

S2Ep5 - The Conversion

- KK: Welcome all you adventurous readers to the Epic Worlds of Alfred Dublin, where we explore the life and works of this fascinating but little known early 20th century writer. Brought to you by the website Beyond Alexanderplatz.
- CG: Hello everyone! Welcome to Season 2, Episode 5 of our podcast. I'm Chris Godwin, and I'm here with Katie Kavanagh.
- KK: Hello, everybody. I'm very happy to be here today. We've had a few problems getting to this point, haven't we, Chris? Episode 4 was a while ago. Now we've tried to record this particular episode, Episode 5, twice already. This is the third time. I can't believe it. Each time we've had a series of things going wrong: signal cutting out, pouring down with rain, all sorts of things happening. So, you'd better take it from here.
- CG: Okay. I should warn you, my neighbour is having some work done on his roof today, so there may well be clattering sounds during the recording.
- KK: OK. But third time lucky.
- CG: Yes Now, Episode 5 covers quite a quite a fraught episode in the life of the Döblin family. Because here we cover his decision to convert to Roman Catholicism, which he knew was going to be immensely controversial and was going to lose him friends. And indeed, the reception from his cultural circle of friends and collaborators and so on was extremely negative. They thought, oh, the poor old fellow must have gone a bit mad, or his mind's not in the right place. And it really coloured the rest of his life.
- KK: And as we'll see, he was quite clear in his relationship, we're going to hear that later on in this episode, some of the letters he wrote to his son, one of his sons, about staying quiet about everything.
- CG: Oh, yes.
- KK: Not rocking the boat. Keep your opinions to yourself.
- CG: Yes. Well, he managed to keep it to himself for a year and a half. So in 1910, he attended a revivalist meeting in a circus tent on the edge of Berlin. And he wrote an article about it, which he called "Christianity with trumpets". And his view was that, uh, even though there's this really deep crisis of religion in our age, you're not going to rescue the situation with circus tent evangelism.
- KK: Right. So in order to have gone to the revivalist event in the circus tent, he must have been thinking, because spirituality has kind of threaded through many of his epics as well, so he must have been thinking, oh, I'm going to go and see this. This is a good idea.
- CG: Yes. But he was also you know, -
- KK: Otherwise why bother going?
- CG: Well, because he was very interested in all the goings on of the big city and how people were living their lives in this rather new circumstance of a massively expanded city, you know, sort of really quite cut off from the countryside.
- KK: I keep forgetting that he's obviously also looking for content and observing the world around him.
- CG: Oh yes. Yes, he was very inquisitive, very, uh, very inquiring mind.
- KK: I'm reading a thing at the moment. Um, "The Artist's Way", and it's. I can't remember the author now, Julia Cameron, perhaps, I hope that's right. Um, but she talks about artists' dates. So for anyone who's creative taking a day or at a time each week to go and do something

creative or go and see something that they wouldn't normally see. Um, so he's filling his cup, if you will.

CG: Oh, yes. Yes, I think there's something in that. So in his first two big epic novels. In "The Three Leaps of Wang Lun", at the end of that, you remember, we did a reading of the Goddess Guanyin, a statue being carried by the acolytes down the hill. And this statue then bends down and speaks to Hai Tang to console her for the loss of her two children, if you remember. And then in in "Wallenstein", he reproduces some quite sort of hair-raising, bloodcurdling sermons by two different priests, which are very indicative of the big upheaval in Christianity in the 17th century as the Protestant forces are breaking away from the old Catholic Church. Then in 1919, he wrote a very long and somewhat rambling article published in a magazine. He called this "Beyond God", which in German is very obviously a nod towards Nietzsche's "Beyond Good and Evil".

KK: Uh huh.

