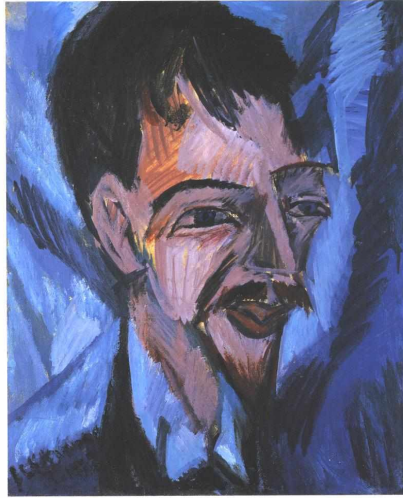


Alfred Doeblin



Beyond Alexanderplatz

ALFRED DÖBLIN

GERMAN MASQUERADE

WRITINGS ON POLITICS, LIFE, AND LITERATURE
IN CHAOTIC TIMES

PART 4 : LITERATURE

Edited and translated by
C.D. Godwin

www.beyondalexanderplatz.com

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

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

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

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

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

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

Selection and translations © C. D. Godwin 2025.

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

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

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

DÖBLIN'S WORKS IN ENGLISH

Translated by C D Godwin unless otherwise noted

The Epics:

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

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

Mountains Oceans Giants, 2021 Galileo.

Manas, 2021 Galileo

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

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

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

November 1918 – A German Revolution:

Vol 1 *Citizens & Soldiers*, 2024 Galileo.

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

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

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

Other Fiction:

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

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

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

Non-fiction:

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

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

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Part Four

LITERATURE

Döblin was a rare example of a writer who was able to theorise about his own creativity. This section includes several of his most important essays and talks on the distinction between his concept of the modern epic and the standard 20th century novel.

By the 1920s, now with two big epics under his belt (Wang Lun and Wallenstein) not to mention the quirky very Modernist novel Wadzek's Struggle with the Steam Turbine, Döblin was able to speak (even more clearly and authoritatively than in the three early pieces in Part One above) about his creative process and the guiding moral of each epic – which often eluded the critics. The five pieces that follow not only offer fascinating insights into literary production, but present a well-grounded challenge to the cultural norms manifesting in a chaotic age.

THE EPICIST, HIS MATERIAL AND THE CRITICS

Die neue Merkur, April 1921 [AzL 335-345]

Suppose you toil for months, years, over a book; live in its time, concentrate soul, imagination, mind and experience for several hundred pages, at last hand the book over: in Germany don't expect any echo! If all goes well, you are rewarded with – criticism.

Earlier – long long ago – epicists sat or stood before an audience: they spoke, had an impact, were alive. Thrust was met with counterthrust; you knew where you were; you saw, heard, felt those who were the reason for your presence. Cities have destroyed all that. You sit with your sheet of paper and start scribbling; the scratch of the pen is a delight. Humanity in the mass has no cohesion, only motion; that people speak a common language is a mere formality. Peoples have grown into huge conglomerates in which (among other diseases) Industry rages, the unleashed spirit of invention, all-absorbing, under no one's control – it has led the intertwined nations of Europe to the ideals of the sprung mattress and toothpaste.

In these huge human conglomerates, it is not only individual voices that go unheard, even small circles are swallowed by the giant whirlpool, and so anyone with something to say sits before a dead sheet of paper, surrounded by dead walls, and going among people the best he can hope to meet is – this or that person who has “read” him, who “rates” him, maybe rates him “to an extraordinary degree”, rates him more than so and so ...

But the worst thing about the public is the mass of critics. They are not even the public. Just as a hedonist demeans the mysteries of love, these demean the book with their eyes and hands. I've always found this thing called a critic a mere mischief-maker. The only justified “criticism”, in my view, comes from a loving or a combative heart: thrust, annihilate; or comfort, revere: that's all. Art appreciation is frivolity, is a mockery of what the toiler has achieved or striven to achieve. But the mass of critics knows neither love nor hate, only *metier*, and the indecent concept: “Art”. (And I can deflect the justification for “criticism” only thus: that the toiling masses too know only *metier*. Cellar air and spider's webs belong together.)

A rather recent custom, and hardly just a custom any more, is to propound critiques, judgements about works of art, as incidental and supplementary quasi-illustrations and examples for the point of view or theoretical postulate of some critic or other. If the opus in question is an important one, then this treatment corresponds not to the intrinsic worth of the work, but only to simplistic theorising; and editors of periodicals for the promotion of literature and the safeguarding of art have a duty to keep this critical habit in check. Authors endure outrageous treatment from the daily press. Important and essential books are either silenced to death, or served up as part of a slapdash global fricassee. Added to this is the unholy alliance

between even the most major newspapers and one or other publisher, whose propaganda commandeers much or even most of the available critical space.

That leaves the few big serious journals. I ask the editors and publishers of these journals: what is more important, more supportive of literature and life: the theory, the postulate, the aesthetic fancy of a speculative brain? Or the toil of those who may have spent years applying their best instincts and most intense moments to several hundred pages? Are our books objects for aesthetic speculation, or can criticism not learn something from our books? And, from another angle, our books are fragments of a lived life, and should be treated only with attentiveness and the strictest discretion.

In recent decades a particular trait has gained hold among the critics, in parallel it seems to me with the stagnation of certain kinds of art: these gentlemen lose all sense of the proper boundaries of their task, make themselves out to be, or feel themselves to be, creative artists, little different from those they write about. And they do not write *about* the artists at all, but toil away on their own account; the work of art is to them like any other material for thinking, for stimulus. This new genre, when it succeeds, is very interesting and justified. But in general it does not succeed, and meanwhile actual criticism still stands there as an autonomous profession and – is orphaned! Those who feel productive in this sort of thing should not be stopped from playing around with it; but, in opposition to such Dionysian criticism, authors reserve the right to shrug the shoulders and say: what has this to do with me.

Some person X or Y is known to me perhaps as a fine mind; I think perhaps he belongs to that group which is occasionally productive in the new genre. But after I have laboured for years on a book and the printed volumes lie there before me – what has X or Y to do with me? And who is the object of X or Y's attention?

Some have said of a book of mine, the novel *Wallenstein*: Let those old historical chestnuts lie; especially now: for when a much bloodier war has just ended and enormous consequences are playing out in our own backyards, what does the Thirty Years War three centuries ago matter? When Flaubert published his *Salammbô*, the Parisians, who revered *Madame Bovary*, sneered at this raving compendium of archaeology. My position in regard to the stuff of *Wallenstein* is different from Flaubert's in relation to *Salammbô*. Saint-Beuve wrote three extensive articles about *Salammbô* (three, three articles, extensive – we are in France, not in the Germany of Dionysian superficiality); Flaubert, in an exercise of anti-criticism, defended himself against supposed inaccuracies regarding say the Temple of Tanit: "I am convinced that I have reconstructed it exactly as it was... In all probability and according to my impressions I believe I have made something that resembles Carthage." This he says, but then this too: "I laugh at archaeology! If colours clash, if details are dissonant, if customs do not follow from religion, or facts do not follow from passions as shaped by custom, and architecture as shaped by climate, if in a word no harmony is present, then I am guilty. Otherwise not." I cherish this, and it is still not enough.

When I wrote a "Chinese" novel, I made several visits to the Museum of Anthropology in Berlin, read a number of travelogues on China and accounts of Chinese customs: but how misleading is the term I use here: *read*: at the time I had no intention of busying myself with China, never even dreamt of travelling to China: I had a fundamental spiritual experience or mindset which I tended with the greatest care, furnished it with everything it needed to work itself out. It seemed comical to me when one of the first thorough notices of the book came from

a professional Sinologist, who – even found my main character authentic! So little did I engage with the real China as I absorbed and observed, that after the book was written you would have searched in vain in my memory for the most crucial facts about China or even the primary sources for my novel: these sources – historical, ethnological, geographical – were not taken in or viewed as facts, but within the framework of a surging psychic process, as its vehicle, conveyance, stimulus to activation – so that once the surge had spent itself there remained only a hazy memory of the milestones that the activation had raced past. At that time I went through so many books about China, but an hour after the *reading* you would have asked me in vain what was in the book: at that time I had more to do than busy myself with Chinese porcelain, the role of Lamaism, the woman question in China. Once I was done with the book I often thought I should follow up this or that topic that seemed so interesting; never did so; what had China to do with me (Lao-tse excepted), when I do not even know Europe. Let psychologists busy themselves with the remarkable phenomenon (which is not new in literature) that the landscapes, atmosphere, depictions of cities and people so often show a surprising similarity with confirmable sources. If Nature offers us a finger we have her by the whole hand: the author has a duty to guard against every laudatory or reproachful confrontation with the sources. You cannot build a person from the food he ingests, even though the food sustains him, indeed influences him.

*

You ask: who cares about the Thirty Years War?

My opinion exactly. Once I too cared about it not at all. I have vague memories of it being mentioned at school, it was some time after Luther, I retained no more details; apparently it ended with the Peace of Westphalia; a bleak cheerless affair with many battles, many contending parties. I never even knew which contenders were fighting in any particular battle. But in 1916, when I was in Kissingen, in an item in the newspaper (I believe it was a notice for a Gustavus-Adolphus Festival) I suddenly came across a picture: Gustavus Adolphus setting out across the Baltic from Sweden with an endless fleet of ships. It surged around me, ships sailing across the grass-green sea; I saw them approaching through the trees as if through glass, the air was water. This compelling and totally incoherent picture stayed with me. It forced me, despite my distaste for the confusions of that time, to read some histories of the period. No, once again not *read*, and this is the crux of the matter: rather to ascertain what I actually wanted from them, and why this apparition, this dazzling vision of cogs and corvettes sailing across the sea would not leave me. I wanted to give tongue to this surging around me, this relentless motion; shapes thrust themselves forward. I *read* these books, and countless more later, as a flame *reads* the wood. I never caught sight of any *fact*; like a magnet my feeling swept over the pages and sucked up whatever belonged to it. Inclination to breathe life into an inert dead mass? Not a bit. My eyes never saw a dead mass, the Thirty Years War is as much a sealed book to me now as it was twenty years ago. Empathy? I know nothing about that, but my feeling even now is the direct opposite: *ecpathy*. Empathy requires loving obeisance, an effort, an urge to want to be fair (hence something that today's critics ought to have). But since I acquired no knowledge of the Thirty Years War, being hindered by my inward dazzlement and preoccupation with my part in this definitely very interesting event, how was I to arrive at empathy. Gloomily uncommunicative as I was then, I had not the slightest capacity for reading. I sought stimulation, to lose myself in stimulation. From the midwife who was trying to deliver me I tried to wrest the forceps that would assist the birth – I mean the documents, the books. *They* were not my topic.

Now, I must make one thing clear: much of what met my gaze in these books and documents seemed without further ado to be proper to my purpose – to be my property. You ask: so, you had decided to start writing? No, it was configured for me, I was lucky to find it, come upon it. Sometimes I sat there quite amazed and said to myself: it's all there, that's how it was, these events, this "historical" context. Until I said quite simply: how lovely that Nature has moved in the ways of my thoughts; so I don't have to go to any trouble. The centre was in me, here was the rim, all I had to do was draw the spokes: the wheel was ready to roll.

There is not much to be said about the centre because, as everyone knows, you can't look into the sun. And if you look through a piece of green glass it's no longer the sun but a supposition about the sun. The wheel rolled, driven by the loudly pulsating motor that was housed within me. The motor pushed on from turn to turn, ate up the road. In a work as expansive as an epic usually is, the author seems to himself to be a swimmer who jumps in telling himself: sink or swim.

Someone who makes great plans, sets goals, or too many goals piled together, is more likely to sink than one who takes the plunge calmly, confident in the strength of his arms and legs and his regular heartbeat. This (swimming and seeing how far you come) is first and foremost what is demanded by living production, not merely literary or more generally artistic production. You can see this with orators: they stand up holding two or three little notes and now everything develops from there; from this phrase another follows; an aside leads to a penetrating observation, the oratory is before us, with us, addressed to us. You must always pull yourself towards things and see what then jumps out from us; that's all you need, nothing more. A product arises from production: the phrase seems comical, but it is certain that, before the production, the product is at most only intuited. It is only during the process of producing that the powers of material, word, tone, concepts, associations, the human spirit first appear; absent these everything is vague, the battle cannot be fought, there is no result. Only during the production does the bull whose horns you intend to seize step forth; only then do you see whether you can in fact seize them. You live in the moment, die at some point from some banality: but it is in the to-and-fro of the moment that everything develops and *is*. Past productions and the past itself leave traces, and with these you travel, enriched, constrained, ossified, measurable, to new regions. If you know the traces you leave, you can even make plans, dispose of – almost manage – yourself as a person. But no disposition as a rule is ever very accurate, only putative and most of all –

Most of all, whoever makes a planful disposition of himself is at once impoverished and exhausted. Or intimidated. Whoever does not preserve wilfulness and freedom overestimates his planful intellect, binds himself to what is dead. It is the last refuge, this confidence in the source – when the plank onto which you have stepped breaks. When a snail is still young, you can break its shell; the contents do not necessarily die, they can produce a new shell.

*

When all's said and done, what is it that endures, in life and in aesthetic production, other than the struggle against the clear rigidified course of the dead and the past, in favour of what is obscure, delicate, only just revealing itself, forever inhibited in its revealing – in favour of *moments*. You fight for the rights of *minutes*. The moment: that's me. I can set up a target, will always be caught out by things I'd never dreamed of. But in the end I don't say: I have been

diverted. In the end I plead guilty to the diversion. A hard task, and this is not an aesthetics for everyone, and no folk religion.

But the core of my inward work on the book *Wallenstein* (to touch on this once again in passing) was the moment I gave this inward work enough room to play: Ferdinand. It's all about his soul. On this I could leave nothing unclear, felt him and the whole world that extended out from him with the utmost clarity, and only for his sake did I persevere with the book for all that long, long time. If I didn't succeed in making this core clear, if this sun sheds no light, then my book is just an objet d'art, and I can go and paint teacups. A sun only becomes a sun by having something to illuminate, by helping flowers grow, by making holes in the darkness, by enabling people to find joy and ruin beneath its rays.

This is the fundamental conception of the book: an emperor, a latent emperor, is held back by another earthly power, Maximilian of Bavaria; he suffers in this earthly plane, and is filled by another tellurian fellow – the most potent of all potentates, Wallenstein – with the ultra-maximum of power, and projected beyond the earthly. Thus far the first volume: Ferdinand cannot ascend any higher through earthly means, the kingdom of the earth and its glory are not only in his possession, but he is bloated with possessing. There is nothing to be done. In him, then, follow all the consequences of the situation. He never loses the sense that all riches are in him and hence under him. This so takes hold that at the end he is paralysed: things happen of themselves. This is what must be felt through. The dismissal of Friedland [i.e. Wallenstein] at the Council of Regensburg only makes sense in this light: anyone who fails to see the Ferdinand of those days need read no farther; it's all just painted teacups. Ferdinand admits: wherever he may turn, he is in the right. From that moment on there is no more development in him, merely a percolation, a becoming-clearer, a differentiation of himself. Affairs assail him from this point on through a barely penetrable mist; he suffers a final blow in the circumstances surrounding Wallenstein's dismissal; thereafter he comes to absolute certainty in his feelings, and now the long drawn out dissolution of the empire, the kingdom of the earth and its glory, all becomes visible.

No, that's poorly expressed: *dissolution of the kingdom of the earth and its glory*. It smacks of saints, renunciation, flight to subterranean realms. It's not an ascetic flight to some god and the feet of some idol. In the end, and long before the end, Ferdinand is a man who no longer knows what good and evil are, who can no longer feel 'sin'. Ferdinand's way is this: come cleanly to the goal – ever and again frustrated, but in the end boundlessly certain: never to suffer constraining influences from this subjugated "world".

How badly, how superficially German critics read can be seen in the fact that one of them stated that the emperor was, at the end, despairing. Tolstoy once said of critics: "They are mostly schooled, trained and educated writers whose capacity to be moved by art is quite crippled or lost." The only role I see for criticism is to grasp what is fertile and beautiful and convey it to others. But what if those through whom criticism works are themselves devoid of grasping organs? In the book I have been discussing, the man Ferdinand doesn't despair in the least. His beatitude shines through. He hasn't renounced the throne, but has surrendered it to himself. The throne was no longer of concern to him. The Emperor ends where he must end, in awe and joy.

The world around him, inexhaustible, goes on. I had no right to set the Emperor up against the world, like a Dante setting himself up against Hell. The Emperor is of the same flesh as

anyone; we're dealing with human beings. I could present them otherwise, hang different names and masks on them: but I never wanted to forget what was imperial, Ferdinandish, in them. Even if only a distant gleam. So Ferdinand is not an isolated figure among a thousand other characters: he is no hero, he is in among them, as they are with him. I said: he is the sun; but plants and stones and chemical elements are also of the sun. No one can accuse me of failing to decide firmly for the "hero". I decided for him so firmly that the book is from first to last nothing but the song of a "hero".

^^^

THE EXPERIENCE OF TWO FORCES

Der Feuerreiter, Dec 1922 [SLW 40-45]

I was still at school when Dostoevsky first landed on me. I vividly remember visits to the small reading room of a Berlin Society for Ethical Culture. Raskolnikov I read evening after evening in Schönhauserstrasse,¹ by day I had to swot up on Goethe and Schiller. My detestation for the over-disciplined enslaving school was extreme. Every day there were hopeless embittering battles. Goethe was shoved at me in an atmosphere of aversion. Dimly I recall an incidental delight in *Tasso*.² An aesthetic kind of delight, such as with Sophocles and Homer: it didn't last. It sank noiselessly beneath the mighty agitations that Dostoevsky poured forth. Nothing could challenge the power of these agitations. Here were resistance, energy, revolution. Compared to Wedekind, Dostoevsky was totally unliterary.

From my even earlier youth, or rather childhood, I recall the first serial adventure stories, delivered weekly to our home. Evenings reading in Schönhauserstrasse stirred the same almost dreadful, totally illicit excitement and unrest. They levered me definitively away from school and aesthetics. I was driven to a vague but strongly felt antipathy against the aesthetic clique. It wasn't the entire novel about Raskolnikov, really just a few scenes. I ignored the plot elements, for me there were too many characters. But individual pages fixed me to the spot as if they weighed hundredweights. I simply absorbed the music of the book, balked at going down into the details. In the same way, while in the Quarta [1893-94 school year], I was carried away by a performance of Kleist's *Prince of Homburg*, without really understanding the substance under the massiveness of the impression, and without wanting to approach any closer. For years I never let anything impinge on this impression, avoided reading the book, never spoke about the play to anyone. As for Raskolnikov, at that time I was not capable of reading the whole thing, meaning follow the course of the novel to its end. I opened it at random, carefully avoiding any page I'd already read. Only years later did I read the ending and many parts from the middle.

The tame classical ensemble disappeared for a long time completely from my sight. It became alien to me. I had no memory at all of Goethe. Slowly a connection formed between the classical ensemble, including school and teaching staff, and the doltish bourgeoisie. Those elements that bumped up against me nearby and from a distance, that conducted the politics of the state, published newspapers, collected pictures, built museums, went to concerts and the

¹ Here was a bookshop with a lending library.

² 1790 play by Goethe about Torquato Tasso, 16th C. poet and courtier who descended into madness.

theatre, looked at photos of theatrical stars – boring, often despicable elements, that represent only resistance. The same bourgeois strata, I saw, that revered the classical ensemble.

In the same period the amoral Nietzschean wave broke over me. I read him with physical trembling. What struck me was not an ideal that he set up, but the encounter with a profoundly stirred-up human being. His unparalleled seriousness of life. At this time I came to know Dostoevsky's *Idiot* as well. For years it was my favourite book that I never read through from first to last. I felt happy just to have it in my hand. I took it everywhere, kept dipping in, a quarter of some chapter, without understanding because I troubled myself not at all with how it all hung together. I must have read the ending several hundred times, word for word. But even now perhaps almost half the book is unknown to me. The usual method of reading, the profane *getting-it-done*, I could not apply to this book. Significantly greater was my familiarity with the "Karamazovs". I'm unable to give a reason for this. New, and unbookishly alive many parts of this work seemed to me. Nevertheless I must have been able at that time to keep Dostoevsky at a distance; at least I was able to read the "Karamazovs" tidily all the way through almost undisturbed, even if here and there dazzled and fixated week after week. I know and knew who the real murderer was; nothing of the sort would have struck me in the earlier books.

I still recall from the beginning of the War a vigorous conversational contrast between the living actively goading Dostoevsky, and Goethe the stuffy god of the educated, the desiccated, fallen away from the People. For me Tolstoy was too gentle, elegiacally Christian. Then for a long time I thought no more of Dostoevsky.

I grew older, observed, wrote. Now and then I recalled Dostoevsky as an enormous historical phenomenon, a spiritual power, but one that could no longer be of help to me. I still had the *Idiot* in my hands occasionally, read this or that page, and returned to my own affairs: it couldn't be of any help. A remarkable preference developed in me for Stendhal's book *The Red and the Black*, for everything sober, sceptical, observant, objective in it; I found his Romantic mumbo-jumbo antiquated. Its nature, its objectivity, attracted me at every turn. I had changed in all sorts of ways. More material had penetrated, the overview had become higher, the penetration more active, less captivating. I already had something to set against the material, something rough-hewn and resolute. From there came a greater distancing from the material, reticence and scepticism. Whereas previously I had breathed in longer, now I breathed out longer and deeper.

After the War ended, as I unpacked my books again at home, I found Eckermann's *Conversations*³ in my hands.

*

What moved Goethe:

Year after year, every winter he sighed about the gloomy time before the shortest day. He sits facing his friends, pours them wine, takes nothing himself. He entertains them with things old and new.

His passionate Marienbad love in old age.

He takes his geologist's hammer everywhere, probes the rocks.

