. It has stopped dreaming. Right now, my past self is listening to the song 'Masquerade'^[9] and feels a little better understood. Years later, in the aftermath, this thought will find its conclusion in the verses of 'Absolution':

*Ich flehe jeden Tag aufs Neue
Um ein Zeichen, einen Ton,
Der mir wieder Hoffnung gibt.*

I will not grant myself absolution; I am uncompromising in this regard. However, hope is not only at the bottom of Pandora's box, but also in the deepest darkness of my soul.

^[1] I am talking about Thomas Rainer. At least, so far I have avoided actual collisions with artists successfully. I won't tell you anything about collisions that have almost happened.

^[2] I liked the diversity of the album; the CD is one of the few that can still be found in my collection today. These pieces are so important to me personally that I am unable to write about them. It is a story that is no longer worth telling.

^[3] While I now listen to Thomas Rainer's other project Nachtmahr much more frequently, I still find refuge in the songs of the band LAI, which mean more to me than the songs of most other music projects. Having listened exclusively to L'Âme Immortelle for many years, I was more than astonished by some of the accusations levelled at Thomas, and I still am today after listening intensively to Nachtmahr's songs. The visuals are certainly debatable, but Metallspürhunde summarise this more succinctly than I can in the song 'Disharmonie'.

^[4] If not stated otherwise, all of the following quotes are taken from: L'Âme Immortelle: «Absolution». In: Momente (2012).

^[5] Dante Alighieri: *La Divina Commedia* (1321). This is probably the best known quote, and it can be found in the chapters Inferno. If you translate the sentence it means something like: «You, who are entering, leave all hope behind.»

^[6] Nachtmahr: «Katharsis». In: *Feuer frei!* (2008)

^[7] Ibid.

^[8] Hell are other people.

^[9] This is the eighth song of the album *Gezeiten*.

