

Humorous and Grotesque Elements in Berlin Alexanderplatz

Humorous & grotesque elements in Döblin's works

Henrietta Szold Schoonover

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Berlin Alexanderplatz

ABSTRACT

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Although most critics have recognized the presence of humorous and grotesque elements in many of Döblin's works, especially in Berlin Alexanderplatz, an analysis of these elements has not yet been undertaken. Döblin manipulates language to set up the incongruity which produces laughter. The paradox of establishing his own order by linguistic anarchy is both an attack and a defense of the world order. He uses satire and irony to expose weaknesses and faults in the world order; targets are both general human frailty and the specific political failings of the Germans and the Weimar Republic. Picaresque elements are noticeable in the character of Franz Biberkopf. Döblin thus uses the picaresque tradition to laugh at society; further, Döblin renders these very traits laughable, thus criticizing Franz' attitudes. The grotesque incongruities expose a world order that is hostile and threatening to man; often such a world, in which man's rationality seems helpless, is summed up in the word "dunkel". In Berlin Alexanderplatz, Franz' misguided view of the world is exposed, not only by satire, but also by the fact that he is depicted in a distorted and grotesque way.

Döblin's literary theories permit the reader to consider humorous and grotesque elements as a serious way in which the author perceives the world. Indeed, were Döblin not so intensely serious, he would not be able to see both the world's incongruities and the delight of its grand totality.

RESUME

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Les éléments humoristiques et grotesques dans Berlin Alexanderplatz de Döblin

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Bien que la plupart des critiques aient reconnu la présence d'éléments humoristiques et grotesques en de nombreux ouvrages de Döblin, spécialement dans Berlin Alexanderplatz on n'a pas encore entrepris l'analyse de ces éléments. Döblin manipule le langage pour créer l'incongru qui provoque le rire. Le paradoxe qui consiste à créer son propre ordre au moyen de l'anarchie linguistique est à la fois une attaque et une défense de l'ordre établi. Il utilise la satire et l'ironie pour mettre en valeur les faiblesses et les lacunes de cet ordre; il vise autant la faiblesse humaine en général que, plus spécifiquement, les faillites de la politique de l'Allemagne et de la république de Weimar. On relève des éléments picaresques dans le personnage de Franz Biberkopf. Döblin utilise aussi la tradition picaresque pour se moquer de la société. De plus, Döblin rend ces traits risibles en critiquant de la sorte les attitudes de Franz. Ces incongruités grotesques mettent en lumière un monde hostile et menaçant pour l'homme; ce monde, dans lequel semble impuissante la raison de l'homme, se résume souvent dans le mot "dunkel". Berlin Alexanderplatz présente la vision erronée de Franz non seulement au moyen de la satire mais aussi en donnant du personnage une image grimaçante et grotesque.

Les théories littéraires de Döblin permettent au lecteur de voir dans les éléments humoristiques et grotesques une façon pour l'auteur de percevoir le monde avec sérieux. En vérité, si Döblin n'atteignait un tel degré de sérieux il ne pourrait à la fois saisir les incongruités du monde et apprécier la beauté de son ensemble.

The Humorous and Grotesque Elements
in
Döblin's Berlin Alexanderplatz

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List of Abbreviations Used

<u>Amazonas</u>	<u>Amazonas. Roman. Ausgewählte Werke in Einzelbänden. In Verbindung mit den Söhnen des Dichters. Ed. Walter Muschg. Contd. by Heinz Graber. Olten, Freiburg/Br: Walter, 1963.</u>
AzL	<u>Aufsätze zur Literatur. Ausgewählte Werke in Einzelbänden. In Verbindung mit den Söhnen des Dichters. Ed. Walter Muschg. Contd. by Heinz Graber. Olten, Freiburg/Br: Walter, 1963.</u>
BA	<u>Berlin Alexanderplatz. Die Geschichte vom Franz Biberkopf. Roman. Ausgewählte Werke in Einzelbänden. In Verbindung mit den Söhnen des Dichters. Ed. Walter Muschg. Contd. by Heinz Graber. Olten, Freiburg/Br: Walter, 1961.</u>
<u>Babylonische Wandrung</u>	<u>Babylonische Wandrung oder Hochmut kommt vor dem Fall. Roman. Ausgewählte Werke in Einzelbänden. In Verbindung mit den Söhnen des Dichters. Ed. Walter Muschg. Contd. by Heinz Graber. Olten, Freiburg/Br: Walter, 1962.</u>
<u>Die beiden Freundinnen</u>	<u>Die beiden Freundinnen und ihr Giftmord. Bibliothek Suhrkamp, Bd. 289. Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1971; rpt. from Außenseiter der Gesellschaft. Die Verbrechen der Gegenwart, Bd. 1. Berlin: Die Schmiede, 1924.</u>
<u>Berge Meere und Giganten</u>	<u>Berge Meere und Giganten. Roman. Berlin: S. Fischer, 1924.</u>
<u>Briefe</u>	<u>Briefe. Ausgewählte Werke in Einzelbänden. In Verbindung mit den Söhnen des Dichters. Ed. Walter Muschg. Contd. by Heinz Graber. Olten, Freiburg/Br: Walter, 1970.</u>
Gese	<u>Gesammelte Erzählungen. Reinbeck: Rowohlt, 1971; rpt. from Die Ermordung einer Butterblume. Ausgewählte Erzählungen 1910-1950. Ausgewählte Werke in Einzelbänden. In Verbindung mit den Söhnen des Dichters. Ed. Walter Muschg. Contd. by Heinz Graber. Olten, Freiburg/Br: 1962.</u>

Hamlet

Hamlet oder die lange Nacht nimmt ein Ende. Roman. Ausgewählte Werke in Einzelbänden. In Verbindung mit den Söhnen des Dichters. Ed. Walter Muschg. Contd. by Heinz Graber. Olten, Freiburg/Br: 1966.

Heimkehr der Fronttruppen

Heimkehr der Fronttruppen. (Volume II of November 1918. Eine deutsche Revolution, Erzählwerk.) Munich: Karl Alber, 1949.

Karl und Rosa

Karl und Rosa. (Volume III of November 1918. Eine deutsche Revolution, Erzählwerk.) Munich: Karl Alber, 1950.

Lydia und Mäxchen

Lydia und Mäxchen. Tiefe Verbeugung in einem Akt. Leipzig: Singer, 1906.

Manas

Manas. Epische Dichtung. Ausgewählte Werke in Einzelbänden. In Verbindung mit den Söhnen des Dichters. Ed. Walter Muschg. Contd. by Heinz Graber. Olten, Freiburg/Br: Walter, 1961.

Märchen

Märchen vom Materialismus. Stuttgart: Reclam, 1959.

N1

For a description of the Döblin Nachlaß, deposited in the Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Schiller-Nationalmuseum, Marbach am Neckar, see "Handschriften des Deutschen Literaturarchivs. II. Nachlaß Alfred Döblin," Auf Grund der Vorarbeiten von Rosemarie Lorenz zusammengestellt von Hilde Vater. Jahrbuch der Deutschen Schillergesellschaft, 14 (1970), pp. 646-57.

Der Oberst

Der Oberst und der Dichter oder Das menschliche Herz. Munich: Karl Alber, 1946.

Pardon

Pardon wird nicht gegeben. Roman. Ausgewählte Werke in Einzelbänden. In Verbindung mit den Söhnen des Dichters. Ed. Walter Muschg. Contd. by Heinz Graber. Olten, Freiburg/Br: Walter, 1960.

Reise in Polen

Reise in Polen. Ausgewählte Werke in Einzelbänden. In Verbindung mit den Söhnen des Dichters. Ed. Walter Muschg. Contd. by Heinz Graber. Olten, Freiburg/Br: Walter, 1968.

Schicksalsreise

Schicksalsreise. Bericht und Bekenntnis. Frankfurt/M: Josef Knecht Carolusdruckerei, 1949.

Der schwarze Vorhang

Der schwarze Vorhang. Roman von den Worten und Zufällen. Berlin: S. Fischer, 1919.

Unser Dasein

Unser Dasein. Ausgewählte Werke in Einzelbänden. In Verbindung mit den Söhnen des Dichters. Ed. Walter Muschg. Contd. by Heinz Graber. Olten, Freiburg/Br: Walter, 1964.

Verratenes Volk

Verratenes Volk. (Volume I of November 1918. Eine deutsche Revolution. Erzählwerk.) Munich: Karl Alber, 1948.

Wadzek

Wadzeks Kampf mit der Dampfturbine. Roman. Berlin: S. Fischer, 1918.

Wallenstein

Wallenstein. Roman. Ausgewählte Werke in Einzelbänden. In Verbindung mit den Söhnen des Dichters. Ed. Walter Muschg. Contd. by Heinz Graber. Olten, Freiburg/Br: Walter, 1965.

W-l

Die drei Sprünge des Wang-lun. Chinesischer Roman. Ausgewählte Werke in Einzelbänden. In Verbindung mit den Söhnen des Dichters. Ed. Walter Muschg. Contd. Heinz Graber. Olten, Freiburg/Br: Walter, 1960.

Wissen und Verändern!

Wissen und Verändern! Offene Briefe an einen jungen Menschen. Berlin: S. Fischer, 1931.

Ztlp

Die Zeitlupe. Kleine Prosa. Olten, Freiburg/Br: Walter, 1962.

I Preliminary Remarks

A. Definition of Humor

Humor is a very personal affair. What causes one man to laugh bores another, yet both men would never deny the existence of humor. To write seriously about humor is akin to explaining the punch line of a joke; to explain is to spoil. Indeed to define humor is an even more humorless task. It is also a thankless task, for there is no theory of humor which is considered to be the standard one.

To compare the subtle differences and the development of the theories is not the task at hand in establishing a working definition for Döblin's humor. Still, we would like to take into account an arbitrarily abbreviated list of theorists to indicate the historical range of the effort, and also to show that each begins theorizing with the question: why do we laugh?

Aristotle reflects about the laughable; it is a defect, but one that neither hurts nor wounds.¹ To jump to the eighteenth century, Immanuel Kant decides laughter is the result of a sudden change of an expectation into nothing.²

¹Aristoteles, Poetik, transl. Olof Gigon (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1961), Chapt. 5, p. 32.

²Immanuel Kant, Kritik der Urteilskraft, ed. Gerhard Lehman (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1963), p. 276. "Das Lachen ist ein Affekt aus der plötzlichen Verwandlung einer gespannten Erwartung in nichts."

Jean Paul defines laughter's source of pleasure as the finite applied to the infinite.³ For Schopenhauer, laughter results from the perception of the incongruity between that which is thought and that which is shown.⁴

Freud contends that "Verschiebung" (translated as "displacement") is the key to laughter.⁵ Moreover, he goes beyond ordering laughter into different categories of incongruity; he truly asks why - not at what - do we laugh. Laughter's source of pleasure lies in the release of repression. The function of jests consists, from the first, in lifting internal inhibitions and in making sources of pleasure fertile which have been rendered inaccessible by inhibitions.⁶

One also finds less famous names involved in the discussion. Harald Höffding significantly recognizes the

³Jean Paul, Vorschule der Ästhetik, ed. Norbert Miller (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1963), VI. Programm, Para. 30, pp. 49-124.

⁴Arthur Schopenhauer, "Welt als Wille und Vorstellung", Sämtliche Werke, ed. Wolfgang Frhr von Löhneysen (Stuttgart, Frankfurt/M: Cotta-Insel, 1960), II, p. 122. Chapter 8 is "Zur Theorie des Lächerlichen" in which Schopenhauer writes: "Meiner im ersten Band ausgeführten Erklärung zufolge ist der Ursprung des Lächerlichen allemal die paradoxe und daher unerwartete Subsumation eines Gegenstandes unter einen ihm übrigens heterogenen Begriff, und bezeichnet demgemäß das Phänomen des Lachens allemal die plötzliche Wahrnehmung einer Inkongruenz zwischen einem solchen Begriff und dem durch denselben gedachten realen Gegenstand, also zwischen dem Abstrakten und dem Anschaulichen."

⁵Sigmund Freud, Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewußten (Leipzig, Vienna, Zürich: Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, 1925) Bd. 9, p. 63.

⁶Ibid., p. 113.

seriousness of laughter.⁷ He distinguishes between "the smaller" humor, which is only a transient, superficial moment, and "the larger humor". The latter presupposes a world view, a point of view to observe the comings and goings of man. Höffding sees the humorist as a sceptic, who is, by his humor, involved in a process of seeking the key to the universe. "Überall sucht er den Kern unter der Schale".⁸ The humorist doubts that dogmatic or scientific knowledge is the right approach to finding the key.

Emil Staiger finds that the comic is a function of time. The sudden switch from a forward movement to a moment at rest produces laughter, "[...] aus einer gespannten Zeit in ein nacktes beharrliches Da".⁹ Käte Hamburger substitutes for Jean Paul's finite and infinite her own "das Eigentliche und das Uneigentliche".¹⁰ She defines her term "Inadäquatenverhältnis" as the discrepancy between the intended actual and non-actual meaning. Both Staiger and Hamburger are concerned themselves with the problem of defining incongruity.

⁷Harald Höffding, Humor als Lebensgefühl (Der große Humor). Eine psychologische Studie, transl. Heinrich Goebel (Leipzig, Berlin: B.G. Teubner, 1918).

⁸Ibid., p. 64.

⁹Emil Staiger, Die Zeit als Einbildungskraft des Dichters. Untersuchungen zu Gedichten von Brentano, Goethe und Keller (Zürich: Atlantis, 1953), p. 195.

¹⁰Käte Hamburger, "Don Quijote und die Struktur des epischen Humors", Festgabe für Eduard Berend zum 75. Geburtstag (Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus, 1959), p. 202.

Henri Bergson, whose own theory of incongruity is mechanical rigidity encrusted onto something living, settles only one problem of establishing a definition for humor: he establishes only that the definition is never established.

Les plus grands penseurs, depuis Aristote, se sont attaqués à ce petit problème; qui toujours se dérobe sous l'effort, glisse, s'échappe, se redresse, impertinent défi jeté à la spéculation philosophique.¹¹

Not only do we have no generally accepted theory, but also we have a difference in an English language definition and a German one. Webster's defines humor as

3a) that quality which appeals to a sense of the ludicrous or absurdly incongruous b) the mental faculty of discovery, expressing or appreciating the ludicrous or absurdly incongruous c) something that is or is designed to be comical or amusing. ¹²

The word "comic" is defined as "causing laughter or amusement". The concept of humor is broader than that of the comic. Comic contents itself with causing laughter; humor actively "discovers", "expresses" and "appreciates" that which causes laughter.

The English language definition does not cover the different nuances inherent in the German distinction between "Humor" and "Komik". A glance in a reference dictionary

¹¹Henri Bergson, Le Rire. Essai sur la signification du comique, Bibliothèque de philosophie contemporaine (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1969), p. 1.

¹²Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, based on Webster's Third International Dictionary (Springfield: G. & C. Merriam, 1961).

should suffice to show how German distinguishes between the two:

Je nach den ihr zugrundeliegenden lächelnd verstehenden, gemüthhaften oder beißend kritischen Haltungen ragt die K omik in Humor oder Satire hinein und bildet die übergreifende Haltung der beiden Ausformungen. ¹³

Wilpert defines humor as part of a world view, "die sich über die Unzulänglichkeiten des Menschenlebens wohlwollend doch distanziert, lächelnd erhebt".¹⁴ Humor rises above life, looks at it from a distance; "Komik" is merely "eine zum Lachen reizende harmlose Ungereimtheit";¹⁵ it is the incongruity between reality and appearance. Humor takes a broader, more philosophic view; the comic is more immediate.

What then can we distill out of the various definitions? Despite the passage of time and the barrier of language, humans do persist in laughing at others and at themselves. Laughter is the starting point for each speculation. The cause of laughter, reduced as far as possible, is an incongruity.

B. The Problem of Humor in the Works of Alfred Döblin

Critics often mention Döblin's humor as if it were a self-evident, decorative touch that does not merit as close

¹³Gero von Wilpert, "Komik", Sachwörterbuch der Literatur (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner, 1964).

¹⁴Ibid., p. 285.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 339.

an analysis as his style or his religiosity or his political commitment. A few ignore his humor entirely. Even the briefest acknowledgment of humor is conspicuously absent in Helmut Schwimmer's dissertation,¹⁶ as in the critiques of Albrecht Schöne,¹⁷ and Karl-Ludwig de Vries.¹⁸ Theodore Ziolkowski overlooks humor as a structural element of the basic conflict in Berlin Alexanderplatz, which for him is the conflict between order and chaos.¹⁹ Walter Benjamin was one of the first to appreciate Döblin's montage technique; he sees it as a product of "Berliner Sprachgeist".²⁰ But he avoids the problem of humor.

Ernst Ribbat's study represents most radically the separation of humor from Döblin's serious intent.²¹ Monique

¹⁶ Helmut Schwimmer, Erlebnis und Gestaltung der Wirklichkeit bei Alfred Döblin, Diss. Munich, 1960.

¹⁷ Albrecht Schöne, "Alfred Döblin. Berlin Alexanderplatz", Der deutsche Roman vom Barock bis zur Gegenwart, Struktur und Geschichte, ed. Benno von Wiese (Düsseldorf: August Bagel, 1963), II, pp. 291-325.

¹⁸ Karl-Ludwig de Vries, Moderne Gestaltelemente im Romanwerk Alfred Döblins und ihre Grundlagen. Ein Beitrag zur Morphologie des modernen Romans, Diss. Hamburg, 1968.

¹⁹ Theodore Ziolkowski, Dimensions of the Modern Novel, German Texts and European Contexts (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969).

²⁰ Walter Benjamin, "Krisis des Romans. Zu Döblins Berlin Alexanderplatz", Angelus Novus. Ausgewählte Schriften 2 (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1966), pp. 437-43.

²¹ Ernst Ribbat, Die Wahrheit des Lebens im frühen Werk Alfred Döblins, Münstersche Beiträge zur deutschen Literaturwissenschaft, Bd. 4 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1970), p. 62.

Weyembergh-Boussart separates humor from Döbblin's world view, although she implies there is such a thing as typical Döbblin humor, traces of which are still present in a work as late as Hamlet.²² Robert Minder also indicates that there is a typical Döbblinesque humor. He sees, for instance, in Döbblin's parody of German Lieder "une 'Lorelei' döebblinienne".²³

In most cases, critics recognize the humor in the major works, but do no more than acknowledge its presence. Matthias Prangel recognizes Berlin Alexanderplatz as an artistic masterpiece, but he is struck by Döbblin's humor only in Babylonische Wandlung.²⁴ Anne Laird Jennings' comments are parenthetical in nature; for example, she just mentions that the chapter headings in Berlin Alexanderplatz are humorous.²⁵ In her discussion of Döbblin's spiritual odyssey, she does acknowledge, however, the defensive quality of Döbblin's irony.²⁶ Leo Kreutzer grants that the autobiographical sketches are

²² Monique Weyembergh-Boussart, Alfred Döbblin, Seine Religiosität in Persönlichkeit und Werk, Abhandlungen zur Kunst-Musik- und Literaturwissenschaft, Bd. 76 (Bonn: Bouvier, 1970), p. 374.

²³ Robert Minder, "Hommage à Alfred Doeblin. Doeblin en France", Allemagne d'aujourd'hui. Revue française d'information, 5, No. 3 (1957), p. 14.

²⁴ Matthias Prangel, Alfred Döbblin, Sammlung Metzler, Bd. 105 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1973), pp. 80-81.

²⁵ Anne Laird Jennings, "Alfred Döbblin's Quest for Spiritual Orientation with Special Reference to the Novels Die drei Sprünge des Wang-lun, Berlin Alexanderplatz, and Babylonische Wandlung", Diss. III., 1959.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 188.

more than merely "ein geistreich-kokettes Spielchen".²⁷ He analyzes the humorous form as "therapeutisches Arrangement".²⁸ Harry Regensteiner simply remarks, "Neben dem Ernst kommt auch der Humor zurecht."²⁹

If the critic does concern himself with Döblin's humor, he sees it only with respect to the main theme under discussion. Mark Goldberg reduces humor to one function; it is the weapon of satire "as it oscillates between light irony and grotesque comedy".³⁰ Wolfgang Grothe maintains that Döblin's theory of the epic leads to the "Gauklerischen";³¹ to the decoratively comic, not to humor. Francis Lide, Jr. uses the elements of humor as a touchstone for a stylistic analysis of Berlin Alexanderplatz in its literary context, but he overlooks humor as an important element in itself.³²

²⁷Leo Kreutzer, Alfred Döblin. Sein Werk bis 1933 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1970), p. 17.

²⁸Ibid. p. 20.

²⁹Harry Regensteiner, "Die Bedeutung der Romane Alfred Döblins von Die drei Sprünge des Wang-lun bis Berlin Alexanderplatz", Diss. New York University, 1954, p. 37.

³⁰Mark Goldberg, "The Individual and Society in the Novels of Alfred Döblin", Dissertation Abstracts, 30 (1970), pp. 3942-43A (New York University, 1969).

³¹Wolfgang Grothe, "Die Theorie des Erzählens bei Alfred Döblin", Text & Kritik. Zeitschrift für Literatur, No. 13-14 (June, 1966), p. 7.

³²Francis Pugh Lide, Jr., "Berlin Alexanderplatz in Context: Alfred Döblin's Literary Practice", Diss. III., 1966.

Joseph Strelka,³³ Timothy Casey,³⁴ Fritz Martini,³⁵ Viktor Žmegač,³⁶ Herman Pongs,³⁷ and Erich Hülse,³⁸ all seem to acknowledge that there are humorous elements in Döblin's works, but do not seem willing to concede its importance. How can Elisabeth Endres claim that after 1933 what she calls Döblin's "leicht humorvollen Stil" was finished?³⁹

A few critics have indicated Döblin's humor to be an expression of the thoughts and doubts about the world and man. Günter Grass indirectly concedes not only the presence of humor in Döblin, but also that it is an important, integral element. He considers Döblin to be "ein neuer Jean

³³Joseph Strelka, "Der Erzähler Alfred Döblin", The German Quarterly, 33, No. 3 (May, 1960), pp. 197-210.

³⁴Timothy Joseph Casey, "Alfred Döblin", Expressionismus als Literatur. Gesammelte Studien, ed. Wolfgang Rothe (Berne, Munich: Francke, 1969), pp. 637-55.

³⁵Fritz Martini, "Alfred Döblin", Deutsche Dichter der Moderne. Ihr Leben und Werk, ed. Benno von Wiese (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1965), pp. 321-60.

³⁶Viktor Žmegač, "Alfred Döblins Poetik des Romans", Sinn und Form. Beiträge zur Literatur, 21, H. 2 (1969), pp. 404-23.

³⁷Herman Pongs, Im Umbruch der Zeit. Das Romanschaffen der Gegenwart (Göttingen: Göttinger Verlagsanstalt, 1956).

³⁸Erich Hülse, "Alfred Döblin. Berlin Alexanderplatz", Möglichkeiten des modernen deutschen Romans. Analysen und Interpretationsgrundlagen von Thomas Mann, Alfred Döblin, Hermann Broch, Gerd Gaiser, Max Frisch, Alfred Andersch und Heinrich Böll, ed. Rolf Geissler (Frankfurt/M, Berlin, Bonn: Diesterweg, 1962) pp. 45-101.

³⁹Elisabeth Endres, "Döblin als Journalist", Text & Kritik, No. 13-14 (June, 1966), p. 68.

Paul".⁴⁰ Moreover, he appreciates Döblin's methods to portray truth in humorous ways, methods which set the absurdity of history plastically in front of the reader. Hans Hennecke's aperçu refers only to Döblin's Linke Poot, however, not to Döblin's entire work: "[...] und man spürt, daß solcher Zynismus ernster sein kann, als der Ernst des ewig Feierlichen."⁴¹

In discussing the early stories, Walter Muschg recognizes Döblin's humor. He indicates that the author creates the humorous effects arbitrarily to entertain the reader.

"Der abrupte Stil [...] wird nun zur mutwilligen Mystifikation, die den Leser in eine heitere Spannung versetzt."⁴² Muschg, *however, does perceive the tragic dimensions in Döblin's humor.*⁴³ Furthermore, Muschg acknowledges that Döblin's humor does.

not cease to be with the beginning of exile or with his conversion to Catholicism.

Ein Spotter und Gaukler blieb er auch nach seiner katholischen Taufe, sein Lachen war da nur weiser geworden, die geisterhafte Lustigkeit eines Mannes, der seine Zeit ganz durchschaut hatte. 44

⁴⁰Günter Grass, "Über meinen Lehrer Döblin", Akzente. Zeitschrift für Dichtung, 14, H. 4 (1967), p. 307.

⁴¹Hans Hennecke, "Voraussetzungslosigkeit und Überlieferung. Alfred Döblin", (written 1948) Kritik. Gesammelte Essays zur modernen Literatur (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1958), p. 166.

⁴²Walter Muschg, "Nachwort des Herausgebers", GesE, p.424.

⁴³Loc. cit. "In witzig-frechen Schwänken und Paradien schlägt der tragische Ernst in den trunkenen Humor einer hintergründigen Trivialität um." J.

⁴⁴Walter Muschg, "Alfred Döblin heute", Text & Kritik, No. 13-14 (June, 1966) p. 3.

Muschg brings to our attention that humor and seriousness are intertwined in Döblin and that his laughter is part of his view of the world. Muschg's brief statements leave open the question how Döblin achieves humorous effects and how his laughter works as a means by which Döblin perceives his world.

