Chapter One

The Stones of Vienna:
Hermine Cloeter and the Spatial Practice of History

Es gibt ein Bild von Klee, das Angelus Novus heißt. Ein Engel ist darauf
dargestellt...Er hat das Antlitz der Vergangenheit zugewendet. Wo eine Kette von
Begebenheit von uns erscheint, da sieht er eine einzige Katastrophe, die unablässig
Trümmer auf Trümmer haftet und sie ihm vor die Füsse schleudert. Er möchte wohl
verweilen, die Toten wecken und das Zerschlagene zusammenfügen. Aber ein Sturm weht
vom Paradies her, der sich in seinen Flügeln verfangen hat und so stark ist, daß er
Engel sie nicht mehr schließen kann. Dieser Sturm treibt ihn unaufhaltsam in die
Zukunft, der er den Rücken kehrt, während der Trümmerhaufen vor ihm zum Himmel
wächst. Das, was wir den Fortschritt nennen, ist dieser Sturm.

~Walter Benjamin, “Über den Begriff der Geschichte”~

Die Ruprechtskirche! In der Schule haben wir gelernt, daß sie die älteste Kirche
von Wien ist, und haben das sehr ehrfürchtig angehört. Wer uns aber hat sie jemals
aufgesucht, ihr die schuldige Respektvisite gemacht?...Vergessen und vernachlässigt
steht sie da, nicht anders als eine alte Mahne im Ausgeding. Nun sieht sie verwundert
und ängstlich zu, wie ein junges Jahrhundert im Begriff ist, neue Kulissen um sie herum
aufzustellen. Schutt und Ziegel liegen vor dem sterbenden Haus zu ihrer Linken
aufgetürmt.

~Hermine Cloeter, “Vom ältesten Wien”~

Like Benjamin’s angel, Hermine Cloeter spent a lifetime puzzling through the
rubble and remains that surrounded her as she wandered through the streets of Vienna.

Cloeter is best known, however, for conducting a forensic and cultural archaeological
investigation of the stones that marked the burial remains of Vienna’s most famous
composer. Within days after Mozart’s death, no one knew where he was buried, only that
it was in a common grave in Vienna’s St. Marx cemetery. The exact location of Mozart’s
remains would remain a mystery for almost two centuries, until Hermine Cloeter
ventured to “unearth” the truth about one of Vienna’s most beloved musicians. Using her

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powers of observation along with the still available accounts of the funeral proceedings and cemetery reports, she tracked down the exact location of Mozart’s grave, resulting in the subsequent unearthing of Mozart’s skeleton.\(^3\)

Mozart’s skull now lies in the Mozarteum in Salzburg, Mozart’s birthplace, available for viewing to curious tourists, Mozart aficionados, and scholars alike. The finding of the skull and skeleton is more than a tourist attraction; it provided the means for elucidating the mystery of the musician’s death. Mozart died from a blunt-force trauma to the head from a fall, most likely a result of a drunken stupor. Cloeter’s forensic investigation helped clarify a century-old mystery, rekindling interest in Mozart and his works of music.

But why was it Hermine Cloeter who was able to find Mozart when so many others had failed? Cloeter’s approach to finding the musician was different than most: she recognized the mystery of Mozart’s burial place to be a problem of space, rather than a problem of time. Where other searchers had used the timelines that explained where Mozart had been days or hours prior to his death and when the body was moved, Cloeter used a history of spatial practices, made up of a mixture of the city’s topography and the culture of the time. Like the expert in biological forensics who uses biological and mathematical clues to solve or elucidate a criminal event, Cloeter, as an urban forensics expert/urban cultural archaeologist, collected material clues in the urban landscape in order to illuminate and recreate an historical event.\(^4\) The materiality of the clues coupled with Cloeter’s sensitivity towards the inherent value of those clues, allowed her not only

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to find Mozart’s skeleton, but also to elucidate an urban space. Clues of spatial history accomplished what clues of temporal history could not: the mystery of Mozart’s burial place no longer plagues the St. Marx Friedhof.