CG: And his idea was that people talk about God but it's just a kind of empty word. It's a slogan. You know, it's lost its meaning, it's hiding a very profound and rich and dark sort of world beyond the individual human. He says you can't identify God with Nature because human beings and nature are part of this cosmos, right? This huge universe and this marvelous thing called Life. And then the marvelous and mysterious thing called Consciousness, which you know is built on top of life. Well, in fact, some people think perhaps even rocks and stones are, are conscious, but he's working his way through it. He reads the Gospels and he sees that these are actually just a sort of novels, you know, they're a literary retelling of a story. And he's still not approaching the mystery of Christ and his birth and his life and his crucifixion. He's still looking at it from the outside. He knows there is something there which is incredibly important, and he doesn't know how to approach it, how to deal with it. Um, you know, he says the mythical content of religion has sunk to the level of a ghost story. And so it's okay. You know, people just listen to ghost stories and think, oh, that's that's fun. And and then it doesn't really mean much in the rest of their life.

KK: I see.

CG: And then in the in the 1920s, newspaper editors were always sending around little questionnaires to lots of celebrities asking what do you think about this? And then they'd fill their newspaper columns with the answers. And one of these that came out in the mid 20s was called "Writing and Christianity".

KK: Oh, so are we going to hear something like this from Döblin?

CG: Well, Döblin gives one of his answer., and he says: "I cannot see any dominant, challenging spiritual power in today's Christianity. There is no productive, expansive, outreaching spiritual power. I see churches, Christians, some pious, some impious. They argue, they're very serious people, maybe too serious, who profess to be Christians, but I've never seen how they're different from other serious, deep thinking people. Their faith has no specific, uniquely productive spiritual power." But then he's saying today's Christianity, meaning the Protestant kind, has not made enough of the enormous, fabulous fact of Jesus of Nazareth. So here you see, a few years further on, he does see Jesus as a kind of a central myth that can bring people closer to these big mysteries behind the human consciousness.

KK: Okay. And all the all the while during this, we should also mention, obviously he's Jewish. By faith.

CG: Well, no, not by faith. He's Jewish. By ancestry.

KK: Okay. Jewish by ancestry. But he's never had any – he's never practiced.

CG: He's never practiced. He had a little bit of Jewish Sunday school when he was very small, before the family broke up, when the father ran away. And he wasn't at all impressed and didn't really think very much of it. But no, he's never been a religious Jew.

KK: What about Erna? Was she?

CG: Well, she was baptized before they got married. Mhm. So, she too, I mean, they had both left the kind of the attendance list of the Jewish community in Berlin in 1912.

KK: She was baptized as a Christian before they were married? Oh, I see. Okay.

CG: So then in 1930, he responded to another questionnaire called –

KK: Sorry, Chris, can I just ask, was it by choice or was it by pressure?

CG: Who? What?

KK: Erna.

CG: Well, they were in a similar situation. They both decided, okay, they come from Jewish families, but they don't, you know, if they're going to have to tick a box called religion every time the government asks them a question about it, they thought, oh well, we'll put down Lutheran or whatever. I think it was Lutheran that they both, were baptized as.

KK: Was that because they sensed, like the persecution at the time or –

CG: not particularly

KK: Did they want to step away from, did they want to make their families sort of “safe” in inverted commas?

CG: No. I mean, they knew that there was a lot of social antagonism from the non-Jewish population. But every Jewish person and Jewish family who had been moving westward into the big cities in the 18th and 19th centuries, they knew that, well, we can assimilate, we can adopt the ways of living and the ways of thinking of the majority population. And hopefully that will mean that we're just accepted as normal human beings.

KK: Okay.

CG: But then, as the 20th century came along, it turned out that that bargain did not hold.

KK: Okay. Yeah.

CG: So. Sorry. In 1930 there was another one of these newspaper questionnaires called “On the Inner Unease of our Age”, where he starts talking about the turn away from rational, mechanistic thinking towards a hyper-rationality that was previously called irrational. A tendency to rediscover what Nature is, what the Human is. Then there should be a new but still undefined religiosity. You know, he's still grasping towards what could be a religious underpinning for human life?

KK: Mhm. Right.

CG: I think we've mentioned before, in 1939, he wrote a very important essay called “Prometheus and the Primitive.” Do you remember? Where basically he's contrasting the Prometheans – remember Prometheus stole fire from the gods, and that was the beginning of technology and and so on.

KK: The main issue is that he gave it to the humans. A gift that the gods said he shouldn't have given. And that's why he was in so much trouble.