When we consider the subjectivity in defining humor we are forced to conclude that we can offer no satisfactorily objective analysis, one that would be independent of the particular author, his material and the particular reader. The reader must comprehend the author's intention of the context in order to appreciate how he manipulates his materials.

An analysis of Döblin's humor has not yet been undertaken, although his humor is an apparent and acknowledged fact. The intention of this study is to examine systematically the humorous traits in Berlin Alexanderplatz. With the help of typical examples we shall try to show in which ways the humorous and grotesque effects are achieved and determine their function. The classification of an example into one particular category is admittedly artificial; many could serve to illustrate other categories as well. Finally, we shall try to establish why Döblin intentionally uses humor as a technique in his narrative art.

In the text, shortened titles and abbreviations in parentheses refer to the editions cited in the key, which can be found on page v.

II Döblin: Portrait and Self-Portrait

One undisputed quality of humor is that it is subjective and personal. Hence an analysis of humor in Döblin's major work justifies first a look at how his contemporaries remember him and how he saw himself. Since we have as yet no biography of him, a brief look at the humorous side of his personality can only deepen the insight into the nature and function of humor in his prose.

In their memoirs, his contemporaries recall his idiosyncrasies, his practical jokes and, above all, his unconventional and seemingly impudent behavior. The following anecdote is told, about Döblin when he was middle-aged, supposedly dignified doctor:

Döblin erfaßte das unwiderstehliche Lausbubenverlangen, mit seiner elektrischen Taschenlampe, mit der er sonst seinen Patienten in die Hälse leuchtete, plötzlich der Ricarda Huch ins Gesicht zu plinkern. ¹

Döblin's appearance was outwardly unprepossessing; Ferdinand Lion describes an impish gremlin:

Niemand dachte sich so weit in Döblin hinein, daß er die Gewissensnot des unberechenbaren, spielerischen Geistes spürte, dieses schmalen, zarten Mannes mit der fleischlos gebuckelten Nase, dem hexenhaft spitzen Kinn, dem ansaugenden Mund mit den spitzen Zähnen eines Nagetiers, dem ausdruckslosen Fischblick, über dem sich schwere Augenlider senkten, der nie-

¹Walter von Molo, "Epiker und Ethiker. Alfred Döblin zum 75. Geburtstag", Die neue literarische Welt, 4, No. 15 (1953) p. 3.

drigen Stirn, die mit unzähligen chinesischen Sprachzeichen bedeckt war. 2

Döblin's outward appearance reflected the mental intensity that left no time for fastidious grooming:

Döblins kleines eingedrücktes Hütchen, das ihm eigentlich nie fest auf dem gescheiterten Kopfe saß. Und sein verbeulter Mantel mit dem halb umgedrehten Samtkragen, der ihm nie recht in Ordnung war, weil sein überaus lebhafter Träger nie Zeit hatte, ihn richtig um den Hals herumzulegen (denn er war zumeist in scharfer Debatte und immer anderer Meinung). ² Bedeutete, daß Döblin "kampfbereit" war. 3

Not only is there a written record of Döblin's physical appearance, but also his wit is well remembered. Walter von Molo sees the serious intention formulated humorously as characteristic for Döblin, the Berliner. In the following he recalls the shock Döblin caused at the memorial service for Arno Holz:

Freilich, alle alten Tanten brachte er schnell in Bewegung. Ich erinnere mich einer Arno-Holz-Gedenkfeier, vor der mir jemand entsetzt zuflüsterte: "Schauen Sie sich bloß dies an, es ist unfassbar!" Was war los? Döblin, der über Arno Holz sprach, hatte eine Grammophonplatte vorbereitet, die noch von Arno Holz besprochen worden war, um ihn selber bei seiner Totenfeier zu Wort kommen zu lassen. So etwas war noch nie da gewesen, aber Grammophonmusik in den alten geheiligten Hallen der Akademie machte Döblin Spaß. Wie ihm Spaß und Ernst in schöner Harmonie immer Eines waren,

²Cited by Hans Daiber, "Nachwort" in Märchen, p. 72. Daiber does not state the source where he found Ferdinand Lion's description.

³Walter von Molo, "Erinnerung an die Akademie-Zeit", Alfred Döblin zum 70. Geburtstag, ed. Paul E.H. Lüth (Wiesbaden: Limes, 1948), p. 13.

so war der in Stettin Geborene ganz
echter Berliner. 4

Döblin seems to have had the typical "Berliner Schnauze" to which nothing is sacred.⁵ Walter Mehring recalls a lecture that Döblin held, "gespickt mit gelehrten Fachwörtern und Redensarten der Berliner Schnauze".⁶ The reminiscence shows that Döblin could combine mutually exclusive styles with success. In his memoirs, Max Niedermeyer recalls Döblin as being true to his Berlin wit throughout his life's odyssey. "Döblin hatte sich in all den Jahren noch etwas Kess-Berlinerisches, einen grimmigen Humor bewahrt [...]."⁷ Even at his most embarrassingly pious moment, at his sixty-fifth birthday celebration in California,⁸ Döblin could find admirers of his humor: Döblin spoke with the "droll humor

⁴ von Molo, p. 16..

⁵ von Molo, "Epiker und Ethiker", p. 3.

⁶ Walter Mehring, "Über Alfred Döblin", literarium, 10 (1962), p. 3.

⁷ Max Niedermeyer, Pariser Hof (Wiesbaden: Limes, 1965), p. 34.

⁸ At this party, Döblin, the *recently* converted Catholic, embarrassed the company by *openly avowing his allegiance to the Church*. Brecht wrote mockingly of Döblin, "daß er soeben eine Erleuchtung erlitten habe". ["Peinlicher Vorfall", Vertreibung der Gespenster. Autobiographische Schriften. Betrachtungen zur Zeit. Aufsätze zu Kunst und Literatur, ed. Manfred Beyer (Berlin: Rütten & Loening, 1968), p. 541.]

inherent in Berlin dialect".⁹ Hermann Kesten calls this attribute of Döblin "preußischen Witz". In his opinion, the old man still possessed youthful vigor:

[...] ein sonderbarer Greis, vergnügt wie ein Berliner Gassenjunge, grollend wie ein alttestamentarischer Prophet, berauscht von Kosmologien und der eigenen überquellenden Phantasie, ein fröhlicher Schwimmer in der stets strömenden Sprache, ein Zauberer und ein Eulenspiegel. ¹⁰

Döblin the Berliner should be a chapter by itself, which perhaps only a Berliner can write. Döblin himself praises Berlin as the place he prefers above all others.¹¹ Berlin for him is more than it is for the tourist who sees only the "Nachlassgarderobe".¹² One must simply know how to look at Berlin, Döblin's asphalted emerald isle. Even the local dialect makes the city dearer to him; he loves "dieses Berlin, das eine fabelhafte ausdrucksreiche Mundart besitzt".¹³

⁹Harold von Hofe, "German Literature in Exile. Alfred Döblin", German Quarterly, 17, No. 1 (1944), p. 29.

¹⁰Herman Kesten, "Alfred Döblin", Welt und Wort. Literarische Monatsschrift, 8, H. 10 (1953), p. 331.

¹¹Döblin, "Das Land, in dem ich leben möchte. Eine Umfrage". Die literarische Welt, 8, No. 18 (1932), p. 3.

¹²Döblin, "Moral der 'Schlager' ", Berliner Tageblatt (12 Feb, 1924); rpt. "Kleines Berlin Dossier", collected by Manfred Beyer, Neue Texte, Almanach für deutschsprachige Literatur (Witten, Berlin, Weimar: Aufbau, Autumn, 1968), p. 293.

¹³Döblin, Verschiedenes. Autobiographisches. Ausführungen zu Werk und Leben. Durchschlag. 5 Bl. Unvollst., Nl.

Although not born in Berlin, the city is his native habitat; it is the stage from which he views world events and on which he himself acts his life. Hermann Kesten remembers their hours together in the cafés of Berlin: "Hier saß ich mit Alfred Döblin, der so fröhlich lachte, ein alter Psychiater, der in der Menschheit einen seiner Patienten wieder zu erkennen glaubte [...]." ¹⁴

How did Döblin see himself? With evident self-irony, in the autobiographical sketch "Erster Rückblick" Döblin promises: "Vermittlung der Bekanntschaft mit einem Familienmitglied". A police record could not be more complete than his self-description, which is in the form of a medical report, including even a graphological analysis:

Wir haben die Ehre, ein Mitglied dieser Familie vorzustellen, den in Berlin ansässigen Alfred Döblin [...]. Sein Bild legen wir in mehreren Exemplaren bei, ferner seinen Handabdruck. [...]

Er ist 160 Zentimeter groß. Nacktgewicht 114 Pfund; Brustumfang, Einatmung: 92 cm, Ausatmung: 86 cm; Kopfmaße: Umfang 58,5 cm, Längsdurchmesser 22 cm, Querdurchmesser 16 cm. Er ist hereditär stark kurzsichtig und astigmatisch. ¹⁵

He pretends to be eager to inform, yet the mass of details reveals nothing of importance about him.

¹⁴ Hermann Kesten, Dichter im Café (Vienna, Munich, Basel: Kurt Desch, 1959), p. 76.

¹⁵ Döblin, "Erster Rückblick", in Alfred Döblin. Im Buch- zu Haus- auf der Straße. Vorgestellt von Alfred Döblin und Oskar Loerke (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1928), p. 47-48.

The successful Berliner Döblin presents both his selves, doctor and author to the public in "Döblin über Döblin" (AzL, p. 359-61). The philistine doctor Döblin admits grudgingly that he knows the author Döblin. He willingly agrees that the books of this man, who, "wie Sie sagen, meinen Namen trägt", are really quite incomprehensible. Actually, he himself would prefer travel memoirs and anyway, his style is disastrous. The author, on the other hand, sees the doctor's waiting room full of material for his next novel, instead of humans. Yet he is convinced that in the eyes of the doctor he must have seemed a full human being and not merely a representative of a profession. Döblin sees both his professions with a sceptical eye. In his capacity as a critic he also deprecates himself: "Ich zitiere einen hervorragenden Autor über dieses Thema, einen gewissen Alfred Döblin, aus den etwas länglichen 'Gesprächen mit Kalypso'."¹⁶

Döblin gives us several self-caricatures in his novels and novellas that are not so much self-deprecatory as self-accusatory, showing, in a way, his helplessness and that of human beings in general. In Berlin Alexanderplatz, there is a fiercely ironical depiction of the medical profession. The murder of Miese having broken Franz Biberkopf mentally, he lies raving in the psychiatric hospital Buch. But all the state's doctors cannot put Franz back together again. They

¹⁶Döblin, "Tänzerinnen", Der Sturm, 3, H. 129 (1912-13), p. 162.

cannot fathom the sickness nor cure the symptoms.

Other parodies of doctors can be found throughout Döblin's works. Dr. Converdon hides behind his science to avoid self-commitment and warm, human contact.¹⁷ The doctors who fuss over the sick Dali-Lama Paldan Jische (W-1, 338-39) are also presented in an unflattering light.

Döblin's self-irony is sometimes mocking and sometimes seriously provocative. In 1927 he wrote "Arzt und Dichter. Merkwürdiger Lebenslauf eines Autors" (AsL, 361-67). He evaluates his artistic endeavors as being a chronic cold: "Auch von meinem eigenen Schreiben hielt ich etwa soviel, wie ein Mensch, der an einem chronischen Schnupfen leidet, von dem Schnupfen etwas hält" (AsL, 362). Towards the end of his life, Döblin reviews his life's work over modestly. "Es liegt ein Haufen Bücher da [...]".¹⁸ A note of pessimism underscores the seemingly self-ironic tone. All in all, he asks himself, what does it mean? He refers to his works as "meine ganze Schreiberei".¹⁹ While he seems to attack his own creation, he defends his own creativity. He feels compelled to defend the seemingly frivolous way in which he seeks his truth. "Es ist ein ununterbrochenes und ernstes Gespräch

¹⁷ Döblin, "Der Dritte", GesE, pp. 76-87.

¹⁸ Döblin, "Epilog", AsL, p. 383.

¹⁹ Döblin, Verschiedenes. Autobiographisches. Ausführungen zu Werk und Leben. Durchschlag. 5 Bl. unvollst., N1.

an die Wahrheit heran, eine Auseinandersetzung und Herausarbeitung dessen, was ich sehe und erfahre und eine Stellungnahme dazu, ein Ja und ein Nein-sagen."²⁰ It would be a pity to see Döblin's self-irony, which does mock his writing, and Döblin's defense of his own creativity only as a symptom of his struggle against his mother, who held all such literary efforts in contempt.²¹ For Döblin, however, the comic is a divine gift; in a clarion call to surrender to silliness, Döblin's sense of joy has no trace of guilt:

"Lasset uns", rief einer, "in Blödsinn ausbrechen, um den geschriebenen Unsinn noch zu übertrumpfen." Ich selber rief, indem ich mich für das erwiesene Vertrauen bedankte: Lasset uns tief Atem holen und uns eine kleine Stunde des göttlichen Blödsinns erfreuen.²²

He insists on his freedom to search for the truth and to present it as he wishes. He ridicules himself; nonetheless he means what he says:

Durch kein Buch lasse ich mich belehren,
fern sei das von mir, ich habe meine Gedanken
und die Worte und die Namen sind da.

²⁰ Döblin, Verschiedenes. Autobiographisches. Ausführungen zu Werk und Leben. Durchschlag. 5 Bl. unvollst., N1.

²¹ Klaus Müller-Salget, Alfred Döblin, Werk und Entwicklung, Bonner Arbeiten zur deutschen Literatur, Bd. 22 (Bonn: Bouvier, 1972). He devotes to this problem a whole section "Ein Dichter mit schlechtem Gewissen", pp. 26-27. He argues convincingly that Döblin never could really cleanse himself of guilt for being an author. This interpretation sheds an interesting sidelight on the motivation of an author, but we hope to show a more literary reason for Döblin's self-irony.

²² Döblin. Prosa. Blödeleien während der Arbeitspause. 27 Bl. Dabei: Durchlag. 27 Bl., p. 7, N1.

Die Situationen stehen mir vor Augen, mein Gehirn arbeitet. Ich habe geschworen, als Wahrheit nur anzuerkennen, was ich weiß und finde. Und mögen die anderen es Unsinn und Blödsinn nennen, ich verkünde meine Wahrheit. 23

²³ Dublin. Prosa. Blödeleien während der Arbeitspause.
27 Bl. Dabei: Durchschlag. 27 Bl., p. 7, Bl.

III Döblin's Language

Döblin's linguistic techniques exploit structures that are not necessarily subordinate to the larger idea, or the "message" of the novel Berlin Alexanderplatz. The language distortion and playfulness, which produce the verbal discrepancies necessary for laughter, belong to categories not unique to Döblin alone; the sum of the examples does, however, reveal Döblin's unique authorial personality. These techniques do not exist in a vacuum. Döblin does exploit them to express general, larger ideas. In this chapter we examine Döblin's mastery of humorous use of language. In the next, we shall then examine how Döblin, with these means at his disposal, expresses his ideas humorously.

A. Distortion and Disintegration of Words and their Meanings

Döblin is an author who is very conscious of his basic building material: words. This "Wortmaterial"¹ is skillfully used to mirror the world as Döblin sees it. Döblin is willing to experiment with his language material and to go beyond conventional forms. Thus his language, which is his "Wortmaterial", takes on a new and potent expressive force.

¹Döblin, "Schriftstellerei und Dichtung", AzL, p. 91. "Das Wortmaterial - worunter ich nicht das einzelne Wort, sondern die in Worte und Sätze gefaßten Gedanken, Vorstellungen verstehen will, die Wortabbildungen der Wirklichkeit - dieses Tagematerial unterliegt auf dem Wege zum Kunstwerk bestimmten sprachlichen und geistigen Prozeduren."

By boldly distorting the "normal" order of words and grammar Döblin surprises the reader into laughter and thereby convinces him that order in general has broken down. Not always is such experimentation merely funny. Apparent silliness of word play shows Döblin's indulgence in words for their own sake as well as his interpretation of the order of the world.

Play with Words and Syllable Components

To substitute syllables is to distort the word and to change the meaning:

Die Schließgesellschaften beschützen alles, sie gehen herum, gehen durch, sehen hinein, stecken Uhren, Wachalarm, Wach- und Schutzdienst für Groß-Berlin und außerhalb, Wachbereitschaft Deutschland, Wachbereitschaft Groß-Berlin und ehemalige Wachabteilung der Wirtschaftsgemeinschaft Berliner Grundbesitzer, vereinigter Betrieb, Wachzentrale des Westens Wachgesellschaft, Sherlock-Gesellschaft, Sherlock Holmes gesammelte Werke von Conan Doyle, Wachgesellschaft für Berlin und Nachbarorte, Wachsmann als Erzieher, Flachsmann als Erzieher, Waschanstalt, Wäscheverleih Apoll, Wäscherei Adler übernimmt sämtliche Hand- und Leibwäsche, Spezialität feine Herren- und Damenwäsche.

(BA, 132)

As the author gives reign to free associations, the language disintegrates into its components before our eyes. The prefix "Wach-" fades into "Wasch-", which degenerates into the suffix "-wäsche". The suffix "-gesellschaft" changes into "-gemeinschaft" and "-bereitschaft", then disappears. We think we know where we are when the paragraph begins. We even believe we can follow the author as he expands on what the "Schließ-

gesellschaften" are protecting. Döblin begins with Greater Berlin, then, in a wider sweep, includes Germany. But then the author turns to the titles of literary works and verbally dodges his reader, who is confused if he tries to find an underlying logical sense. The reader is enticed into the author's word play. The only logic which holds the passage together and which allows the reader to follow the author is the verbal play with word parts. This reliance on verbal structure alone, especially after the correspondance between the words and reality has been lost, is especially important for Döblin. It is the author alone who determines the meaning by imposing his order on the words.

So too, the author intrudes into a quotation of an advertising text for cigars:

Loeser und Wolff, Berlin-Elbing, erstklassige Qualitäten [...], Brasil, Havanna, Mexiko, [...] eine Spezialleistung in dieser Preislage, in Kisten zu hundert Stück, 10 Pfennig. Ich schlage alles, du schlägst alles, er schlägt alles mit Kisten zu 50 Stück und Kartonpackung zu 10 Stück, Versand nach allen Ländern der Erde, Boyero 25 Pfennig, diese Neuigkeit brachte uns viele Freunde, ich schlage alles, du schlägst lang hin. (BA, 180)

The statement of success suddenly somersaults into a grammatical exercise, the final conjugated form declaring the speaker to be triumphant and the "du" to have to capitulate.

In the following example the first part of the compound word changes, each new prefix being related by the internal vowel rhyme.

Wer steht am Schanktisch, Tranktisch, Gesang-
tisch, wer lächelt in die rauchige Gestank-
bude?

(BA, 211)

"Schank-", "Trank-" und "Gesang-" refer to one table, which is presented as if it were three. We are given each function of the table and thereby we can imagine what the men around the table are doing. The internal rhyme having established unity in diversity, it includes finally "Gestankbude" in the chain of words. We go from the small table to a larger entity, the booth. The prefix "Gestank-" is ambiguous. First, it literally refers to the smell of beer and cigarette smoke in the pub; secondly it metaphorically passes judgment on Franz for seeking friendship with the Pums gang. The man who stands at the table, who is drinking and singing and smiling into the smoky booth is Pums himself. In this tavern Franz is carousing with his new friends who will treacherously betray him. At this moment, however, he is happy to drink his "Molle " in the company of the Pums gang. To sum up fleetingly the contrast between Franz' foolish, childish trust and the gang's untrustworthiness, Döblin rhetorically asks who is this man, thus introducing Pums in this playful manner. The varied, rhyming words suggest the conviviality of Pums; the list of words taken all together indicates his true character , which is spelled out in the subsequent sentences as repellent and sleazy.

Going one step beyond playing with syllables, Döblin

plays with punctuation as well.

Ihre Zähne schlugen wie in tiefem Frost aufeinander, Punkt. Sie aber rührte sich nicht, Komma, zog nicht die Decke fester über sich, Punkt. [..] Ihre glänzenden Augen irrten flackernd im Dunkeln umher, und ihre Lippen bebten, Doppelpunkt, Gänsefüßchen, Lore, Gedankenstrich, Gedankenstrich, Lore, Gedankenstrich, Gänsefüßchen Gänsebeinchen, Gänseleber mit Zwiebel.

(BA, 79)

The melodramatic scene, obviously quoted from a trivial novel, in which a woman feverishly raves, loses acceleration. It ceases to depict the anguish of the heroine and degenerates into a verbal carroussel. The punctuation stages a palace revolution and triumphs over the ruling verbal intention, only to be dethroned by the "meaningful" elements within its own ranks: the word "Gänsefüßchen" grows into "Gänsebeinchen", which in turn gives rise to "Gänseleber mit Zwiebel". The authoritative structure of punctuation is no longer in control. Contents disintegrate, fading into new directions like the fade-out in a film.

Syllables are melted together: "Das sind wir Arbeitsleute heute, das Proletariat" (BA, 141) for "Arbeitsleute heute".

Or syllables are stretched: "Dreimal drei ist neuheune, wir saufen wie die Schweiheine [..]" (BA, 211). The repeated syllables correspond to the slovenly enunciation typical of a song belted out in a pub. Brevity is the soul of wit and this verbal technique acts as a compressed metaphor which is used to depict the heart and soul of a throbbing metropolis.

We are spared a long, detailed description that people speak indistinctly or that they sing in wretched style in a pub. Imitation renders such an analysis superfluous. We the reader are called upon to recognize the stereotype. The cleverness of such a shorthand description is the basis of our laughter. The same technique is not always meant as a humorous description. In the following example, it is not funny, but simply describes: the word "Tobbtobtsüchtiger" (BA, 368) corresponds to Franz' temporary insanity after Mieke "betrays" him in front of Reinhold. The word appears in the middle of the description of Mieke's bloody mouth and broken furniture. These surroundings counteract any amusement at the form of the word itself. The repeated syllables here are ominous and threatening.

By the technique of playing with syllables, the author reveals the personality of a character in a way no description could. The author lets Frau Labschinsky gallicize her German: "schließlichement" (BA, 210). Her actual class status proves not to correspond to the one she sees as hers. She gives herself airs. In her mind the bastard combination "schließlichement" is the epitome of elegance, while the author underlines by such a formation the discrepancy between supposed elegance and inelegant commonness.

Playing on the language structure of German which adds "-er" both to names of vocations and to countries to indi-

cate a person's origin, Döblin succinctly describes Eva's cavalier as a "Börsianer" (BA, 259, 278). Thereby we learn that he is rich; the source of his wealth is the stock exchange, which is treated as if it were his native country.

An entire image can be created with a single word. Such a one-word image can capture the essential characteristic more trenchantly than a literal depiction. The description in the following example does not particularly capture our attention: "Der Herr in Pfeffer und Salz" (BA, 82); it is such a well-worn cliché that we pass over it. Then the author extends this structure and we have the ridiculous, literally impossible yellow-plaid lady: "Nebenan lacht eine Gelbkarierte" (BA, 82). Repetition of the joke with a fresh new punch line amplifies the humorous effect.

Deliberate distortion of the meaning of a word does not necessarily create nonsense words or nonsense images. In the following example Döblin mocks the precious refinement of the sophisticated:

Wenn sie ihn gelyncht hätten, hätte die Überschrift gelautet: "Lynching des ungarischen Ministerpräsidenten bei der Stadt Kaposvar", das hätte das Geschrei vermehrt, die Gebildeten hätten statt Lynching Lunching gelesen und darüber gelacht [...]. (BA, 398)

By substituting one similar word for another, meaning is delightfully distorted. The original sense is replaced by a new sense, the displacement is a useful tool of satire.

Not only do general words belong to Döblin's "Wortmaterial", but so does the proper name of Franz Biberkopf. He addresses Franz as "Biberkopf, Lieberkopf, Zieberkopf" or "Franz Biberkopf, Ziberkopf, Niberkopf, Wiedekopf" (BA, 368) or "Franz, Franzeken, Biberköpfchen" (BA, 258). The author is playing with his character, willfully reducing him to "Wortmaterial", stripped of his unique human personality. While it is funny to see the name "Biberkopf" played with and reduced to nonsense, the presence of either a proper or a distorted name for Franz Biberkopf constitutes a serious motif in Berlin Alexanderplatz. The absence or presence of a name parallels Franz' development.

What is the function of a name? Identification, and above all, self-identification. For Döblin and for Franz Biberkopf a proper name is the key to Franz' inner development to decency ("Anständigkeit"). As Franz proudly writes his name on the registration form, his self-confidence is shown to have an imperturbable core:

Und dick wie mit einem Stock haut er seine
Buchstaben über das Papier; ich bin noch nie
ein Feigling gewesen, und was mein Name ist,
den laß ich mir von keinem stehlen, so heiß
ich, so bin ich geboren, und so bleibe ich:
Franz Biberkopf.