History is ideally transparent, especially history illuminated by the clarity of time. According to Enlightenment-era philosophy, the application of time to history allows for a transparent and clear understanding of historical events. Because of the hegemony and power of time, it has become the main tool of historians. History books are filled with dates and other references to time, all used in the attempt to clarify what happened. Timelines are used throughout the disciplines to explain developments of theories, the movements of people, the rise and fall of cultures, or even the life of a single individual.

Despite the authority that time holds in the discipline of history, not all historians or writers analyzing the past use time to study events of the past—some use space instead. The use of space to investigate history is especially prevalent with those historians and writers who write about and interact with an urban topography. The space used by these writers is built space, as well as an inhabited and practiced “lived” space. Tangible artifacts, buildings, streets, houses, the ground, and the very materials used to construct spatial arrangements all constitute built space. The worn spots in stairs and walkways, legends, stories, and daily practices such as graffiti, short cuts and

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4 By forensics, I mean the use of material clues to elucidate, clear up, or prove the facts or existence of an event. By urban cultural archaeology, I mean the study of past human culture directly related to the urban setting using material remnants of that culture.
7 Ibid.
misappropriations constitute lived space. For theorists, such as Michel Foucault, Michel de Certeau, and Walter Benjamin, urban space is an incredibly powerful tool for understanding human history within the context of the city.

Whereas time provides a transparent overview of history, the spaces of a city tend to be opaque. Where time allows for a clear understanding of events, space can confuse this temporal-based understanding. This opacity comes from the human occupation of space and from the progress of time. As humans live in and create urban space, they endow the topography with stories and anecdotes, with an impression of human personality and with multitudes of meaning and importance. Because built space is endowed with these elements, rather than physically inscribed with meaning, the use of space to understand events of the past tends to be difficult. Clarifying history through urban space is additionally troublesome, because built space and its attached stories and memories are visibly forgotten and ignored as time advances. Despite the difficulties of working with and understanding urban space, some intellectuals specifically choose space as a tool for discernment and clarification of history. For these individuals, understanding history becomes an investigation of sensing, feeling, and divining human activity out of the mass of artifacts and used spaces, rather than an activity of merely seeing human evolution through time. Hermine Cloeter is one such urban forensic historian.

Unfortunately, contemporary literary scholars have ignored Cloeter’s writings, neglecting her contribution to literature. Margaret Friedrich has written a book on the

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9 See, for example, de Certeau’s “Walking in the City,” Benjamin’s “Passagenwerk,” or Foucault’s “Of Other Space: Heterotopias and Utopias.”
correspondences between Cloeter, her cousin, and the writer, Otto von Swiedenek, shying away from analyzing any of her many books and articles. A lecture given on June 6, 2000 at the University of Vienna discussed Cloeter's relationship to the Wiener Moderne. Other than these two examples, no scholarly work or discussion is available to or present in the scholarly community. The lack of scholarship about Cloeter's literary works would suggest that either scholars have not been aware of her works or scholars have not found merit in her works worth the attention of a larger audience: by ignoring her works, they have declared her writings to be arcane, anti-modern, and insubstantial. Her popularity during her long and prolific writing career of more than sixty years, her thirteen books and more than two hundred feuilleton articles, her Ebner-Eschenbach prize, and her honorary professor title, however, suggest that her writings have significant value—a value waiting to be discovered and discussed. This thesis is an effort to present an initial critical analysis of Hermine Cloeter's writings, an attempt to continue a dialogue about Cloeter in the scholarly community and, above all, an effort to show that Cloeter's works are of singular literary value.

Throughout her career as a journalist and writer, Cloeter wrote about the history and built space of Vienna. But it is not just space and not just history that Cloeter writes about, she uses the physical spaces of Vienna to expose and explore a tangible history of the Austrian capital. This explanation of Cloeter's works is not a mere matter of opinion, however. The journalist readily admits the reasoning behind her life's work. In an unpublished autobiography, Wie ich Schriftstellerin wurde, Cloeter closes her story with an explanation of why she wrote. Having returned from several trips to other European

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10 There are no scholarly articles written on Hermine Cloeter, other than articles written by the author of this thesis and the publications mentioned here.
countries in 1910, Cloeter desired to walk through her childhood city with a perspective enriched by her experiences abroad. In her stroll through Vienna’s Innere Stadt, she encounters the Dreilaufershaus and is shocked by what lies before her:


It is not the shock of seeing a building fall into disarray that agitates Cloeter and lays a foundation for her long career of writing, but rather Cloeter’s keen recognition of what this building is and means to Vienna. The Dreilaufershaus functions as a living, dynamic repository of Vienna’s spatial history—to lose the building, to let it “die,” would mean losing an essential part of Vienna and its past. Hermine Cloeter, as a master of urban forensics in Vienna, is not willing to allow such a loss.

