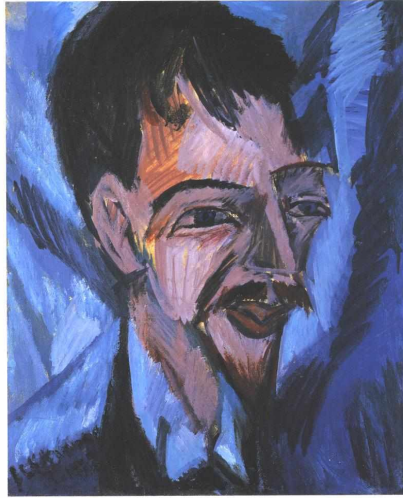


Alfred Doeblin



Beyond Alexanderplatz

ALFRED DÖBLIN

GERMAN MASQUERADE

WRITINGS ON POLITICS, LIFE, AND LITERATURE
IN CHAOTIC TIMES

PART 2 : POLITICS & SOCIETY

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.

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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.

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Translated by C D Godwin unless otherwise noted

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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

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

November 1918 – A German Revolution:

Vol 1 *Citizens & Soldiers*, 2024 Galileo.

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Part Two

POLITICS AND SOCIETY

From 1921 to 1924, Döblin adopted the pseudonym 'Linke Poot' (Left Paw) for his more political writings, which provide vivid and trenchant commentary on the failure of the German Revolution.

His two major essays on history: 'The Thirty Years War' and 'Prometheus and the Primitive' offer trenchant overviews of Western Civilization.

CANNIBALS by Linke Poot
Die neue Rundschau, June 1919. [DMB 10-25]

Between 1919 and 1924, Döblin published around 20 essays using the pseudonym 'Linke Poot' (Left Paw), which he felt gave him more freedom to be provocative. This translation (titled 'On Cannibalism') was first published in full by The Brooklyn Rail in March 2019; it appears here slightly shortened.

During the brutal suppression of unrest in March (following the so-called Spartacist Uprising in January), Döblin's sister Meta was killed by shrapnel.

A miner somewhere not long ago slaughtered a young child, sold the musculature as mutton, and some of it, to the horror of every mutton-eating reader, reached Berlin. A similar case has been known since ancient times, when it gave rise to the craziest tragedies. Now lots of mutton turns up in Berlin that actually is not. One consequence of the meat shortage is a certain expansiveness and catholicity in zoological matters; judgement clouded, hunger stilled.

What is it that causes the sated and the starving alike to shudder at this encounter between miner and child – I believe it was a miner, but that's not to say more overground professional classes are entirely in the clear. What exactly offends us in this trick of demoting a human being to a lower class of animal? The snuffing out, or the mutton chop? Snuffing out is commonplace, the chop uncommon. And the vegetarian declares: a corpse is a corpse. What's fair for the ox is fair for the human, we're all vertebrates, there's no discernible difference between the cannibal and the average European. From a culinary standpoint it's hard to give an opinion; there's evidence that even a human-based mutton chop is nice and tender and bears comparison with any cuts from bigger livestock. What's more, ethics and human pride bid us reject a contrary opinion.

So I don't know if people are wrong to say the whole business of human mutton chops is hysteria and prejudice; one simply shouldn't do such things. Behind it, according to the sceptics, is nothing more than contempt for one's nearest and dearest, who are deemed inedible and arouse revulsion. Clearly the only way forward is a compact between the classes of animals: to eat each other only in accordance with specific rules; within each class individuals rub along together and practise pacifism with inhibitions. Humans are eaten professionally only by such and such animals. Humans eat humans by devious routes. This is the dietary rule here on earth. It's the law, it's etiquette.

Since cannibalism has already had consequences as bad as those in ancient tragedies, we can surely perceive wisdom in this precept.

*

Kleist's *Penthesilea* is an extraordinarily ranting piece of theatre. It made him *persona non grata* with Goethe, but retains a horrible beauty. It's typical that this play, for long a morsel known only to the literati, can under excellent direction be performed on the public stage arousing great emotion, powerful tension and sympathy. An unsettled time requires strong accents, the strong accent resounds in echoing souls torn open. In this play the heroine, in a state of mental confusion and fog, throws herself on her beloved in a misunderstanding – so great a misunderstanding that she herself speaks of transposed syllables, küssen (kiss) and bissen (bite), a rhyming error – and 'kisses' him to pieces with teeth and hands, only to come to her senses dripping with blood.

I'm no friend of the theatre, especially not of tragedies. I'm not eager to be robbed of the little bit of sense that God or one of his functionaries gave me. Up there they show how some man or woman or creature can't do something, and I'm supposed to marvel or find it tragic when they try to do it regardless. As if I with my knock-knees tried to jump two meters. [...] Comical, tragic, stupid, painful. It's long been said that a person is seldom as stupid as the heroes of tragedy, and maybe this is enough to justify how seldom they appear on the stage.

That this Penthesilea, out of grief born of love, falls into a trance is doubtless something that happens every day. That she then assaults someone – that too happens often; in most cases crockery and windowpanes attest to it. That she then half devours him is a less common case, but the mad devour all sorts of things. The whole point is: in her agitation she doesn't notice that Achilles has come to her as a lover; that's the key point, everything is built on this over-hasty act; I must go along with it, I'm duty bound to marvel at it. But this is only a means to an end; the point, for Kleist and us: someone must be eaten, figuratively, and – what is so sensational here – not figuratively. It's like this in every tragedy, and here it is in your hands. A sacrificial victim must be found, the sacrificial victim that we need. The word *tragedy* comes from the goat [*tragos*] that was once sacrificed; the little goat has disappeared, let's make do with humans! For we are cannibals, and every day we contravene the dietary rules here on earth; we stuff ourselves full at the theatre. A vegetarian won't watch a tragedy, not a total vegetarian. We declare it a cunning piece, speak of Art, retain professors who must write thick books about what tragedy is. But we gladly let our brains grow dim, we accept with credulity the boundless nonsense, the blinkered absurdity of the heroes, when in Homer for example we see the suitors at their dinner: "And Athene set off uncontrollable laughter in the suitors, crazed them out of their minds – mad hysterical laughter seemed to break from the jaws of strangers, not their own, and the meat they were eating oozed red with blood – tears flooded their eyes, hearts possessed by grief."

We feast on Othello and Desdemona, King Lear and his sweet daughter. The more radiant the Achilles the more willingly we accept him, for out of common clay is the human made. And that is why the theatre requires a hero, whereas in the newspaper a janitor's child suffices: it must be unwrapped, must be dished up for us with all the details, and we must tuck in: both senses apply. [...] When we rise dripping to our feet, only the naïve say: we are purified. Rather we are sated, for the moment.

Humankind has preserved these tragic games from the most desolate period of our history. We well recognise ourselves in these games. What do we expect from them? What sympathy towards each other?

*

I was barricaded in Lichtenberg during those March days. Already on the Monday when the General Strike was called, a broken sabre lay on Alexanderplatz late that evening. Everywhere restless angry masses of humanity stood around. Motor cars were stopped, people shouted: "Once we can move, you can move." They chased after a car that refused to stop in König Strasse, crack! the windscreen was split in two, the driver surrendered. Next day already a distant rumbling could be heard, people said it was from Alexanderplatz, but we couldn't see who was fighting; up to the Wednesday we had the newspaper only once. Day by day the press of people swelled on the Frankfurter Allee, that great eastern boulevard. On the Wednesday I tried to push through to Alexanderplatz from Lichtenberg, but beyond Warschauer Strasse the throng

was considerable. People shouted in groups, debated, the mood almost unanimous against the government; these were the typical middling and labouring people of the district. Workers at a furniture factory not yet on strike were dragged out by a mob around 4 p.m. On Königsberger Strasse a man shouted: "They nabbed one of the government troops at the bridge, and they've done for him good and proper." Jubilation.

The people so aroused. Suddenly it all streams to a certain point, then flees apart: an aeroplane overhead. They scream: "Take cover, he's got bombs." You run too, though you don't think it likely. You turn slowly back east again, and – look! – five civilians walk past with rifles on their backs, grim determined faces, a mass of mostly silent people around and behind them, they search from house to house, cross the street. Two armed men half in army uniform link up with them, they enter a house, one stays outside, people say they're looking for weapons. They come out, and turn down Warschauer Strasse.

The wildest stories from the city are passed on by people who claim to have seen it: there's been a battle between Marines and government troops; the battle went back and forth, the Marines had the upper hand; two hundred government troops barricaded in police headquarters were fired on from Alexanderplatz and the Waisenbrücke; the insurgents have begun digging trenches in the zoo; they mean to hold the government troops there until their food runs out; reinforcements from Spandau will soon arrive.

And then Thursday afternoon, late afternoon, trying to turn down the Allee, you see something that hits you like a blow: overturned across the carriageway, wheels towards you, big vehicles like dead beasts blocking the wide street. Under the rail overpass the road into the city is blocked. Two or three rifle-toting men in torn military uniforms pace up and down by the vehicles. And now more trucks come pouring down the road from the freight depot, into Gürtel Strasse; word is they've been called in to block off every access to the Allee. You stand and watch astonished, along with many others, to see what the men do with the trucks. Eager youths leap forward to help, it's all so solidly calm, workmanlike. There's a small machine gun, a man punches a hole in the bed of the lorry, shoves the barrel through. Muttered questions left and right, what's that about, a grenade'll smash those thin planks. By evening Gürtel Strasse too is blocked; we're barricaded in. Strange thing is, we see hardly any defenders. Wherever you go two or three men are standing together, five at the most, word is the rest are in taverns and residential buildings, but until the last day they were nowhere to be seen. And those who pushed past the barricades reported the same: that's all there is. Hardly any traffic in the streets beyond; once a day the Bolle milk-cart, very very brave, through real gunfire, admired by friend and foe. A stirring picture from another world.

Similar scenes in the streets on the following days. Small groups of people outside buildings, on street corners, loud rifle shots, machine-gun fire – but who are they shooting at? – frequent shouting; the streets empty, shutters lowered on many buildings. No gas in the apartments, no electric light, no water. Every morning men, women and children come running out with cans and pails, run to the well; when the machine-gun ratatats they all run back in. Around eight in the evening, what they call 'going to sleep'. Now and then through the night, heavy guns pounding.

A strange sight from Saturday onwards: Workers' Samaritans and female ambulance staff. These are normal vehicles with boarded sides, closed trucks, boards and stretchers piled on them. A nurse sits up there next to the driver with her Red Cross armband, behind, often

squeezed in, other personnel, each waving a big white flag, waving and signalling without a pause. It's a most remarkable sight, mediievally poignant. When they go by themselves they also wave a white flag; obviously the armband is not visible at a distance. Near the Town Hall five machine-guns have been posted, often there's one standing quite exposed in the street, the location changes, they're probing. Now and then a lorry drives down the street, contents unclear, covered; handcarts are pushed along. Patrols of two or three go past, civilians and half-soldiers, now and then a sailor's uniform, not much weaponry, they hand rifles one to the other. Soon it's not easy to dare the approach to the Allee, there's shooting from too many places; if you do make it nearer, the so-called barricades are still in place, word is there's a trench mortar; the groups of people are smaller now. It really should be a pushover to deal with these few insurgents, but of government troops there's neither sight nor sound.

Flour days. From the goods yard across the town park come funny figures: little men and women and children white with flour. They haul packages and sacks; wherever they walk or stand they leave white marks. A cart comes down the street, unloads outside a building not far from the Allee, a shop sets up, selling eggs and flour; one egg fifty pfennigs; flour, I heard, a Mark for a pound. Mobs of poor people run about. The stuff, they say, was taken from looters. The machine-guns at the Town Hall suddenly point in a new direction, towards the town park, the station from where the funny people are coming. They're being chased by the few insurgents who are visible; anyone carrying a package is taken to the Town Hall steps where a small crowd of people and a few soldiers are standing about. Every package is checked; anyone who can't provide proof and seems suspicious has it taken away. A sad pile of sacks and packages builds on the little staircase outside the Town Hall. Suddenly everything becomes orderly, forms a nice queue as if at the grocer's, rations are meted out for free, people come running from the buildings with their little shopping bags and baskets. The looters often don't give up their stuff willingly, they howl and threaten, a woman curses: how long since she saw any flour and now they're taking it from her, have they no pity; she finds she's lucky to escape with her skin intact.

From ten on Sunday morning heavy shooting nearby, and then all day and night with long pauses. Most casualties are said to be on the Allee, many civilians killed, especially children fetching water, and women.

So who else are they to shoot?!

In neighbouring buildings they go down to the cellars. Things seem to be on the turn. Hardly any defenders to be seen. What are they actually waiting for? One stands outside my building fiddling with his machine-gun, runs to another because he doesn't know how to operate the thing. The man works on it for an hour, then it rattles away merrily. On Monday evening – weekdays hardly mean anything to us – everywhere there's the comforting clatter of the little guns. Early on Tuesday the machine-guns are still there, but strangely there are lots of people, even children, on the street, standing outside doors. And look: there, led by two boys, someone in a steel helmet is coming over from Normannen Strasse, and another, they go up to the machine-guns, carry them away one behind the other, the two of them exactly one behind the other just as when the insurgents brought them, they have the same technique. Ever more civilian presence on the sun-bright street. Rumours of Government troops, the insurgents have run away, that night they'd still been quarrelling at the goods depot, they took the pins from the guns.

Clop clop down Frankfurter Allee, in broad daylight, thick columns come marching with cannon, field kitchens, baggage. So, the barricades are gone. They come from every direction, one huge cannon in camouflage paint is emplaced by the Town Hall, they dig a hole for it after lifting some paving stones, set there the long-barrelled thing that hasn't yet spoken. Incredible how many soldiers there are all of a sudden. And at once crowds of people in the street whom we'd never seen on previous days: well-dressed men and women out for the air, most have something in their hands, cigarettes for the soldiers; from several shops and buildings they bring out flowers. But here and there I catch a fleeting glimpse of a little woman and a child, creeping: our goodly flour-creatures; quick, along behind the houses; where on earth do they find it all. The machine-guns we now see and hear are considerably bigger, unusually mighty beasts that crack like cannon – I've no idea even now against whom, there's lots of shooting in a war and not much is hit, and now it *crack cracks* even into the air, that's progress, low over the buildings aeroplanes come flying, apparently shooting down at the roofs; this doesn't much clarify matters for me; a plane flies pretty fast, who does the man think to hit with this procedure; most likely once again – us. But anyway it looks like something, you have to understand the military view of the situation. In the morning hours numerous patrols set out from the school. And now people say: Aha, they're going into houses. Youngsters stand and chat to soldiers and guide them, and from balconies older people point soldiers in the right direction. And soon we see civilians between two soldiers; who knows if these are the ones that lay in the street; they're taken to the school, towards the Allee. Towards noon I go down and hear: They're shooting people over there in the churchyard, or the schoolyard, it's martial law. I don't believe it, there's also talk of aeroplanes dropping bombs; I myself witnessed how insurgents cursed and manhandled a prisoner they'd taken, and two minutes later a woman who couldn't have seen any more than I did said the man had been shot dead, and this ran through every building. Clearly this martial law stuff was bogus.

But – it's strange. People clump so outside the churchyard and opposite the churchyard. Red posters are stuck to walls, remarkable texts: Weapons must be surrendered, there and there, it makes sense, but then: Whoever has not by such and such a deadline handed weapons in at the Black Eagle will be punished, failure to surrender, it said, will be treated as suspect according to martial law. The next day brings clarity; certain things you can't believe until you see them. (At the end of the war I argued with a French-leaning lawyer about Wilson's armistice telegram; the accusation of looting etc. struck me, as one who knows the German soldier and army, as absurd. The lawyer smiled: he wasn't naive enough to share my opinion. A scoundrel, I thought, this fellow.) Sentries stand at the churchyard, barbed wire fences are being erected in front of them. Word is three bodies lie shot outside the school. I go across, push through the crowd of soldiers and civilians, past a machine-gun; outside the gate near the churchyard wall on a bare patch of ground lie three unmoving bodies, caps over faces. Past women with handkerchiefs to their mouths I come to the schoolyard; half a dozen flamethrowers stand along the wall, lively barracks movement, wagons being unloaded; a captain goes past, steel helmet low over his brow, monocle, cold look. At the wall close to the entrance three pale men, ordinary crumpled clothing, they look wretched as if they've been up all night; the younger gives a challenging yawn, the other two look miserably at the ground. They're not yet sentenced, I hear; later: all three were released. When I try to reach the Allee, a procession comes up the street, strong marching steps, twenty men, rifles at the shoulder, steel pots plonked on their heads. What do they want, we have enough soldiers here. A man tall as a tree leads them, pale bold serious face, strange they all wear a helmet and he only a cap; even the volunteers seem to have trouble with

their outfits, for all of them are neat and tidy while he has a shabby black soldier's greatcoat. And when I try innocently to go past, the people run together behind me, there are shouts of Clear the road! Everything runs to the other side, and when I turn around the tree-tall leader is climbing the steps to the church, they shuffle left and right: another one's about to be shot. And just as we close our eyes tight, a salvo bangs out.

So so, so so. That was one. It lies there in its soldier's black greatcoat. Once it was a human being and now it's a thing. The notion is damned heavy. An undeniable shock. One has seen many people die, but – this was something special. It was so methodical, one could almost go mad at the thought. He's not the only one; people point between the palings of the churchyard fence and count three, four, five.

A heavy *boom* sounds. They say the fighting has moved on to Boxhagen.

*

I won't talk about how the whole tactic is beyond my understanding. You must have some particular military background to understand how a few hundred badly armed, hardly armed men thrown together, spread over a wide area, for whole days are – not attacked: by thousands and more thousands of heavily armed troops with cannon, tanks, armoured cars. The German army didn't collapse, was lively at least on the principle "always slowly onward". And at a pinch I can understand the use of heavy artillery, armoured cars: they wanted to show they had them and the insurgents didn't. In order to scare the insurgents and warn them they killed several hundreds, maybe many hundreds of people, citizens actually. The aeroplanes had the task of finding how many of the enemy were at a place; but perhaps it's enough from a military standpoint to let us civilians know that they are there; and we were very glad of it.

But what I do understand clearly is martial law. The work done after the battle. Spiegelberg, I know you. That's him again, the one I met so often: *tabula rasa*, piff, paff, victory, Germany first in the world. Captain Fryatt and the indecent haste with which he pronounced sentence, i.e. topped someone. Somewhere two gentlemen sit at a table behind a telephone, grind their teeth, say: Hold on, young 'un, we'll be at you soon enough, slow and steady, chuck a couple of grenades so they know what's what, we'll have 'em by the short and curlies. Short and curlies, ha, they won't stray again.