(BA, 264)

Precisely at the point the author distorts Franz Biberkopf's name in the examples above, we learn that Biberkopf has no name: "keinen Namen hat er" (BA, 368). His old identity is a false one and he does not have a new one yet. At the depth

of his moral corruption, he provides himself with false identification papers, those of Franz Räcker (BA, 278). While living with Mieke, he has the name Franz Räcker on his mailbox (BA, 283). After Franz' descent into the purgatory of madness, when he realizes his responsibility in Mieke's death, Franz is reborn. The author considers Franz to be a new man. Now his identity papers with the old name of Franz Biberkopf no longer correspond to his identity; it is only by a quirk of fate that the new man carries the same identification as the old Franz (BA, 488); the two are, however not one and the same man. The author seems bemused by the possibility of two men in one:

Ja, dieser Mann - wir wollen ihn Franz Karl Biberkopf nennen, um ihn von dem ersten zu unterscheiden [...].
(BA, 493)

Where Franz has been shown to have no name, Döblin has consciously exploited the childlike variations of a name to satirize Franz' childish nature.² There is something gently mocking in the very name "Biberkopf". Naming a character to indicate what his traits are is in the literary tradition of satire; for example, Grimmelshausen's Simplex Simplicissimus or Thomas Mann's Serenus Zeitblom. Döblin is no exception to this tradition. We have Tatjana Sanftleben (BA, 205) who decides at the last moment not to commit suicide. In Babyloni-

²Cf. Wadzek, p. 22. The hero rejects the nickname Franzel and insists on being called Franz.

sche Wandrung, the Babylonian-Chaldean-Assyrian god is introduced at the beginning of the first and second book as "Herr, Konrad mit Namen". Although Konrad never forgets his former power and glory, the author explicitly refuses to accord him the splendor of his old Babylonian name; he does not ever mention the old name. Döblin uses the proper name as a means of satirizing a character in Der Oberst.³ In Hamlet the names neither disintegrate into components as in Berlin Alexanderplatz nor turn into satirical nicknames as in the Babylonische Wandrung or Der Oberst; but that they do change - Gordon Allison into Lord Crenshaw - marks the quest for self-identification.

Repetitions and Variations

To repeat the same material with slight variations is another technique of language distortion. The following brief sentence from an advertisement text is one example:

Emaillerschilder, Emaillewaren jeder Art,
deutsche und recht echte persische Perser-
teppiche, Perser und Perserteppiche, for-
dern Sie kostenlose Zustellung. (BA, 365)

This sentence has the flavor of a nonsense patter song; how clever to repeat without really duplicating the exact words. In the first part, enamel products are being commercially

³We find "Herr Tieferschreckt", "Herr Leid-und-Weh", "Herr Unbeirrt" p. 46; "Herr Qual-und-Verzweiflung" p. 60; "Herr Fest-im-Sattel", "Herr Mir-kann-keiner" p. 170.

praised. The name of the product is being hammered into the potential customer's consciousness by insistent repetition. The second product mentioned are Oriental rugs. It is as if the customer's mind has snapped under the pressure; the sentence is silly. "Genuine Persian Persian carpets" is a redundant phrase; "genuine Persians" is an absurd redundancy. The last sentence pretends that the dignity of commerce has not been besmirched; yet there is the possibility of genuine Persians being delivered. With such advertising texts, Döblin is trying to pack every possible aspect of the city into these comprehensive descriptions.

In order to explore comprehensively the mind of a character, Döblin resorts to manipulating grammar. Varying the separable prefixes of "denken" mirrors Reinhold's deliberations.

Reinhold geht hin und her [..], denkt
nach, denkt vor, denkt hin, denkt her.

(BA, 358)

The ungrammatical variation of the verb gives the illusion that he is meditating about a complicated and even lofty concern; in reality, he is pettily and single-mindedly scheming how to hurt Franz. He finally hits upon the idea to tell Mieke about Franz' old habit of inheriting his cast-off girlfriends.

Rhyming words repeat the same sounds with slight variations.

Der Mann hat mal eine Bestie angefallen
und hat ihm einen Arm abgebissen, aber
dann hat er sie gestaucht, daß sie raucht
und faucht und hinter ihm kraucht. Keiner,
der mit Franz geht, bis auf einen, sieht,
wie er die Bestie hat gestaucht, daß sie
kraucht und raucht und hinter ihm faucht.
(BA, 357)

Döblin repeats the chain of rhyming words a second time. We seem briefly to be caught in a vocabulary cage that consists only of those words ending in "-aucht". This passage ironically mocks Franz's false security in his friendship with Reinhold. As long as Franz is so simple-minded about Reinhold's motives, even after the incident with his arm, Franz is prey to Reinhold's animal cunning.

Duplication itself is funny if the repeated word has two different meanings: "Es [..] latscht an [..], Reinhold [..], ein Junge mausgrau in mausgrau" (BA, 212). The first "mausgrau" refers to the impression one has of Reinhold; he is not an imposing figure. The second "mausgrau" refers literally to the color of the clothes he is wearing. The dreary impression reinforces the aptness of playing on the expression "grau in grau".

We find duplication of a root word in the following example: the Pums gang "fürchten sich fürchterlich" (BA, 240). They fear that Franz in revenge for his lost arm might "squeal" on them. The use of the cliché "fürchterlich" to mean "very much" paradoxically becomes alive again, underscoring their timidity and cowardliness after the bravado in

pushing the unsuspecting Frans out of the moving car.

In the following example, the intention of the author is not primarily to amuse the reader by the repetitions and variations; the intent is to reveal the mental daze of Frans:

Bei den Juden saß Franz eine ganze Stunde auf dem Sofa. Sie sprachen, er sprach, er wunderte sich, sie wunderten sich eine ganze lange Stunde. Worüber er sich wunderte, während er auf dem Sofa saß und sie sprachen und er sprach? Daß er hier saß und sprach und daß sie sprachen, und vor allem wunderte er sich über sich. Warum wunderte er sich über sich? Er wußte und merkte es selbst, er stellte es fest wie ein Registrator einen Rechenfehler. Er stellte etwas fest.

(BA, 142)

Three basic elements are subject to variation: "sprechen", "sich wundern" and finally "feststellen". Döblin's language mirrors the mental strain needed by Frans to cope with a very simple situation. Here there is no authorial voice audible that shows that the author is poking fun at Frans for being simplistic or dazed. Yet the total effect of the passage can be classified as humorous. The technique of repetition with slight variation builds up and builds up until the overall effect is of something very intricate and complex for what is a straightforward description of one action following another.

By the same technique, the following example proves its own basic statement: there is a touch of idiocy in the air.

Es liegt in der Luft eine Sachlichkeit, es
 liegt in der Luft eine Sachlichkeit, es
 liegt in der Luft, und es liegt in der Luft,
 in der Luft. Es liegt in der Luft was Idio-
 tisches, es liegt in der Luft was Hypnoti-
 sches, es liegt in der Luft, es liegt in
 der Luft und es geht nicht mehr raus aus
 der Luft.

(BA, 258)

Between each comma the basic formula never exactly duplicates itself with the exception of a repeated "es liegt in der Luft". The total effect is to convince by demonstration that there is indeed a touch of idiocy in the air; one is hypnotised into a state of idiocy. Such a graphic demonstration is inherently humorous - why so much trouble to establish painstakingly so humble a point? The "objectivity" ("Sachlichkeit") in the air is replaced by the word "idiocy", proving that objectivity must be the same as idiocy.

Listing

Not only does the word disintegrate into its components, but also words of similar meanings are strung together. All variants are explored. It is a simple trick: the child's delight in counting and naming all the objects he sees. The toddler laughs after he has put all his possessions in a row, counted them and named them. Döblin, who claims to be one of the children and the crazy,⁴ shares this delight in the con-

⁴"Und wenn man mich fragt, zu welcher Nation ich gehöre, so werde ich sagen: weder zu den Deutschen noch zu den Juden, sondern zu den Kindern und den Irren." Döblin, "Arzt und Dichter. Merkwürdiger Lebenslauf eines Autors", AsL, p. 362.

crete world. Thus we frequently find lists in Berlin Alexanderplatz which are really catalogues of a city's contents. The opening of the fourth book, for example, is a list of the houses and their contents (BA, 131 ff). Following a list of the shops comes a list of different types of buildings:

Über den Läden und hinter den Läden aber
sind Wohnungen, hinten kommen noch Höfe,
Seitengebäude, Quergebäude, Hinterhäuser,
Gartenhäuser. (BA, 132)

Precision of observation replaces general description. The humor of this list lies in detail added onto detail after the phrase "hinten kommen noch Höfe". It is not necessary to differentiate among the types of buildings in order that the reader knows what is to be found beyond the courts. Yet the author gives us a new punch line with each additional item on the list.

In the following example the new items on the second of the two brief lists serve to describe each man more precisely. Here it is necessary to specify each addition:

[...] und Franz erzählt nun gurgelnd und
schluckend und Meck hört nun gurgelnd
und schluckend und staunend und mit Be-
friedigung, was es für Menschen gibt (BA, 211)

By repeating, Döblin proves that the listener shares the same outlook as the talker - both gurgle and swallow - and also that the listener reacts to the talker - Meck is aston-

ished and satisfied with what Franz has to say. Their communication is reduced to inarticulate sounds; the encore of body noises unites the two men as no mere spoken dialogue could do.

While listing of items itself can be the structure which creates the humorous effect, the different nature of the items themselves, listed, lined up and juxtaposed one after another can be humorous:

Sie lesen Zeitungen verschiedener Richtungen, bewahren vermittels ihres Ohrlabyrinths das Gleichgewicht, nehmen Sauerstoff auf, dösen sich an, haben Schmerzen, haben keine Schmerzen, denken, denken nicht, sind glücklich, sind unglücklich, sind weder glücklich noch unglücklich.

(BA, 183)

Here the human comedy is itemized, both by biological and psychological categories. Listing is the structure by which we hear the authorial voice, which is gently satirical of the human anthill with all its contradictions.

In the midst of disorder, the author is establishing an order in which all possibilities are counted and organized. In listing, mutually exclusive opposites are compelled into an order. In listing, the author is identifying his world. This process of identification is a process of assuring himself of the existence of a concrete world. No wonder then, the child-like delight in listing and thereby identification of the concrete and human world. It is a world without the complications of needing to be ordered into any one spe-

cific philosophical system; it is simply there.

Imitative Sounds

Onomatopoeitic sounds are sprinkled throughout Berlin Alexanderplatz. One does not expect sounds to be written out. Döblin does not say that Franz stands at a door and rings the doorbell; there in the text stands simply the word "Klingling" (BA, 38). Instead of stating that the widow in the Lüders incident slams the door in Franz' face, the narrator becomes a sound effects man: "Rrrrrr, der Riegel wird vorge-schoben" (BA, 118). Prison bells do not ring, but their "bumm bumm" punctuates Franz' thoughts (BA, 36, 431, 441). Like the child imitating the sounds of trucks or trains, the narrator imitates the motor noises to be found on city streets and on building sites: "rrrrrr, rrrrrr" and "rrrrrr rumm" (BA, 38).

The imitative sounds are carefully orchestrated in the chapter "Vorwärts, Schritt gefaßt, Trommelgerassel und Ba-taillone" (BA, 320-28). Undignified, childish sounds are grafted onto a conventional, serious text. Apparently only silly sounds, these disconnected syllables do have meaning. Here Franz, despite the loss of his arm, marches forward, determined to reconcile with Reinhold. The metaphor is drawn from military life; the childish sounds of the nonsense syllables stress the hollow, even foolish bravery on Franz' part.

Life is compared to a battle field over which grenades are bursting "dummdrummdumm" (BA, 320). The soldiers must bravely march forward, despite the war which is not mentioned as if tabu. The crash of the cymbals in a military band drowns out all the horrors of battle.

Wenn die Soldaten durch die Stadt marschieren, eiwarum, eidarum, ei bloß wegen dem Tschingdarada, dada.

(BA, 320)

We find nonsense syllables from this theme repeated throughout the scene, marking the acts in the drama of reconciliation. They appear just before Franz, mustering his courage, enters into Reinhold's room (BA, 321). Again the words appear during the encounter in which jealousy and hatred flood Franz' thoughts (BA, 323). Once more the sounds appear as Franz stumbles from the room (BA, 325), and again when Franz, shaking in every limb, is ashamed of his flight (BA, 326). As if da capo, the full theme reappears when Franz delights in Reinhold's company (BA, 328). He has willed himself to overlook Reinhold's betrayal. The "nonsense" syllables are the childish sounds emitted in childish glee and innocence, unaware of the full implications and danger in the noise imitated. As the full realization of Reinhold's perfidy finally begins to dawn on Franz after he discovers who has killed Miese, these sounds echo again in the text (BA, 424, 432), driving home to the reader the foolishness of Franz' willful naïveté. In a tragedy, innocence turns out to be a cruel joke.

There are onomatopoeitic sounds which add to the horror in the scene where Mieke is murdered: "huh, huah, uh-uu-huh" (BA, 388). Döblin inserts sound effects into his text. The sounds written out cause laughter, but one that sticks in the throat. The laughter belongs to the grotesque. Döblin evokes every laughter using a metaphor from construction terms, when it is implied heavy blows are needed to topple a house; Mieke's death will be such a blow to Franz' false self-confidence. Thus in describing Mieke's death, the author uses the sound of a pile-driver: "wumm—wumm" (BA, 389). Later, when the news of her death finally reaches Franz, we find this sound "wumm, immer sachte, rumm" (BA, 422). As Franz lies in the asylum, this sound echoes in his ears (BA, 462 ff). The nonsense syllables which at first seemed so undignified and childish in the text now obsessively haunt Franz' brain.

Imitation of sound requires conquering the fear that one is being foolish. Normally we communicate only with words and sentences; only fools and children uninhibitedly zoom, vroom or pocketa. Döblin uses their habits, "unacceptable" in a literary sense and has endowed their sounds with highly sophisticated, intended meaning.

Drawings

When drawings appear in Berlin Alexanderplatz, language has failed to perform its normal function of communication.

Pictures must replace the printed word. We find drawings at the beginning of the second book in Berlin Alexanderplatz:

Franz Biberkopf betritt Berlin



Tiefbau



Sparkasse und Stadtbank



Handel und Gewerbe



Kunst und Bildung



Gaswerke



Stadtreinigungs- und Fuhrwesen



Verkehr



Feuerlöschwesen



Gesundheitswesen



Finanz- und Steuerwesen

(BA, 49-50)

These pictures are not illustrations added to the text, reinforcing the written word; they are themselves part of what the author wants to say. Döblin extracts the humor of contrasting written and pictorial media and the humor of having a modern up-dated form of heraldic devices.

Puns and Pseudo Etymologies

According to Webster's, a pun exploits one word having several and incongruous meanings or it plays on words that sound similar, but have diverse meanings. Words with a literal and a metaphorical meaning are the most tempting to pun on:

Breiten wir, werte Brüder und Brüderinnen,
den Schleier der Nächstenliebe 10 Quadrat-
meter über die zwischenliegende Zeit.

(BA, 237)

While one can spread a metaphorical veil of neighborly love,
one cannot give it exact dimensions; love does not lend it-
self to mathematical measurements.

In the following "Feuer gefangen" is used metaphorically
and then treated as if it were literally true.

Angenehm berührt, und zwar gleich auf den
ersten Blick, eine badisch-schwedische
Verlobung: da hat eine Prinzessin aus dem
Schreichholzland bei einem Prinzen von Baden
Feuer gefangen. Wenn man bedenkt, wie weit
Baden und Schweden auseinanderliegen, so
wird man staunen, wie das so piff paff auf
solche Entfernung geht.

(BA, 257)

"Catching fire" refers to falling in love; the second sentence
is pointing out how difficult this process is as "catching
fire" is taken literally; a Swedish "match" ("Streichholz")
was set afire by being struck in Baden.

Macabre is the pun about Reinhold going over dead
bodies: "[...] der Reinhold, der geht über Leichen [...]."
(BA, 412). While Reinhold is as ruthless as the cliché
suggests, he also has murdered Mieke, thus making the well-
worn phrase for ruthlessness literally true.

When Reinhold is temporarily without a girl-friend he
is described as going about on "Freiersfüßen" (BA, 240). He
is free of entanglements while he woos one girl after another,
the pun being made on the idiom "auf freiem Fuß" and "freien".

In the following two men are talking about a conversation one of them had with his boss:

"Ich hab deutsch mit dem Chef gesprochen, darauf hat er mich angefahren. Abends hatte ich meine Kündigung auf den Ersten."

"Man soll nie deutsch reden in gewissen Situationen. Hätten Sie mit dem Mann französisch gesprochen, hätte er Sie nicht verstanden, und Sie wären noch drin." (BA, 55)

The idiom "deutsch sprechen" means to speak plainly. Had the worker spoken less plainly, that is, in another language, he would not have been fired.

A happy maltreatment of language is to be found in Döblin's pseudo etymologies in which he forces words to communicate meanings never intended. We have seen Döblin's ability in Berlin Alexanderplatz to extract new and surprising meanings of seemingly inalterable familiar words as in his puns or in the quotation marks which become goose liver with onions. In the unpublished "Blödeleien im Büro während der Arbeitspause" we have a summation for the defense of language distortion. With arbitrary logic, Döblin submits geographical names to etymological explanations that would never find their way into Grimm's Wörterbuch. "Appenweiher" is really a mispronunciation of "Affenweh" and we are given the tragic story of monkeys screaming, "dieses grelle, herzerreißende Wehgeschrei". "Stuttgart", so Döblin muses, cannot possibly have once been an Amazon state for female horses. Impossible that emancipated mares would have chosen a name which imme-

morialized their shameful, unemancipated state. The name Stuttgart has a significant proportion of t's: four of them in nine letters. The conclusion is obvious. Stuttgart was once a "Teestadt", a city bustling with tea-traders and tea-caravans. "Düsseldorf" comes from "Rüsseldorf", because here elephants had rendezvoused. They were, however, forced to flee to the east; the only trace of this march is the name "Rußland", from "Rüsselland". "Potsdam" was originally "Potsdonnerwetter verdammt noch einmal", a terrible war cry against the wild men, invading Germany from the South. Missing "Schauinsland" because of the fog, the invaders overshot the mark and landed further to the north, stealing the name Potsdam, however, for their new home.

In the "Blödeleien" Döblin maintains that this absurd way of describing and explaining things is truer to reality than apparently objective reasoning. This purpose certainly lies behind the language distortion in the story of Franz Biberkopf.

B. Döblin's Use of Varieties of Style

In using Berlin dialect to talk about Fate or scientific jargon to describe a brutal murder or a pathetic style to express simple content, Döblin exploits the contrast principle of humor. The contrast arises from the content being served to the reader in an inappropriate style. The choice of style to misfit the content gives us the humorous, comic tone of Döblin.

Berlin Speech and Colloquial Speech

It is only natural that Franz Biberkopf should employ the Berlin dialect, for he is a simple man who was born in Berlin and grew up there. It is unexpected, however, to find that Old-Man Death is obviously a Berliner. He speaks to Franz in the most colloquial Berlin German:

Du warst nie da, Dreckkerl du [...]. Als
 ick dir Lüders schickte, haste die Augen
 nicht aufgemacht [...]. Ich sag, du hast
 die Augen nicht aufgemacht, du krummer
 Hund! Schimpfst über Gauner und Gaunerei
 und kuckst dir die Menschen nich an und
 fragst nich, warum und wieso. Was bistu
 fürn Richter über die Menschen und hast
 keene Oogen.

(BA, 477-78)

Döblin amuses us by consciously reversing a literary tradition, which tells us that Death should speak in blank verse or at least in solemn tones. Instead he uses the idiom of his listener, a Berliner, to depict Franz' moral blindness. Death takes on a distinct personality. Döblin has dispensed with

the conventional image of Death as an old man with a long, flowing beard, an hourglass in one hand and a scythe in the other. In its place we have a blue-collar worker. Death seems to take a personal offense at Franz's behavior. He mildly curses him: "Dreckkerl", "du krummer Hund". He mocks Franz: "Blind bist du gewesen [..], der Herr Biberkopf aus dem feinen Viertel [..]" (BA, 478). He is impudent and obscene:

Die Welt braucht andere Kerle als dir [..],
die sehen, wie alles ist, nicht aus Zucker,
aber aus Zucker und Dreck und alles durcheinander.
Du Kerl, dein Herz her, damit es aus mit dir ist.
Damit ichs in den Dreck schmeiße,
was hingehört. Die Schnause kannst du vor dir behalten.
(BA, 479)

We are amused to find Old Man Death himself using euphemisms for death: "Kannst einpacken. Laß dir einmotten. Bei mir biste abgemeldet" (BA, 479). These euphemisms are as much a product of Berlin speech as the dialect words "Kopp", "Oogen" or phrases such as "bist ja garnich uff die Welt jekomm".

Berlin speech is marked by quick repartee on a low level. This rapid exchange is not the clever conversation in the salon of a well-cultivated person; it is not profound; it is earthy and bouncy. It can be sophomoric: during one of its raids, the Pums gang ties up the night watchman and post what they obviously believe to be a witty sign.

Der Stellmacher schreibt zwei Pappschilder:
"Vorsicht! Frisch gebunden!" Die hängt er
dem Wächter vorn und hinten an. (BA, 407)

The joke hinges, of course, on the warnings against freshly painted surfaces and freshly waxed floors.

Obvious and obscene puns display not so much Döblin's verbal wit as they do the smutty humor and wit typical of Franz' milieu. Franz jokes with Lina:

"Weeßt du, Lina, was eine Lageristin ist?"
 [..] "Na, die Pölsch, die ist doch Lageristin, die muß Platten raussuchen bei dem Musikfritzen." "Mein ich nich. Wenn ich dir einen Schups gebe und du liegst aufm Sofa und ich daneben, dann bist du ne Lageristin und ich der Lagerist." "Ja, so siehst du aus." Sie kreischte.

(BA, 81)

The narrator's humor is refracted from Lina's and Franz' punning: he shows the two bawdily enjoying body puns. Another example of gutter wit found among Franz' friends is the following:

"Kommt ein Angler an ein Teich, sitzt da ein Mädal, sagt er zu ihr: 'Na, wie ist, Fräulein Fischer, wann gehen wir zusammen fischen?' Sagt sie: 'Ich heiß ja gar nicht Fischer, ich heiß Vogel.' 'Na, um so besser.'" Alle drei brüllen.

(BA, 399)

For the reader there is, in addition to the joke itself, of course, the joy in the characters' incontinent laughter. The following example of vulgar humor almost succeeds in being clever and witty:

"Hör mal, kennste das. Sagt ein Fräulein: 'Sagen Sie, was heißt eigentlich: a propo?' 'A propo? Von vorn herein!' 'Sehn Sie', sagt die, 'hab ick mir doch gleich gedacht, daß dat wat Unanständiges ist! Kehoh!'"

(BA, 399)

Berlin speech is unabashed and, above all, quick-witted. In the following example, a man wants to see a movie, but does not want to pay the price of sixty pfennigs: will he or will he not succeed?

"Fräulein, ists nicht billiger für einen alten Landsturm ohne Bauch?" "Ne, nur für Kinder unter fünf Monaten, mit nem Lutschpfropfen." "Gemacht. So alt sind wir. Neugeborene auf Stottern." "Na, also fuffzig, mal rin."

(BA, 31)

There is the humor of the exchange between the customer and the girl. Her exaggeration is taken up and elaborated by the customer: "So alt sind wir. Neugeborene auf Stottern." There is no mendacity in these lies and they are even rewarded with a ten-pfennig reduction in price.

Blunt, unsophisticated answers mark the honesty of Berlin speech: "Was ist sexuelle Aufklärung?" asks Franz. "Das sind nackte Mädels, gemalt" (BA, 73) is the answer. The speaker is not trying to be clever or to amuse. The author is depending on the reaction of the reader to appreciate the direct answer; to a more middle-class, inhibited mind the question of sexual enlightenment is filled with deliberative pros and cons.⁵

The colloquial speech in Berlin Alexanderplatz has often

⁵Cf. Döblin's own essays: "Über Jungfräulichkeit", Der Sturm, 3, H. 121-22 (1912-13), pp. 121-22; "Jungfräulichkeit und Prostitution", ibid., Heft 125-26, p. 142; "Sexualität als Sport?" Querschnitt, 11 (1931), pp. 760-62; and "Berliner Ehen", Ztlp, pp. 63-65. The essays castigate the prudish, Victorian tyranny imposed on many by the then existing sex laws.

been cited as being humorous.⁶ Its humor lies in its slyness, sharpness and snottiness ("Schnoddrigkei"). The colloquial speech asserts itself, it is not intimidated by a middle-class sense of propriety or literary standards. The German speech of Franz Biberkopf's working-class milieu has an assured self-image. Franz' street-barker spiel for his bow-tie business is a display piece for slyness and snottiness whose outrageous logic only increases the humor we find in exaggeration.

Herrschaften, wer hat heutzutage Zeit, sich morgens einen Schlips zu binden und gönnt sich nicht lieber die Minute mehr Schlaf. Wir brauchen alle viel Schlaf, weil wir viel arbeiten müssen und wenig verdienen. Ein solcher Schlipshalter erleichtert Ihnen den Schlaf. [...] denn wer solchen Schlipshalter kauft, wie ich hier habe, braucht kein Schlafgift und keinen Schlummerpunsch und nichts. Er schläft ungewiegt wie das Kind an der Mutterbrust, weil er weiß: es gibt morgens kein Gedränge [...].
(BA, 70 ff)

Franz uses far-fetched logic - a pre-tied bow-tie scarcely replaces sleeping tablets - in order to arrest the attention of the street crowd. The passer-by stops to listen to Franz because he is amused by the spiel, not because he has been comparison

⁶Cf. Volker Klotz, "Agon Stadt. Alfred Döblins Berlin Alexanderplatz", in Die erzählte Stadt. Ein Sujet als Herausforderung des Romans von Lesage bis Döblin (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1969), pp. 372-418; Fritz Martini, Wagnis der Sprache Interpretation deutscher Prosa von Nietzsche bis Benn (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett, 1954), pp. 336-372; Albrecht Schöne, "Alfred Döblin. Berlin Alexanderplatz" in Der deutsche Roman vom Barock bis zur Gegenwart, pp. 291-325.

shopping for bow-ties. In addition to more sleep, Franz promises him comfort, obviating a visit to the tavern. He promises that the bow-ties are stylish, even suggesting that one can use a wide band, just like the homosexuals do on their shoes. Like the passer-by, the reader is caught up in the fair atmosphere, in which one will accept the most exaggerated assumptions of patent nonsense; no offense is meant and none is taken.