Cloeter’s writings record and expose a tangible history, one based on her physical movement through the city, experiencing and exploring built elements of the urban landscape. Recognizing that pieces of the city’s spatial history are at risk of being lost, Hermine Cloeter, as a flaneuse, writes and records experiences of Vienna’s past through her own explorations of space, preventing the essence and cultural richness of the city

from being lost in the progression of time. To prove this hypothesis, I have broken down
my argument into four chapters. In Chapter One, I will use biographical and
autobiographical sources to look at the development of Cloeter’s use of urban forensics:
her approach to Viennese history and the city’s built environment. In Chapter Two, I will
tie Cloeter to the cultural figure of the flaneur by describing her methodology of reading
the urban topography and by showing her own position as a flaneuse with a unique
relationship to the city. The first two chapters lay the foundation for Chapters Three and
Four, in which I will show more specifically how Cloeter uses the urban landscape of
Vienna to redeem and reclaim its past. In Chapter Three, I will look at Cloeter’s essay
“Durch die engste Gasse von Wien” to illustrate her methods of urban hermeneutics.
Finally, in Chapter Four, I will analyze Cloeter’s interaction with individual built and
lived spaces and artifacts, showing that Cloeter reclaims Vienna’s spacial history by
merging the current topography of the city with the cultural richness of Vienna’s past.

Hermine Cloeter had a prolific writing career. Her first publication took place in
November 1902 with the appearance of an article titled “Chopin” and was followed three
months later, with the publication of a second article, “Das fremde Glück.” Both articles
were published in the Deutsche Zeitung under the pseudonym Justine Lot. After these
first two publications, Cloeter did not publish for five years, taking time to hone her
writing skills and gain courage to publish what she wrote under her own name.
Beginning in June 1907 with the publication of “Rosen,” her first feuilleton in Vienna’s
Neue Freie Presse, her real name accompanied each of her works. Over the next thirty-
one years, she continued to write feuilleton articles, producing at least 236 articles for the
Neue Freie Presse before the newspaper's publication was halted with the arrival of Hitler in Vienna in 1938. After 1938, Cloeter continued her scholarly work, writing feuilleton-like essays for a variety of journals and society publications. Many of her feuilletons were collected and republished as books; Zwischen Gestern und Heute: Wanderung durch Wien und den Wienerwald is just one example. Over ninety of her feuilletons were eventually published in book form.\textsuperscript{13}

Cloeter's feuilletons explored such things as the architecture of Vienna, cultural and historical figures of Austria and the Austrian capital, cultural iconography, the Austrian countryside, and even fairy tales. Many of her essays, especially those dealing with Vienna as a urban landscape, take the form of a walking dialogue describing what could be seen and explored by walking Viennese passageways. Her books, as collections of her feuilletons, explore similar topics. The aforementioned Zwischen Gestern und Heute: Wanderung durch Wien und den Wienerwald, Häuser und Menschen von Wien (1915), Geist und Geister aus dem alten Wien (1922), and Wiener Gedenkblätter (1966) explore the cultural heritage of Vienna and the beauty of the Viennese countryside. Two of her books, Donauromanitik (1923) and Beglücktes Wandern (1947), deal specifically with culture in the Weißenkirchen, Wachau, and Niederösterreich regions of Austria. The rest of her books consist of a collection of poetry (Die ferne Geige [1919]) that appeared as feuilletons, books on historical figures (Die Grabstätte W.A. Mozarts [1931], Johann Thomas Trattner [1952]), and a collection of Hugo Wittman's feuilletons (Hugo Wittmann Feuilletons [1925]), which Cloeter edited.


