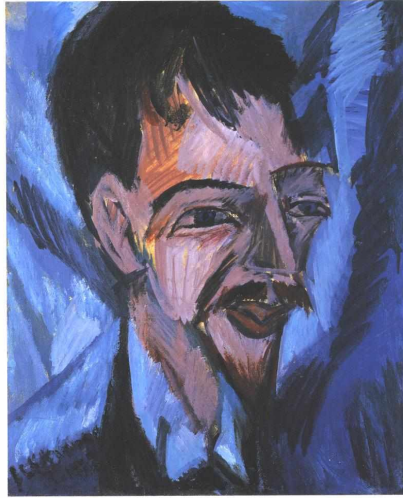


Alfred Doeblin



Beyond Alexanderplatz

ALFRED DÖBLIN

GERMAN MASQUERADE

WRITINGS ON POLITICS, LIFE, AND LITERATURE
IN CHAOTIC TIMES

PART 1 : PREWAR AND AFTERMATH

Edited and translated by
C.D. Godwin

www.beyondalexanderplatz.com

Alfred Döblin (10 August 1878 – 26 June 1957) is now recognised as one of the three great literary figures of early 20th century Germany (alongside Thomas Mann and Bert Brecht). His works encompass epic fictions, novels, short stories, plays, theatre reviews, political essays and journalism, natural philosophy, the theory and practice of literary creation, and autobiographical excursions. His many-sided, controversial, even contradictory ideas made him a lightning-rod for the philosophical and political confusions that permeated 20th century Europe.

In the half century after his death, virtually all Döblin's vast output has gradually been published in modern editions, often with useful editorial commentary. But in the Anglosphere he remains known, if at all, only for *Berlin Alexanderplatz*.

Döblin's non-fiction writings, of which this volume offers a small selection, provide indispensable glimpses into his creative process, mind and character as he grapples with catastrophes, confusions and controversies in his own life and in the wider world of the chaotic 20th century.

C. D. Godwin has translated six and a quarter of Döblin's great epic novels, so that all nine epics are now available in English (albeit some are out of print, and two have not yet been formally published as books). He has also translated numerous pieces of Döblin's wide-ranging non-fiction, a sample of which is included in this volume.

His website www.beyondalexanderplatz.com offers translations and commentary on Döblin and other neglected contemporaries.

The podcast [The Epic Worlds of Alfred Döblin](#) presents readers of English for the first time with fascinating details about Döblin's life and works.

Selection and translations © C. D. Godwin 2025.

The excerpt from Döblin's Introduction to his selection *The Living Thoughts of Confucius* was translated by Doris A Infield, © Cassell & Co 1942.

'Prometheus and the Primitive' was published on *The Brooklyn Rail's* InTranslation website in September 2014.

'Cannibals' was published in *The Brooklyn Rail's* print edition in March 2019.

DÖBLIN'S WORKS IN ENGLISH

Translated by C D Godwin unless otherwise noted

The Epics:

The Three Leaps of Wang Lun, 1991/2015 NY Review Books

Wallenstein, available at <https://beyondalexanderplatz.com>

Mountains Oceans Giants, 2021 Galileo.

Manas, 2021 Galileo

Berlin Alexanderplatz, tr. Michael Hofmann 2018 NY Review Books/Penguin

The Babylonian Exile, available at <https://beyondalexanderplatz.com>

The Land without Death (The Amazonas Trilogy), 2022 Galileo

November 1918 – A German Revolution:

Vol 1 *Citizens & Soldiers*, 2024 Galileo.

Vols 2 / 3: *A People Betrayed/The Troops Return*, and Vol. 4 *Karl & Rosa*, tr. John E Woods. (with substantial cuts), 1983 Fromm International

Tales of a Long Night, tr. R & & Kimber, 1984 Fromm International

Adventurous Reader's Guide to the Epic Worlds of Alfred Döblin, Galileo 2024.

Other Fiction:

Men without Mercy, tr. T & P Blewitt, 1937 Gollancz. A new translation by C D Godwin is at <https://beyondalexanderplatz.com>.

Bright Magic: stories, tr. Damion Searls, 2016 NY Review Books

Wadzek's Fight against the Steam Turbine, tr. Anne Thompson. Self published 2020

Non-fiction:

Journey to Poland, tr. Joachim Neugroschel. 1991 Paragon House

Destiny's Journey, tr. Edna McCown. 1992 Paragon House

CONTENTS

Introduction	iii
Key dates in Döblin's life and career	vi
Sources	viii

Part 1 PRE-WAR AND AFTERMATH

Fabulations (1905)	2
Quality and Causality (1906)	5
Widow Steinheil (1908)	6
Theatre of the Little People (1909)	9
Nineveh on the Spree (1910)	10
Cosy Family Scene (1912)	11
Futuristic Word-technique: Open letter to F T Marinetti (1913)	12
To Novelists and their Critics (1913)	15
Remarks on the Novel (1917)	17
Letter to Herwarth Walden (1915)	19
Beyond God! (1917) [excerpt]	20
Revolutionary Days in Alsace (1919)	26

Part 2 POLITICS AND SOCIETY

Cannibals (1919) by Linke Poot	34
The Bear, Reluctant (1919) by Linke Poot	41
Dionysos (1919) by Linke Poot [excerpt]	43
Revue (1920) by Linke Poot [excerpt]	44
The German Masquerade (1920) by Linke Poot	45
<i>Postscript (1): The Kapp Putsch (1921)</i>	51
<i>Postscript (2): from 'General Strike in Berlin' (1922)</i>	52
The Thirty Years War (1921)	52
<i>Postscript: Origin and meaning of Wallenstein (1930)</i>	60
New Youth (1922) by 'Linke Poot' [excerpt]	61
Berlin Day of Mourning (1923) by 'Linke Poot' [excerpt]	63
Epilogue to <i>Two Friends and a Poisoning</i> [excerpt]	63
Catastrophe on a Left Turn (1930)	65
Prometheus and the Primitive (1938)	69
Confucius (1940)	80
The German Utopia of 1933 (1946) [excerpt]	81

Part 3 LIFE

Doctor and Writer (1927)	88
A Dentist and his Victim (1927)	91
<i>Postscript: Letters that don't reach me</i>	94
The Doctor is In (1928)	95

Two Souls in a Single Breast (1928)	97
A First Look Back (1928)	99
Alfred Döblin speaks about his life (1930)	139
All Kinds of People (1933)	140
A Year in Hollywood (1941)	143
<i>Postscript: 'Embarrassing Incident' by B. Brecht</i>	157
Departure and Return (1946)	157
Writing means sitting in judgement on oneself (1949)	171
 Part 4 LITERATURE	
The Epicist, his Material, and the Critics (1921)	166
The Experience of Two Forces (1922)	171
Remarks on <i>Mountains Oceans Giants</i> (1924)	174
<i>Postscript: Postcard to Ephraim Frisch</i> (1922)	180
'Writing' and 'Literature' (1928)	180
Construction of the Epic Work (1928)	185
Joyce's <i>Ulysses</i> (1928)	200
My book <i>Berlin Alexanderplatz</i> (1932)	202
<i>Postscript (1) Afterword to the new edition</i> (1955)	204
<i>Postscript (2) Günter Anders meets Alfred Döblin</i> (1931)	205
The Historical Novel and Us (1936)	206
 CONCLUSION	
Epilogue (1948)	220

INTRODUCTION

Over six decades of a writing life, Alfred Döblin (1878-1957) produced such quantities of output covering such varied genres and themes that even now, after half a century of vigorous scholarly work, no comprehensive overview has yet emerged and indeed may never prove feasible. Readers who become hooked by Döblin find, as they explore, constant surprises that invite ongoing revaluations. But those who do not comfortably read German have only a tiny sample of his works to go on.

In the English-speaking world Döblin is known, if at all, for only one work: his big-city novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz*. The few other major fictions already published in English have so far made little impact: some have been out of print for decades; more recent titles have so far been little noticed. Because Döblin is unfamiliar to Anglophone editors, his books are seldom reviewed, so bookshops seldom stock them, and so, despite his status in Germany as one of the country's three most important writers of the first half of the 20th century (alongside Thomas Mann and Bert Brecht), *because Döblin is unknown he shall remain unknown*.

This selection from Döblin's wide-ranging non-fiction aims to introduce Anglophone readers to a voice that represents both an acute individual sensibility, and a kind of filter into which flowed many of the currents of 20th century European culture, with all their confusions and contradictions. The selection focuses on three broad areas: politics, life, and literature. (Döblin's philosophy of nature and his views on religion are also touched on.)

While still at school, Döblin read avidly in the philosophical and cultural undercurrents of the day (Kleist, Hölderlin, Spinoza, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Dostoevsky) – a habit which endeared him not at all to the Prussian functionaries who staffed and inspected the school (see “A first look back”) – but as a young adult his principal interest was Medicine. Qualifying as a neurologist in 1905, he published frequently in professional journals while “withdrawing from the struggle for so-called existence” into junior positions at mental asylums and hospital emergency rooms. But he also wrote novels, stories and an avant-garde play, cultivated contacts with leading avant-garde writers and artists such as Else Lasker-Schüler and Herwarth Walden, and helped found the influential Modernist journal *Der Sturm*.

In 1912, when Döblin was in his mid-30s, a damburst of creative energy raised writing to at least an equal partner in his two professions. In that year he married and started a family, set up his own medical practice, and began his first epic novel, *The Three Leaps of Wang Lun*, which not only depicted an exotic civilisation entirely on its own terms as if Europe never existed, but did so in a language of great originality and power. He completed it just before the First World War broke out; published in 1916 it was awarded the Fontane Prize.

The War and its aftermath, for Döblin as for so many of his generation, was a life-changing experience. One German critic sees all of Döblin's writings from 1933 on as an extended process of “literary grieving” [Kiesel, 1986]. I would go further: all he wrote from around 1917-18 onwards stemmed from deep grief at the mess humanity had landed in with its Promethean worship of war, technology, money and power.

In late 1914 Döblin volunteered his medical expertise (meriting an officer's salary) rather than wait to be called up (which would mean a private soldier's daily pay). He spent the war years in Alsace (since 1871 a quasi-colony of the Reich), first at Saargemund, within earshot of the big guns of Verdun, then at Haguenau. He came into conflict with superior officers over poor nutrition of the patients in his care. On sick leave with a stomach complaint, he was able to spend time in the libraries of Strasbourg

and Heidelberg, absorbing materials about the Thirty Years War, employed to great effect in his next huge epic novel *Wallenstein*. He witnessed the tumult in Alsace following the collapse of German military and civil authority on 10 November 1918 (see “Revolutionary Days in Alsace”) and revisited it twenty years later, fictionalised with many interweaved individual actions and reactions, in the first volume of his four-part novel *November 1918: a German Revolution*. (The English translation in the 1980s omitted the first volume; it is now available as *Citizens & Soldiers*, Galileo 1924). His disgust at the “incapacity” of Leftists who could orate endlessly but were helpless when faced with a need for action is clear in “Cannibals”.

Back in working class eastern Berlin, Doctor Döblin pursued multiple careers as cultural critic, theatre critic, playwright, essayist, radio broadcaster, and author of several more “modern epics”. In 1928 he was elected (against opposition from conservative members) to the new Section for Literature of the Prussian Academy of Arts, a platform which enabled him to press even more vigorously to loosen the hand of a conservative establishment – critics, professors, elitist writers – stuck in a moribund 19th century mindset that ignored the enormous changes wrought by technology, industry, urbanisation and new communications media. (See e.g. “The Construction of the Epic Work”).

In 1929-30 the international success of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* for the first time brought a substantial income from writing.¹ At his wife’s insistence the family moved to the swankier West End of Berlin, which ended Döblin’s years as an insurance-based medical practitioner. (When, out of frustration, he tried to re-register with the insurance bureau, he was told he would have to be classed as a “newly qualified doctor”).

Döblin’s flight into exile in February 1933, a day after the Reichstag fire, at first seemed a relief from the hopeless situation of the later Weimar years, a mood reflected in his burlesque novel *Babylonische Wandlung (The Babylonian Exile)*, written largely in Zurich.² Moving to Paris (cheaper, but depriving him of the daily German language that so nourished his writings), Döblin, by now stripped of German nationality, was granted French citizenship on condition that two of his sons perform military service. (One, Wolfgang, a mathematician of genius, would be killed in the first weeks of the 1940 German invasion.) Despite the loss of his medical career – he was not qualified to practice in France, and lacked adequate French language skills – and his income from all sources in the Nazi Reich, Döblin collaborated on exile periodicals, and continued to write fiction (the Berlin family novel translated as *Men without Mercy*; the South American trilogy *Land without Death*; the first parts of *November 1918*). Two notable essays of the late 1930s are included here: “Prometheus and the Primitive”, a perceptive take on western civilisation; and “The Historical Novel and Us”.

The German invasion of May 1940 forced a new flight into exile. After months of nightmarish adventures Döblin, his wife and youngest son managed to reach New York (where eldest son Peter was already working), and travelled on to Los Angeles, where MGM provided him, along with a few other exiles, a one-year contract as a writer (see “A year in Hollywood”). Trying but failing to secure publishers for English translations of his books, his MGM contract not renewed, Döblin for the first time in his life had to fall back on unemployment benefit and contributions from relief agencies, friends and relatives. During this period he and his wife converted to Roman Catholicism, a matter he regarded as purely private, but which upset close friends (see e.g. Brecht’s poem “Embarrassing incident”).

¹ To put it in perspective: sales of *Alexanderplatz* in Germany amounted to some 40,000 copies. When Thomas Mann was awarded the 1929 Nobel Prize, his *Buddenbrooks* was reissued in an edition of 700,000 copies.

² My translation is available at www.beyondalexanderplatz.com.