³ Johann Peter Eckermann (1792-1854): *Conversations with Goethe in the last year of his life* (3 vols 1823-32).

When the Lisbon earthquake happened, when he was still young, he found his servant at the window at night observing the heavens, having been afflicted by a sense of a terrible event of a tellurian nature.

He picks a bone up on the beach. It is an intermaxillary. The colours derived from a murky medium, and its brightness.

He was so longlived. His serious geriatric ailments, which he always overcame. His easy death.

His moodiness. The changes in his mental colouring.

His joy in thinking, in good ideas.

The breadth of his interests. The sense that a man must tackle everything. Behind everything, in everything, there's something hidden.

The juxtaposition of vigorous gestures and the greatest calm and dispassion.

His lack of embarrassment, his naturalness in relation to his urges. He challenges society, but doesn't want to.

How quickly he recovers from the death of others, for example his son. Death is worthless, he doesn't let the fact that someone's died bother him.

He likes a drink. Eats well. Has a high regard for knowledge, but not for punditry.

He was alive at the time of Mozart.

Lord Byron gave him lots to chew on, gave him pleasure, but (Goethe does not say so) he rankled as well. Diabolical, seducer of girls, Parliamentary speechifier, adventurer, traveller to Greece: high style compared to Goethe's private life, his official post in Weimar. But he keeps this from others.

A person who has thoughts, many, and variable. He shakes them from him and sticks them on anew.

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Voltaire heads back to Switzerland and from there begins to bombard the world with topical thoughts. He *sets to*.

Goethe goes about in and around Weimar, takes strolls in his garden. Newspapers, pictures, books, stones arrive at his house; he reads, dictates. He grows and dies. Clearly he does not *set to* beyond his house. He regards himself as a Thing-in-Itself.

Dostoevsky, Voltaire, a few heroes and founders of religions were leaders. Goethe was simply Goethe. Accusations of this were already levelled at him during his lifetime.

It is not right when leadership concerns no one, especially not one who merits that mantle. There are two kinds of leadership. An age that suffers under rotten institutions is inclined to consider the struggle against rotten institutions the most important, the only one. There is something slower than institutions, but which also changes, much more slowly, and must be tended: the very character of the human being – concepts, drives, ways of feeling. This is the foundation of the second, much rarer, type of leadership.

Goethe wrote German. As our present age sees it, he was no German. Was German as Dante was Catholic: i.e. before there were any Protestants.

After a brief period knocking about in Germany, there came Italy.⁴ He pushed along a thousand paths to leave Germany, in order to find nourishment and broaden himself. He extended his foundations.

Today: only one who is truly national can be of international importance. Then: only the Omninational can claim to be national. Finally: he keeps the relationship to Nature upright in his thoughts and character.

Two kinds: leaders, and word-leaders. The gentlemen of books, speaking platforms, the theatre, public opinion are word-leaders. As a rule they are led by other forces.

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REMARKS ON MOUNTAINS OCEANS GIANTS

Die neue Rundschau 1924 [AzL 345-356]

After my novel *Wallenstein*, in 1919-20 I was caught up vigorously in politics, continually, not least in writing; staked a position. With my *Linke Poot* (Left Paw). That was a different kind of style, of speaking; it was good that I gave it a distinct name. For Kant was not Kant when he was a Geography professor (which he also was). Then some messing about: a mediaeval drama came along (*The Nuns of Kemnade*). Meanwhile on a Baltic beach I had seen some stones, ordinary pebbles, that moved me. I took stones and sand home with me. Something was stirring in me, around me.

When at the War's end I brought *Wallenstein* back home from Alsace-Lorraine without a concluding chapter, I felt around, sought around in me how I should end it. Best not to at all, I sometimes thought. Then, at the beginning of 1919 in Berlin, I was profoundly affected by some blackened tree-trunks on the street. That's where he must go, I thought, the Emperor Ferdinand. What stirred me, the stream of feelings, a new spirit, at once seized on what it had found. Commandeered what some other related transient vanishing spirit had left behind.

How feeble, to stick the label "re-orientation" on this. We are terribly fouled up in our thinking, by our daily practical dealings with its clear challenges, by the need for quick decisions, by habit. Puzzling things are no longer a puzzle when repeated ten times over, without in the least being cleared up. Most discoveries and scientific thinking consist of grabbing gobbets from the jaws of habit and showing their obscurity. I "re-oriented myself": it was merely the symptom of an inward process. When I saw the blackened tree-trunks and was affected by them, the consequence was a child stirring in its mother's womb.

Emperor Ferdinand had to go right away down that path. I laughed, but allowed him no grace period. I felt: this is a break. It's no longer *Wallenstein* but something new. But I ought to and must lead the Emperor to it, whatever his past. Even if he should only become lost in this new realm, and pass away. And what else should he do: even I couldn't find my feet there. But I had to give the book this wonderful full stop. Even today I'm glad I allowed no contradiction, no

⁴ 1786-88. The trip resulted in his *Italian Journey*.

rule, no consequence to trouble me, but set down what I was able to, what I loved, and let it go from me.⁵

The full stop wasn't the end of it. With me it's like this: some things start by entrancing me, but I can't pursue them systematically. They slip away. I don't know where they go to, but if they're important they come back again and again, and that's the way I "pursue" these things. It's a kind of acid test that things undergo. If they don't come back, they're deleted and were as nothing.

Amid all the politics I spent some months in 1920 (I don't know how it happened) occupied with biology, which I hadn't bothered with for years, and then with all sorts of natural science stuff. I sniffed about here and there. Took notes on ants and the curious way they construct their fungus gardens, then things from astronomy and geology. I had no idea where it was leading. A remark in a historical record about the Abbess Judith of Kemnade took me off for several months in a quite different direction. But the stones from the Baltic moved me. For the first time, really the first time I hesitated, no, was reluctant, to return to Berlin, to that city of buildings, machines, human masses, which otherwise I clung, clung fast to. I had a desire to stay longer in free Nature and let these things, for once, play around me.

Since childhood I have been a townie, a big-city dweller; at the age of fifteen, on a country outing, I saw my first cherry tree. To me it seemed ridiculous, romantic enthusiasm, vapid time-wasting to bother myself with the countryside. Prussian discipline, facts, sobriety, diligence: these were instilled in me at the Gymnasium in Berlin. I still remember my almost breathless joy when the first cables for Berlin's electric trams were being strung, and the mockery of my schoolmates when I went a half-dozen times to the Kroll Opera, not to a show but to stand by the basement entrance and gaze at a machine whose purpose I didn't know but which held me enthralled. Until recently I had something against Nature, I often said so and even wrote it. Even today I'm repelled by the search for aesthetically beautiful landscapes. It's pathetic to look at a bank of clouds and see nothing but nice shadows. The world is not there for gawping. Young ladies are not the measure of all things.

Then, as I have said, after the War it came over me. It began with the inconsequential full stop that concluded *Wallenstein*. Stones from the Arendsee lake. It had me. The ascetic of the Prussian school receded. Or redeployed. Tears flowed, the Earth fetched me. I set down some essays on Nature: "Water", "Nature and her souls", "Buddha and Nature". Wanted to make a little book of them, but didn't, couldn't.⁶ The maxim of these ideas was "I – am – not".

I experienced Nature as a secret. Physics as the surface, begging for explanations. I noticed I was not the only one lacking an attitude towards Nature, the World Being; there were many others. Puzzled, I now viewed textbooks, for which I once had respect, quite differently. I sought and found nothing. They knew nothing of the secret. Every day I saw, I experienced Nature as the World Being, meaning: weight, colour, light, dark, its countless materials, as a cornucopia of processes quietly mingling and criss-crossing. It happened that I would sit over my coffee and be unable to find my way to what was happening there: the white sugar grains vanished in the brown liquid, dissolved. Now how was that possible: "dissolve"? What was something flowing,

⁵ Critics often expressed outrage that Döblin should contradict History in the way he depicted Ferdinand's end.

⁶ Döblin's reflections on humans and nature appeared in 1927 as *Das Ich über der Natur* (Ego over Nature).

fluid, hot doing to the solid to make it give way, snuggle up? I know I often became frightened, physically frightened, giddy in the face of these things – and sometimes, I confess, even now I feel uneasy.

For some months the pressure of these things was so strong that I deliberately turned away from them. I had to. I had to write something to be rid of them. Something different, quite different. Resolutely I set to. Best would be something epic. I could throw myself into that most easily, it would carry me far away. – What happened was strange.

Critics had reproached me for always painting some grand historical canvas. So they were challenging my imagination. This annoyed me. This time I would steer well clear of history. And anyway I'd just put behind me my Abbess Judith from the Middle Ages. I wanted something of the present time. Something pointed, active, to counter the "happening" of Nature. Me against my Nothing. And nothing could be more epic, more in motion, than: drive the present time out beyond itself. No way to deal with the present as such: I'm no Zola or Balzac. I needed an empty space, beyond the present. Thus, the future. That would be the most fertile field for activity and phantasy. When I found it I was glad.

I sent out a couple of feelers. The first part I wrote was the voyage of the Negro Mutumbo, later incorporated in the Greenland section. Here someone is crossing the sea, burning holes in it, has a magic cloak, the sea has to put a stop to it. Then came a plan for a huge expedition, at first I didn't know where to. But I didn't want to take off to the stars, this would be an adventure on the Earth, wrestling with the Earth. So: these people, nothing more than a kind of bacteria on the Earth's skin, become over-mighty from brains and cleverness. They take up the proud imperious struggle with the Earth. Soon, at the end of 1921, I had my goal: Greenland: icy waste, the volcanoes of Iceland trained on it. I had an image of glowing ovens: volcanoes as ovens equipped with huge chimneys, heat-conveyors, heat-channels, reaching across the sea to Greenland. The volcanoes massively reshaped, Earth loosened in its depths.

At the end of 1921 I felt my way, borne along by an idea that gladdened me with its scale, its boundlessness, it made me proud and cocky like a rider racing his horse across the steppe. I felt my way over the terrain: Atlantic Ocean, Iceland, Greenland. In the National Library, City Library I devoured atlases, geography books, specialist maps, wandered through the Museum of Oceanography, Museum of Natural History. Meanwhile the background was becoming clearer. I pinned it down in the big clothbound notebook in which I sketched plans for my novels: "The big city. Development of its industry and technology. It's prodigious, more prodigious than Nature. First there were kings. Song of the knights. History of this Earth. Wars. Science. Then came the workers. The big city: Berlin. What lived there. Struggle of Nature with Technology. Erotic types. How finally a volcano is opened up. Or how buildings are left empty. They won't let buildings rule over them. Alienation of people from nature." Epic and Hymn. Hymn to the city.

By the beginning of 1922 I was so impatient I abandoned my professional work for four weeks to make a start. It revolved around the Iceland-Greenland venture. I drew special maps of Iceland, delved into vulcanology and the science of earthquakes. It went swiftly into geology and mineralogy/petrography. As always I wrote and researched at the same time. I lived from hand to mouth. At first, anyway. Gradually as I work I gain an overview of my needs, and put my materials in order. The collection grows to a substantial volume as I work, sorted in my file-box

alphabetically according to key words. In the first quarter of 1922 the Iceland-Greenland section was put to bed. I knew roughly where the momentum came from, not yet where it would lead.

But I soon noticed something during this beginning. I had moved out in order to evade the terrible mystical Nature-complex. And – was sat in the midst of it. In the midst. In my hands I held books on mineralogy, petrography, geography, looked at rocks in the museum! I was deep in it again from another direction. Sunk. It had reared its head again. The strongest weapon I had raised against this heavy, chest-tightening concept was of no use. I myself was engaged in the Theme: human strength vs. Nature's power, the impotence of human strength. Without knowing or wanting it, I had made a mirror-image of my little special effort. Yet I was not the same now as I had been before starting the book. I keep saying "Nature". It's not the same thing as "God". It's darker, huger than God. The complete whirling secret of the world. But still something of "God". It seems right to me that people approach this intimidating riddle with shoes in the hand, and only seldom. Now as I wrote I found that the way I felt about the secret had changed. I found myself facing a secure, strong power that demanded expression, and my novel had a specific task: to praise the World Being.

I – prayed. That was the transformation. I prayed and let go. I resisted as meekly as one resists in prayer. My novel was no longer a gigantic struggle among city-states, but an affirmation: a comforting and celebratory song to the great Mother Powers. Around May 1922, while I was in seclusion in Zehlendorf for several months, I gave voice to this in the "Dedication". I laid down my arms before the autonomous Will in me. And knew and know: an autonomous Power was making use of me.

Around this time I set aside the basically finished Iceland-Greenland Parts, and began to write systematically from the beginning. My plan read:

"In the first book, the conquest of the world is over. Plan for de-icing Greenland. There are districts in cities with remnants of nationalities that hate each other. A Negro from the Gold Coast. The machine-lords make use of the man of violence. A scene: the mowing down of excess people, then the machine-lords themselves. Corpses of those shot, embalmed, hung from pillars for decades but were not silent. At specified times moved their arms, screamed harshly. This was Mutumbo's clock. – Frenzy following the de-icing of Greenland. They want to lay waste all the city-states. Then the transformation of the pleasure-city, city of bronze.

A figure: lanky very young man with deepset eyes, a megalomaniac. He claims descent from gods, and orders their worship. Has himself worshipped in the form of animals. He constructs a hill, and there in a bowl-shaped depression his palace with its towers. The Greenland campaign conceived and crushed by him.

Spread of this regime across the whole Earth. Shattering images of the flight and retreat of African and Arab hordes out of the cities.

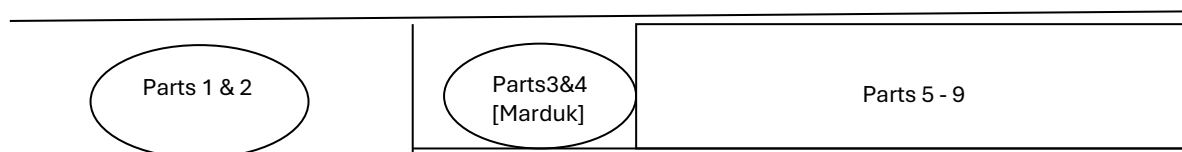
The last people have the capacity to rejuvenate themselves. They cannot die.

The rejuvenation process, or maintenance of a particular age. Sleeplike trance. These contrasted with the Naturals, the older peoples. Their last battle."

This was distributed and planned over and around the Iceland-Greenland Parts. That I distributed so much and always more in this central section had the secret advantage that I kept ... withdrawing from it, that at least temporarily I ... ducked out.

The first two Parts are this undermining, an introduction. I was swiftly captivated, had to follow on, to see and set down vividly how, under the flourishing onward march of technology, mankind as a social organism and as the human animal conducts itself. It wasn't possible to expand further on this; but everything I touched on was at risk of growing into an entire book. I constantly had to cut back and apply the brakes. To give myself respite and keep coming up for air, from time to time I broadened out the report – whole sections could only be a report – to an oasis-like tale, allowed events to spread. Hence Melise of Bordeaux and the whole Urals War and other smaller passages. After the synthetic food and the Urals War, at first no more progress was possible, no way over the ridge. Another register was needed. After the masses and density of the first books I had to let in something lighter and more personal. I am an enemy of the personal. It's nothing but swindle and lyricism. The epic has no use for individual persons and their so-called fate. Here they become the voice of the mass, which is the real and natural (hence epic) person. The individual fate of a city-state, Berlin as a representative one, now developed; Marduk, the second Consul, his friend Jonathan and the woman Elina accompanied and unfolded and gave voice to the events. These two books, the third and fourth, became a novel in themselves. There the theme of the whole work was taken to its bitter end, even surpassing the Iceland-Greenland adventure. Marduk and Elena were the first to lay down the arms used against Nature and really against themselves. Marduk was dismembered, melted down by Elena and returned to the Earth. Behind and under his life of violence, he found himself.

And so I had run right past my Greenland obstacle. Had shot right over it. What to do with it. No problem: it had been the individual fate, insular, menaced, of one city-state. All of technology, the monstrous apparatus of power of western humanity was still alive. They would have to follow Marduk's path. The scheme looks like this:



Parts 1 and 2 reach the point where technology breaks down, and then stay there. Marduk, over two Parts, leads us to the goal of the whole novel. Humanity as a whole must take a long enormously sweeping path in order, much later, to reach the same goal. This from Part 5 to the end.

After the Marduk sections I had to feel my way via a transitional Part 5, towards the two colossal Parts of the Iceland-Greenland adventure. Now a quite new song started up. The really big one. A new spirit knocked the stuffing out of the original sketch. It was the Urals War again, not brief and ending inconclusively, but full-width and working out all the consequences. Now the whole of humanity would meet its fate.

In general I was steered by a plan I'd sketched thus: "Marduk's empire. Meanwhile the terrible further growth of discoveries. The discoveries attack even the empire. That's part I. Part

II: war against Nature. Greenland the high point. Nature falls on the attackers, failure of the enterprise. Part III: gentle coming together. Troubadours.”

But this was only a general direction of growth. Details were created in the moment, developed according to circumstances. Great Nature never moved against the humans. Humans assailed her. Those who opened hearts and eyes met a richer fate than Marduk. Kylin and Venaska are not continuations of Marduk and Elina. The characters in the later parts have no independent existence, are very close to Nature. Venaska in particular is never freed from the (geographical and epic) landscape.

Just as I had hesitated long over the last chapter of *Wallenstein*, so here with the last Part. After the collapse there was really no more to say. But in the months while I was writing the later books I was long since done with much of what I wrote. The inner drive had been lifted. At first I'd been impatient to get to grips with these things; now, to be free of them. For a while I'd often been asking: "Where are you at now?" It was a happy feeling when in May 1923 I dealt with Venaska's fate: the suffering yearning soul sinks itself in the horrible rampaging Giants, calls them her brother, and they die willingly. We are not lost to the other powers. We can have agency. The mighty realm of natural "souls". It's no longer this book –

In some respects this was a peculiar book for me. Its style, for one. Normally I relish conciseness, objectivity. Here I was unable to resist impulses of a purely linguistic kind. It went wide and colourful. It was as if everything wanted to be autonomous, and I had to be on my guard. The lofty plane of several parts, their solemn hymn-like character, contributed to this. I also confess that I had the feeling I was no longer in the region of my own prose or normal prose, in the purely linguistic. Where the journey's going I don't know. The old verse-forms seem to me impossible. You shouldn't force anything, should not want, let it all become.

Then, women. Before this I'd never beaten about the bush. They just weren't that important to me. All too easy, when women pop up, to go idyllic, or psychological, or private; they sterilise the epic. You must treat them in a different way if you want to draw them into your epic. You must defang them, demolish all that is sweet, self-important, catty, interesting about them. The true Female is what's left. No longer the solitary Outsider-thing but the simple elementary minx, that other human species, the Man-Woman. For you must realise that the woman, unlike those degenerate females who only "love", does other things besides; namely (just like a man) guzzles, drinks, falls ill, is nasty or docile. During the writing I managed mostly to leave women out. I had to guard my male characters from being made ridiculous and silly by them, as generally happens with a "loving creature".

Now in connection with my theme, in the emotional space of this work, I had women in my grasp. That wonderful phenomenon, the Female, was there. That manifestation of Nature, Nature as the Female. She was not so different from the male. It was merely a variation of Nature in the context of the Human. It was not clear to me that there could be only Male and Female. There must be a third, a fourth kind. These were the varied species of the later books. The boundaries between Male and Female kept dissolving away from me. But this blurring of the boundaries lent an enormous charm to human relationships. I stepped beyond normal / perverse. Its "sense" became clear to me from my underlying feeling.

I've said enough. I don't like spending time on old works, partly (as I've mentioned) because I'm already somewhere else, and what's the point of looking backwards. On top of that this latest book is for me something singular, frightening. Does it help anyone, what I've said here? I don't

know. All in all you have to learn to see the unfamiliar. A riddle is no longer a riddle after the tenth repetition. The books I write are neither hard nor easy. I provide data – some, it seems, new and strange. How “hard” or “easy” the data are is irrelevant, a private matter.

Farewell and a long life, Balladeuse, Marduk, Icelandic volcanoes, Greenland’s glaciers, Venaska, Giants. By our fruits shall you know us. You are all me and not-me. I am glad that I’m no voyeur, that I welcomed you like a good host when you came into my house. I never asked you whence and whither. We understood each other by a handshake and a glance, even now, as I show you dear lovely creatures to the door.

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Postscript: Postcard to Efraim Frisch, 22 August 1922 [DBr 121-122]

Döblin’s efforts to justify the problematic Marduk/Balladeuse/Jonathan storyline in Mountains Oceans Giants (which my translation left out, with a link to the omitted passages for those who want them) began as early as 1922. Efraim Frisch was an Austrian writer, editor, translator, and publisher’s reader. Presumably Döblin had sent him the MS, and he had balked at those scenes.

Dear Herr Frisch, well, if you don’t like the “Balladeuse” episode, just leave it out. I wouldn’t want to give away the others; that would make me uneasy. One episode is once again no novella, and I thought I had set out all the important premises – and when I gave a private reading they all understood that bit! Completely; for *in essence* it is actually self-contained like a novella, presenting a dreadful individual fate, dreadful individual events. It *must* be comprehensible, or else I’ll have to line up with the losers. The Balladeuse, who appears here and nowhere else – the tyrant – the friend tearing himself free of him: these three form the play, all other “premises” are side issues; any murkiness is trivial. Ergo: take another look at the crazy horrible episode (it’s worse than the Jew Burning in *Wallenstein*) – you’ll see through the battle between the Man-beast and the Woman-beast – for sure without pleasure, it cost me some nerves to stare these things in the face. – I’m not at all cross that you set up “resistance” in the Freudian sense, and simply thought to prep you for a – misfired? – pleasure.