\textsuperscript{14} Friedrich 561-566.
The variety of Cloeter’s works and the themes contained within them are manifestations of her declared purpose in writing: reclaiming forgotten space through exploring and writing about it. Cloeter, however, did not accidentally or unintentionally happen upon this raison d’etre for writing literary compositions: it is a result of a variety of influences, both in her personal life and in her associations with other artists. In order to investigate more fully her modes of examining and exploring Vienna, I will first look at the personal influences that shaped Cloeter’s interests and purpose as a writer, including her childhood and natural personality. Second, I will discuss the more external influences that helped formulate Cloeter’s literary intentions, including her mentors and the feuilleton form.

Cloeter’s childhood experiences served to awaken her to the world of Vienna to her and to engender a keen perception of the urban landscape. Hermine Rose Justine Cloeter was born 31 January 1879 in Munich to Vienna-native Bertha Krause and Nürnberg-native Christoph Cloeter. Just after their only daughter turned one, the family moved to Vienna. Her father founded a varnish and hardware factory with the support of her maternal grandfather. Though not Viennese by birth, Cloeter’s affirms: “ich kam also nach Wien noch vor der Zeit bewußten Denkens.” Her earliest memories and formative years of development all took place in Vienna—it was her home city and remained so until she moved to Weißenkirchen in 1963, at the age of eighty-four.

In her childhood years, Vienna was an all-pervasive background for Cloeter. She attended church and her parents made sure that she was active in the many social

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14 Friedrich, Ideale und Wirklichkeit: 12.
activities available to young Viennese girls, including concerts, art exhibits, and outings to the parks and forests which surrounded the city. These activities provided a basis for her later enthrallment with and adventures into the rich heritage of Vienna. Watching everything that went on around her was a talent and habit Cloeter developed early and as she admits, “ich konnte studenlang nichts tun, im Gras liegen und den Blumen ins Angesicht schauen oder in Zimmer und Stube nur mir still die Dinge besehen, die mich umgaben.”\(^{17}\) This talent of observation melded well with her relationship with Vienna. In his radio biography of Cloeter, Joseph Handl recognized: “die Liebe zu Wien und allem Wienerischen hat schon von kindauf die persönlichen Wesenszüge Hermine Cloeters beeinflußt und geprägt.” He quotes Cloeter as saying: “die Atmosphäre von Wiens ererbter Kultur und Kunst [bot] jene Möglichkeiten, die [meiner] musischen Begabung zur Entfaltung dienten.”\(^{18}\) Vienna was not just a static location where Cloeter spent her childhood, but rather a dynamic mix of culture, education, and curiosities.

Cloeter’s childhood interests and activities were supplemented and reinforced with academic education. She attended private schools and as a teenager, she enrolled at the renowned “Lyzeum der Frida Liste.”\(^{19}\) Of her private education, Cloeter writes that it stood “auf hoher Stufe” and offered “der weiblichen Jugend die besten Bildungsmöglichkeiten.”\(^{20}\) It was in the last years of private schooling that Cloeter began studying subjects that interested her throughout her life and became an important subject of her feuilletons, history, music, and art history.\(^{21}\)

Cloeter's natural tendency towards observation, her knowledge of and kinship to the essence of Viennese space, and her discovery of subjects that intensely interested her created a sensitivity to and appreciation for certain parts of Vienna: those important to Vienna's history and culture. In walking through the city, Cloeter used her powers of observation to look at parts of the city often forgotten by others. Her knowledge of the city combined with her deep interest in Vienna's cultural heritage and her natural curiosity of unfamiliar space led to the production of articles that are often centered on the explanation of the historical significance of a certain building, house, or street in Vienna.

The skills Cloeter had developed through her childhood and education were further refined through her interaction with other writers, thinkers, and artists. Mentors helped Cloeter to direct her toward a deeper level of cultural appreciation and helped cultivate her writing skills.