CG: Yes. The Prometheans see the world as a resource to be exploited. And in Dublin's terms, the Primitive were people who see the world as a source of wonder. And so he traces it through 3 or 4000 years of Western history, from the ancient Middle East all the way through to the

modern world, where one or other of these tendencies is in the ascendant. You know, you have periods where the world as a source of wonder is quite prevalent.

KK: Yeah. More spiritual.

CG: Yeah. And in fact, that, concept, that division seems to me was a kind of precursor of the things that, um, Iain McGilchrist talks about. He's a neuroscientist who's gone deeply into why do we have two halves of a brain and what do these two halves do? And, uh, how do we get past all the pop psychology, the men are from Mars, women from Venus kind of thing, to see what is really going on in the brain. And he's saying now, for the past couple of hundred years the very Promethean left brain has been ascendant. And it's the left brain which likes to grasp at things and is very certain that it knows what it wants to do, and it knows that what it wants to do is the right thing to do, and it's not going to be told anything different by anybody else, meaning the right half of the brain, which is the more kind of holistic and reflective part of the mind. Um, but Döblin's essay, I think, it fits very well within that sort of paradigm.

KK: Okay. OK. So we are now in the 1930s.

CG: Well, no, I think now we can move into what we were talking about in the last episode, the flight through France, where Döblin was basically almost made suicidal by the dreadful circumstances.

KK: And he was seeking solace in cathedrals, wasn't he? He was going into –

CG: Yes. And he was looking at the crucified man and trying to see what really was this image telling us and what did the life of Jesus tell us? How did it become such a widespread religion in large parts of the world. But he's still early on in this stage where he was separated from Erna and they were desperately trying to contact each other. But he was in this internment camp in southern France. And he's looking at this crucifix, but his gaze is returned empty. "They say you have to have faith and have to be convinced. But this I lack." He says this is in his account of his flight through France, which he published after the war. "But there is something in me that draws me to the crucified man. And when I read the New Testament, I feel elated, filled with joy. He is more true and full of life than a typical human. But was he sent by God? Is he God? This is my only question."

KK: The Trinity? Yes, it's a big one.

CG: Well, okay. But he says "I know of the vast Beyond, beyond all human conception to which we believe we can give a name, and beyond all conception of that which we call God. That syllable that we say: God. But it has effects on the Earth and on us humans." Then later on in America, they've made their way via New York to Los Angeles, where he has this year in the film business that we talked about last time. But they put their son in the local high school and find that the teachers are all very friendly, very different from the Prussian monsters who rule over the classroom. But then they're thinking "we cannot allow the boy to grow up like this with no knowledge of what the world and human existence mean". You know, they can't just go through life, drift through life. And so they were thinking. He and Erna had long, serious conversations. And then a friend of theirs, a well known art historian, said, "oh, Alfred, you know, just down the road from you, there are these Jesuit priests. Have you ever had a chat with them?" And this is rather strange because Alfred, just a few years before, had written a whole large novel about the Jesuit experiment in Paraguay, where for 150 years the Guarani Indians were saved from the slave traders, and even hardened atheists like Voltaire had said "this is a great human experiment, a great humanitarian venture." But Alfred had never actually spoken to Jesuit priests. This novel, by the way, was *The Land without Death* volume two.

KK: For *The Land without Death*, where did he get his research from then, if he hadn't spoken to Jesuit priests before.?

CG: Well, he spent a lot of time in in the Paris Biblioteque Nationale. And so he was looking at atlases and the river, the Amazon caught his attention and that fired his imaginative juices to

start putting together some ideas. And then he came across the Reductions which they set up as safe spaces for the Guarani Indians.

KK: Where did he find the account that account?

\G: It was quite well known. I mean, even Voltaire in *Candide*. It's a long time since I've read it, but Candide or Doctor Pangloss actually visited Paraguay to have a look at these settlements. And so, you know, there was a lot of information.

KK: This was a good opportunity then for Erna and Alfred whilst they were in LA.

CG: Yes. Because they had concerns about their youngest son who was in his teens at this time, you know, they didn't want him to grow up to be a sort of aimless wanderer through life.

KK: This is Stephan.