Returning to France in late 1945, the Döblins were grieved to learn of Wolfgang's death, but found their other missing son Claude alive and well – he had lain low in Marseilles, but fled to Switzerland as dangers grew. Alfred was appointed to the French Occupation Authority, and spent three years vetting publications and energetically promoting cultural renewal for a demoralised and largely unreceptive population. His final decade, marked by financial straits and worsening health, brought increasing recognition and honours.

He died in June 1957; his wife Erna committed suicide in September; both were buried beside Wolfgang in the little Alsatian village of Housseras. Alfred insisted that they could not be buried in Germany, because “they will desecrate our graves”.

In the 1960s serious efforts began to bring out new editions of Döblin's works, including compilations of his scattered contributions to journals and newspapers. A dedicated archive was set up to house voluminous papers (including a trunkful found by chance in a Zurich warehouse). The 24-volume (incomplete) Collected Works published by Fischer Klassik over the past decade provide a firm foundation for ongoing scholarly investigations and translations. As his works enter the public domain in 2027, opportunities arise for innovative treatments to bring Döblin to the attention of a wider public.

I hope this first selection of Döblin's non-fiction to be published in English will stimulate wider interest in a fascinating but under-appreciated master of 20th century German writing.

*C. D. Godwin
Stroud, U.K.
New Year 2025*

Key Dates in Döblin's Life

1878	AD born 10 Aug to Max and Sophie née Freudenheim.
1888	Max absconds to America with a young employee, throwing the family into poverty. Sophie takes the five children to Berlin.
1900	AD begins Medical studies in Berlin; attends courses in Philosophy, Literary History. Meets Herwarth Walden and many of Berlin's musical, artistic and literary avant garde.
1904	AD transfers to Freiburg to complete his medical degree, with a thesis on "Amnestic Disorders in Korsakov Psychosis".
1905	AD's absurdist play <i>Lydia and Mäxchen</i> is performed in Berlin. He has so far written two novels and several short stories, not yet published.
1906-10	AD works at mental hospitals. Affair with young nurse Friede Kunke brings a son, Bodo.
1909	AD meets Erna Reiss, his future wife. She is a pioneer female medical student.
1910	Modernist magazine <i>Der Sturm</i> is launched. AD will be a major contributor until 1915.
1911	AD opens his first medical practice. He sends his first volume of short stories to Martin Buber as publisher's reader.
1912	<i>Jan</i> : AD and Erna marry. <i>April-May</i> : Futurist Exhibition. <i>Oct</i> : son Peter is born, baptised.
1913	AD finishes his novel <i>Wang Lun</i> . Family moves to Berlin East.
1914	<i>Wang Lun</i> accepted by S Fischer. <i>Aug-Dec</i> : AD writes a novel: <i>Wadzek's Fight against the Steam Turbine</i> . <i>Dec</i> : AD volunteers for army, sent to Saargemund.
1915	<i>Mar</i> : Son Wolfgang born in Berlin. <i>Jun</i> : Erna brings children to Saargemund. AD compiles second volume of short stories.
1916	<i>Wang Lun</i> published, awarded Fontane Prize. AD is sought after as journal contributor.
1917	March events in Russia lead AD to reconsider political views. <i>May</i> : Son Klaus born in Saargemund. <i>Aug</i> : AD transferred to Hagenau after conflict with superiors.
1918	<i>Jan</i> : Friede Kunke dies of TB, Bodo cared for by her mother. (AD would keep in touch all his life.) <i>Nov</i> : AD sees war's end and revolution in Alsace.
1919	AD resumes medical practice. <i>Mar</i> : sister Meta killed by shrapnel during brutal suppression of worker uprising. <i>Jun</i> : AD uses byline 'Linke Poot' for critical essays.
1920	<i>Apr</i> : Mother Sophie dies, buried next to Meta. <i>Oct</i> : Epic novel <i>Wallenstein</i> published.
1921	<i>Apr</i> : Max dies. <i>Autumn</i> : AD begins writing <i>Mountains Oceans Giants</i> . <i>Nov</i> : Begins 3-year stint as Berlin theatre critic for <i>Prager Tageblatt</i> .
1922	<i>Feb</i> : AD meets Yolla Niclas, who will become his lover and muse. AD goes into retreat to complete <i>Mountains Oceans Giants</i> .
1923	<i>Apr</i> : AD's play <i>Die Nonnen von Kemnade</i> premiers in Leipzig. <i>Nov</i> : Anti-Jewish agitation leads AD to engage with Jewish problems.
1924	<i>Jan</i> : AD chairs German Writers' Defence Union. <i>Mountains</i> is published. AD's criminological study of a murder is published. <i>Sep-Nov</i> : AD's travels in Poland raise awareness of a real "Jewish people". Religious vision in Cracow.
1925	<i>Nov</i> : AD's first radio broadcast.
1926	<i>Jan</i> : premier of AD's anti-war play <i>Lusitania</i> disrupted by Nazis. <i>July</i> : Begins writing verse epic <i>Manas</i> . <i>Dec</i> : Son Stefan born in Berlin.

- 1927 *May: Manas* published.
- 1928 *Jan:* AD elected to Literature Section of Prussian Academy of Arts. *Aug:* 50th birthday celebrated in print and on radio. *Dec:* major lecture on “Construction of the Epic Work”.
- 1929 *Oct: Berlin Alexanderplatz* published. (Th. Mann is awarded Nobel Prize.) *Dec:* AD delivers memorial oration for Arno Holz.
- 1930 *Nov:* AD’s play *Marriage* is shut down by police as “Communist propaganda”; many writers protest, inc. Th. Mann.
- 1931 *Jan:* Family move to Berlin West; AD gives up his medical practice. *Oct:* AD elected to 3-year term on Senate of the Academy.
- 1932 AD begins writing picaresque epic *Babylonian Exile*.
- 1933 *Feb:* AD flees to Zurich. *Sep:* moves to Paris as sons can’t work in Switzerland. *Nov:* friend brings AD’s furniture and library to Paris.
- 1934 AD studies French, Yiddish, intensifies Jewish émigré links. *Apr:* *Babylonian Exile* published in Amsterdam. *Jul:* AD begins a novel: *Men without Mercy*. Several translations of his epics appear.
- 1935 Peter emigrates to USA. AD begins S American epic *Land without Death* (= *Amazonas*).
- 1936 AD, Erna and 3 sons become naturalised French citizens. Wolfgang and Klaus are liable for military service.
- 1937 AD befriends French Germanist R. Minder. Begins to write *November 1918*.
- 1938 *Mar:* with Anschluss, all AD’s works in Austria are seized. Wolfgang (a mathematician of note) presents doctoral thesis at Sorbonne. *May:* AD trip in Alsace with R. Minder, to refresh memory for *November 1918*. *Sep:* belated 60th birthday in Paris.
- 1939 *Mar:* AD injured in traffic accident. *May:* In New York for PEN congress; reception at White House. *Oct:* AD works on counter-propaganda in French Information Ministry. Part 1 of *November 1918* published; parts 2/3 in progress.
- 1940 *May:* Germans invade. Wolfgang is killed; parents find out in 1945. Erna and Stefan flee south. *Jun:* Ministry evacuates, AD hunts for wife and son. *July:* AD and Erna reunited; frantic weeks to secure visas, tickets. *Sep:* voyage Lisbon-New York. *Oct:* On to Los Angeles, 1-year MGM contract.
- 1941 AD’s selection of sayings of Confucius is published in New York. His account of escape from France fails to find a publisher. *Oct:* AD unemployed; supported by dole, relatives and charities. *Nov:* AD, Erna and Stefan become Catholic.
- 1942 Work on last part of *November 1918* hampered by lack of materials. AD and Erna have serious health problems.
- 1943 AD’s 65th birthday celebrated with 180 exile guests. AD lets slip about his conversion.
- 1944 An episode from *November 1918* is published in New York (in German).
- 1945 AD in exile has been unable to secure English translations of his works. *May:* asks about work in France. *Aug:* begins *Hamlet (Tales of a Long Night)*, his last epic novel. *Aug:* offered post in French Occupation Authority. *Oct:* AD and Erna return to Europe. *Nov:* AD to Baden, in French uniform.
- 1946 *Oct:* first issue of AD’s new journal *Das goldene Tor*.
- 1947 *July:* First visit back to Berlin. *Oct:* New edition of *Land without Death*.

1948	AD retires, continues to edit <i>Das goldene Tor</i> .
1949	AD and other exiles form Mainz Academy. His only explicitly Christian fiction <i>The Pilgrim Aetheria</i> fails to find a publisher.
1951/52	Honorarium from French state, and compensation from Berlin, fund a small house in Paris. <i>Sep</i> : AD has heart attack.
1953	<i>May</i> : AD declines invitation to East Berlin.
1954	AD's health worsens; <i>Mar-Sep</i> : treatment in Freiburg. <i>Oct</i> : Mainz Academy awards AD 10,000DM literature prize.
1955-7	AD in very poor health, dies 26 June 1957. Erna commits suicide 15 Sept. Both are buried alongside Wolfgang in Vosges village churchyard.

SOURCES

AzL	<i>Aufsätze zur Literatur</i> (Essays on literature). Ed. W Muschg. Walter 1963.
DBr	Döblin <i>Briefe</i> (Letters). Ed. H Graber. Walter 1970.
DMB	<i>Deutsche Maskenball</i> (German Masquerade). Ed. H Graber. Walter 1972.
EinK	<i>Ein Kerl muss eine Meinung haben</i> (A chap must have an opinion. Reports and critiques 1921-24). Ed M Beyer. Henschel 1974.
FGif	<i>Die beiden Freundinnen und ihr Giftmord</i> (Two girlfriends and a poisoning). Fischer 2013.
GedS	<i>Gedächtnisstörungen bei der Korsakoffschen Psychose</i> (Amnestic Disorders...). Tropen 2006.
IN	<i>Das Ich über der Natur</i> (Ego over Nature). Fischer 1928.
KS-1	<i>Kleine Schriften 1</i> (Shorter Pieces vol 1). Ed. A W Riley. Walter 1985.
KS-2	<i>Kleine Schriften 2</i> (Shorter Pieces vol 2). Ed. A W Riley. Walter 1990.
RiP	<i>Reise in Poland</i> (Polish Journey). Ed. H Graber. Walter 1968.
SAPL	<i>Schriften zu Aesthetik, Poetik und Literatur</i> (Writings on aesthetics, poetics and literature). Ed. E Kleinschmidt. Fischer 2013.
SchR	<i>Schicksalsreise</i> (Destiny's Journey). Walter 1980.
SJF	<u><i>Schriften zu jüdischen Fragen</i></u> (Writings on Jewish questions). Ed. H O Horch. Fischer 2015.
SLW	<i>Schriften zu Leben und Werk / Zwei Seelen in einer Brust</i> (Writings on life and work / Two souls in a single breast). Ed. E Kleinschmidt. Walter 1986.
SPG	<i>Schriften zu Politik und Gesellschaft</i> (Writings on politics and society). Ed. H Graber. Walter 1972.
UD	<i>Unser Dasein</i> (Our existence). Ed. W Muschg. Walter 1964.

Part One

PRE-WAR AND AFTERMATH

Döblin's writings in the first decade of the new century reveal a wide range of interests: life in the big city, the fabulating mind, the criminal mind, the cinema and its audiences.

From 1912 he begins to show his very individual critical stance towards Modernist phenomena in art and literature, which will remain his hallmark over the next decades.

Then came the War, which caused him enduring grief. Its chaotic end triggered robust engagement with political events and mentalities.

FABULATIONS

from Döblin's 1905 doctoral thesis [*GedS* 50-77] (excerpts)

Döblin was a rare specimen: a writer of fictions who could theorise his own creative processes. This interaction with a brain-damaged alcoholic patient prefigures later writings on his own mind-state as a new imaginative fiction takes shape.

Anamnesia

Patient E.F.G., farmer, 54, Prot., no family history of anamnesia. Very good physical and mental disposition, married 1875, 4 children, happy marriage. Well regarded in the village as orphan warden. Gradually worsening alcoholism. Hallucinations starting 4 years ago. Children report "delirium" 2 years ago, ascites and oedema since last year, improved by hospital stay. Said to be "not quite right" since the delirium. Mental condition varies according to alcohol intake. After much drinking expresses notions of jealousy, which when comparatively sober he admits are baseless. Under the effects of abstinence, in July 1904 sudden onset of confusion, loss of orientation, motor agitation, restlessness, insomnia, raised temperature. Admitted to clinic on 18 July. [...]

First exploration

24 November 1904: Does not recognise the investigator, asks courteously to whom he owes the pleasure, very happy to meet. Gestures to the orderly to bring a chair and scolds him for his inattention. When the investigator asserts that he knows the patient, and calls him by name to prove it, patient ponders a long while, then addresses the investigator as an acquaintance with whom he sat in a tavern in Hasel two or three years ago. It was a fleeting acquaintance, he knows nothing further of it.

He claims to be now in Hasel, the year is 1856, autumn, and he himself was born in 1856. He was in the war in 1870 (true), names the correct regiment. Married directly after the war, in 1856. When alerted to the contradiction, he declares with a laugh that it can't be true, the investigator should check again in his papers. He is adequately oriented to geographical bearings. But the reigning emperor is Frederick V; he knows him personally, saw him in the war. He knows about religions. Luther founded the Protestant faith, he saw Luther around 20 years ago in Freiburg. Patient did not speak with him, for as a simple farmer he could not introduce himself to Luther. Luther was a small strong man with a firm voice, they were crowding around him.

He handles the basic times-table accurately but not quickly; he always repeats the question in a loud voice. He is unable to solve bigger problems. E.g. 6×13 . Patient gives $6 \times 10 = 60$, then $6 \times 3 = 18$, and then says: "Makes 18." When reminded of the previous calculation, he starts again, then forgets the first number and asks for paper.

Asked again where he is now he replies: "In a tavern in Todtmoosau." Says that investigator is a notary with whom he is discussing all kinds of serious matters. He started out at 10 a.m. from Hasel to Todtmoosau. And now it is 12 noon. "But didn't you have lunch?" Yes, right! At home, now it's 5 in the afternoon and he'll have a coffee.