Döblin's impudent tone is by no means confined to Franz Biberkopf and to Berlin Alexanderplatz. In his early journalistic essays of the 1920's, Döblin had sharpened his pen and his tongue. Especially in his theater and his music critiques,⁷ his criticism borders on insult. Where one expects conventional words, Döblin depends on exaggerated assumptions to express his disapproval of a play or a concert. Words with vulgar connotations used in a context normally reserved for more polished style create the humor of "Schnoddrigkeit".

After Babylonische Wandlung we do not find this colloquial tone in Döblin with significant exceptions. We do not find the sly, snotty tone in his late journalism. Döblin

⁷See Döblin, "Starke Schauspieler, dünne Stücke", Ztlp, pp. 51-54; Xitanes (Döblin), "Bayreuth in Berlin", Das Theater. Illustrierte Halbmonatsschrift für internationale Bühnenkunst, 1, H. 1 (1909-10), p. 13; Döblin, "Hansi Niese", *ibid.*, Heft 4, p. 83; Döblin, "Gyges und sein Ring", *ibid.*, Heft 6, p. 134; Döblin, "'Der Graf von Luxemburg', Operette von Franz Lehar", *ibid.*, Heft 9, p. 203; Döblin, "Musik nebst Schimpfworten", Ztlp, p. 14.

wishes explicitly to teach and therefore does not rely on the innuendo of satirical contrast to strike the reader. We do not find the colloquial, snotty tone in his later works, for his heroes are more educated than Franz and not the buffoon that the god Konrad is. Therefore they formulate their thoughts more conventionally. From Karl (Pardon) to Edward Allison (Hamlet), the protagonists are middle-class, which means they are more conscious of what others might think of them. In their speech they are afraid to indulge in the bold strokes of logic, which are really not logical, as Franz Biberkopf does. We rediscover the colloquial tone which is used to contrast with the reader's expectations of what is appropriate in the Märchen vom Materialismus and Reiseverkehr mit dem Jenseits. In the former the rebellious elements of nature and in the latter the spirits conjured up employ bouncy, aggressively colloquial speech. Yet even here, in contrast to Berlin Alexanderplatz, the tone is more subdued.

Children's Language

The humor in children's language is similar to that in Döblin's use of imitative sounds; the undignified playfulness of the child's mode of expression contrasts with the conventional, staid seriousness of the adult's. The incongruous antithesis between the simplicity of the child's world view and the subtle complexity of the mature adult's is starker

in Döbblin's use of children's language than it is in imitative sounds.

Addressing an adult with baby talk is a sarcastic comment on his maturity. Franz explains to a prostitute that he has served time. She offers him a schnaps as comfort:

Da bleibt er liegen, lang, wie er ist:
 "Was soll mich Mampe? Mir haben sie ver-
 plempert. Da hab ich in Tegel gesessen,
 für was denn. Erst bei de Preußen im
 Graben und dann in Tegel. Ich bin kein
 Mensch mehr." "Nanu. Wirste doch nicht bei
 mir weinen. Tomm, mache Snäbelchen auf,
 droßer Mann muß tinken. [...] Tomm,
 droßer Mann, noch ein Mampe. Sinds die
 Augen, geh su Mampe, gieß dir ein auf
 die Lampe."

(BA, 36)

She takes Franz' disclaimer, "Ich bin kein Mensch mehr" at face value and treats him like a helpless baby, albeit she gives the baby schnaps. Her maternal cooing ends in doggerel, reminiscent of nursery rhymes.

Where the simple language of children's rhymes and songs are used, the humor is based on the contrast between them and the surrounding "adult" text. The complexity of the adult world is abandoned for the simplicity of the child's world:

Um acht Uhr 23 Minuten, 17 Sekunden tritt
 wieder einer an den Schanktisch, Trank-
 tisch, einer, - eins, zwei, drei, vier,
 fünf, sechs, sieben, meine Mutter, die
 kocht Rüben - wer wird es sein?

(BA, 212)

At this precise moment in time, Franz is meeting Puns himself. It is his gang and its activities which will morally

test Franz; at this precise moment in time, the numbers give way to a child's counting rhyme.

Another children's rhyme is the chant that Franz remembers as he plods downstairs:

Franz geht die Treppe runter. Eine Stufe,
noch eine Stufe, noch eine Stufe, ne Stufe,
Stufe, Stufe, vier Treppen, immer runter,
runter, runter, noch runter. Dösig ist man,
ganz verrammelt im Kopf. Kochste Suppe,
Fräulein Stein, haste nen Löffel, Fräulein
Stein - haste nen Löffel, Fräulein, kochste
Suppe, Fräulein Stein. (BA, 219)

His thoughts flow from thinking about his tiredness back to a nonsense children's chant.

The opening of the second book of Berlin Alexanderplatz illustrates the juxtaposition of the two worlds, the child's and the adult's. Here Döblin establishes a leitmotif which he can use economically throughout the novel to comment on Franz' development. We are presented first with a pious fairy-tale:

Es lebten einmal im Paradies zwei Menschen, Adam und Eva. [...] Die Sonne ging auf und unter, der Mond tat dasselbe, das war eine einzige Freude den ganzen Tag im Paradies.

So wollen wir fröhlich beginnen. Wir wollen singen [...]: Mit den Händchen klapp, klapp, Klapp, mit den Füßchen trapp, trapp, trapp, einmal hin, einmal her, ringsherum, es ist nicht schwer.

(BA, 49)

Following immediately is the description of Berlin and the Rosenthaler Platz. There is a serious intent to this passage. Franz fails to recognize that this paradise is no paradise.

Knowing this, we can now appreciate the scathing irony of the last sentence in the quotation above "es ist nicht schwer". The words which sounded so innocent warn us that the opposite is true. Franz will not have an easy time readjusting to the complex world of Berlin as long as he conceives the world to be childishly simple.

Franz congratulates himself when he starts earning an honest living selling newspapers:

Er [...] entschließt sich, Zeitungen zu handeln. Warum? Sie haben ihm davon erzählt, Lina kann helfen, und es ist was für ihn. Einmal hin, einmal her, ringsherum, es ist nicht schwer. (BA, 72)

Among the newspapers he sells is the Nazi propaganda sheet, which brings him into heated conflict with the more radical men at Henschke's pub. The order of the world, which seemed to be so simple, breaks down for a moment, but only briefly, and then:

Es lebten aber einmal im Paradiese zwei Menschen, Adam und Eva. Und das Paradies war der herrliche Garten Eden. Vögel und Tiere spielten herum. (BA, 100)

As in a fairy-tale, order, simple and childish, has been restored. Franz turns to Lina to comfort himself with an evening out. His world is repaired, so to speak; life is once again child's play:

Mit den Händchen klapp, klapp, mit den Füßchen trapp, Fische, Vögel, ganzen Tag, Paradies. (BA, 102)

Just before Franz is to experience Fate's first blow - the widow betrayed by Lüders slams the door in Franz' face - his world is still a paradise. The chapter in which Franz stands in front of this door begins thus:

Es war das wunderbare Paradies. Die Wasser
wimmelten von Fischen, aus dem Boden spros-
sen Bäume, die Tiere spielten, Landtiere,
Seetiere und Vögel. (BA, 117)

Into this garden a snake, more cunning than all the animals of the fields, slithers.

As Franz is forced to surrender his first illusions about the simplicity of life, the refrain is heard again:

Mit den Händchen klapp, klapp, klapp,
mit den Füßchen trapp, trapp, trapp. (BA, 126)

Franz then disappears to drown himself in drink. The first blow of Fate has badly shaken, but not yet destroyed, his belief that the world is a simple, easy place to live in.

Encyclopedic Description

As we saw earlier listing of words can be humorous. Related in structure is encyclopedic description, which piles detail on detail. With Döblin this method of literary description reveals a mental playfulness, just as does the list of words or syllables which disintegrate. His is a mock seriousness. Thus we have numerous advertising texts in Berlin Alexanderplatz, which list a wealth of detail about a

product (BA, 89), for example. The exact position of Berlin is given down to the minute and second of latitude and longitude (BA, 494). The effect is amusing, even macabre as with the death statistics (BA, 428). First of all, we do not expect such precision, which the encyclopedic listing provides. Secondly, we expect the description to end with each item, yet there is another and still another.

What is basically only a fleeting impression of an object or of the city grows into a thorough, miniature lecture on the topic. A word leads to an association; an association leads to a digression; a digression, to a lecture. By this route Döblin finds himself holding forth on various species of fowl. His favorite genus is, illogically, roast fowl; but the flood of subsequent facts swamps the initial "wrong" entry. The author informs us, in the best dry textbook style, how the "Zwergsumpfhühnchen" differs from the "BruchMühnchen", that the "Monial" or "Monal" is also called the "Glanzfasan" by the experts and what this bird's habits are. Despite the wealth of detail, all this information is irrelevant to the plot. Despite the scholarly presentation, the information is unimportant. The realization that this is trivia is formally conceded:

Jedoch spielt sich das alles sehr entfernt
ab zwischen Sikkan und Bhutan in Indien,
es ist für Berlin eine ziemlich unfrucht-
bare Bibliotheksweisheit.

(BA, 145)

The author pays scrupulous respect to knowledge, but smuggles in an illogical fact; he bows dutifully to facts unearthed by scholarship, but dismisses it - and thereby he mocks the relevance of bookish wisdom.

Books are not the only repository of irrelevant wisdom. The newspaper devoted to local news takes itself as seriously as an encyclopedia and is as apposite to the story. The entire chapter "Lokalnachrichten" is devoted to what is happening in Berlin in the second week of April. The chapter concludes:

Wir kehren nach diesem lehrreichen Exkurs
über öffentliche und private Ereignisse in
Berlin, Juni 1928, wieder zu Franz Biberkopf,
Reinhold und seiner Mädchenplage zurück.

(BA, 209)

The local news is an ironic mixture of gossip, stock exchange details and theater chit-chat. In a strict sense of the word, the news is not instructive. But it is the usual light fare that one does find in all large city papers. If these items are of enough importance to make the news, then the story of Franz should find interested listeners:

Es ist anzunehmen, daß auch für diese Mit-
teilungen nur ein kleiner Interessenten-
kreis vorhanden ist. Wir wollen die Ur-
sachen davon nicht erörtern.

(BA, 209)

The speaker is referring to the main characters in the same way a reviewer discusses the success or failure of a book or film.

Scientific and Bureaucratic Language

Scientific and bureaucratic language is the self-consciously formal and impersonal style we find in official and legal papers, professional books and journals. The language strives for complete objectivity; the writer strives for anonymity. In Berlin Alexanderplatz the author uses this style to parody the idea of objectivity. Also he parodies this style to comment on man's relationship to his world: to reveal Franz Biberkopf caught in a world of law paragraphs he does not understand and to mock the authorities who take themselves more seriously than they deserve to be.

A mathematical law tells us what happens in a given event; yet, no matter how detailed, it is too impersonal to describe the event. Döblin attempts to define exactly the mystery of death by using Newton's first and second laws of motion:

Was die Sekunde vorher mit dem Brustkorb der Frauenperson geschehen war, hängt zusammen mit den Gesetzen von Starre und Elastizität, Stoß und Widerstand. Es ist ohne Kenntnis dieser Gesetze überhaupt nicht verständlich. Man wird folgende Formeln zu Hilfe nehmen:

Das erste Newtonsche (njutensche) Gesetz, welches lautet: Ein jeder Körper verharrt im Zustand der Ruhe, solange keine Kraftwirkung ihn veranlaßt, seinen Zustand zu ändern (bezieht sich auf Idas Rippen). Das zweite Bewegungsgesetz Njutens: Die Bewegungsänderung ist proportional der wirkenden Kraft und hat mit ihr die gleiche Richtung (die wirkende Kraft ist Franz, beziehungsweise sein Arm und seine Faust mit Inhalt). Die Größe der Kraft wird mit folgender Formel ausgedrückt:

$$f = c \lim \frac{\Delta v}{\Delta t} = \text{ow.}$$

Die durch die Kraft bewirkte Beschleunigung, also den Grad der erzeugten Ruhestörung, spricht die Formel aus:

$$\Delta v = \frac{1}{c} f \Delta t.$$

Danach ist zu erwarten und tritt tatsächlich ein: Die Spirale des Schaumschlägers wird zusammengepreßt, das Holz selbst trifft auf. Auf der andern Seite, Trägheits-, Widerstandsseite: Rippenbruch 7. - 8. Rippe, linke hintere Achsellinie.

(BA, 105)

Pedantic care is taken to describe mathematically, objectively and impersonally every force. The universality of "Newton's Law" is, however, adapted as a sop to Ida's individuality. The law is made to fit the special circumstances of Ida's death by "localizing" it to the "Njutensche" law. Even in this form the law does not uniquely describe Ida. The narrator pretends absolute confidence in modern, progressive science:

Bei solcher zeitgemäßen Betrachtung kommt man gänzlich ohne Erinnen aus. Man kann Stück für Stück verfolgen, was Franz tat und Ida erlitt. Es gibt nichts Unbekanntes in der Gleichung.

(BA, 105)

We hear the author's satiric intent, for the dispassionate use of a mathematical formula contrasts starkly with Ida's anguish and pain. The scathing irony climaxes in the last sentence quoted: "Es gibt nichts Unbekanntes in der Gleichung". The effect is macabre, underlining the inhumanity of science. Sexual potency and impotency are also analyzed in science.

tific terms, demonstrating again the dehumanizing effect of science.

Die sexuelle Potenz kommt zustande durch das Zusammenwirken 1. des innersekretorischen Systems, 2. des Nervensystems und 3. des Geschlechtsapparates. Die an der Potenz beteiligten Drüsen sind: Hirnanhang, Schilddrüse, Nebenniere, Vorstehdrüse, Samenblase und Nebenhoden.

(BA, 34-35)

This elaborate, "correct" description of the human sexual apparatus, of the psychological process, of the inhibitions which must be overcome for sexual intercourse does not in the least help Franz, who, left in a pub during this digression, is mulling over his second failure. Nor does the scientifically developed patent medicine against impotence help him. The text of the label guarantees the impeccable scientific pedigree of the product:

Testifortan, geschütztes Warenzeichen
Nr. 365695, Sexualtherapeutikum nach Sanitätsrat Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld und Dr. Bernhard Schapiro, Institut für Sexualwissenschaft, Berlin. Die Hauptursachen der Impotenz sind: A. ungenügende Ladung durch Funktionsstörung der innersekretorischen Drüsen; B. zu großer Widerstand durch überstarke psychische Hemmungen, Erschöpfung des Erektionszentrums. Wann der Impotente die Versuche wieder aufnehmen soll, kann nur individuell aus dem Verlauf des Falls bestimmt werden.

(BA, 37)

Döblin has found a marvelous example of the style in scientific writing. The sentence explaining the causes of impotency are sonorous and quite impressive and also incomprehensible to a non-medical person. The rounded phrases of the

last sentence conceal the lack of real information. The impotent man is to resume intercourse when it is possible to do so; but there is no indication of how the patient knows when it will be possible. The last sentence is the medical equivalent of the infuriating cookbook advice: cook until done, when one does not know how to recognize "done".

The inadequacy of science to explain sexual success as well as failure is contrasted by two styles of language. Frans' sexual success is depicted at first in broken quotations of scientific laws:

[...] keine Schwerkraft, Zentrifugalkraft.
Es ist verschwunden, versunken, ausgelöscht die Rotablenkung der Strahlungen im Kraftfeld der Sonne, die kinetische Gastheorie, Verwandlung von Wärme in Arbeit, die elektrischen Schwingungen, die Induktionserscheinungen, die Dichtigkeit der Metalle, Flüssigkeiten, der nichtmetallischen festen Körper. (BA, 40)

All of nature's laws are suggested as suitable descriptions for Frans' potency. Yet, how does Franz himself view his success?

Er krabbelte hoch, lachte und drehte sich vor Glück, vor Wonne, vor Seligkeit. Was bliesen die Trompeten, Husaren heraus, halleluja! (BA, 40)

We have a juxtaposition of the "correct" scientific formulation next to the imprecise, yet more convincing reaction of Franz himself. The impact of the latter ridicules the claim of the former to being the key to truth. Objectivity is limit-

ed in describing truthfully Ida's death or Frans' sexual success.

The coldness of medical jargon mirrors Reinhold's calculating nature, even under the influence of alcohol. The jargon implies that Reinhold loses control of himself. Drunk after having pushed Frans out of the moving car, Reinhold severely beats his current girl-friend Trude. He pulls out her hair, breaks a mirror over her head and punches her in the mouth:

Alles dieses konnte, wie gesagt, Reinhold, weil ein paar Glas Schnaps sein Großhirn narkotisierten und infolgedessen sein Mittelhirn freie Hand bekam, das bei ihm im ganzen tüchtiger war.

(BA, 238)

Not Reinhold, but his "Mittelhirn" is given a free hand. The implication is that Reinhold is not responsible for his uncontrolled behavior. Responsibility lies outside of Reinhold: "Er selbst wollte eigentlich auch nicht, die Tat vollzog sich aber trotz seines Nichtwollens gewissermaßen automatisch, sie vollzog sich hauptsächlich unter Beteiligung seines Mittelhirns [...] " (BA, 238). The irony is that there is no separation between Reinhold and his "Mittelhirn"; he cannot plead not guilty. The jargon of forensic psychology is being mocked. It does not provide an excuse, but merely obfuscates justice.

Bureaucracy distorts the humanity within us. The jargon of officialdom reveals itself to be absurdly alien to human-

ity . The language of the law like the language of science is heartless, cold and inadequate to help Franz. The uselessness of the law is shown precisely in the chapter where Franz swears to stay "upright".

Der Polizeipräsident, Abteilung 5, Geschäftszeichen, es wird ersucht, bei etwaigen Eingaben in vorliegender Angelegenheit das obige Geschäftszeichen anzugeben. Ausweislich der mir vorliegenden Akten sind Sie wegen Bedrohung, tätlicher Beleidigung und Körperverletzung mit tödlichem Ausgang bestraft worden, mithin als eine für die öffentliche Sicherheit und Sittlichkeit gefährliche Person zu erachten.

(BA, 43)

A list of paragraph numbers follows, according to which Franz is to conduct himself while adjusting to society. First, the pomposity of the language is annoying more than amusing. The confidence which comes with authority contrasts with Franz' own cockeyed confidence to stay "upright". We know that Franz' definition of "anständig" is not within the letter of the law; it is sometimes not even within the spirit of the law. Secondly, the truth which is not true strikes us. Franz has killed another human; he has committed manslaughter, which is rendered more imposing, being called "tätliche Beleidigung und Körperverletzung mit tödlichem Ausgang". He is a dangerous person. Yet, we know more. We know that he is also "der alte gute Franz Biberkopf" (BA, 40). The formality of the law's language conjures up the idea of a fiend. It is as if we saw a sign "beware of vicious dog" posted in front of

a friendly St. Bernard.

Döblin parodies the undeniable order and logic of the official style by contrasting it with the surrounding text, which depicts disorder and chaos. When Franz leaves prison, houses seem to sway and the roofs seem to slide. Frightened by the chaos which seems to surround him, Franz recollects the regime of prison: "Auf entsprechendes Glockenzeichen ist sofort mit der Arbeit zu beginnen [...] " (BA, 15). To us the extreme order of the prison regime is starker and more forbidding than the preceding chaos. It is an ironical comment on Franz' state of mind that he should find comfort in such an impersonal, alienating order; it is also satirical criticism of the prison system, which makes Franz so unfit to reenter into society. Franz has become the victim of the order imposed on him. The prisoner who writes to the public prosecutor is also the victim of order for order's sake.

An die Staatsanwaltschaft am Landgericht.
Während der Gerichtsverhandlungen gegen mich vor der Großen Strafkammer des Landgerichts teilte mir der Vorsitzende, Herr Landgerichtsdirektor Dr. X., mit, daß von einem Unbekannten aus meiner Wohnung Elisabethstraße 76 nach meiner Verhaftung Sachen abgeholt worden sind. Diese Tatsache ist aktenmäßig festgestellt. Da dies aktenmäßig festgestellt worden ist, so muß doch, von der Polizei oder Staatsanwalt veranlaßt, eine Nachforschung stattgefunden haben. [...] Ich bitte die Staatsanwaltschaft, mir über das Ergebnis der Ermittlung Mitteilung zu machen oder mir eine Abschrift des bei den Akten befindlichen Berichts zu senden [...].
(BA, 109)

The letter-writer, imprisoned, is asking for an inquiry into a theft which has taken place during his incarceration. He avoids using the word for "stolen" and circumscribes it with the ridiculously inaccurate word "fetched" (abgeholt). He employs a ludicrously correct style, uncommon to thieves behind bars. He so punctiliously observes the formal conventions of address and formal style that there is no trace of any personality left; it has been totally eradicated.

The neatly ordered paragraphs of the prison code render human beings unable to fit into social order and fail to give them a sense of integrity. In the beginning, Franz can find comfort in the regime imposed by prison regulations, but he cannot fit into the order outside the prison walls. He wants to be upright, but the paragraphs of the law give him no aid other than labeling him dangerous. Franz does not hide behind the law, he is merely its victim. The prisoner who writes the letter is clever enough to manipulate the proper phrases.

The best satire of bureaucratic language and mentality is not in Berlin Alexanderplatz, but in Unser Dasein. It is a grotesque letter written by the "organization of miscarried babies, "Im Namen aller Fehlgeburten". The "authors" do not exist; yet they write. They are deeply wronged and what do they do? They form a society and inform the world of its existence and of their plan to write a constitution:

Herr Doktor, bei uns hat es nicht geklappt. Es kam etwas dazwischen. Was, wissen wir nicht,

denn wir waren ja noch gar nicht da. Nun haben wir einen Verein gegründet der am Leben Behinderten. V.d.L.B. Unser V.d.L.B. hat seine Satzungen noch nicht herausgegeben, aber wir erlauben uns hiermit, Ihnen überhaupt von unserem Bestehen Kenntnis zu geben. [...]

Mit geziemender Schätzung.

V.d.L.B.

Das Generalsekretariat

Nummer 169821033107

Der unterschriebene V.d.k.Kst. und V.d.k.K. (Verein der keimenden Kastanien und Verein der keimenden Kartoffeln) schließt sich mit Entrüstung dem obigen Protest des V.d.L.B., Sektion Mensch an. 8

Moral outrage is dissipated in the registered organizations and initials of titles.

Biblical Language

The sonorous cadences of Biblical poetry and religious sermons are not generally humorous, unless the verses are parodied or are themselves used to parody. In Berlin Alexanderplatz Döblin imparts a somber dignity to the story of Franz Biberkopf, when he refers to the fates of Jeremiah (BA, 19, 215, 231), Job, (BA, 153 ff, 418 ff), and Abraham and Isaac (BA, 311 ff). To comment seriously on Franz, Döblin echoes the Old Testament curse with which God drove Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden: "Von Erde bist du gekommen, zu Erde sollst du wieder werden" (BA, 126). Here Franz is infuriated at Lüders' betrayal of his confidence; the first

⁸ Döblin, Unser Dasein, p. 66-68

test, the first blow of fate strikes Franz and yet his pride is not broken. When Döblin later substitutes a different target for the same verses from Genesis, the curse seems unreasonable and incongruous:

Ein Müllhaufen liegt vor uns. Von Erde bist du gekommen, zu Erde sollst du wieder werden, wir haben gebauet ein herrliches Haus, nun geht hier kein Mensch weder rein noch raus. So ist kaputt Rom, Babylon, Ninive, Hannibal, Cäsar, alles kaputt, oh, denkt daran. Erstens habe ich dazu zu bemerken, daß man diese Städte jetzt wieder ausgräbt, wie die Abbildungen in der letzten Sonntagsausgabe zeigen, und zweitens haben diese Städte ihren Zweck erfüllt, und man kann nun wieder neue Städte bauen. Du jammerst doch nicht über deine alten Hosen, wenn sie morsch und kaputt sind, du kaufst neue, davon lebt die Welt.

(BA, 181-82)

The products of the complex modern cities with its intricate commercial structure all end on the trash heap. The literal dust to which man returns is here transformed into the malodorous insignia of a metropolis. The narrator then parodies the Vanitas theme, by citing the historical precedents, Rome, Babylon and Nineveh. The pictures in the last Sunday's newspaper, he pedantically notes, show that these ancient cities are not forgotten; for archeologists are excavating at these sites. If only academics who preserve and classify the past are interested, then the cities are dead and cannot be reborn. Besides, the narrator cynically remarks, these old cities have served their purpose: like any piece of goods, when a city becomes dilapidated and decayed, one throws it

out, buys a new one, and thus stimulates the economy.

The religious rhetoric of the Salvation Army is a parody of itself. The pathos, earnestly meant, is embarrassingly fulsome.