CG: This is Stephan. And of course, they were also in close contact with Peter, the oldest son who was on the East coast, they kept in regular contact by letter.

KK: Is Peter in New York?

CG: New York or New Jersey. Yes. But anyway, they went along in October, November of ~~1941~~ 1940, along to this church down the road where there were two Jesuit priests who were very friendly and knowledgeable and scholarly and knew exactly what it was that they were after. And, all through that winter and the spring, they were teaching them the meaning of the catechism, the meanings behind the words.

KK: So he's in his early 60s right now, about?

CG: Yes, he's about 63 now. And at the end of November 1941, they were baptized as Roman Catholic, which as I said was a very big turning, very important turning point because it meant a lot of personal problems for Döblin, but also affected the way that the literary world and scholars and publishers and so on looked on him and his works from then on, and not always in a very favorable way.

KK: So, to get a feeling of the emotional strain that this was putting on him, perhaps we can read a few letters to his son Peter

CG: Yes, these are from October 1941 to the end of 1943. So the first letter in October 1941:

Oct 41 Peter: Petrus, your mamma has already written to you about the religion thing, and the Rosins. So now you will finally leave it alone. You surely do not want to insult anyone. And one has to be cautious about every attitude and not push oneself forward. If someone doesn't want to listen, then leave it alone, and this applies *absolutely* to you! It is *not a matter for conversation*. Best wishes, Papa.

KK: Oh yes. Don't bring religion to the dinner table. That's it.

CG: Yes. So then a bit later on, in 1942, he writes to Peter:

...You write that you were invited by Goldstein to a 'Passover Seder'. Dear Peter, the reply to such a friendly invitation seems to me very simple – I've used it several times in similar circumstances: that by birth and so-called 'race' I know that I am a Jew, anything beyond that is quite unknown to me and of no interest. I would say: "At home I never saw any Jewish religion, never had any Jewish instruction. The religion may be very lovely, but I do not like such old things that apply to just one single tribe; the religion of a Jewish nation that no longer exists is of no interest to me; I am an American, if anyone asks my nationality. A religion should apply equally to every people and every person, and there is no 'chosen people'. That reminds me too

much of the Nazis.” That, dear Petrus, you should thrust under their noses when they next approach you, and decline at once!

KK: And what was Peter's reaction? Do we know?

CG: Oh, well, I'm sure he took his father's lessons to heart.

KK: Yes. Then how old was Peter at this stage?

CG: Well, he was born in 1912. So he's in his 30s., But then in late 1943, this was after Alfred had come out, so to speak, he writes:

6 Dec 43: ...Petrus, it's nice that Frau Wendringer put you in touch with Catholic people, but please: do not forget that you must say *nothing* about my conversion to the faith. I hope you only spoke about yourself to Frau W. (If by chance about me or us, let me stress that I must and will have absolute discretion; else I should have enormous difficulties and unpleasantnesses to deal with; I will absolutely hold back *during the War*.)

CG: So even after that disastrous birthday party where he “came out” and annoyed Bertholt Brecht and worried Thomas Mann and various others, he's still insisting on keeping it under everyone's hat,.

KK: Very conscious about keeping a low profile, yes. What was the trouble: that people had helped them so much as a Jewish citizen?

CG: Well, yes. You know, with all that was going on under the Nazis. His Jewish friends would obviously see this as a betrayal. You know, he's running away from the community at a time of great peril for it. But then, on the other hand, all the intellectuals and artists would say, oh, this old fellow, he's backsliding into a kind of medieval magic. And he's not one of us anymore. So there'd be two angles which will have a very big impact on the way that he can engage with. people who previously he'd been able to get on with, you know, have robust relations with.

KK: **He was** very thoughtful about the repercussions then and obviously didn't want to ruffle any feathers. And it sounds like it was really just for them, a decision that they didn't want anyone else to share. It was a personal, very personal decision.

CG: Yes, but based on what he hoped he was going to be able to present to the world as a better way of thinking about religion, trying to overcome the agnostic or atheistic tendencies that were increasingly taking taking over in Western civilization.

KK: Can I ask, did they baptize the whole family? So obviously it was Alfred, Erna. Did they also take Stefan along?