Lots of heads have thought about the death of a person, and killing, and we need only to reflect on it. Even among the masses memories of these thoughts swim about: see the movement to end capital punishment. I take no pleasure at all in the deeply impure desire for human tragedy-deaths; I've already registered my distaste. Here a more particular distaste. According to reports, the insurgents too killed people. But what I saw of killing was organised by the authorities in a legally methodical way, you might say ordered as a piece of wisdom. There was no passion, greed, infatuation, hatred, revenge, the judge here had at his disposal every reservoir of superiority and deliberation. Hatred and passion explain the insurgent killings. The office that ordered this cannot even make that claim.

When Captain Dreyfus sat on Devil's Island, a man alone, still alive, object of a questionable trial, whole crowds in France were in uproar. We know what Zola and Voltaire thought about lawbreaking. And now we know what people in Germany, the imperial republic, think of it. The population of poets and thinkers has no time for it, must deal with all the old detritus. The poets poetise, the thinkers think, they've done it since the Ice Age and will still be doing it until the

next Ice Age. But the people this is all about are not alive but dead, dead as a doornail, and gone is gone. Yes, they were taken away wholesale and struck down, and those who ordered it and cover it up are German public authorities, yesterday today and tomorrow German authorities, our law courts. They are unshaken even now, these law courts, by the normally so powerful pathos of our spirituality, for which Goethe and Tolstoy lived. Lived, I say? Leatherbound books they produced for them, material for empty hours. Where are you now, you who are cultured, spiritual, you swashbucklers? You bigmouths! You're sickening, the lot of you. With your stupid modern plays, your poems where you're imagining God knows what, your ridiculous new forms of expression. You can't even express in simple terms the oldest feeling: the rage and horror of a man at such misdeeds. No, it's too much for you, you psychic cripples!

Understand: a cannibal thinks what he does is right because he knows no better. He devours my uncle as I eat spinach. But the devouring office here, loaded up with all wisdom, all morality, does not overcome its inhibitions like, say, the aficionado of tragic dramas, no, it ignores them. It glibly says No to everything that has meaning for us. For, for, for it knows something else. It believes that it knows, more, it does believe it: This state must preserve its order, better: my order. The state must be preserved, my state, even if the blindest injustices and unrighteousness pile up to the ceiling. This state, that exists only in their own heads.

I'm not troubled by one or two deaths, we all have to go sometime. But this senselessness is unbearable, boundlessly repulsive. I won't be fobbed off with expressions like: "You can't make an omelette without breaking eggs." The law of the state cannot be restored by an insolent breach of the natural claim to justice.

And what lies behind it, behind the Theory of the State: the primal cold of ice. And what lies behind the silence of half, three quarters of the population, its spirituality –

[...]

When a fox grows old, the following tale can be told of it: He sticks his brush, the famous brush of a fox, straight up in the air, takes himself off to the other animals and makes his proposition. He renounces vegetables, rotten wood, green cabbage, asparagus, celeriac, radishes, and furthermore the enjoyment of lions, elephants, crocodiles, frogs and ants, and will devote himself entirely to the service of young chickens. He requests the assembled creatures, his brush straight up in the air, to support him in his sacrifice by reserving to him all the young chickens, or at least making it easy for him to reach them.

The Imperial German Republic is regaining strength. Its teeth may have been knocked out, its back is done in, but it's doing well for a start. People can set to work again. A treaty is proposed for setting up a League of Nations, and tucked away you see the paragraph: "No country may interfere in the internal affairs of another country."

That makes sense. Germany needs to be left alone to restore itself. It must develop from scratch, unhindered, its national characteristics: servility, and poverty of feeling. People of Europe, guard your holiest possessions, don't let yourselves be robbed of your weak judgement! Even the Turks won't let themselves be robbed of their fun (meaning massacres) with the Armenians, under the banner of self-determination: "Everyone his own Cesare Borgia!" Germany so much the less, where the phrase "to each his own" still shines in all its glory; "his own" included Poland and Flanders. Everywhere doctors prescribe massacres at home; from pulpits they preach: "If your neighbour's eye offend thee, pluck it out." You can understand that

countries finding themselves in the undeserved crisis of having no Armenians look desperately for a way out: they stick to their criminals, i.e. the other political parties. It has proved expedient for these nations in crisis to position certain parties for the purposes of pogrom; if necessary everyone can take turns; changing places makes it cosier. At present in Germany we have available: Conservatives, Jews, Spartacus, Bourgeoisie; if you like they're ready to start their own pogroms against the others, and you can find lots of variations to keep a tolerably great people going for the foreseeable future. In Germany each can act on his own account: here they take democracy very seriously.

There's a proposal for a different international treaty. In one place, almost as an afterthought, we read: for undeveloped peoples, on the Equator or nearby, mandates shall be assigned ...

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THE BEAR, RELUCTANT by Linke Poot
Die neue Rundschau, August 1919 [SPG 100-109]

Background: The Versailles Peace Conference opened on 18 Jan 1919; the German delegation was handed peace terms on 7 May; a peace treaty was signed on 28 June, and ratified in the National Assembly on 9 July.

The leg had gangrene, was removed. They cursed the doctor because they'd lost a leg.

They shuffled along in chains, a smith cut them free. They yelled, scolded: we can't walk straight, our hands and feet are raw, they hurt.

Their smith was an unusual fellow: the prisoners were none of his business! This they know: now they have something.

These predators, complaining. Released from the cage, unable to run. Sand trickles between the toes, over the soles, the ground is soft, they slide and lurch, wind ruffles their fur. They want to return to the cage, huddle, stand clutching the bars.

You see this horrible situation when an animal is being tamed. The beast is led to a confined space, and at once everything it's used to is no longer valid. Yet instincts continue to present themselves. Every organ now superfluous, but still there, importuning. How they chafe and scrape themselves raw. The clang of the prison house: the human being, isolated, suddenly nothing to look at, nothing to activate the auditory nerves straining for a sound – but the nerves are intact, and waiting. The whole human being, attuned to an enormous number of stimuli, now suddenly deprived in every organ, and on top of that it's as if they deliberately stimulate and torment him, he's fed, charged up; they pour stress into him, inspiring anew the organs, eyes, ears, bones, feelings. If he were a boiler he'd explode. So the whole thing is askew, runs idle, hallucinations, phantasms, excitation-states.

Germany tipped from its cage. The problem: how to make a tamed animal wild again. It should and must return to the wild. It should and must make revolution.

So it's not wrong and it's no laughing matter when the instincts of hundreds of thousands or millions come surging up. Not even the apparent misery of those who weep for the defunct regime and who are pained by one of the peace conditions above all: the surrender of the

dungeon-symbol. Posters on the wall, German women proclaiming: the sailors should redeem their shame by scuttling the fleet, the land army should not hesitate. How glad they are to hide behind instincts now bereft of purpose. How they refuse to see that they've lost all purpose, and wave their sweet little flags.

A roar from the National Assembly: revenge. They're unhappy; people goad them still. They don't know if they're coming or going. What should they do but cry revenge on those who made them unhappy.

A secret: they're lying when they make a big to-do about this peace. They're glad of it, expected nothing else, maybe a bit more lenient here and there. How outraged they would have been, how ashamed and broken, if a just peace had appeared in front of them. This fact, this true revolution: justice, in which they do not believe, and will never ever believe.

What more do they want? It symbolised what they've lost, what's been taken from them, for centuries the optimum of their conditions of life. From which they had become inseparable. They themselves were half-destroyed when those conditions were destroyed.

The great revolution of 1789 was preceded by decades of dire disturbances. The populace was loosened and freed from the soil and the constraining fetters. There was Montesquieu in the *Persian Letters*, mocking spirituality and all the institutions of state, he, president of the Parliament. In his youth Voltaire wrote satirical verses about Louis XIV, for which he took a trip to the Bastille; this was early in the 18th century, the revolution came at the end, and in between the man had not sat quietly, had not sat alone, Encyclopaedists and Materialists toiled away, a war of liberation was fought in America. Slowly the government apparatus began to malfunction, until the wheels began to squeak and fail. Taxes were the last straw.

In Germany on 4 August 1914, even some workers rejoiced, to say nothing of the middle and upper classes. The Radical MP Frank went off to war, to set an example.

In the end the Entente's foot stomped on the antheap. The disarray of the shaken tumbled little creatures. And these are meant to make a revolution!

There is no intention and has never been any intention to set you free. They could have done it already, maybe for the sake of your blue eyes, there's something about the Germans, there's enough raw material in them. But even the sun does not intend to draw forth plants and trees, yet here they come. The sun is an awesome ball of fire, a dreadful glowing mass of gases, and tender flowers live from it, can't live without it, they wait for it.

In Nature there's a thing called Adaptation. It's no imposition, no weakness, but the capacity to master chance, attain power over circumstances. It's entirely up to any creature to be a slave or not. As long as you bay at foreigners and their peace, you'll be their slave. Like flowers shrinking from the sun so they won't be scorched. But still they grow towards it. I repeat: grow.

Gratitude for the Entente: where is this phrase? When will it be written? [...]

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Lice crawl over the bear's pelt and make their music. The bear is supposed to dance.

Oh, how weary the scene of paradox and confusion makes you. Who wouldn't rather be in Turkestan or further east, lie under a felt tent, *let, o world, o let me be*.

And just one happy thought: the lice can pipe whatever tune they want, the cage, the cage is broken open, there's no denying. And if the bear wants to go back into the cage, the iron bars of the whole world stand ready to greet him. He must turn round, must come out into the open. The bear groans and grunts lamentably.

When shall we hear you, at last, grunting sincerity and gratitude?

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DIONYSOS by Linke Poot [excerpt]
Die neue Rundschau July 1919 [DMB 25-36]

On the wall of a very northerly tenement block is a big garish cinema sign. An arrow points down from the first floor. You go past a bar into a gloomy passage; in there, in a little wooden lean-to, a kind of watchman's booth, an elderly woman gazes out on the day-bright street. And when you half reluctantly slink into the passage – you're shaken.

For – there they are. They. The patrons of the cinema.

They walk snuffling up and down past the posters, it's six in the evening, Saturday. The clothes, men's and women's, are loose sagging jackets, skirts, trousers. All hanging on them. The faces are all dull, moistly grey-white, no expression. The women wear shawls over the shoulders or under the arms, hair unmade. They hunt in their bags for the purse. Man and wife converse in low voices, the faces don't change as they study the provocative posters. Wearily, like crumbling clay figurines, they lay out the money for the grinning cashier woman, and slip into the dark – stable. For this is the space into which these people creep from their noisy tormenting factories, their stuffy little rooms; it's filled with musty smoky air. Blackness, a huge daunting blackness, pierced in the middle by a solitary flickering bundle of rays, hardly finger-thick at the back, expanding as it aims for a dangling patch of cloth. There it jiggles, twitches, grey muddy spots on a harsh eye-watering white. And all stare at this cloth as they take their seats. They're content to sit and place their hands with the hat and shawl on their knees. A piano plays, all evening the same two or three silly pieces, incorrectly, same mistakes every time. Suddenly a shrill female voice rings out, declaiming in Berlin vernacular, it's the promised first-class commentary. Some detective business, what does it have to do with these people, weekly roundup, races, unrest here and there, interlude. "The interrupted supper".

Not a face changes expression the entire evening, all remain slack; if a young thing turns around and laughs, she meets blank stares. Numbers are called out, men and women stand, they go back down the passage, the booth is shut up now. The street is dark. Shawls over the head, fists in pockets. They don't talk, drag themselves off home.

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When you see them in the factories, in ranks like companies of soldiers, the same hand movements day in day out: that's – how it is.

When you see them outside, it's not far from unbearable.

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Berlin streets around seven in the evening, eight in the evening. Summer-bright streets and boulevards, half empty, empty. Work has ended, shops are shut. People still sitting in trams, heading for home.

Where are the people now? They've crept home, are eating supper, reading the paper, their party's paper – stirring up hostilities, unsettling – and off they trot to be entertained. Oh the gruesome spectacle of the cabaret, these music cafés, these dance amusements! They cannot be amused, it's not been granted them. Bourgeois or proletarian, they're workers. In this country the word has been given: if you don't work, you don't eat. The worst swearword here is parasite. They find their – shall we say, good cheer – in the factory, the office.

What a stroke of genius, what psychological perspicacity: a people to whom joy has not been given are to be helped to find themselves by – enslaving them. Ah, socialism never thought people would take it that much at its word: the duty to work. The Entente saw how almost from nothing this Herculean people strove to make its realm into a behemoth, for whom, for what? Work, pile up luxuries and not use them. Build high speed railways, aeroplanes and, having done so, not know what you've begun. Start a war, ever more territory, what for, work even harder. They've made virtues of necessities; earnestness, tragedy, dignity, music are held in the highest regard here. People have their surrogates and sidetracks. When the people are already factionalised, we do them a favour and remove the burden of having to think why they're in a faction. The world is sundered, there's the division of labour: people who join factions, for people who enjoy themselves.

Fate, not politics.

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The big reality: May, June. Loose clothing now, colours, livelier movements. You see that people are not just a head, thinker's brow, irritable mouth. Deep within they carry all sorts of things around; these animate them, make them jaunty, they're glad. Nature's better than a barrel-organ. They swarm around in the warm air. Shops provide fine footwear for this, net stockings, bright neckties, they swing walking sticks, blow cigarette smoke. You see that even shops have meaning. You can see what they're there for. What a joke: the arid dismal solemn rows of factories, industries, warehouses, all that lies behind it, import bans, customs laws, blockade, what it is that is brought to life and flaps around. What it is! The sun hatches them all, little men, little females, maidens. Ah maidens. We weave for you the virgin's crown, of many gonococci. Oh love, ultimate victor in the struggle. [...]

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REVUE by Linke Poot [excerpt]
Die neue Rundschau Feb 1920 [DMB 77]

[...] The western Jew is another story. A curiosity that he's still around; probably it has more to do with the host peoples than with him. The peoples of Europe seem to have kept the Jew as a spittoon, he certainly plays an important role in the housekeeping of these people. I read once that the Jew as an extinct race makes a spooky impression, and arouses a fear of demons; hatred of Jews goes deeper to the culture-historical demonopathies that line up with and have the same spiritual dimensions as the fear of ghosts and belief in witches. It's tightly enchained and woven into these things and so can't be set aside. It justifies itself according to the age on grounds of physiology, or racial biology, or morality. History provides the true basis for this demonopathy: the simultaneous flooding of Jews amongst the peoples of Europe and the degradation and

stigmatising of existing religions by Christianity, together with naïve disgust for Jesus-killers in a context of continued scepticism by these Jews against the new religion. [...]

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THE GERMAN MASQUERADE by Linke Poot
Die neue Rundschau, May 1920 [DMB 94-106]

In mid-March 1920, right-wing officers led a Putsch against the Weimar government. It was defeated when soldiers refused to fire on civilians, and unions called a general strike. Döblin has little good to say of any players in this farce.

Gerhart Hauptmann wrote a play called “The White Saviour”. Into a beatifically lovely and decadently weak Mexico there breaks a militarised Christian horde of Spanish origin. The emperor of the Mexicans, expecting the promised White Messiah, experiences disillusion; Christianity is exposed. That’s how it seems: exposed. The play ends with curses on the Christian bandit rabble.

The artistry, the ballad-like conception, is not the point here. As in a picture by Rembrandt, all light falls on Montezuma, the emperor. The context is a transparent screen, squirming more or less shadowy in the background.

After reading the script I asked myself: what does it mean, placing the Mexican so much in the light, alone in the light? This play is indictment-literature, no different from other well-known recent examples. Infamy is heaped on the Christian military state. I have some objections. The supposedly polar opposition between Christianity and warriorism after a time makes no impression on me. One can, to one’s own satisfaction, describe the Christian military state as a fake; that doesn’t do much. Religious concepts and fictions from the start have never served the purposes of science and truth; everyone inherits his treasure of theories and images, builds on it, uses it for his own pretty little purposes. That’s all. Falsity never comes into it. Such religious teachings are like a garden rake: if a dog or a cat looks at the rake, it makes absolutely no sense, for in themselves the tines and the handle make no sense; the rake must be observed in conjunction with the gardener using it; then you understand. The Gospels purely as a literary document are unreal; you always have to add in who believes them, when they believed them, how and why. Gospel-believers of different eras and regions can’t be compared with one another; the same drops of opium can calm an adult, excite a nervous person to the point of vomiting, kill an infant, have no effect on a drunkard, give a mouse fits, and they’re all opium-believers.

It’s easy to say Christianity is ill-suited to warlike Spaniards or to us. [...] More: the superhuman goodness, the “true Christianity” of Montezuma is worthless against Cortez. Against Spaniards, Europeans and me. I protest against swindling fictions, against false measures and constructs. Brutality is the true face of Montezuma.

I praise the Spaniards, against Montezuma. I praise reality at any time against the dream, and the dream only when it is creative and leads to something. Montezuma, deeply reflective and moving, following his Stations of the Cross – he serves nothing but the poetry of Gerhart Hauptmann. [...] I shouldn’t like to be alive if Montezuma were anything more than a character in “The White Saviour”. Montezuma is the complement to the whole world, into which it will

all turn. And all the sleek horses, steeds groomed and ungroomed, lions with their terrible smell, little flitting butterflies, black beetles, Parliamentary bigmouths, fraudulent millions, assault on a girl and a leap from a window, holes in socks, children's cries, the blue Adriatic, my darling is a weaver, gas stopcock: and Montezuma's supposed to show his face and make it all kaput? That's a bit steep. This emperor is nothing more than an idealised humbug, than smoke on a European roof. Against him, the stopcock and the weaver darling are victorious. I take you under protection against him, you petty rabble. I take his most disgusting, most uncomfortable and smokiest opposites under protection, bombast, ugliness, banality.

The Mexican persists as a reaction to raging bellicosity. So I keep quiet and offer him a hand. But reaction can't manage enough. Life in all its drives must be penetrated. Banter no longer carries you through. Everything wants to be rummaged over and answered anew.

This is certainly a desperate time for artists with a strong urge to phantasy and the statuesque. Now is the night between two days; there's no world-view you can adopt for domestic use. The Conscience of the Age is at work. But paths must be cleared with force, so you can drive a car on them. What lights up now can only be yearnings, and wants. The spiritual look to the East; they'll look in vain; no new wine will be poured into old bottles. They exhume messages of salvation, Jesus, Buddha, Laozi: they'd do better to let the explosive called Spirit, urgent Instinct, play out.