Warum soll Franz nicht auf die Bußbank,
wann wird der selige Augenblick kommen, wo
er sich hinschmeißt vor seinem schrecklichen
Tod und den Mund aufmacht und singen darf
mit vielen andern hinter ihm:

Komm, Sünder, zu Jesu, o, zögere doch nicht,
wach auf, du Gebundener, wach auf, komm ans
Licht, ein völliges Heil kannst du haben,
noch heut, o glaub, und das Licht zieht dann
ein und die Freud. Chor: ~~Dem~~ der siegreiche
Heiland, der bricht jedes Band, der siegrei-
che Heiland, der bricht jedes Band und führt
zum Siege mit mächtiger Hand, und führt zum
Siege mit mächtiger Hand. Musik! Blasen,
schmettern, ~~daching~~daradada: Der bricht jedes
Band und führt zum Siege mit mächtiger Hand.
Trara, trari, trara! Schrumm! ~~Daching~~daradada!
(BA, 343)

The straight-forward guilelessness we know in Franz contrasts harshly with the insincerity of the Salvation Army's vision of penance, accompanied by drums, clashing cymbals and blaring trumpets. The vision includes the belief that all problems will be easily resolved once the sinner has surrendered his soul to Jesus, and then publicly shows him celebrating the surrender. In reality, the battle is an intensely lonely one and leaves one aside from participation with the masses. What Franz does win is no final victory, but only a renewed self-confidence with which he can attack problems as they appear. The public carnival atmosphere of the hymn answers the question "Warum soll Franz nicht auf die Bußbank".

When Biblical cadences and language are used humorously, the resulting satire underscores how private the gospel of God is.

What does the use and misuse of different *categories* of language mean? Döblin has a sense of wonder not only for what is in the world, but also for the mystery of the material which is language that is used to describe it:

[...] und auf den Zetteln [trolley tickets] steht in demselben Deutsch mit dem die Bibel geschrieben ist und das Bürgerliche Gesetzbuch: Gültig zur Erreichung des Reiseziels auf kürzestem Wege, keine Gewähr für die Anschlußbahn.

(BA, 183)

C. Aphorisms and Figurative Language

The essence of an aphorism is brevity; its characteristic is clever formulation and its purpose is to express the author's opinion.⁹ Aphorisms should be included among the categories of humor: a complex thought is surprisingly well-expressed with extreme economy and with a witty formulation.

There are not too many aphorisms in Berlin Alexanderplatz. The few draw their wit from the snotty tone as much as from their pithiness. "Das 11. Gebot heit: La dir nicht verblffen" (BA, 142). What at first seems a blasphemous mockery of the first ten commandments turns out, on reflection, to be sound advice in this topsy-turvy world. The advice appears when Franz is regarding the Jews who are trying to help him. He is as surprised that someone should want to do so as he is astonished that he is released from the Tegel prison.

The wisdom embodied in the following aphorism is a jaunty, if macabre version of "carpe diem", it is appropriate to the Pums gang who are drinking with Franz in a crowded, smoky pub:

Jung am Galgen gehangen ist besser, als
alt Zigarrenstummel suchen. (BA, 211)

⁹Cf. Gero von Wilpert, "Aphorismus". Sachwrterbuch, 1964; Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary, "Aphorism".

While true aphorisms are infrequent, there is no paucity of platitudes offered as if they were clever aphorisms. They reveal how unperceptive Franz is, if he thinks a commonplace thought is an articulate insight into life.

Immer wieder verkündete Franz: "Man muß sich ausfüllen. Ein Mensch, der Kraft hat, muß essen. Wenn du die Plautze nicht voll hast, kannst nisch machen."

(BA, 188)

The author indicates to the reader with the word "verkündete" that what follows is to be understood as epigrammatic wisdom. Franz has reversed the customary moralization: he who does not work shall not eat.

Like aphorisms, maxims are also a complex thought expressed very compactly; they have, however, a moral point rather than a witty one. In Franz' bow-tie pitch we find misapplied maxims:

Man muß Zeit sparen. Zeit ist Geld. Die Romantik ist weg und kommt niemals wieder, damit müssen wir alle heutzutage rechnen.

(BA, 71)

Franz tucks as many maxims as he can into his sales patter because he hopes to strike a responsive, buying chord in his audience. "Time must be saved," he tells the crowd, implying that they will do so with his pre-tied bow-ties. "Time is money," he assures his prospective clients, hoping that they will part with their money to buy these ties. "Romance is dead," he adds, enticing them to make use of his technical device.

On the serious side, maxims can be used as ominous commentary on the development in the plot. At the close of the scene in the smoky pub where Franz meets Pums himself, Franz feels particularly warm and friendly towards Reinhold.

Und Franz kann sich gar nicht genug freuen
über Reinhold. Ein reuiger Sünder ist besser
als 999 Gerechte. (BA, 213)

The laconic addition of the saying ironically underscores Franz' mistake, the sin of his friendship for Reinhold.

At one point, Döblin explains why he uses platitudes and maxims: they formulate the truth.

Es ist aber in der Welt so eingerichtet,
daß die dämlichsten Sprichworte recht be-
halten, und wenn ein Mensch glaubt, nu ist
gut, dann ist lange nicht gut. Der Mensch
denkt und Gott lenkt, und der Krug geht so
lange zu Wasser, bis er bricht. (BA, 456)

As if to persuade us of the truth of his conclusion about the truth of adages, Döblin rattles off a number of sayings that are shopworn clichés. The barrage of sayings shares the helpless quality of Polonius' advice to impart helpful nuggets of wisdom. However, the adages do apply; they are relevant to the story of Reinhold's fate. Going under the name of Moroskiewicz, a Polish pickpocket, Reinhold smugly believes himself safe from the police search for Mieze's murderer. His cover turns out to be his undoing: "und wenn ein Mensch glaubt, nu ist gut, dann ist noch lange nicht gut". Reinhold has been too clever for his own good. Out of boredom

with prison routine, he falls in love with a young prisoner to whom he confesses all: "Der Mensch denkt und Gott lenkt". Upon his release, the young man tells the story which gets to the police and Reinhold is captured: "und der Krug geht so lange zu Wasser, bis er bricht". Reinhold has finally overreached himself. At first glance, the adages seem ineffective in "real" life and irrelevant to it, but the truth they contain cannot be denied forever.

Berlin Alexanderplatz closes with Franz Biberkopf a more politically and socially responsible man than he was at the outset. He is Döblin's ideal political and social being because he has his eyes open and reflects about things. The delicate equilibrium between blind adherence to the collective good and loyalty to the individual good is summed up in the seemingly cryptic, but blunt aphoristic comment:

Darum rechne ich erst alles nach, und wenn es so weit ist und mir paßt, werde ich mich danach richten. Dem Mensch ist gegeben die Vernunft, die Ochsen bilden statt dessen eine Zunft.

(BA, 500)

In snotty language and in doggerel which seems flippantly frivolous, the aphoristic reflection on human political and social activity embodies a universal truth. What seems at first to be a trivial remark turns out to be an acute observation.

The pompous speech of the Reichskanzler Marx, lifted from a newspaper, closes with the cryptic saying: "Lebe, wie

du, wenn du sterbst, wünsche wohl gespeist zu haben" (BA, 68).¹⁰ The exact meaning of these words of wisdom are more puzzling than illuminating, but they do sound impressive. As a pithy summation of the speaker's remarks, themselves a string of clichés, the distorted aphorism mocks the intended spiritual uplift in the hackneyed phrases of the speaker.

As we have stated, aphorisms are not overabundant in Berlin Alexanderplatz or in Döblin's works in general. At first glance they seem not to be present at all. What we give as examples generally melt so into the background of the context that one could argue that the label "aphorism" is artificial. Only by quoting out of context do these examples take on the pregnant, sharp meanings, complete within themselves. Why are aphorisms so little in evidence, when, as we have seen, Döblin is sensitive to the latent absurdities lurking in a turn or phrase?

¹⁰Cf. Christian Fürchtegott Gellert's poem Vom Tode, the second stanza of which begins: "Lebe, wie du, wenn du stirbst, wünschen wirst, gelebt zu haben". In an essay, Döblin parodies the form of the aphorism itself. Döblin had been asked by the editor to participate in their series, in which famous authors contributed a pithy statement of wisdom. Under the title "Lebensweisheit aus unserer Zeit", Die literarische Welt, 6, No. 50 (1930), p. 1, there stands, in script, in its entirety:

Sehr geehrter Herr Haas: meine bisher - 3. Mai 1930 - erlangte Lebensweisheit fasse ich in dem Satz zusammen.

Lebe, wie Du, wenn Du stirbst, wünsche wohl gespeist zu haben.

P.S. Auch die Umrahmung stammt von mir.

Mit schönem Gruß
Alfred Döblin

We can suggest an answer by examining the tendency inherent in some of the language techniques already examined. Döblin's humor exploits contrast, two opposites that spark by juxtaposition. Much of the humor of the different language styles, for example, arises from this contrast. Secondly, Döblin loves to extend a word, a thought into a whole paragraph, or into a whole situation. Thus we have what we would call the additive humor. Both these tendencies do not favor the succinctness necessary for an aphoristic style. Yet we do find aphorisms and aphoristic style in Döblin. They share the same scepticism and subjectivity of his episodic narrative style, which reflects about, mocks and pokes fun at the human condition.

In Berlin Alexanderplatz there are many images and representations of people and things that, while witty in their expression, do not offer the neatly phrased wisdom of an aphorism. The images are not limited to one or two sentences in length. A carefully selected word in a description economically reveals a large, unexpected aspect of the people and events in question.

In the following example in Berlin Alexanderplatz the key word is "Exemplar" which turns the human traffic constable into an automaton:

Die Schupo beherrscht gewaltig den Platz.
Sie steht in mehreren Exemplaren auf dem
Platz. Jedes Exemplar wirft Kennerblicke

nach zwei Seiten und weiß die Verkehrsregeln auswendig. Es hat Wickelgamaschen an den Beinen, ein Gummiknüttel hängt ihm an der rechten Seite, die Arme schwenkt es horizontal von Westen nach Osten, da kann Norden, Süden nicht weiter, und der Osten ergießt sich nach Westen, der Westen nach Osten. Dann schaltet sich das Exemplar selbsttätig um: Der Norden ergießt sich nach Süden, der Süden nach Norden. Scharf ist der Schupo auf Taille gearbeitet. Auf seinen erfolgten Ruck laufen über den Platz in Richtung Königstraße etwa 30 private Personen, sie halten zum Teil auf der Schutzinsel, ein Teil erreicht glatt die Gegenseite und wandert auf Holz weiter.

(BA, 182)

"Exemplar" turns the traffic constable into a human traffic light, impersonal, efficient, of cosmic importance as he controls, not merely traffic, but the compass directions themselves. The constable is a terrifying "es"; like an enormous insect, his legs, encased in puttees, and arms, swinging back and forth, dominate the body. The whole picture of traffic sweeping around the feet of the traffic constable contrasts with the insignificance of the pedestrians, the "private Personen", scurrying across the street. The life at this intersection is so described that it wins a life of its own, as if independent of the narrator. There is an absurdity which the narrator allows to take over and develop by itself.

An inventive simile can bring inherent absurdities in a situation to light. When Franz begins to doubt the wisdom of inheriting Reinhold's cast-off girl-friends, he thinks, "[...] ich bin wie auf Monatsgarderobe auf Weiber abonniert [...]" (BA, 197). There is a recognition and resignation in

a fate in a situation entered upon willingly. Reinhold's cast-offs come in regular intervals whether Franz will or no. What was agreed upon seemed so convenient at first, but now Franz realizes the strain of keeping up with such a quick succession of girls.

An oxymoron, which fuses two opposites together, delights by being paradoxical. The Pums gang has trouble finding reliable "fences", "die zuverlässigen Hehler" (BA, 400). By definition, "fences" are criminal and criminals do not share the upright man's sense of honesty: yet there is such a thing as honor among thieves - why does Franz not inform on Reinhold when he loses his arm? why else does Klempnerkarl hesitate to betray Reinhold to the police? There is, after all, a grain of truth in the fusion of opposites, "reliable" and "fences".

By consciously applying a word to a context in which it is not normally used, Döblin comments and criticizes. The contrast between what the word means and the use to which it is put gives us vivid and humorous images. This critical attitude is based on a scepticism of the existing order. In the later works of Döblin the critical attitude remains, but the scepticism is counteracted by a belief in an ideal order based on religious tenets. This change perhaps explains why we find most of the few examples of aphorisms and the aphoristic style and unusual images in the works before 1933.

D. Literary Quotations and Motifs

Döblin splices into his text extracts from the German literary classics and snippets from popular books, ballads and songs. To appreciate the humor of the cited material, the reader must bring a knowledge of German culture along; quotations and literary motifs must be known to the reader, so that he can have that pleasant "aha" feeling. Secondly, the reader must unite disparate styles, ideas and situations of the text and of the quotation. Thirdly, he must understand the commentary on the story which the quotation implies.¹¹

The impact of the contrast between the literary quotation and surrounding text is not always humorous. If the author is reinforcing his serious intention of the passage by summing up with a familiar literary quotation, then the effect falls short of amusing. For example, the lines from the ballad "Erntelied" ("Es ist ein Schnitter, der heist Tod") and motifs from the Book of Job or Jeremiah are woven into the text of Berlin Alexanderplatz. They alert the reader to the fateful implication of the passage just read.

To qualify as humorous, the literary quotation contrasts with the surrounding text in such a way that it reveals the incongruity of the quotation itself or of the passage just

¹¹Herman Meyer, Das Zitat in der Erzählkunst. Zur Geschichte und Poetik des europäischen Romans (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1961), p. 12. He considers the charm of an inserted quotation to be the "Spannung zwischen Assimilation und Dissimulation".

read. It reveals the frailty of men and the banality of their culture. Of course, Döblin, otherwise a daring linguistic innovator, is not the first author to snatch passages from well-known texts for humorous purposes. It is of consequence for the analysis of the humorous use of literary quotations in Döblin that Herman Meyer sees its history as essentially parallel with the history of the humorous novel.¹² One criterion for a humorous novel is the presence of a personal narrator whose presence is directly felt in the text. Only such a narrator can use quotations to comment on his characters and their actions. This perhaps explains why we find no examples of literary quotations in Wang-lun, where Döblin's literary theory demands the disappearance of the narrator. In Berlin Alexanderplatz and the Babylonische Wandlung, where most examples of humorous quotations are to be found, the author's voice is highly audible: the intention of the quotations is to comment.

We have seen the humor of listing and encyclopedic description, which depends on the abundance of detail. If abundance and superabundance are funny, the inserted quotations add to the types of details listed. In addition to description of the city, - the traffic, the people, the stores, the trolleys - there are the quotations. Nothing is too "high" or "low" to be excluded: not only literary passages, but

¹²Meyer, p. 16.

there are also snatches from popular songs, indeed, newspaper articles and advertising texts, all of which are the literature of the man-in-the-street. When Berlin is introduced, at the beginning of the second book, even the trolley regulations, posted where the bored traveler reads even the finest print, are cited (BA, 52). The numerous entries in the telephone book for the firm AEG is inserted into the text as the trolley 68 passes one of the company buildings.

Döblin invokes and inverts quotations from "high" literature. He distorts Lessing's dictum "Kein Mensch muß müssen" (Nathan der Weise, I.3). Applied to Franz it becomes: "Er wird in ein Verbrechen hineingerissen, er will nicht er wehrt sich, aber er muß müssen" (BA, 177). Lessing's homily is a paradox: "must" denotes iron obligation, the entire statement confirms man's free will. By inverting Lessing's "Kein Mensch muß müssen", Döblin adds one more twist to the paradox. He states the opposite, saying that although Franz does not wish to act, Fate forces him to do so. The reference to the original meaning makes Döblin's statement an ironical comment on Franz' lack of moral courage to determine his own actions. In the larger context of the entire book, however, Lessing's statement is borne out to be true: man is not the victim of blind fate; he does have free will.

By misquoting, Döblin has also an ideal weapon with which to attack hated academic stuffiness. He purposely dis-

torts and banalizes "culture". The classical author most often quoted in Berlin Alexanderplatz is Schiller, whose pathos is an attractive target for Döblin's ridicule.

When a familiar quotation from literary and popular ballads is applied to a "low" situation there is a certain school-boyish disrespect for the veneration which society reserves for its culture. Franz schemes to thwart Reinhold's habit of discarding an old girl-friend for a new one. Along with Cilly, his own "Braut" who was once Reinhold's, and Trude, Cilly's successor, Franz becomes embroiled in intrigue to keep Reinhold faithful to Trude. Franz believes himself successful; on the next few pages his bubbly complacency will prove to be a hollow victory. At the height of Franz' euphoria, the narrator comments:

Doch mit des Geschickes Mächten ist kein
ewiger Bund zu flechten. Und das Schicksal
schreitet schnell. Tragen Sie, wenn Sie am
Schreiten behindert sind, Leisers Schuh.
Leiser ist das größte Schuhhaus am Platze.
Und wenn Sie nicht schreiten wollen, fahren
Sie: NSU ladet Sie zu einer Probefahrt im
Sechszylinder ein.

(BA, 210)

The narrator applies the verses from Schiller's Lied von der Glocke to Franz. Schiller's words conclude the stanza in which the proud father joyfully contemplates the fruits of his labors: the happiness and well-being of his family. Schiller ends on a note of warning; one cannot stave off disaster. The exact words of Schiller are: "Und das Unglück schreitet

schnell". Döblin changes "misfortune" to "fate". The line leads him to consider the image literally; in which case, he absurdly reifies the image: if fate steps quickly, then he shods it with a brand-named shoe. If that is not satisfactory, implying the shoe, but also referring back to "Schicksal schreitet schnell", then the customer can ride. Who is the customer? It is Franz who is hurrying to his doom. The narrator has substituted the phrases of modern advertising for Schiller's note of warning. Happily gloating about reforming Reinhold ("Doch mit des Geschickes Mächten") Franz is delighted to tell Meck all about his success ("ist kein ewiger Bund zu flechten"). In this pub Franz meets for the first time Herr Pums himself and then meets Reinhold, who resents the interference ("Und das Schicksal schreitet schnell").

Schiller's Lied von der Glocke is not only applied to life in the throbbing metropolis, it is purposely misquoted. Two lovers sit in a corner of a dance-hall and embrace. To indicate the length of the kiss and passion of the "Mädel" and her Willi, they are described with lines from Schiller: "[...] sie knutschen sich, Zehnminutenbrenner, festgemauert in der Erden steht die Form aus Mehl gebrannt" (BA, 274). The arrow of irony flies in two directions: against Schiller and against the lovers frozen into their unstable form.

There is the school-boy idea of wit which forces double entendres in otherwise harmless well-known lines. Franz visits

a prostitute: "Das schwammige Weib lachte aus vollem Hals. Sie knöpfte sich oben die Bluse auf. Es waren zwei Königskinder, die hatten einander so lieb" (BA, 33). The two children in the old and familiar folksong experience an unexpected transformation. If a double entendre is clever, it ceases to be school-boyish and is genuinely amusing. It remains, however, as a deflationary pinprick in the balloon of cultural values that society holds so dear.

In addition to showing the banality of the "cultural values", misquotation also reveals the helplessness of culture to insure against human misery and indignity. The moral emptiness of "culture" stands revealed by the misapplication or the distortion of a quotation. To have the great classics as a model neither ennobles the action nor properly honors the classic:

Sie trägt schon frei nach Schiller den Dolch
im Gewande. Es ist zwar nur ein Küchenmesser,
aber dem Reinhold will sie eins für seine
Gemeinheiten geben, wohin ist egal. (BA, 241)

The contrast between Cilly's kitchen knife and Schiller's more literary dagger (from the poem Die Bürgschaft) is amusing, but the humor is pathetic. The emotional intensity behind the kitchen knife dulls that of the more rhetorical dagger; the white heat of Cilly's anger contemptuously emasculates Schiller's idealized image.

Döblin gently satirizes his characters, unrefined and

uneducated, when he lets them exhibit their version of belles lettres. From a fellow inmate in Tegel Franz has learned a poem which he recites in a pub. Like the salon lion quoting Goethe or Shakespeare, Franz searches a moment for the right source of his quotations - the name of the prisoner: "Ein Gedicht weesß ich, aus dem Gefängnis, ist von einem Strafling, der hieß, wart mal, wie der hieß, das war Dohms" (BA, 94). The heavy moralizing tone of the poem is reminiscent of that in the verses of Wilhelm Busch.

Willst du, o Mensch, auf dieser Erden ein
männliches Subjekte werden, dann überleg es dir
genau, eh du dich von der weisen Frau ans Ta-
geslicht befördern läßt! Die Erde ist ein Jam-
merneß! Glaub es dem Dichter dieser Strophen,
der oft an dieser dofen, an dieser harten Speise
kaut! Zitat aus Goethes Faust geklaut: Der
Mensch ist seines Lebens froh gewöhnlich nur
als Embryo! ... Da ist der gute Vater Staat,
er gängelt dich von früh bis spat. Er zwickt
und beutelt dich nach Noten mit Paragraphen
und Verboten! Sein erst Gebot heißt: Mensch,
berappe! Das zweite: halte deine Klappe! [...]
(BA, 94)

There is no classical meter, but doggerel, no esoteric philosophy, but sceptical platitudes are served up as a grand metaphysics of life. The world is a valley of misery. Man is better off unborn; he cannot even drown his troubles in beer or wine without a hangover the next morning. The "poem" mocks the convention of recitation just as Alice-in-Wonderland's spontaneous reworking of "Father William" parodies the Victorian love of didactic, "uplifting" verse. There are not great ideals, no eternal hope to fortify the listener.

The poem concludes with a slightly altered quotation from Schiller's Braut von Messina and a deformed popular "epigram" appropriate to the mental level of his audience:

[...] was ist der Mensch, was ist das Leben?
 Schon unser großer Schiller spricht: 'Der
 Güter höchstes ist es nicht.' Ich aber sag:
 es gleicht ner Hühnerleiter, von oben bis
 unten und so weiter.

(BA, 94-95)¹³

The effect of this "literary" potpourri on the audience is great: "Sie sind alle still." Franz, unconscious of the irony of his remark, passes judgment on the poem: "Schön, was, ist was fürs Leben, aber bitter" (BA, 95).

Just as Franz is deeply moved by these literary dregs, he is ~~un~~comprehending when confronted by a demanding text. But he is not too intimidated by what he reads to lack an opinion.

[...] d'Annunzio heißt das Oberschwein, n
 Spanier oder Italiener oder aus Amerika.
 Hier sind die Gedanken des Mannes so von
 der ihm fernen Geliebten erfüllt, daß ihm
 in einer Liebesnacht mit einer Frau, die
 ihm als Ersatz dient, der Name der wahren
 Geliebten gegen seinen Willen entflieht.
 Da schlägts dreizehn. Nee, du, Kollege, mit
 so was da mach ich nicht mit.

(BA, 75)

Franz rejects the sophistication of d'Annunzio's views in favor of his own direct outlook on sex. His straight-forward approach pokes fun at d'Annunzio's views, sandwiched between

¹³The penultimate line of Schiller's play reads: "Das Leben ist der Güter höchstes nicht." The final "epigram" is based on the popular saying: "Das Leben ist ne Hühnerleiter, man kommt vor lauter Dreck nicht weiter."

the confused introduction and Franz' decided reaction. D'Annunzio rationalizes sexual freedom; Franz does not need to do so. He feels no guilt for his sexual habits and thus needs no theories.

Popular songs show the cultural preference of Franz and those in his milieu. The lyrics may be trivial, sentimental, but they make no pretence to be any "higher" than they are on the scale of cultural values. The humor of their addition to the text lies in their extraordinary poetical ordinariness coupled with their aptness in the text; the quoted strains of a 1920's popular song are not extraneous verbiage. In the following example, Mieke is visiting Eva and sings a romantic ballad, beginning thus:

Bei Abrudpanta trieb ihr Wesen Der Banditen
wilde Schar, Doch ihr Hauptmann Guito Gut und
edeldenkend war. [...]

(BA, 305-6)

The numerous lines of uninspired verse tell the hackneyed story of plighted troth between the noble robber captain Guito and the beautiful Isabella. The father imprisons the one and forces the other to marry. She falls into a deathlike faint and the just escaped lover carries her off. Pursued by the angry father, man and maid, in desperation, put their faith in God and end their troubles with a cup of poison. The ballad could be a scenario for a Rudolph Valentino movie.

Sonja and Eva wissen, es ist ein gewöhnliches Lied vom Wochenmarkt, vor einer Bildtafel wird es gedudelt; aber sie müssen beide

weinen, wie es aus ist, und können sich nicht gleich ihre Zigaretten wieder anstecken.

(BA, 306)

In the girls' minds the song is nothing special, nor in the narrator's mind - he choses the word "gedudelt", which firmly places the song on one of the lower rungs of the cultural ladder. There is no satirical disapprobation from the narrator because they weep, affected by the cloying sentimentality. There is only gentle satire when they cannot relight their cigarettes, the symbol of the emancipated, sophisticated flapper.

Although Döblin appreciates the liveliness of popular songs that have no "cultural" value, he also exposes their sickliness and banality. The words of popular songs are absurd:

Ja, die Frauen sind meine schwache Seite,
sie sind die Stelle, wo ich sterblich bin,
küß ich die erste, denk ich an die zweite
und schau verstoßen schon zur dritten hin.

[...]