With best wishes, Dr Alfred Döblin

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‘WRITING’ AND ‘LITERATURE’

Address to the Literature Section, 15 March 1928 [AzL 87-97]

In late 1927, the Berliner Börsen-Courier approached the president of the Literature Section of the Prussian Academy of Arts (informally called the “Writers’ Academy”) as well as the “outsider” Alfred Döblin for their views on the role of this institution. Döblin provided a long thoughtful response, centred on the question: “What can academicians as writers do? What can they do as writers?” A few weeks later he was informed of his election to this body (against opposition from conservative members). The next two pieces – both oral presentations – follow up these questions in detail. [Polite formalities omitted]

Now, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to express my pleasure at standing here rather than in any other place. Let me explain. In Germany up till now it has been the norm, and the only possibility, that art can be discussed in public only by scholars and middlemen, critics and whatever is connected with them. By 'in public', I refer not only to academic lecterns and lecture rooms, but also to newspapers and journals. Actual consumers – readers and listeners – are completely absent. And even the producers are squeezed completely out of the picture. We are objects of discussion by third parties, and are to stand up straight and not interfere or engage with what these higher authorities, these so-called critics, do with us. There's no back and forth of assertion and response, only assertions. We are to keep our mouths shut.

But it should be obvious that in matters of art – let me put it politely – the producers too have something to say. The producer (i.e. the writer, in the literary context) is not as clueless about his own work as critics and scholars would have us believe. The author is by no means a total idiot regarding his own work. We know from the past, and the history of literature tells us, that extraordinary words, indeed the best, most acute, most profound words about art have been spoken by artists themselves. Thus sober and authoritative criticism by producers belongs alongside criticism by consumers and middlemen. Indeed, I consider normative and prescient criticism by authors as loftier, more important and more fruitful than anything said by mere onlookers and explicators and ingenious comparators.

In our time, besides all this craziness, criticism has grown to see itself as its own purpose, sees itself as "art", for which the work of art is merely a starting point or stimulus. If we producers were to speak out against this ridiculous stupidity, this crazy vanity of inadequate half-natures, it would be not merely a desirable spontaneous act on our part, but an act of self-defence. So much for the basis of my statement that here I stand, and nowhere else.

A third point too is dear to my heart. This Academy is an officially constituted body, created by the Ministry of Culture, and here a body of literary producers has its place. These are living authors. And now I would like to draw your attention to the aloofness between living production and living authors on the one hand, and on the other the university where the literary tradition is curated. I'd like to throw out the question whether this aloofness is necessary. The university ponders Goethe - young, old and middle-aged; I have no doubt that the gentlemen who teach there never met Goethe in the flesh. But should it not be in the interest of the university, of German Literature as a discipline and its problems, to enter into contact with living authors even if not all are Goethes, in order to learn from them something that might also help with respect to Goethe? I can't exclude the possibility that the university might gain from us all kinds of stimuli, materials, and maybe even arrive at new questions to tackle. Maybe we authors could also gain something from the other side: contact with young scholars is already important in itself.

In any case, this Academy is the perfect instrument for bridging the empty space between living production and the university. I also consider desirable a connection between literary producers and students: future teachers and writers.

I now come to the actual theme of my address: distinguishing between the novel and a work of epic word-art, and distinguishing between "writing" and "literature". I believe that erecting a strongly-mortared wall is one of the most pressing tasks for current literature. It does not bother me if Romance countries place no value on such a separation; I am concerned with what I see here in Germany.

I wish to talk about the work of epic word-art and its characteristics.

Word-art has a harder time than painting or music to attain the status of Art. The material for music and painting is already quite non-realistic. This non-reality (bluntly: this artificiality) is the whole point; it makes no sense – it's impossible – to reproduce something that's already at hand, the point is to bring forth something new, something specifically human. Especially the notes of music, how they are produced and reproduced by specially-made instruments, their sequence according to human-made laws, scales and so on, are happy and fruitful conditions for creating an art. With words the case is otherwise. The word is an article of direct daily use. We speak and write for everyday tasks using the same words we're meant to use to attain the status of Art. We are put in an especially tricky position. Giving birth to an art using the raw material of the word is clearly harder than using musical notes or colours.

The word has two elements: one acoustic, and one cognitive. Word-material – by which I mean not isolated words, but thoughts and concepts expressed in words and sentences, the construction of reality by means of words – this everyday word-material is underpinned on its way to becoming a work of art by particular linguistic and cognitive processes. This is the most general point that can be made about the production process. At any rate, every production of a literary kind begins with a desire for distance from reality. Only then can come what people call "processing the material" – for our "word-material" is the actual substance of literary writing. You could say that what words undergo, in a double sense, is a kind of refining process. When someone asserts that literature calls for reflecting reality to the maximum extent possible, or, as I would put it, for presenting realities in concentrated form, they are wrong, because there's no such thing as literary reality. "Literary" and "reality" are self-contradictory. Literature does enhance somewhat the reality offered by our everyday word-material, the data of reality are used to show *that* one is enhancing and *where* one is enhancing, and *what* one is enhancing. As you'll see, I avoid the distasteful word "creative"; we're concerned here to characterise what "creativity" is; for our purpose it's enough to use the simple phrase: enhancing reality.

So the writer refines his material and distances himself from reality by penetrating as cerebrally as possible into what he draws in and produces from reality-data, or has the data line up, according to his will – philosophical or psychological or biological or social or ethical, as the case may be. This enhancement of reality, this arranging of the reality-data fixed in word-symbols, is writerly work and a humanly "creative" achievement. It is not scientific work, for what's wanted is notoriously an enhancement of reality, whereas science, subjectively at least, wants to add nothing to reality. The aim of science is to uncover, lay bare, make reality accessible. Now, I'm in no position to call History a science – regardless of the undoubted desire of historians to be scientific. I think no one can deny that we might call historians, given their undoubtedly scientific desire and their quite different achievements, an intermediate form between science and writing. Each stands more or less on one or other leg. Interesting historians privilege the writerly leg.

Close alongside History, then – and now we enter territory important to us – we have that literary product which is fabricated on a mass scale and could really be fabricated by more or less any home-worker: I mean the novel. In our age the novel is a most comical and ridiculous product. It's a complete mystery how anyone could mention the novel in the same breath as literature. There's a saying: the novelist is half-brother of the poet. That's a very kind way to put

it. He is perhaps the expired great-uncle. The incomplete, half-made, abortive character of the novel is obvious when you remember what kinds of novels there are:

- the *Bildungsroman*, the novel of education. If he wants to educate, perhaps the author would do better to teach; what does he presume to do when he mixes shaky learning with an entertaining fable, ink with egg-yolk;
- historical novels: straining for truth when even historians have abandoned that ambition;
- dreadful novels of the naturalistic age, supposed to depict or represent an entire epoch;
- and then biographies, written by people who have no clue what a person looks like, how a person grows, and who among us actually knows it, and this they call Biography.

A mass of amalgams, things left standing on ten half-paths. What are these novels? They are farther removed from science even than history, they drape themselves in props from rental shops of outmoded art, and as a rule have some practical purpose: to entertain and achieve something ethical, or what the author has cobbled together by way of ethics; or they aim at political agitation, or they want to make a social-critical impact, or enlightenment; or they merely want to be the place where the tormented author pours out his heart – hence a literary cabinet for exhibitionists, a literary WC.

Now that's all meaningful, understandable, and has its justification. Especially a mechanical age won't dispute this justification, and we know how eagerly our public reads such novels. To the public they're the very essence of literature, the authors of such printed matter consider themselves literary figures, and the reader is happy to grant them that status. And why should the public not read such books? They popularise certain ideas, make known places and peoples, provide easy access to certain ideologies, recall bygone things, and the reader gains something akin to knowledge; most are not boring, or only in part. So what we have here is a kind of competition of the gutter, now with journalism, now with science, now with ethnology or geography or ethics. With art there is never competition; only a little is stolen from available artworks. Some of these "literary works" (and this is the peak of comicality) emphasise how totally "accurate" they are, and (no less comically) scientists feel compelled to point out errors in the text. A cat paints itself blue, and blue hussars curse it for a fake hussar.

I think it's a shame that the public and authors both believe such literature is art. It is, as I've said, a practical and useful writer's trade. It is illicit science or illicit politics or illicit ethics. Their illicitness doesn't matter, but in no case is it *licit art*. This descent into the practical, into the useful and comprehensible, epitomises the civilisational decadence of the work of art.

Literature stands in clear contrast to purposeful rational writing. It looks as if I'm preaching *l'art pour l'art*, that I deny any impact of the work of art on life and the living person. Not at all: that's a foolish misconception. But for sure the phrase *l'art pour l'art* contains a sensible gesture of denial: in our case, it is not done with newspapers and preaching. Literary creation too has its purposes that impact on life and people, but they are the specific, very complex, and yet very topical purposes of literature. Literature has no need to borrow its purposes from Party Central or a textbook on ethics. Literature, like art in general, is an autochthonous plant, it has its own way of growing, and the laws of its growth are its own laws.

Let me offer two essential markers that differentiate the literary epic: sovereignty of imagination, and sovereignty of word-art. As examples of the literary epic I name the works of

Homer, Dante, Cervantes, and fairytales of every kind. As for men who know what sovereignty of word-art means, I name Arno Holz, the composer of *Phantastus*, and Rudolf Borchardt, the translator. A very important work is the *Ulysses* of James Joyce, which is no work of art but works its way through to the most important elements of art, it knows the boundless sovereignty of phantasy in the dramatic passages, and knows too in many places the unleashed autocracy of language.

I would like to make two more observations, one on attitude and bias in the work of art, the other on phantasy.

Attitude is merely a factor in the author's psychology. Of course anyone, as a citizen, can adopt any political or ethical standpoint, which remains a private affair of the author as long as he has not proven himself to be an artist through a work of art. What's more, artists in general have only very rudimentary political or ethical standpoints. In any case, as a rule the only task of an attitude is to lead into an artistic process. The production process, if it's to be an artistic one, from then on proceeds according to its own rules. But we have to give attitude its due: attitude can easily endanger the work of art, but the artist with attitude has also noticed that the work of art is no plaything, that it's something other than an object for the auction room. A biased work by a non-artist, by an agitator with a gift of the pen, seeks contact with life, just as much as those novels I mentioned that borrow or steal props from earlier works of art. Thus the typical biased work actually finds no contact between art and life, merely a short circuit. One could make a cheaper and more direct impact with pamphlets. But, as said, novels do no harm, and nobody reads pamphlets.

Secondly, phantasy. There's exact and inexact phantasy. Bleached, washed-out, ragged reality is not imaginative reality. Serious writing presupposes a super-normal acuteness of vision and nose for the truth of the discipline. Serious writing without great spirituality is not possible. Hence the distaste many writers feel for the "truths" of the political programme conveyed to them by the yapping of newspaper-tykes. Serious writing demands a very sharp eye for reality. Homer, before he sang, had very acute vision. I've remarked before how lots of authors have inherited from Homer only his blindness. A prime example of what literary imagination should be is Dante's Hell. Phantasy toils in a completely sovereign manner away over every reality. I have called phantasy and word-art the twin pillars of literary art.

Let me add a philosophical point. Distance from reality and its paraphernalia while making use of reality and its objects is in the end the biological condition of growth. The human being grows in the work of art out beyond existing nature, and is himself creative nature. Moreover, nature produces artworks and art forms apart from humans and without humans.

The epic work of art proceeds on its way, it elapses, like all poetics, in time; the work of literature flows through time, like music. But the epic work of art exists in time even more so than the drama. In the epic, the action grows piece by piece through layering. This is epic apposition. But the drama develops in quite another way, it unfolds from a single point. There we have only an unfolding, and when it's fully unfolded the play ends. Dramas are in a sense immobile and static, and closer to sculpture than to music.

It is not without interest that the author of novels works on the same lines as the dramatist, and has no sense of the epicist's incremental layering process. The reason for this is easily seen: the author makes economical use of his cognitive powers, he can't rely on chance, and so he develops within his novel an idea, a combination, in the same way as a dramatist. The epic work

distinguishes itself from the novel in another aspect: the novel lives on suspense, indeed only from suspense, suspense is the only fuel that warms the author. Now in itself suspense is not bad, is actually necessary, but only as a rather extrinsic factor; suspense stands in opposition to the distinguishing feature of the epic work: characters and events in the epic awaken the reader's intimate involvement by themselves and apart from any kind of excitement. They grip, all by themselves. In a good epic work, individual characters and individual events have a life even apart from the whole, while the run of the mill novel whooshes past in great excitement, and a few days later you can't remember any of it and the whole thing was a fraud.

That, in short, is what I have to say on the theme of "writing" and "literature". It's essential to distinguish these two modes of writing, and to orient the public – and authors – to them as separate entities.

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THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE EPIC WORK

Die neue Rundschau 1929 [AzL 103-132]

W F Schoeller's 2011 biography Döblin on p. 326-7 provides background to this lecture:

In 1928 [...] he sought to link the Academy to the University, wanting to bring literary praxis and Germanistic research into confrontation with one another, guide students to works currently being written, and open for discussion that fraction of literature that is teachable. [...] Döblin took his announced goal much further. In May 1929 he proposed a Writing School on the lines of master classes for musicians and graphic artists, linked to the Academy.

Then on 10 December 1928 he delivered his own magnificent text before an audience of a more than a thousand in the Audimax of Berlin University. In it, he extolled yet again poetics as a valid form of expression about writing, literature, and their relationship. He sought a connection with the occidental epic, and in a magisterial marking-off from current fiction which only touches on reality, he projected a concept of the epic work of art and the complications that ensue when it seeks to restore the ancient alliance between narrator and audience. This work of language strives as closely as possible to reality as it conceives it, is not satisfied with any image, but pierces through that sphere.

Walter Benjamin thought the essay a "masterly documentary contribution on the crisis of the novel." Among the audience from the side of the university were prominent professors of German literature, and also some students who later pursued careers in academic German Studies [...] Probably no one from these circles [...] ever wrote later about Döblin. The discipline only much later began to approach the literary modern. The essay offers a theoretical foundation for Berlin Alexanderplatz, and can be understood as a counterpart to Brecht's epic theatre. Reader and author both move in the dark zone of creation, try to orient themselves, come to sense the current and the strokes necessary for swimming in the epic flood.

1. The epic work is a report of a hyper-reality

I begin with the question: Is the basic form of the epic the report, or what in fact **is** the distinguishing feature of the epic? We know that for the drama, or so at least it seems, the underlying distinctive feature is dialogue.

I pick a novel at random and read:

When Colonel Spring von Springgenau, having achieved the status of pensioner in his final posting at Rathenow, took up residence, not in Wiesbaden like most of his colleagues, but in Partenkirchen, Friederike had just turned seventeen. It was spring, the windows of the house into which the family moved gave a view across roofs to the Bavarian mountains, and every day, even at breakfast, the Colonel told his wife and children how lucky he felt that it had been granted to him, while still in sound health at the age of sixty, to escape the call of duty, the smoke and torpor of the big city, and be able to enjoy to his heart's content the delights of Nature, for which he had yearned ever since the days of his youth.

Well, there's no doubt that this is something like reportage. Something like.

I pick up a newspaper, and in the local news I find:

Motorcycle accident involving two policemen. Early today two policemen from the barracks on Wrangel Street collided on their motorcycle with a street sweeper's cart. One, 25-year-old Constable Wichert, sustained a broken collarbone; the other, 20-year-old Constable Willy Wolf, received serious head injuries and concussion. Both were taken to the hospital on Friedrichshain.

This too is a report, delivered in the simple past tense. Clearly the first report differs from the second in that the second is a factual report, i.e. announces something that happened, while the first just imitates a report. For sure the colonel did not announce every breakfast-time how lucky he felt to be able to give himself over to Nature, and I may also doubt that Friederike was seventeen years old. Maybe she was not even called Friederike, and was only sixteen. In any case, these are assertions which I don't believe even when they are presented in the simple past tense. But of course we all know that this colonel did not utter such words at breakfast and every reader knows that Friederike was not seventeen, the author merely writes it thus, but nevertheless – the author writes it, and we accept it!

Really, what does it mean: the man deceives no one with his report, intends no deception, and yet he imitates a genuine report. I'm opposed to imitations on principle: but here I would like to clarify the meaning of an imitation such as this. I have no doubt: a calm sensible man who reads the daily news on the front page of his newspaper in the simple past tense will quite rightfully balk when below the fold something is reported in the same form as above, but clearly not a syllable of it is factually correct; and he will quite rightfully regard such doings as foolish and a malpractice, and will avoid reading below the fold. So what can I say about such novel-reports where the one reporting doesn't believe it, and no one hearing it believes it either? It's a scam with pre-assigned roles. You may tell me: it's "Art", but I regret to have to say that for me it has the all the characteristics of a quite stupid scam.

Someone hisses: It's you who's stupid, a novel only pretends to be reporting, we're in the realm of old Vaihinger and his *As If*, neither side has to believe, the theatre audience don't need

to believe either, only children and peasants sometimes fall for it, it's all appearance, illusion.⁷ All this I hear, and it's the correct explanation, and there we have, life-size, our pseudo-rationalist imbecilic age. (There does exist a wonderful rationality; our epoch is not rational.) This explanation with its appearance, its illusions, its *As If*, puts the whole of creative literature on ice. If it is supposed that Art and the fundamental form of the Epic must rest on the self-deceit of both parties – writer and reader – and if we are all clear about the matter in advance, then there's no point in writing even a syllable.

But the report mode is something quite different. When Miss Amelia Calf-Lambkin reads to me from her latest novel and it's narrating something, nah, I don't believe it. I don't believe a word this lady author says, and that's clear to both of us from the start. *But what happens then when Homer starts up, when Dante goes through Hell, when Don Quixote sets off on his horse and Sancho Panza rides behind on his donkey – are these merely formal reports, really?*

The aestheticians of old say: yes indeed, these are, formally, mere reports, Don Quixote is not attested in the records, and of course a donkey was riding across Spain, donkeys ride across every landscape in every age; but this particular donkey, with Sancho Panza on its back, is not historically attested.

What makes this particular donkey believable above all other donkeys? Here I come to the nub of the matter. Outside the sphere of historically attested facts there is clearly a sphere of existence about which one can make formal reports, using the simple past tense, and any such report demands of me, the reader or listener, a belief – so that under such circumstances it becomes once again worthwhile to write, since now an honourable relationship, resting on a well-founded trust, is once again established between author and audience.

What lifts one or other invented action in report-mode out of the domain of the merely concocted and written-down and places it in a sphere of truth – the truth of the specifically epic report – is *the exemplary nature of the action and the characters* depicted and communicated in report-mode. Here we have stark fundamental situations, elemental situations of human existence to be worked through; it is elemental human situations that appear in this sphere and, because they are real in a thousandfold fragmented ways, may be reported as such. Yes, these characters, who are no Platonic ideals, this Odysseus, Don Quixote, Dante the wayfarer, and these primal human situations in their primal originality, truth and potency stand above fragmented everyday reality. And so a whole range of characters, no great number, rise above reality; of them new yarns may ever and again be spun.

I have no particular need to point out that attainment of this exemplary and simple sphere separates the epic artist from the novelist, novel-writing being a solid, bourgeois, commercially useful occupation; it imitates some superficialities without penetrating into reality, or even breaking through its surface. The really productive act requires two steps: it must approach very close to reality, its solidity, its blood, its smells, and then must pierce through it; this is its specific task. The first step is taken by every decent writer, and you can see: every epic author is first and

⁷ Hans Vaihinger (1852-1933): The starting point of his *Philosophy of the As-If* reads: "How do we often arrive at what is correct, using assumptions which we know to be false?" Vaihinger addresses this point: "The human conception of the world is an enormous web of fictions, replete with logical contradictions all the way from scientific fabrications to practical goals, and from inadequate, subjective, pictorial modes of conception, whose encounter with reality is ruled out from the start." *Philosophie des Als Ob*, 1911, p. 14. Cf. 'Fabulations' in Part One of this volume.

foremost a good writer. And today there are everywhere, including among the epicists, middling to good literary talents, but the writer necessary to deliver the epic is weak. And so of course we never find a literary epic. For how can someone pierce through reality when he has made no provision, and often lacks the capacity, for grappling with reality. Secondly, there are enough (actually not yet enough) enlightening and descriptive novels which flourish only in the world of letters, where the authors have no wider ambition or, like their public, know of none. But thirdly, we have the adverse example of literary constructs, tedious things because everyone can see: this is no true author of epics, he has no love for reality, takes not the slightest trouble to grapple with it, he phantasizes into thin air. Homer for sure was blind, but only when he started to sing: before that his vision was clear-eyed, incorruptible; he had the Greek and Trojan background and societies down to a T.

I have just shown how I would justify the use of the report mode in the epic, and would like to demonstrate it in a hypothetical historical sequence:

Obviously in earliest times the report, the formal report, was all there was of literature and humanity in general, and what was reported really was believed, always. Belief depended on reports; reporting meant “reporting the truth”. At that time reality and dream and phantasy were not kept so much apart as today, and so obscurity, curiosity and fear led men to believe everything that was said and reported. We come across this sad primal condition among primitive peoples even now, and in the realm of lawcourts dealing with oaths and perjury even today we find in a number of simple people this childish primal condition that confuses dreams, phantasy and reality. But I would assert that at the time when Homer sang, the things that he reported possessed credibility to an even higher degree: Odysseus really did sit with Calypso on the island, the Sirens really did sing and, between ourselves, we have recently become aware that much more truth, even historical truth, underlies these myths and sagas than was once suspected. But where we are now, these things are not believed; reality, phantasy and wish-fulfilment are kept strictly and soberly separate.