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The Kapp prank was no Putsch. Rather firstly a fact, secondly an unmasking. This time a real exposure. But only for two minutes. The dance goes on. Free entry for infants, generals and workers. The citizen pays. Music strikes up: *It's how we live, it's how we live our days*. A request goes out to hurl grenades from the balcony. Artillery and munitions available at the kiosk. The honest finder of a republican mood is requested to deliver it to the podium, where it will be auctioned to the highest bidder. Guests with foreign currency welcome. Warnings against Bolshevism, Imperialism, Syndicalism, Monarchism and other bodies of water: drink only Müller Extra and Afrikaner ("Alcohol's no friend of mine, but Afrikaner suits me fine.")

What unmasked itself is the Holy Roman Empire, it took off its heavy republican boots, removed its false parliamentary teeth, placed them in water, and whinged. For one desperate moment it was about to drink the water and choke on the dentures. [...]

When after several spirited months the Germans asked about the new spirit, they found that it was: work. They discovered via their enthused ministers that the true Democrat and Socialist goes to the factory at six o'clock, heads home after eight or ten hours, pays taxes and increases output. They needn't trouble themselves with the rest, for the folk song [*actually a 17th century hymn*] already sings it so beautifully: "Let dear God do the governing, keep hoping all your life." Wherein it is left unspecified who is meant by this dear god.

This answer astonished the hesitant and uninitiated, who pointed out they'd already worked like that in the old accursed Germany. But just as Christianity in the mouth of a Spaniard is something special, so Socialism as defined by a German: in opposition to monarchy and authoritarian rule it can only mean: more work, stricter order, higher taxes.

Various workers were dissatisfied with this improvement. They had to express it. Slowly the government, which had drunk foreign gods and spirits to the full, came by the notion of the Minority. Which meant, it seems: flex the biceps. Minorities are there to submit. Minorities

must betake themselves to the ground occupied by the majority. Appointed as saint and patron of the new Roman Empire was old Pythagoras, teacher of numbers. But this was only public worship; in secret other things were in train, other prayers being said, and the minorities to left and right could smell it. They had nothing against Pythagoras, only against his priests. In the name of the old Greek the majority drew their short swords and thrashed the minorities. Knocked them all into a heap. Because that's what you do with a minority. And that was the excuse for a state of siege. And those who happened to be standing by made it worse. Finally they unleashed martial law, the minorities knew what time it was. The priests of Pythagoras blew fanfares. At once the minorities in arithmetical terms had to equal zero.

Worshippers of German Pythagorean democracy were horrified now and then: the whole thing looked like nothing less than dictatorship. But the high priests spoke in benedictory tones: it only looks like that, it's all developing, continuous development is characteristic of Germany, *peu à peu* we'll arrive at the real and genuine and sole blessed Pythagorean form of government as described in the holy books from England, America, France, word for word; it's inevitable. Everyone must be patient, as soon as the disturbance caused by the godless minorities abates, the affair will sort itself out. And with that the high priests withdrew into their sanctuary. They were in a very strange mood. They didn't like meeting the public. For on one occasion someone had shouted out: "If Number is the ruling idea of the State, why don't you divide it up? Why don't you fix it, you big'eads and State bonzes, so that everyone gets as much to eat as everyone else, how come you stuff yourselves and we go hungry?" And that couldn't be right; but where was the man who'd brought the talisman from so far away, the missionary of the new Mystery?

There was also a Republic there. They'd let the same man bring it to them. They had no idea what to do with it, since in these parts they understood only rogues, laws and taxes, and when you looked more closely a Republic was neither lathe bench nor drilling machine. But they tried to cope with it. Ten men of the government rolled up their sleeves, spat into their palms, set to, put the Republic on its feet. There it was. A marvellous thing. They wondered if they should put a glass house around it, they polished it up nicely, showed it off to all the neighbours, were pleased with it. A few older gentlemen and ladies were entrusted to keep it in good order and watch over it; for there was much thievery in the land.

Five minutes before the thing was set up, the land was still a monarchy. Monarchical to the marrow, so to speak. The marrow in the bones of the very same Pomeranian grenadier with whom Bismarck and his successors played soldiers. All were agog to see what impression the shiny new Republic would make on them. For them, as a bonus, a Constitution was made. Even in America they marvelled how scrumptious it was. It had to taste good to the Monarchists. In their exuberance they wove a new flag: black-red-gold. It was lovely. I travelled to many towns throughout Germany, from an artistic interest in this new combination of colours. I never saw any. One person I met claimed to have seen it, but the man, who had a strong lisp, proved to be colour-blind. I spoke to a member of the government, who told me: firstly, the German people should not be diverted from their work by fear of a new flag, and then you can't cultivate pleasure in art just yet, until the old stock of flags is used up, those being black-white-red. I saw plenty of those in Berlin in every possible street and on every possible occasion; I marvelled at how systematic and continuous our development was in Germany. With my own eyes I saw the imperial flag and the old Marine war ensign over Berlin Castle. I was deeply astonished, during the March days in Lichtenberg after the uprising had been quelled, to see Republic government troops advancing under the imperial flag, and well-known songs blared from their bugles, it

sounded strange and surprising. But you had to praise the flags; the white was immaculate, you could believe it when people said: it's the new flags. They comforted me: gold is hard to come by, where can you find gold these days, those are children, they cling to their flags, let them have their flags. And when I declared: "I too am a child, and I want my flag," they whispered in shock and pulled me into a corner: "Don't joke about it, you'll set the people off."

It's one of the Republic's most important tasks not to get on the wrong side of the Monarchists, especially if they're military. For as said, the Republic was brought by a wise man from abroad into the Holy Roman Empire; what we were to do with it he never said; it was a Republic with no *Instructions for Use*. The military could wreck it, and then what would we have?

What the explanation was for this mysterious entity would emerge from lengthier interaction with it. Above all it must "embed" itself. Embed itself. Decrees were enacted: "The Republic must embed itself; consideration must be given to enabling it to do so with consideration and no disembedding. And by not annoying anyone. For we are one People!" And all of them, ministers, parliamentarians, mere vote-fodder, lurked excitedly to see how it would manage it, the Republic, this crazy thing, this cunning devil, and "embed" itself. And every morning devoured the papers for clues. All swore to abide by their oaths, stand fast with the Republic. Stand fast. Looking left and right at the next man. Stand fast with her.

In this mysterious situation, pregnant with riddles, curious pranksters were piqued to see through the game. The Monarchists in particular were swollen with curiosity. Day by day they felt more strongly that their wrong side had not been infringed. They stood firm on the ground of actual conditions, raised the black-white-red flag, came together in columns, and consulted. German ministers felt the urgency of the times and the intense public interest; into every office, every leading section of the army, they placed men of the old system, with its passionate interest in the Republic. It was an event that filled all who stood by the Republic with a most intimate emotion: as when Old Conservatives to a man declared themselves ready to join the army and stay there. [...] The War Minister himself, offspring of a socialist party, stood up in Cabinet, praised the effect of this so remarkable Republic on these men, especially on them, and hence none could be as dependable as they. He drew them to his heart. They observed him during this procedure and found that it was easy to break a Republican's neck.

And in spring the Republic had been made secure. Then a number of Germans set themselves formally in motion, equipped with swords and trumpets, with the blessing of representatives of the Republic. They wanted to welcome the Republic in the Temple of Pythagoras and see as well what she would make of an unsuspected blast of trumpets and a decisive attentat. Kapp turned up. It wasn't Kapp, General Lüttwitz mistook him for someone called Lindemann, said: "You go first." [...] They resembled two people who don't read and content themselves with knowing all the answers. In a word: High Treason. All their movements had great hopes of several years in jail. Behind them several thousand people in the stage of puberty, who also could not read or write, but knew how to throw a hand grenade.

It's interesting to observe how in Germany, at decisive moments, youngsters in the pubertal stage always pop up, ready to be commanded by conservative officers. Older age groups meanwhile wait at home to see what the pubertal youths and conservatives do, or go on strike. That's how the German revolution goes.

When Lüttwitz appeared in Berlin with his youngsters and within ten minutes the youngsters had flowers in their buttonholes, the government fled shuddering at such antiquated proceedings and the lack of respect for highly cultivated institutions. Lüttwitz declared that out of a purely mathematical interest he wanted to ascertain who the minorities are, and glared so fiercely at the democratic government, raising his fists as well, that they slipped away via Dresden to Stuttgart. He knew he was in possession of select troops, who undertook immaculate exercises and other things, with whom he could make his calculations. On their armoured cars and steel helmets they'd painted friendly swastikas, and waved the flag of continuous development.

"What'll to happen to me?" was the cry in every Berlin household, and not long after in the whole of North and South Germany. "Wait, and have a cup of tea," the Nationals said. Officers and senior schoolmasters whinnied like horses to battle-music, but not so loud. *Poco piu mosso* ("a little livelier"). *Sostenuto* alternating with *staccato*. Order must be restored, can't go on like this, food's no longer affordable, it's the profiteers. *Deutschland Deutschland über alles*.

In the silence of the March days the moderate citizen looked in his purse; it hadn't shrunk, they decided to go on existing, come what may. Anyway the Putsch was outrageous: the soldiers were paid well, the black market boomed, one can live with taxes and the (tee-hee) works committees; how's that for interfering with the constitutional setup. Elections, God willing, should definitely no longer take place. They went to the window: nice to have a window; called out: "Workers, officials, protect the Constitution!" The workers listened. Grumbled: "Not on your nelly. It'll be a long time before we strike for the likes of you lot." Then suddenly: "We're on strike. But –" and whistled, banged their slippers together, and came out merrily on strike. "Thank God," the moderate sighed, relieved, when he stepped to the command window and saw his serving maid bringing water from the well. "They're on strike. The poor people will suffer greatly. But it's for the Republic. The wretched Baltic lands." And betook themselves with Madam to the store cupboards, sat on the sofa and said: "So, now the strike can begin. We'll see how well it holds out."

There were lots of incidental effects as water and lights were cut off. It wasn't easy for invalids; gravediggers didn't bury their clients; the medical world urged consideration for the interests of the suffering. The War had lasted four years, in every waiting room there were posters, we must hold on, a little malnourishment is not harmful, the most learned professors wrote experiment-based treatises on the value of de-fatting and its excellence for the health. Now the layman learned that a health impairment that lasts four years is not so bad as when it lasts four days. In the days of the strike there were warnings of outbreaks of disease, and of the consequences, already long felt, of the lack of gas and water; clearly tuberculosis, shrewd as it is, makes up in four days what out of patriotism it missed out on over four years. There are secrets in medical science. Maybe a little doctors' strike could paralyse a raging epidemic. Remarkable that the gentlemen haven't thought of it.

In the houses of the moderates they looked out daily from their battle-window, happy, sometimes shaking the head a little: "They're on strike. Still on strike." Deep in thought they carried these words with them from the front back to base, the sofa. A heavy black suspicion tugged at the heart: "If only they don't strike so very much." Suddenly gunshots sounded in the night. Into the nocturnal silence someone shouted from a higher floor: "They're striking too much! Woe! Woe is us! What can we do? Where's Kapp?" And in bed they tossed and turned:

“What do they have against Lüttwitz all of a sudden? When he did such a good job last year against the Spartacists. Are we not all Kappitalists?”

And one day the dreadful news came: Lüttwitz had disappeared and the strike was continuing. Those who had defended the Republic at the front and back at base were furious: “Scandal!” The Nationals placed their medals in the black-white-red casket “Farewell”, went about the streets in robber-civvies; people exchanged covert melancholy glances with them. And the bolder ones peeked at the flyers: “Are the Majority Socialists in on it? Are the trades unions in on it too? Where is Lüttwitz? Where’s the old government?” They moaned: “It’s a catastrophe. The whole country will be ruined if there’s even one day’s strike. The economy’s gone. Exchange rate *bratta tatta patta ta.*” Someone heard “Brahmaputra” and wished to be in India. But there’s Bolshevism there too, apparently. All that’s left is Einstein’s Theory of Relativity, wherein everything is somewhere else; how does that come about? No way to ask Einstein, with the telephones blocked.

Troops were marched to the Döberitz training ground, not without having practised some dashing manoeuvres with public participation. Eunuchs banished by the strike obtained rest cures in the country to calm their nerves; they had well-founded hopes that nothing would disturb their cure. The so-called old government now returned badly decayed from Stuttgart, under Württembergian military cover. When they’d been carried inside and laid on the bed they said “yes” to everything anyone asked of them. Tearfully they thanked all visitors and bystanders for the loyal service they had rendered. They spoke again of the Köpenickian con trick they’d endured, it wasn’t clear and is now impossible to say if they meant the Kapp Putsch or their own behaviour. They expired gently in the arms of the trade unions.

Their successors are said to be strongly mistrustful of the god Pythagoras’ miracle powers. People declare they’ve learned something from the event. Pomerania is re-arming as a precaution; offices are being divided up. The masquerade continues, with shorter pauses likely between dances.

The Lüttwitz affair was a brief unmasking. In parallel a proletarian movement, made of soldiers who were meant to occupy the streets, refused, and so were prepared to conquer Rome. That idea has worked throughout history, blithe and droll.

How funny, I forgot all about the black-red-gold flag in Berlin. It’s there. It flutters at the Schlossbrücke on a Spree barge beside a public convenience. In the barge, for a modest entry fee, a rotting whale can be viewed. And smelled. You pride of the Holy Roman Empire.

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POSTSCRIPT (1): THE KAPP PUTSCH *Die Welthühne*, December 1921 [SPG 200-201]

Only three ‘leaders’ of the Putsch were prosecuted, only one went to jail; he was released early, and successfully claimed a full pension.

You toil for years at Philosophy and end up frustrated. For basically not much has come of it. Philosophers fill libraries with their books, we go through them, read the books, and that’s that. Each side is gratified by the encounter. You leave the library forthwith and go about your business. That’s how it’s all gone up till now.

The Kapp Putsch changed the situation. It amended Philosophy in unexpected ways. More: the Kapp Putsch has helped Philosophy, hitherto confined to libraries, to break through into reality. Library doors have been flung open by the Putschists, and the monstrous manifestations of the worldly-wise, hitherto unknown, have unexpectedly appeared on the streets. Here for the first time it must be stated, announced and proclaimed: the Kapp Putsch was a metaphysical Deed. The first Deed in world history that had no Doer. No – it was the second. The first was the German Revolution, which landed on the heads of the actors.

But the Kapp Putsch had the special and unique feature that the peculiar nature of their Deed was known to the actors and tragedians. They had nothing whatever to do with the Deed. The Deed set itself up. It enacted itself in broad daylight at six o'clock in the morning in the Tiergarten, and they, the Doers, were at the scene, the Deed went into action, the Reich Chancellery was occupied, decrees issued. Arrests were made; it went on like that all day, and they were always at the scene. They were indubitably at the scene, had no wish to deny it, but the Deed was also there, and it was the Deed's own private affair.

All normal persons will find such a proceeding absurd, nonsensical, fantastic, simply a swindle - thereby demonstrating their lack of education. The above-mentioned Philosophy has spent decades trying to put this error right. The relationship of Deed to Doer has long been clear. Thunder does not thunder, it's not the thunder that thunders, rather *it* thunders. Grammar with its separation of subject and verb is a disaster and a temptation to illogic. The German language, like others, is not just hard but also stupid. This they noticed and understood in East Prussia [*where almost all government officials went along with the Putsch*], at the Döberitz training ground [*where the Marinebrigade Erhardt assembled to support the Putsch*], and now in Leipzig [*seat of the Reich Court*] it has become public knowledge. Grammar has wreaked fearful depredations on the criminal law; these few days in Leipzig will see a big step forward for criminal justice reform.

Now we clearly see and clearly understand: the Kapp Putsch did it all by itself. It was a stroke of Divine Providence. The accused acquiesced to it. They saw it coming, minds filled with foreboding, it transformed itself into a Deed, they were down for it, they knew not how.

The verdict has today, Sunday 18 December, not yet been handed down. It's considered that, since they did not really commit High Treason, they should be punished for removal from office. Clearly that's monkey business. Understand: the Deed happened. Say it out loud: The Kapp Putsch ran its course. It belongs in the history books. In the libraries. Which is an immediate consequence of the Philosophers breaking out into the street.

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POSTSCRIPT (2): From "GENERAL STRIKE IN BERLIN"
Prager Tagblatt, 14 Feb 1922 [*EinK* 49-52]

For three years (November 1921-September 1924) Döblin wrote theatre reviews and commentaries for this Czech newspaper. The foreign-currency

payments, originally a pittance, became a lifesaving source of income during the hyperinflation. This piece shows a clear development in the German situation since the previous year: inconveniences, rather than the risk of being shot.

I write – from a time before the Flood. Two candles stand before me: they flicker a good while, a strange, not unpleasant light by which I'm able this Sunday evening to inscribe my lovely blank paper. Strike in Berlin since 20 hours ago. Railway workers have been on strike three days already. You go past urban rail stations, main line stations, a deeply moving scene: wide station plazas – empty; no cabs, no cars, gates closed, the entire miles-wide mechanism – rails, locomotives, guard huts, signals, coal depots – the roaring streaking long-distance train, the smoke, the whistles, shunting: silent, all gone. The hand of the human is on the mechanism. At this moment, when the monstrous apparatus stands silent, we recognise its huge anonymous force and, at the same time, how this force can be constrained, lamed, torn apart by human forces. The impression, at the first moment sombre, oppressive, becomes at the second and third moment wonderful! And always powerful. But: for three days no out-of-town newspapers, no letters, food supply disrupted; the government has already commandeered coal supplies from the hands of private merchants. Yesterday evening the apparition came nearer: people were out on the town, in the trams, the urban rail, the underground, and around ten o'clock, eleven o'clock the trams jolted to a halt; tramway officials in the big squares came up to the drivers and conductors, two words exchanged; then: "All out! We're returning to depot." By twelve the last cars were entering the depots. No one objected: the toy was taken from under their noses. Thousands had headed out in finery and costumes to masked balls; how they got home I don't know. [...]

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THE THIRTY YEARS WAR

A spinoff from Döblin's work on Wallenstein, his magnificent reinvention of the historical novel, this 1919 essay, which points to demonic forces masquerading as politics, appeared in a 1921 compilation titled Die Befreiung der Menschheit (The Liberation of Humanity). [SPG 45-59]

Even the extravagant number thirty awakens fantastic notions. There were never 30 years of warfare; it was a series of wars with big pauses in between, and in the end it's a bit of a stretch to see the Peace of Westphalia as a conclusion to the spectacle. The war came to a stop only in Germany; the closely associated events in Scandinavia, the Balkan peninsula, in Hungary needed another ten to twelve years, so the whole complex only ended after around forty years. The pauses often lasted years; peace treaties were signed, partial peaces, long armistices, military action so lethargic it can hardly be termed such. And then arms taken up once more; this or that player disappearing entirely from the scene. For much of the war, large regions of the Empire saw nothing of it: Bavaria for example, which was occupied by troops only after the entry of Sweden; eastern German regions; some Austrian ancestral lands; numerous other places experienced nothing more than occasional transits of military units.