(BA, 257)

Ich reiß mir eine Wimper aus und stech dich
damit tot. Dann nehm ich einen Lippenstift
und mach dich damit rot. Und wenn du dann
noch böse bist, weiß ich nur einen Rat: ich
bestelle mir ein Spiegelei und bespritz dich
mit Spinat. [...]

(BA, 258)

In context these bouncy lyrics are the verbal equivalent of the exciting rhythms and happily discordant harmonies of Gershwin's music. The carefree mood, however, jars against the mood of the immediately previous scene in which Eva has mistaken the attempt to pay off Franz for a murder attempt.

The words of a hit song run through Franz' head as he thinks of Mieke:

Für wen, für wen hab ich mein Herze rein gehalten? Für wen, für wen, für dich allein, heut nacht kommt mir das Glück entgegen, drum lad ich dich verwegen ein, heut nacht will ich dich heiß beschwören, daß wir gehören uns allein.

(BA, 351)

Franz streichelt ihr den Nacken und ist so freundlich gut zu ihr, so herzensgut, für wen, für wen habe ich mein Herz rein gehalten, für wen, für wen allein.

(BA, 352-53)

Although the sentiments of deep love correspond to Franz' feelings, their sentimentality does not correspond to Franz' more casual way of expressing himself. In one sense Franz' former amorous attachments belie the allegation in the song of having a pure and untouched heart. In another sense, these suffocatingly trite lyrics are true: before Mieke, Franz has never known love, only possession. Like the stupidest of sayings, the most hackneyed sentiments have their grain of truth.

In the last analysis, however, banality is irrelevant. The self-consciously "pretty" rhymes are inadequate to depict life.

Der Invalide und Franz sitzen umschlungen am Ausschank: "Ich kann dir sagen, du, mir haben sie die Rente gekürzt, ich geh zu den Roten. Wer uns aus dem Paradies vertreibt mit Flammenschwert, ist der Erzengel, und daraufhin kehren wir dahin nicht zurück. Sitzen wir oben am Hartmannsweilerkopf, sag zu meinem Hauptmann, der ist aus Stargard wie ich." "Storkow?" "Nee, Stargard. Jetzt

habe ich meine Nelke verloren, nee, da hängt sie." Wer einmal am Strande des Meeres geküßt, von tänzelnden Wellen belauscht, der weiß, was das Schönste auf Erden ist, der hat mit der Liebe geplauscht.

(BA, 85)

The natural rhythms of speech employed to depict Franz, an acquaintance and their girls at a dance-hall table makes the smoothed, insipid rhythms of the concluding verses quoted seem old-maidish and prissy. Here the language is precious; for example, the word used to describe the waves is the lighter, more delicate "tänzelnd". After the dynamic, heady effect of the pastiche of conversation fragments, the song is an anticlimax; its saccharin sentiments are an outrage to what has gone before. Döblin is jeering at the vapid lines of verse.

The hit tunes wallow in sentimentality. They are "pretty" idealizations of the way we think. In the following example, Reinhold has shattered Mieke by telling her about Franz inheriting his former girl-friends. As she fights to reconcile herself to this new and repugnant picture of Franz, she hears an organ-grinder outside her window:

Sie steht am offenen Fenster, hat einen blaukarierten Schlafrock an und singt mit dem Leiermann: Ich habe mein Herz in Heidelberg verloren (det is eine falsche Gesellschaft, der hat recht, daß er die ausräuchert) in einer lauen Sommernacht (wann kommt er denn nach Hause, ich geh ihm entgegen über die Treppe). Ich war verliebt bis über beide Ohren (ich sag ihm keen Wort, mit sone Schlechtigkeiten werd ich nicht kommen, keen Wort, keen Wort. Ich hab ihn so lieb. Na, meine Bluse werd ick mir anziehen).

(BA, 361-62)

Mieze's thoughts in parenthesis arrive eventually at the same conclusion as the lyrics: she loves the man. Therefore she will remain loyal to him. The gulf between her thoughts and the lyrics, however, is wide. Her natural indignation, her pride and finally her loyalty are sarcastic pin-pricks to the fatuousness of the lyrics.

A brief reference should be made to the movie scenarios. Like books, poems and songs, movies range from the trivial to the sublime: from what is churned out to feed a profitable market to what is consciously conceived of as art. The first film mentioned in Berlin Alexanderplatz is the one Franz goes to see upon release from Tegel.

Einem Gänsemädchen soll Bildung beigebracht
werden, warum, wird so mitten drin nicht
klar. Sie wischte sich die Nase mit der
Hand, sie kratzte sich auf der Treppe den
Hintern, alles im Kino lachte. (BA, 32)

The plot shows a baron lusting after a 'goose-girl when he ostensibly is concerned with her education, all of which unbearably stimulates Franz. His physical reaction to the movie shows that the education of the girl is but a pretext, a sop to moral guardians: the movie makers know quite well what their audiences like. Only a moral guardian might be interested in the refinement of a goosegirl.¹⁴

¹⁴Another film has Eva and Herbert in the audience (BA, 396-97). Eva sighs happily as the noble cavalier does away with the villain. Again, the plot is minimal, and again it is what the audience obviously wants.

The quotations from literature and popular culture are humorous because these particular sentences have a value beyond their literal meaning: the quotations and misquotations signal "culture" to the reader. Drawn from a coherent tradition, the quotations represent books and poems, ballads and songs to which society has assigned a scale of status values. To cite Schiller is to pay homage to these values. The quotations are cultural code words. One establishes his intellectual rank according to whom he cites and how accurately he does so. Thus, the parodies of cultural code words are an attack on the belief in their status and that of entire literary motifs as well. We have seen this in the contrast Döblin creates between the dynamic rhythms of his prose and the boringly smooth meters of the quoted lines; we have seen this in the contrast between the urgent realism of the direct discourse and the sentimental fantasy of the quoted material. Not only are the code words rendered silly under Döblin's treatment, but entire motifs parody and are parodied. When Franz conceals Reinhold in his room in order to parade his ideal happiness with Mieke (BA, 362-70), Döblin is consciously mocking Friedrich Hebbel's Gyges und sein Ring. The "low" cast of characters in Berlin Alexanderplatz playing the roles of Gyges, Kandaules and Rhodope is the humorous, distorting innovation on the classic theme. The result of the sin in Berlin Alexanderplatz is nonetheless as tragic as

it is in Hebbel's play. Döblin's tragedy is less abstract than Hebbel's and therefore more credible.¹⁵

In addition to being a target of parody, the values of the cultural tradition are also the weapons of parody. The religious motif of Vanitas transforms the mundane, animalistic procedure of gobbling lunch into a parable, an act full of sound and fury, but signifying nothing:

Ein junger, dicker Herr mit einer Hornbrille sitzt auf einem Stuhl und verzehrt den Mittagstisch [...]. Er sitzt ganz allein an seinem Tisch, aber doch in Sorge, [...]. Punkt, jetzt ist fertig, jetzt steht er auf, schlapp und dick, der Kerl hat alles glatt aufgefressen, jetzt kann er zahlen. [...] Dann geht der dicke Kerl raus, schnauft, macht sich hinten den Hosenbund locker, damit der Bauch gut Platz hat. Dem liegen gut drei Pfund im Magen, lauter Eßwaren. Jetzt gehts damit los in seinem Bauch, die Arbeit, jetzt hat der Bauch damit zu schaffen, was der Kerl reingeschmissen hat. Die Därme wackeln und schaukeln, das windet sich und schlingt wie Regenwürmer, die Drüsen tun, was sie tun können, sie spritzen ihren Saft in das Zeug hinein, spritzen wie die Feuerwehr, [...] auf die Nieren erfolgt der Ansturm, wie im Warenhaus bei der Weißen Woche [...]. Warte, mein Junge, warte, bald gehst du denselben Gang hier zurück an die Tür, wo dransteht: Für Herren. Das ist der Lauf der Welt.

(BA, 335-36)

The young fat man is not aware of the cosmic disturbance

¹⁵See Joris Duytschaever, "Eine Hebbelsatire in Döblins Berlin Alexanderplatz", *Etudes Germaniques*, 24, No. 4 (1969), pp. 536-52. The scene clearly contributes to Döblin's fight against misplaced awe and admiration for Hebbel. "Ich möchte der ehrfürchtigen Einpökelung Hebbels mit einigen Wendungen Schwierigkeiten bereiten," Döblin writes in a theater review twenty years before *Berlin Alexanderplatz* / "Gyges und sein Ring", *Das Theater*, 1, H. 4 (1909-10), p. 134/.

taking place in his digestive system. The biological process is depicted like a battle on Judgment Day, but with metaphors from urban life: the excitement of fire engines and the hubbub of white sales. The outcome is not glorious victory, but a mundane trip to the toilette.

When Lina and Franz sell newspapers in the streets of Berlin, Döblin draws upon the battle image in Kleist's Prinz Friedrich von Homburg and Homer's Odyssey.

Im Kriegsgebiet machte Lina, die herzige, schlampige, kleine, ungewaschene, verweinte, einen selbstständigen Vorstoß à la Prinz von Homburg: Mein edler Oheim Friedrich von der Mark! Natalie! Laß, laß! O Gott der Welt, jetzt ist's um ihn geschehen, gleichviel, gleichviel! Sie rannte spornstracks, schnurstreichs auf den Stand des Weißkopfs. Da brachte es Franz Biberkopf, der edle Dulder, über sich, im Hintergrund zu bleiben. Er stand hintergegründet vor dem Zigarrengeschäft von Schröder Import Export und beobachtete von da, leicht durch Nebel, Elektrische und Passanten gehindert, den Verlauf der angesponnenen Kampfhandlung. Die Helden hatten sich ergriffen, bildlich. Sie tasteten ihre Schwächen und Blößen ab. Hingepfeffert und -gesalzen hat Lina Przybilla aus Cernowitz, des Landbauers Stanislaus Przybilla einzige eheliche Tochter - nach zwei nur zur Hälfte gediehenen Frühgeburten, welche beide auch Lina hatten heißen sollen -, hat Fräulein Przybilla das Zeitungspaket. Das Weitere ging im Getöse des Straßenverkehrs verloren. "Die Kruke, die Kruke", so stöhnte bewundernd der freudig behinderte Dulder Franz. Er näherte sich als Reservearmee dem Zentrum der Kampfhandlung. Da lachte ihn schon vor der Destille von Ernst Kümmerlich die Heldin und Stegerin an, Fräulein Lina Przybilla, schlampig aber wonnevoll, kreischte: "Franz, der hats!"

(BA, 80)

The narrator turns the Berlin streets into the fields of

Fehrbellin and Troy: Lina engages herself in hot battle, while Franz, "der edle Dulder" follows Ulysses' example of looking on.¹⁶ Discretion being the better part of valor, Franz, it is implied, bravely convinces himself to remain in the background; he stands "hintergegründet" in the protection of an import-export cigar store. The solitary warrior against the urban enemy, the competition, is Lina who is named in the Homeric tradition which gives her father's name and family history. Here, the history mocks the epic convention. Interrupting and deflating the grandiose style, the mention of two previous miscarriages before Lina's birth detract from Lina's uniqueness because they were two potential Lina's.

Franz finally enters the battle, carefully timing his maneuver to coincide with the end of the campaign. He does not have the explanation that he was daydreaming as the Prince of Homburg had; Franz calculatedly held himself in reserve, letting Lina fend off the "charge". She is exhilarated by her victory; her obvious and noisy delight, in the last sentence of the paragraph quoted above, contrasts with epic dignity. Nonetheless Franz feels that he deserves a reward and in the nearby pub, orders himself a schnaps.

Döblin mocks the conventions of citation: not only does he take over a passage from Kleist's play, but also the

¹⁶ Perhaps we have here an indirect reference to the Ulysses by James Joyce.

stage directions, which are applied to Franz and his "retinue" in the pub:

Nun, o Unsterblichkeit, bist du ganz mein,
Lieber, was für ein Glanz verbreitet sich,
Heil, Heil dem Prinz von Homburg, dem Sieger
in der Schlacht von Fehrbellin, Heil! (Hof-
damen, Offiziere und Fackeln erscheinen auf
der Rampe des Schloßes.)

Noch een Jilka!

(BA, 80-81)

Humorous quotation shows up in varying degrees of intensity in Döblin's subsequent works. In the Babylonische Wandrung, misquotation and parody are similarly an attack on "culture" and aestheticism as stultifying. In Döblin's last novel Hamlet we find a mosaic of literary motifs, uniquely altered, woven into the plot. The measure between the known, established version of the motif and Döblin's version is once again a measure of man vis-a-vis the product of his imagination, his culture.

With consciously inappropriate references to stories, poems, plays, songs, ballads and even movies, Döblin puts established values into question. The humor produced by the contrast between the material quoted and the context of the realistic story exposes the false, making the sham appear ridiculous and attacking irrelevant and alienated cultural values.

Summary

Language is "Wortmaterial" for Döblin. He is acutely aware that the tools of the novelist's trade are words. Whatever reality or illusion he successfully creates with his tale he can do so only with words. Döblin has a verbal perspective of the world. His view of the world is reflected in what he says with words and how he does so.

When language breaks down we laugh basically because Döblin's language unexpectedly confronts our conventional view of how a tale should be told. The techniques of verbal distortion that are funny are, of course, not unique to Döblin. He is not the first to quibble with syllables and syntax. Before Berlin Alexanderplatz, the Dadaists, for example, had formally proclaimed anti-language and "non"-art to be art. Puns certainly do not date from Döblin, nor does the humorous exploitation of many varieties and nuances of different styles of the spoken and written word.

The incongruity that jolts the reader into laughter is intended to present Döblin's particular view of the world. The established order of grammar is shown to be precarious; the scientist's jargon is unmasked as self-serving pomposity; aphorisms fail to conceal that they are tedious platitudes; fine literary quotations do not enhance the prestige of the text but are made to attack the shortcomings of sanctimonious respect for cultural tradition.

The humorous techniques of verbal disintegration depend on the destruction of the old order, the ancien regime of grammar and syntax. Nonetheless they also create a new order. Döblin takes delight in his world and positively affirms it as he infects the reader with his verbal exuberance. There is the joy of listing, adding item onto item, as if he were an urban Linnaeus establishing order in a world of chaos. Likewise, Döblin's independent spirit shines forth in his original etymologies, which close the circle of chaos-order: an order, albeit Döblin's own, is imposed on words. He is sceptical of linguistic convention, yet he is no advocate of linguistic anarchy.

The world that Döblin creates cannot be realistic in the sense that the nineteenth century novel is verbally realistic; but with his "Wortmaterial" Döblin gives us his ordered reality. The paradox of establishing order by linguistic anarchy is special to Döblin. What seems to be verbal chaos is a different order than the conventional one. With his rejection of the usual order as chaotic and ludicrous, Döblin is sceptically attacking the world. With his own alternate verbal order, he is delightedly defending its very existence.

IV Satire and Irony to Reveal the Weaknesses and Faults of the Existing World Order

Döblin is concerned with the individual's relationship to the rest of the world. Each man is aware of the conventions of society; each man is subject to the physical laws of the universe. Man is the focal point, for whom all the conventions, regulations and laws are expostulated. The existing, "normal" world order is the sum of all these legal, social and scientific laws. What is the position of the single individual in the face of such a sum of laws? Döblin casts about for an answer. Part of his answer is the personal dilemmas into which he puts his heroes and how he has them come to terms with the world. Part of his answer is a satirical or ironical attack on the existing order. He shows how man is deformed and dehumanized by the existing order. He shows that the existing order is not the only possible one, nor the best of all possible worlds.

A. Author Intrusion

"The romantic fixation which revolves around the beauty of perfect form, in art or elsewhere, is [...] a logical target for satire."¹ A traditional literary device, author

¹Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism. Four Essays (New York: Atheneum, 1969), p. 233.

intrusion often satirically reveals the sham of the literary ideal of beauty. By intruding himself into the narrative of Berlin Alexanderplatz, Döblin questions the "normal" form and order of prose fiction. He is consciously flouting the literary convention by which the novel is an imaginary world unto itself. Döblin's audible voice wants to hinder the reader from succumbing to any fictional illusion. Immediately one is reminded of Brecht's repudiation of "culinary" effect, in his theory of epic theatre.²

As with the language that disintegrates, author intrusion in Berlin Alexanderplatz destroys the meaning of one order without pessimistically annihilating the world; indeed another order is substituted. Through the non-logic of his narrative, Döblin wants to replace illusion with a depiction of the world that is somehow a truer, more honest re-creation of reality. By playing havoc with his story, Döblin on the one hand questions the intelligibility of the world. On the other, he unmaskes the story as merely illusion, thus assuring us the events and characters have real existence beyond the limits of fiction. The author's interruptions serve to deflate the pretensions of ideal beauty, to flout the limits of illusion and seek to make illusion part of reality.

²Bertolt Brecht, "Anmerkungen zur Oper 'Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny'", Schriften zum Theater 3, Gesammelte Werke in 20 Bänden, Werkausgabe Edition Suhrkamp (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1967), Bd. 17, p. 1004.

Each interruption basically takes us by surprise. Each time the author makes his voice heard he is reminding us that he is in control. "Nu mal weiter im Text" (BA, 348). We are in the text; whatever the author writes is "text". The narrator, however, is saying that some of what he writes does not qualify as text and some does.

Characters do not exist on their own.

Das will Karl, Reinhold und Miese, rückwärts
Miese, Reinhold und Karl, und auch Reinhold,
Karl, Miese, alle miteinander wollen es.
(BA, 375)

Suddenly after the second comma, the narrator asserts himself. Within one sentence he turns his characters into jerky puppets under the control of a capricious operator. The three have lost their ability to act out their assigned roles in the story.

The control is arbitrary and willful, not subject to any rules we might normally expect. The arbitrary nature of what the author tells us or withholds from us issues a challenge: we can be offended or we can laugh at the author's presumption. At the beginning of the ninth book, for example, there appears the chapter "Reinholds schwarzer Mittwoch, aber dieses Kapitel kann man auslassen" (BA, 455). Why, we ask ourselves, did the author, who is writing this story, include a chapter apparently so unimportant that he tells us that we could leave it out? Either the author has up until this point fooled us into believing each character is important or we are faced with an author who tells his readers to do

the editing themselves. The author apparently does not care to select which information he gives; it is all served to the reader: "Aber wen das [Reinhold's fate] nicht interessiert, der lasse die nächsten Seiten einfach aus" (BA, 456). Perhaps the narrator, versed in human psychology, knows that his disinterest insures his reader's interest.

The author even pretends that he cannot better control his story:

Ein anderer Erzähler hätte dem Reinhold wahrscheinlich jetzt eine Strafe zgedacht, aber ich kann nichts dafür, die erfolgte nicht.
(BA, 238)

The author's mock apology plays on the argument in literary discussions between "art" and "life". It would be morally fitting, and therefore artistically appropriate if Reinhold were punished for having pushed Franz out of a moving vehicle. The author has the power to write the story accordingly. Instead, he uses his authorial power to say that "life" does not punish Reinhold. The author seems to shift the blame to "life". Yet the reader knows that it is the author who is responsible for the "life" of his characters as well as the "art" of his story. In a novel it is the author, not "life" who decides that Reinhold goes free. With a twist, life, even the world order, are embarrassed.

The narrator's commentary satirizes the characters. At the beginning of the fourth book there is the prologue which remarks on Franz Biberkopf's progress in readjusting

to society. The author tells us how the reader reacts.

Franz Biberkopf hat eigentlich kein Unglück getroffen. Der gewöhnliche Leser wird erstaunt sein und fragen: was war dabei? Aber Franz Biberkopf ist kein gewöhnlicher Leser. Er merkt, sein Grundsatz, so einfach er ist, muß irgendwo fehlerhaft sein. (BA, 129)

From the nineteenth century novel Döblin has taken the device of including the reader in speculation in order that the intention of the author is clear: here, that one realizes the significance of the Lüders incident for Franz' moral development. Döblin uses the familiar device in an unfamiliar way: he equates the character himself with a reader. Moreover, he considers Franz better than the average reader. Franz, at least, recognizes that there is something wrong with his basic principles even if he is not sure exactly what.

The irony of this introduction becomes ever more apparent as the story unfolds: like the average reader who does not see any significance in the Lüders incident, Franz, it turns out, also does not see his mistake regarding Lüders. He is not the "ungewöhnlicher Leser" after all. After going on an alcoholic binge, he bounces back, more cocksure of himself than before.

The ironical inserted comment not only passes judgment on the story, it is directed against the reader as well, who might be shocked. In the following, Franz has just inherited Cilly from Reinhold. Franz and Cilly are trying out a pair of boots together:

Sie sind am Kippen. Sie kippen, es gibt
 Gekreisch, Fräulein, zügeln Sie Ihre
 Phantasie, lassen Sie die beiden mal
 lustig unter sich, die haben jetzt Pri-
 vatsprechstunde, für Kassenmitglieder
 ist erst nachher von 5 bis 7. (BA, 197)

The narrator defends Cilly's and Franz' right to privacy against a prudish but inquisitive imagination. The narrator takes his defense from the phrases found on signs hung up outside of a doctor's office. As if reading such a sign all the way through, he adds the general consultation hours, thus absurdly implying that at given times anyone can view Franz' and Cilly's sexual activities.

Chapter titles provide the author's commentary on the action. Many of them are ironic judgments because the narrator choses fine-sounding phrases to describe not so fine events. "Schwunghafter Mädchenhandel" (BA, 193) echoes the language of headlines found on the financial pages, transforming Reinhold's pimping into a stolidly bourgeois trade agreement. In the chapter entitled "Unrecht Gut gedeihet gut" (BA, 237), the formal, Biblical tone of the title contrasts with the sleazy gusto in drinking and whoring. The statement itself proves to be true, ironically mocking the proverb "Unrecht Gut gedeihet nicht ". "Glänzende Ernteaussichten, man kann sich aber auch verrechnen" (BA, 362) is the title of the chapter in which Franz wants to show off Miese to Reinhold. The dry tone of the commercial jargon in the title understates the intensity and nastiness of Franz'

fury when he feels Miese has made him look like a fool in front of the concealed Reinhold.

The chapter title "Belehrung durch das Beispiel des Zannowich" (BA, 20) could be a caption on the balladeer's poster held up to the crowd. There is a moral in the story that Franz is about to hear of a clever swindler, but the point ("Man muß die Welt sehen können und zu ihr hingehn" BA, 24) is lost on Franz. It is tragic irony for him that he is warned and yet chooses to ignore the lesson. The "Bänkelsänger"-author tells us of Franz' intense resolve to remain "anständig" in the chapter entitled "Und nun schwört Franz aller Welt und sich, anständig zu bleiben in Berlin, mit Geld und ohne" (BA, 43). We know that Franz means well, but his success depends on having money. For the petite bourgeoisie, "Anständigkeit" is no abstract idea, but is closely bound up with one's finances. By the end of the chapter it is clear that Franz cannot be "anständig" without money. For Franz, morality depends on the inner contents of one's pockets rather than on the inner strength of one's soul.

Along with many of the chapter titles, the prologues told by the author at the beginning of each book resemble the lyrics of "Moritaten". These are street ballads which tell of a low crime, held up as a negative example and concludes with an obvious moral. Woven into the story of Franz Biberkopf, the "Moritaten" passages satirize the earnestness

with which Franz swears to be upright ("anständig").

Dies zu betrachten und zu hören, wird sich für viele lohnen, die wie Franz Biberkopf in einer Menschenhaut wohnen und denen es passiert wie diesem Franz Biberkopf, nämlich vom Leben mehr zu verlangen als das Butterbrot.

(BA, 10)

Franz' story is held up as an example; there is a touch of the doggerel rhythm; and there is the obvious statement: "vom Leben mehr zu verlangen als das Butterbrot". We all, of course, want more from life than just our bread and butter. The irony here is that this goal is to prove so elusive to reach and so difficult to attain in the course of Franz' story.

In Berlin Alexanderplatz we hear the narrator's voice, so that we know that there is a story-teller, a narrator with a point of view.³ He wants us to be sure that we react to the events and evaluate them properly. Thus he satirizes, comments ironically by proving he is in control, by showing, moreover, that the control is arbitrary and by adopting the

³Döblin's theory of narration is discussed by Wolfgang Grothe, "Die Theorie des Erzählens bei Alfred Döblin", Text & Kritik, No. 13-14 (June, 1966), pp. 5-21; Müller-Salget, Alfred Döblin. Werk und Entwicklung, pp. 232-85; and Karl Herbert Blessing, Die Problematik des "modernen Epos" im Frühwerk Alfred Döblins, Deutsche Studien, Bd. 9 (Weisenheim am Glan: Anton Hain, 1972).

moralizing tone of the "Bänkelsänger".⁴

The narrative interruptions are there to break the illusion and they amuse the reader because they are not, strictly speaking, part of the plot; they are there because Döblin participates so intensely in the very real fate of his heroes, encouraging them, worrying over them and mocking

⁴In Babylonische Wandlung, the narrator's interruptions become more personal; the narrator speaking is Döblin himself. The comments are self-mocking and at the same time, deeply questioning of his own worth, all of which sheds an interesting light on the interpretation of the ending in Berlin Alexanderplatz. Döblin himself writes that Babylonische Wandlung satirizes the idea of sacrifice promoted in the earlier novel (AzL, p. 392). In the emotional upheaval of emigration, Döblin doubted the lessons he thought he had learned: "Ich verhöhnte die tiefere Erfahrung, über die ich schon verfügte und das Bild, in dem ich diese tiefere Erfahrung sprach, benutzte ich lange zu nichts anderem als Späßen" (Schicksalsreise, p. 396). This "tiefere Erfahrung" in Berlin Alexanderplatz is held to be that only resignation, humility and sacrifice are possible in the face of overwhelming fate by Wolfgang Kort in Alfred Döblin. Das Bild des Menschen in seinen Romanen, Studien zur Germanistik, Anglistik und Komparatistik, Bd. 8 (Bonn: Bouvier, 1970), p. 84. Müller-Salget effectively counters this interpretation by basing his argument on a careful reading of the ending of Berlin Alexanderplatz and on consideration of Döblin's philosophical and political writings at the time, especially Wissen und Verändern! If man reflects, he can strike a balance between blind allegiance to one's self and to a political ideology.