And as for Art, this is what we have achieved: we have pushed works of art out of reality into the realm of illusion, or, let’s be blunt, into the realm of deception. We call it “life”, seriously, and reserve a very sketchy and amusing enthusiasm for Art. As serious busy people we allow Art into our lives in the hours of leisure between eight and ten in the evening, in the theatre, or now and then in our daily bus ride. We’ve done the same with religion. We have instituted Sundays and holy days and employ a number of officials to manage them. We do still approach these matters with a modicum of piety. But the fact remains that in religion, as in art, a few people see through the situation, and view it very differently from their official contemporaries. Just as a pious Sunday is not the last word in religion, so old Vaihinger is not the last word in Art. Art is and remains something rare. A work of art does two things: it *discerns* (yes, discerns, whatever the philosophers say), and it *creates*.

I end my historical sequence with these words:

Works of art have to do with truth.

The epic artist can still, today, in all seriousness, employ the report mode.

2. The epic work repudiates reality

Now that I've spouted a justification for the use of the report-mode in the epic, I'll set this point aside, and as I do so and glance around behind it, I am surprised: I stand there and come to another conclusion that contradicts the first. So I read a few sentences from *Don Quixote* and see that what is said there is – consciously – untrue, for both sides, for the author as well as the reader! *And despite this, no, precisely because of this, the form chosen is that of the report!* I suddenly notice the “precisely because of this”. The author chooses the report-mode, which is only permitted in the realm of so-called facts, he employs it for his notorious non-facts, for now it is something highly arousing and pleasing, with a huge pleasure rating. Here we have a characteristic transformation of Art in a materialistic-scientific age. Here we have the state of affairs, wonderful, unbounded, of free fabulation. What is fabulation, the bold unfettered reporting of non-facts, of notorious non-facts? It's a toying with reality, in Nietzsche's words a *laugh of superiority* over facts, even over reality as such. Hence the knowledge: it is not true, and nonetheless I employ the report-mode. Here one is in competition with stony firm solid reality, and performs magic with it and blows soap bubbles made of the same material that the creator of the world used to make the whole heavy Earth, the heavens and all the animals and their fates. We are in the proud and humane region of free phantasy.

The report-mode points to the sovereign will of the human being, of the author at least, to play with reality in despite of all knowledge and science. Now everything is possible that can be thought, gravity is swept aside, all physical laws are swept aside – but at the same moment there is the knowledge: gravity and all the laws exist, but we – we can do anything, we use the report-mode to tell of a quite other world. Poetic writing is more than a dream. A dream too plays with reality, but to our mind still has a fatal and irksome bond with reality. In poetic writing the levity and mocking of reality are complete. This is the huge gain in pleasure – for author as well as reader – imparted by fabulation in the report-mode.

Place against this levity the gaucherie and ponderousness of most current and earlier novels. Most of their authors have no idea what sort of instrument has been given into their hands. They are the victims of rationalism and the era of the natural sciences. It has slit the throat of poetic writing. Authors think they must sniff around reality rather than play with it or fling it aside. They think they have done their best when they are as accurate and as close to nature as possible. As if anyone could be. Nature does not let itself creep into a belly, and has no need of trainbearers. Authors boast that they have handed down most truthfully and almost as a documentary the history of an era or a family or an individual, as accurately as possible, as close to reality as possible. Maybe using the methods of a theoretician, a historian. If you compare this – this striving and its results – with the sphere of the hyper-real to which I first alluded as one of the pillars of the report mode, and the sphere of the phantastic, of fabulation, as the second pillar, how paltry, wretched, even burlesque are these naturalists who think they must take the report-mode at face value. You now see clearly the relationship between the two spheres of Art that coincide in the report-mode epic, as I showed just now: the sphere of phantasy and fabulation is simply the negation of the sphere of reality, and guarantees a toying with reality – the sphere of hyper-reality is the sphere of a new truth and a quite special reality.

And now one is again permitted to speak in report-mode. This mode regains its truth in the sphere of the epic work of art, and there is no more talk of scams, of fancy; poetic writing is no longer a dishonourable, confused and implausible matter, poetic writing is no longer degraded to a subjective plaything, and if truly epic writing employs the simple past tense and makes a

proud report, it is showing that it knows what it is and that it knows its place and its rank in the life of the spirit.

3. The epic does not *narrate* the past, but *represents*

Now I have answered the question: Is the report the fundamental mode of the epic? I have affirmed it and given reasons when and why the report is allowed to be the fundamental mode of the epic. I need to make one incidental point. I spoke of the simple past tense and of the report, and it may seem as if the form of the past is the form in which the epic must construct its verbal artwork. This is by no means the case. It is quite irrelevant, and a purely technical question, whether the epicist writes in the present, simple past or perfect tense, he will change tenses as he deems appropriate. The decisive point, which is not incidental, is that what one often reads – that the *dramatist* presents a plot unfolding in the present, the *epicist* narrates a plot that is already completed – is incorrect. It's superficial and laughable. For everyone who reads an epic work, the reported events are happening *now*, the reader experiences them now; whether present, simple past or perfect tense are used, the things are just as present to the reader and are received no differently than the performance of a play. Both are a representation, a setting-forth. All setting-forth is in the present, however it is formally composed. The difference between the epicist and the dramatist consists in this: the dramatist allows the action to proceed through the sense-organs of the eyes and ears, while for the epicist the organ of representation is the imagination. Only the spiritual location – the stage, or the imagination – distinguishes the two forms of writing. I shall soon have more to say about the close kinship of epic and drama.

4. Towards the epic of the future

Having talked about the report as the basic mode of the epic, I must make a practical observation, which may surprise you and may provide a hint to authors, in direct contradiction to what I have said. I do not recommend employing the report as the only mode of the epic work. You know that Homer, Dante, Cervantes, the three greatest epic names, chose only the report-mode; and all the novels in Germany today, as far as I know, animate themselves only in this mode: they set forth in a reporting, narrative mode. I do not advocate this. They are two different things: the epic work of art, and the epic method, i.e. the report mode. It is nowhere written that the epicist must only report. In the ancient theatre, in old dramas, there are sections that have nothing to do with the ongoing action, the chorus for example. Shakespeare too, somewhat shamefacedly, now and then allows a figure to step before the curtain and tell us something. And rightly so. There is also a dogma, one ready to be broken, that the drama may unfold only via dialogue. I can attest with pleasure that the cinema – narrative through pictures – has already penetrated the theatre in an experimental way, and is hammering at the door of the worn-out mode of the dialogue drama, of the players up there on the stage talking among themselves without reference to me.

You'll throw your hands up in horror when I advise authors in their epic works to be decidedly lyrical, dramatic, even reflective. But I shall persevere. In our epic works we have no need to surrender our freedom to some particular heritage in which tradition presents itself as dogma, and we shall make such use of the novel as seems good to us. Germany is a land of pedantic epic realism. Realism: I mean you want to report on realities or pseudo-realities. In France writing is lighter on its feet, has for a long time been more elastic. There are but few stable laws of art for the artist; mostly the artist makes up his own laws of art. The epic work of

art is not a fixed artistic form; like the drama it is constantly evolving, actually in direct resistance to tradition and its representatives. Just as today's theatre is fossilised in the dialogue of the characters up there – and we are denied the benefits of reflection, of lyrical or mocking intervention, of freely variable artistic action, even of speech directed at us; we are not made part enough of what is happening up there – so it is with the epic, where the report-mode is an iron curtain which separates the reader and the author from one another.

I confess: I have paid endless homage to the report, to the dogma of the iron curtain. Nothing seemed more important to me than the so-called objectivity of the narrator. I admit that even today communications about facts, documents, make me happy, but facts, documents, I mean, why? Now that great epicist Nature speaks to me, and I, so small, stand before her and rejoice, just like my older brother. And it happened, as I wrote this or that historical book, that I could hardly stop myself from transcribing verbatim whole sections from the archives; sometimes I even collapsed over the documents and said to myself: I can't improve on this. And when I was writing a work that depicted a battle between giant humans and great Nature, I could hardly restrain myself from transcribing whole articles on geography; the course of the Rhone, how it breaks out of the mountains, the names of the various valleys, the names of the tributary rivers, what cities lie along them, it's all so wonderful, and communicating it is so epic, I felt quite superfluous.

But you can't hold to this stance your whole life long. Some day you discover other things besides the Rhone, the valleys and the tributaries: you discover yourself. I myself – this is the craziest and most bewildering experience an epicist can have. At first it feels like the experience that will wring his neck. But he sees himself in danger and difficulties only for a short time before he sees that a work of art is a matter for the artist, it's not the past that fixes laws, I make my own laws, and now an epic work of art for me means something else. Is the author allowed a voice in an epic work, is he allowed to jump into that world? Answer: yes, he may and should and must. And now I recall what it is that Dante has done in the *Divine Comedy*: he has himself wandered through his poem, he has tapped his characters on the shoulder, he has mixed himself into the action, and not in a playful way but in all seriousness, everyone in his time understood him in the main point of the poem. He took part in his characters' lives. He danced like King David before the victorious army of his characters.

When I say we want the epic to be lyrical, dramatic and reflective, I'm not advocating a merging of forms. We must move on to a fresh core of the epic work of art, where the epic is not fossilised in the particular stance of today, which we quite wrongly take to be the normal stance of the epicist. In my view this means going even behind Homer. In this splendid and risky moment, however, we need two things: ability, and being. This primal form of poetry will refresh all who approach it, but it will cause much grief. Only those who come from a mother may go to the mother. So I see an epic work coming one day which, having blown up tradition and the role of the report, will honestly say something to us. I would like to tell authors, again and again, not to serve the form, whatever it may be, but to make the form serve them.

And with this we set aside a particular, and today very serious, difficulty. I propose that the epic form be made quite free, so that the author can pursue all the possibilities of representation that his material demands. If his subject feels like dancing a lyrical dance, he must let her dance. Authors are constantly assailed by calls for Relevance, for a literature of the present day. Quite honestly, it can even be said: you don't really want literature, it's had its time, art is boring, you

want facts and facts. To this I say: bravo, and three times bravo. You should not make any assumptions about me. Colonel Springgenau bores me at once. *The true writer has at all times been himself a fact.* A writer's task is to show and to demonstrate that he is a fact and a piece of reality and always just as good and factual as the square on the hypotenuse or the cathode ray. Authors should not lift facts from the newspaper and incorporate them in their works, it's not enough. Ambulance-chasing and photography are not enough. To be oneself a fact and create space for this in one's works: this makes a good author, and that's why I urge him today to let drop the constricting mask of reportage in the epic and set himself moving in his work to the extent that he sees necessary.

5. Contrasting today's individualistic with the earlier collective mode of production

I have no intention of doing away entirely with the problem of the epic form, in fact I don't intend to touch on and name all the essentials. I shall do no more than skirt the defensive works around this castle, study the forward defences and make for the point of entry. I am speaking now entirely of the externals: which influences shape the epic work? Once the epicist was a bard, bringing among the people his fables and farces and sagas which were already current among the people and to which he brought at most only a little reworking, maybe introducing variations here and there, or a new way of singing. The man had a specific task: he had to hack his way past Life, his audience were stern judges, if what he brought did not please them, the man would go hungry. This was a very obvious influence on the shaping of his work, it was the liveliest and most productive form of criticism, you can come straight out and call it a collective work of author and public; bread and money were the most pressing arguments for the author, and indirectly a solid factor in regards to the shaping.

What of today? Now an author sits in his study, clutches pencil or pen, and something is supposed to occur to him. He too wants to earn money, but in this respect the bards and minstrels of old had it much better: they were in contact with their public, quickly noticed what they needed to deliver. Now the author can go down the street, talk with his publisher, read the papers, listen here and there; but "connection" with an audience is out of the question. We all sit on an insulator, which without doubt is an unpleasant situation unsupportive of creativity. The present situation in cultured countries is conducive to the nurturing of individualistic authors, for in our countries the great coalitions, the great collectives are entirely political and economic, there are no ideal powerful collectives, at least for the majority of authors; not in general a healthy atmosphere for great drama or the great epic.

Today's author groans under the misfortune of the printed book. A book is endlessly long, you can always make a book longer, make two books, three books, how can an author know when to stop? At bottom he should only stop when the supply of paper runs out. And this is the missing condition for an external form for us today. And *how* should we speak, who regulates our voice – suddenly we have no voice, they take our voice away and give us a waste of print. How can print influence the rhythm of our voice, when it is actual speaking, actual inhaling and exhaling, the cadence of intonation according to the sense, that constructs the sentence, and lines sentences up one after the other. And *what* should the author of today write, who does he write for? He has no idea where the books will end up, maybe they'll stay in Leipzig in the

publisher's warehouse, he doesn't speak for anyone, he speaks into the void, no longer is there any general folk-thinking, machines and the economy have torn it all to pieces.

An utterly catastrophic state of affairs. There are no plots any more that everyone wants to hear, there is no longer any tangible folk-thinking, or only in a rudimentary sense. So here we have the poor author of today, it's a quite unhealthy condition, almost an anachronism, he too wants to earn money, his poverty is no anachronism. So how today, when authors go about by themselves, even if part of a social circle, how can the shaping process of an epic work be achieved, does the author feel he is something of a functionary, does his work consist of a task, is someone perhaps looking over his shoulder? Let me describe a present-day shaping process.

6. Outline of the incubation stage in the current mode of epic production

While you're going about your daily work, while you attend to all quotidian matters, in a favourable age something separates out in the author's interior and clumps together, if I may use so graphic an image. An inward preoccupation is occurring. It is, to be more exact, thinking without thoughts. Things are moving there covertly, you feel something is emerging, or has emerged. The entire organism, the soul stands in a state of preparedness, and always following a period of tension or melancholy or frenzy. I say always, and this is an important point, for the frenzy or sadness or tension points to the fundamental stance of what is coming, what is to be revealed, it signals the inward process and reaches out beyond the author's normal bearing, not always, but at some moments, and betrays itself in mimicry and other ways. Here the author is identical with the work and it is the prodromal stage, the incubation stage of production, an unresolved situation where the work which is preparing itself overflows into the author, it is not yet set apart enough from him, where the work is clearly taking and draining essentially all the energy from him.

And now there comes the point which I must allude to and lead to and which is of decisive importance, and it is not a personal moment but is valid more or less generally. At first as a rule the incubation stage proceeds for a variable length of time, you feel you are being drawn along by something you need to nurture. I don't normally hold much with the simile: author and work are like mother and child, but here in the incubation stage we have something like a maternal situation.

There are two entities: one that bears, observes, becomes slightly uneasy and grabs at all kinds of nourishment, and one that is borne. The thinking conscious Ego has at this time taken on a quite specific function, I'm speaking of epic authors, those of the present day: you lead yourself like a beast to a manger and watch to see if the fodder is to your taste. You receive rebuffs, you can go hugely astray, and now and then with an epic work I have the impression that there is here something good and right, but the author has not quite grasped the substance, he has an unlucky hand, for luck is needed to find the right sustenance. Indeed, it can happen that you are still slogging along and the inner situation is already defunct. You're like a hen that fails to incubate her egg. And then suddenly, I mean suddenly, what do we have?

I am struck dumb, I have read that and heard that and forgotten it already, and now suddenly something jumps out and without knowing why I am seized or senselessly snared, no, fascinated, by an image. It's not a vision, not a hallucination, but a lot of things together, a soul-condition

of peculiar brightness, not vague, but of an abnormal spiritual clarity in which all riddles are solved and you feel like Siegfried when he licked the dragon's blood: you understand every language and everything. For example, when I started on a historical novel, *Wallenstein*: I could ruffle in a pile of dusty files, flick through an exchange of correspondence, delve into it, delve into it. That which is preparing itself in me sips from it, sips from it, and suddenly there stands before me the image of a fleet, not a vision, something more encompassing, Gustavus Adolphus sailing across the sea. But how is he sailing across the sea? There are ships, cogs, frigates, high over the grey-green water with the white combs of its waves, across the Baltic, the ships ride the sea like horsemen, the ships jog through the waves like men on horseback, they are laden with old-fashioned cannon and people, the sea rocks under them, they are sailing to Pomerania.

And it's a wonderful picture, totally fascinating. I feel it happening to me; it's like turning a tangled ball of twine in my hand and finding the end. For the sake of this splendid situation I come to a firm decision, and know: I shall write about this and report; to celebrate and praise and make known this situation, I shall write a book.

This image-blessed enlightenment, this knowledge-laden moment is experienced by the author as the first conception. I mean: what has come before is the incubation stage, but has reached the point where it has crossed some threshold value and has emerged to his sight. To his sight, to whose sight? And here two points are important for us in the conception stage.

The first point is: the whole has reached a certain temperature, has taken on a certain breadth; the nourishment was good, the beast has stretched its tongue out to a particular fodder, a picture becomes possible, the picture shimmers in a certain brightness. And now the Ego, which up till now has nursed only tentatively, takes on another function, another task, and that is the second point. Now the Ego can see what is there before it, so to speak, can see the one it has been nursing at its breast. It regards this entity, and – assumes a stance in relation to it. To make it quite clear: *at this moment the author is no longer alone in his study* thinking and brooding. Of course he does not, like the bards and balladeers of old, go among the people and sing what they bring to him and adjust to their wishes. But the author, from this moment, carries the people within him.

That observing Ego has taken over in our time the role and function the people played for those bards of old. *The Ego becomes the public, becomes the audience, and what's more a participant audience.* [Please don't confuse this with Goethe's "ideal audience".] From this moment on there exists a co-operative, a collaboration between the Ego and the entity that writes. This observant, thinking and evaluating Ego stands in a lasting relationship to the entity that writes, goads him on, nourishes him and leads him on for good or ill, acts as a regulator. And so for the epic author – and the same must go for the dramatist – there is no question of a blind unfettered drive, an unconsciousness, that does the writing. Only the incubation stage is unconscious, whereas in a strange way the second stage is permeated by consciousness, drenched in thoughts, in the values of the whole milieu: status, class, social standing, ethnicity. And now all these things, thoughts, values construct the work in a collective struggle with the entity, the individual, that writes.

Here as well (just to make the picture of the production process a bit more complete), something quite remarkable usually happens. The conscious thinking Ego does not always keep to the role of the public, the spectator and collaborator; in a strange way it is drawn into the work process itself; the work in progress, at several points which invite an unleashing, exercises

a fascination over the Ego, bewitches the Ego, and now, without removing the thinking and collaborating, two situations arise: the Ego, the collaborator, loses its guiding role in respect of the work, it puts on masks, it suffers its work, dances around its work. The Ego is drawn into the game-situation of the work in progress and to some extent has lost control. So now the author is even deeper into a murky literary creation. [Think here of the future “epic” and speak the voices of all profundity! Have courage, dare, set to!] Although the general clarity persists, its reaction to the work has become less transparent, the work itself now threatens to become shapeless, which is merely to say that it shrugs off the formula we have hastily applied, but deeper forms appear, the work becomes a deeper creation.

Now comes the second situation, the second stage of this fascination, where the author can no longer stand upright before his work, where the work devours the author and his conscious Ego: we’re at the stage of prolonged anonymous conception.

And so the production process goes back and forth: long stretches of rational clarity and perceptible shaping line up at a first conception, these are calm stretches, filled out by the imagination, and then there follows the pounding of the conception, this pillar looms up like an island in an earthquake, and again we have a culmination and a new beginning. There are many types of author; not all will understand what I mean. Creative writing, you see, is not merely, in Ibsen’s words, holding judgement over oneself, nor does it mean, as moralists and politicians among the authors think, holding judgement over oneself and others; it is much more: for example letting oneself go, playing, for example having the courage to undergo inward bewitchings and sacrifice oneself to them in form and substance.

7. Details of the mode of production

a. The epic work exists *in statu nascendi*⁸

I want to glance at further shaping processes, and describe the effect of some shaping factors. You embark on an epic rather like a swimmer plunging into the sea. You don’t know yet how wide the sea is, but you trust your strength and enjoy the swim. It matters not whether you start writing at once or, to keep your powers in balance, make an outline. You have an initial conception and a vague shadowy underlying feeling; all you can do now is forward march and go stalking after the central situation, which is not yet at all clear. Ladies and gentlemen, most epic works are undertaken in such an obscure urging, and the work shows its face only as you labour. You believe the writer is making you a report and writing down what he knows. No, he knows nothing, or almost nothing, he’s following an intuition and a sense of his powers to plunge into an adventure. You write to your theme. And so *the reader joins the author in the process of production*. All epic works deal with Becoming and Happening, and so, I would say, it is appropriate that the epic report is not laid out all complete and buzzing like a shot from a pistol, but the reader experiences it *in statu nascendi*.

With any epic of some size, you must know, what is presented is not a rounded, closed, thoroughly circumnavigated work of art, rather you attend at the creation, development and growth of the work, in contrast to works of the plastic arts and probably some dramatic works. But even these have something of it, and not of the worst. The same goes for great works of the other temporal art, music: themes develop out of one another not only musically but also in real

⁸ In a state of being born.

time, they just now come into existence. And this gives to them, as to an epic performance, not just a special charm but also a peculiar truth and verisimilitude and perspicacity, for when we see how something comes into existence before our eyes, we imbue it quite readily with the character of a truth, and it convinces us. This is the specific law of causality in the epic.

This *flowing before our eyes* also has the advantage that it leads author as well as audience from surprise to surprise and from delight to unforced delight. It has the advantage that every situation produces the next, unforced. And there's a reason why this mode of creation is necessary: you can never scan far enough ahead in an aesthetic sense, never know where possibilities for raising or reducing tension will arise; you can stake out very roughly the outlines of the whole thing, but if you plant the stakes too close together you spoil the conception, because these stakes don't correspond to the place you're working towards.

b. The epic work is constitutionally unbounded

I shall mention a further attribute of the epic work of art: its unboundedness. It's the strangest attribute for an art form, this law of unboundedness, but there it is, won't be brushed aside, and you should look closely at it because it is a quite essential characteristic and we stand on the most solid epic ground when we stick to it. Externally we have the current situation: the epicist has at his disposal the book-form, but a book is a start though never an end. So I have to make a start, and may the good Lord help me to come at some point to an ending. If someone tells me I have one hour to speak, I can adapt to that and am forced to a particular outline. But today the epicist is faced with only one possibility for achieving an externally bounded form: namely, if the publisher rations the number of pages.