But how big was that military? Germany has grown no larger since that time. On the same expanse of land have appeared at wide intervals "armies" of ten to twenty thousand men. Thirty

thousand men, i.e. the strength of two modern army corps, already made a strong army. Albrecht Eusebius von Waldstein [*i.e. Wallenstein*] now and again at his peak brought it to a hundred thousand, supposedly even a hundred and twenty thousand men. But these were quite sporadic numbers, and perhaps only on paper, for those gentlemen the colonels, officers, generals and intendants lied intensively about the strength on their books, in order to increase cash contributions arbitrarily.

The numbers were sporadic also because, at all times, there was a sporadic reducer of armies: disease. At that time in the Empire were numerous epidemics of which we can hardly form a picture. Rampant at around the same time, in addition to syphilis still raging as a plague, were the French sickness, the true plague, bubonic plague, cholera, typhus, black pox, the heavy flux, probably also infectious influenza. But such diseases had their own self-destruction mechanisms, for the carriers at that time were soldiers: they lay dead. When in the first half of the war the bold Dane, Holk, with his Imperial Croats made his second plundering raping and murdering expedition through Saxony, to persuade Prince-Elector Johann Georg, the Beer-king of Merseburg, to stay quiet, Holk himself was left dead of the plague outside Leipzig, along with 6,000 Imperials: he, the favourite, the bane of Wallenstein the Imperial Supreme Field-marshal General. The campaign in Hungary against the little hare-lipped lecher the Bastard Mansfeld was essentially ended by the *malattia ungherese* [Hungarian malady]: the bloody flux; whoever survived was the victor. (Mansfeld died on the run in Bosnia.)

It was such small rapidly assembled armies that ran and loafed about in the wide Holy Roman Empire.

Slowly but surely the war pulled itself together. At first it was a semi-private war within the Austrian ancestral lands: even at that time Bohemia had no desire for a Habsburg king. The Czechs celebrate as their national affair the day ordained by the Emperor Ferdinand the Other for the execution of Bohemian rebels in the Old Town Square of Prague, presided over by his governor von Liechtenstein. That day has nothing to do with the Czech people; the rebellion was by the Bohemian nobility; the people had no stake in it, other than their blood and property, and the Bohemian nobility was no Czech nobility: among the names of the executed were almost equal numbers of old German and Czech men; and to crown it all two men with very typical Czech names had been thrown from a window at Prague Castle at the start of the liberation struggle: Martinič and Slavata.

Then at the end of the war the accomplices of the Habsburgs demanded payment for their merits, and when Duke Maximilian of Bavaria had by this means swept up the Palatinate and its electoral rights, it was no longer a private Habsburg matter. When, on top of this, the Lower Saxon estates became fearful because they too were about to become spoils of war, this time the Emperor's, there was sufficient prospect of several years more war to be enjoyed. Appetites were aroused in many places, and everywhere men were determined to loosen Gordian knots with the sword.

And now the first foreign power intervenes, the elemental war-hardened pirate and bane of German Baltic seafarers, Christian of Denmark. The Dane may have lacked merit, but he had strong arms and long fingers. The affected regions expanded. This man and his hangers-on were given a good thrashing, and there the whole matter might have ended, for no one now was squawking about the lost Palatinate and the former King of Bohemia's electoral rights. In fact the Emperor had so much headwater he risked sending his Generalissimus home.

Then “His Royal Majesty of Sweden” turns up in Germany, in the Holy Roman Empire, on the Pomeranian coast, presenting himself on no other grounds than that Sweden too is there. As everyone knows, you can always find a reason for anything, no need to study law or be a Swede, it’s enough for most people to justify their existence by sticking their fingers in here and there. Sweden had the ability to wage war in Germany, and for that very reason it waged war. As Spinoza, who flourished rather later, put it in such naive and delightful terms: “Every capacity is a virtue.” Armed with such virtue, and with ships, cannon and the evangelical creed, just as the Thirty Years War seemed already at an end, “His Royal Majesty of Sweden” Gustavus Adolphus, ruler of Goths and Vandals, appeared before an Emperor Ferdinand aroused in amazement from his glorious slumbers and the hunts and Masses that normally filled his days; violated old Duke Bogeslav of Pomerania, and the Brandenburger Georg Wilhelm, even though (or because) he was his brother in law. Now the war had a very good chance of lasting years, for the Swede was very forceful, and people came to him voluntarily and not so voluntarily, even Saxons. And the events that might result from running wild in such an environment were quite simply incalculable. Even at that point people noticed a friendly interested face peeping over the fence from the west into the suddenly so lively German garden: the Most Christian King of France Louis XIII, who felt himself much blessed by that Spinozan virtue, all the more so as things in Germany heated up.

And the Swede roared about him so long that every right-thinking person had to admit: after devastating so many regions and places, after annihilating so many thousands of German lives, he had a claim to some German land. But time was up even for this man and his hangers-on. The Emperor defeated him, the Swedes were so weakened that most of their fellow-travellers fell away or were minded to make a separate peace. Meanwhile France had been sending huge sums into Germany to pay for the war. A critical point came when peace was concluded with Saxony by the Peace of Prague– as critical as death in a human life. Germany – or rather the war – made it through the crisis, thanks to France. Sixteen or eighteen years had already gone by. Then and in the years that followed, France loomed monstrously large; it had no such nice little reasons as the Swede, was Catholic like the Emperor, but had political interests to protect against Catholics, against Catholic evangelicals. It knew how to wage war in the Pyrenean peninsula, stir up Catalonia and Portugal against Spain, support the rebel Hungarian Georg Rakoczi against the Emperor, buy a German duke. For years the Swedes and French toiled separately and together in the Empire. They pushed on as far as Vienna. I’ll give none of their famous commanders the pleasure of a mention by name; let generals mutter the names among themselves. They toiled so long that in France the finances, ample finances, were totally ruined, the oppressed nobility and the magistrates wanted to give up. While in Sweden, dangerous unrest stirred among those over-burdened peasants still left alive, allied with rebellious cravings against the favoured nobility. They weren’t exhausted, they could have fought on for another hundred years, but they had to flex their biceps for internal politics. Since the brain had so long been unemployed, for a long while it functioned badly in the search for peace. The brain approached the conclusion of the peace with anaemic absent-mindedness. They pondered a dozen times, riffled through the whole war once more, the whole present situation, waited for the next one; they tried war on the tip of the tongue, the lips, their full cheeks, spat it out, swallowed it again.

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There are many kinds of war. For example, when a nation collapses like a sandpile and goes wandering. When the Mohammedans conquer the world between Mecca and Spain. When Genghis Khan comes out of Asia. There's a flavour there, background, perspective. It's much harder to get a grasp on this jostling and chafing by France, Denmark, Habsburg, Sweden.

I say "France", "Holy Roman Empire", "Denmark". We know that usage from Shakespeare: such and such a one possesses Gloucester and is called Gloucester. And he identifies with it, and now it's not so funny. He doesn't wage war *for* Gloucester, but directly *as* Gloucester, himself. France: but who was France? Germany: a member of the House of Habsburg, Ferdinand II, elected Roman Emperor, in Germany, Hungary, Bohemia, Dalmatia, Carniola, Slovenia, Archduke of Austria, Duke of Burgundy, Steiermark, Carinthia, Württemberg, in Upper and Lower Silesia, Margrave of Moravia, in Upper and Lower Lausitz, Duke of Habsburg, Tirol, Gorizia. He had it all, it was him, all twenty lands. He had it inclusive of people and livestock, inclusive of faiths and beliefs, for *cuius regio eius religio* ("you'll take the ruler's religion"). And all identified themselves most energetically and palpably with their country. That is, they arranged the relationships of their countries, and lived like princes from them.

In Sweden during the war you had to pass through many a parish before you found an able-bodied man; the whole of Sweden at the time had only one and a half million people, the king embarked on a dreadful debasement of the coinage, he grabbed the salt, grain and copper monopolies to himself, in East and West Gotland people fed on tree bark and acorns. But this was nothing compared with what happened in Bohemia under the protectorate of German Ferdinand. There we have the absolutely outrageous episode where the Emperor plays a leading role in mortgaging the Mint to a consortium of usurers, who abused the mortgaged object to a hitherto unheard-of degree. They produced so-called "long money", which in due course lost all its purchasing power, the state became bankrupt, the highest Bohemian nobility, including the imperial governor, and the Emperor with them, had won. But within a few years the paymasters in the imperial household were receiving invoices for 150,000 guilders for kitchen expenses, 114,000 for wine cellar services, 10,000 for court fodder services, 8000 for candles. And on one occasion when the court travelled to a consultative convention in Regensburg, the estates of Lower Austria had to pay 60,000 guilders, the archbishop of Salzburg had to provide a loan of 100,000 thalers, the town of Regensburg (which at first had argued strenuously against the convention) 30,000 guilders, and an advance of 15,000 guilders was taken against the deficit in the Bohemian treasury.

Where else was the Emperor to find such large sums? From "contributions" during the war; for this purpose the imperial army had to penetrate deeply into the Empire, out of Bohemia and the ancestral lands, for this purpose the question of the so-called Restitution, the recovery of formerly Catholic foundations and regions, had to be tackled theologically and juridically. And the generals provided an example with their soldiers as they hanged and extorted. Wallenstein always worked hand in hand with the Court, which he bribed assiduously all the way up to the Empress. At his death this man left a sum, unbelievable for those times, of many millions; no doubt one of the motives for his assassination.

Normally such extortions were not to the taste of the landed nobility, for they used such methods themselves and came up short, hence the catastrophically aggravated collisions during this war between the militarily powerful Emperor and the electoral princes, the competitive

conflicts directed by the Bavarian Duke and cunningly exploited for the private purposes of his own House of Wittelsbach.

Dreadful peasant uprisings flared up, protesting against this identification of prince and people, in the Harz, in Upper Austria, Bohemia; the terrible Count Pappenheim outstandingly proved his worth in suppressing one such uprising; for long afterwards the peasants sang a song of “the poltroon Pappenheim” which ended: “No one will quibble, he’s the personified Devil”. But they no longer had their old strength, they succumbed again to an inescapable heavy serfdom, the evangelical-communist manifesto of 1525 was forgotten, the Bundschuh peasant movement¹ was brutally clubbed down.

And in this way the people were also participants in the war, which was more of a private matter between dynasties, belonging to the genealogical almanac. Current circumstances led to ill will among dynasties, causing several hundred thousand deaths. People at the time felt it was reasonable; we who set the democratic principle above all else shouldn’t criticise them for that. Tsar Peter, the one they called “the Great”, is said (some time after the age in question) to have asked naively for a demonstration of the guillotine: would one of the Dutchmen standing around please lay his head under the blade. In Russia no one would have dared point out that the man would then be dead. It was great conquerors and their militarily powerful descendants who at that time carried on their business as described. The firm of Habsburg came into the mix, someone wanted to take Bohemia from them, and we shall certainly spare ourselves a description of all the dealings with all the procurers and commissioners, the field commanders and politicians, that our poor children strangely even today have to learn by heart (I really can’t say why, it must have something to do with tradition.)

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But the big beasts should not be the only ones held guilty for this bundle of wars. If we furrow our brow, roll our tongue, stretch the larynx to utter the great word: human history was in play, this war unleashed religious tensions, profound anxieties came pouring out.

Similar things have been said loudly, eagerly and often of the great actors during these thirty years. Gustavus Adolphus was the chief rowdy, the Jesuits not far behind. We don’t doubt that people believe this. When something is said often enough, it’s believed; repetition replaces proof, serves as proof. The converse is also true: people may say it because they believe it, but only under certain circumstances, not without further ado. The masters of this period were told it so often by others, by their court theologians, father confessors, diplomats, by their opponents, that eventually they said it themselves, and maybe even believed it – what people mean by believe: that they were waging a religious war. To fight a couple of battles, conquer a strip of land, of course no religious excuse is needed; any robust robber band can do just as well with no supporting apparatus.

Let us agree: rowdiness, quarrelsomeness, a thieving disposition, softened with phrases and crazy ideas. In other words: the old song.

No doubt it’s better to do the rulers of the 17th century an injustice in this direction than in another. We must now confirm that at that time an interesting change was taking place in what people call faith, religiosity. Long-dead Luther started it, then it went over to the other side and

¹ Bundschuh (1493-1517), precursor of the Peasant Wars 1524-26

in the end flourished mightily on all fronts. It was a mimicry of religion: for because the age and its people were berserker-savage, religion too became so. St Francis loved his fellow men, saw water as his sister, the wind his brother, the sun his sister. And how long ago was it that the rabbi Yehoshua of Nazareth spoke tender parables to the poor and peaceable, and summoned children to him. In the Crusades thousands of children set off for Jerusalem, Crusaders at the time sang: "We go in God's name, we ask God's grace, may the strength of God now help us and the holy grave in which God himself lay, kyrie eleison".

Now there was another uproar. Religion had come to palpable dogmas, with which people boxed each other's ears until they rang, with which they would embitter even the little bit of life left in Hell. They were subjected to the things they used. The Jesuit authority Orlandini said of Luther: "That betrayer of the Catholic faith, fugitive from the monastery and originator of every heresy, that depraved booby despised by God and man, in the 28th year of his falling away, having become excessively intoxicated and lost his usual wits, was in the night taken by a sudden illness and swept away. His cursed soul flew out, a tasty morsel for Satan, whose belly is sated on such nourishment." The Catholics themselves fought for the glory of God and Christ's rose-coloured blood. On the other side people cursed the "stinking Jesuit goats"; the Pope sat on the "throne of pestilence"; here the saying was: "If they're going to hang the Pope and all the priests, I'll give all I have to make the ropes." The one thing that united them was the fear of Satan and the burning of witches.

This religion was to a great degree considered credible by every lady and gentleman. It mattered not what side you were on; any side could turn anything into a matter of religiosity. In this respect Catholic, Calvinist, Lutheran all stood firm. Thanks to the elasticity of so-called Christianity, you could buckle on your article of faith like a sword belt, and set about you with a dogma as with a war-hammer. Who could ask more of a religion. And so it came to pass that Gustavus Adolphus was awaited as a Messiah, he, the lion from the midnight realm, he'll show those papists; and then he declared persuasively: between Catholic and Protestant there's no compromising; one must be defeated. This rigid obstinacy and determination that looked neither right nor left hurled fire onto the great wealthy city of Magdeburg; the Protestants would rather destroy it than hand it over to Catholics.

The Saxon court theologian Hoe von Hoenegg had a most dazzling conception of his profession: to provide theological justifications for whatever his masters intended to do. At the Leipzig convention he preached from the words of the prophet Asaph: "Oh God make them as a wheel, as stubble before the wind." He preached mightily for a victorious peace. And the Jesuits, the fathers of the Company of Jesus, comforted: no need to love God, it's enough not to hate him. What's more, the Catholics had a great store of mercies in Heaven over which the Pope could dispose; in certain cases each rosary bead secured a hundred days of indulgence; telling the rosary took a quarter of an hour, in all you could obtain 6,000 days' indulgence every day. And finally there was another privilege for members of the Company of Jesus: they had a share in all unknown indulgences.

When some decades earlier Mary Stuart began plotting the murder of the wicked Protestant Elizabeth, the Spanish Cardinal Mendoza was greatly edified by this "very Christian and just intention, so useful to the holy Catholic faith as well as to the intentions of His Majesty." The worthy gentleman did not know how un-Christian one could be even in his holy faith, for Gilbert Gifford, recruited by Mary to her plot, was himself a Catholic priest and a secret agent of

Walsingham, Elizabeth's adviser. The completely mechanical faith of the German Emperor Ferdinand II, who directed the first phase of the war, is characterised in his saying: "When I encounter a priest and an angel, I bow first to the priest." And by the way, we know the cunning way in which the famous Wallenstein – general von Waldstein, Duke of Friedland – also Admiral of the Oceanic Sea, was set aside. Since the Emperor in Regensburg had no idea how he should act, he turned to Lamormaini, his Jesuit father confessor, who asked the general of his Order and the Pope, who was an ally of the French; but the discussion was of Franco-German affairs. You can imagine what answer fell out from the question: should the Emperor remain superior to his general, or ...

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We can set the devoutness of the actors of the time on a scale. The Swede Gustavus Adolphus would occupy the most prominent place. He was a monstrous heap of devotion. After his victory at Breitenfeld he swore: God has become Lutheran. He took his uncompromising Protestantism in a politically authoritative direction: he was after dominion in the Baltic. As he declared to his Council of Eight in Uppsala, the Emperor is now right under our noses in Mecklenburg; we must either wait for him in Calmar, or face him in Stralsund. A preventive war, then. The rest can be seen from the implementation.

Bavarian Max must be set alongside him – one of the most interesting and strongest figures of the war, and the only one of the great actors who lived through the whole thing from start to finish and who so tenaciously insisted on his booty, the Upper Palatinate and the electoral rights. He was an affiliate, i.e. a secret member of the Jesuit order, a greedy man, whose cunning diplomacy enraged the Swede in particular. In almost every phase, now clandestinely, now openly he conducted a war against the Emperor; but his faith put a brake on him; he was and remained chieftain of the Catholic party, their leader throughout the war. His field-marshal was Count Tilly, who called the Virgin Mary his commander in chief.

Father Joseph, François Leclerc du Tremblay, a Capuchin, was Cardinal Richelieu's right hand, and perhaps his eminence grise. He founded a particular female order in Paris, which practised a wonderful ascetic mysticism; he studied the steps by which the soul becomes united with God, its immersion, its splashing into God. When the Swede appeared in Germany he concluded an offensive alliance with him against Habsburg, using this Protestant as a French shock absorber in Germany. At Regensburg he succeeded in obtaining a treaty that left the Emperor defenceless, and then on top of that breached the treaty when that seemed more advantageous. He conducted the most questionable politics; in Paris he taught that Love should guide the intellect.

Even better the Duke of Friedland, a convert. He conjured up dreadful anger in the Jesuit party in Vienna, under whose thumb he lay, by declaring he was already in league with the Protestant German prince-electors, and would turn this blunt political necessity against both them and the Emperor.

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Anyone looking into those times must ask: where was this Christianity that was so often called in aid? It had been driven out by – Theology. It had slipped away secretly between the dialectic and the bone-relics, waiting perhaps Buddha-like for its rebirth. Where did Humanism hide itself? A hundred years earlier Luther had stood astonished before the heathen creature in

Rome. Faith, a fat goggle-eyed shaggy thing, had pounced on Humanism and laid it flat. A long time of waiting had begun. It took more than a century before Winckelmann appeared, he who founded German Classicism, before Goethe crossed the Alps.