The technique of author intrusion confirms Müller-Salget's conclusion. The very fact that Döblin is involved in intense debate with himself, the very fact that Babylonische Wandlung mocks the "tiefere Erfahrung" shows that Franz' struggle in Berlin Alexanderplatz has been rewarded; and that the book ends, not with resignation, but with the attainment of a new individual maturity within the collective. With Konrad's exile from the Babylonian heaven and Döblin's from Berlin, this "solution" has evidently become dubious and the search must be taken up again. Hence, the personal nature of author intrusion in Babylonische Wandlung.

them.⁵ In the tradition of romantic irony, author intrusion destroys illusion when attention is called to the story being a story. Döblin writes "Die Dinge in diesem Buch Berlin-Alexanderplatz [...] " (BA, 456), reminding us in the book itself that we have only a book in our hands. The effect is like peeking behind the scenes in a play.

Narrative illusion for Döblin is not the means by which he gives the reader reality:

Was nun irgendeinen erfundenen Vorgang, der die Form des Berichtes trägt, aus dem Bereich des bloß Ausgedachten und Hingeschriebenen in eine wahre Sphäre, in die das spezifisch epischen Berichtes hebt, das ist das Exemplarische des Vorgangs und der Figuren, die geschildert werden und von denen in der Berichtform mitgeteilt wird. 6

The narrator is a pedagogue; his characters and plot are figures on a blackboard to be pointed at. The epic order in the "as if"⁷ story is destroyed to teach us, the reader, reality. By causing us to laugh when he intrudes his presence

⁵Cf. John R. Frey, "Author-Intrusion in the Narrative. German Theory and Some Modern Examples", Germanic Review, 23 No. 4 (1948), p. 288. He has no good word to spare for these "ugly protrusions" of Döblin: "Either judged by standards of taste, skill or discretion, Döblin's extremely individual interjections often have an offensive quality [...]. They lack functionally and structurally enhancing values [...]. [...] Döblin intervenes for the sake of intervening. [...] Thus Döblin utilizes a potentially fruitful device in a rather dubious manner." Humor is indeed subjective, but Frey cannot sustain his argument that the intrusions lack functional and structural values.

⁶Döblin, "Bau des epischen Werks", AzL, p. 106.

⁷"Diese Erklärung mit der Illusion, mit dem Schein, dem Als ob, damit stellt man die Dichtung kalt." AzL, p. 105.

into the story, the author prevents us from being swept along by the narrative illusion. He wants to call attention to his own world order. In the very sentence calling attention to the fact that Berlin Alexanderplatz is only a book, Döblin also assures us that there is a truth to be learned from the story:

Die Dinge in diesem Buch Berlin-Alexanderplatz vom Schicksal Franz Biberkopfs sind richtig, und man wird sie zweimal und dreimal lesen und sich einprägen, sie haben ihre Wahrheit, die zum Greifen ist.

(BA, 456)

B. Absurd Logic

Döblin is sceptical of a system based on "conventional" logic, into which man has organized his knowledge. He suspects that man has put the world into a straight-jacket - one which is accepted by all right-thinking men, but one which fails to recognize that the world may chose to operate differently.

Es gibt eine Sorte von Erzählern und Geschichtsschreibern, die auf Logik, auf nichts als Logik schwören. Für sie folgt in der Welt eins aus dem andern, und sie betrachten es als ihre Aufgabe, dies zu zeigen und die Dinge entsprechend auseinander zu entwickeln. Sie machen für jeden Vorgang der Geschichte einen andern ausfindig, aus dem er sich dann ergibt. Es bleibt dem zweiten Vorgang schlechterdings nichts anderes übrig, als sich aus dem ersten zu ergeben, wie ein Küken aus dem Ei.

Wir sind nicht von einer solchen logischen Strenge. Wir halten die Natur für viel leichtfertiger als die genannten Geschichts- und Geschichtenschreiber. ⁸

Logical rigor, in this case of story-tellers and historians, does not correspond to frivolous, flippant, lightheaded Nature. Döblin is spelling out his theory: Nature behaves in accordance with its own rules, not man's. With the word "leichtfertig" there is a touch of mischievous joy, as if Nature were pulling our leg. Let men calculate, add, subtract and divide, they will never fully understand Nature; they only fool themselves if they believe they do.

Long before this passage in Verratenes Volk, however, Döblin had recognized that the world is irrational. To

⁸ Döblin, Verratenes Volk, p. 438.

demask the rational is to attempt to see the world as it really is. Caught as we are in the conventions of our logic, we find the demasking liberating and amusing: Döblin's alternate, alogical world seems ridiculous, a marvelous flight of fancy, which makes our rigorously logical world seem so leaden.

In an absurd world, assumptions do not hold true; premises never lead to expected conclusions. We find this in the language itself as well as in situations where the scientific laws of cause and effect are suspended.

To reify a metaphor takes the reader's sense of language by surprise.

Gisa, bleibe mir, bleibe mir (geh nicht weg, fahr nicht fort, fall nicht hin, bitte, setzen Sie sich). Verlaß mich nicht. Doch die trostlose Stille hatte weder Ohr noch Herz (noch Fuß noch Nase). (BA, 79)

The narrator gives an equivalent to "bleibe mir" by using the opposite of the verb plus a negation. So far, this substitution is logical and makes sense. Then he offers a second equivalent "fahr nicht fort", which matches the first substitute, but is no longer exactly in the same spirit as the original. Continuing the idea of not physically moving away that is embedded in the substitute, but not in the original text, the third alternative is "fall nicht hin". Indeed, this is no longer equivalent to any of the preceding offerings. Hence, when the last associated idea appears,

"bitte, setzen Sie sich", the narrator has arrived at an absurd linguistic impasse. The same absurd extension by association transforms the body metaphors for hearing and feeling into body parts that have no metaphorical sense, and are therefore delightfully meaningless when we mentally transfer a foot and a nose to the places held by the ear and the heart.

When the intended meaning of a sentence disagrees with the actual one, the humorous discrepancy is due to disappointed logical assumptions. The conclusion of the actual statement is illogical. In the following example Franz asks Miese if she thinks when she sits doing nothing all day.

Fragt er sie, so sagt sie immer und lacht:
sie denkt gar nichts. Man kann doch nicht
den ganzen Tag was denken. Das findet er
nu auch.

(BA, 282-83)

With the word "denken" the statement concludes falsely. One is, in fact, always thinking as long as one is awake and conscious. If Miese were to substitute almost any other activity - housekeeping, walking, any other choice - the sentence would conform to our logical expectations. The premise of the statement is that one cannot do the same activity all day. This is true. Miese tires, however, of thinking. The conclusion is an impossibility. Franz' agreement with her statement is ironic in retrospect, when we have finished the book. At the close of Berlin Alexanderplatz, Franz has

learned "to see", which means he has learned to think and to reflect about himself and the world.

Tautology also exploits the contrast between what we expect the statement to say and what it does say.

Gebt euren Kindern Bananen. Die Banane ist die sauberste Frucht, da sie durch ihre Schale vor Insekten, Würmern sowie Bazillen geschützt ist. Ausgenommen sind solche Insekten, Würmer und Bazillen, die durch die Schale kommen.

(BA, 180)

We are told that a banana is protected by its skin against insects, worms and bacillae. Then the exceptions are listed. We expect to hear what can penetrate banana peels. Instead of additional dangers, we have a list of the same pests as before whose only special attribute is that they can penetrate the peel. The attribute is redundant; to qualify as exceptions the insects logically already possess this characteristic. The beginning of the sentence teases us and the end lets us down. Likewise the following newspaper quotation teases us:

Geheimrat Czerny hat mit Nachdruck drauf hingewiesen, daß selbst Kinder in den ersten Lebensjahren.

(BA, 180)

The sentence stops before it is finished. In the context, which is a description of the Alexanderplatz, this sentence fragment is from a scrap of newspaper blown about the busy square. The quotation is itself as incomplete as the newspaper is.

When an indirect answer is given instead of a direct one there is the possibility of humor. In the tradition of Talmudic logic, one replies to every problem set with an illustrative and brief story. In this manner two Jews, like the rabbis of old, tell the story of Stefan Zannowich (BA, 20 ff) and later, the story of the transparent ball (BA, 45). The two ghetto Jews and their parables are in a venerable tradition and their stories are as significant for Franz as any traditional, scholarly ones. The moral of the tale is lost on Franz; the parable and the problem it illustrates seem to lack any connection. The charm of Talmudic logic is that it seems to answer with non sequiturs; by definition non sequiturs are not logical answers. Nonetheless, these stories are appropriate to Franz' situation.

Defying the principles of time, anachronisms are an example of the illogical. Wrenched out of the context of one era, the anachronistic detail is set into another epoch. Associations from the former are incongruously placed in the latter. What was dignified and appropriate is now awkward, inappropriate and incongruous; what was awesome and remote is now familiar and close at hand.

Defying the tacit law that themes from ancient Greek literature must be told in an elevated style, Döblin retells the story of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra in a mixture of colloquial slang and cultivated, antiquated speech. The modern

idiom in the tale is anachronistic, briefly transforming heroic Greeks into twentieth century Berliners, and royalty into uncouth, lower-class city-dwellers. Clytemnestra becomes "ein beispielloses Luder" (BA, 107) who "does in" Agamemnon. The reaction of the senators to the murder strikes a modern chord:

Worauf die Senatoren bekümmert sind, immerhin
aber die treffende Bemerkung finden: "Wir
staunen deiner Rede Kühnheit an." (BA, 107)

The narrator's comment transforms the worthy Greek men into politicians calculating what effect their remarks will have in the next election. As a result of such a contemporary image the stilted, epic style of the answer itself is no longer in place.

Out of time and place are the angels Sarug and Terah (BA, 434 ff) who comment on Franz' anguished crisis. Two angels in Berlin in 1928 do not fit into the roar of traffic, the smoke and beer of pubs and the noise of pneumatic hammers. Their presence disagrees with our logical picture of Berlin, which is based on experience and modern beliefs.

Warum gehen zwei Engel neben Franz, und
was ist das für ein Kinderspiel, wo gehen
Engel neben einem Menschen, zwei Engel am
Alexanderplatz in Berlin 1928 neben einem
ehemaligen Totschläger, jetzigen Einbrecher
und Zuhälter. Ja, diese Geschichte von Franz
Biberkopf, von seinem schweren, wahren und
aufhellenden Dasein ist nun so weit vorge-
schritten. [...] Es naht der Punkt, wo alles
erhellt wird.

(BA, 434)

The angels themselves question their relevance:

Terah: "Dann meinst du, wir sind eigentlich überflüssig?" Sarug: "Ein bißchen meine ich es, - [..]."

(BA, 434)

At the beginning of Franz' crisis, where he is brought to the police headquarters, he is alone, abandoned by the two angels, "die Engel werden ihn verlassen haben" (BA, 444).⁹

One of the tricks that Döblin uses more in other works than in Berlin Alexanderplatz is to assume that inanimate objects are as lively as animate ones.

Ich bin nicht irrational. Ich kann nicht dafür, daß die Objekte irrational sind. Aber die Objekte sind ja, in meinem Sinne, weitgehend rational. Dann kann ich nicht dafür, daß die andern nicht meinen Sinn haben. ¹⁰

Throughout his life, Döblin finds it arrogant of man to assume that only he is rational. By believing in the rationality of objects, Döblin exposes man's confidence as a self-centered view. The statement quoted above is a paradox. Döblin claims not to be irrational; yet, his belief in ra-

⁹Döblin is perhaps drawing upon a familiar Jewish tradition. According to popular belief, two angels show the unborn soul the glory in paradise and the suffering in hell. Such a knowledge, however, would make free will impossible, the child being motivated only by fear of punishment and hope of reward. An angel, therefore, strikes the child just before birth to make it forget all it has observed. Thus man can follow either his good or evil inclination and there is a moral value to his action. S/olomon/ Schechter, "The Child in Jewish Literature", Studies in Judaism (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1896), pp. 346-47.

¹⁰Döblin, Prosa. Das Öl auf meinen Federn. 1 Bl., N1.

tional objects is, in our conventional way of thinking, proof that he is irrational. A rational object is implicitly an animate one; if objects have a "mind" of their own, then we have the possibility of their choosing to submit to or to rebel against man's order.

The motif of objects rebelling in Döblin's works can be roughly divided into three phases: in the earliest there is a threat to man behind the absurdity of objects behaving like people; in the second, to which Berlin Alexanderplatz belongs, there is a truce - without the threat there is small opportunity for the humorous incongruity of rebellious objects; in the third the truce proves precarious - once again providing the necessary conflict for humorous contrast.¹¹

An example for the first phase is the early play Lydia

¹¹Müller-Salget's investigation of animated nature, that is, Döblin's naturalism, is more detailed than Robert B. Kimber's dissertation "Alfred Döblin's Godless Mysticism", Princeton, 1965. Müller-Salget recognizes that the theme of animated nature is to be found as early as Der schwarze Vorhang. He traces the development of Döblin's naturalism from his concept that nature is an annihilistic, overwhelming force which threatens the individual, to the idea that nature is a system in which man takes an equal place with all the other animals and objects. Müller-Salget uses the word "Gleichwertigkeit" (p. 234). He recognizes that the pantheism, which marks the early Döblin, continues after the conversion (pp. 57-68). Other than in the farce Lydia und Mäxchen and a few other early stories, however, Müller-Salget does not see the thematic reflection of an animated world that is threatening to man appear again. Kimber also implies that an equilibrium between the individual and nature means peace in the material, animated world (p. 237). These views ignore Döblin's novella Märchen vom Materialismus, written in 1943, late in Döblin's life.

und Mäxchen. There is the playwright, the characters which are objects of his creation, and the props: the chair, the cupboard, the candelabra, the spirit (Klabautermann), and the man-in-the-moon with a Berlin accent. Briefly recapitulated, the plot of Lydia und Mäxchen opens with the props discussing the actors in the roles of Lydia and Mäxchen and also their own dissatisfaction with their existence. In the next scene, the director tells us that the actors have run away; but, to his surprise, "spirits" have stepped into the roles. The characters Lydia and Mäxchen rebell against the playwright, eventually turning on him and then destroying themselves. At this point, the objects rise up against the playwright. As they create havoc and bedlam on the stage, the playwright, supposedly the creator and controller of characters and props, grotesquely, helplessly stuffs his handkerchief into his mouth and the curtain falls.

There are two mutinies. As characters, Lydia and Mäxchen are objects, having been produced by the playwright's imagination. They reject the trivial and sentimental emotions and the actions the playwright has assigned to them. The second mutiny is the rebellion of the stage props. They too are only present by the grace of the playwright's imagination and they too act independently beyond what, logically by stage convention, is their limit. They assert the right to animate existence itself. The objects feel wronged and in-

sulted at the conventional, silent role allotted to them. In a logically organized world, it is not an insult to assume objects have no feelings or that they should feel insulted.

Döblin mocks the rebellion itself. He is being sceptical of the possibility of change when he shows that the mutiny fails to establish a new order. Lydia and Mäxchen kill themselves and the objects have not only the will to exist, but also all the same petty traits of humans. The chair is the rhetorical spokesman for the revolution; the cupboard is the non-ideological sceptic, significantly smelling of moth-balls; the candelabra is the selfish type, incapable of reflecting on the larger issues. Her sole wish is to possess Lydia's rose-colored shoes with silver buckles.

Objects are subject in Döblin's world to the same laws of nature and psychology as man.¹² The clearest statement of Döblin's belief in an animate world is his philosophical treatise Das Ich über der Natur. The first proposition in the book states that everything is animated: "Es gibt nur beseelte Wesen in der Natur; auch die chemisch-physikalische Natur ist beseelt."¹³ The importance of this book for the interpretation of Berlin Alexanderplatz lies in the optimistic

¹² See the essay "Landauer", Der neue Merkur, 3, H. 3 (1919-20), pp. 215-17. Döblin speaks of objects as if they were complicated psychological problems that need analysis. Also, see the essay "Die Schranktür", Ztlp, pp. 126-18. Here Döblin wonders if objects are not seeking revenge.

¹³ Döblin, Das Ich über der Natur (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1927), p. 243.

balance between man and nature. The two are interdependent, they are in harmony. There is no need for rebellion of things. Thus, the second stage in Döblin's works has a more optimistic outlook.

Berlin Alexanderplatz reflects this new-found confidence of Döblin in man's place in the universe of objects. The montage technique allows Döblin to embrace the entire universe, from the most insignificant speck of dust to a cosmic ray of sunshine:

Der Sonnenschein aber, der lautlos die vorderen Tische und den Fußboden belegt, in zwei lichte Massen geteilt von dem Schild: 'Löwenbräu Patzenhofer', der ist uralte, und eigentlich wirkt alles vergänglich und bedeutungslos, wenn man ihn sieht. Er kommt über x Meilen her, am Stern y ist er vorbeigeschossen, die Sonne scheint seit Jahrmillionen, lange vor Nebukadnezar, vor Adam und Eva, vor dem Ichthysaurus, und jetzt scheint sie in das kleine Bierlokal durch das Fensterglas, wird von einem Blechschild: 'Löwenbräu Patzenhofer', in zwei Massen geteilt, legt sich über die Tische und auf den Boden, rückt unmerklich vor. Er legt sich auf sie, und sie wissen es. Er ist beschwingt, leicht, überleicht, leichtleicht, vom Himmel hoch da komm ich her.

(BA, 89)

The last phrase is a quotation from a Christmas carol. Hence, the joyful celebration of the Savior's birth now glorifies the whole, secular world.

The same montage technique allows Döblin to satirize this new-found equality. The persons figuring in a newspaper article seem as important in a description as the person reading the newspaper:

Sie / Franz, Eva and Schreiber of the Pums gang / sitzen in der Stube von Franz. Die Grüne Post liegt auf dem Tisch, der neue Schwager des Exkaisers wird getraut, zwei Männer halten ihm von hinten die Krone über den Kopf. Löwenjagd, Hasenjagd, der Wahrheit die Ehre. "Warum wollt ihr mir Geld geben? Ich hab doch gar nicht mitgeholfen?" [...] Er stöhnt. [...] An der Erde liegt die Grüne Post, der Bulgare wird getraut mit einer Prinzessin. Ich muß mal sehen [...]. (BA, 255-56)

Due to the lack of the usual transition, the Kaiser's new brother-in-law seems to sit on the table and the Bulgarian seems to announce his engagement while lying prone on the floor next to the "Grüne Post". Although the rush of impressions is united by the montage technique, not all things are narratively equal. When Döblin refuses to emphasize that Franz, Eva and Schreiber are more important than the "Grüne Post", and that the newspaper encompasses the Bulgarian, he creates a picture we find ridiculous even if we do imagine the transitions that Döblin has omitted.

Döblin feels so sure of the equal importance of everything ~~that he~~ includes it, even though it is admittedly irrelevant to the story. Thus, at the end of the digression about the different sorts of fowl, he concludes:

Jedoch spielt sich das alles sehr entfernt ab zwischen Sikam und Bhutan in Indien, es ist für Berlin eine ziemlich unfruchtbare Bibliotheksweisheit. (BA, 145)

Of course, such a digression serves Döblin's purposes despite his claim to the contrary. He wants to indicate the difference

between his "real" story and dry, book knowledge.

All things being equal, animated glasses of beer become characters of minor significance. Franz tries to drown his sorrows in drink after he has lost his arm. He sits in a pub with the glasses in front of him:

Die erste Molle sagt: Ich komme aus dem Keller, aus Hopfen und Malz. Jetzt bin ich kühl, wie schmeck ich?

Franz sagt: Bitter, schön, kühl.

Ja, ich kühl dich, ich kühle die Männer, dann mach ich ihnen warm, und dann nehme ich ihnen die überflüssigen Gedanken weg.

Überflüssige Gedanken?

Ja, die Mehrzahl aller Gedanken sind überflüssig. Etwa nicht? - Ob. Recht sollst du haben.

(BA, 260)

The conversation continues, the alcohol providing the only companionship for Franz in his loneliness. Metaphorically, the words from the beer are articulating one part of Franz' dialogue with himself. It brags of its power to blot out the superfluous thoughts; even drunk, Franz' brain is flooded with thoughts. Here he is trying to wash out every thought with alcohol. Later, in the asylum as the past comes back to obsess him, he is to realize that there are no "superfluous" thoughts. The humorous incongruity in the image of animated beer in conversation with its drinker is one of bitter irony.

Although Döblin never returns to the point where the rebellion of things means personal annihilation as in Lydia und Mäxchen, his outlook is never as optimistic again as in Berlin Alexanderplatz. In his third and last phase, the bal-

ance between man and nature is, at best, precarious. In the Märchen vom Materialismus the equilibrium is delicate, easily subject to being upset. Once nature is seen as being able to determine its own behavior, regardless of man's declared laws, we have a situation where there is room for the comic.

The story begins with nature being perfectly content with the world as it is. Then the news about the theory of materialism reaches the animal and plant, and finally, the mineral kingdom. Depressed and moody, each being realizes that they no longer have the comfort of the old law's routine. As they experience freedom, they become more and more audacious, causing more and more havoc in the world. Sugar refuses to dissolve in coffee; meat refuses to be digestible in men's stomachs. Only when bullets no longer trace their expected parabolas does man become seriously concerned; peace might break out: "Man stand schon dicht vor einem dauernden Frieden."¹⁴ Taking draconian measures, the generals incite nature to one last grotesque boycott before the denouement. Finally scientists craftily let it be known that the theory of materialism is doubtful. This news shatters their confidence in man's intellectual supremacy. Relieved of the burden of believing in man, nature joyfully returns to the old laws. Man, however, continues to be blind to the authority higher than himself.

¹⁴Döblin, Märchen, p. 55.

As in Lydia und Mäxchen, the humorous effect of the rebellion against man lies in illogical behavior. An electron logically continues in its orbit; in the Märchen it freely decides its own course. A tiger logically is an instinctual beast of prey; in the Märchen it becomes a vegetarian on hearing of materialism. Light logically travels at a certain unvariable speed from its source to the earth; in the Märchen it dawdles and slows down until it arrives only as blue light. Although blue light has the highest energy, Döblin implies that blue waves are the slowest, thus permitting a pun: to be blue in German is to be tipsy. Döblin implies that the light stopped off at wayside taverns on its trip from heaven to earth.

The qualities of human frailty beset the rebellious elements. As in Lydia und Mäxchen, there is humor in this pathetic fallacy. Light waves cannot resist drink; gasoline infiltrates an automobile and together they undutifully stop to enjoy spring which the driver does not. The vegetarian tiger is anxious to eat politely with a spoon.

Unlike the end of Lydia und Mäxchen, the rebellion in the Märchen ceases voluntarily and peace is restored. Man foolishly believes he has won the conflict. Nature, however, ignores man's mathematics and science. It is no longer "menschengläubig".¹⁵ The final irony of the Märchen is that

¹⁵Döblin, Märchen, p. 66

the peace does not reaffirm the truth of man's science, even if order has been restored.

In all three phases in Döblin's works, an illogical, absurd world demasks the faultiness of what we assume to be a rational and logical one. Döblin is presenting us with an alternative; we do not have to be hildbound by the conventions of our logic. Sometimes the alternative is no more than an escape; other times the alternative, while incongruous and amusing, is an appeal that we believe in a higher, irrational truth.

C. Satire of Human Nature

Man is an imperfect being. This premise underlies every satire, whose humor depends on the discrepancy between the ideal, good man and the real, imperfect one. When human nature is unmasked as being ridiculous, self-righteous, pompous, absurd or any other of the host of possible disagreeable traits, we have satire.

Satire of Interpersonal Relationships

Long before Döblin conceived Berlin Alexanderplatz, he was satirical of the person who cannot warmly and fully love. In his early stories he draws caricatures of men who are incomplete because they are not capable of the gift of love. Relationships to other people are strained, distorted and distorting. In the early stories, Adolf Götting ("Astralia"), Michael Fischer ("Die Ermordung einer Butterblume"), Dr. Converdon ("Der Dritte"), the blasé diarist ("Die Memoiren des Blasierten"), Valentin Priebitz ("Die Nachtwandlerin"), Bruder Anselmus ("Der Kaplan"), Hubert Feuchtedengel ("Das verwerfliche Schwein") and Miß Ilsebill ("Der Ritter Blaubart") are satirized characters. They hide behind social conventions, they pride themselves on their self-importance and social propriety. They lack, however, the spontaneity of love. Their self-importance is only in their own minds.

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Döblin unmasks them as petty and childish.¹⁶ To each of these men, who are preoccupied with conventions and appearances, love comes in the form of overwhelming sexual instinct, which in its destructive path demasks the absurdity and repressive cruelty of the conventions.