Patient follows the investigator's questions and objections attentively, undisturbed by interjections from other patients, the coming and going of orderlies, coffee trolley, lighting up. He promptly grasps what he is being asked, immediately and without effort understands the contradictions pointed out to him. When the investigator deliberately misunderstands him, the

patient corrects him. Only what is pertinent to the question is answered, one or two sentences. Then the patient waits expectantly for the next question. Answers are given with unhesitating certainty.

25 November: Patient does not recognise the investigator. Challenged to remember, he says: "Oh yes, you're the notary, of course, I know you, know you for sure, sir." Starts to cry, and in the following adopts now a formal tone, now sobs for half a minute at a time. Investigator is supposed to read out a Will left by a recently deceased relative. We are in Hasel town hall. He came here this morning, he says, having loaded up the previous evening. He gives a precise account of his route from home to the town hall; he met no one along the way. "But how is it you're lying in bed in the town hall?" Well, that's the way they do it in Hasel, it's often the case when there's a need, and he is ill after all, has TB of the bones and brain.

Patient is given a perception test: keys, matchbox, books, playing cards, photographs are correctly recognised at once; likewise very varied objects in a picture book, domestic animals and some wild animals. Patient also knows how to use the key to the briefcase etc. A picture of a lion elicits only the word "lion"; he does not know what kind of animal it is, what it does. Asked: "Does the lion crow?" he replies: "It roars." [...]

26 November: Patient has met the investigator once before, but does not know when or where. Investigator knows all about cattle, right, he's the vet. We are now on a ship in North America. "What gives you that idea?" There's a constant rocking. The trees outside show we're in harbour. What year? Doesn't know, but it's not 1856 or 1904. This morning he set out from St Louis after a splendid breakfast there, describes the breakfast, chocolates etc. The road was long, like that from Hasel to Basel. He was sent to America by the Hasel Union, to buy a cow, he set off from Hasel four months ago. The people lying here are all sick, they have their temperature taken so it can be compared with the cow's temperature. This is so the cow can be kept at the right temperature. The cow is stowed lower in the ship, he's already been to see it today, and heard it mooing. Investigator should go right away and take a look. Investigator is not a doctor for humans. The doctor's already been today, a big gentleman, name's Rhein, an American, he has been for a walk with him. The topic of their conversation was the sale of a bed in the next cabin, which has been bought by an agent in Germany. Doctor is interested in this bed; patient holds firm to his misperception for an hour while other perception tests are made: "I can't read now, it's dark on the ship, they ought to light the lanterns."

A perception test is conducted using coloured slips of paper, numbers (black on white), picture books in colour and black and white, a hymn book. The objects are looked at but not named. The patient is alerted that he will be asked questions about the objects immediately after seeing them. After intervals of varying length, during which the above conversation is pursued, a question is posed and the object again presented.

Known animals: cock, dog, cat, mouse are recognised after 1½ minutes, asked before this (after 1 minute) what he has seen, he replies that nothing has been shown him, the pictures he recognises again were shown to him a quarter or half an hour ago. The investigator, who has just turned away with the picture books to ask the orderly for light, is no longer recognised. A giraffe is not identified at all, when it has been shown him and he has repeated the name out loud; it is presented three more times during the examination. The patient fails to recognise it each time. The animals are either coloured or in black and white; the patient cannot recall whether they are in colour, or what colour, as soon as the book is closed; at the same time he

knows it was a cat etc. The action, the stance, the surroundings must be described as they appear in the picture: according to the patient the cat has seized a little mouse in its right front paw, has quickly pulled it close and eaten it up. (In fact the cat is sitting in front of a mouse trap with a mouse in it.) When he retorts that there can be only one animal in the picture, he cannot be persuaded. Of a tree shown quite isolated in the picture he asserts: a snake has twined itself around it. This snake is mentioned every time later, after brief reflection, when he has been unable spontaneously to name any animal actually seen. Asked if he has not seen any cat or mouse, he says: "Yes, there were lots of cats there, big cats and really small ones." (There was only ever one cat picture.)

He claims to know the colour of the cock, but gives the wrong colour. The cock, shown without anything around it, is according to the patient standing on a little dungheap with a hen sitting beside it that the cock is preparing to jump on. He states exactly where the hen was sitting. Five minutes later, asked about the cock, he says it had leaped about, turned head over heels and been quite wild. When shown the cock, he says he has already seen this, but this wasn't the one he meant, and he searched in the book for the other cock. The cat, too, was a different one before. [...]

27 November: Patient does not recognise investigator. He is now in the port of St Louis. Describes his outings today. With vigorous contradictions and suggestive indications of the room, the orderly, the trees, etc., we succeed in making him believe he is in Hasel. "Yes, but I thought I was in America. – But it must be true if you say so." "What is this building called?" patient asks. Investigator: "But surely you know the tavern called the Green Lamb?" "No I don't. It must be new. You must be the proprietor?" "Yes. Now tell me what the building looks like from outside." Patient: "Well, it's a fine big building with lots of steps. A very fine building it is, and there's a garden." Investigator: "Have you tried our Green Lamb sausage yet?" Patient: "Yes, I've eaten that. It's famous everywhere, lamb sausage." Investigator: "And how's the wine?" "It's expensive in America." Investigator: "But we're in Hasel." "In Hasel?" "Yes, indeed. In Hasel the wine's good and not expensive." [...]

3 December: Does not recognise investigator. We are in St Louis. We write 1890, he is 90 years old. Born 1850. The Ten Commandments are called January, February, March, January, February. – He calls out to the "serving lad" to go down and look at the cow. "Where are we?" "In Constantinopolitan." What is he doing there? He got married here, he says, and went to school here too. The year has five months, up to May, he can rattle off the rest fluently. The other months don't belong to the year, they've been presented to the "most honourable Prince Bismarck" as a gift. "And what should Prince Bismarck do with the months?" He lends them out to deserving citizens. A month has a long and black appearance. The month has 36 weeks, each week 12 days, the month 250 month days. –

Patient feels very weary today. He has already unloaded manure, driven into town, fell off the cart onto his side. Into which town? Thinks for almost a minute, then: "Into a fine big town." "Hasel?" "No." "St Louis?" "Yes, St Louis." [...]

5 December: Has seen the investigator before. Where, he doesn't know. He thinks it was when he was buying cattle, investigator is a vet. Recalls a visit by relatives the day before, names almost all of them correctly. Cannot give any details of what they talked about. Again a severe coughing fit; he calls the orderly and says: "Send a telegram to my home." He is ill, the doctor has been. Cannot provide details of the doctor's appearance or name. He is in hospital in Hasel.

He only said send a telegram, what he meant was, send someone. Children are making a row outside. (It's patients shouting in the bathroom.) He is "in his 50s", born 1850, it could be 1895 now. "Where were you this morning?" "Lying down." "Tell me something about your life." Was in the war of 1870, parents both dead, he is a district administrator in Hasel and an orphan warden. He is impatient at having to lie here, and instructs the investigator to wag a finger at his son in law and tell him to look well after the cow. He was already in this hospital a week or two ago because he had trouble walking, and pains everywhere. It was not this room, that room was on the opposite side of the corridor. [...]

Final exploration

21 February 2005: Patient does not recognise investigator. Patient is at home now with his parents, both are alive. The mother is 40 years old; he too. Father is still alive "as long as he hasn't just this moment died." The other patients are workers who must be looked after for all sorts of ailments; the new law requires them all to be insured. The orderly is his son in law. [...]

Commentary

[...] In all his confabulations the patient used conversational forms of one well used to dealing with people, now and then with an official flavour (e.g. has been an orphan warden); his demeanour always corresponded with his actual age and earlier activities, never with his paramnesia. [...]

The confabulation made use mostly of everyday memories. [...] The patient's suggestibility became evident many times: the fabulated thinking is only loosely associated and any other definite notion can be substituted for it. But the patient always returns to his own fabulation, no doubt swayed by the emotion that formed the starting point of the fabulation.

The tenacity of the individual fabulation systems is variable; some last one or two days, others weeks. The systems are of little consequence, [...] contradictions pertain mostly to time data. But the coarser framework of the system is consequential. The investigator's blue briefcase and his notetaking lead to the notary, then the Will, then the town hall, then the order to load up, etc. Even obvious contradictions with the current situation – e.g. that the patient is not lying in bed but is in the town hall – are brought forcibly within the system. [...]

^^^

QUALITY AND CAUSALITY

Jan 1906, unpublished. [KS-1 55-57]

On 8 Jan 1906 Döblin wrote to Herwarth Walden: "now I'm putting something together from the heart and my card index box, a philosophical piece 'Quality and Causality'; not very long, probably I'll pull it together with other similar pieces that weigh down my card index, as a series of remarks and ideas about aesthetics, in a dialogue..." [DBr, 37-38] This must refer to Conversations with Calypso on Music, published in 1910; Döblin later confessed he had no idea why he wrote these.

With the exception of a few idlers, there are probably not many people who sit themselves down and decide "now I'll do some thinking". Even if such a decision would be no more barbaric than: now I shall pray; now I shall ~~get married~~ fall in love; lots of young-girl type stuff; they come to us ~~discreetly~~ uninvited but imploring, so that we owe them a return visit.

Now let's imagine just such a problematic friend of thought; he's about to think. At once there's an aporia: "think about what?" For it's good to think, but even better to think of something. And in his ruminative embarrassment our robber baron poses to himself the remarkable question: "Well, what can one actually think about? What is it all about?" (The question is so authentic and emerges from such a state of perplexity that we wish to lay it all out and arrive at an answer. Let's follow the puzzled man's reasoning.)

An Indian god is said to have replied to this "What's it all about?" in a very drastic manner, by uttering an endless series of names, attaching to each thing a name. But, if people have inherited all other things from the gods, then so too this error, and here's a good opportunity to study a divine solecism at its source. For clearly, superhuman cunning should say: "each thing is different, no thing is to be compared to any other thing". The Indians demand little of their gods, in Europe Leibnitz could say something similar and no one would be especially impressed. But at the very least it might be said that the god made it too easy for himself when he gave every plant, every grain of sand, a name; for is a plant the same morning and evening, from one second to the next? The plant must be distinguished point by point from its microscopic infinities, from the infinite transformations in its own life process, as well as from infinite externalities. To assume that the naming occurred even in this sense would be inadmissible atheism, for even the logician knows– and all the more so an immortal – that it is not possible to isolate something in this infinitely flowing continuum. And no language is pure enough to [sentence breaks off] ~~Secondly~~ the god contradicts himself: he does not want to compare, and yet he counts off [...] but counting presupposes difference, comparison. Above all the god is superficial, for he rattles off the names blindly, maybe differentiates one leaf from another, instead of first asking: "To what should I give a name? What should be differentiated from what?" (The right of "comparison" on the other hand is clearly not negated by the proposition of Non-differentiation; for comparing and correlating are the most essential thought-functions even here.) But on the other hand even a lowly empiricist notes the proposition that the Individual Is different; on the other hand he does not ponder the prior question of how one arrives at the individual. What is there? Is there individuality? Let's say the attempt is made to pursue this trivial train of thought and assume the individual as a fact. This would give ~~colour, light, a book, a scissors, a table~~ isolates: a sun, a book, a table, a cloud.

^^^

WIDOW STEINHEIL

Morgen, Dec 1908 [KS-1 57]

The earliest of Döblin's forays into the criminal mind, which culminated in his fascinating 1924 exploration Two Girl Friends and a Poisoning. The Steinheil case was the subject of a 1958 book L'affaire Steinheil, by Michel Chrestien.

After a small section of the public had busied itself for a while with her, now suddenly a very large section did so, and that with no tenderness at all. The facts are: 27th May, discovery of the strangled painter Steinheil, strangled Mme Jupy, battered Mme Steinheil; valuables missing along with five thousand francs. The manservant Remy upstairs had heard nothing, the police found no clues; an Apache raid. Mme Steinheil had only seen three black men and a red-haired woman appear beside her bed. In the summer Mme "Kriemhild" Steinheil cried revenge from time to time, eventually found a pearl from her stolen brooch in Remy's briefcase. A jeweller

came forward: Kriemhild³ herself, back in June, had wanted the pearl removed from the brooch. In short: the robbery is a red herring. Two journalists, Marcel Hutin and Georges Labruyère, extract a “confession” from her, the ostler Alexander Wolff is the murderer. Viz., he forces his way by night into the bedroom, the shameless fellow, she screams; M. Steinheil rushes in: first strangling; Mme Jupy screams, second strangling; Mme Steinheil screams, she’s battered, and hears the words “I’ll let you live, on account of your daughter” as they leave her lying there. But Wolff can prove his alibi; so, another swindle. The widow in custody.

What now?

A servant girl almost raped on the stairs and robbed of fifty francs ... assaults on the railway witnessed by no one ... assaults under anaesthetic ... being tied up – by oneself, after inflicting a few little cuts ... all are swindles, and point to a degenerate lying fantasist as the perpetrator. Just such a degenerate-hysterical motif is seen in the three masked men and the redheaded woman ... the ostler caught in the act, who on the path of love strangles two people and utters well-turned nobly romantic phrases. That’s why the inventor of such tales is not necessarily more closely involved; they invent, because that’s the way thoughts run ... More suspicious is the pearl. It shows that Mme Steinheil does know something about the affair, and is directly involved. Accusing other people means as little as accusing herself; all a perversion of thought that works only with emotions, affect, not with facts. That the pearl supposedly stolen from her is in her possession is the only fact, alongside *pseudologia phantastika*. But it’s enough.