This hot-blooded period, teeming with individuals, which had dissolved the warm deeply sentimental 16th century and which framed its violent passionate overflowing style in the Baroque – hot-blooded and violent were the rulers, the most visible classes– from its soil brought forth spirits of another kind. They would make their impact only slowly, not like dynamite, but the explosion would be no less certain. Descartes, born in the Touraine, lived in Germany during the war years; he sifted through the gloomy mechanical dogmas and found his way to the *natural light* within, in self-consciousness: “I think, I am conscious, and only insofar do I exist.” Spinoza of Amsterdam was the clearest most rigorous spirit; in the end he stumbled into a mystical intellectual love of God, but before that he found that truly human activity flows only from an intellect freed of affect; he even found the phrase, the royal phrase, amid all this waste of dogmas and myths: “Reality and perfection are one and the same.” Grotius, during the wars between states large and small, conceived of the law of nations as the general law encompassing the various national laws. Galileo, who by observations of Jupiter’s moons and the phases of Venus established the incredible fact of the heliocentric hypothesis, disturbed this age no more than a gentle breath.

And the result was not merely, as Hegel asserts, political. Theology had been left lying; it had lost its psychic recruiting force. And as imperial power waned and local princes became sovereign, there bloomed in a thousand places little dynasties and tyrannies in poor, poor Germany, which thereby became the loser of the war. The burgher estate in decline, the peasantry long done for, despots on the rise, proliferating! Theology recruited no more spirits, even no more theology (a win), but servility expanded, overshadowed the great once free land, once the paragon of freedom. Subservience was imposed on the Germans with a cruel slow-acting stamp; subservience that later made all thoughts, poetry, discoveries weak and worthless, because actions remained shabby and wretched. This subservience, against which they strove in vain through all the conquests, advances and achievements.

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Humanity has a lot of time. Since the days of the Neanderthals already several hundred thousand years have passed; meanwhile, everything happened in the greatest calm, expansiveness and elaboration; people had the concept “progress”, all they had to do was live, assert themselves, defend themselves from death. Meanwhile they filled out the epoch between two ice ages. What are a few years of war, say thirty or fifty, which in such a vast sweep of time can be discerned only under the microscope. What more, perhaps, than a tiny reminiscence of those cosy millennia when mammoths were hunted, cave bears, tigers and hyenas fought and devoured each other. Cats won’t leave a mouse alone; we are approaching a gentle, tame mental climate. As human beings throng together, the inclination grows to be free of atavistic pleasures. Even this war that lasted thirty years was a means to that end. At bottom it served among the European populations, principally in Germany, to discredit Theology, the systematic persecutions of the Church. Within a few decades, in the broken-down lands there was no more business to be done with dogmas. A time would come when even the most dangerous puppet-masters, the fathers of the Company of Jesus, would be checkmated; the Church itself wanted nothing more to do with them. There would be another king in Egypt. Voices that sounded as

a barely audible chirping in the grass of the age of wars would grow louder and more perceptible, the horde of crickets that they tried to exterminate or lock up grew to monstrous proportions; a century after the toper Georg Wilhelm in Brandenburg, an atheist king sat in Berlin. Biceps that craved action could find healthier tasks. “La liberté” was on the march.

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POSTSCRIPT: Origin and meaning of my book *Wallenstein*.

An incomplete unpublished MS was found in the archive; it has since gone missing. But a Czech translation appeared in 1930-31, and was back-translated from Czech into German. [SLW 184-187]

I wrote the two-decker *Wallenstein* during the War, in 1916-18, the final part not until I was back home in 1919. At first I worked as a doctor in a military hospital for infectious diseases in Lorraine, living in a small town, and kept myself busy in a strange way. Afternoons and evenings I was able to write – disturbed of course by official duties – under threat from air raids. My room was on the upper floor of the building. When I went back up I spread my manuscript material out again, and when I was ready, took it downstairs for safety. Bombs fell in the neighbourhood, but nothing happened to me or the manuscript. It came with me on the long repatriation transport in November 1918 across the whole of Germany, and lay on my desk in Berlin through the bad revolutionary winter of 1918-19. Maybe there’s something in it of the dreadful atmosphere in which the book was composed: war, revolution, sickness and death.

My idea was anyway, during the War, to depict “war”, even if not this one. No, depict is the wrong word, better: set it out in an epic process, letting it become seen, felt, experienced. Later, of course, especially recently, others have depicted war, and this War in particular, more precisely. I confess I’ve never found any of them satisfactory. War is many, many things in one. Above all, unbounded demonism and unleashing, chaos; the world before the word of God came into it; alongside this, war is resistance against the terrible demon, the assertion of human superiority (ah, now it’s inferiority!); alongside this an economic process gone mad; alongside this political agitation and games of intrigue. A dreadful thing, war; no one should wish it; it’s a test, a temptation that the human, this insecure animal species, has failed.

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How did I come to choose the Thirty Years War and Bohemia and *Wallenstein* as my stage and my characters? At first it was only its great similarity with 1914-18: a European war. I rummaged around for books. The university library in Strasbourg gave me what it had of French and German books about that period. The monstrous fate of Bohemia drew me in, and this *Wallenstein*, whom I saw as a Bohemian renegade, not at all a Schillerian “hero”, a modern captain of industry, depraved profiteer of inflation, genius of economics and (in a crazy sense) of strategy, a figure whose only possible parallel is Napoleon I. Alongside him was a Habsburg Emperor, Ferdinand II, who according to the documents was a dreadful nincompoop. Maybe it would have been no worse to present such a character simply as a representative of

the power system of the time. I didn't want to. I wanted no Naturalism. This should be no cheap imitation of history, no reproduction. It should actually (despite the mass of historical details) not be a "historical novel". And for sure that genre does not at all suit the over-lifesize events and characters given here. So I had no use for a nincompoop as counterpart to the gigantic machine that was Wallenstein.

So what did Ferdinand II become? The other character besides Wallenstein. No, the real leading human character of the novel! Who is drawn bit by bit into the terrible game, and then becomes active, and – goes away. This Ferdinand deserts throne and empire, and finally, the world. But the war goes on. And the chaos has already devoured even the monstrous nobleman who engendered it: Wallenstein. (What I've just described was my attitude at the time regarding the relationship between war and humanity; later I became much more active and decisive; you don't find me then or now on the side of war, but now I feel genuine disgust and self-assertion against mad autonomous war-making, and know what debt we owe human dignity.)

This *Wallenstein* is the epic song of a great shattering war, of the violent forces that set it up, of its monstrous people and events – and of the humanity that wanders through the war and will, I think, before long overthrow it. Admittedly, in this book we see humanity weeping and lamenting and, in the end, creeping away.

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NEW YOUTH, by Linke Poot [excerpt]
Die neue Rundschau, Oct 1922. [SPG 209-218]

What haven't the old achieved. They've made fools of themselves before the young. They set up a war, lost it, partly the victors, partly the defeated. They fought over there, so doing the young the favour of not being at home. It was an unforgettable feast. Schools became barracks, mustering stations, clinics, hospitals. Teachers captured Iron Crosses. People went collecting for the Red Cross, for the first War Loans, the second, the third, the fourth, the fifth. Something was always being "nailed" for charity, now Hindenburg, now some coat of arms. Lessons were combined, classes merged. The Abitur was completed as a joke, the certificate offered with no obligation to the highest bidder, the least deserving, export permits to the Front or at least into the War required as security. You could become a doctor, receive a licence after how many semesters? Emergency licences. It was the sick who felt the emergency.

Even worse were the emergency engagements, war-weddings. These were contracted wholesale, you met only three days ago, or barely a week, then off you went into the "Field" where the air was less rarefied. Once those three days would hardly have been enough for a nice long kiss, now you had merry high-grade animated legs and ran to where you wanted to go: the registry office. It gave a little pleasure, and later ...

Later was the War, which would not be ignored. The War lasted an enormously long time, and spread over an enormous geographic area, from Arras to the Suez Canal, from Jutland to the Caucasus, from Jerusalem to the Baltic; anything could happen there, why think about it. The War was totally organised for eternity, it functioned marvellously, bedded down; making war was fun. And you got married quickly before rushing into it. Then back home someone was left sitting afflicted with something more than a long kiss, but she too and the rest of society

were full of fun, and the most wonderful tales are told of this. They were herded together in munitions factories, little lads so young, little lasses so young. They sat and ate together in barracks, they had lots of cash, no constraints, the munitions were not the only explosives in the depots, you showed yourself a lusty artilleryman firing off good shots.

Sheds went up in the towns; who sat in these sheds? Young badgers and their sweet lady badgers. Those who produced gas had green hair, but amusements were boundless; at sixteen you might be a clapped out roué living under a gutter. Meanwhile a constant stream of old men came off trains, reservists with heavy packs, lousy, dreadfully dirty. They staggered home, cursed as they inspected the damage, and headed back again filled with rage. What do you think, how much of the disgruntlement at the Front from those “revolutionaries” and “socialists” was displaced and redirected rage at domestic evils?

The old had been expropriated. A base new world was comporting itself back there. It was all going to the dogs back home. War industries, the Hindenburg programme had their effect; no wonder if the Front was not “stabbed in the back”, but enraged. The War was no longer a matter of warriors, snazzy cavaliers on little snow-white steeds, but hurled itself on the country with classroom-mergers, munitions depots, sheds in big cities, animated locksmith apprentices, hospital trains filled with bitter men, elderly reservists welcomed by the filth of the homeland on top of the filth of the trenches.

And young sprouts thrive. “Us youngsters”.

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Lichterfelde-West near Berlin, railway overpass. Ten, fifteen youths, senior secondary age, in Wild West masks, Buffalo Bill. Evidently sprung from a Karl May novel. Pathfinders. Although all the streets hereabouts are clearly named, and even on the rare patch of unbuilt “land” it’s all numbered, staked out, parcelled and you can ask for quotes from Estate Agent Central on Unter den Linden. You know they’ll slink along like in the cinema, always along the wall, silent, Winnetou, Wille-wau-wau-wau, Witto-hu; they’ll have a kettle to cook something up even though they’ve sandwiches in their pockets. They’ll defy the thunder, keep it up in the face of foe and tempest and every power all the way to Zehlendorf-Mitte. On their wide-brimmed East African Ranger hats as on their determined faces it is written: the green whitecat with the black pelt shall not at this time be slain and bound to the stake, and no one at the very last moment is to be cut free from the stake while he, the noble one, bleeds already from a thousand wounds, those who are two among brothers, those from whom litres of blood stream, they have faith in English sticking plasters. This time the Fatherland shall be saved. Winnetou in patriot garb. And what do the trumpets blare? *Hail to thee in victor’s wreath.* [...]

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BERLIN DAY OF MOURNING by Linke Poot [excerpt]
Unpublished MS. [SPG 218-222]

On 11 January 2023, French troops marched into unoccupied parts of the Ruhr, to enforce full delivery of reparations demanded under the Versailles Treaty. Popular outrage, passive resistance and acts of sabotage ensued, as did hyperinflation.

[...] Saturday: four children in the living room. Wolfie, 7, comes rushing in shouting: “There’s war! Where’s mama? There’s war. Fräulein Stock said so. Yeah, there’s war.” He flounces excited and merry about the room, takes off his rucksack, with female help: “The French are coming. They’ve occupied the Ruhr. It’s a river. They came across it. On a bridge. To Essen.”

“Good Lord, Wolfie, what do they want in Essen?” - “There’s a factory there, a great big one, Kropf’s. They want to make canons there. More and more canons. They already have lots. We’re not to have any. All for them!”

I am speechless, but he insists. After a while little Daus [Klaus], 5 years old, toddles up to me: “What’s the Ruhr? Is it a country? Why do the French want it? Where do the French live, do they have a country? Is it bigger than this room or the Frankfurter Allee?” He’s fired up from Wolf’s story and his excitement, wants to join in and doesn’t know how. Then Peter comes home, straight from his high school. There’s been a mourning ceremony, he’s cross, what’s to do at home at eleven in the morning.

“Petrus, what did they do at your school?” - “Mourning.”

“Tell us!” - “That’s all I know. We were in the big hall.”

“What happened?” - “I don’t know. Something about the Ruhr. Wolfie’s already said. The headmaster spoke first, then a teacher.” He starts laying out his train set. “Did you enjoy it?” - “Yes, we sang *Deutschland über alles*. As I was coming down the steps I remembered everything the teacher said. Now I’ve forgotten.”

“It’s about the Ruhr.” - “Yes, the French have occupied it. They’ve got tanks, big tanks like in the War, and canons. And we’re supposed to give them telegraph poles as well. We don’t have any. That’s what it’s about.”

“About telegraph poles, Petrus?” He’s playing on the carpet, “Yes, for the telegraph.”

Little Trudi, same age as Wolfie, presents herself with many curtses. They too had a mourning ceremony. It was lovely. But they were dismissed earlier, at ten. A teacher spoke, at length. But his voice was hoarse and she couldn’t follow. And then a girl from another class sat behind her and kept larking about and giggling.

So much for National Mourning. [...]

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EPILOGUE TO TWO FRIENDS AND A POISONING

May 1924 [FGif 73-76] (excerpt)

When I survey the whole, it’s like in a story: “then the wind came and blew down the tree.” I don’t know what kind of wind it was or where it came from. The whole is a carpet made of scraps of cloth, silk, bits of metal, lumps of clay. It’s stuffed with straw, wire, twine. In several places bits lie loosely side by side. Some fragments are joined by mud or glass. Yet there are no holes and it all has the stamp of truth. It has been cast into the mould of our thoughts and feelings. This is how it happened; even the actors believe it. But it also did not happen this way.

Of mental continuity, causality, of mental substance and its agglomerations we know nothing. One must accept the facts in this case – the letters, events – and systematically resist

actually explaining them. Not even were one to tread here and there farther into the depths would anything have happened.

First, there are the dreadfully unclear words that must be used to describe such events or connections. At every turn fuzzy, often palpably childish. Summarily stupid words to describe internal events: *inclination, disinclination, abhorrence, love, vengeful feelings*. A mishmash, a muddle, made for elementary practical comprehension. Here jars are labelled without first checking their contents. Herr Link develops an inclination for cheerful childlike Elli: what actually changes in him, how does the change embed itself, how does it proceed, and how does it end. An entire file of facts is not so much denoted as overlooked by the label "inclination". For the danger in such words is always that one believes that one can understand with them; thus they bar the way to the facts. No chemist would work with such impure material. Newspaper reports and novels that present such lived events are much to blame for making us satisfied with such empty words, since we hear them so often.

Psychic connection, or even causality: how are we to think about this? One can always tweak the causality principle. First you know, then you turn to psychology. There, disorder brings better knowledge than order.

Who imagines the actual motive in such cases can be known? As I pondered on the three or four people in this affair I felt I had to walk the streets they used to walk down. I sat in the pub where the two women got to know each other. I visited the home of one, spoke with her, spoke with and observed others who were involved. I wasn't looking for cheap background colour. One thing was clear to me: the life, or a slice of life, of a single human being cannot in itself be understood. The human being lives in symbiosis with other humans, and with other entities. Making contact, drawing close, growing together. This is already a reality: symbiosis with others and with dwellings, houses, streets, squares. To me this is a certain (albeit obscure) truth. If I extract from this one individual human, it's like observing one leaf or one joint of a finger in order to describe its nature and development. But they cannot be described like that; the branch, the tree, the hand and the creature have to be described along with it.

So what has an impact, what develops over and beyond the individual. The statistics are astonishing. The wave of suicides moves in a regular way up and down year by year. Some big rules are in play. A power, an entity, steps forth in these rules; the individual does not notice the power, the rules, but he applies them.

How strange is the simple fact: a human being is young and has certain drives; grows older and acquires others. Each individual just like any other. And each one feels this youth and love as a private matter and thinks to be exercising the Ego. You'd never understand anyone if each one wasn't the same as any other; meaning: no one like himself. Here a generally effective motive force is apparent: one's age, and humanity itself. It determines life expressions in this or that manner. It's the motive force and nothing else. [...]

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CATASTROPHE ON A LEFT TURN

Das Tage-Buch, 3 May 1930 [SPG 247-253]

'Die Linkskurve' (Left Turn), edited by Johannes Becher et al. for the Union of Proletarian-revolutionary Writers, ran from 1929 to 1932. In the December 1929 issue, a review of Berlin Alexanderplatz stated: "In this book, Döblin gives unconcealed

expression to his hostility to the organised proletarian class struggle. Insofar as he deals with politicising workers, these do not speak the language of class-conscious workers, but a tavern-jargon. Döblin deliberately sets out cynically to mock and ridicule the archetypal worker of our time who has been shaped by the political and economic contradictions of capital into a sharply delineated figure. Against this mass-type, the representative of the political and cultural problems of the modern age, he sets the invented, mystical, unenlightened figure of Franz Biberkopf, the 'good man', and deliberately insulates him from the proletarian class struggle. A clever mask conceals a reactionary and counter-revolutionary assault on the thesis of organised class struggle. It is no accident that in a book about Alexanderplatz (where Police HQ was located), Döblin says not a word about the bloody altercations with the police. Police HQ has 'supervised' Döblin. The book strengthens our conviction that 'left-leaning' bourgeois writers constitute a political danger to the proletariat, against which we must be on strictest guard." [SPG endnote p. 488]

In a separate article, Becher writes: "Face to the workplace – this turn is for us the vital question. If we complete this turn, we shall be best able to evade all dangers that arise from the workplace of literature. Our own face, turned to the workplace, will be changed: our works will acquire the natural simple speech of the proletariat, the smell and colour that truly belong to the proletariat, there will be a mass of material there, the most valuable and comprehensive we could hope to find, - and our writers, if they write a novel called Berlin Alexanderplatz, will certainly not find it necessary to adopt methods which despite their ultra-realism are quite unrealistic, merely in order to mask a crazy unviable construct: the transport worker in our novel will be a class person, will be a transport worker and not an artificially extruded laboratory product like Döblin's "transport worker" who seeks to prove his existence by gabbling a stenographed Berlin dialect, and suspiciously enough takes note of the number of every tram that crosses the Alex. Whoever allows himself to be so endlessly atomised, to dissolve in details and believe that the details sum up to make a whole – he does not create a new art form, as bourgeois critics assert in their need to glorify everything; all he does is affirm, though very much against his will, that bourgeois literature is at an end." [SPG, endnote p. 490].

This thing I'm going to talk about is called *Linkskurve* (Left Turn), costs 30 pfennigs an issue, octavo format, printed by 'Peuvag'. It emerges from the darkness on the first of every month. It's not worth talking about, it's an authentic, i.e. also inauthentic, literary magazine behind which stands a clique of people who blow each other's trumpets and are possessed of infallibility. But we should say something about *Linkskurve*, because it's the official literary organ of the German Communist Party (KPD).