One of Cloeter's most important mentors was the master Viennese artist William Unger. Cloeter describes Unger's influence with deep gratitude and appreciation for the hours she spent under his tutelage, noting:

Wie erquicklich der Kreis von Jugend, der sich allsonntäglich um den verehrten Meister zu versammeln liebte, aber auch anmutete, das Beste blieb doch stets, wenn man im ruhig bewegten Gespräch mit Vater Unger beisammen sitzen und sich eines Privatissimum erfreuen durfte. Sein reiches, vielseitiges Wissen, sein hoher, geläuterter Kunstgeschmack erschlossen einem da in ungezwungener, lebendiger, vom Augenblick und seinem Inhalt eingegebener Rede und Gegenrede tiefere Kenntnis vom
wahren, heiligen Wesen der Kunst, als pedantische Lehrhaftigkeit und
tote Buch gelehramkeit jemals vermitteln können.22

Unger’s society and his invitation of others like him into their circle helped refine
Cloeter’s knowledge, skills, and interest in history, literature, and the arts. This
refinement then functioned to make her more sensitive to the stories and histories that
explained not only the world at large, but especially Vienna.

As Cloeter entered adulthood and searched for an avenue through which to
explore her interests, the writer, Edmund Hellmer, played a significant role in Cloeter’s
scholarly development. Were it not for Hellmer, Cloeter may never have even
considered writing. Music was Hermine Cloeter’s first love. Could she have chosen any
profession, she would have been a singer. However, due to acute nearsightedness,
reading the small musical notes was almost impossible.23 Despite this hindrance, Cloeter,
her dream of becoming a singer still alive, continued with her singing lessons. When her
parents, disapproving her choice to continue singing because of the strain, withdrew their
support, she decided to continue her passion by relying on her language skills for
financial support by working as a translator.24 Asking the advice of longtime friend and
editor of Die Deutsche Zeitung, Edmund Hellmer, Cloeter was advised to avoid the
translating business, because of its many difficulties. Hellmer’s next words then changed
Cloeter’s career and life direction: “Schreiben Sie doch selber was!”25 Writing her own
texts was not something she had ever considered—she was shocked by such a suggestion:
“Ich war so verblüfft, wie wenn man mir etwa zugeschuldet hätte, ich sollte Seiltänzerin

22 Ibid. 3-4.
23 Alimann, Personal Interview.
25 Ibid.
werden, und sagte ganz erschrocken: ‘Ja, das muß man ja auch können!’ Worauf er kurz und bestimmt erwiderte: ‘Sie können es—ich weiß es.’"26 Despite her disbelief in her own abilities, Cloeter took his suggestion seriously and spent several weeks writing in a forest retreat. As mentioned, her first article, “Chopin”, was published in 1902, when Cloeter was twenty-three years old.

Hellmer sparked Cloeter’s interest in writing, but the feuilletonist Hugo Wittmann refined that interest. She met Wittmann while on a group trip to München. Cloeter was astounded that “ein Mann wie Hugo Wittmann es der Mühe wert fand, sich mit mir jungem Ding über alle möglichen Kunst- und Lebensfragen zu unterhalten.”27 Cloeter was all the more astonished by his attention and recognition, because he was one of the most well known Viennese feuilletonists of her time.28 Cloeter treasured this friendship and recognized how much it improved her writing skills:

Und welche Fülle von Stoff drängte doch zum Gespräch! Ich war glücklich mich mitteilen zu dürfen und auf Verständnis zu stoßen, glücklich, aus so freigebig gebotenem wissen schöpfen zu können, glücklich vor allem, in Zustimmung vielfach eine Bestätigung und Bekräftigung meiner Ansichten, ja meines Wesens zu erfahren.29

Her association with Wittmann helped reaffirm her endeavors in writing. Upon their return to Vienna, the master feuilletonist encouraged the young writer, helped to develop her writing skills, and introduced her work to the editor of the Neue Freie Presse.

26 Ibid.
27 Ibid. 9.
With the encouragement of Wittman, Cloeter spent five years (1908-1913) making “eindrucksvolle Reisen” to other European cultural centers, including Switzerland, Paris, Italy, London, the Netherlands, and Germany.\textsuperscript{30} Her visit to Paris was an exceptionally important moment in her development as a writer of articles about urban history. In Paris, Cloeter met Georges Cain, curator of the unique Musée Carnavalet. More than a mere museum documenting the history of Paris, Musée Carnavalet was a collection of strange items that gave insight into the forgotten moments of Parisian life and history. It was not so much Cain’s profession as a museum curator that had such a great impact on Cloeter, but what his profession allowed him to do. Inspired by the collection in the museum, Cain would stroll through Paris, looking for strange places and artifacts that provided connections to the lost world of Paris’s dark history.\textsuperscript{31} Cain wrote about his walks in a series of books, whose titles reveal their great influence on Cloeter’s own works: Pions de Paris, A travers Paris, Anciens théâtres de Paris, Promenades dans Paris, and Coins de Paris.\textsuperscript{32} Cloeter describes his writings as works of small, delightful conversions “worin er seine Leser kreuz und quer durch Paris führt, die Geschichte seiner Stadt aufgeblättert.”\textsuperscript{33} Cloeter’s experience with Cain and his museum helped her to develop a keen sensitivity to the historical weight of European cities, helping her to understand “wie beredt tote Dinge sein können.”\textsuperscript{34} Cain was the master of urban forensics in Paris, using the urban space of Paris to explore the material history of the French capital. Cloeter’s association with him helped to create a similar approach to the