How is the widow involved in the murders? All she herself says is to be understood from the angle that it comes from a woman who as a child often ate worms, her father’s a drunkard, her mother a hysteric who suffered chronic nervous ailments and handled sleeping draughts, gas taps, strychnine and suicidal thoughts as casually as teaspoons. In such an atmosphere one thinks of Kant’s Categorical Imperative and the question: “What is Truth?” But also: “What is murder?” Now it seems that the case was not been sufficiently investigated at first by the Paris police. Why are the corpses being exhumed now, when post mortems should have provided enough information? Strangulation is easily differentiated on the mortuary slab from death by poisoning with pseudo-strangulation; it must already be beyond dispute. Stupefacients are no longer detectable, or hardly. The widow’s relationship to the two deceased in the weeks preceding was not discussed, nor was her apparent interest in murder; it seems the widow was not treated as clinically as required. It took the crude *faux pas* with the pearl before the police deigned to follow up. The fact that the woman was tied up should have been a signal: every criminologist was adamant that this is typical. Even though they believed Remy when he said he heard no screams, no steps were taken against the widow. Astonishing.

You can’t apply normal psychology here. Don’t ask: “What was her purpose in choosing murder?” but rather: “Why?” She says she wanted her false accusations to whitewash herself in the eyes of a lover – but she surely had several at the same time. To keep accusing others when the affair has been laid to rest, even exposing herself to the stupid business with the pearl, in other people would be a mere diversionary tactic; in her: “I won’t rest, I must speak of it always. Playing Kriemhild is alluring; it suits me.” For God’s sake, no moral dilemma. In the end she must have believed herself to be Kriemhild, maybe just a few days after the murders, once she’d taken the measure of the examining magistrate. Personality consciousness in a degenerate can

³ Kriemhild a.k.a. Gudrun: legendary wife of Siegfried.

oscillate considerably. She accuses in good faith; she hid the pearl in good faith. She keeps stirring up the affair, adorning herself with it, glamourising herself with it.

There's scarcely any doubt that the murder plan originates with her. Meaning the instigation as well as the details. It is the details that first clearly betray their origin in a degenerate person. She lies half naked on the bed, bizarrely tied up. She cannot in any case have taken part in a murder, at least not by herself, not least by reason of physical prowess. But she must have been present; sensation beckons, and the horribly cold heart of a born criminal. Half naked: there must be a whiff of sexuality. If it should be found that she had tied herself up – which should be (or have been) fairly easy to prove, then she was ipso facto the lone murderer, the victims stupefied beforehand.

The failure of the robbery red herring allows the conclusion that misdirection was intentional, and fits the novelistic plan of the whole affair. Both victims had to be got rid of; she had made plans and discarded them a hundred times. The reason: a thousand non-reasons, well-known hysterical depression blamed on the man, hatred for the colourless apathetic husband, aversion, very intimate things. She is compromised by accusing the husband now of perversity, a cowardly character. A week earlier she was still ready to avenge him. As for the mother, one recalls the unbounded hatred of the hystero-degenerative for certain blood relatives; the germ lies far back; outbursts come now and then. And then: the mother had pushed her into the marriage; that's the link between the two victims.

Don't suppose that where morbidity begins, the path to acknowledging one's actions is blocked. On the contrary, here it simplifies everything, becomes typical; in healthy people it's individual, and difficult. Maybe, perhaps certainly, in the period leading up to the murders she experienced serious chaos in her love life; her morbidity increased, rage became a handy excuse and unleashed the old aversion, the already fixed dislike of the two victims. It has been shown that she depended on neither of them, that she gained by their deaths, grew into a new role, and blazed a new path for her almost lost existence. Possible that she inveigled some lover to take part; or a few Apaches and bravos; but that's relatively unlikely; the role of executioner is of secondary importance. Most probably, best fitting this type, is poison or stupefaction and pseudo-strangulation by herself; this fits the pseudo-robbery, the pseudo-tying up. Actual murderous robbers would not have found it easy to break into the Steinheil residence, would have left clues behind; would not have proceeded in such an abnormal way: strangulation is not common in robberies. The woman would have screamed, she would most probably have been distraught or completely psychotic for a long time afterwards.

No doubt she now has no clear idea of her part in the deed. The auto-suggestive influence of this type is well-known, intriguing; if she actually knew anything afterwards of the deed, it was wiped clean by the emotion-laden aftermath. But the deed probably occurred in a state of excitement, followed by disorientation that guaranteed a defective memory. Later she acted almost as if she had not taken part. As long as the case remains pending, nothing more will come from her; something might be retrieved by a period of observation in a mental asylum.

The indisputable possibility of disorientation at the time the deed was committed will in any case require that she be found not guilty.

^^^

THE THEATRE OF THE LITTLE PEOPLE

Theater, Dec 1909 [KS-1 71-73]

This early piece reveals Döblin's enduring fascination with the new medium of cinema; cinematic scene-building is pervasive in his fictions. But Döblin, whose artistic medium was always words, never converted this interest into practical engagement with the film industry, unlike several notable contemporaries. (And his older brother Hugo opened Berlin's first "talkie" school.)

We also see here Döblin's view of Berlin's working poor: hard-nosed but sympathetic, and his clinical eye for cruelty (which W G Sebald misread as perverse delight).

The little man, the little woman know nothing of literature, no development, no direction. In the evening they amble down the street, stand chatting under a railway bridge, gawp at a collapsed nag; they want to be moved, aroused, shocked; to explode with laughter. The strongest stuff is there ready. I mean torture chambers, sea creatures, and eventually: taking part in revolutions.

We have anatomy theatres, waxworks, cinematographs. They cater to the loftiest wonders and the thoroughly grisly. The quality of the offering stands in direct proportion to the size of the desired goosebumps.

When a visitor enters a waxworks, he at first wonders if he should show reverence to a grimacing imperial family or inspect the thumbscrew: torn between respect and horror. Then he spots a "Mouth Pear": "The implement was placed in the mouth of the delinquent and then screwed open; it opened out in all four directions and stretched the mouth so powerfully that the unfortunate victim could only produce a whimpering tone; and often the mouth was burst apart." The visitor stands amazed at a tottering Prince Bismarck, at a giant potato; takes note of a dissected female sturgeon which produces the prized delicacy caviar; under No. 486 he sees a spiritually benighted mother boil her own child in a cauldron. Half-dead he drags himself over to a penitent's cage from Luther's home town. Even at the end, his horror at the sight of a Württemberg Boot strikes like a blow, for the more cultivated person is quite sensitive about feet. He is not up to the situation. With difficulty does he grasp that these institutions provide a varied picture of a progressing culture; and he drinks a glass of beer at civilian prices.

And then off to the flicks. They're in the north, south, east and west of the city, in smoky basements, sheds, derelict shop spaces, in big halls, expansive theatres. The more refined offer a chance to savour this photographic technology, so fabulously true to nature, optical illusions, and then the little entertaining dramas, fictions by Manzoni, very refined. Oh, this technology has a great capacity to develop, almost ripe for Art. In the middling theatres "Rome Burning" is already lighting up the screen; persecutors chasing human game over rooftops, streets, trees.

Only the drinking-den type in the north have their own special genre, are far beyond the level of the merely artistic. Harsh lamps beckon from across the street, by their light you see yard-high placards dangling over the door, a giant organ blares: "A murder has occurred". The corridor to the auditorium is lined with stuffed monsters behind glass, funny automatons.

Inside the low pitch-dark space a man-high square of linen glows over a monstrous public, a mass hypnotised by this white staring eye. In corners little couples squeeze together and allow enraptured libidinous fingers to roam. Consumptive children draw shallow breaths and shiver slightly in their evening fever; the eyes of foul-smelling labourers almost start from their sockets. Women in musty clothes, painted street women lean forward and forget to pin up their headscarf. *Panem et circenses* to the full: pleasure as essential as bread, the bullfight a popular

necessity. As simple as the reflexive delight is the releasing allure: criminal affairs with a dozen corpses, horrible criminal chases piled one after another; then fustian sentimentalities: blind dying beggar and the dog expiring on his grave; a piece titled: "Watch out for the Poor" or "Crab Catcher Woman"; warships; the sight of the Kaiser and the army arouses no patriotism, just ugly astonishment.

Clear as day: the flicks an excellent remedy for alcoholism, strong competition for the cheap gin-shops; wait and see if cirrhosis of the liver and the birth of consumptive children become less common in the coming decade. Don't deprive the people or the youth of their pulp literature or their flicks; they need a very bloody nourishment without the starchy gloop of folksy literature and the watery effusions of morality.

But the more educated person leaves the premises, glad above all that the cinema – is silent.

^^^

NINEVEH ON THE SPREE

Der Sturm 2, 10 March 1910 [KS-1 77]

This is Döblin's first published piece to show clear Expressionist features.

It rises out of the unmissable much-invoked sands of this landscape, laid down not near a southern sea from which emerged the Foam-risen Goddess, plunging not into the deep azure of a gracious heaven that has room enough for countless gods, nestling against no grove of pine, of olives, indeed of palm trees, but watered entirely by the Spree and the Panke – Berlin, strange city of pleasures and sins, undermined by railways, seething with beasts of toil whipped on and allowed no little hands for prayer, wheezing from lungs filled with toxic factory fumes, and, instead of innumerable gods, innumerable diseases crawl around and mingle compassionately with the poor folk.

This strip of heaven knows not the historical treats of ancient baths, nor Near Eastern ecstasies, the joyous dances of Corinth and Tanagra. Here everything was spoiled from the start. Impious religions do their business, souls are possessed by every kind of quarrel, earnings-envy. Thirst and thirst, and hunger, hunger – only the deity Time is worshipped; unable to exhaust Time, people wriggle their way towards immortality.

But from this sand the wolf peers out with malachite-green eyes, the lean beast of pleasures, whips the long legs with its tail, the jaws grind, it spits and scatters husks on the ground. As the city flames in the night, the wolf howls through sleeping streets and is heard wailing through the provinces.

Berlin itself has no, almost no demand for pleasures, neither eye nor ear for them. This caustic, sinew-straining, thought-filled town could produce the most abnormal and audacious delights if it directed its ingenuity to that end. But here one almost drowns in the din from funfairs, in garish peasant colours. Here pleasure has no real source of production; people from Munich, Rixdorf, Prenzlau feel quite at home.

Thoroughgoing North Germans, Berliners develop no social sense, have no folk festivals; keep to their homes, take care of the family, dress up for and against one another; their sense of community is sated by reading the newspaper, private parties, attending a play or a parade. So Berlin has acquired no pleasure-town. Strangers wade hopelessly in the sand, the sand is there

but Berlin does not see it. It sees gigantic dimensions, but only of banality, sees originality only in the huge scale of businesses; not spirit but calculation; not order but sobriety, thirty-fold sobriety; not imagination but things thrown together with no style. Here and there a light, a torch, a candle.

First I want to speak of the avant-garde of pleasures, of the patrolling priestesses of Venus. Let me catch my breath.

^^^

COSY FAMILY SCENE

Der Sturm, Jan 1912 [KS-1 109]

A family. A pensioner in his fifties suffered a stroke early one morning. The doctor at the bedside asks the wife – a lean grim person sitting on the sofa with a newspaper – for a cup of hot coffee and a spoon for the sick man ... A full ten minutes later she comes in with a broken mug-lid and an old black spoon. The doctor is startled. She, anticipating: “Don’t worry, you can let him drink. I’ll throw the things away once he’s done.”

The same woman asks the doctor, as she returns home from a walk, what she should take when the husband actually dies. She can’t stand excitement, the family doctor says she really must look after her nerves

Five in the afternoon. The woman recoils from the door when she sees the doctor there again at the bedside. She’s just been at Weber’s funeral supplies shop.

A short while later she retrieves her newspaper from the sick room. With tears in her eyes she squeezes the doctor’s hands: he’s being so much imposed on, how can they thank him. And would he please not forget to remove the man’s ring right away.

The stroke victim has died. The family – ancient mother, wife, two young sons – sit silent in a row on chairs by the bed; a scene worthy of Ferdinand Hodler. The wife stands up. It is God’s will, what can you do. It’ll all turn out right, our savings are in safe hands. Mama don’t cry ...

^^^

The next three pieces are key texts for understanding Döblin’s ideas about literature – creative process, purpose, social context – and his insistence on sensitivity to language and how it can unveil “realities” of the world and the universe.

Fifteen years later, with several epic works under his belt, he will expand on these central themes in his great lecture “The Construction of the Epic Work” – see below.

Marinetti wrote the Futurist Manifesto in 1909, and ten years later co-wrote the Fascist Manifesto. His Mafarka the Futurist extolled speed and war and aeroplanes.

FUTURISTIC WORD-TECHNIQUE

OPEN LETTER TO F. T. MARINETTI

Der Sturm, March 1913 [AzL 9-15]

Dear Marinetti,

The first time you came among us was last summer, the exhibition of Futurist pictures. On that occasion I wrote in *Der Sturm*: "Futurism is a great step. It represents an act of liberation. It is no tendency, but a movement. Better: it is the movement forward of the artist." The intensity and originality, the boldness and utter absence of constraint made a great impression on me. I often thought, and said so to you at Dalbelli's restaurant: "If only we had something like this in literature!" You kept silent. A few months later literary manifestos fluttered over our houses. An absence had become an event.

That wasn't what I meant. I don't dispute your right to stir us up. You have energy and hardness, masculinity, which should be unleashed with pleasure on a literature bursting with eroticism, hypochondria, evasions, cruelties. In your *Mafarka* you gave often uninterrupted expression to a massive unrefined sensibility. You are rhetorical, but your rhetoric is no lie. It is clear to us both, Marinetti: we both want no prettifying, no decoration, no style, nothing external, but rather hardness, ice and fire, the yielding, the transcendental and the shattering, unwrapped. Packaging is for the classics. Flatfoot inlays, plaster corsets and other orthopaedics we revere alongside sonnets and world views gifted to grammar school girls. We abjure whatever is not direct, not immediate, not surfeited with objectivity; tradition, the epigonal, is reserved for helplessness. Naturalism; we're still not nearly enough Naturalists.