I got to know this thing when it turned its attention on me. When someone gave me this issue, I was so delighted I bought some back numbers. I read through them all, some parts were fun, some gruesome. I'll say something about this recently created apparatus. For this thing is an apparatus. It produces mechanically normed criticism, judgements are delivered on a conveyor belt, any child can operate it. It's an automaton with controls to protect against independent thought, especially adapted to the needs of the blind and the juvenile. On the outside, this thing is painted red. Inside, it's noticeably paler, and you know why when you see

the names of the editors: Becher, Andor Gabor, Kurt Kläber, Erich Weinert, Ludwig Renn². Karl Marx once said: "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world." If we substitute 'principle' for 'religion', we identify the role of Belief among Party authors. Conceptual vacuity, defects, are papered over. The evil heartless world must not intrude. But it does, a little.

For sure one is nothing, but one is no bourgeois. For sure one can't write, but what one writes is not bourgeois. For sure one cannot think, but one thinks in approved ways. If I were an artist and had to paint the five editors of *Left Turn*, I would paint them in their incubator, there they perch side by side, pitiable to the marrow, dagger between the teeth, they make big goggle eyes and try to instil fear.

The first issue of vol. 2 has a leader by Johannes R. Becher. It's essential reading. I recommend everyone with an eye for humour and the grotesque to read this article; you can still buy the issue, only 30 pfennigs. It's the literary flagbearer of the German Communist Party. One often wonders how it is that the Party flails about so, and fluffs its opportunities. Here you see why. "The central task of the League of Proletarian-revolutionary Writers is the development of an indigenous proletarian-revolutionary literature." So the prophet. They'll sit in Kielblockstrasse in Lichtenberg and "develop" an indigenous literature: Herr Becher, who produces prose and smoky hymns in a porridge of unswervingly Expressionistic language; Herr Ludwig Renn, freshly-baked comrade, author of a moderately good war novel praised by the bourgeois press, whereupon he thought himself famous; Herr Andor Gabor, who he? Herr Kurt Kläber, O God, the *Passengers*,³ once he tried to do something, and couldn't; Herr Erich Weinert, who "develops" cabaret sketches. This quintet will manage it.

We're informed that: "Our proletarian-revolutionary writing has made enormous progress in the past two years." What's wrong with me? I never noticed! It must have happened, unremarked, in Kielblockstrasse! That's so far away. Drat! Why didn't they phone? It's amazing that a secret literature can blossom in our midst. But then what I see is: our proletarian writing has just "made enormous progress", but now we learn that "we are a first stammering word, a beginning, and must strive ever higher." Something's not right. How the "stammering" fits with the "enormous progress" is not obvious to the bourgeois who merely thinks with his head. Clearly the Communists, or their literati, scarily enough also have at their disposal secret organs that they don't show us. However will we cope. Maybe the appalling contradiction of "stammering" and "enormous progress" has something to do with Marxist dialectic? But that's such a hard topic, whole courses are devoted to it. This might be an exemplary dialectic: "enormous progress" and "stammering". (We bourgeois, among ourselves, who think only with the head, call it nonsense. You see how rotten we are.)

Now, since disharmony has clearly emerged in the Communist secret literature of enormous progress, Johannes R Becher has hit upon his next handy idea: dictatorship over literature.

² Gabor (1884-1953): Hungarian, worked for *Pravda* in USSR 1934-45. / Kläber (1897-1959), a.k.a. Kurt Held: labourer-writer, fled to Switzerland, broke with the Party in 1938 over Stalin. / Weinert (1890-1953): satirist, in USSR worked for Radio Moscow, took part in purges. Served with International Brigades in Spain; 1943 President of National Committee for Free Germany. / Renn (1889-1979): scion of Saxon nobility, jailed 1934-36, fled to Switzerland. Commanded an International Brigade in Spain, then exile in Mexico. 1947 returned to DDR.

³ *Passagiere der dritten Klasse* (Third Class Passengers), 1927 novel by Kläber. Can be found online.

Whoever won't listen must feel. Why does a writer need to think at all, think independently, when the residents of Kielblockstrasse can think for him, – I mean, they don't think there either, rather the thinking is done at [Party HQ in] Bülowplatz, – I mean, they don't think there either, they think, I don't really know, I don't understand the infinitesimal calculus, maybe some astronomer knows it? "So we demand that our literature be placed under the same control and accountability as every kind of political work." In other words, whatever displeases Kielblockstrasse will make no enormous progress, or, as the case may be, will be no first stammering word.

Who better, I admit, to serve as Dictator in this drunken muddle than Johannes R Becher, since he's already proved himself dictator over logic and the German language. Curious as to the secret literature of enormous progress, I encounter this sentence: "Our works are not noble or polished to crystal clarity, they have a hard edge, for they are born and grow in the breeze that wafts from History." Now I've missed the turn. Where for the thousandth time are these works with a hard edge? The prose and lyrics of Johannes R Becher? That literary cottage-cheese? Where's the breeze that wafts from History? Not in German books, those are horribly noble and polished to crystal clarity, shiny as one of Anton von Werner's riding boots.⁴ But in *Linkskurve* itself you can find new proletarian poetry. Here's a taste, a poem by Hanns Vogt[s]:⁵

Red dog! Red rabble!
O you!
Radiant, wonderful!
Glowing, believer!
Today and tomorrow and the next day
And always you are there.

Enough? No word needed. This is the hard edge, grown up in the breeze wafting from History! (Less harshly: from an early issue of *Der Sturm*.) German Communist literature!

Finally, Johannes R Becher can't hold back: he has to say how it is with this new proletarian literature, he must avow what is, and he says (don't hold your breath): it is Rosegger.⁶ This emerges from Becher at the point where he has a book of mine in front of him. The former transport worker (Becher omits the 'former': a good bourgeois tradition, that, I swoon), who according to Becher is no longer a 'former' transport worker in one of my books, is an "artificially extruded laboratory product". Accusations levelled against the writer include: that he collects endless details and piles them up, that he is a mere stenographer of Berlin dialect, that the streetcar numbers he cites are accurate, that the book is ultra-realistic. If you'd like to know how it should really be, you find out: "Our works will acquire the naturally simple speech of the proletariat, the smell and colour that truly belong to the proletariat."

Now let's ask, as a professional and a layman, how we get there. The author is not allowed to be realistic, the details he gives mustn't be accurate, there should be no authentic Berlin dialect: what then? Clearly: Rosegger! Regional stories, the smell of nature, the famous 'clod of

⁴ Werner (1843-1915) painted historical topics in photographic detail.

⁵ Vogts (1900-1976): writer/dramatist, stayed in Nazi Germany, Communist Party member 1945-50.

⁶ Peter Rosegger (1843-1918): Austrian regional-nationalist writer.

soil'. Alas I don't mean either Rosegger or Ganghofer!⁷ I've had enough of natural proletarian speech from the poem cited above; and the cottage-cheese paeans of Johannes R Becher, a.k.a. the hard edge, likewise fail to sharpen my appetite. I kept to the simple Berlin dialect, which I didn't copy down stenographically, because I don't know how to be a stenographer. And if the details in my novel prove accurate, I beg Herr Becher's pardon, I'm such a goof: – when I mean Alexanderplatz I say Alexanderplatz, and when I mean cottage-cheesehead, I say Becher. And if I gather endless details, I promise that next time I'll do no gathering but pluck poetry straight out of the air: "O you radiant, wonderful, glowing, believer." Didn't it cross my mind just then that Herr Becher once attempted a novel using unsuitable means, and that novel was alas confiscated⁸ – everyone should have read it – and didn't he find himself then a mere appendix – a one-page literary directory? Oh pish, Herr Comrade, how can you. These after all are details, that's how you go on, and you want to be Rosegger?

What these gentlemen want, the goal of their foetal trains of thought, no, not their goal, is clear. There's a picture book, you know it, Georg Gross' *The Face of the Ruling Class*. Showing the face of the ruling class is absolutely a necessary act – but it would admit reality, and pipsqueaks and cowards find that scary and distressing. To show reality as it is, demonstrate the true needs of the masses and make theory from those and for those – that would be Marxist. Excuse my boldness in quoting the unknown Marx again: "Theory is realised among the people only to the extent that it is a realisation of their needs." And again: "One must depict the petrified condition of German society and thereby force it to dance so that one can sing to it its own melody. One must bring the people to be shocked at themselves, in order to give them courage."

Compare these truly hard sentences with the weak porridge of Communist chiefling Becher's phrases. Compare the closeness to reality of these quotes with the lyricist's fear of details. Compare the authenticity of these sentences with *Linkskurve's* stammering. "Face to the workplace," sings Becher. Nah, my son. In reality he writes with his face to *Der Sturm*. They hate reality, these sober historical materialists daren't approach reality. They believe it's enough just to wave your little red flag over reality.

Listen to what a literary leader of the Party writes to introduce a new year's issue of the official organ of the KPD: "We are not such idealists as to idealise *what is* [a hard enough task, for they don't know what is]; we are not complacent, we do not claim to be satisfied: we tug and pound the drum. We incite, so that the revolt will come sooner. That is our literature, we must proclaim it like a gospel. It rips through brain and heart." To which I say, without stenography: "Calm down, lad, for goodness sake." Here we have the ridiculous wretched literary representatives of the KPD: little red flags waving over a reality that no one knows, that they all step aside from with cant phrases. Who wonders any more where the politics are?

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PROMETHEUS AND THE PRIMITIVE

⁷ Ludwig Ganghofer (1855-1920): Bavarian writer, promoted young writers including Rilke; friend of the Kaiser.

⁸ Twice Becher was threatened with prosecution for his writings, but both cases were withdrawn before trial.

No MS exists; Döblin complained about the mangled ending perpetrated by the editor of the short-lived exile journal founded by Thomas Mann.

This translation first appeared on The Brooklyn Rail's InTranslation website in September 2014.

*The essay offers a succinct and trenchant historico-philosophical overview of the concerns that permeate *The Land without Death*: the will to power and death-wish of Europeans, culminating (at that point) in the rise of the Nazis; the floundering of the Christian Church in the face of colonial atrocities and wars of religion; and the organic world of native tribes in which natural and supernatural form a cointinuum.*

Western history is viewed in terms of a sharp divide between the Promethean impulse, which sets Man above Nature and isolates him from it, and the sense of connectedness with Nature that Döblin labels "the Primitive." He notes the ambivalent account in Genesis, and sets the emergence of Christianity in the context of a highly Promethean Roman state offering no satisfactions to those dispossessed by Roman civilisation.

But over time the Church, with its own hostility to Nature, succumbs to its own Prometheanism, and accommodates to worldly power. Just as the mystical sense is fading, Europe embarks on its age of discovery (a.k.a. conquest and subjugation). Nature, and Man, are viewed as a machine. The scientific enterprise, bent on quantifying everything, drains the world of qualities. The rise of mass societies after the French Revolution sees mysticism incorporated into the Promethean state where it benefits only small elites. The yearning for a human society, a connectedness of human to human, human to Nature, is perverted into state-sponsored suspicion, the policing of thought, and the pseudo-solidarity of social classes and mass rallies. The result is barbarism and the degenerate mysticism that is nationalism.

The only way out, says Döblin, is to "reset this power whose grasp is now awry, whose pivot is the domination of Nature by Man--and to accommodate to the mystical realm." But he is not optimistic.

What is Nature?

She presents herself as Nature writ large, in the myriad starry worlds. On our Earth she brings forth crystals, animals, plants, people. She shows herself in the changing seasons, she is thunderstorms, heat, cold. We experience her in the simplicity of slow silent fecundity, in gentle never-ending growth, in the transience of life with its youth and age and in great catastrophes, in earthquakes, floods, volcanic eruptions.

She does not dwell in any single presence, finds no sufficiency in any one of her creations. She surges through Time, ever developing and thereby swiftly or slowly subverting herself. Time is her element *par excellence*, she is inconceivable without Time and without the change inherent in it, the constant unfurling and discarding, dissolving and reconstructing.

Does this have a purpose? It is very human to ask such a question. Clearly it is replete with meaning, rather: meanings.

She possesses multifariousness, innumerable facets, and at the same time boundless monotony. What appears to us as death and fills us with gloomy fears is for her a matter of

course. She brings forth colour, music, beauty. At every stage she is excitable, strews charms about, from which answers and actions ensue.

This makes her accessible to numbers, so accessible that she seems always to be calculating, soaked to the very core in numbers. But on the other hand this seems no different than when you make a poem and structure it according to the meter as an Alexandrine, a tercet, a sonnet, or when you group flowers according to their stamens.

She seems mercilessly hard, consistency and logic are among her defining features. She pursues the sins of the fathers unto the third and fourth generations, only then to vary on a whim, to play and make anything possible. She does not deny causality, but this betrays little about her.

Does she not stand there like a solid inapproachable statue of stone? But nothing about her, to the attentive mind, lies beyond the inkling of a feeling. And exhilaration and ecstasy break out among animals and men.

It is one of the most curious acts of Nature, from which she never shrinks: the creation of entities that separate from her and place themselves in opposition to her. In particular Man, who whether he will or no must acknowledge himself an entity of Nature, falls into a tormented ambiguity. He experiences himself with a body, an organism that links him to the animals, undergoes the changes common to all natural bodies, is afflicted with birth, growth and metabolism and faces the prospect of certain death—but at the same time Man regards this entity, which heaps so many pains and joys upon him, with a mistrustful and alienated eye. He cannot and will not identify himself entirely with this entity of Nature. He experiences himself as a solitary being. He believes himself, at least in part, to be free from Nature, he confronts her, and considers this the true human species.

And so a foundational fact is experienced, with which all philosophy occupies itself and for which it has developed various formulations. The intimation of bereavement – separation, dissolution, elimination – dwells deep within every living thing. This feeling is always mingled to some degree with an existential sense of well-being. The closer the individual to the general forces of Nature – in the realm of crystals or plants – the weaker this feeling is likely to be. But we slide from a passive and questioning acquiescence in our isolation into an active relationship with it. The notorious confrontation of Man against Nature arises, in the end the poor questioner has concealed his face behind a ruler's pride. But in the depths, unaltered, that primal feeling still lurks. Of course when unease now arises, it serves only as an irritant.

Now we gain insight into the meaning and nature of technology. No doubt: a man and his group want to defend themselves. But technology is more than utility. And then, what is utility? Useful for whom, at whose service? At the service of a profound necessity, of the isolation into which we have stepped and its overcoming. Objectively, in eating, breathing, our so-called metabolism, we return always to the "Earth" into which we shall sink in the end; corresponding to this is an inner attitude: that we live weighed down by primal isolation and individuation, and are driven to overcome it (spiritual metabolism, spiritual respiration).

Technology is not just a battle against Nature, it also *bridges the way out of individuation*. We may say: Nature, which has fragmented itself into these individuals, creative Nature, seeks to merge again with the fragmented world. And this is *the innermost meaning of technology: not to subdue Nature, but to draw near to her again*. It is not outrageous to assert: whatever Man can

designate as creative Nature (primal being) gives to each of her progeny a whiff of a notion of this origin and at the same time an urge to turn back. The will to this kind of return is no foreign body in Man, but an urge out of isolation, which is fragmentation, into wholeness.

Inward technology and outward technology

And now for the first time we utter the word “primitive.” There are two paths. From earliest times, two technologies and stances have set themselves up in opposition, arising from the ground we have just described: one is the stance and technology that drove the discovery of firemaking, tools, weapons; the other is what we call “religion.”

The historical continuum to which the technology and stance of fire-making, tools, and weapons led, we shall call the Promethean, or the continuum of outward technology. The historical continuum which, using other methods, concerns itself with primal existence and the primal condition, we call the Primitive, or the continuum of inward technology. “Primitive” denotes the mystical continuum pure and simple because of its orientation towards the primal condition that preceded individuation. The practices and measures we call religion seek to connect the individual with primal existence and the primal condition—the firemaker’s technology has nothing to do with it.

The firemaker is Prometheus. It is he who aggressively and wilfully rends and treads down and circumvents the questioning and suffering primal sense of the individual. He acts. He spreads himself powerfully out through Nature, senses the mysterious underworld but lets it be. For him it must end in hubris and tragedy. Thereafter those on whom the spirit of Prometheus falls no longer grant to the mystical stance the character of a serious autonomous praxis and technology, they no longer recognise any primal being or primal condition, they deal only in discrete objects as isolated as themselves, with which they establish external correspondences and which they value according to their utility.

But “primitive” mystical persons do not circumvent and suppress this primal sense. The primal sense is the fire, the flame that lights them. Consciousness of the primal situation remains alive in them. They do not relinquish a connection with the variously named and even personified powers of Nature and primal being. It remains the centre of their thoughts, the actual object of their dealings. They develop practices to strengthen this connection and, at least temporarily and under specific circumstances, to re-establish it. They acknowledge their dependence on this side formally and at all times, and expect guidance from it.

So we find in human history two movements which start from the crisis of individuation and develop practices to overcome it: the older, still familiar one, which later weakened to “religion”; and the newer one that strides along the road of discovery, constructs mighty edifices, and drives human isolation on towards a total confrontation with Nature.

The first to utter the word “primitive” with an undertone of sympathetic rejection and defiance was Prometheus. “Primitive” was what he called the being who knew not the making of fire. Primitive is the abandoned origin. When the twirling and rubbing of two sticks or the fire-saw first produces a flame at the hands of a human pursuing his innate urge to build and seek, then a flame is lit in his brain as well, surprise and pride are there, and it is a beginning and has a voracious character. There are ages in which the explorer merely exploits and safeguards his spoils, but curiosity urges him on. Nature, in which up to this point he was part

of a continuum, he sees now for the first time as she shrinks back before him. When a human with a growing consciousness and an enquiring technical urge hastens after her, he is really chasing a fugitive spirit. But for a long time yet he does not sense this, for in his pride of discovery, in his curiosity and fever of exploration, the main elements of the Promethean have entered his blood. Humans in general will follow this path, they will become significant, and distance themselves ever farther from the exit that then becomes “Nature”—apparently distance themselves, for Nature is incalculable, and plays games. Driven by the Promethean spirit, the early nomads, gatherers and hunters, farmers and herders will come ever more strongly to rely upon themselves alone, to live from products they themselves have fashioned, to reshape the Earth to their requirements. They will exterminate unfriendly beasts, screen themselves from the elements, cling together ever more closely in social groups, and at last succeed in introducing biological changes in themselves and their groups which may one day break through the boundaries of our species.

Then the Promethean urge will be consummated, and yet this achievement will not, as some fear, cause the Earth to perish. For Prometheus is not alone, after a while he will be summoned yet again to the system, to the great system.