CG: Yes. Wolfgang, of course, was already dead by this time, although they didn't have any clear proof of that yet. And Klaus or Claude was still in Marseille, or about this time, I think he had to flee to Switzerland when the Vichy government started clamping down. So I'm not sure whether Klaus followed them at some stage.

KK: Okay. But last time we mentioned the difficulties that they had with Klaus.

CG: We did. Yeah. So perhaps I should say, looking over my archives, Klaus after the war had basically broken off relations with his parents, because he was extremely miffed that they hadn't been able to wait just a couple of weeks more, when he could have caught up with them in the south of France after being demobbed from the French army. We talked about how in fact they were actively sending money and things to him from Los

Angeles. They were constantly trying to get help for him to have money orders sent across, people helping him get visas and so on.

KK: And do we know how did he react to the conversion?

CG: Oh, I have no idea. No.

KK: But I mean, it was just very sad that he should have been so kind of traumatized, I suppose, by his parents seemingly running away and abandoning him that he wasn't able to overcome it, and from the way we talked about his circumstances, even when they returned to France, that was still happening.

CG: Oh, yes. Well, it was when they returned to France, he made it clear he didn't want anything to do with them.

KK: Yes, it was just very sad.

CG: Anyway, he had this birthday party in August of 1943 with all the exiled notables there, including Brecht and Thomas and Heinrich Mann and, a lot of other people, musicians, actors, film people, writers and so on.

KK: And I'm assuming the lot of them were still in exile at that point.

CG: Of course, they're all still in exile in 1943.

KK: Yes. And naturalized?

CG: Well, some of them had managed to become American citizens.

KK: Sorry. Let me rephrase that. So what I'm saying is the majority of guests at the party were Jewish?

CG: Yes, I would think so, yes. But they were sort of the intelligentsia, you know, the smart people, people in the creative professions and so on.

KK: I think we talked last time, didn't we, about the reaction and Brecht's rather nasty remarks.

CG: We did. We read his poem.

KK: Right.

CG: But it was only really in the 1990s that a German literary scholar who'd really built his career studying Döblin in a very sympathetic way actually pointed out that his conversion was a political act. It was a reasoned, well thought out political act to try to counteract the tendencies in Western thought that had been growing ever since the mid 19th century where increasingly the clever people said, "oh, now we can do what we want." I mean Aleister Crowley around 1900, his motto was "Do what thou wilt", which is a very kind of nihilistic way of framing the human condition. I mean, if everybody just does whatever they want to do, we have chaos. So Döblin was taking a principled stand to say we really need to try to bring back the idea that there are things beyond the individual human ego.

KK: Right.

CG: And that societies which, you know, prize the ego and individual desires and do anything –

KK: Do we know that? Has he written, is there evidence?

CG: Has Döblin written about this, you mean?

KK: Yes.

CG: Well, only in the sorts of things that we've been discussing. He wrote quite a lot after they got back to Europe and he was reminiscing, looking back on his life. And he wrote quite a lot, in fact, in Los Angeles, he wrote two enormous books of religious dialogues, trying to explain to a younger man, a "sensible" young man who doesn't believe in this religious nonsense, trying to explain to him what it was about. So, yes, to answer to your question., there were two very substantial religious dialogues that eventually got published after he got back to Germany. And he also wrote a novella, a very Christian based novella called *The Pilgrim Aetheria*, which I translated last year, actually, you can find it on the website.

KK: Good plug,, yeah. What's the name of the website?

CG: Beyond hyphen alexanderplatz.com. But this novella was not really published in his lifetime. A short excerpt from it appeared in a Catholic magazine, but it wasn't published until long after he was dead. Even though according to Erna, he'd said this was his favorite of all his works.

KK: Oh, interesting. And how did you find it, Chris? And when you translated it, what was your view of it?

CG: Well, I admired the very skillful way that he, he kind of walked a very fine line between psychological plausibility and magic, if you like, or, you know, God sort of intervening directly in the story. The psychological plausibility was very striking. I mean, even quite late in the story, the heroine Aetheria was still letting slip things about her past which suddenly started to make sense of the whole disastrous series of events that led her eventually to find religion.