Up to this point we walk side by side. You listen, Marinetti, you say nothing new to us with this. You commit to us. Now your manifesto and your efforts begin to cut extraordinarily vigorous grimaces, and push themselves forward to become thrice-holy reality. You are half African; your love for total reality takes on a rather Berserker air; you chomp and chew away at this robust resilient entity in a way I find lamentable; you gulp it down as a snake does a frog.

First you analyse the distortions and falsifications that artistic productions endure through verse and rhythm. You nail down what is forced, deflected, self-relishing in verse dynamics and warn about and bewail the reality that has slipped away. Someone tried to catch lobsters and was whacked by Marinetti for not fishing up kohlrabi. It comes down, Marinetti, to what one wants: when you go to a café, you can hardly demand artillery fire from the maitre d'. When Baudelaire lets rhythm overpower him, and speaks through the mouth of its motion, floats on the back of its waves, he knows what he's doing. And why attack him, Marinetti! He, like you, is an artist; the reality he deals with he knows better than you. You are no custodian of artists. That would amount to the breeding of epigones, to your own suicide. Surely you can't mean there is only one true reality, and identify the world of your automobiles, aeroplanes and machine guns with the World? We aren't there yet; your belly is not yet so full that there's room left only for me.

Or do you ascribe to the rough-edged noisy colourful World an absolute reality, that we must approach with the reverence of stenographers? Should you, the artist, mean that, and preach on the lines of inescapable Naturalism? Appalling, and yet it almost seems to be true. So all we need do is imitate the bleating, huffing, rattling, howling, whining of earthly things, seek to attain the tempo of reality, and it shouldn't be photography but Art, and not just Art but should be labelled Futurism? You're supposed to have accomplished all unawares this wee little transposition: reality is materiality? You, Marinetti? Sometimes I actually believe it! And that's why for a moment you forgot why the rhythms and verse-art of Baudelaire-Mallarmé are good, necessary and heavenly: because Art also delivers narcotics, stimulants, can reveal what's above

and below reality, because in this heightened tone, this scattering and this drifting descent lie intoxication and flight – really, you haven’t flown enough in aeroplanes – because calmly, beneath the music of the words, the “objective” content, the “material” content, can become divorced from content and meaning, can retreat, evaporate. This and other music drags itself only wearily to the “things” that come knocking about behind it. Our German mystics have written so endlessly of this, with baffling hints of a darker reality behind; all they did with their words was rattle and rustle. And in this there is no restraint on reality, no restraint on the poet, no falsification has occurred – and we who read it also felt the triviality of the words. Ability, Marinetti, that’s what you must have. And for a moment you uttered a strong word and a very feeble thought.

It’s clear what you want – even if you did throw the baby out with the bathwater. The old song: we must approach closer to life.

Life offers colossal treasures, and no shovel is needed to unearth them. Not only do we shoulder no tools: rather we go pomaded in our lacquered shoes and perfumed shirts down into the mines. In your haste you run past with an actual pick, leather clothes and lamp, very fine big things. Really I shouldn’t polemicise against you, for it’s all too clear for whose sake you err: for your own sake, for the sake of a few descriptions of battles, the tempo and noise of which in fact you bring out splendidly. But no agitating, no revolution on that account, just do it well enough, we’ll be glad of it; but there are other things than battles and (between ourselves) one can “make” of a battle something quite different from what you have made.

But you’re at your worst, you are most dangerous in your monomania (for you are a monomaniac) when you throw all your weight onto syntax for the sake of battle-vividness. I find this kind of generalising horrible. How do you understand adjective, adverb! In a complete sentence there are various valences; various sentence-functionaries predominate, now the subject, now the verb, now the adverb. You can enhance the momentum of a word, or weaken it. You can shorten sentences, can roll along in periods, can set down a single word – substantive, adjective, verb, adverb – and precisely thus can you approach extraordinarily close to reality. Just as you like, just so, however you like, and why all of a sudden this amputating? We don’t all want to roar, shoot, clatter; surely you’ll permit me to drink warm almond milk, or eat a tart with cream, or ruin your concept, just as I like! And if you should happen to want to write in that way for some reason, no one will hinder you; we all enjoy every original and powerful style; in our burning urge for reality we are comrades; but no categorical edicts over us who know and do everything very well, sometimes better than you, no world-shattering gestures and death-dealing grimaces. Our hens don’t cackle so tragically. Marinetti, you assail us; you revile us as clapped-out “Passatists”, reactionaries. I do not merely defend my literature; I tackle you head on.

I say: your battle can be done much better. Your battle is from start to finish stuffed full of images, analogies, similes. Good, but it doesn’t strike me as very modern, it’s right doughty old literature. I grant you all your images – but now to battle! Point blank, Marinetti! Yes, it’s easy to call field commanders an “island”, to have heads fly like footballs, torn bellies spray like watering-cans. Gimmicks! Antiquated! Museum! Where are these heads, what’s with the bellies!? And you call yourself a Futurist? It’s lousy aestheticism! Things are one of a kind: a belly is a belly and no watering-can: that’s the ABC of the Naturalist, the real direct artist.

To abstain from images: that's the prose writer's task. You really didn't need, in presenting that confusion of geometry, observations, literary reminiscences, psychologisms, to go to such menacing extravagances. The "island" of the field commander is a banal bleached image – and here I'll show you what, and how little, your telegram-style contributes. You provide the reader or listener with short catchwords for the head word, labels for many of your free-standing substantives: heads-footballs, bellies-watering cans etc. How cosy and how trivial it is; they may be images, associations, indirections, but that's all.

For you overestimate your listeners, your readers; you push onto them your own task of forming this image-material. Some of your association-sequences I couldn't understand, and why should I bother if you don't take the trouble to set them out comprehensibly: the catastrophe of missing punctuation, missing syntax; for you have associations, and these are linkages, and you are completely incapable of bringing them to expression. Every couple of lines we can see: you lose the syntax, hunt around for it, you coerce, you assault your notions, leave them incomprehensible in order not to contravene the principle. This is a violation of art; methods have no place in art, madness would be better. And what does your adjective-free, verbless, adverbless "field commander island" say to me, and the whole succession of unbound substantives that step nakedly across like shorn poodles? Everything, almost everything is left dangling in undefined emptiness. "Field commander" means nothing to me, adding "island" doesn't help; maybe in your head it all makes sense, but it hasn't emerged, hasn't made it onto paper, hasn't blossomed to linguistic reality – with or without full stops, I don't care. I don't want to hear "trumtrum tateterata" fifty times, which requires no great linguistic mastery, but rather to see your field commanders, your Arabs – but you're incapable of showing them to me. You lay down your weapons just where the prose writer's biggest task begins. "Ammonia, clinic, scalpel, bullfight" etc. are marginal notations; I have no wish to be fobbed off with theories in place of the specific breathless reality of a battle – and humour doesn't cut it with me either.

You tried to condense it so much that the process shattered your beakers and all you have to show is the shards as samples of your art. Hence garbage. A field commander can be brought to life by a movement, must, must be presented so, or it's all just verbiage. Your cavalry floats horseless or soldierless through empty space; no vibrating ground or resisting air, just "cavalry" point blank; I can do nothing with it; it's pale and empty like "sun", "spirit", totally abstract. The cannon-fire and the shrapnel may deafen me, but they don't make me blind. But your theory condemns you to such abstractions.

Dear Marinetti, in *Mafarka* you offered a passionate mix of drama, novel, lyric; you titled your collection of poems *Destruction*, your ultimate effort flings itself at the steely scaffolding of language: the mattress remained undamaged, you flew into the air. Of the honesty of your efforts there's no doubt; but I find it regrettable that you must constantly see walls in front of you to be run against, and the facility of the pure untheoretical writer who can fly over the walls is never given you. No use wasting your gifts of persuasion on us, who also write. People aim at vividness, concentration and intensity in many ways; your way is certainly not the best, barely even good.

Bestir yourself, learn from us! Your books show that you're an artist, a writer, and the energy of your instincts, the freedom and purity of your Naturalism, your anti-eroticism, attract our total sympathy, my total sympathy. But never forget there is no art, only artists, that each grows in his own way, that each must be careful how he jumps around the others. There is no universal

mass ordinance for literature. Whatever you do not conquer for yourself goes missing. Abandon your scheme of sheep-breeding; it brings too much noise and too little wool. Look after number one. You tend your Futurism. I'll tend my Döblinism.

^^^

TO NOVELISTS AND THEIR CRITICS THE BERLIN PROGRAMME

Der Sturm, May 1913 [AzL 15-18]

The artist toils away in his isolated cell. He himself is two-thirds self-deception and blather. (The door is open for discussion.)

Certain things remain immovable over time: Homer is still enjoyed today; art conserves; but in the course of centuries working methods, like the surface of the Earth, undergo changes; the artist can no longer fly into the arms of Cervantes without becoming moth-eaten. The world has grown in breadth and depth; old Pegasus, outflanked by technology, has been hoodwinked and transformed into a stubborn mule. I claim that any good speculator, banker, soldier is a better writer than the majority of current authors.

Writers of prose, always the first to jump on a bandwagon, encompass the world not through new rigorous cold-blooded methods, rather they chew away constantly at "material" and problems of their own internal shortcomings. You should rein in your supposed inner needs, and hand the reins over to Art. Serious writing is not biting your nails and picking your teeth, but a public affair.

A fundamental defect of the serious prose-writer these days is the psychological angle. The psychology of novels, as of most everyday situations, is a purely abstract phantasmagoria. The analyses, the attempts at differentiation, have nothing to do with the processes of a real psyche; you never get to the bottom of it that way. The protagonist's "motivation" is as much an error in a novel as in real life: it's a poetic gloss. Psychology is dilettantish conjecture, scholastic verbiage, wool-gathering bombast, misguided lyricism.

Rationalism was always the death of Art; nowadays the most importunate and cosseted rationalism is called psychology. Many a so-called "fine" novel or novella – the same goes for the drama – consists almost entirely of analyses of the characters' trains of thought: conflicts arise in these trains of thought, leading to trivial or concocted "plots". Maybe such trains of thought do occur, but not so isolated; in themselves they say nothing, cannot be represented: an amputated arm, breath without the breathing person, glances without eyes. Real motives come from quite another place; these, lacking a living totality, are humbug, aesthetic froth: a bored doctrinaire author bereft of ideas blathering to educated people desirous of instruction.

One should learn from psychiatry, the only science that deals with the whole soulful human being: it has long recognised the naiveté of psychology, limits itself to the noting of events, movements – with a shake of the head and a shrug of the shoulders for the rest, for the "why" and the "how". The formulae of speech serve only for practical interaction. "Anger", "love", "contempt" denote complexes of phenomena that impinge on the senses; beyond that, these primitive and vulgar concatenations of letters convey nothing. They refer to events, changes of action and effect, that were originally visible, audible, partly calculable. They can never and

nevermore serve as a microscope or telescope, these blind lenses; they cannot become the guideline for a life-emulating plot. You must hold fast to this original intention, this simplicity, and then you have achieved the real, have demystified the word, avoided inartistic abstraction. Just as the word-artist must at every moment “see” back to the word in its primal sense, the novelist must force “anger” and “love” back to the concrete.

And this shows a way out from psychological prose. Either: lyricism with its immediacy, open and no longer embarrassed; sure steps attaining to both heights and depths; first-person speech in which naïve reasoning is permissible. To be sure, I doubt whether such a form can be called “novel” or “novella”. Or: actual novel-prose, on the principle that the object of the novel is Reality with the soul removed. The reader as the completely independent foil to a designed and created process; let the reader be the judge, not the author. The façade of the novel can be nothing other than stone or steel, electrically flashing or dark: it keeps silent. Serious writing oscillates in a process like music among the shaped notes.

Amid the enormous jumble of formed shapes, representation demands a cinematic style. “The abundance of faces” must parade past with the utmost crowdedness and precision. The utmost in plasticity and liveliness must be wrung from language. The casual narrator has no place in the novel; one does not narrate, one constructs. The narrator has a peasant trustworthiness: concision, verbal parsimony is required; new turns of phrase. Sentences that allow the concurrence as well as the sequence of complexes to be rapidly discerned should be deployed to the fullest. Rapid confused events in bald catchwords; wherein everywhere the greatest exactitude should be striven for, in suggestive turns of phrase. The whole should appear not as if spoken, but as if *present*. The word-art must emerge in the negative, in what it avoids, missing ornamentation: in the absence of intention, in the absence of the merely pretty or the linguistic flourish, in holding mannerisms at bay. Images are dangerous and to be used sparingly; one should sniff out each event’s uniqueness, grasp the physiognomy and the particular growth of an event and present it sharply and objectively; images are lazy.

The hegemony of the author must be broken; never can the fanaticism of self-denial be taken too far. Or the fanaticism of kenosis (self-emptying): I am not I but the street, the lamps, this and this event, nothing more. This is what I term the stony style.

Borne away by this psychological craze, writers have placed the individual far too obtrusively at the centre of the novel and the story. Thousands of particular, thoroughly exaggerated individuals have been invented, the author sunning himself in their complexity. Behind the pernicious rationalism, the whole multi-dimensional world completely disappears. These authors, truly, have toiled away in a closed room. The artist has demeaned himself to become the dogsbody of paltry scholars, has blinded himself, distanced himself from the friends of art and the reader, unable to look upon all the riches of life. A scribbler’s workshop has been nurtured, a systematic impoverishment of art. And this has allowed a second craze, the erotic, to take hold. The writerly world is simplified step by step to the sexual relationship; a process applauded by the interest of a bad, or badly led, public. Such a watering-down, this dilution of the little bit of life that penetrated to the writer’s study.

Naturalism is no historical -ism, but a shower bath that ever and again breaks over art, must break over it. Psychologism, eroticism must be swept away; the author depersonalised, externalised. Let the earth steam again. Away from people! Boldly on to kinetic imagination and

the recognition of unbelievably real contours! Phantasy of facts! The novel must experience a rebirth as a work of art and a modern epic.