We live in the age of Promethean hegemony. We have retreated, hemmed ourselves in, to a technical utilitarian way of living, feeling, and thinking. Our thoughts and concepts are now merely hammer and tongs or entire machines. But it remains a fact that the Promethean urge does not make world history all by itself, but against and with—with what? With the whole other multidimensional Nature. If History were nothing more than the onward march of a Promethean spirit it would be a straight line, transparent and easily described. But it is not. Our encapsulation in the Promethean urge, in the tyrannical dominion it exercises especially over the white race, has led to us calling the little torch that flickers there “Light,” while the vast expansive brightness for which every laudatory word is too feeble we call “Darkness.”

Western civilisation is replete with the savage, we may say often barbaric, progress of the Promethean urge—it is the path of civilisation—and with other movements countering, harmonising, interlacing with it.

Prometheus in the Bible

Out of earliest occidental history emerged the powerful work that is even today read everywhere, exerting effects by which we recognise that it contains things that still speak to us. This is the Bible. Its very first page announces the Promethean claim in a programmatic way. From nothing less than his God will Mankind accept dominion over Nature. The whole inventory of his inheritance is listed, the fish of the sea, birds of the air, cattle, the Earth and every creeping thing upon it. But what is demanded of the warden of such a grandly bestowed dominion is not, you notice, very agreeable to Man, and at first he makes no attempt to take it on. Man is relocated – why only after this prelude? – to a pleasant spot: he lives in a wonderful garden where he’s on first-name terms with God, he lives amicably and not at all domineeringly together with all the animals. (Here, moreover, is where Mankind becomes Man and Woman, where they live together in innocence and are not ashamed in each other’s eyes.) Dramatically, tragically, this blessed primal condition, the very model of a primitive existence closed in on itself, suffers dissolution. A “sin” is laid between the later and the earlier condition. Through “sin” Mankind is driven suddenly into the quite undesirable condition of a Prometheus.

(The story is obviously the product of a male mind: in the beginning Man is created, he is Mankind, the Woman merely a piece of him; unlike every other creature she certainly does not come directly from the Creator's hand. And it is fitting that already we hear the familiar ascetic note: the Woman is stigmatised as seductress, on whom is pinned the blame for every evil. Let us concede: they are strange, these Prometheus figures from the beginning of the Bible. And the sense of bitterness so predominates that we do not even notice what is being said: that everything, in all its immensity, is represented as the outcome of folly instigated by female wiles!)

Later this scene appears again, sketched more boldly. There is mention of giants, of the children of God who came unto the daughters of men, and here, really, a "new, world-dominating species" is named: they are called tyrants, mighty of the earth, men of renown. Now we see what's what.

And then, the third time—you can't escape it—we learn fully what these mighty men actually achieve, a tower in Babel, and see who it is before our eyes. They were, we are told, one people, with one language, the Lord himself was curious and came down to see this tower being built by men, his creations, and again God is allowed to decide on annihilation, because he rightly sees: they will never desist from anything they set their hands to. Then they must stop building the city, become scattered across many lands and speak many languages. Quite clearly, though devoid of amorous adventures, this is the third Original Sin. Until today they have never stopped building. For after the threefold report the actual history of a single people begins, and you see constant detailed accounts of the same thing we have just looked at in summary, and it all looks like evidence for it. Prometheus, who feels uneasy in his skin. (We shall see that this ancient people, the Hebrews, had another powerful "mythical" back story and pursued Prometheanism only weakly, but they understood humanity and placed the report of Creation and Original Sin as a warning at the start of their history.)

And so at the very moment of leaving the primitive primal home, we have the whole calamity of our permanent condition and the West: forced to work, and condemned to die. Now there is no more talk of Man's descent from God. The cold, shattering word is: Thou art dust, and to dust shalt thou return. This is a turnaround. From its first appearance in the Bible, Promethean pride speaks of itself in a depressed and troubled tone, and mourns a primitive primal condition represented as "Paradise." Here is the old, old feeling of separation that we spoke of. Despite his pride, he knows how things stand with him and what Paradise is, but in the end shrugs his shoulders and lets Cherubim with fiery swords set up camp at its gate.

There is no lack of clarity here as to the goal of human desire. Man wants the Last Thing: not to die, and wants to know Good and Evil. But Man lets his God speak scornfully and dismissively: "Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life..."

And so White Western Man draws himself up in a sorrowful yearning posture. Will he strive to regain the primitive state full of mysteries? No. It is enough for him to dream of it, as of Paradise. He remains fully occupied in fighting, oppressing, and gathering riches. All he does in respect of the murky sense of suffering and sin that he still feels is to make a compromise with his God, who promises him much if he will obey the commandments, pray, and sacrifice in the prescribed manner.

As it began with the backwards look (meaning: into the depths beneath him), so it goes on; Man relapses into primitivity, the Primitive appears as Baal, Astarte, golden calf, local deity, something else, and moral deviations appear too. These early Western people, as the document regretfully confirms, succumb to the temptations of animal and vegetable deities, give themselves to cults where grieving about individuation is almost unknown. People plunge into deeper historical strata, immerse themselves through these deities once more in a certain primitive condition, at least temporarily.

Those peoples who practised cults in and beyond the domestic hearth were interestingly, in a strictly craftsmanlike sense, the superiors of the ancient Hebrews, but nonetheless not so conscious of the Promethean, that is to say the technical will. The ancient Hebrews are the first Western people, in that they consciously developed and formulated the Promethean will. They project this will onto the primal power itself: "God" is unique, an agglomeration of powers, a monarch, and his priests and prophets viciously persecute whole generations who deviate into idol-worship.

But despite this they neither practised the Promethean will nor made it their spiritual centre. The ancient Hebrews held fast to, and were held fast by, the primeval, magical ritual of prayer and offerings, and so had the second technology and stance and the door leading to the primal condition. They tended knowledge and preserved practices by which helpless isolated beings concern themselves with the great primal One. Thus this young Western people has a double face. And this is somewhat typical: even where Prometheanism thrusts ahead with full force, it drags remnants of its mirror-image along with it.

Hellas-Rome and the shift to inward technology

A look at the Greeks, another people of the White race, a very this-worldly tribe. The Prometheus myth arose among this luminous people. No gloomy sublime reports, celebrated in bitter earnest, of a primal creator and original sin. There is a world of gods, but this heaven mirrors an autonomous human aristocracy. How accessible to joyfulness, even irony, it all is. The Hellenes, builders of strong city-states, ruling over huge numbers of slaves, are not inclined to ponder overmuch on the terrible and tragic human condition—although they know it well, although pessimism and laments are threaded throughout their culture. There is talk of a dark past, of battles with giants, the horrific Atrides, the dismal Fates who sit over the gods are there, the figure of the Sphinx—but these are distant and remain dark, and there is no yearning for it, or for a primitive dreamland. Here Prometheus is completely victorious, and when Zeus, the chief god, seizes him and chains him to a rock, he has to use force and violence to fetter the primal monsters.

After the Bible, with its glorious foregrounded figure of Man the Master and the yearning that breaks through for the primitivity of Paradise and the earth-deities—after the proud Hellenes, poised in a tragic stance, making only a timid dismissive gesture towards the other world, and reflecting their own magnificence in a heaven full of gods—after these come the Romans, of whom some, including Horace and Tacitus and the *Bucolics*, sigh for simple and primal conditions. But we will not speak of such literary yearnings, rather of the vehement, catastrophic eruption that led to the birth of Christianity.

How mightily did the Promethean spirit reveal itself in Roman state-building, in the army, in law, general civilisation, organisation, and endless political expansion. And precisely now the serious fallback, the counter-movement, Christianity, induced by the radicality with which the Roman principle was pursued. Christianity appears as if pressed from one of the many subjugated and soon landless peoples. At first it drifted like a little cloud from nowhere across a couple of Roman towns. People fled from the almost seamless consolidation of the state into the individual, the private, and yearned for a “primitive” condition. This was the truest, most genuine mystical movement. Roman soldiers and citizens saw themselves confronted by an utterly abhorrent phenomenon, by a will to escape from their civilisation into a primal condition. The individual, robbed of his former means of existence, was in these provinces all alone, thrown back on himself, driven into himself. In helplessness he “came to himself,” and he produced the slogan—a fantastic assertion in the Roman Imperium: the individual is the child of God. Here is the birth of the individual out of a bankrupt politics. This “Christianity” was obviously not “of this world.” It was unpolitical, anti-political. In the eyes of the victorious humanity of this age, the Roman, on whom all custom, peace and order rested, it was mere chaos and anarchy.

Christianity was premised on the unbearability of the general human situation, fixed and trapped in its Promethean rut. In an over-large society with all its civilised trimmings, masses of people found no place and no satisfaction. In this crisis they sought a region where the rough Roman soldier could not follow: their inwardness. Nietzsche’s story of a simple slave uprising is not false, but foregrounded, without depth. Since horizontal attachment to society was not achieved, and in the long run not possible, masses of people sank vertically into “religions”: the refreshing and completion of Mankind by the re-emerging “religious side.”

In its “paradisiacally” simple, peacefully happy ground state, early Christianity reveals its primitivity. The adherents are poor. Their thoughts constantly reveal the impact of the primitive; it’s all about the beginning and the end of the world, the millennial kingdom. It is only natural that, in opposition to Rome, religions in Asia Minor and North Africa, autonomously developed and from the same continuum, should attach themselves to it. You are in a state of purest primitivity, awaiting Paradise. But quite soon, because Paradise does not come, other tones blend in. The individual again senses suffering, ever more as time goes on, but is now also sinful, guilty. It begins with ascetic practices, and slides into a particular kind of religious technology. The ascetic impulse presses on until—it doesn’t take long—one’s own flesh and the whole of Nature is viewed as sinful and anti-human.

And here we are, sailing in the finest Promethean current! Man against Nature! (This development was already prefigured and prepared: the awaited Paradise would not be found in the Garden of Eden, but in the Hereafter.) Through its hostility to Nature, the whole of later Christianity landed up in remarkable, ever-changing, playful proximity, a dangerous proximity, to its old enemy Prometheanism, whose Roman form it had sought to destroy. Each side has a canny understanding of the other. Compromises follow, on the basis of “hostility to Nature.” Now, moreover, you can rule, take part in politics. This is the Christian settlement seen from the Promethean side. Thus did Christians gain access to working in the mortal world.

Of course, developments on the other side lie much nearer to Christianity, on the side that appeared with the assimilation of cults from Asia Minor. Here you work with, not against, Nature. You accommodate to “heathenism.” Christianity, as it becomes Catholicism, seeks

accommodation also in a direction that corresponds to its essence. It draws closer to its origins. It gathers a mass of primitivities about it.

Onset of a new Prometheanism

Hellas-Rome succumbed to the aggressive primitivism of young Christianity, the West lay to this side for a thousand years, but the battle was not over, the position reached was not stable.

Christianity, come to offer the individual a mysterious access to Primal Being, had as Catholicism given in too readily to its dual inclination and was crumbling: its inclination to hostility towards Nature and to politics and the governance of this world, and its inclination towards local myths, ancient magic. The reins hung loose. People grew stale. They no longer represented the urge towards the Primal World from which they came.

In the first half of the second millennium after Christ's birth, a Promethean wave of enormous breadth and impact set itself in motion. This is the age of the discoverers of the Earth and the heavens; but "discover" also means "conquer" and "subjugate." The West that we see and live in today emerged at this time. Early on (to provide a test of how close we are to that time), Leonardo da Vinci employed exact quantitative methods, he studied music and physics, occupied himself with problems of flight and ballistics. He is heir to the great discoverer of fire, his true son. He builds machines with the aid of algebra and geometry, and at the end of the 15th century demands the experiment. He is the source of the saying: "The earth is a machine and so is Man." Descartes, the originator of French thought, agrees with Leonardo. He says: "The body of a living man differs from that of a dead man to the same extent that a watch or other automaton (i.e. a machine that moves of itself) does when it is wound up and possesses the physical principle for the motion for which it was constructed." The English chime boldly in, and Hobbes imagines the state and society as "a single great machine whose nature can only be understood when the state is dismembered conceptually into its elements, which spring from human nature." Hobbes too uses the example of the watch or complex machine.

After the Renaissance and Luther, the age of secularization. The religious continuum driven to the wall. Remnants stand like islands in the flood.

The continual force of a great, ubiquitous spiritual-material current. From time to time it appears to recede, then regains its vigour and there come whirlpools and underminings. The French Revolution, after the Enlightenment's preparatory work, draws a line in October 1793 between it and earlier ages, it breaks with the Christian calendar, time is reckoned from the autumnal equinox, human reason is installed on the now vacant throne of God, and festivals are instituted for secular "virtues," work, revolution.

Now the scenery is dominated by interweavings, of which there are many examples. The movement that now rules absorbs for its technical practical progress images and motives from the other continuum, it "secularises" them. And this means: the accommodation reached by the Church and especially by Catholicism is lured into a secular, Promethean framework outside the Church. "Human rights" now step forward as political ideals, quite differently from their original conception. Mysticism is not left on the shelf, rather efforts are made to incorporate it practically. This modern inclination plans a kind of church outside the Church.

Here is the reason for the irresistible social movements of recent centuries, which appear to revolve around self-evident and necessary changes in relations between rulers and ruled, as if on the one side we have property and satiation, and on the other side hunger and envy. The fury of the actual struggle, however, is fuelled from elsewhere.

An optimistic mood reigns over the path of progress. No trace can be detected of the great sorrow that accompanied the first Promethean steps. No one looks into the dark abyss in which the human ego lies, stretching out its arms, lamenting. The slogan of the age seems to be "Hope and Blindness."

Where do we stand now?

We saw how various were the heads on the bodies that formed the Promethean impulse among the Hebrews, Greeks and Romans. But when this impulse re-awoke at the end of the Middle Ages, what had it become? What did it get up to now?

This time it extends its victory march to north and west, reaches from the Mediterranean into the interior of Europe. And now it assumes a strange, de-sensed character, even though it busies itself only with visible, palpable, and ponderable Nature. And see: it sets out to master the multiplicity and manifold nature of these phenomena, and allows their tactility, visibility, audibility to disappear. You cannot argue without further ado that this comes with the times, it's a Prometheanism arising from a Christian camp in a Christianising age. All by itself, lacking contact with any ascetic power, this tremendous urge for mastery assumes features that appear ascetic (the counterpart to the Christian inclination to appear Promethean and engage in politics); all by itself, from its own being, the urge for mastery over Nature develops its own asceticism, a denial of the world. It dissolves all qualities into quantities. Abstract numbers rule. It leads to mere forces, relations, dynamisms. How clear it is that what is at work here is not the whole man, but a monomaniacal brain and the urge to mastery. He makes the world "manageable." He wants to hold it in his fist. So a fantastical image arises. As in a Buddhist meditation, colour, tone, and form disappear trait by trait, you sink into ever profounder deafness, blindness. The person who manifests here is a pure action-being, and the Promethean impulse—enormous paradox—brings forth amid the riches of a world grown wide a skeletal, even shadowy, nihilistically frozen person. (What a contrast between this modern Prometheanism and the joyous world-acceptance of the Greeks.)

And now to the deformities of humans and societies that this being has wrought.

The construction of a sense of mastery belongs to the essence of modern Promethean power, directed not only over elements, plants, and animals, but especially over people, and all under the same sign. This power works against Nature in that it ignores and destroys the inborn urge of people to form a society. Ever and again in these times, new groups and individuals spring up to enjoy the lust for power over people. This subjugation and slavery, and not the subjugation of Nature, is the main point. The breeding, specialisation, and objectification of humans is pursued proudly and deliberately. It is not "man" or "the human race," humankind as a whole that is led in this way towards the noble magnificent Promethean flame, only small closed groups of aristocrats and despots; larger groups are forced towards the fire to serve it; whole populations are sacrificed in war and serfdom and thrown into the fire to fuel it with their lives.

Societies led in this manner may be great and admirable in their organisation, in the clarity of their statehood. They may provide welfare for their people, because they want to shape them to the ruling will. But there is welfare and welfare, human relations and human relations. And you can guess the kind of human relations that underlie these societies and with what means they are produced: outward relations in the service of the will to mastery, and the regulation of such relations through decrees and laws, control by armies and police.

The Absolute State and mysticism

So it comes to the dismantling of natural Humanity, and its replacement. The main form of human connectedness becomes “collectivism,” i.e. the agglomeration of masses, by chance or intention, into organisations. What is desired is human anonymity and anaesthesia; what is pursued is repression, trivialisation, and contempt for the person, for the I, for the inward, for thinking. (You do not notice that you are trying to magic away a primal phenomenon—the one we spoke of at the start, our primal individuation which no act of state can touch.)

So you begin to make human relationships harder, on the premise that the only thing that matters is “the public.” In the great ages of mysticism the only thing that matters is in fact the mystical “public”—God, the primal condition—because from this there follows a self-evidently experienced, deeply satisfying, and uplifting regulation of individual life. This imitates the Promethean power; the ape of religion believes he can make similar prescriptions. But policemen masked in religiosity are still around. The natural exchange of views is hampered, silence is demanded, with cynical disregard for what one “thinks.” (The mystical age valued “thinking” differently, recognising it as *the* fundamental power.)

State authority grown “absolute” ushers in an age of stunted humanity. Other, likewise Promethean, images of the state in periods of civilization merely wanted to regulate and govern natural relationships; the “absolute” state must abhor and suppress these relationships just as its absolute science drives out colour and sounds in favour of quantities. But what happens to mankind now? The image of power, because it cannot permit the honest and free association of people, but rather must encourage suspicion, places society in a condition of true suffering, in a kind of war-footing of all against all, and this is the opposite of the “paradisial” life of the mystical continuum.

The preferred approach is to treat the masses like an army, a battle-ready instrumental mass. People are enormously dependent and at the same time impoverished, more so than in the time of the Caesars because the public is now so much more extensive. Such societies are under powerful inward stresses, they incline either to collapse or to war.

Now something emerges that is of particular interest to us, because it touches on the mystical continuum: some space is left for other human concerns. The colossus of such a collective organisation feels that he has feet of clay and needs support. He does not give up his principle, but makes use of another as well. The colossus strives to achieve cohesion among his coerced fragments through inward stimuli and anaesthesia. So as surrogates of spiritual connectedness we have mass rallies, uniforms, fireworks, games. They both dazzle and intimidate the disintegration-prone fragments. Feelings of power are excited in the fragments, and this is the start of a particular form of human crippling: attention is diverted away from a person’s nature and his lamentable condition to make him what for other reasons he is already

inclined to become—a being of violence in the image of this apparatus, just as the degenerative mystical continuum lets him become an animal or plant. Hordes of petty tyrants run about, miserable people in the toga of a Caesar, a repulsive masked ball. Now they only catch glimpses of their selves, no longer have access to their inward resources, to their actual scope. It externalises and coarsens. Here we see the barbarism resulting from a degenerate Promethean impulse.