KK: Okay.

CG: But, you know, the reader probably needs to set aside prejudices, shall we say, in order to enjoy the story, a very skillfully wrought story.

KK: Okay. Interesting. So does that mean that we have come to the end of our episode?

CG: Right. Perhaps we could read one more letter from, Alfred to these friends we mentioned called the Rosins, who are living in New York. These are friends of his from the early 20s. He I think he was a banker, and she was very interested in cultural issues. But he wrote a very long letter to them just ~~after that disastrous birthday party~~, before their baptism, to kind of set out his rationale.

KK: Yes, yes. Okay.

CG: So shall we read that now?

KK: That would be really good. Yes, please.

CG: Okay. This is 17th September, 1941. To the Rosins:

Dear Rosins, I've been meaning to write to you for a week or so, and keep putting it off. It's a letter I wanted to write after a rather confused and quite agitated letter from Peter. But now I'll do it.

Peter writes that he spoke with you about his religious matters, which I know about, which even after discussions here in Hollywood have become stronger in him – and in so doing he experienced a very bad reaction from you. You, dear Frau Rosin, spoke apparently – I don't know whether in relation to me, or to Peter – of "betrayal". After a very tense and not very long debate, writes Peter, he felt he was actually being "thrown out". What the rights and wrongs

of it are – my old Peter being the reporter – I cannot exactly know. But let me in any case say a few things on the matter.

I am terribly sorry that Peter even broached the subject. It is wrong, it is unjust, and I have informed him of this in all clarity and with no possibility of misunderstanding, and he has told me he understands. Religion is a private matter; his relationship to certain things he would do best to keep to himself, even more so when revealing it to others, as in this case, leads to annoyance or misunderstandings.

I myself, it's true, have been occupied, through Kierkegaard, more strongly over 2–3 years with Christian mysticism and philosophy. You may have seen something of this in my book *Citizens and Soldiers 1918* (the Becker and Tauler characters); it comes more to the fore in the unpublished 2nd volume. It's nothing more than my (basically the general) endless conversation between "Ego" and "Nature". Insofar as this has been my constant line of thought, dear Frau Rosin, I'm sure you'll not speak of "betrayal".

Were I to appear in public behaving and speaking somehow or other like a Christian, especially now, that would be a "betrayal", namely of that which I also am, of Jewishness. Am I doing that? Have I done that? Not as far as I know. This story of Peter saddens me, it's annoying, even dangerous, it torments me. I have always had the same attitude towards Jewishness, nothing has changed there: we are a people that finds itself being utterly dissolved and absorbed. The Jewish religion is a national religion. And as little as we – you as well as I – feel ourselves still to be Jewish people, so little is the old Jewish religion suited to us, suitable for us. In fact, dear Rosins, we have never had occasion to talk to each other about religion as such. It never seemed to me that you were Jewishly "pious", in any event we never had cause to discuss it. – Why, I now ask myself in all seriousness, why are you two, to whom I am honestly so cordially devoted in friendship and who I personally love – and how many people does one have, especially now, with whom one can have such a relationship – why suddenly are you angry with me about a – fundamentally absolutely unchanged – line of thought?

If, which is not the case, I were today or tomorrow to become Catholic or Protestant, why should I not do so – as long as it remains "in my bosom". We now know that Bergson, publicly a Jew, was for years a Catholic, but he kept it to himself as a private matter and knew that revealing it at that time would be to stab his own people in the back. My connection to the Jewish people in recent years even became politically active – and I have appeared in public 1000 X as a Jew even though already in 1912 in Berlin, i.e. before the First War, I left the Jewish community and religion – you can find this printed in the "Jew[ish] Lexikon" etc. However – I did not hide away in a corner; because a battle was raging I was and remained a Jew. And so now – even if my reflections of a philosophical kind should urge me to become a Buddhist. – (Here in Hollywood many American Jews are followers of "Christian Science".)

Dear Rosins, what I've written is incomplete and maybe not clearly expressed. Actually I now believe that everything Peter wrote was misunderstood or exaggerated.