^^^

REMARKS ON THE NOVEL

Die neue Rundschau, March 1917 [AzL 19-23]

The epic, whether of the meaner or the better sort, has been beset for some time by wreckers. I'll jump right in.

They don't keep their room tidy; excitement ruins the novel, writers surrender and squat on a dry branch. Writers forget more and more that they should be producing epics, they crowd more and more around the Drama, around the tying and untying of conflicts in this or that direction, plays, tragedies, comedies. A wedge has been driven into the novel; for sure it doesn't come from the German, rather from the French: the obsession with squeezing things together, point-blank problem-setting, an abstract rigour, reinforced beams, dogged downhill run to the conclusion. It has the appearance of a novelistic form – which does not exist and should not exist, let alone with blueprint, scaffolding, architecture.

Appearance, false pretence. They present plot, people and actions straight from the egg, best to have as few people as possible, other people as shadows in the background, decorations, fillers, and then a little setting, scenery insofar as necessary; it's all just accoutrements, it's all simplified to a slick, narrow, onrushing plot. The game is revealed at the start: we are to be deceived, we have a closet dramatist before us, we have a drama, narrated on paper. No new art form, no art form (such a proud term) at all, but rather incapacity and plagiarism. The novel has nothing to do with plot. We know that at the beginning, even the drama had nothing to do with it, and it's doubtful if the drama did well to tie itself down like that. Simplifying, battering and trimming into shape is not the business of the epicist. In the novel it's a case of piling, heaping, turning, shoving; in the drama, today's drama, with its impoverished one-track plot, it's 'Onward!' Forward is never the watchword of the novel.

The reduction of the novel to that forward-moving single plot is matched by the growing, and so carefully nurtured, incapacity of the public. Time there is a-plenty, but they've been totally ruined by the newspaper. Impatience is the measure of all their affairs, excitement the A to Z of the book. An hour and a half of torture, they spit, the book has done its duty. What does not excite is boring; here is unconcealed naïve shamelessness: depict defects as advantages, and add demands. The film is stuck in the same groove as the newspaper. That's the whole debacle of the novel. The better authors should not let themselves be deceived. The public are insolent, and the publisher belongs to the public.

In the drama, the big pathetic scene was once the centre and the main object. All the rest a toing and froing, something like a plot through prologue, epilogue and all the logues in between. Then they have to sniff around this or that hero, and in particular this or that heroine, bring them 'closer to the human'. Soon the centre of gravity shifted to the intellect, cosy understanding, neighbourly interest, the progress of the hero's life. Psychology beats pathos down. The broth is diluted with 'development' to make it tasty. The concept of plot has swallowed up everything that, by the grace of art, billows on the stage and in the novel.

It's not enough for them to have shock, joy, laughter, inner balance. Let's see what happens: the poor public disappears from view. Now the second mask falls. You don't let yourself come too close, you hate the crude familiarity, you won't be operated on, whoever they might be you won't let them rummage in your own defenceless entrails, you have your gas mask, people want excitement. That's enough. Instead of prayers, words; instead of shock, spiritual preoccupations; instead of poetry, plot. All the rest is conceded, given away, redundant.

It's already back to front to accept that the Human is the object of the drama or the novel. Neither genre has anything to do with the Human, or with the importance of an individual hero and his problems. Leave all that to the pedagogues, parsons, psychologists, psychiatrists: poeticised psychology is a nonsense. All we have, in colour or black and white, are happy, sad, profound, superficial events in a life: make of that what you will. But the Human and its things are easily found, you just stay at home, problems and conflicts lie around on the floor, you only need a bit of construction: wham, you've slipped right around Poetry.

Better models are Homer, Cervantes; Dante too. Dostoyevsky should not go unmentioned. They show how one moment is justified by another moment, how every second of our life is a complete reality, round, fulfilled. Every page says: "Here I stand, here I die." If a novel can't be cut like an earthworm into ten pieces, and every piece moves by itself, it's worth nothing.

*

The hunchbacks in the chapel of Saint Remacle in Charles de Coster are epical poetry – Till Eulenspiegel's japes and adventures are created from the source. Dante's monstrous "Hells" are beyond discussion, individually and altogether: one is simply struck dumb. Rogozhin in Dostoyevsky's *Idiot*, the scene with the banknotes in the stove, the debate between the maid and the young lady, the depraved general's attempted robbery: all rooted in the soil. What can be said of Don Quixote, tilting at windmills, his fat companion? Odysseus doing battle with the suitors, his encounter with the swineherd, gods conversing on Olympus, the so-called tallies in the *Iliad* – who today would be capable of such descriptions? – armaments, ships, military formations, clashes. To transcend all this with a "fast-moving plot": Michelangelo's statue as a candlestick, used as a household item.

Ten novellas do not make a novel. Nothing in a novel should grow into a novella; but all the same there are connections. One has to keep a balance between the bunch of arias in an early opera, and Wagner's endless melodies.

The novel has a hard job asserting itself as a work of art; that's how the detailed novel-like newspaper report makes the apparently fluid transition to a novel. It's true. Life writes superb novels; adding art is mostly superfluous. This closeness to everyday reportage discredits the novel, turns it for many into the lowest form of art. The epicist needn't be embarrassed by this, for he is said to despise art above all; he turns the apparent defects of his position to advantage, he stands closest to the lived life by virtue of his material: the word. He should keep art ten steps away from his person. Simple, narrative, representational speech is a gift of God: no one can rob him of it. Style should not overlay representation, not even as wet matting. Style is nothing but the hammer with which to work away most objectively at what is represented. It's already an error when style makes itself noticed.

Vast, the material of the epicist. In the epic you hardly notice this. The average narrator stays on the level of the writer, as a rule has not felt his way into life, and so lacks creative power.

Without further ado he takes the man-woman relationship as available material. The novel has of course as little to do with love as painting has to do with the woman or man. This assertion renders the everyday novel totally sterile. There are bones, muscles, lungs, nerves as well as sex organs. The everyday novel will not recover until the basic principle breaks through: *mulier taceat*, meaning: an end to loving. The despised robber-novel, Karl May, pulp literature are better. They well up more strongly, broadly, and from stronger, richer and purer instincts.

^^^

LETTER TO HERWARTH WALDEN [DBr 61]

By volunteering rather than waiting to be called up, Döblin hoped to receive the salary of a qualified doctor rather than a soldier's daily pay. The bureaucratic snafu outlined in this letter to Walden confirmed his distaste for the Wilhelmine State and its military. (He was not designated Assistant Doctor until August 1918.)

Saargemünd, 3 Jan 1915

Dear Walden, You will probably not receive this before the 6th, these things take three days, strangely enough, despite several express trains daily that take 16 hours.

So here I am in the Lorraine boondocks. No cars, no horse cabs; now and then a handcart, peasant-looking people with pointed black felt hats, a long shawl half-Italian around neck and shoulders. Chaplains in a broad Jesuit hat and long pleated gown. Red-cheeked children in the streets; the broad sonorous dialect that allows itself much time. I'm staying at one of the three hotels by the station; a 15 minute stroll takes you out of the town; our military hospital lies out there. It's the Bavarian Infantry hospital, four long whitewashed buildings, the sheds between them in a square. They're for internal ailments (rheumatism, inflamed lungs, infections especially: typhus, flux). They all come from the Argonne Forest. Metz is not far off, we're very close to the Operations Zone; there are constant rumours that we're about to be included in the Zone. When you walk about the area you can hear the canon very clearly, like thumps on a sofa two storeys up through an open window. The firing probably comes from Upper Alsace.

My uniform will be ready in two days, it's compulsory here. I'm a prescribing doctor, look after three sheds each with around 20 serious cases. There are 12 of us doctors, headed by a Chief Doctor (Staff Doctor); it's funny, two Berlin lady doctors are here, volunteers with a special contract, they have wards to look after like us; so, doctor shortage. Meals are taken together in a hotel, I don't join in, or only sometimes. How can this close society continue? Petty bourgeois who just gossip about each other. You know the worst thing is snooping on one's opinions; you see it here all around; how could I endure it, with my frivolity and levity.

In another respect too matters are not so good: militarily. You should sneak yourself in, then you'd see something. Be subordinate, but to whom, and about what, and often in demeaning ways. It sounds nice in the papers: such and such a professor or lawyer serving as a stable-boy – all for the Fatherland. But up close you see the motives for requiring this “subordination”. The arrogance, overt delight in humiliating. We civilian doctors or reservist doctors play a beastly role; our situation is unclear. There are six of us; cursing gets you nowhere. Alert anyone who's thinking of volunteering without being called up! I gain insight into – military natures ...

Which brings me to a special favour I'd like to ask of you. Here with our unreliable telephones and poor mail service it's like being on the naughty step. As I mentioned, our situation is unclear. You know that a week or two before my departure I volunteered for Belgium or France. Untrained reservists in my 1878 cohort were never levied or even called up in Berlin. So at the moment, as far as my cohort is concerned, my voluntary status is cancelled and my military situation is changed. My current experience tells me that being called up as a reservist is out of the question; when I reported to the District Command in Berlin I was told that as a member of this cohort I did not come under military authority, but should report to the civilian section of the Induction Commission in Berlin-Lichtenberg once I was due to depart; they even wrote this down. Now here in Saargemünd as in Saarbrücken, the general headquarters of 21st Corps, I was told on my arrival point blank: "Yes, your Berlin cohort is in now; there's no question of us making a contract with you. You're a reservist and inducted as such." I dispute this. I knew nothing of it. So please: enquire at the District Command in General Pape Strasse or at the General Command III Army Corps on Lützow Ufer, or at the Civilian Committee of the Induction Commission that you or perhaps Kurt belong to, and ask *whether the unlevied 1878 reservist cohort has already been inducted, or whether an individual in that cohort is allowed to be inducted in Berlin*. I have no doubt at all that it's absolutely false and intended only to lower our pay. Please ask Dr Jakobi too, he's younger than me. Please send me reliable information as quickly as possible. My pay is not yet settled, but they're treating others the same way. I really need the money, as you will understand.

Best wishes, to your wife as well! – Dr Döblin

^^^

BEYOND GOD!

Die Erhebung, vol. 1 (1919) [KS-1 246-261]

The title is a nod to Nietzsche's Beyond Good and Evil. (In 1904-5 Döblin had written two long essays on Nietzsche, unpublished until long after his death.) This essay is somewhat rambling; I have tried to excerpt the most cogent parts. From the style it was probably written (in part at least) in 1917, a companion-piece to his first anguished attempt at autobiography, Doktor Döblin.⁴

Let it not be said that, for unbelievers, God is dead. He goes among them as something neither alive nor dead, as a ghost in a dreadful scary marasmus.

What is he, this God, and what is his significance? An anachronism we all call him, but he doesn't want to be that: something outgrown only in a literary sense, that keeps rearing up to mock us. [...]. I myself, after so much schooling in the flourishing sciences, carry God as an active element within me, wave him away, am ashamed of him and the myths that surround him, rage against the stigma, feel enslaved – and again he tempts, is there is there. He comes upon me like an autonomous thing that I can't remove from my house – like a fellow tenant in this house, actually. But I don't want him, I have no use for him, he's inside me like a corpse. I have to find out what makes him so eternal; the ground must be thoroughly dug over. No injustice should be done, either to me or to him. It's not a matter of getting rid of the ghost, but of finding my

⁴ included in my compilation *The Cutting Room Floor. Eight orphaned and outcast pieces from the prolific pen of Alfred Döblin*.

way to something that I'm clearly looking for, that still clings helplessly to the corpse, the ghost, a historical flower that long ago lost its roots and wilted. [...]

*

Where is it shown that I am subordinate to this catchword "God"? I sense the sweetness found in devotions, in prayers, the invigoration that follows such submission, the equilibrium it produces, the attraction of surrender and humbling. Why do I consider God a catchword? Because reflection shows me that nothing human or humanlike (but that is God), nothing moral, or of a kind that I know and is knowable to a human head, is the pillar or essence of the world. Such perplexity, this uttermost riddle, to approach something as if it has ears, an emporium where you can buy something.

[...] Why must my impulses and instincts invoke an absurd philosopheme from the infancy of humankind, a poetical phantasm for which I am too much in earnest. Perhaps, or probably, many of these instincts and feelings are inferior atavistic states of weakness and corruption, kept awake and given new life by this terrible anachronism, vices that help me remain "pious". In me, even at my age, there is no clarity, no purification, whenever insight came, resolve failed, it never preyed on my mind, or not very much. But the preying grows worse, year by year. It must happen: God must be deposed; first: free from God!

References to stars, moon, flowers in the mouths of present-day poets are mere turns of speech. And so it is with the catchword God and everything connected with it: solemn formulae from ages past, historical mummery. [...]

*

They say it is not the job of humans to be governed by reason; rather, what we should attend to is simply satisfying the biological requirements of existence. Are we cattle? Do we have perceptions and capacities of memory, logic, of judgement, enough to build railways and docks, yet allow ourselves to sink into the mire? Are perceptions and capacities there only to meet our coarsest animal needs; is everything on top of that a luxury? [...]

*

[...] The world is richer and darker than the legends suppose. It's easy to free myself from them. But not from the mythical in general that lurks within them.

The stewardship of ancient myths, the centering of the world on a mummified human being called God, the associated complex of childish naïveties must be set aside. Religiosity must be freed from this label, this signum, this thorn in the flesh. Desires and impulses must be vindicated that now are still helplessly wrapped in the cloak of the old religion. Who does not lament that while all this passion flows, it is forced, despite all resistance, to flow this way only and nowhere else. [...]