But the same attribute of unbounded form also applied, if one may put it like this, to the era of the early story-tellers. It is really an internal attribute of the epic. Even the early epics hardly had a beginning, and certainly no ending. A man stopped narrating today, and tomorrow narrated some more, the people want to hear something new, and because you don't have much material, and interest always grows when you can link to something old, you end up with an episodic work, a continuing story, additions without end.

In drama, a man dies promptly after two hours. The epicist is more relaxed, he lets him die today but he may rise again tomorrow. This is the correct epic method, the fruitfulness of the situations and characters is symptomatic, and you the reader must not let yourself be deceived by our modern pseudo-epics, novels that try stupidly to imitate the drama – most modern novels could be turned into something like a stage play, and that is a sign of their false formal underlying principle. The situation and the characters are exhausted in two hundred pages.

Look at Cervantes' Don Quixote: you might be able to make a stage play out of Don Quixote's fight with the windmills, not easily, but still. But the whole epic work, the book *Don Quixote*, can never be adapted as a stage play, for the same thing happens a hundred times with some new variation, Don Quixote ever and again fights against some new species of windmill, and Cervantes is happy with that, and it is a matter of chance, something tagged on from outside, that Don Quixote at some point dies. For Cervantes the matter was at an end, he allowed Don Quixote to die, Cervantes was already an individualist, but successors could easily have continued writing this splendid story.

And so this is, externally and internally, the attribute of unboundedness that has imposed itself on us as a shaping process.

c. Dynamic and proportion as shaping laws and co-creators of content

I now want at the same time to pin down a contrary tendency, another law of many epic works: I want to touch on the closed form. But only from a certain perspective do these two attributes stand side by side. For each particular epic production wants, like Don Quixote, to achieve a conclusion, an ending, and hence formal closure. Though epic is unbounded, formless, a particular work brings an unbounded epic to an end and invents special shaping rules and principles just for this particular concrete case. So, for example, I plan to depict a revolutionary ferment in a population, and a vivid scene forces itself on me as a beginning, an attack on a leading state official, a night scene. This is felt completely as an introduction, a kind of muffled drum-roll, a single harsh discharge, then silence. Specific points are worked up from the character of this tempestuous and unsettling introduction.

Now I am entangled in what follows. There must be a gigantic story-line, or else the proportions don't match, and a particular dynamic is called for. I must start slowly, broadly, perhaps with one person, in order to achieve a massive crescendo. These proportions and this dynamic, the formative tendencies, are felt quite vividly, and if now the imagination sets to work and tirelessly pulls in material, the highest law and the headquarters from which the authoritative directives emanate is this formal law prescribing a broad, slow advance. And now, having pulled along a single person as if on a thread, I throw person after person into the process until a certain height is reached. I started a Chinese novel with such a drumbeat and such a muffled drumroll of subterranean revolution.⁹

It begins for purely formal, I could say musical, reasons, with a report on one particular man, and this report is then spun wide and this man must become the red thread to which I attach other threads, and so people group around him, force him to actions which gather ever more people around him, and so I make him my hero, the mover of this movement, to broaden the canvas I add a few more episodes and now, purely artistically, I have set down the beginning of my book. No, had to set it down. These characters, their gathering, and the characteristics of their progress required and co-created this definite will to dynamic and proportion, a musical tendency, tendency to an architectonic music. The law of form, I have to say, actually created the content that is solidly there. But the epic theme was: someone struggles in vain, powerless against violence, a weak hero, truly powerless.

Let's look at another place. The revolutionary movement has reached a terrible level. The colours of this scene are already unbearably harsh, calm stately tones are needed. Now I've no more use for my hero. I have him make an inward change of direction, he abandons his sect, disappears into the countryside. For the grand stately tones I must seek out other people and actions. So the Tibetan Pope appears, a different very bleak scenery is sought and depicted, monasteries, Tibet the land of ice, stately progress of the Pope to China, to the great Manchu Emperor. The structure of this section stands firm before all the details. It is the ground plan.

⁹ The Prologue to *The Three Leaps of Wang Lun* (1916) was dropped from the text as published, to appear later as a short story: 'The Attack on Chao Lao-hsu'. My translation restores it.

Within this section itself, in the details, the same formal schema is at work. Whole stretches are experienced beforehand from particular starting points, but devoid of content, only in their dynamic and a rough idea of their length. Into this empty skin now imagination pours and fills it up. I'd like to speak of a network of tension, of a dynamic network that spreads itself gradually over the whole work, tethered to specific conceptions; and actions and people are embedded in this network. And you can see that an epic work of this kind resembles neither the boundless old epic-type nor the wretched modern dramatic novel-type. I speak here of a self-developing type of modern epic works of art that bear within them quite specific laws of form. I have given easily analysed examples in my own books.

If you ask, what then do these works, works with these laws of form, resemble, the above analysis has already made it clear: symphonic works. It is understandable if the artistic characters of the two temporal arts, music and literature, share some common features.

8. Language in the production process

Finally, I shall depict the role of language in the production process.

As soon as the conception has occurred, there is a situation of bewilderment. The author must speak or write, as the case may be, he would like to speak or write, and something astonishing happens, which has often been observed: you notice that at the moment when you speak or write, you step into a completely different world, we can say into a different spiritual plane. Conception is no longer conception, or so at any rate a number of authors have asserted. In the speaking, in the writing, the thing has changed, and the affair, though still quite nice, is no longer overwhelmingly imposing. Thus, embodying the conception in a body of language has an essentially transformative effect, even, we say calmly, partly destructive. These authors now find themselves bereft of what is unique, what is quite special about their conception, and are no longer satisfied with "language". Perhaps these authors have a special kind of conception and intuition. With other authors, myself among them, the matter goes differently.

I am content with language. It provides me with extraordinarily useful services, and is the most valuable helpmeet in my work. There are several connections and links between the conception and language. For those who are disillusioned by the conception once it is written down, language is clearly an instrument, a tool, material upon which they can set down the ideas and phantasies that have come to them from elsewhere. But language can also be experienced in another way and can be something else. The following example comes from my personal observation.

Some ideas are without language. You must be careful not to write them down too quickly, or you too will feel that sense of disillusion. Things want to ripen, the idea will form its language-body soon enough. And then a moment will come when out of this situation you have a single sentence, and to some extent you have caught the beast by the tail and now it can't get away. Now the situation as written down is no longer identical with the conception, but is richer, more concrete, more alive! And first and foremost in the epic: it presses on ahead. Momentum may already be latent in the conception, but the writing, the succession of sentences, the melody that is now being spun, allows no rest. How much richer and more valuable is this written version than the conception, which in the end is no more than a constant bass drone.

But it may also happen, strange as it may sound, that an ideal conception is accompanied by a specific form of language. This is nothing supernatural, but lies close to the realm of dreams in which one hears some particular words and sentences.

And thirdly, it may be that you have no ideal conception, rather some sentences occur to you, God knows out of what context, and for an author this is the happiest of all situations. I mentioned earlier the voyage of Gustavus Adolphus across the Baltic. This conception remained dumb and yielded no fruit. I was reluctant to give it expression. Then while I was immersed in some work, reading about dignitaries at the court of Emperor Ferdinand the Second, a sentence came to me, and this was a *conception in language*. And this kind of conception in language is just as good as a merely ideal conception, and for the epic author, the practitioner of language, is all-important. That sentence read: "When the Bohemians were defeated, no one was better pleased than the Emperor. Never before had..." It went no further. But it was excellent, it was the beginning of my book, there were the melody and the rhythm, I could begin, nothing more could happen to me. If I must depict the relationship between conception and language, I shall say: the conception is merely the text of a song, language is the song, the music. With language you add immeasurably to the "conception", and the song is not complete without the right melody.

But just as for the librettist everything depends on the correct scoring of his words, so for the author everything depends on the intimacy of the relationship between his ideas, fancies, and language. Just as poorly aimed language can spoil his concept, so well-chosen language, well-conceived language, can relieve him of half the work, even the phantasmising and inventing. For well-aimed language leads in the right direction, leads the initial conception towards new ideas, is itself a *productive force*. The greatest formal danger for the epic author arises when he jumps into the wrong register of language. It would be a blessing for authors and readers if the philologists would produce a dictionary of German linguistic styles and registers. Such a work would be important in the training of authors and in scaring off dilettantes. In German we have no great number of clearly distinct speech styles and speech levels. There's conversational speech, which varies with the various social classes, and in the provinces crystallises differently, not just in terms of accent. There's the register of newspaper people, stockbrokers and other professions. But for authors these unfortunately don't have much weight. It would be desirable for them to dive more intensively into this full human life. What is important for them is the written styles: for example, the style of the Bible translator Luther. This style has outlasted whole generations, at present occupies a particular literary level, a particular spiritual plane, and anyone stepping onto this level must know where he is headed, must know where this language is leading him on to, and that adopting it coerces him not just to follow up a few sentences with other sentences from the same level, but also limits thoughts and concepts to this level. In other words: *In every style of language there lurks both a productive force and a coercive character* – in terms of both form and ideas.

Dilettantes exploit this and can easily write at this level, they do not notice that they are barely in the game, that it's a matter of autonomy in language and ideas, they need only insert their little coin into the machine and it grinds into action. But even the true author is at risk, but he knows what I have said: you think you are speaking and you are spoken, you think you are writing and you are written.

To continue on the subject of our dictionary, of linguistic style and the related spiritual values, we have Schiller's iambic style; Goethe's contemporary prose; the prose of Heinrich Heine, whose successors can be traced in today's feuilletonists; the classical style of Platen¹⁰; and others. All these linguistic styles possess their own spiritual level which makes them fruitful, formative – and on the other hand, especially for the independent author, catastrophically domineering and hampering. Only a layman thinks that there is just one German language and you can think in it as you like. The cognoscenti know that there are several registers in which everything must set itself in motion. Whoever wants to be spiritually independent, whoever wants to say something of his own as a writer, is at great risk. He does well to know this risk, and it is no novelty that anyone who wants to speak his own mind must first push away old ways of speaking in order to call a spade a spade.

As far as the formative power of language is concerned, as I have already shown I have to speak of a general productive power of both form and ideas, and it reveals itself in thoughtful writing and written thought as an urging on from one sentence to the next, one paragraph to the next. Now and then more rhythmical laws come to the fore, now and then alliterations take the lead, now and then more assonances. Ideas on this level struggle with the linguistic at every level. The victor – in the case of the good writer – is always language. Anyone who has not experienced this does not know the fundamental fact of the *living language*, which is not the language of philology and dictionaries. It is rather a blooming concrete phenomenon, it knows no "words" any more than the world knows individual objects, it flows in words and sentences vivid and filled with thought, experienced and deeply felt. More could be said about the very banal separation of prose from poetry, prosaic and poetic language. In the truly epic those with sharper eyes see that this separation cannot stand.

Now I must stop speaking of language, of its productive power in the formal and spiritual realms, of its coercive character. I shall not discuss how I see the liberation of the epic work from the book as a difficult but useful task, useful particularly as regards language. The book is the death of actual language. The most important shaping powers of language elude the epicist who only writes. For a long time my motto has been: away from the book, but I see no clear road for the epicist of today, unless it is the road to a new kind of theatre. And this jibes with what I have said above about the renaissance and regeneration of the epic work.

What makes an epic work? The ability of its creator to press hard up against reality and pierce through it in order to attain the simple great elementary fundamental situations and characters of human existence. In addition, in order to create through the art of words a living work, the writer's jaunty art of fabulation. And thirdly everything surges in the stream of the living language on which the author floats.

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JOYCE'S ULYSSES

Das deutsche Buch 1928 [AzL 287-290]

Döblin resented claims that Berlin Alexanderplatz was an imitation of Ulysses. He was already well into his novel before the German translation of Ulysses appeared.

¹⁰ Count August von Platen Lyric poet (1796-1835).

Joyce's book comes heralded by colossal voices. Its author is called "our greatest writer", the "Homer of our age". The first edition (just to orient ourselves) appeared in 1922 on the author's 40th birthday. In Germany the Rhein-Verlag brought out a translation by Georg Goyert in a private printing of 1000 copies. This one is in three volumes; the first has 458 pages in the German edition, the second 465, the third 662. So we have a work of around 1600 pages.

The above pseudo-critical appraisals are totally wrongheaded. But this is an unusual and quite extraordinary book. I can't recall ever encountering in the last two decades any extensive written work of such formal radicality. There's not a trace of Homer in Joyce, rather Homer, who gave him this trademark, has in burlesque fashion shot right past the writer's central intention: Joyce, or his *Ulysses*, demonstrate the impossibility of a Homer today.

Numerous authors in every land – let's say confidently a compact majority of all authors – construct their solid books, fabulate or spin off tales on a smaller or greater scale, things with a proper beginning and a proper ending, as if such things exist, and have never reflected on this way of writing, way of thinking, way of fabulating, and never see the comical side of their activities. For these authors are also today's private individuals, citizens who earn money, pay taxes, walk down the street etc, etc. One must know that art forms depend on particular ways of thinking and a general milieu. That's why forms are continually being overtaken. Old novels entertain us, they make use of our compositional sense, they're the precipitate of such a compositional sense. And then they're really novellas made longer, and novellas are anecdotes and aphorisms made longer. Such novels are more or less aphoristic.

Meanwhile – let's say since the *Elective Affinities* – all sorts of things have happened that oppose such aphoristic, such isolating of a course of events; but authors and their publics are insufficiently aware of them. The cinema has entered the domain of the novel, newspapers have grown big, are now the most important and widespread written product, everybody's daily bread. More: the experiential canvas of today's people is the street, street scenes changing every moment, shop signs, traffic. The heroic, and especially the importance of the singled-out individual, has taken a big step back, overshadowed by factors of the State, political parties, economic structures. Some of this had been happening earlier, but now a person is really not bigger than the wave that carries him. To the canvas of the present day belongs the unconnectedness of one's actions, of existence generally, flightiness, restlessness. A sense of fabulation and its constructions now appears naïve. This is the core of the so-called crisis of today's novel. The author's mentality has not yet caught up with the times.

Joyce feels the comedy in fabulation, no question, he's out to be what he is, as much in the book as at home. How will he manage it? A polemical remark up front: it's not necessary to go about it in the same way as Joyce. It's not a single-track line. And this is an experimental work, neither novel nor poem, but a banging together of their basic elements. But it's good and of great importance for authors and the public that the path he takes be taken by one individual in such a sure and decisive manner. Cataracts will be removed from many eyes by this book; now they'll see what they get up to in their gloomy rooms for what it is.

In these sixteen hundred pages three rather banal Irish people, the advertisement canvasser Bloom, his wife, and his friend Dedalus are tracked through nineteen hours. I've read the careful analysis of *Ulysses* by Alexander West in the Swiss monthly *Annalen*. The very placid reviewer calls the book "a tragedy", and "the doom-laden expression of a doom-laden age". But it's utterly untragic, even humorous in a very strong and coarse manner, and is the most energetic attempt

to pin down our present everyday that has ever been presented in book form. To this end every fable is totally shaken off, and a minute attention to detail is required. It's worked in an impressionistic and pointillistic style. Larger converging ideas of a purpose, external or internal, are out of the question. The connection between the individually noted elements and moments is made by association. So this is the method, and in its one thousand six hundred pages the book signals the nineteen-hour lifecourse of these three persons.

To this extent the book is characterised at its core as biological, scientific, and exact. Today's human being is knowledgeable, scientific, exact; that's why the author offers a book that sits alongside science. The only difference from science is that it has no real subject. Bloom and his wife are typical figures like a horse, a fir tree, and so their description too has an exact value. And so the whole thing proceeds as real, even though it's still only "as if" real. In its most confident parts this literary work has a completely scientific stance. And not as a mask. The dream sequences in the brothel are presented dramatically just as (and because) they unfold as drama. The chapter on the pals Bloom and Dedalus heading home moves along on precise questions, e.g.: "What attracted his attention lying on the apron of the dresser? – Four polygonal fragments of two lacerated scarlet betting tickets, numbered 887, 886. What reminiscences temporarily corrugated his brow? – Reminiscences of coincidences, pre-indicative of the result of the Gold Cup flat handicap" and so on. Mrs Bloom's daydreams proceed in an uncoordinated series over a hundred printed pages lacking full stops, commas, the sentence structure dissolved.

In this way the book attains an uncommon authenticity and truth to nature. In contrast to other expansive narratives it rolls along vividly and three-dimensionally. (The book is not consistent: more confident towards the end, at the beginning old problems seem to appear.)

And yet the book has not a trace of clear sober naturalism. Something else breaks through: now things can be "poetised" anew left and right. The lives of the three characters serve Joyce merely as threads. In these two days he constructs a huge quantity of knowledge, library-wisdom, moods and fantasies. Which lends the book its name: Ulysses or Odyssey through the entirety of today's empiricism, natural sciences, psychology. Joyce's off-colour humour is very strong in its fantastical burlesque.

With this I have pointed to the book's two main characteristics. It is not for the great mass of the public, which still lives in the old flat fabulation. It is a literary advance out from the conscience of today's spiritual human. In its own way it seeks to answer the question: how can one write literature today? Every serious writer should get to grips with this book, and publishers should enable this (the subscription price amounts to 100 Mark.)¹¹

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MY BOOK *BERLIN ALEXANDERPLATZ*

Der Lesezirkel 1932 [SLW 215-217]

The Reading Circle¹² has invited me to talk at one of its evenings about the creation and style of my epic work *Berlin Alexanderplatz* that appeared in 1929, and to address the critical utterances

¹¹ : In unhappy exile in Paris in the 1930s, Döblin only once came face to face with Joyce, who had been living in the city for several years. "We looked at each other and said nothing," Döblin reported. [Robert Minder, in *Text+Kritik* 13/14 (1972), p.59]

¹² The 'Lesezirkel Hottingen' was a long-established tradition in Zurich.

about the book that have grown loud in the Press. I have accepted, and would like to offer some words in advance of my talk

It would take me a long time to relate how I came to the content and fundamental motif of the book. Here I shall say only: my medical profession has frequently brought me into contact with criminals. Several years ago I also had an observation ward for criminals. A lot of interesting and discussion-worthy things emerged from there. And when I encountered these people and many like them outside, I was presented with a peculiar picture of this society of ours: how there is no sharply defined boundary between criminals and non-criminals; how in every possible place, society – or rather what I saw of it – is riddled with criminality. This was already an unusual perspective.

Then something else. I have known the east of Berlin for decades, I grew up here, went to school, later started my medical practice. While earlier I valued imagination, and what's more a maximally unbounded imagination, in the past decade my own surroundings, the landscape in which I moved, the east of Berlin, came more sharply into view, more engaged my attention. Here I saw such an interesting and absolutely true and as yet undescribed type of people. I've been able to observe this human type at various times and in the most varied circumstances, and observe them in the only true fashion, namely by sharing in their lives, their activities, their miseries. I saw them in years of peace, then now and again during the War when I was home on leave, and I was again in their midst during the Spartacus uprising in 1919, in the inflation and the years that followed. My book is a test case of how I saw these people.

I have, too, a philosophical, even metaphysical line to touch on. Each of my big epic works was preceded by a spiritual underpinning. The epic work is the artistic form, I might say the continuation and concretising and also the testing out of the intellectual position achieved by the preceding mental groundwork. So as a rule, the conclusion of each epic finds my mental stance already superseded and shaken up. It begins in certainty and ends with a new question.

Here now, as the fundamental undertone of the book *Alexanderplatz*, is my position, which I laid out in my previous book of natural philosophy *Ego over Nature*: this world is a world of two gods. It is at the same time a world of creation and of destruction. This conflict happens in time, and we are participants. Now this line of thought connects to the earlier one of criminality. I said that society is riddled with criminality. What does that mean? Both order and dissolution are present. But it is not true that order – even merely its form and its existence – would be real without the inclination to dissolution and the fact of destruction. So, in the book Franz Biberkopf leaves prison. His nature is good, or what people call good, and on top of that he's a burned child and fears the fire. And as he goes into the world, well now, he wants to be decent, he honestly and truly wants to follow the laws of this world as he imagines them. And – it's impossible! He can't manage it. Blow after blow rains down on him and defeats him; I might also say, defeats this intellectual position.

A few remarks on the style of the book, and the critical controversies. Again and again, especially after the appearance of the English and American translations,¹³ people make reference to Joyce. But I knew nothing of Joyce until I was already a quarter of the way through my book. Later his book delighted me, as I often said and wrote, and was a good wind in my sails. Similarities can arise independently of one another at the same time, or the same thing

¹³ An error: there was only one English translation, by Eugene Jolas.

spring up in different locations. It's not hard to understand this. Some critics have praised the book to the skies, others have half-praised it with some grumbling, others have eschewed praise and railed against it in fury. All are right. I beg those especially who have railed against the book and will continue to do so to take me to their heart, for I deserve both the scolding and the taking to heart. More will come at my talk!

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POSTSCRIPT (1) Afterword to the 1955 GDR edition [SLW 463-465]

At that time I had arrived, so to speak, freshly back from India, in the mid-1920s. I came back from India, i.e. I'd been occupied for some time with an Indian theme that crystallised as the epic *Manas*.

How puzzling. I'd spent my whole life in the east of Berlin, attended the local parochial school, was an active Socialist, ran a medical practice for a poor clientele – and wrote about China, the Thirty Years War and Wallenstein, and most recently about a mythical and mystical India. People gave me a hard time. I hadn't intentionally turned my back on Berlin, it just happened, the fabulation came easier that way. But now I was able to take a different tack. One can write about Berlin without imitating Zola.