Allow me to add that otherwise we are living peacefully (probably my last weeks with MGM; they probably won't renew our contracts; Heinrich Mann is already dismissed).

I hope to hear good things from you soon! With the most cordial greetings,
your

D Döblin

KK: Do we know Chris, if they or how they responded to that?

CG: Oh, they stayed friends.

KK: They did stay friends. Oh, good. Earlier you said that somebody wrote about it being politically motivated.

CG: Yes.

KK: But everything that you have read out in terms of his letters is very much "Keep it quiet, don't tell anyone." And it's no one else.

CG: Until after the war.

KK: Until after the war. But this was after the war?

CG: No. It's still 1941. Come on Katie, when did the second war end?

KK: I keep thinking that it's in the 60s because he's in his 60s!

CG: Oh, Katie! No, no, this is still in the middle of the war.

KK: So then after the war, how did things change? What did he say after the war?

CG: Well, he published these two enormous religious dialogues. He presented himself when he was back in Germany as a French Christian rather than as a German Jew, which also annoyed an awful lot of people.

KK: Um, okay. So that's when things changed.

CG: Yes. Well, I mean, they changed from August 1943, when the intellectuals who'd been at this birthday party where he came out, all started muttering about it, he's obviously ill, he's backsliding, you know, and so on. And this colored the reception of Döblin and his works even for decades after his death. But this representation of it as a well considered political act was an extremely useful corrective to the received wisdom of what this conversion meant. But it's, s just very sad that it did have this negative effect in his last years when he was increasingly in very ill health.

KK: Can you remind me, what age did he die?

CG: He died in 1957, so he was just 79.

KK: Ah, right. So it's really interesting. I actually really like talking about this sort of thing. I wouldn't mind talking about it at the dinner table! And I'm not particularly religious myself, but.

CG: Well, no, nor am I, but I mean, it's fascinating.

KK: I like to think that I might be spiritual. I enjoy my walks out in the great nature.

CG: No, I think like me, you're aware that there is a vast cosmos out there.

KK: Yeah, absolutely.

CG: Beyond the human being.

KK: And I love hearing what other people believe as well. I think that's so interesting. I mean where we're living right now, at the time that we're at, here within the UK, I guess, you know, people can talk openly about religion and it's quite nice. And I think probably some places they can't.

CG: We probably both react in similar ways to people who are obviously extremely egotistical and self-centered and think that they are the only important thing in the universe.

KK: Yes. Gosh. I would never take that stance. Yeah. Really interesting. Thank you for that. I think we needed this as a separate episode. I think there was enough content for it to be a separate episode.

KK: What might we be talking about next time?

CG: Well, I think perhaps we could tackle the other extremely controversial topic in Döblin's life.

KK: Oh, we fling from one contro-. We might have more gremlins with that!

CG: But I think it's time that we gave a very considered review of Döblin's relationship with young Yolla Niclas.

KK: Oh here we go. Okay, well, that could be fun, too. Interesting. So thank you so much for joining us, everybody on YouTube, on Spotify, on Apple Podcasts, and wherever you get your podcasts from. We love sharing these things with you.

CG: Yes. And it would be nice to know that we're not just sort of speaking into the void. So the website Beyond Hyphen Alexanderplatz dotcom does have an email contact there, and we always love to receive messages from any listeners.

KK: We've had some great ones, some really good ones, haven't we Chris?

CG: So all right. Well thank you for listening, and hopefully we'll be back more or less on time for another release in the middle of June,

KK: Yes.

CG: No, no, we're in June already! Oh, gosh. July! Right. Oh my goodness.

CG: Because I'm going on holiday at the end of next week.

KK: That's fine. Anyway, we'll work it in maybe a little bit slower than advertised. It's okay. Summer hours we're on now.

CG: Okay. Well thank you Katie.

KK: All right. Thank you everybody.

KK: We hope you've enjoyed this episode of the epic Worlds of Alfred Dublin. Join us next time to explore more about this fascinating writer's life and works. Meanwhile, visit the website beyond Hyphen Alexanderplatz for posts about Dublin and some of his unjustly neglected contemporaries, as well as downloads of translations. So until next time, happy reading!