*

We need to ponder quite specifically what it means that religions are inherited within families, tribes, peoples. Well then, it's not so much a matter of belief. We seem not to know that a personality or a private opinion are available. The god is not there for the private individual. No personal stance vis á vis God is demanded; rather lining up with the family. Religion, like God, is an indisputably public affair. And for most of us a matter of indifference, one of the many realities we must deal with. In essence a characteristic badge of tribe or family. With religions,

every prayer is a renewed avowal by the individual to the community, ending in an oath of loyalty; the communal nature of religion.

One must consider what is left over. We are tucked away in society, all our thinking is social. Empty words: away from the group, on to the individual. Individuals in a psychic sense don't exist; we'd never make ourselves understood if there were individuals. Rather: away from the old group. Yes, the old, superannuated group. The point is reached where new group badges become necessary, where available symbols seem worthless, vacuous or false. Then the signal for liberation is given. There are two kinds of pleasure: the pleasure of possession, and the pleasure of creation. At the moment, creation rules. We do not possess, but many of us drag ourselves about with rudiments of the old religion. Which no longer afford pleasure.

*

Undisputed, the antiquarian value of religions. Undisputed, the extensive and very skilful attempts at adaptation. But undisputed too, our entitlement to existence. All the Fountains of Eternal Youth promised by these religions, magical transmutations, are no help. [...]

There's nothing that might with certainty be "God". A bad and painful striving to somehow bring God down to us; as if we try to use a rusty machine of the most antiquated construction instead of throwing it on the scrapheap. [...] There's no point helping God to his feet by identifying him with Nature, that brings nothing but smoke and mirrors, false premises, wrong directions, blinkers; an incapacity to see the matter objectively, unmythically. [...]

Dead and dying religions stay alive essentially from lack of competition. To this end huge numbers of people are offered up to tend, serve and venerate them, they busy themselves with these shrivelled things and earn a living from them. The support is mutual. The apparatus has proliferated enormously. You can't just blow it away.

*

[...] Religion as a tool for socialisation. And then it's truly astonishing how cities are centres of godlessness: cities where socialisation is pursued to the utmost. And at the same time this is the solution to the riddle: a socialising tool is superfluous here, there's already enough society. Cities live in a fully artificial socially constructed world, hardly affected by changes of season, ignorant of the starry heavens, of seed and harvest. And on the other hand they live in a fully present up-to-the-minute world: myth and God are at once exposed and groundless. Religion has sunk to the level of a ghost story. [...]

*

I am certain that more significant than Jesus for the Christian religion is the Church, the actual means for binding individuals, the organisation under the sign of a mythology. This religion draws its strength from a curious contradiction: between the individual and the social. For Jesus isolates the human being, draws attention to the self, focuses on the utterly unique individual soul – but the community is formed by this Ego. The individual is deceived, can't find himself, he's not there; what is presented to him as the Ego, that so yearned-for object, is the group. This game of hide-and-seek enormously strengthens the religion and draws adherents, because people strive intensively after nothing so much as their own beatitude. [...]

*

When I reread the Gospels recently, I was very disappointed. Clearly I had aged a lot since last time. The fourfold presentation of essentially the same events bore the stamp of literary artifice; I had the impression of standing across from authors who wrote as they felt, about whatever weighed on the heart; goodness knows what lies behind it, and how many cuttings from contemporary anecdotes and literary artefacts I was presented with. How can you find Jesus behind all that. Mainly I find in these four novelistic, gushing, ethics-drenched Books the same tone of the dispossessed as in the rhetoric of our socialists; yet it's not a matter of the dispossessed speaking to the dispossessed, who are meant to rise up against demagoguery, nor is it a movement for better wages, but rather for ethics. The poor are flattered, their passivity praised, the dark side of wealth and privilege is highlighted. Historians must ascertain how the Jewish people of old came by this frame of mind; but how does some mood in Judaism so long ago concern anyone today. How did such a one-sided chain of thought become the basis of a world-conquering religion? What exactly made the impoverished Fourth Estate the creators of a religion? What is certain is that the Fourth Estate are not the only ones entitled to a religion. The other Estates, or classes, probably had no demand for religion, and so were not productive that way; they accepted what the Fourth Estate brought them, became so to speak Christian – meaning, they adopted Christian affectations as a sideline.

So here, as usual, the Fourth Estate laboured for the benefit of the other Estates; they were paid for it, the Church grew and grew. Christianity has become something in the life of groups, Estates, nations, one thing among many. It is not up to representing the spirituality or the soul of any Estate, class, nation, either as a whole or in essential points. The original bias in this doctrine guarantees this, even if the Church has striven in the course of centuries to draw in other popular forces, in order to become their advocate, grant them spirituality, the spirituality specific to each class – of course not with scientific detachment and impartiality.

In particular, what has entered the Christian religion, what has become the Christian religion [...] is the cult of Mary, a joyous blissful legend, something like a Christian nature-religion – the most successful effort of the Church to save itself. For the rest, religion has remained external to fundamental human instincts, where it never gained a foothold. And these instincts felt no absence of Christianity, they acquired in the dark, with no expenditure of spirituality, what they needed from churchiness. Pride, ambition, fame, the army, the arts, technology: for religion unattainable, inapproachable! To say nothing of science. An army treats flags, ranks, medals as all-important; esprit de corps a stand-in for community. Similarly for other groups. We all know what is meant in “civilised” countries by “society” and public opinion; they have their own values, deities, attributes. Religion never comes into it, they remain unreligious, atheistic.

*

Creative forces, the architect of a religion:

- *Spookiness*. Superstitions of country folk, ghosts, remnants of older religions. Dull mindless anthropomorphism. Magic, exorcism as essential requisites of a religion. The real ancient medicine men. Very deeply anchored, untouched naïvety.
- *Desire for miracles*. The urge for ecstasy, intoxication, rapture. Liberation from the everyday, a flight from its annoyances headfirst into miracles. On the other hand the inclination to fanaticism, delight in fabulation, in astonishment.
- *Need for support*. Even after death people live in groups, meet their friends.

- *Obedience*. The inclination to obey, to be led, serve, be submissive. This is a basic emotion. It has a double root: one social, where the human being is unfree and never emerges from feudal oppression. One metaphysical, which applies to every being: the impotence of the isolated entity, whose existence is not derived *ab initio*. Expressed in Spinozan terms: the antinomy between obsolete modifications and substance; the being that is human incorporates unnecessary existence. [...]

*

Once more: the mythical content of religion has sunk to the level of a ghost story; it works with magical devices, talismans. Against this we have the fullness and opulence of our spirit, our spiritual experiences and needs. Our emotions flicker into the void, while religions have mouldy old legends to which the love of entire generations clings. What's more, these generations cannot prevent themselves from loving these legends. Where is the exit? [...] Who can help by putting an end to it? Maybe we don't need religion. It's not a matter of replacing the enactment of one myth by another; that is not the goal. Rather, we need to create freedom from catchwords, [...] create clarity, clean the air. Then the ground is made ready for things that want to emerge. How humanly high we shall then be without God or magic; it will summon our human powers.

*

In the cities, a great number of people are alienated from the dominant religions, a larger number are unacknowledged non-believers, a large number need only a nudge to kick over a rotten faith. Dreadful textbook cases of religiously orthodox men who are at the same time eminent scientists. Coleopterology does not inoculate you from stupidity, nor does Sanskrit. Such cases say nothing about the old religions, all they show is the huge amount of impurity the human soul can tolerate.

And so we hang around on street corners with empty hands. Lurk like tramps outside church doors, jeer at processions, scoff in disdain at ceremonies. It's not necessary to be a tramp, to be angry, to jeer. [...] We are not the dispossessed, but legitimate heirs setting out after a long time to validate our unexpired claims. As long as this religion preached a southern myth and we flocked to it, it could do what it liked, mistress of its own house. But when it began to penetrate into our lives, to take over our feasts and festivities so that they ceased to be ours and became Church festivals, the situation changed. This – the Church with its feasts, ceremonies and all that – is no longer just the church, but us together with it. [...]

*

Secularised properties: this brought in the first Reformation. Secularised Church ideas, festivals, institutions: this would bring in another. Church and religion – just not this Church and this religion! Away with the corpse called “God”! Freed from “God”!

We demand that the Church yield back all that is good and useful, we thank her and charge her to withdraw to the life estate of her theories. We do not throw out the priesthood, for priests are necessary, just not these who are so closely bound. Let them help, create; the way is open, the landscape vast, missions to the whole world! [...] What is useful must be wrung from the hands of the Church so that it can be put freely to good use.

And then a diving rod should be applied to the human soul, and the question asked: what in there likes to celebrate festivals, attend church, expend treasure? As said, an enormous part of

the human soul was unknown to the old religions. We'll find out what within us has need of religion, what instincts are amenable to religion and ready for it. [...]

Let the faithful not fear for their faith. Let no one fear assaults by heretics on their religion. We're dealing here with unbelievers, but those who reject the term. For us it's about self-assertion, standing up against the oppressive all-encompassing massiveness of the Church. I do not live in the shadow of the old religion, I have not fallen away. Am neither churchgoer nor heretic, but myself.

^^^

REVOLUTIONARY DAYS IN ALSACE

Die neue Rundschau, Feb 1919 [SPG 59-71]

In several essays just after the War, the writer Döblin's sharp eye for the telling detail blends with Doctor Döblin's attempts to diagnose the sickness in Germany's body politic. This vivid piece of reportage was turned into masterful fiction 20 years later, in Citizens & Soldiers, the first volume of November 1918: a German Revolution.

The *Strassburger Neue Zeitung* early Saturday: "Our news by telephone from Berlin is unavailable today, the line is blocked; we hope to provide our readers with a clarification soon." That morning I stood in the Senior Inspector's office, the old army boots reported with no particular excitement: a Commissariat official is here from Saarbrücken, someone just phoned from there, told me to change into civvies, sailors have come, there's revolution, like in Kiel.

Just then there's a call from the garrison commander in a nearby spa town: can a guard detail be despatched urgently, there's mutiny. The Senior Inspector enjoys this: "The world's gone mad, everyone's in a tizzy, keep calm, always keep calm!" Last night it seems there was unrest here too, in the barracks of our little garrison town, also choreographed by sailors. In the morning soldiers leave the barracks and occupy the garrison HQ meeting no resistance; the old man, General S., is livid, they threaten to break his sabre, then it all calms down.

Towards four in the afternoon, rumours already swirling, suddenly there's music in wide Barracks Road: a massive horde of soldiers seething along out of formation, hands in pockets, unarmed, behind a wildly waving red flag, a corporal in the lead. They throng tumultuously about the barracks gate, the sentries grin and let them through, they surge from one barracks to the next, the procession grows ever longer, howling, shouting, a press of civilians, they fetch prisoners out of the local holding stations. Soon half the town is behind them.

I run down, chat with some soldiers: we won't listen to officers no more, that's finished, and if anyone gets arrested just for overstaying his leave, that's finished too. That was all. Other soldiers when questioned said the same, they were all very merry about it; and anyway the war's over and we're going home; curfew at eleven tonight, no need to salute officers.

A strange uneasy excitement in the town. Crowds in the few streets, everywhere crammed with soldiers wearing red armbands; I'm in civvies. The barracks yards have yielded up their mass of humanity, young puppies, cripples from the convalescent companies, elderly reservists.

The faces of these Alsations, as if it's a carnival parade and they're the onlookers. Now it's out in the open: checkmate, we can do nothing more with these.

Rumours fly that the French have broken through at Saarburg, they'll be here in a day or two; drat, now how will we get out. Extra editions in the evening twilight, local fishwrap, people crowd around, read aloud in groups. And it's the second blow; the first was the horribly revealing speech by Prince Max seeking an armistice, and now: Kaiser's abdicated, the Kaiser and King, the government's been handed over to Ebert without explanation, to the Social Democrat Ebert. It's a mere formality, this "handing over" of the government; lying behind it: we have a revolution, it's the same in Berlin as here, they're not giving the government to Ebert, he has it already. Here I sit in this damnable hole, the French on our heels, how will we get away, I want to go to Berlin.

Sunday morning at the hospital my people greet me with smiles and big red ribbons; empty corridors, empty offices, patients alone in the wards, in their beds; a nurse wanders about: everyone went off very early into town, a Soldiers' Council is being formed, the hospital's choosing its delegate. There's a dead body, flu, right among the living, she has no one to take it away. I run through the building, an inspector takes pity. Not long ago the big beasts came through this empty building, dripping with titles and medals, Inspector General, Chief Medical Officer, we trembled, they shone lights in every corner, the corporal trotted behind with a little book, every trivial thing noted down, every negligence in matters of dress, bedmaking, notations on headboards. Even now the doors all display a list of every chair, every curtain-rod, every spittoon in the ward. Now, at one stroke ... Downstairs the old morgue attendant greets me gloomily, he's worked here thirty years, who'll pay his pension.

In the afternoon a big assembly in the marketplace. Sunny autumnal weather. On the way little D. bumps into me, our radiographer, carrying a photographic case. After a few words he slips past, doesn't want to be seen with Germans. In the lovely wide old square, shingle roofs, ringed by excited civilians there's a disorderly mass of soldiers wearing red cockades. The light is dazzling; confusion of voices.

And look, in among them are officers, pale, no shoulder flashes, in timid groups like lambs amid a pack of wolves; and look, they too wear red cockades, these men marked for sacrifice.

Windows and balconies of the houses around the market are packed with civilians. A jamboree, everything radiant, malicious glee, contempt, entertainment for a cocky audience. In the window of the Café G. the whole smug upper bourgeoisie of the little town, smiling – no, grinning – animated, boisterously observing the spectacle. There's stout little M. with his hands in his pockets, he's head of the food supplies office, millionaire, complained all through the war with a big cigar drooping from his mouth, he nods: "A fine business for those Prussian gentlemen." Lawyer W. clearly can't come up with enough witticisms, he tells them to his left, his right, points out this or that group of soldiers. His worship Mayor M. is here, he's here, how could he not be. Up till now he's mimed being a Prussian government assessor, now the capable young man groups himself in a French-painterly way at the window frame; he's reflective, mulling over a speech he'll deliver in French two weeks from now. (A couple of days ago, when I made an audit visit to Pechelbronn, that evening at the station there was a fellow making a jocular mocking speech to a bleating public: "Let's sing it again, that lovely song: Deutschland Deutschland über alles.")