And what I set about, following the Indian *Manas*, was *Manas* with a Berlin accent. I had no particular material, but this great city Berlin was all around me, I knew individual Berliners, and so as always I started writing with no plan, no guidelines, I devised no fable, the line was: Fate, the actions of a man who has so far failed. I could rely on language, the spoken Berlin vernacular; I could create out of it. The fates I had seen and shared (my own fate too) guaranteed a safe journey.

At the beginning of the Indian *Manas*, the poor hero bemoans his fate and storms into the Realm of the Dead, to a new life. Now I saw an accidental murderer, a condemned homicide, leaving prison, and I accompanied him on his way back into the city. What models and stimuli they concocted for me! Some said I was imitating the Irishman Joyce. I have no need to imitate anyone. The living language around me is enough for me, and my background delivers every conceivable material. The simple Berlin transport worker Franz Biberkopf spoke as a Berliner, was a human being and had the manner, the virtues and vices of a human being. So, just released from his cell, he wants to begin a new life, fresh, free and frisky.

But outside nothing had changed, and he himself had remained the same. How could any different result arise? Clearly only if one or the other was destroyed – either Berlin, or Franz. And because Berlin remained what it was, it fell to the ex-convict to change himself. So the inner theme was: sacrifice; bring himself to be the sacrifice. The sacrifice theme, for those who can read, pops up early on in the book, the Biblical Abraham is meant to sacrifice his only son to the highest God, we are taken to the slaughterhouse in the east of the city, and attend at the death of animals.

Franz wanted to be "good", but what is that beyond a mere word? He must run the gauntlet, one misfortune after another. Biberkopf chasing after the Good, a hunt with eyes closed, and the horse under him dashes away, when will the two of them,

horse and rider, come a cropper? At the end they seem to have come a cropper. But when Franz lands up in the mental hospital, something in him really has changed. The sacrifice has been made, in silence. There he stands, as the ending presents him, gatekeeper at a factory, living but battered, life has shaken him up mightily.

This book, its pre-publication rejected by both of the leading Berlin newspapers, appeared in the pages of the old *Frankfurter Zeitung*, and aroused a great deal of attention. When it appeared in book form, it became a best-seller, one edition after another, translations more or less good.

And when my name was mentioned, people added *Berlin Alexanderplatz* to it. But my path was still a long way from its end.

Alfred Döblin
Höchenschwand, Black Forest
31 July 1955

POSTSCRIPT (2): Günther Anders meets Alfred Döblin (1931)¹⁴

My interpretation of Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* played a major role in my writer's CV. I had never made a literary text the starting point of a philosophical reflection; I despised writing about writing. I still recall how I devoured the novel very soon after it appeared. What excited me was not just the Dos Passos-like film and montage construction – then quite original in German fiction – but above all the representation of human beings, who, in contradiction to Heidegger's¹⁵ *Being-in-the-world* were – as unemployed and criminal persons condemned to be social drop-outs – *not in any world*. What I sought to do was take their mode of existence, specifically their disintegrating speech that reflected the disintegration of their relationship to the world (to my own astonishment I was taking notes before I had actually begun the task), and translate it into philosophy.

After dashing off a draft I phoned Dr Alfred Döblin, whom I didn't know at all. He agreed to meet, began at once to read the draft, at first shook his head (for as a doctor he was used only to the philosophy of the natural sciences), slowly the headshaking abated, and he now and then said, in his Berlin vernacular, that I seemed to him *ein ganz Schlauer* ("a right clever sort"). And when he was through with it after more than an hour he judged it "amusing, but spot-on." (I would never again be called "amusing".)

Unforgettable how, when we were not entirely in agreement over one of my assertions, to my no little astonishment (rather: terror) he began to look up the number for Franz Biberkopf in the phone book: *he* was to settle the argument, and the search was only abandoned (even at that time Döblin's spectacle lenses were thick as a finger) when I pointed out that a) Franz B was by Döblin's own dictum already dead (which took him aback); b) even if he were still alive, Franz would

¹⁴ Günther Anders: Introduction to *Mensch ohne Welt*, C H Beck 1984, xxvii-xxix. Tr. C D Godwin. Written in 1931, Anders' review of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* was not published until 1965.

¹⁵ Heidegger: Anders studied with Husserl and Heidegger. The latter was Hannah Arendt's lover before she married Anders.

certainly not be able to afford a telephone connection; and c) he was alas merely one of those puppets invented by Döblin – which in the end, scratching his chin, he “couldn’t rightly dispute”. So prankish, or so crazy, was this genius of a tailor’s son from Stettin.

Regardless of the merits of the argument in question, after this phone-book scene he suddenly seized my hand, dragged me downstairs, we walked – nay, raced – down Tauentzien Strasse, then (he holding my manuscript like a trophy out before him, possibly afraid of bumping into a closed door) we stormed into the editorial offices of *Die neue Rundschau* where he at once tried to hand it to the editor Rudolf Kayser. But he (being not very bright) was incapable of recognising Döblin’s masterpiece for what it was, and asked me (this shortly before Hitler, every night bodies were found lying in entries) if instead I could write him an essay on “the struggle of German youth”, an offer which to me, the totally unknown, was fabulous to be sure, but which I turned down with a laugh (to Döblin’s delight) because of the pathos-vocable “struggle” – in short, the two of us were given the brush-off by a nobody. In consequence, my acceptance by the elite *Neue Rundschau* was not celebrated until 1946 and my Döblin-text appeared in print more than thirty years after that refusal (in the *Festschrift* for the 80th birthday of Georg Lukács in 1965).

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THE HISTORICAL NOVEL AND US

Das Wort Moscow 1936 [AzL 163-187]

The curious fact that several exiled writers produced historical novels in the 1930s (notably, Döblin’s Land without Death and Mann’s Joseph sequence) aroused hostile queries: Why don’t these writers put their efforts into solving today’s crisis? Is this escapism? This essay, published in an exile journal in Moscow edited by Johann Becher, sought to explain.

Every novel needs a foundation of reality

How does a historical novel differ from any other? Here’s the start of a typical novel:

Night had fallen on the garden. From the mighty wall of treetops behind the house, above whose densely tangled branches it had for hours been slowly climbing, now, with a reddish glow, emerged the Moon. Klaus opened the window and leaned out over the dark garden. As always, the silent calm magic took hold of his senses. Ruth, who at his request had remained behind at the piano, slammed the lid with a decisive movement, annoyed that suddenly he was ignoring her ... etc. etc.

Everyone who reads this knows: it didn’t happen; even the author never for a moment intended us to believe that this Klaus and this Ruth actually lived and that on this moonlit night, a night with a specific date, the events he’s beginning to relate actually took place. For we’re in a novel, in the realm of invention, even if – how strange – the events are made to proceed as if they really happened and are historical. That’s how matters stand, and it’s extraordinarily strange, but important, and must give rise to reflection: if in an ordinary novel things are not narrated as if they actually happened, if they’re not narrated as if they could have happened, if the plot proceeds implausibly or improbably (compared with reality), then we reject it: it’s a bad novel.

In our case, with Klaus and Ruth making an entrance, we are ready to play along, and why? Such nights, when the moon slowly climbs above the treetops – a clear tangible image – really do occur. And a Klaus, any old Klaus, note, leaning out like that – he might be called Max or Erich – could also exist. And we are not in the least astonished in these circumstances to find a Ruth there, at the piano and becoming annoyed with him for looking out of the window. We play along because it's all possible, and doesn't have to have really happened at all. We accept the rules of the game, but we let it proceed under one condition: it must at least be possible.

So the ordinary invented novel, in order that we find it acceptable, already requires a foundation of reality. And if we ask where this comes from, and why we can't just set out a totally improbable game, a 100 per cent *jeu d'esprit*, the answer is: this is how our novel of today reveals its provenance. It is a relic, better said a stage of development of a form of narrative that *did* report on events that actually occurred. Once upon a time the epic was *the* format for informing, for spreading news, and *the* format for preserving what had actually happened. This was a time when people had no writing, no newspapers. Since information was passed on by word of mouth, elements of fable could creep in. To enhance preservation, the information was fixed in verse; the verse-form made repetition easier and fixed the content as far as possible, and these two aspects, rather than any "aesthetic intention" is the real reason for the emergence of the early epics and tales told in verse.

A clear break between truth and poetry occurred only later, made possible by new formats for transmission and preservation, most notably writing and the book, following which our own prose of narrative and reporting was able to develop. Despite this development, long after the spread of writing and printing, there appear in our present-day novels ancient – to some extent prehistoric – traces; we just mentioned one: we want to be able to believe the events in the admittedly invented novel, and things, if they are not historical, must at least be possible.

So a double task falls to today's author: at one moment to present reality recognisably and convincingly, even without a specified time and place; and at another to make of these reality-components something whereby the whole thing becomes a novel. You have to admit, this has a curious consequence. Author and audience sit themselves down with a secret understanding, and the author begins to satisfy the listener's desire, presents facts about the world, interesting and important, but mostly commonplace and in no respect accurate as to how they actually happened in some sense, but in a way that pleases the listener. Author and listener in their respective roles do what dreaming does, every night everywhere, though more tidily and robustly, in the one person who is at the same time author and listener, i.e. within the dreamer.

There is no mode of narration, of epic composition, that fails to offer an semblance of reality such as we find in the modern novel. When Hansel and Gretel in the fairytale go into the wood and meet the witch, the events and characters, the whole situation, are totally impossible. Not a trace of history. The situation is replete with errors. Things happen that contravene well-known laws of nature. But even here, in the purest form of creative writing, we find, if the tale is not purposely stupid and inane, a certain remnant of reality clearly shining through. The theme of the children, their childish behaviour, simple actions, their desires: these are real. The encounter with wicked people who lure children and abuse their innocence: this is real. And, mute but looming in the background, stand our own will and our feelings, plugging us into the plot so we can help carry the whole thing along: we see how the children behave, we note how it goes, we

want to help the children, that's how the plot should proceed. In this way the plot, the narrative, this genre of writing form reality out of ourselves.

In fairytales we see even more clearly than in the novel (which is stuffed full of reality-relics) why we swallow and welcome the whole genre. The action thus presented satisfies us. We need such relics of reality in order to have the world before us, as representers of the world, as its representatives; but only so that from now on, after true reality has been suppressed, after all the mishaps and failings of everyday life, we can plug ourselves in freely and independently, autonomously. What we apply is the law of our needs, not the laws of the physical world.

The novel is the contemporary form of the fairytale. (Of course this does not mean that the novel is a kind of 'fairytale' and that we ought to orient ourselves to actual fairytales to know how it should be done today. Dimwits and pranksters who do this should not be disturbed in their creations – yet these are our 'creative writers'.) Our whole causal view of the world is different from that of children and primitives. We cannot stand magic, contraventions of natural science. We demand even of the novel a verisimilitude and plausibility that meets our needs. Our requirement for reality encompasses an enormous amount, not just a physical and causal rightness or possibility, but also a political, social and psychological rightness or possibility. And if these conditions are met, the narrator can start, and his realm begins, with an understanding between author and reader after a certain compromise: the realm of *As If*¹⁶, a pretend reality that amuses us, thrills us, fortifies and enhances us.

Reality is ubiquitous in the novel

And so we construct in the novel a reality of this kind, a pretend-reality, pervasive and total. But the reality of the novel has, in any specific case, another characteristic that I shall point out here. It's as well to pin this down before we come to the historical novel.

Let's stick with the example of the Klaus and Ruth we cited earlier. As we said, it's some Klaus or other, some Ruth or other, that are spoken of here. So there before us, in the foreground of the novel, we see persons, and events connected with them, of a general sort. The generality of persons and events that we find in the foreground: this is the characteristic we point to here, and want to look at more closely.

We have to ask the meaning of this generality. Why does one, why does one *want* to, place some Klaus or other, some Ruth or other, in the foreground along with their actions? Here's the answer: even earlier, in the age of oral transmission, the reality being reported was only transmissible *in general*. Understandably so: oral transmission simplifies, impoverishes the content, deletions occur, to make the main plot easier to recall. And there we are, impelled along the path followed by all forms of thinking, even Philosophy: the path of Abstraction. Specifics are allowed to fall away, specifics are brought to the fore. When later we find generalities like some Klaus or other, some Ruth or other, we have no concept to explain how these are engendered by philosophy, only intermediate products and approximations. We can formulate it thus: figures and events in the epic are on a path between concrete individual Reality, and the Concept. And so even long ago there existed the necessity – arising from the way memory works and the oral mode of transmission – that led to impoverishment and simplification in the guise of Generality. Along with this came at the same time another force, with the same meaning, but

¹⁶ See footnote on *Vaihinger* in 'The Construction of the Epic Work' above.

positive. For you must not only, but also, allow specifics to fall away and bring others to the fore. This is no academic matter. Transmission involves a praxis: you want to orient yourself and take up a stance, prepare yourself for action. This is achieved by creating ideal figures and representative actions.

These two venerable forces, the drive to omit and the desire to foreground, to create generalities, are the heritage of the novel today. The drive to leave out no longer arises from the same cause that operated in the age of oral transmission – for we can fix data in writing and print – but from new conditions that have the exact same effect. You're forced to dispense with concrete, individual, total and complete accuracy, because this cannot be a matter for the novel. The novel, firstly, is not so equipped. It can't compete with photography or newspapers; its technical means are inadequate to the task. Secondly, the novel participates openly and systematically in this ideal-creation and generalising. And here a very active force is put to work by the writer: his individual imagination, the inclination to invent and combine, pleasure in the free play of notions. (But let's not overestimate the 'freedom' of these notions.)

The generality we have spoken of applies mainly to certain figures and events, namely those that stand in the foreground, those on which the author lets loose his fabulations and imagination. The whole is embedded in an absolutely genuine reality, all the time, and we do not take this as a joke. If an ordinary novel generally constructs a pretend-reality, this must rest on a solid, verifiable basis: the reality of the social environment. The foregrounded events, the plot can be general, and are in the hand of the fabulist, but they too are underpinned by the laws of reality, they have to unfold and pass muster in the light of a totally real background.

The historical novel is firstly a novel, and secondly no history

Where do matters stand now with the historical novel? I offer two test cases.

No, I will not quaff this goblet! Jost Fritz shouted into the landscape, and if a companion had been at his side – but Jost was running alone, his brow furrowed – the companion would have been hard put on this bright day to arrive at the thought that Jost, stamping along in his knight's garb, was struggling with an imaginary heavenly counterpart, perhaps an angel, approaching him with an unpleasant potion. As he ran Jost stared at the stones, etc., etc.

That's from the pretty novel *The Seed*, by Regler¹⁷. Or the beginning of the original and powerful book by Hermann Kesten, *Ferdinand and Isabella*:

King Juan was suspicious. He had been reflecting on his life. Fifty years he had been here on this good and pleasant earth. He had reigned for thirty-six years as Juan the Second. Or was it not Alvarado, decapitated today in Valladolid, who reigned in the king's heart, Alvarado the First? As the dreadful light of dawn slipped in through the window, the king left his bedchamber unobserved, etc.

We read this and know at once (we of today, maybe not a savage or someone from another epoch): this is a novel and nothing like that happened. The same applies to the events and characters that we demonstrated with our examination of the novel *per se*: a pretend-reality is presented, generally plausible and probable – only added to it is something special: the writer

¹⁷ *The Seed: a novel of the German Peasant Wars* (1936) by Gustav Regler (1898-1963), ardent Communist until the mid-1930s, then disillusioned.

makes use of historical persons and events. After our earlier remarks we don't find it odd that a writer has drawn on historical data. It's simply the old movement of the epicist towards the events of reality, especially big, striking events. And we see here the old inherent ineradicable function of the novel: to fix, preserve, and convey great events into the consciousness of the masses, the collective. However, what can we say about this truly atavistic movement appearing thousands of years after writing was invented, when there's no need for preservation.

There are people now who, for this very reason (the use of historical events and persons to represent a pretend-reality) reject the historical novel and consider the whole genre rotten. They are wrong. Only a bastard genre is bad, because unclear and misleading: like those widely distributed and beloved biographies, works neither fish nor fowl, whose authors can't make up their minds to define the nature of their territory. You can actually see more clearly here what the author does not achieve than what he achieves. He does not deliver a clean documentary historical picture, and does not deliver a historical novel. Of course such a mangling and demeaning of historical material is found distasteful.

But the situation of the historical novel is otherwise. For there exists in principle no difference between an ordinary novel and a historical novel. The historical novel is firstly a novel and secondly no history.

It is a novel. Why? It relates from beginning to end things that can never be attested historically to have transpired like that, for which the author has no documentary evidence. He lends it the appearance of reality. And finally he works under tension, wants to arouse our interest, amuse us, shock us, grip us, challenge us. So he plays with us like any other novelist, like an artist, and to do so develops the charm of his material: his language. So, it is a novel.

And the history that the novel is not? For sure the novel contains enough history, for sure the author has pored over lots of books, but the novel butchers history, it falsifies, suppresses, even more than that biography. Compared with our novelist, the biographer is a gentleman of honour. So why should the historical novel be subject to more censure than a biography? You have to admit: the only thing that can meet the enormous demand for purity that many make today, their decisive will to truth and verifiability, is genuine history, pure and unadulterated, the naked representation of things that are documented. We demand that they be represented without additions or deletions, exactly as they occurred. Even the interposing of an arranger we find ridiculous, even shameless. We want the events, not the author. At the most we permit a clearly demarcated discussion of events. But 'art'? We reject such art. We are not children. The truth of historical things – we thirst for it, thirst in the face of every unspeakable swindle that surrounds us. I'd like to believe that such a stance is totally justified. Assuming it allows any art at all to remain, it would condemn the historical novel as a stupid deception.

Whoever makes such a judgement does not have to give it up, but may temper it on inspecting two things closely: one regarding history *per se*, and one related to the role of history in the novel.

What is history? People want something from history

Let us speak of history *per se*. History itself, the writing of history, is not at all the unambiguous naked transmission of what happened. It is not at all a pure representation of actual events. We pore over the historians – Pliny, Tacitus, Caesar, on to Burckhardt, Taine, Ranke, Treitschke –

and massive tomes of history. Indisputable: no one here has the slightest intention of mixing genres. The data are in order, mostly at least. The events are in order – hold on, what am I saying? The events are in order? Scholars disagree among themselves! You see: this one reports events quite differently from that one. Schiller, in the Prologue to his *Wallenstein*, says of the historical figure of his hero: “Confused by partisan hatred and favour, his historical character fluctuates.” He says: fluctuates. Schiller, the history professor, who has read the history books of his time. Historians generally have access to the same records, but excavate them differently. There are gaps in what has come down to them, which they fill in different ways. Representing without judging is impossible, judgement is involved even in the way the materials are organised. But judgement originates in the person of the historian, his class, his times.

And so not only the historical figure of Wallenstein fluctuates; many figures, maybe all, do so. Recently a study appeared on the Roman emperor Nero, who is always presented to us as the apogee of Caesarean madness. But suddenly we hear that the old sources are worthless, Tacitus and his gang, with their reactionary mindset, lied and distorted and so on, Nero was a progressive, no worse than others of his time. So, what do we make of that. No one can guarantee that tomorrow even the sturdiest statue won’t wobble.

History-writing in general always wobbles when a new class rises. And anyone seeking refuge from the lies and falsifications of biographers and novelists by heading for solid and verifiable History comes out of the frying pan into the fire. Despair overwhelms you, unless you decide to stay with just one book! In fact this is the best advice; stay with one book and declare that this book transmits the Truth. For two are an irritation and three destroy all perspective. That two or three books are even possible is the true evil of cultural Bolshevism. The churches always knew this, and permitted only the one Book. So when we look into the writing of history, we ascertain: the only honest thing is chronology. The manoeuvres begin with the lining up of dates. And say it out loud: people want something from history. And here in all modesty we approach the historical novel.

The historian, for the most part, does not know his own mind, or does not acknowledge it; the novelist does know his mind. The historian, if he is no mere chronologist, wants to conjure up a picture of bygone reality; the novelist too, albeit a smaller picture, but fuller and more concrete. So what distinguishes the historian from the author of a historical novel? Robustly formulated: the artist works decisively and consciously, leaps about as lord and master of his little bit of material. The historian scrabbles around in his material, searches through it, is handicapped and has a bad conscience. For he pursues a mad ideal of Truth, a mad ideal of Objectivity, that contradicts every one of his classifications and fundamental conceptions. The author is not out to fool himself or us; but the historian puts on a white beard and mimes: world history is the judgement of the world.

So we have this dreadful threat: you sin against history! – maybe a little watered down. Not more than a little watered down. You can always assert: if even the history of the historian is a historical novel, then that, and that alone, is what meets our needs.

But if the novelist does in fact intend to compete with the writer of histories, is he guided by the same intentions, or by others? I’ve already stated clearly: the historical novel is firstly a novel and secondly no history. I must now say more sharply: the historical novel is firstly a novel, and secondly and as often as you like, a novel.

But, you say, this is terrible, then what is history doing in a novel, what role does it play there, do you really not want authenticity? Some authors do strive for a visible 'authenticity', with a huge investment of erudition. Think of Flaubert's *Salammô*. Does this set out to embellish the surface of an ordinary novel with the particular gleam and allure of a historically distant landscape, mere 'exoticism'? We must clarify the concept 'authenticity in the historical novel'. This is the central question. The whole framework stand or falls on it.

The novel's new function: reporting on society and the individual.

Every good novel is a historical novel.

I repeat: the author, for the purposes of his novel, makes use of certain materials from history available to him in exactly the same way that he makes use of certain newspaper articles or certain events from his own experience. He intends to play, on himself and his audience, his readers, the same game we described earlier.