\textsuperscript{30} Cloeter, Hermine Cloeter: Eigenes zu meinem Lebenslauf: 1.
\textsuperscript{31} Cloeter, Wie ich Schriftstellerin wurde: 15.
\textsuperscript{32} These titles roughly translate to The Stones of Paris, Crossing Paris, Ancient Temples of Paris, Walks through Paris, and Corners of Paris, respectively.
\textsuperscript{33} Cloeter, Wie ich Schriftstellerin wurde: 15.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
city of Vienna. Having been awakened to the essence and eloquence of urbanity’s “tote Dinge” and to the possibility of approaching the urban landscape via spatial arrangements, Cloeter returned to Vienna and sought to search out historically-laden places and artifacts in of her own city.

Besides Cain and the other historians and writers who mentored Cloeter, the actual form of the feuilleton fostered Cloeter’s fascination with Vienna’s artifacts and built landscape. Historically, the feuilleton constitutes an entire section of a European newspaper, dedicated to the cultural happenings of the city. As the newspaper, as a method of writing, developed over the last few centuries, the feuilleton has generally been reduced to one article of the paper. The content, however, has stayed the same. As scholar Günther Petersen describes, the feuilleton is “ein Kind des Journalismus; seine Ahnenreihe läßt sich bis auf die Zeit der aufklärerischen Popularphilosophie zurückführen.”

Through Peterson’s explanation, we see that the feuilleton is a type of journalism that allows the reader to reflect on and to explore popular philosophies/philosophical ideas of the present and past, including music, well-known writers and musicians, and building styles and design. Additionally, flaneurs—a unique type of urban writer to be discussed in Chapter Two—often chose this particular section of the newspaper as their place of publication (Franz Hessel is one such example).

Cloeter’s choice to write in this literary form allowed her the freedom to explore the city as she chose and encouraged a unique analysis of the metropolis’s cultural essence and heritage.

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Cloeter’s perspective of a city’s culture, space, and history combined with her unique writing style cemented Cloeter’s purpose in writing. Her first trip into Vienna’s city center upon returning from Paris, during which she wandered, intent to explore and write about her explorations, shows just how significant these varied influences were. Returning to Cloeter’s quote regarding her task in writing, we see that her associations with scholars and fellow writers, and her experiences engendered a love for what she considered to be a living past:


Through Cloeter’s adventure into the city, she realized that because of ignorance and/or forgetfulness on the part of the typical Viennese inhabitant, historically important space was dying and needed to be revived. The feuilleton form, whether a single entity or a collection, was the perfect forum for reclaiming Vienna’s spatial history and for showing that the space containing Vienna’s history was as much a part of the urban landscape as the current “built space” and present inhabitants.

Influenced by both personal and societal influences, Hermine Cloeter developed a purpose in writing that allowed her to experience urban history through urban space.
Sensitive to built space, Cloeter’s relationship with the city of Vienna, allowed her to record and portray these explorations of spatial history for others and to reclaim forgotten and dying parts of Vienna. Looking at the abandoned stones and bricks of Viennese urbanity, Cloeter shows herself to be a master of urban cultural archaeology and forensics, who like Walter Benjamin’s angel of history, tries to reassemble the pieces of the past while the furious winds of progress swirl about her.\footnote{Cloeter, \textit{Wie ich Schriftstellerin wurde}: 15.}

\footnote{Please see the first quote provided at the beginning of the chapter for a better feeling of Benjamin’s description of the angel of history.}