Music, infantry's coming, the red flag bobs up and down in the hands of the childishly smiling leader, everyone parading their freedom with hands in pockets, smoking a pipe; they swagger along arm in arm. Civilians draw aside to let them through the ring. A table is carried

from the café over the heads of the crowd, someone climbs on, it's starting, everyone on tiptoe, a soldier speaks, then another, he roars hoarsely: "must not happen again, is not permitted, shameful for a soldier." The barracks at the training ground have been broken into, the contents plundered, horses sold to civilians. I ask in bewilderment, what does this have to do with the essence of revolution, why are they doing this; soon I realise this is all a part of it.

Walking slowly behind us through the mocking jostling throng comes the old man of the garrison in his gaudy general's uniform, on stiff knees, the same dandy as always when he comes here. He struts about a bit this way and that, speaks to no one, no one greets him, disappears. What fear and terror he always used to blow about him.

A soldier, an Alsatian, waves his hands about up there: he didn't join this movement just to see something like looting take place. "You all know me!" (The other soldiers in the Soldiers' Council are not stupid, they won't let any militia in until the garrison has pulled out, won't include a single Alsatian in the Council, no one wants to hand out muskets to this lot to use against us. And anyway, last night all the soldiers had their weapons taken away, none of the officers has buckled on his gun belt.) Someone else on the table, North German by his accent, addresses himself to the locals: they should rejoice with us, we too are now free of alien domination; mark it well: even we, actually in the market square at H., addressed by a German in front of Alsatis and recorded here for posterity. The bourgeois crowd accepts it all graciously, stately on its throne, lets itself be flattered, some slip away, the balconies empty, it's becoming tedious, time for coffee.

The dogs, they rock securely on their heels, just wait, gentlemen, you'll laugh on the other side of your face. Conclusion, music, march off.

The revolution makes itself felt at home. My young man ran off with twenty Mark early this morning, that's how revolutions are celebrated. The farmers deliver no milk for the infants, for a long while it hasn't agreed with them. Monday morning annual fair, many civilians running about with red ribbons, some tricolours can be seen. The paper advises us to keep emotions down, don't antagonise the soldiers unnecessarily. My colleague St. from Kreuznach has returned, we speak a little of our worries, he says accusingly: "Now you have your revolution, you and your *Frankfurter Zeitung*."

On the way someone brings the rumour that the Belgians and French are fraternising with our red soldiers at the front, English ships are flying red flags. I almost fall for it, anyway it pleases me to hear it, and I think how to pour some cold water on our worthies here. On the way I meet our splendid senior pharmacist W., he listens quite distraught to my cry of jubilation. "Yes," I laugh, "there's no more blue-white-red, black-white-red, now there's only red and red again and for a third time red." A few days ago we thought up a witty accolade for him, a blue-white-red frame with his name, but the last letter "e" graced with a huge acute accent. I go into the other pharmacy, the pharmacist receives the same shock. Only Professor E., whom I encounter on the way to the station – he's off to Strassburg, shaking the dust of H. from his heels, was stationed here on duty, but what is duty now, he's an Alsatian – he smiles and lifts a warning hand: "A victorious army does not make revolution."

The stipulations of the Armistice in the extra editions lying around everywhere are hardly remarked; internal politics have swallowed the external, the war has been swallowed by the revolution. But the Alsatis stand around in groups stunned by the number of locomotives and wagons we must deliver; lucky them. The Sunday edition of the *Strassburger Neue Zeitung*

headlines its lead article “Shreds”, speaks dismissively of Wilhelm, who wanted to tear the Alsatian constitution to shreds, who through his undignified clinging to the throne drove everything to the limit, now the entire German constitution is in shreds, etc., etc.

“From this perspective all so-called solutions to the question of Alsace-Lorraine are to be considered, from an autonomous federal state through neutrality to a plebiscite; and as democrats we do not shy from asserting that today we decline even a plebiscite: its only purpose would be to cheat France, a purpose which in any case we are convinced can no longer be achieved even with the strongest measures of persuasion. We know what we want! Our forefathers protested not just in Bordeaux in 1870, but also in the elections of 1873 and in Berlin, and it is therefore quite wrong to suggest that the opinion of the people of Alsace-Lorraine regarding the annexation was never sought. It is clear and unambiguous, and has been known to the world for almost 50 years. When, therefore, the question arises of a popular referendum, the only meaning this can have is that the French should ask us if we wish to remain with them. We are burning to give the French our answer!” Such a prompt response to Germany’s liberation; for them it’s a liberation *from* Germany. No surprise there.

In our little town this afternoon a session of the local council; his honour the mayor, erstwhile government assessor, reports on the changes in the Empire that have been accomplished, the hour has come when – see the “Shreds” article for the gist. Next day in the sewing room where the Patriotic Women’s Union for Charitable Giving and the Wounded works away, twenty needlewomen work away silent and furtive, the town has commissioned them to sew flags, you know the colours.

Gunfire on Wednesday night towards one o’clock (two nights earlier I’d been woken at the same hour by gunfire, there’d been an air raid alarm at ten, but they just threw leaflets down saying they’ll be here by the 15th). When I enquired next morning what the shooting was about they said it was a Bavarian transport, the men refused to go on, they rioted at the station, unhitched carriages, shot at signals. Tonight the shooting concerned a speeding car coming from Strassburg that had been seized by the sentry post there. The car drove through the town in the dark full of armed soldiers; what they intended was not clear, people talked of an attack on a barracks, clearly it’s just a bunch of Alsations heading home together with the car.

On Thursday a crazy scene of plunder in Barracks Road. The barracks form a huge long block of housing, at the gates at three or four places along the road a throng of civilians mixed with soldiers, many country people in flat caps, short jackets, with wheelbarrows, horse carts, ox carts, many more lurking in the background, they come up out of side streets. Outside one of the yellow barracks, right by the door, is a crowd of maybe a hundred people shouting, jostling, flowing this way and that. As I approach I see several windows on the second floor are open as far as they’ll go, suddenly soldiers appear, hatless, laughing and shouting down to the street. All at once several soldiers side by side bend back, throw down armfuls of boots and stuff; keep bending back, throw boots out high, scatter them in every direction. Everyone makes a grab, kids run off with a single boot, now there’s a knot of people hitting out, yelling, scolding. The barrows and carts come closer. Crowds of soldiers at the vehicle entrances, they’re closed today. Sentries with raised rifles (incidentally the sentries, like soldiers generally, are suddenly no longer carrying their rifles at the shoulder, or on the back barrel up, but in the Russian manner with the butt upwards; headgear too has given in and acquired a certain tendency to a Russian shape); the soldiers are wearing new clothes: it is said, credibly, that the huge stocks

inside can't be moved out, no one wants the French to have them, but these newly-clad soldiers are actually delivering to the avidly waiting peasants and townspeople in the background; the soldiers keep going back in, no one's checking how often the same one returns, deep in the ground floor passage on the cart they change back into old clothes.

Towards evening the picture changes; civilians with their raw red faces have been chased away, sentries have blocked off the whole street, no civilian can just wander in, word is the storerooms are locked, though some are already empty. In the town people move in a strangely light-hearted happy feverish colourful excitement, sacks are dragged along everywhere, there were never so many carts in town as now, among them wretched Russians, released PoWs with bundles in their hands. Along the main street a line of furniture vans heads for the station. Taverns chocablock with people, now provisions make an appearance, of course the French will bring everything with them, they say that in Nancy trains are already standing by full of white bread and red wine for Alsace. The price of wine suddenly crashes, you can buy a fat goose for five Mark a pound, yesterday it was twelve Mark, or fifteen.

Someone calls to me in the street, I'm not wearing shoulder flashes now: "Comrade, the cockade must come off." Off, then. I encounter officers, mostly in civvies, who all explain how they propose to get away; you write yourself a leave chit, sign it yourself or have it signed by the Soldiers' Council, the Council stamps anything. Most of the bigwigs are already up and gone, in civvies of course, even General S. who yesterday attended a session of our Soldiers' Council in order to discuss essential matters regarding the withdrawal of the regiments; after speaking he dropped back into his chair and said for all to hear: "You can imagine how hard this is for me." Tonight the Dragoons will march out, over the Rhine into Baden. How comfortably the local colleagues stroll around. One of them, when I happen to express how little pleasure I feel in exchanging the meat stew of Alsace for the turnips of Berlin, says to me quite benevolently: "They'll do all they can to prevent famine among you lot. They'll find it, they'll find it, you can be sure." I: "But this tawdry Armistice." "They'll tone it down, they just want to humiliate the military, don't worry." How far we've fallen. And it's all stealing, hauling away, thinking only of possessions. Overnight we've been struck to the ground in the most grotesque way, to be trodden underfoot. Many carts and people heading down Barracks Road to the airfield; most are too late; our big new airfield, they say, has been deserted by man and mouse, people and soldiers are forcing their way in, or trying to, huge amounts of materiel, petrol, metal are stored there. At last doubled sentry details are posted there.

This evening little M., forename Aron, appeared at my house, the trader, namesake of the fat millionaire. How he came here from Rumania a year ago, still suffering the after-effects of dysentery, totally intimidated, ground down, wretched, shaking with fear. The cruellest Prussian NCO regime had exercised its power on him, on the defenceless Jew, who could do nothing but keep his head down, beg, bribe, hide underground. He knows how to keep going, now he's finally been abandoned here in misery. How he crows now, in civvies: "What do they want? Are you a human being when you're a soldier? Are you for such officers and gentlemen a human being? And if you're ill, an Alsatian? They had their Staff Doctor Sch., now he's Senior Staff Doctor, you should have seen, he never touched anyone, monocle in his eye, cigar in his mouth. Alsations A1, fit for service." How happy he is: "It had to come, it should have come long ago. Let the bigheads feel it. Orders, orders, yes sir, hold the line, and we sit in the mud." And he tells endless stories of his sufferings, some funny, some accusing. How Prussian ladies at the start of the war acted so high and mighty when they came to work in the hospital, their little

jealousies; how a pharmacist had noted one of these young ladies in his register as “the pig”; how this became a matter of state; how he had to play along when one of the ladies treated him as her orderly: “Go across to my regiment now.” To my regiment!

An officer’s lady whose child lay ill had said to me a few days earlier when she visited: “So if they depose our Kaiser, I shall no longer wish to live.” She wasn’t emotional, it was quite genuine, but now I bump into her and she’s still alive, just anxious for the whereabouts of her furniture. “And our Crown Prince, such a dashing gentleman.” Well, what can you say, the woman had her beliefs, they worked splendidly for her, how should she understand other motives? When I argued with her a little, she said yes, property could be shared a bit more evenly and fairly, but it’s all the fault of the rich peasants and the bankers, that can be changed, but our Kaiser? “And really you can’t change everything. Take the head of a district, for example, he sits in his circle like a little king and everything goes like clockwork. And they cling to him and obey. When that too should all be over and done with.” Sister Grete in the infants’ crèche, a resident of Alsace but German to her very bones, keeps pestering; she’s been travelling around southern Germany for days to find a place for her parents, to no avail, there’s nothing to be had. Her father’s at the Strasburg cathedral building office, a pensionable post, he’s an old man, will the French keep him on. “What’s become of our great rich Germany. Look at the railway carriages, seat covers all cut up, no curtains, even the fastenings for the luggage-rack nets have been cut away. No heating, the locomotives can hardly pull, there’s no coal, the engine’s defective, people begging in the streets for bread, it’s enough to make you howl.” She will never and nohow become French, but there’s nothing for it but to stay.

By Wednesday we are quite headless, meaning: chief, senior inspector, corporal all gone on some excuse or other. The army hospital is supposed to march off, we wait anxiously for our train, there’s a terrible shortage of carriages, three hundred are ordered from the railway, twenty arrive. We’ve sent all the serious cases to the town hospital. When I go to the army hospital on Wednesday, the ambulance is waiting below to take someone away, upstairs the man lies dead, died suddenly just now. This terrible flu never stops. Crates have been packed, straw lying in every corridor with hospital supplies, books, there’s hammering. I find the big rooms of crockery, porcelain still quite full, women standing about, it’s not clear who’s in charge, who’s going to check things off. We’re supposed to be leaving on Thursday evening. It’s clear there’s a huge amount of thieving in the hospital. An orderly from the town’s ambulance company was caught carrying away marble tops from the night-tables in his gurney. Every ward is empty, people go from room to room, prams moving everywhere without check, evidently loaded up with coal, out through the doors.

On Thursday evening, under the harsh glare of magnesium lights piercing the darkness, the lumbering transport train departs. We travel all day. We freeze to death. Three pigs, two goats were supposed to be slaughtered for the transport, we could have feasted, but where was it all? A day in the goods yard at Würzburg. Stroll through the town. A red flag flying at the castle, a red flag in broad daylight! Posters on the pillars, signed “The Republican town commandant”. What sort of world are we entering. No newspapers for days, all we can buy is a local Würzburg paper, the masthead: “Free of Berlin”. The contents the same old story, clericals playing to Bavarian pride, they’re using the ploy of “Berlin Terror”.

On Wednesday in Berlin, I head for Potsdamer Platz for the ceremony to the Fallen. Along the way I encounter a group of Social Democratic voters, red flag up front, respectably clad calm

men and women, they're singing the tune of the Marseillaise. I have the impression of a little club outing. The lines of people at Potsdamer Platz are not as thick as usual at such gatherings, it stretches across the city as far as Friedrichshain. In the endless procession are wreaths with red ribbons, red banners, proletarian cries, otherwise nothing to remind me of revolution, a well-ordered petit-bourgeois event writ large.

First I must put myself to rights.

^^^