Statehood does not stand still now. It tries to seize actual ideas. To external coercion and dazzlement it adds inward coercion. It breaks in on the mystical continuum.

Two things stand against the absolute state. Firstly, in the Promethean space there always exists a generalised, free-floating mysticism seeking a point of attachment, and secondly, in the West one finds a particular kind of pseudo-mysticism, a glorification of secularism. You speak (we use a German example, but what we describe goes beyond Germany) of a special Indo-Germanic piety, you declare yourselves a holy nation, you oppress alien or recalcitrant elements. What a fantasy you offer, to help the neo-Promethean image hiding in this stadium full of ecstasy and uproar to attain glory and majesty. What a mass of cajoling speculations, exploiting of literature, plundering of fables, myths. Magnificent proud Promethean power parading in a tawdry burlesque. The smell of the times sweats from the pores of these fantasies and speculations, they mirror the dreariness, confusion, and urge to expansion of this age, they lead to no primal ground, no yearning and no feeling leads them there, they look to no future, they stand firmly anchored in their time.

Did Nietzsche share the fantasies that parade around now, the fanaticism of “blood,” nation, race? He offered many sacrifices to the Prometheus of these days, especially his doctrine of the Will to Power and the Superman. But he always kept in view a picture of great, creative, and magical Nature. He who thought of higher human beings had not the slightest intention to serve our technical-industrial, outwardly pompous, inwardly ruinous coercive state with its degenerate, excessively Promethean impulse lacking any regulating balance.

This mass of brain-flowers with its mythic posturing. Everything brought forth in icy coldness, revealing the cold, ascetic will to power. How can mysticism arise out of this artificially attenuated, dessicated humanity? The ground for this, in such an age, can exist only where the technical and expansionist urge has not been able to rage excessively, where it can still arouse protest: among its sacrificial victims, the suffering, the oppressed, the denigrated and displaced, who for a long time seek via Socialism an entryway to the old rubble-filled shaft.

Let us look more closely at the kind of “mysticism” that serves the coercive state in our time, that it sets before its subjects in order to provide itself with a security it can never attain; this mysticism is an expansive scientism, stemming from Darwin. You are presented with a zoological nationalism. Degenerate mysticism and degenerate Prometheanism touch and encounter each other here, to their astonishment; neither knows anything of the primal ground and the tragic primal human urge to go “back!”—but both throw themselves at this singular view of Nature, at blood and beast, the mystic for ecstasy, the heirs of Prometheus only because they need legitimation. The claim to divine right, the elite claim of a modern “people” and the same claim of ancient mystical peoples resemble one another, but only outwardly. Today’s states base the claim solely on an overweening growth of the Will to Power; boundlessness is the essence of the Promethean impulse. This pseudo-mysticism bears no relation to primitivity, and especially not to authenticity, you don’t even believe in it yourself, it’s all cleverly concocted and

written-down fantasies promulgated by paid hacks and interested parties. These bloodless learned scribblings rave, their bombastic rhetoric especially loves the word “blood.” An agitator says for example: “The Christianity and humanism now vanishing into the ether ignore the stream of blood-red real life that courses through the veins of every genuine people and every culture.” The barriers to thought appear clearly in the following sentence by the same author: “The conflict between blood and environment, blood and blood, is the final epiphany accessible to us.” They have made a very great stride into self-awareness recently, those who proclaim that the classical German materialists, Voigt, Moleschott, Büchner, latterly even Ernst Hückel, belong to their camp.

There is no way at all to create a mystical foundation out of the images, healthy or sick, created by Prometheism, but the inclination to do so reveals a weakening and degeneration of its power.

And it is so. And now we close these fragmentary remarks. Two things remain for the future: to reset this power whose grasp is now awry, whose pivot is the domination of Nature by Man; and to accommodate to the mystical realm. But a sudden reversal could also occur in the other continuum.

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CONFUCIUS

The Living Thoughts of Confucius, presented by Alfred Döblin, to which he wrote a long Introduction (translated by Doris A Infield) was published by Longmans Green in N. America in 1940, and by Cassell in the UK in 1942. It went through several editions up to 1959. When Döblin landed in New York he must have been gratified by the US\$500 royalty cheque that awaited him.

[...] Has this master, have these old writings anything to say to our times? They can always be used as a touchstone and an anti-type. To come to the main point, in order to see the necessity of binding human morals to truth, to a moral command making us responsible and, at the same time, demanding activity, Confucius’ doctrine should be compared with two modern theories which believe that they have succeeded in escaping from this principle of a moral basis: the theories of Karl Marx, and of Nietzsche.

Beginning from a generally humanistic concept, Marx, together with the socialism of his day, soon tied himself up with class war, but his aim was always to reach in this way a truly social society. Little by little though, he lost interest in man and his morals and stressed the importance of external, material things. It was, therefore, inevitable that, in fighting through to this goal, tyranny and brutality and the inhumanity and bestiality natural among men should spring forth. Nietzsche saw man in some connection with nature, but what kind of nature? A non-existent, merely physical-mechanical one. Thus here also is lacking the discernment of our ties with the physical-spiritual world as a whole, a connection and collaboration which must not be shaken nor deformed. From Nietzsche there remains a hopeless nihilism which also leads to tyranny and brutality.

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THE GERMAN UTOPIA OF 1933 AND LITERATURE

Das goldene Tor 1946 [SAPL 369-406] (excerpt)

In 1933 Döblin wrote a controversial article sorting current German writers into four categories. He revisited it for the new journal he founded after his return to Germany in 1945, prefaced by these three sections.

1.

[...] When considering the character of the power that since 1933 set itself against the entire material and spiritual life of the country, one does well to acquire a clear understanding of what is a Utopia. For this movement, this power, possessed a Utopian core; many even saw this as the core of its power; and for sure this core had a formative, shaping effect on the development of this power-body.

So what is a Utopia? It is a human plan to interrupt history, in order to jump free of history and achieve a stable perfection. The impetus may come from fatigue, and may also come from an enormously high-tensioned human willpower. People notice and observe for a time the course of their historical existence, they see states being formed, states being dissolved, the formation of new groups and constellations, and while this all seems to them colourful and full of novelty, it is, on the other hand and in the long run, monotonous. It's as if from time to time people develop history fatigue. They push politics away and allow themselves to be governed by professionals. Their own interest strays away from the imponderable uncontrollable processes of history, and flings itself at something that promises to last, that really is relevant and heart-soothing. And now into the eternally changeable world a dream-vision is conjured up, which is meant to triumph over confused historical reality. A situation is constructed which is meant to form the culmination, the flowering, the conclusion of the historical process.

[...] Note particularly the difference between Utopia and religion. It seems that the definition of Utopia could encompass religions, both as regards its initial impetus and the end result: a conclusion, the culmination and coming into flower of the all too wearying historical process. But in one point religions diverge from Utopias. Religion leaves the earthly plane. The Utopian demand for power is directed at the Earth; the world is to be not overcome, but conclusively and radically altered. The consequence is supposed to be the opposite of a Deluge; but the renewal should break like a new Deluge over the whole of the past.

Behind Utopias and religions lie fundamentally different concepts. A Utopia believes it knows – rather, does believe – that humanity can attain a lasting state of perfection, but only after radical alterations to their social arrangements. Religion takes a more realistic view: that given human nature as it actually is, a lasting state of perfection and happiness is unattainable.

And so, at least in relation to earthly happiness, it is the Utopia that has faith, and religion that lacks faith.

Utopians present themselves as the greatest effective realists, and for them religion is an ineffectual dream. But religion is the great question mark even during the lifetime of the Utopia, and the great sad clear-up operation afterwards must always be dealt with.

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So with a Utopia we have the image of a state of historical perfection which, although historical and a product of history, steps forth claiming the right and the ability to make a conclusive end to history. Suchlike curious plans have popped up several times in history. Naturally they are linked to the names of thinkers, of philosophers and poets, even of complete fantasists. At first

they are merely literary, paper images, and find themselves in a certain state of innocence, but rapidly change their nature and show their teeth when they end up in political hands. For they strive from the start, as one understands it, to become political (for at bottom they are political, political ideas and action programmes *in statu nascendi*). They have actually chosen the wrong profession if all they do is gather literary dust. Every inventor of a Utopia twitches a little at the thought of becoming a Prometheus, kneading humanity and bringing humanity into conformity with his desired image.

A famous historical case tells us how that goes: Plato the philosopher-king, with the plan for his republic of Syracuse under the protection of his friend the tyrant. It didn't go well, Plato made no progress. But later he could hide behind the excuse of not having had enough power. His plan, he could assert, had never been tested and had not been refuted.

Others cannot wiggle out of it like that.

Several Utopists in the last hundred years, however, have found themselves in a (for them) fortunate situation. Twice in the course of a hundred years specific social Utopias have been able to flourish. They had the possibility of growing into reality and making impacts until suddenly their time came and now they could show their nature truly and fully and jump catastrophically into time and history. The two eschatological images I speak of are the economic Communist-Marxist one, and the biological one that was to be realised in Germany after 1933.

The long gestation of the Communist-Marxist idea, presenting itself as proletarian Messianism, is well known. For around a century this Utopia wandered the Earth, aroused, agitated, and planted seeds, until towards the end of the First World War in a place where people had least expected it, in Russia, an explosive power unfolded in the hands of a man and had the impact of both a Deluge and a transformative new beginning. This idea, emerging early in the Industrial Age, wants to do away with class tensions and promises, through the installation of a Communist commonality whereby even the state is supposed to wither away, to attain the desired degree of perfection. Implementation of this gigantic experiment is still ongoing. There is no possibility at present of giving a reliable history of the struggle playing out here between Utopia and human reality, or of the results so far, the transformation of the Utopia, the regression to a ferment.

But what concerns us here is not this one, but rather the totally different one that grew up at the same time in the same countries: the biological Utopia, which a short while ago tried to realise itself in Germany. In contrast to the a priori activist socio-economic thesis that was quickly taken up by political parties and pushed into social life, the biological idea for decades led a shadowy existence. The new biological theories, Darwinism, notions of development with the part-notions of selective breeding, survival of the fittest, were themes of Enlightenment, of popular philosophy. Fine-minded literature could cope with these. But already by 1870 a philosopher gripped by the time and gifted with imagination, Frederick Nietzsche, recognised the possible or, as instantly became clear to him, the *necessary* consequence of Darwinism, namely the Superman, the higher species of animal. His brain was filled with this image, and he made himself into the prophet of this species of human that he had dreamed up and coloured in. As behoves a Utopist, he was at once belligerent against religion, and all the more so as au fond he knew very well what religion is – and slandered and misinterpreted religion that cheats

people of this world with the same determination as his Utopian colleague from the social line, Karl Marx.

The two lines of force, the socialist and the biological, that ran through the century of the natural sciences, were very quickly taken up differently by different classes. Workers adopted the economic Marxist-Communist strand, the bourgeoisie the biological. Each class sketched out its Utopia: the proletarians the classless state, the bourgeoisie more slowly and less confidently the ideal of the Master Race.

Now began the struggle and the competition between the Utopias.

2.

Consider how the biological Utopia developed. The biological line of force was for a long time the axis for various others around at the time. In art and in literature there were well-tended motifs from Germanic myths that formed part of the treasure-house of German consciousness; think of the Nibelung saga in which Hamerling and Hebbel⁹ dabbled, as, with a colossal and striking apparatus, did Richard Wagner. This was already not just Literature. It had a streak of political idealism, clearly seen in Wagner. Interestingly, it was Nietzsche who denounced the bad neo-German, Great-Man-seeking character of this literature. At that time the actual political circles – Prussianism, the military – distanced themselves from the new upstart ideas. Only now did notions of Siegfried, the national hero, merge with those of the Master Race.

What was lacking to lift the biological notion of the future to the rank of a historically practicable Utopia was an encounter with a Power. What body of power will take over (we won't say: take pity on) this as yet free-floating idealistic force, and will it allow itself to be used as a motor? The simplest case, as we mentioned, was that of Plato: a poet-philosopher who conceived a notion of the state which he was allowed to put into practice. The case of the two 19th/20th century ideas of the future we have considered lies elsewhere, both in the origin of the idea and its realisation: the idea grows slowly and bundles itself with parallel ideas, for quite a while it fuels daily struggles and thereby runs the risk of losing its true character. But then the historic moment arrives, and after so much straying and preparation and distortion it is granted to the Utopia at last to reveal its pure (or we have to say: terrible) face and to take the *salto mortale* (fatal leap) into history and to begin by emerging out of history.

How much of the real true Utopia is still there, when at last it falls into the hands of its executor? In our case, that of the biological Utopia, Nietzsche's purely biological idea (of the Superman who is to be created) was very soon cast aside in favour of the idea of the White Aryan human, the Master Race. This was a weakening and the first degeneration of the Utopia. But worse was to come for the idea, when after the First World War it celebrated a marriage with the nationalist idea of revenge. That eagle was well plucked. All that was left was the practical idea, easy to popularise, of the Aryan or German world ruler, to whom the future would belong. The original biological idea of the future, anyway a secular human notion, now served to infuse new blood into revanchism and Pan-Germanism.

Some hesitate to bestow on the 1933 ideology of state power the name of a Utopia. They consider it a purely propagandistic fake. And in fact the originating idea had been strongly altered through contacts and mergers with others. It degenerated, became constrained. It is

⁹ Robert Hamerling (1830-89): popular Austrian writer of epics./ Friedrich Hebbel (1813-63): dramatist.

certainly not possible, in terms of the clarity and precision of the Nazi initiative, to speak of it in the same breath as the Marxist movement. The crippling, and one might say prostituting, of the guiding idea by the Nazis is obvious. And what can one say when all that is left of the entire plan to elevate humanity, to supersede humanity with a higher species, is the extermination of various neighbouring peoples declared to be of inferior worth and to be ransacked and driven from their land, and other things that are cosily explained as coming from a crudely unleashed militarism?

Nevertheless the Utopian contribution is not to be denied, and the whole historical picture of this movement that began as an apparent revolution, stormed undeviatingly ahead and ended in catastrophe, cannot be understood without attaching to it the label "Utopia". This characteristic receded as it spread throughout the state and came into contact with the naïve, natural and unalterable realities of life, but it persisted in active circles, albeit deformed and disputed in some way or other.

The "religious" quality that was perceived in this movement while it stayed fresh came from this Utopian core.

3.

We are now in 1933. The power-body that has seized control of the Utopia – of which they had their own conception – is there. It had formed from a post-war party whose strength came from two sources: negatively from the fierce anger of the defeated warrior bent on revenge and rehabilitation, and positively from ancient Pan-Germanism, now propped up and decked out in Utopian feathers.

It has the peculiar élan that comes even from a Utopia in degenerate form, about which the French Academician Gillet¹⁰ once remarked: the power-body that has set itself in motion across the Rhine has about it something of a new Islamism. So here we have the power that flung itself over the land physically and spiritually, and meant to sweep away in a Deluge a past that was no longer consistent with it. The assault touched all spheres, and not least (you might say: first of all) literature.

It's understandable; Utopian systems always take intellectual things very seriously. For one is oneself an exclusively intellectual construct, and because one wants a hundred percent new future, one cannot tolerate any co-existence. One does not want the possibilities of a democratic state, one is not a state and does not want a state, rather one is a boundlessly growing, dynamic kernel that has broken through into the broad life-sphere of humanity in order, if it can manage it, to swallow it all down. It didn't, and never could.

The broad, human, natural and supernatural reality of human beings has the upper hand, and the human being, the "perfect human", either overcomes the greedy Utopia, defiled and lacerated and cursing turns his back on it, or he submits, takes from it only what suits him, and instead of a Utopia it has become manure for his field.

In the centuries before this date of 1933, German literature in its stately fashion had grown in all its variety, without ever having been called before a high tribunal to state its name and species. Every generation sang their songs as best they could, told their stories and let heroes and jesters strut the stage to act out scary, exciting, funny scenes. Anything could be said,

¹⁰ Louis Gillet (1876-1943): literary historian, elected to Académie française in 1935.

printed and performed, the only boundaries set by convention, morality and natural tact. Excesses and deviancies were self-correcting. Literature had always to renew itself, for firstly, old works become used up, and then the circumstances of human society change, especially under the impact of technology, and finally people change along with society and want art and literature to keep pace and remain contemporary with these other living changeable things. This was self-evident to artists, poets and writers; they had sensitive antennae, and if the feelings of their contemporaries changed, so much the more did theirs. They sniffed around everywhere and always what was new, of the future. Often they ran ahead of their age, and we should not forget that from their circles there often came those tender dreamers and creators of the later so dreadful Utopias.

Now it happened in 1933 that these artists and literati were re-designated from their status as isolated dreamers, inventors, players, entertainers (pathfinders and prophets as well) to become collaborators on the basis that it was not about collaborating with a particular “state”, or even a particular empire, but a huge adventure of humanity, a voyage such as had never been, a breakthrough to the goal of all human goals.

To appreciate the uniqueness of the situation one must know and not lose sight of the fact that if artists, poets, writers are “private” persons, in Germany they are especially so and in a quite special way. You could say they are so private that they are already no longer private (meaning: less than that). They are private, because they lack something of the original sense of that word: namely, a normal relationship with state and society. They are, as a consequence of our well-known German development, exactly like every other German citizen in a state, but only *in* a state, not in *their* state. They live in Germany, but they are not Germany. “Germany” is perhaps their dynast, their lord and master and official apparatus – thus it was for centuries – and after the dynast has fallen the citizen remains in that position.

For a decade or two maybe nothing will change, especially if no decisive correction is made, no educative effort. It’s hard enough for the simple citizen, the worker, businessman, artisan to undertake all by himself an alteration in his stance towards state and society and take the state into his possession and regard it as his own; but it’s especially hard for the majority of intellectuals and especially for artists, poets and writers. Excluded like everyone else from the public sphere of state and politics, from the reality that is “state and politics”, they had in their own way cut themselves off from everything to do with the state and officialdom and created a parallel half-unreal space, their realm, their domain where they could pretend to be free and in charge. You know this remote, becalmed, unworldly territory of German poetry; from such works you can learn little about real life. Some fraction of these artists and authors actually revels in the role of magician and medicine-man.

So the Utopian power that claimed to know the future flung itself against this scattered band of isolated artists and scribblers. It sieved and forbade and commanded. Without further ado they summarily annulled two fundamental attributes of people in these groups: their private character, and the spontaneity of their production.

What happened? Let us first see: who is, who was, this German literature around 1933?
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