But we soon see that the ordinary novel of today distinguishes itself from the fairytale *inter alia* by the quite enormous emphasising and hypertrophy of the materials taken up and dragged along. We see that regions of material, spaces of reality that we never find elsewhere in written literature, are given a place in the novel, and only there. Things of the most intimate and personal dialogic and social life, things about the individual, gender relations, love, marriage, friendship. No newspaper, no history book can orient us so accurately and penetratingly to all such highly important and powerful things. And the fame of a good author of today rests not coincidentally but in all seriousness on how true-to-life are his depictions of such personal and social phenomena. And this is not a demand from us, rather the acknowledgement of a state of affairs that every reader can confirm and of which the author is aware, although the author reserves to himself somehow a certain freedom of movement towards or away from the region of the fairytale.

And so we find, after the report-function has fallen away from the ordinary novel, a *new specific function of a reporting kind* has devolved upon it: to present special reports from the region of personal and social reality. *From this starting point, a quite characteristic authenticity begins to accrue to the novel.* I mean authenticity that is directly experienced and observed, which attaches for example to Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* or Dostoevsky's *Raskolnikov* or Tolstoy's *Resurrection*, to say nothing of many of Zola's books or Maupassant's novellas. They all attest to exactly this kind of authenticity. And readers are just as merciless as critics on this point, and we see from this that we have here an important attribute of the novel.

As matters stand, what are important and deserving of being written down are not only the brute obvious historical facts, peak history if I can call it that, but also deep history, the history of individuals and the social conditions that surround them. *In the sense of deep history, every good ordinary novel is a historical novel, and undoubtedly – for we can check it out – authentic.*

We must follow these thoughts further. We have revealed a decisively new characteristic state of affairs. Although the novel is for sure just a novel, this form is burdened and, if you will, destroyed and blasted by another tendency, by the drive towards reportage from the realities we have mentioned. A turning point has arrived. Even after the invention of writing and printing, the novel was not confined, impoverished, crippled to the status of fairytale.

If we view ancient epics as the broad trunk of a mighty tree, in the course of ages the tree has spread several branches. After the newspaper and the discipline of History spread their branches, the fairytale developed independently. But alongside newspapers, History and the fairytale, the novel found its own special place on the tree, it was no offshoot of the fairytale. We have before us a new, specific, original entity which, like the others, also attests to reality.

We therefore notice criss-crossing directions in the novel today. The novel is in a struggle of competing tendencies: fairytale entities with a maximum of processing and a minimum of material; and novel-entities with a maximum of material and a minimum of processing.

While it is a special task of the novel to attest to reality, and in particular personal and social reality, a completely new twig was able to sprout from the novel, a form that has almost abandoned the old processing aspect: namely, reportage.

Today's novel is in a situation full of contradictions. And whoever tries to discern how the novel is torn between these two tendencies notices one single trait of the novel, which I here name. A great number of readers say and demand: the book should not concern me overly much; my interest in it should be optional. Events and characters must relate to us, we must notice that we and our situation can be identified more or less with what we read there. But we must also notice: that's not exactly how it is with us. A distance must be maintained.

We, I mean a great number of readers, allow ourselves only with provisos into a situation that seems somewhat risky. We allow ourselves to be enticed into situations that in some way are exciting and frightening, but in the background we know: it can't happen to us, it's just a game, it's not us. According to aesthetic theory we have a sense of release, relief and liberation at the end of many literary works, among them novels. I believe honestly that behind it there's a certain *Schadenfreude* and smug satisfaction: it's not us who are played with in that way, who suffer this and that. You could also say that now and then we feel ourselves participating, carried away, but we let the author sacrifice some imaginary individuals in our place.

The author is a special kind of scientist. Literature is never a form of idiocy.

After this exposition, you can see there are many points that merit discussion. Is the novel a form of art, of literature, is the novelist a poet or 'merely' a writer? In the moment when the novel attains its new function of discovering and representing reality in a special way, it's hard to define the author as either poet or writer, rather he is *a special kind of scientist*. He is a special alloy of psychologist, philosopher, social observer. I would add that, in Germany, rather few authors deserve to be called 'scientist' in this sense. Mostly they content themselves with cannibalising old observations, and one book lives off another, if you can call it living, and it's written in an overwrought and at its worst a contrived language. I am not prepared to accord the name of poet to someone on the basis that he has no relationship to reality. Apart from self-observed and self-experienced reality, it is the processing, the imagination and the authentic way with language that makes the poet.

Moreover it can be seen that a certain number of other authors allow themselves to be overpowered by the old form of the novel. They cannot find an appropriate form for the autonomy of their experiences and observations as such, in the embrace of the old novel. The new scientist struggles against the novelist. Brute externalities, the positioning of the novel in

the marketplace, tip the balance. And it's not by chance that ever and again experimental novels pop up to announce the dissatisfaction of their authors with the old form.

We can check and control for the truth of what we have said by taking a look at authors. What is certain: they are separated into the awakened and the sleeping. The awakened – it is these alone I shall speak of – have a close and natural relationship to reality. They do not at all float in the clouds, as the age of overstuffed furniture would wish. Several serious writers have taken advantage of this wish, sleep has descended upon their eyes, and of course during the whole capitalist age nothing weighed so heavily on their heart as the concealment of the basis of their existence and their embarrassing background. Blinkers and hot air were needed for that, sweet-talkers, at best versifiers, poets in the clouds, daydreamers, at worst idiots. For every better sort of bourgeois it was self-evident that serious writing is a form of idiocy. If the writer is not an idiot, he is driven in that direction by not being paid.

But it is romantic, to put it mildly, when Schiller – the busiest of all court officials *par excellence* – when Schiller asserts that in the division of the Earth, all that remained for the poet was Heaven. This was just sucking up to the Duke of Weimar. The bourgeoisie has certainly always paid its lackeys badly. But it has put them to intensive use, i.e. misuse, here on Earth, just as it misuses religions and has killed off all their credibility. Serious writers and poets, I say again, are a particular kind of scientist, and so have their feet planted firmly on the ground. Because of their science they have more access to reality, and access to more reality, than many others for whom the only reality is their little bit of politicising, wheeler-dealing and haggling.

If I make any claim at all for a creative artist of today, it is this: he is totally at home on the Earth. A mystical gift? Not at all. Nor is it a mystical or neurotic weakness. A more complex seeing and thinking, a deeper empathy, a more nimble combining. What's more, it is my view that the artist in general does not represent degeneracy, but normality in respect of a humanity richly encumbered with other problems.

If you place an artist – a real one, not stupid – in front of some reality, or if he places himself before it or in some historical material, do you imagine, do you fear that he will write what people call writing, i.e. fantasize out of the blue? No trace of it, the fellow is cold, incorruptible, and has a penetrating gaze. And he sticks with it. The concept of resonance helps us understand this. He possesses an uncommonly delicate and well-developed resonator. And when certain congenial historical things (they have to be congenial to him) crowd in upon him enough, the resonator begins to oscillate, and he, the scientist, is a writer or poet if only he can now transform the resonance into language and images. It is not the mastery of a new or old form, but intimacy with reality that makes a good or better author, i.e. his resonator. With every successful work the world is again enlarged, our wealth is increased, a new Columbus voyage has reached land, a new Indies discovered.

It's impossible here once again to express adequately my distaste for the inauthentic, the abusers, those who play at art, who play with art, the art-artists, those who carry stylistic fads to the extreme and make powerful things of Nature and Art fit for the bourgeois salon. Nothing has paved the way for the lamentable slide of Art into opportunism more than its preceding degeneration into the 'artistic'.

The peculiar development process of a historical novel

We can now, I think, learn more clearly about several important matters – the question of reality in the novel, and especially authenticity – if we trace the process by which a particular historical novel developed. Something founded in his personal situation and his social position brings the author face to face with a mass of material. He is caught up in it, in ancient Carthage and Salammbô, in Spain and the expulsion of the Jews, in the Peasant Wars, Wallenstein. That resonance I mentioned has started twitching, an affinity between the author and that bygone age is revealed or created, and becomes firmer the more the facts that stream to him. It seems to the author that he ‘understands’ the age intimately, he can conjure it up. He has no intention of digging around in these trenches like an archaeologist to enhance a museum, rather he wants to make forgotten things live again in the world, open the mouths of the dead, set their dry bones in motion.

The more he goes into the details, the more competent he feels. He is in a stage of enthusiasm, a condition like that of Siegfried in the *Nibelungenlied* when he tasted dragon’s blood: he knows the language of the birds. So it seems to him he ‘knows’ this age and he will set it down in the world – he almost thinks he will make it live again. In this stage he is, despite everything, no fool, but enormously clear-sighted, sharp-eared. Now he makes an initial characteristic selection from the material, and this will more or less determine the line of the book. That’s how it appears at the start: the author feels he can board the boat and set off. And he does. Now something happens that is not too different from Columbus’ voyage, though in the novel, alas, no goldmines appear on the horizon. Off he rows, all jolly, and look: everything changes. It turns out in a way he never imagined. Everything has changed, he brought along certain guidelines, history has written this or that, but many points don’t fit, and others are not needed. Huge amounts are cast overboard. And now what does he bring into the world? Does he really bring back that bygone age that engendered such enthusiasm? The author seemed to have Wallenstein, King Philipp, the Peasant Wars down to a T. And now, when all that was needed was ‘merely’ to flesh it out, ‘merely’ bring it to life, Wallenstein and the others transform themselves. They are no longer those who were fixed in your reading, whom you had in view for your project.

What is this? The transition from one reality to another. The transition from a commandeered reality, a quite shadowy heritage, into a genuine, purposeful and affect-laden reality. The initiation of mere material into a fixed form and at the same time its specific transformation. Here comes the actual moment of the novel.

And if we ask: what’s going on? we see: here something is in train that cannot happen to the historian. The historian’s commandment: leave all the facts alone. The author is under different orders: he thinks through and feels his way through his material step by step, and if he wants to set to and does set to, he is driven not by a mad urge to objectivity, but by the only authenticity available to individuals on this Earth: *the partisan nature of the actor*.

The author’s passionate nearness to his material exists and will not be toyed with. In facing his material the author becomes aware, maybe not very clearly, what this material means to him and what’s happening here: *an argument* of a particular kind, one *not separated from the material itself* but *appearing in the figures and unfolding of the action*. We know that in a dream, the argument in and with the dream-material proceeds just like this. The author never becomes completely aware what the material means to him, why he’s sinking his teeth into it, why he gives this or that figure a voice, why he lives in this or that remarkable situation. The better and

more appropriate the choice of material, the more, and more fully, he can weave into it his own self, his whole active humanity. The bits of history, the parts he has taken over, become bits of himself, exposed one after the other, and this makes a living ongoing world.

And a second consequence arises from this bringing-alive once author and material become merged. For if the author is an open and complete person, he has not conducted a private argument with the chosen material, but has conveyed into a bygone age the fire of a present-day situation. Now we have what we were always seeking: the reality and authenticity of the historical novel. The more this bygone age has truly found in him its husband and key-bearer, the more willingly it yields to him. Events line up unforced, it's as if blindly scattered stones were waiting only for this wand, the wand of the living, suffering, acting, to rebuild themselves into a column.

To the extent that humanity is there, human thinking, feeling, social life, to that extent is authenticity, i.e. real access, possible in literature. For we are of no different timber than those out there in their graves, and the conditions and arrangements under which we live make it possible at times for seemingly quite different conditions over there to accommodate us as well.

Two contradictory driving forces in the modern novel and its practitioners

I return to the assertion I made at the beginning: underlying the novel of today, not just the historical novel, are two currents, one flowing from the fairytale, the other from the report. These currents do not originate in the air of an aesthetics, but from the reality of our lives. We carry within us, to a greater or lesser degree, an inclination to both currents. But we do not deceive ourselves when we say: the active, progressing strata push these days towards the report side, the non-active, calmed and satiated strata to the fairytale side. This is certainly a gross generalisation, a simplification, but by and large it meshes with our observations. Who would relish the pleasant mix of novels and rave about misty azure poesy, delight in traditional styles and modes of speech and yet have no interest in reality – who else but one for whom all goes well and who likes his comfort? Probably too the unimprovable, for whom everything goes badly and who also want their comfort. They want dreams, soothing, consolation. There's nothing to say against it. But they want nothing further. And there's a lot to say about that. And so the ever more bourgeois masses consume the pretend-novel, and the active among the proletarian classes like the warriors of the bourgeois classes want reports and arguments from the realm of our personal and social lives.

The historical novel in our exile literature: to what party do the active belong?

It's time finally to ask, how did discussion of the historical novel arise just at this point?

Many of us are living in exile, no longer surrounded by the society whose fate we grew up with and whose language was ours. We are, physically at least, beyond the magnetic field of the society we lived in, rejected and not yet hitched to a new one. There the active writer finds few things that he can use, that sustain his *joie de vivre*. Most of the surrounding everyday remains for a long time silent to him. This is so in every emigration. Here there arises in the storyteller a specific drive towards the historical novel. It's an emergency situation. In itself the historical novel is obviously not the product of an emergency. But wherever writers are exiled, there you find the historical novel. Understandably so, for apart from the lack of a present there is the

desire to find parallels in history, to locate and justify oneself in history, the need to reflect, the inclination to console oneself and, at least in imagination, to take revenge.

Even before the time of our exile, we were emigrants in our own country. You can be an emigrant in your own country. And not only writers, but whole portions of the population were such emigrants, namely those who lived in voluntary or compelled political abstinence. In Germany we had a large quantity of mystical, religious and fairytale literature, the literature of romanticisers, sceptics, the inactive, many pretend-objective representations. We had little active literature, emanating from the partisanship of the active and offering a newly discovered present of a personal or social kind, or an argument with it. Germany had many historical novels, by people who were not exiles, but who were they? We had the best-selling novels of the Egyptologist Ebers, then Felix Dahn's novels of the Roman and Gothic periods, then the historical series of Gustav Freytag, *The Ancestors*.¹⁸ Why are these books so musty? Not because of any literary incompetence of their authors, for some of them were distinguished masters. But because the authors were incapable, given the political castration of the Germans, of mobilising their masses of historical material. They could not press on to the only true authenticity that enables this, namely to the powerful partisanship of the active, to the will of the suffering and the aggressive, they wanted only to endorse and glorify. They were complicit.

We are not complicit. I have spoken of the historical novel. My theme is: the historical novel and us. Now I bring the 'us' to the fore.

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The reader, the audience, sits down to a novel, and it's *his own* concerns he wants to experience. It's about him, more or less explicitly. The author appeals insofar as he reveals *his own* concerns. What today are the concerns of reader and author, what are the principles by which one selects historical materials, pierces through and actively shapes them? We only have to glance around a moment and the answer is clear.

Back there in the country we have left behind, how we observed not just the economic anarchy, the stupid struggle of all against all, but along with that the bewilderment and instability of the people, their inner emptiness, the dreadful nihilism that seeped into everything and led everyone to live as best they could, unconcerned about the next man, lazy, comfortable in their solitude. And with it this immense stirring up of great and powerful masses of people, full of the best but cut off not only from real political life but also from participation in the culture and poisoned by the tormenting sense that they'd been disinherited and would remain hopelessly disinherited. So all that can grow is hatred and vengeance. And facing this terrible but natural hatred, the stance of superiority yet lived on. The moribund master class hurled its insolent and arrogant judgements over the middle-class masses, the bourgeoisie, so that the judgements were happily appropriated as their own. The masses never experienced what a society really is, neither at school nor outside. Instead they were snared and enchanted by images from the realm of masters and serfs, images of violence, war, technology, of success, of world records. The natural love of every human for the land on which he lives, for the people he grew up with, was falsified into hatred for the neighbour, into a possessive madness over frontiers.

¹⁸ Georg Ebers (1837-98); / Felix Dahn (1834-1912): hugely popular national-liberal, social-Darwinist writers. / Gustav Freytag (1816-95): dramatist, novelist, popular historian.

To unveil and pillory this monstrous degeneracy: this is the only thing that anyone who wants to write today can take with him along the way – as a task, a strength that can move the magic wand. That is the negative. Then the positive: authors must distance themselves from the sphere of violence, contempt for humanity and cruelty. They must avoid cowardice and cosy obfuscations. The terrible is not to be sought for its own sake but depicted as disgusting, degenerate. The tireless struggle of all humanity – especially the poor and oppressed –for freedom, peace, genuine society and harmony with nature provides enough examples of courage, strength and heroism. And whoever seeks this will find in every epoch more than ever suspected by the dead people back there, the miserable vehicles of violence.

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CONCLUSION

*Döblin returned to Germany in November 1945 in a French officer's uniform, which did not endear him to his former compatriots. His efforts to find publishers for new editions of his works only slowly bore success; his own section of the French Occupation Authority vetoed *Citizens & Soldiers* (the first volume of November 1918) for fear it would stir up resentments in Alsace-Lorraine.*

His "Epilogue" is consciously a swansong for his decades of thinking, writing and arguing. It was followed by several years of worsening health and limited receptivity to his books and ideas from critics and the public. Not until some years after his death in 1957 did serious efforts begin to make his works accessible, and to assess his place in the culture of 20th century Europe.

EPILOGUE

Final version 1948 [SLW 304-321]

It's probably about time to write an Epilogue.

Here lies a pile of books – “here” is the wrong word, I should say: there exist, there have been written in the last five decades, but not “here”. Some re-appear, most have gone missing. Would I feel pride if they all stood before me, and like a cherished author I was honoured with a “Collected Works”? I think not. This is not the time for collected works, such puffed-up ostentation. Let no one these days fool himself.

When cities lie in ruins, when all are doing their best to scrape along, everyone is sick of the past and no one knows what tomorrow will bring and no one is stirred to hope (or can be stirred), then the times call for a “selection”: fragments, torsos laid side by side on a trolley. Where to start, where will it end? Don't ask.

What did these books want? I still remember. I, who still feel myself as “I”, wanted nothing to do with them. There were in these things no aims, desires, intentions. But at some point I was seized by a message, a report. On each occasion there must have been some item of news or a story, for when it sparked and connected and I held it fast, it proved to be the seed in a mother liquor, a supersaturated solution: crystals grew.

I could also say that a string came into my hand, it turned out to be the end of a ball, and I began to unroll it till I reached the other end. But what I unrolled, what flowed out of me in pictures, of course, was I myself, my state at that time, and even more: something that worked in me impersonally, as Nature, and loved to take on spiritual, fantastical forms, a meteor, a stone statue, precipitating out of my substance.

When it came to an end, every time I was glad it was over.

This happened to me often, at intervals of years, and such things belong (you can read about it) to the everyday psychology of “production”. Afterwards I had no wish to see the offspring, my “product”, and if it came into my hands I hardly recognised it and pushed it away. It repelled me a little. Such a strange self-consciousness, such an “aura”, during those periods. It lent a peculiar knowingness, a clairvoyance.

What did I know of China or the Thirty Years War? I lived in this atmosphere only for the short span of the writing. Importunate, harshly lit vivid scenes placed themselves before me. I scooped them up, wrote them down, and brushed them off. There they lay in black and white. I was glad to have no more to do with them.

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My obsession with writing began early. My first pieces were written at age 14, in a little blue notebook. And what did I note down at that time? God is good. He is Goodness in the world. This was the solution to the riddle of “God”.

I noticed early on that I had succumbed to religion and metaphysics – and tried to extricate myself. I read a huge amount, not so much *belles lettres* as philosophy (while still at the Gymnasium, around 1900), Spinoza, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. Spinoza most intensively.

Why did I try to extricate myself from metaphysics and religion? Perhaps because they were splitting me in half. I had little chance to talk about the things that bothered me. There were

discussions galore during my schooldays, but nothing and nobody I came across was capable of acting as a spiritual midwife. And I remained in that state while living my life in bourgeois society, a medical man and one with a deep interest and involvement in things of the world, moving among them (untidily, without discipline, without guidance) as best he could. But inside, this entity carried around a strange character that quarrelled with the man outside, the medical man, the one living in society, and never reached an understanding. It never could reach an understanding.

*

When I wrote I took care not to compete with Nature. It was clear to me from the start that one is faced with this reality. The task, after all kinds of naturalistic principles were proclaimed as challenges, was to depict this confrontation.

Around 1900, when I left school, at the start of my student career, I came into contact with Herwarth Walden (he too lived in the east of Berlin, in Holzmarktstrasse, his father was a medical consultant). We made fun of the current idol of the bourgeoisie, Gerhart Hauptmann and his inauthentic fairytale feyness, and the cramped classicism of Stefan George. The author of *Buddenbrooks* was already there; we ignored him.

One came across Else Lasker-Schüler, Peter Hille¹⁹ in the Café des Westens²⁰, occasionally at Dalbelli's on the Potsdam Bridge. We had close contact with Richard Dehmel²¹, with Wedekind²², Scheerbart²³.

Around that time (1905) I wrote a play *Lydia und Mäxchen – A deep bow in one act*²⁴ which was performed in a matinee alongside a piece by Scheerbart at the Residenz Theatre in Berlin in 1906. It was the protest of a written and acted play against its author. The characters and scenery come alive and make themselves independent. They speak and act differently from what the author believed himself able to require. During the performance they drive author and director from the stage and in an impudent and provoking manner bring the tamely composed script to a gory conclusion.

Around that time I worked in Regensburg as an assistant doctor in the local mental asylum, and wrote a long abstract piece reflecting on music (I no longer know why I did this), with the title *Conversations with Calypso on Music and Love*. Parts of it were printed in *Der Sturm*. That journal also took my early short stories, fantastical, burlesque and grotesque pieces that I later collected in the volume titled *The Buttercup Murder*.

¹⁹ Peter Hille (1854-1904): Bohemian, often homeless writer, in 1902 set up a literary cabaret in Berlin with several leading lights of the avant-garde.

²⁰ Café des Westens: also known as Café Grossenwahn (Megalomania). Gathering ground for Modernist artists and writers and their hangers-on.

²¹ Richard Dehmel (1863-1920): Expressionist writer; became one of the best known WW1 German poets.

²² In a 1947 letter Döblin wrote positively of playwright Wedekind (1864-1918), having earlier been sharply critical: "In life he never achieved the position he deserved. He was not seen aright, not properly appreciated."

²³ Paul Scheerbart 1863-1915: poet, sketcher, wrote phantastical fictions; forerunner of the Expressionists.

²⁴ *Lydia...*: first performed 1 Dec 2005 at Walden's Salon for the Friends of the Art Union (not at the Residenz).

The worthies around *Der Sturm* enjoyed these pieces, which seemed to them “expressionistic”, flesh of their flesh and blood of their blood. But when I raised my visor and let rip with *Wang Lun* (1912), the game was up – now was my true beginning. Neither Walden nor any of the others from the circle of the orthodox said a word about the novel. But we maintained friendly relations. They developed (with Stramm and Nebel ²⁵ in the lead) into pure word-artists, artists anyway. I followed other paths. I understood that lot well, they never understood me.²⁶

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Expressionism and the genres associated with it remind one of the East Asian philosophy of Zen. Just as the latter thaws out a logic and wisdom considered “normal” but in fact frozen, so Expressionist art turns its back on the smoothness and shallowness of “beauty”, which it attacks and demolishes. This is not a merely formalistic turn, even if the fights around it focus on form.

But this was not enough for me. I turned my back even more than the Expressionists on the kind of “beauty” we had inherited, and was for that reason deemed by them an apostate. I never took literature and art very seriously. My view was that one should make use of values and literature for other purposes, important purposes. What were these?

I saw how the world – Nature, society – rolls over people, rolls over the person, like a heavy iron tank. Wang Lun, the hero of my first extensive fiction, experienced this. Along with other casualties he withdraws, still alive, from this violent misanthropic world, and without attacking it poses a challenge. It rolls over him and his friends anyway. In this case it proves to be the stronger. Nothing else is proven.

I couldn’t stand still at this point, the process was too weighty and sombre. I had to pursue things farther. And I didn’t want to be fettered by the weight and the sombreness. So I turned smartly about and arrived, quite unintentionally, in fact completely against my will, in daylight, fresh air, and burlesque. *Wadzek’s Struggle with the Steam Turbine* was to have been followed with a *Struggle with the Petrol Engine*. But war came just as I wrote the *Steam Turbine*, I served as a military doctor in Lorraine and Alsace, and was surrounded by the noise of war and the misery of wartime ailments. For weeks on end the thunder of cannon fire from Verdun.

So I leapt down from my *Wadzek* steed and mounted another nag, *Wallenstein*. In *Wadzek*, the man floundered breathlessly along in the wake of technology, he kicked out, cried, stumbled, went down on all fours, and then another came running along wheezing. But in *Wallenstein* someone stood there and did not budge. The book should really have been called *Ferdinand the Other*. I knew this. But *Wallenstein* denoted the time and the circumstances. Here I let myself go. I was awash in facts. I was in love, excited by these documents and reports. I’d have liked to deploy them verbatim. Insofar as events in history occurred, they were authentic and complete.

Among them, as ringleader and commander of facts, as their motor, stood the man of facts, the sceneshifter of history: Wallenstein, wood of their wood, iron of their iron, granite of their granite, certainly not flesh of their flesh, for there was no flesh. And if I had left this man to his own devices, it would have meant thirty years of war. But why depict this and conjure up

²⁵ Otto Wilhelm Nebel (1892-1973): painter, actor, Expressionist poet.

²⁶ Worthies around *Der Sturm*: Döblin namechecks Rudolf Blümler (who staged several *Sturm* events); Lothar Schreyer (editor 1916-26); August Schramm (senior postal official and Expressionist wordsmith); Franz Marc (painter and writer from Munich); Oscar Kokoschka (painter and writer).

memories, with the thunder of Verdun in the background? Neither the Thirty Years War nor the thunder of Verdun spoke to me.

And so to Ferdinand the Other, the Emperor (whom I had to create). I set him conversing with the almighty facts. He answered the thunder. Result? He gives up.

That's how I saw things at that time. Like Wang Lun, Ferdinand faded from the "world".

*

No, there's nothing left for a man to do but give up. That was my general insight at the time. Openly and furtively I took pleasure of a Spinozan kind in grandiose phenomena. No doubt I saw humanity, its Ego, its suffering. But I showed no mercy to it or myself.

So here I was, led back to the same place. For however prettily the historical events were packaged, I was not deceived as to the weakness of the position, the indecisiveness, lack of courage of this suicidal opposite number.

So my next venture was not an isolated historical event, but Technology, the power latent in Man, and I embarked on *Mountains Oceans Giants*. This time a quite general theme: What will become of Man if he continues living this way? (The years that followed provided some examples.) It was as if I called myself to order.

In a book that sweeps over epochs and spaces, I was able to report on the development and misuse of technology, to the point that it embraces biological praxis, undertakes alterations even in humanity, its own originator, and how it leads humanity back to the Cretaceous. The horrified remnants of humanity now bend the knee and sacrifice humbly to primal powers.

"Sacrifice" and "humility" were my inventions, this insight, but not yet the inner power. Now I was at the end of the road with masses and enormous collective forces. Yes, up to the *Giants* book I had clung to the sublimity of the created world and been on its side. With the exhausting efforts on the *Giants* book, enough had now been done to me.

*

There was a pause – and then I set off again to see where I stood. Some people undertake such exploratory journeys through reading, others through conversation and lengthy, penetrating introspection. Something of the sort precedes my books. But the real process of introspection and discovery occurs during the writing itself. The peculiar, bitter, fatal fact is that – each of my books ends (for me) with a question mark. Each book throws the ball to a new one.

After reaching the end of the "mass road", I was led to the individual human, the person. I did not consciously draw this conclusion from what had gone before; my unconscious, which I usually left alone to do its work for me, did so.

Once I found (in Berlin, in the city library on the Marstall) a travelogue from India with many pictures and lots of history.²⁷ This was a new area for me, and it was fantastically, tropically bountiful. I was enthralled by reports of Hinduism, of Shiva the God, of a Realm of the Dead. I saw a man intruding there, someone from our world, prepared to be torn to pieces by the sorrow he finds there in the world of the dead. He wants to be assailed by all earthly pain, bind himself to all the pain, because he knows, having returned from war, that we are all one and the same,

²⁷ travelogue: probably E Schlagintweit: *Indien in Wort und Bild*, 2 vols 1880-81.

all brothers, the murderer and the murdered, the executioner and his victim. He dares the terrible journey and breaks down. But Savitri, a woman (a Goddess, divine love) raises him again; he returns as a new man, a demi-god. Thus, written in free verse, was *Manas*, an epic poem.

Up till then my books had had a kind of success of attention. The actual book market was occupied by other authors. There you could find tales of love, marriage, crime, lots of psychology, and the educated public also liked their education to be served up in novels; they were served with contemporary issues, cultural problems with a dollop of philosophy. This is the essayistic, Sunday supplement degeneration of the novel.

My books could not join in. I presented images, and everything was dense, too dense for newspaper readers.

Added to this was the distinct style of each of my books, which was not laid over it from the outside. I had no style “of my own” that I carried around with me all the time as mine (“the style maketh the man”), rather I allowed the style to emerge from the substance.

So here, in *Manas*, free rhythms and an Indian world: it was too much. This book was spurned. “How on earth did you light on this?” asked my publisher, old Fischer, in dismay once the disaster had unfolded.

For me, the book was all right. From this point on came books which pivot on the individual human and the mode of his existence.

*

Manas: even he let me go, unsatisfied, though I let him return to his mythical landscape as a demigod. The question *Manas* threw to me was: What happens to a good man in our society? Let’s see how he behaves, and what our existence looks like from his angle. This became *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (a title that my publisher absolutely did not want to accept, it’s just a railway station, and I had to append a sub-title: *The Story of Franz Biberkopf*).

Of course I didn’t write this book – rather, it didn’t write itself – in free verse, but in the accents of Berlin. But blindly – these being the critics of our age – they made short shrift of the book: “successor to Joyce.” Even if I should be beholden to someone and follow them (something I have absolutely no need of, I manage both style and substance quite well for myself; my motto is: “I live in a house of my own, and have never copied anyone else, and always laugh at any master who does not laugh at himself”) – if I did have to follow someone and borrow from them, why go to Joyce, the Irishman, given that I became familiar with the style and methods he used (which I much admired) at the same place he did, among the Expressionists, Dadaists and so on.

Alexanderplatz has a style suited to it, as did *Manas* and *Wallenstein* (admittedly you need some acquaintance with these to see it).

This book (misunderstood as a depiction of the Berlin underworld) was a success with the public, and I was nailed fast to it. This didn’t stop me from proceeding farther down my road, and disappointing those who want a consistent template.

“Sacrifice” was the theme of *Alexanderplatz*. Depictions of the slaughterhouse, the sacrifice of Isaac, the recurrent refrain: “There is a Reaper whose name is Death”, should have made this clear. The “good” Franz Biberkopf, with his claims on life, endures unbroken right up to his death. But he was supposed to be broken, he had to give up, not just externally. But I had no idea how. Facts leap out at you, but paralysis doesn’t save you.

*

To run this problem to earth, to get behind the secret of a breakdown and what leads to it, I now set in motion a man similarly comfortable in his body, but this time excessively arrogant, a Babylonian god. This god “Conrad” was burdened with crimes, a much more serious criminal than Franz Biberkopf, the simple transport worker from Berlin. But he was even less inclined to work on and with himself.

This book, *Babylonische Wandlung* (*The Babylonian Exile*), makes a shocking mockery of the idea of sacrifice in *Alexanderplatz*. The god Conrad has not the slightest thought of atoning, he never even acknowledges that he has abdicated, lost his throne, and maintains this stance throughout. I’ve no idea how my plan skidded away from me as I wrote. A mischievous imp played a trick on me. It was a setback. I struggled with his comings and goings.

So I went into exile in 1933 carrying this book. It got me no farther, and indicated a resistance, an obstacle and rigidity in me. It’s as if I felt something coming close, and barricaded myself against it.

*

In 1934 in the Paris suburb of Maisons-Laffitte (in exile I had a lot of time to think) I tinkered around with a little Berlin novel *Pardon wird nicht gegeben* (*Men without Mercy*). A family story with an autobiographical topping. I say “autobiographical”. This is progress. I dared to approach the hearth. Earlier I had declared haughtily: “The epicist has eyes in order to see into the distance.” I was not fond of lyricism, I wanted events, incidents, figures, a stone façade – and no psychology. (In those days I did a lot of observing, and my profession was Psychotherapy – of others.)

*

Very soon after this excursion in the form of a novel, I encountered Kierkegaard in the National Library in Paris, and browsed, at first without much enjoyment, in the two volumes of his *Don Juan*. But the book would not let go of me. For the first time in ages I read with attention. I made notes.

But there, in the same great library, I stumbled on something else: atlases. And then ethnographies with marvellous pictures. I was caught, lured away from Kierkegaard. Maps of South America with its mighty Amazon river: what a joy. I always had time for water, for the element of rivers and seas. I wrote about water in *Ego above Nature*, and celebrated oceans in the Utopian book.

Now, the Amazon. I immersed myself in its character, this marvellous being, river-ocean, age-old thing. Its banks, its animals and people belonged to it. One thing led to another. I read about the indigenous peoples, stepped into their history, read how the White Man invaded. Where had I come to? Again the same old story, hymns to Nature, praise the wonder and glory of this world? Same old dead end?

Soon I began writing, really with one idea: to give to this river-ocean what was the river-ocean’s, and show its people, and not let the Whites near. This was the first volume: *Land without Death*. (Oh what slow progress one makes.)

But in the end Las Casas butted in. The man began to complain. His voice would not be drowned out by the rushing of this marvellous river. I allowed people to enter alongside the hymns to Nature, and the next volume was done, the ball flew on.

Las Casas' appearance at the end of the first volume turned the rest into prologue. It was no dead end.

And now it became the magnificent humanitarian effort: the Jesuit Republic on the Paraná. Christianity in a struggle with Nature, and in a struggle with inadequate Christians. A new theme, I wanted to learn from it and test myself. I couldn't evade the theme, it pursued me, apprehended me just when, at the end of the first volume, I was acting as if I'd outrun it.

And yet I did evade it, I extracted myself as smoothly as I could. That accounts for the vibrancy and shimmer of the style, also for the cheerfulness (of Conrad, who would not atone), for the worship of the primal powers of Nature. But within it there stood unmoving a reserved profound reverence. Religion stands there in silence –

The swan-song of this South American novel (*A New Jungle*) could not help but depict the terrible inconsolable scorching sense of loss that still remains.

After that, Kierkegaard came to the fore and now, 1936, I devoured one volume after the other. (Oh, at that time my eyes were good, I could read and read.) I excerpted large parts, filled notebooks. He shook me. He was honest, alert and true. His results did not interest me as much as his style, his direction and will. He pushed me towards, not Truth, but Honesty.

And after I had satisfied my desire for adventure with my South American book, I returned to my native shores. I thought of Berlin, that distant city, and examined in my thoughts, as I had done in 1934 with *Men without Mercy*, how it had all come about. I wanted to lay out the old landscape and in its place a man, a kind of Manas and Franz Biberkopf (the test probe) so that he could test and experience himself/myself.

First I erected the landscape, set the scene (in the first volume of the narrative work *November 1918*) in a military hospital in Alsace, where I had worked as a doctor in the latter part of the war, 1917-18. And soon the man came towards me, a patient whom I shaped and fixed on to carry his and my burden in the novel.

Two things ran alongside each other and together: the tragic fizzling-out of the German revolution in 1918 and the obscure motives of this man. The question raises itself in his regard: how he should begin to act. But he wants to. From what starting point? On what basis? He has to decline to reach a decision. He cannot choose between two and three sandbanks as a foundation for the house he will build. The story becomes heaven-and-hellish. The man, Friedrich Becker, is surrounded by hallucinations. He must pass through the "gate of horror and despair". He stays alive. In the end he finds himself broken and transformed into a Christian. (This happens in volumes 2 and 3.)

He carries the Christianity he has attained through the final volume (*Karl und Rosa*). Heaven and hell continue fighting in him. Deteriorating outwardly, eaten up inwardly. But – he is raised up.

The book *1918* floated on ahead of me. It was completed in 1941 in California. Between the third and fourth volumes lay the year 1940, the dreadful invasion of France. Later I wrote about a resulting "fateful journey" through that country.

Then I myself was granted what had eluded my Conrad but not Friedrich Becker: an enlightenment. The enlightenment was complete. The standpoint was given. Another view of the world, another kind of thinking. I tested my new situation thoroughly in a book *Der unsterbliche Mensch* (*The Immortal Human*). I looked around the house I had entered. I strolled through the rooms, whose doors opened to me. I wanted to say nothing new, nothing invented, only to report what I found and how it looked here. Not a novel, no: a report, description, and a comparison with earlier: hence the dialogue and the appearance of the younger man.

*

After writing this and setting it aside, things did not go as they usually do when I finish a novel. Earlier, in between novels I used to start a bulky file of reflections by means of which I used my consciousness, in thoughts and not in images or characters, to capture what the person who bore my name said to himself and to existence. So, I once wrote (after *Mountains*) the book *Ego above Nature*, and after *Alexanderplatz*, *Unser Dasein* (*Our Existence*). With each such spring-cleaning I came a little bit farther, just a little bit. “I” found that the shaping and the encounter with a whole whirling world brought me farther, contact with this reality meant something. Now: how should I haul myself along in the face of things? How should I, the former worshipper of “the world”, appear before it? It was out of the question. All my epic works up till then were tests. Now there was nothing more to “attempt”. Now I must present myself to the “world”. It was time to set myself more securely and firmly on the ground, which was no collapsing sandbank.

I hadn’t lost myself, hadn’t become a zombie. A couple of stories shot up, surprising me. I quickly wrote them down and admit: I’ve no clear idea how they came to me: goblins at work, again. These were *Der Oberst und der Dichter* (*The Colonel and the Writer*), and two comic stories, burlesque bits of fun, a mix of seriousness and clowning: *Materialism: a fable* and *Traffic with the Beyond*.²⁸

But as well as these little tales I had sketched other material. I had the idea of putting it together and completing it. They should, I thought formally, be narrated to someone, like the Arabian Nights. But how, and for whom?

As I asked this I was already writing my Hamlet novel [*Tales of a Long Night*], and already preparing the person the stories should be aimed at. He was ill in bed, was confused, torn apart – it was Edward, coming home from the war and unable to find his bearings. He becomes a Hamlet, always questioning his surroundings. He does not want judgement, but earnestness and urgency: he wants to know what has made him and everyone else ill and bad.

And the situation is actually a dreadful one, and slowly he brings it into the light. Truth, only Truth can heal him. And throughout the diversions and sidetracks we indirectly, and ever more directly, receive information, and in the end confessions and admissions. A rotten sluggish situation is revealed, the family comes more and more into ferment. Finally tragedy strikes, but along with it, catharsis.

²⁸ Both stories translated in *Bright Magic: stories*. Döblin notably does not mention his only explicitly Christian work of fiction: *The Pilgrim Aetheria*, which according to his wife was his favourite work. It has been largely ignored by the lit. crit. industry.

The book might have been the first of a series, if I were younger. But all questions must cease sometime. The book was written mostly on German soil.

*

So all that was written over decades, and I can look at it and say: "That's me."

One kind of thinking is the Whole, sometimes (exceptionally) abstract, mostly tied to a thousand facts and events. Thinking does not go around naked, it draws to itself a throng of facts and pulls them like a hood over its head. I can ask questions, I can think thoughts. The Whole, however, this Masquerade, and why this and not that masquerade, this mixture is something special. It is a thickening, compaction, growth, the formation of a growing thing, and belongs in the realm of spiritual germination, sprouting and formation of offshoots. (The word "Kunst" ('art') has obscure origins.)

Products of this kind break through the individual form. Just as in the physical world metastases grow from tumours, so the spirit turns out such products. The preceding abstract thinking can then be interpreted as the stimulus for bud formation.

Whether this can exert any influence on others, on "the people", I have never enquired. But I was conscious that, even without looking around at the environment, it is always present. A person does not grow alone. Even when one is dead and puts forth no more buds, one is still an effect in the great spiritual web, and is present.

*

Maybe I'm dreaming it all.

What do I know, actually? I know that in this world-age, jostled, abandoned, spellbound in the bleak heavy circle of this eon, that we human beings have a hard time. We rub ourselves raw against the walls that surround us. We beat our fists on them and hear the smack of our hands and how we scream. We try to break out of the dungeon, and that is the other sense of the "thickening" of language in poetry, our intellectual poetical efforts to "create".

But we won't let it rest. We cannot decide. Our damnable spirit can never stay quiet. It's the heritage of Cain. Every one of our days is a reprise of the fall from grace. Yet our spirit dreams, and hopes that it will attain something, it knows not what.

Satan goes amongst us. Do not doubt it. Do not be fooled by the bright light of day. And electricity gives no true light, and the atom bomb blows nothing up.

But there exists the eternal, good and just God. Only in his presence is the horror comprehensible. How far we have loosened ourselves from him is evident. The trepidation, inconsolability, the misery here call to him.

Just as sun and joy are emblems and fragments of Heaven's completeness, so is the whole of Heaven there, and the eternal God – among us he's called Jesus – once descended into our flesh and in this desolate housing ignited the old fire.

All a person should do is glorify God, praise the heavenly, and first and foremost this action that protects us from nothingness: Jesus of Nazareth, born of the sweet mother of God, laid in the manger, he grew, bestower of mercies, miracle worker, teacher among people, who headed straight for the martyr's cross in order to remove from the world our ferment and rottenness, this human putrefaction. For he saw: we cannot help ourselves.

What can be the content of existence, what tasks does it set us, by which the gloomy nature of our existence can be justified, if not this: to obtain purification, uplifting, straightening out, prepare to free ourselves from evil, loosen ourselves from entanglements, from the shameful debasement that evil brings.

Blessed is he who has more than eyes, more than logic and mathematics. Blessed is he who can mature without toil. But blessed too are we who during our lifetime have enquired, sought and strayed, blessed are we even if we limp into harbour wrecked, and stand or lie at the foot of the lighthouse that our inner eye has always had in view.

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Also edited by C. D. Godwin:

**THE CUTTING ROOM FLOOR -
Eight outcast and orphaned pieces from the prolific pen
of Alfred Döblin**

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1. Dunkirk Flotilla (1941) - *Döblin's contribution to the script of MGM's 1942 blockbuster Mrs Miniver never made it to the final cut, so he missed out on the Oscar for Best Screenplay.*

2. Doctor Döblin (1917) - *This first anguished attempt at autobiography remained unpublished during the author's lifetime. Only ten years later was Döblin able finally to face down the traumas of his childhood.*

3. German Conditions, Jewish Response (1924) - *This response to a questionnaire from an editor was first published in 1986 from an MS found in the archive. It was written during Döblin's lengthy travels around Poland in late 1924.*

4. Summer Love (1933) - *This tale of a stunted Ego was included in Unser Dasein ('Our Existence'), published in 1933 and promptly banned and burned by the Nazis.*

5. Lost Letters: the muse who must not be named (1940s) - *The role of Yolla Niclas in Döblin's life and work from 1922 until his death is still a taboo topic in the scholarly world.*

6. Stauffer and the Women (1942-44) - *This novella-length storyline, written in Los Angeles exile, was cut entirely from the 1980s English translation of November 1918: a German Revolution. It resonates with several themes in Döblin's own life.*

7. Conversation in the Palace of Ch'ien-lung (1912) - *One of many offcuts from the manuscript of The Three Leaps of Wang Lun, this piece is notable for the density of the evoked atmosphere, and the synaesthesia at the close.*

8. The Pilgrim Aetheria (1947-49) -

This explicitly Christian tale was not published in Döblin's lifetime. It has been largely (and unjustly) ignored by the German literary establishment, and the reading public, since it first appeared in 1978.