In Berlin Alexanderplatz, there is the tension between the rules in the game of love and the reality of love and sex. Franz' attitude towards sex is so blunt and so direct that looking at mere pictures in pornographic magazines can excite him, and even debilitate his love-making:

[...] Mit Bilderankieken fängt es an, und nachher, wenn du willst, dann stehst du da, dann gehts nicht mehr auf natürliche Art und Weise.

(BA, 74)

The dealer, however, feels that his product must be defended against Franz' attack. He reads a passage from the magazine "Die Ehelosen":

"Na also, hier; was da steht, ob das nicht richtig ist, ist bloß ein Beispiel: Das Sexualleben der beiden Ehegatten durch einen Vertrag regeln wollen, diesbezüglich eheliche Pflichten zu dekretieren, wie es

¹⁶The insistence on full titles is petty: "Herr Götting, Adolf Götting, Privatgelehrter" (GesE, p. 36); "Herr Michael Fischer" (GesE, p. 43); "Der berühmte Frauenarzt Dr. William Converdon" (GesE, p. 76); "Hubert Feuchtedengel - Neuromanist und die zweiundvierzigtausend Mark seiner Erbschaft verfressend" (GesE, p. 202). Their features are insistently described as childish: Michael Fischer, the head of an entire firm, has "eine aufgestellte Nase und ein plattes bartloses Gesicht, ein ältliches Kindergesicht mit süßem Mündchen" (GesE, p. 42). Valentin Priebe has a childishly "aufgestülpte Nase" (GesE, p. 153).

das Gesetz vorschreibt, bedeutet die scheußlichste und entwürdigendste Sklaverei, die man sich nur denken kann. Na?" "Wieso?" "Na, stimmt's oder nicht?" "Kommt bei mir nicht vor. Ne Frau, die das von einem verlangt, nee so was, ist denn so was möglich? Das gibts?" "Liest es ja." "Na, das ist allerhand? Die sollte mir kommen."

(BA, 74-75)

For Franz this paragraph is too theoretical to be credible. He is horrified, but not at the slavery of wedlock, against which the article fulminates. He is horrified at the idea of an emancipated woman in a position of sexual equality. In his direct way, Franz happily claims his right to love and leave a woman as he pleases. We laugh when the dealer scornfully dismisses Franz' ability to appreciate theories of love; they are of dubious value in contrast to Franz' direct physical sexual satisfaction. The love he feels for a woman is of the body, not of the spirit and therein lies the tragic irony when he later displays his Miese to Reinhold.

The stupidity of laws against homosexuality is satirically shown in the case of the bald-headed gentleman. To apprehend the man, the hotel owner stoops, both literally and metaphorically, to peep through a keyhole. Instead of protecting his wife from the knowledge he professes to be so shocking, he calls her so that she may look too.

Aber in dem Zimmer sind Guoklöcher durch die Tür. Der Wirt sieht was und ruft die Wirtin, die sieht auch was. Und nachher sagen sie, das dulden sie in ihrem Hotel nicht, das haben sie gesehen, und er kann es nicht leugnen.

(BA, 78)

That the hotel owner waits until afterwards to scold the man blunts the sting of his self-righteousness. If he and his wife were truly outraged and really indignant why did they not interfere immediately?

The bald-headed man does not escape being the victim of satire as well as of the law. Instead of drowning himself in shame as he intended to do - a tragic fate - he merely gets drunk and returns two days later to his mother - a silly fate. He is eventually called into court where his defense is pathetically funny. He is no crusader for reform.

Hab ich gestohlen? Habe ich einen Einbruch begangen? Ich bin nur in das Herz eines lieben Menschen eingebrochen. (BA, 78)

The sentimental, trivial metaphor for love satirizes the bald-headed man. A middle-aged man with grown daughters, he uses the language of a popular song. The defense itself, albeit a maudlin one, is his plea for the right to love - in this case, for a man to love a boy.

In a letter from a girl to her boy-friend, we see the eternally rocky course of love:

Lieber Ferdinand, Deine beiden Briefe dankend erhalten. Habe mich doch reichlich getäuscht in Dich, dachte nicht, daß es eine solche Wendung mit Dir nehmen würde. Nun, Du mußt doch selbst sagen, um uns fest zu binden, sind wir noch beide reichlich jung zu. [...]
Du hast vielleicht gedacht, daß ich auch solch Mädchen bin wie alle Andern, aber da hast du dich geschnitten, mein Junge. Oder denkst du vielleicht ich bin eine reiche Partie? Aber da bist du auch auf dem falschen Wege.

Ich bin aber nur Arbeitermädel. Dies sage
 ich dir, damit du dir danach richten
 kannst. Hätte ich gewußt, was darraus wer-
 den würde hätte ich mit der Schreiberei
 gar nicht erst angefangen. Also jetzt
 weißt du meine Meinung, richte dich danach,
 du mußt ja wissen wie es in Dir aussieht.
 Mit Gruß Anna.

(BA, 337-38)

She combines all the stock arguments ever used in a "Dear John" letter. She is disappointed in him; they are too young to be bound to each other; he thought she was a girl just like all the others; he is mistaken if he thought she was rich; she is only a simple working-class girl. She lets him know her opinions. From this smorgasbord of excuses Ferdinand can make his own selection.

While Franz may not be bourgeois in his relationships to women, he is still guilty of not really loving. In this respect, he is a close relative of the protagonists in the early stories. He is satirized in the same way: the red-haired Jew calls him "Männchen" (BA, 25); the details of his life are recited so that one might be impressed with his importance, but the recital reveals his lack of human decency, thus he has no claim to significance. Because Franz feels no regret for the death of Ida, his prodigious strength becomes a satirical recital when one considers his difficulty to readjust to Berlin.

Dieser Franz Biberkopf, früher Zementarbeiter,
 dann Möbeltransportör und so weiter, jetzt
 Zeitungshändler, ist fast zwei Zentner schwer.

Er ist stark wie eine Kobraschlange und
wieder Mitglied eines Athletenklubs.
(BA, 103)

The reasons Franz has for pride are his strength, his size and his ability to earn money. The pride is false, however, if he feels nothing about Ida's death.

He is content merely to drink, having "eine Molle nach der andern und einen Dornkaat dazwischen [..]" (BA, 103-4).

Hetsen ihn, von früher her, Ida und
so weiter, Gewissensbedenken, Alpträumen,
unruhiger Schlaf, Qualen, Erinnyen aus der
Zeit unserer Urgroßmütter? Nichts zu ma-
chen. Man bedenke die veränderte Situation.
(BA, 103)

In this passage (in which Franz is contrasted with Orestes) there is a satirical thrust at the institutionalizing of repentance. It is further pointed out that the modern Church as a moral institution is ineffectual:

Ein Verbrecher, seinerzeit gottverfluchter
Mann [..] am Altar, Orestes, hat Klytämnestra
totgeschlagen, kaum auszusprechen der Name,
immerhin seine Mutter. (An welchem Altar
meinen Sie denn? Bei uns können Sie ne Kirche
suchen, die nachts auf ist.) (BA, 103)

For Orestes, whom the speaker with his snotty and biting "Leutnantston" holds in contempt, the altar is a place of significance; the altar is the place where man is formally confronted with God the lawgiver. For Franz it is meaningless. The querulant voice in parentheses wants to know which altar, for in present-day Berlin there are no churches open at night. The modern Church is shown to be helpless to inspire

remorse in Franz. Whatever Franz must learn in order to reform himself, he must do so on his own.

In another context a man affirms his individual responsibility: "Ich bin Gegener des Fatums. Ich bin kein Grieche, ich bin Berliner" (BA, 57). "Berliner" becomes the term for apotheosized individualism. No longer merely an indication of origin, "Berliner" is inflated to be the equal counterpart to being "Greek". Without the support of laws, traditions or conventions, Franz, the Berliner, has none to help him but himself. As long as Franz bases his behavior on false values, - his pride in his physical strength, his self-confidence so precariously founded - he cannot reform himself.

Satire of False Values

To love the solid comfortable life is the mainspring of Franz Biberkopf's existence - and the cause of his willful moral blindness. He swears to be decent ("anständig"). This concept embodies the values of the petite bourgeoisie: industriousness, uprightness, cleanliness, punctuality, distrust of anything equivocal, and above all, obedience to authority. There is little inner substance to the "Anständigkeit". Franz makes it dependent on possession of externals: money and his friends' good will.

Biberkopf hat geschworen, er will anständig sein, und ihr habt gesehen, wie er wochenlang anständig ist [...].

(BA, 111)

The characteristic "anständig" is not a function of time. One does not start and stop being upright. The adverse situation tests and proves one's decency; it does not temporarily extinguish the trait until the situation becomes more amenable to decency. Franz' confidence is spurious. He experiences the zenith of bourgeois respectability at the moment when he is in reality at a moral nadir. The false values which Franz assumes are so satirized that the society which has such values is more the subject of the attack than is Franz himself.

Was trägt er jetzt? Auf einem Tisch für bar 20 Mark gekauft einen tadellosen Sommeranzug. Für besondere Feierlichkeiten ein eisernes Kreuz links, das trägt er als Legitimation für seinen Arm, genießt die Hochachtung der Passanten und den Ärger der Proleten.

(BA, 278)

Like any member of the petite bourgeoisie, Franz exhibits the fruits of his labors and his loyalty to country. However, the fine suit was bought with his share in the Pums gang robberies; his purchased medal legitimizes an arm lost in the course of robbery, not war. If society rewards the outward show of conformity to its standards, then a man without honor will use foul means as well as fair to achieve wealth and the trappings of honor.

Franz cannot take the blame alone for his misconduct. Others around him do the same thing. Lina's former landlady extracted a pension for veteran's widows on account of her husband who only had suffered a heart attack. Franz is lost

in admiration:

Lina, von Paragraphen, Gesetzbuch Bürgerliches
und wie sie ne Rente rausgequetscht hat für
ihren toten Ollen, wo der alte Placker nen
Schlaganfall gehabt hat, was gar nich mitm
Krieg zu tun hat.

(BA, 73)

Franz admires the woman's ability to turn the system to her advantage. The satire which shows an uneducated woman outwitting the State is directed against the latter. In the case of Franz, however, in his new suit and new Iron Cross, the satire is equally directed at Franz, for he has sworn to remain "anständig". Although he may persuade himself that he is at this moment "anständig", the means of having achieved this status are not.

Elsewhere in Berlin Alexanderplatz, Döblin gently satirizes the high value we place on business success. The vision of being financially independent as a businessman is the driving force in the asthmatic man Bernhard Kauer (BA, 219 ff), whose dream does not accord with reality. His self-image as a man of important affairs bears little resemblance to the grey dullness which has him running up and down tenement stairs, ever short of breath, ever in search of a "deal" with the help of the classified ads. He is always short of money and therefore can never buy the fabulous things he claims to have found. But he did buy a copying machine on which he prints his business cards that he is enormously proud of:

"P.P. Datum des Poststempels. Zu meinem Bedauern muß ich von der gestern getroffenen Abmachung widriger Umstände wegen zurücktreten. Hochachtung. Bernhard Kauer."
(BA, 221)

The pathetic reality shows how doggedly and perversely the man pursues his dream. The aura and glamor of being a businessman atones for the shabbiness of his enterprise and the misery of asthma.

Human Frailty and Human Immutability

While Döblin considers the present world order, in which man strives for questionable goals, to be less than perfect, he also recognizes that human frailty prevents man from overcoming his weaknesses and establishing a perfect world order. Human foolishness as well as human wickedness limit man's capacity to change.

At the root of Franz' troubles lies his stubbornness, which is summed up at the beginning of the chapter "Dritte Eroberung Berlins":

So ist zum drittenmal Franz Biberkopf nach Berlin gekommen. Das erstemal wollten die Dächer abrutschen, die Juden kamen, er wurde gerettet. Das zweitemal betrog ihn Lüders, er soff sich durch. Jetzt, das drittemal, der Arm ist ihm ab, aber er wagt sich kühn in die Stadt. Mut hat der Mann, doppelten und dreifachen Mut.
(BA, 261)

On the first entry into Berlin the roofs sway, not Franz. The active voice for the swaying roofs seems to shift the

burden of responsible action away from Franz. The roofs are, absurdly, given a will where Franz has none. The second conquest of Berlin underscores Franz' tenacity: "er soß sich durch". Drinking through a problem is ironically implied to be the solution to it. The third conquest must be done without an arm. The badge of shame, which is the loss of the arm in the robbery, is ironically presented as the symbol of his courage, which is his comeback. His confusion, bull-headedness and daring are negative characteristics, but they are all presented as if they were admirable ones. The term "Eroberung" becomes an ironical, mocking word. Here he does not gain victory; his stubbornness triumphs.

A misplaced sense of loyalty to Reinhold is a major factor in Franz' eventual crisis. Hoping to please him, Franz agrees to accept his discarded girl-friends. He is so eager to serve Reinhold that he is blind to the consequences to himself or to the girls. "Und Franz war so begeistert von dem Geschäft, daß er sich gleich aufmachte und den kleinen verwachsenen Ede in seinem Bau aufsuchte [..]" (BA, 196). It is a dirty business in which Franz so happily bustles about: Reinhold is guilty of treating his girls like merchandise. "Da machen wir Kettenhandel, was, wie in der Inflation?" (BA, 196) he suggests to Franz. To the question does he want a "Mädel", Ede reacts practically and positively:

Dem kam das gerade zu paß, der wollte mal aussetzen bei seine Arbeit, dann hatte er

Krankengeld und konnte sich ein bißchen pflegen, die kann dann für ihn einholen und zur Kasse gehen. Aber festsetzen bei mir, das sagte er gleich, das gibts bei mir nicht.

(BA, 196)

Ede "buys" the unwanted girl with the same peevish care as an old maid selecting vegetables. The entire scene ironically depicts Reinhold's and Ede's love of creature comfort that reduces the girl-friend to a time-saving convenience. Also mocked is the eager willingness to be pleasing in Franz. Ordinarily this quality of friendship is a sober and good one. Yet, indiscriminately applied, it becomes a comic quality. So endowed, Franz is the butt of the author's humor. This eagerness is a failure on Franz' part to judge when he should please and whom he should please. Later this failure that we laugh at is to be his and Mieke's undoing.

Döblin's satire of human nature reveals him to be pessimistic about the capacity of human nature to change for the better.

Und was Frau Minna anlangt, die Schwester der Ida, so geht es ihr gut, danke schön, Sie sind sehr liebenswürdig. Es ist jetzt 20 Minuten nach 11, sie kommt grade aus der Markthalle, Ackerstraße, einem gelben städtischen Gebäude, das auch einen Ausgang nach der Invalidenstraße hat. Sie wählt aber den Ausgang Ackerstraße, weil er für sie näher ist. Blumenkohl und Schweinskopf, dazu etwas Sellerie hat sie eingeholt. Vor der Halle kauft sie noch vom Wagen einen großen fetten Flunder und eine Tüte Kamillentee; man kann nie wissen, den kann man immer brauchen.

(BA, 109-10)

After the death of her sister Frau Minna continues with life just as before. The polite phrase of thanks for the unspoken inquiry cements the tiniest details of her life into inflexible tradition. We expect the death of a close relative to be a major event in our lives. Although the daily routine does continue, it is with altered sensibilities. Minna's routine is the essence of the daily, trivial concerns that constitute life. Her self-assured bustling about with her marketing seems to shut out even the memory of Ida's existence. The routine nature of Minna's life brings us up short when it so completely triumphs over Ida's death.

This brief image of a routine captures the mood of what always was and what always will be. The objective tone of the author seems only to describe Minna's activities, but the minute detail mocks the imprisonment in such a narrow sphere. In the short sketch "Die Berlinerin" we find the same immobility in the Berlin milieu:

Die Berlinerin ist gewöhnlich die Tochter eines Gastwirts aus der Romintener Straße. Sie wird mit einem blonden Schopf geboren, in ihrem zweiten Monat kauft ihr ihre Mutter einen Sportwagen und eine lila Steppdecke, das Kind kann auch mal draußen brüllen, ist ja jräßlich. Mit 6 Jahren kriegt sie ne Bonbontüte und geht in die 109. Gemeindeschule, Tilsiter Straße. Mit 14 kommt sie da raus, wird konfirmiert und ist Packfräulein bei Tietz, Andreasstraße. Alle paar Monat geht sie zum Kassenarzt und läßt sich Eisenpillen aufschreiben, einmal schickt sie die Kasse auch nach Buckow. Den Franz Wippert lernt sie im "Trichter" kennen - wat wiste denn mit den jrünen Jungen, Mädels - na laß mir

doch. Sie ist hübsch und schlank mit 18, Verkäuferin im Trikotagenlager, Plattfüße, kriecht man von der viele Stehen, haste doch nicht nötig, nimm doch den Franz! Dann nimmt sie den Emil März, Elektromonteur, heiratet und ist verheiratet, dabei verliert sich langsam die Form und unser Interesse, die kleine Emilie kommt an, die wird mit einem blonden Schopf geboren, in ihrem zweiten Monat kauft ihr ihre Mutter einen Sportwagen mit einer lila Steppdecke, das Jöhr kann auch mal draußen brüllen, is ja jräßlich. Keine Wohnung haben sie auch nicht, die Berlinerin wohnt bei ihren Schwiegereltern bis zum jüngsten Tag.

Der weitere Verlauf: Zum Schluß seht ihr die Berlinerin, wie sie Witwe ist, aber noch ganz gut imstande, fettschlank, da geht sie Blumen gießen. 17

As with the description of Minna, the humor lies in the author's application of eternity to "low", mundane life.

As we usually think of it, eternity and daily tasks evoke mutually exclusive associations. Minna's shopping and the uneventful biography of the "Berlinerin" are unimportant. They exist in a world of dailiness, yet, their dull routine is satirically elevated by being described as if it were sacrosanct tradition.

The constancy of human failings is the story of Franz Biberkopf until the moment of truth in his delirium. The angel Terah recognizes the impossibility of any change exter-

¹⁷Originally published in same year as Berlin Alexanderplatz in Ball-Almanach des Vereins "Berliner Presse" (Jan. 29, 1929); rpt. in "Kleines Berlin-Dossier", collected by Manfred Beyer, "Neue Texte, Almanach für deutschsprachige Literatur" (Witten, Berlin: Aufbau, Autumn, 1968), p. 301.

nally imposed on man:

Du bist noch ein Kind, Sarug, du siehst
das hier erst ein paar tausend Jahre.
Und wenn wir den Menschen hier wegnehmen
und ihn woanders hin versetzen, in ein
anderes Dasein, hat er getan, was er
hier tun konnte?

(BA, 434)

There is bitter truth in Terah's paradox that Sarug is still a child after a few thousand years of existence.

To what purpose does Döblin satirize human nature?

While the satirical attacks are based on a negative and pessimistic view of man's condition, they are nonetheless proof of optimism: they hope to effect a change. By showing the present condition of man to be false and to be ridiculous, satire implies that the condition can be corrected and improved. If improvement is possible, then pessimism avoids turning into nihilism. The moment a character undertakes to change himself, he no longer can be the butt of satire. Can one laugh at someone who is - without any sentimentality - simply good?¹⁸ The closing paragraphs of Berlin Alexanderplatz tell of Franz Biberkopf's life after his spiritual rebirth. The style is straightforward; the comic, mocking tone is now reserved for others who do not "see".

¹⁸When "humor" meant the characteristic passion, as for example in Elizabethan comedy, to surrender to one's "humor" meant to become the unbalanced, imperfect, "humorous" man. The "humorous" man sets himself outside the pale of perfect, ideal behavior and thus becomes the butt of satire. So too is Franz the object of satire, a comic figure as long as he retains his "humor" - his refusal "to see".

D. Social Criticism: Döblin's Political Wit

Critics have long been aware of Döblin's social and political sensitivities, in his general prose works as well as in his journalistic essays, and, of course, in Berlin Alexanderplatz.¹⁹ They have discussed his attitude towards political problems as factors necessary to understand the problems in his novels. Döblin does not spare his humor in speaking of human weaknesses; he is equally generous when speaking of political and social problems. Understanding Döblin's political wit is necessary to complete the view of

¹⁹Leo Kreutzer, Alfred Döblin. Sein Werk bis 1933, sees Döblin's work from the socio-political perspective: the activity or the passivity of Döblin's heroes corresponds to a political world view, which Kreutzer interprets from Döblin's journalistic articles of the 1920's, especially "Link's Foot" and other non-fiction prose, such as Reise in Polen, 1926 and Wissen und Verändern!, 1931. Indeed, Müller-Salget bases his interpretation of Berlin Alexanderplatz on the political tract Wissen und Verändern! James H. Reid, "Berlin Alexanderplatz. A Political Novel", German Life and Letters, 21, No. 3 (1967-8), pp. 214-23, limits his discussion of Döblin's political views to an interpretation of Berlin Alexanderplatz alone; so too Heinz D. Osterle limits his remarks to a political interpretation of November 1918: "Alfred Döblins Revolutionstrilogie November 1918", Monatshefte, 62, No. 1 (1970), pp. 1-23. Hans-Jürgen Krysmanski, Die utopische Methode. Eine Literatur- und wissenssoziologische Untersuchung deutscher utopischer Romane des 20. Jhs. (Opladen, Westdeutscher Verlag, 1963), mentions that there are political and social factors to be considered in the analysis of the Utopian method of treating human problems. Very briefly he looks at Berge Meere und Giganten. Roland Links, "Roman des 'Leidens an Deutschland'. Zu Alfred Döblins Buch Pardon wird nicht gegeben", Neue Deutsche Literatur, 10, H. 2 (1962), pp. 117-24, interprets the novel strictly from the socio-political point of view: an individual's fate versus social and economic considerations.

his satire and irony in general.

Why separate the discussions of Döblin's political and social satire from general satire? Starting with the birth of Linke Poot in 1919, immediately after World War I, Döblin's previously general attacks on philistinism and provincialism²⁰ focus on the political problems which beset Germany and German society.²¹ By the time Döblin writes November 1918 in 1937-1941, he is obsessed with the specific question why were the German people unworthy and incapable of running a republic. The Weimar Republic is born with such hope and already in the 1920's Döblin perceives that Germany is not ready for it. This preoccupation with a definite historical event makes valid a separation of Döblin's political satire from satire in general.

The essays of Linke Poot use satire to repeat the same themes in endless variation: the Weimar Republic is no change from the preceding monarchy, the German people do not want a change, the Germans prefer theorizing to action - and how urgently Germany needs a change in the postwar period.

In Berlin Alexanderplatz we find the same concerns. The Weimar Republic represents no new social order.

²⁰Cf. the early stories in GesE which satirize the stuffiness of the petit bourgeois mentality.

²¹Some of Linke Poot's essays were collected in book form as early as 1921 in Der deutsche Maskenball (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1921).

Das Deutsche Reich ist eine Republik, und
wers nicht glaubt, kriegt eins ins Genick.
(BA, 291)

The pre-war German Empire has changed its name, if not its substance. A republic, the state formed by the consent of free men, is, in Germany, imposed by the billy-stick. Freedom proves to be an empty promise:

Die Bürgerlichen und die Sozialisten und die Kommunisten schreien in einem Chor und freuen sich: Aller Segen kommt von oben. Vom Staat, vom Gesetz, von der hohen Ordnung. [...] Für alle, die im Staat leben, sind Freiheiten in der Verfassung festgelegt. Da liegen sie fest. Die Freiheit, die wir brauchen, die gibt uns niemand, die müssen wir nehmen. Diese Verfassung will die vernünftigen Menschen aus der Verfassung bringen, aber was macht ihr, Genossen, mit Freiheiten, die auf dem Papier stehen [...]? Wenn ihr wo eine Freiheit braucht, kommt ein Grüner, haut euch aufn Kopp; [...] der Mann kennt keine Verfassung, sondern sein Reglement, und den Knüppel hat er dazu, und da hast du das Maul zu halten.

(BA, 293)

All the parties piously intone that all blessings come from heaven, meaning political freedom. The subsequent puns on "freedom" and "guarantee" turn these blessings into a term of ironical mockery. In a free society the constitution guarantees freedom; the word used for "guarantee" (festlegen) connotes, however, the opposite of freedom. "Festliegen" echoes the preceding verb as if to imprison "freedom" even more so. "Freedom" is a word written on a piece of paper, but it is not for the common man. The resentment and anger

this denial evokes is bitterly summed up in the pun: "Diese Verfassung will die vernünftigen Menschen aus der Verfassung bringen". The expression "aus der Verfassung" plays on the idiom "aus der Fassung" which means loss of composure or self-control. What should instill order - the constitution - in the society of free men, instead, instills disrespect. So frustrated by the constitution of Weimar, the German has no loyalty to the new state, the lack of which is sowing the seeds of the Republic's destruction.

Loyalty remains fixed to the monarchy. Like many people, Franz likes best to read the "Grüne Post" which ignores politics. The activities of the ex-Kaiser fill the columns of the "Grüne Post" (BA, 254). There is scathing satire in the stark contrast between Franz' problems with the Pums gang and the feudalistic irrelevance of the Kaiser's family affairs.

The old values of the monarchy live on. James H. Reid points out that Franz is given military values: "Haltung" (BA, 13), "Ordnung" (BA, 85, 98 ff, 211, 213), "Disziplin" (BA, 90), "Zusammennehmen" and "Durchhalten" (BA, 213).²² To prove that Franz Biberkopf's career is an allegory of German political development after the First World War, Reid cites Döblin's parody of the "Wacht am Rhein", a patriotic song, which appears after the first two blows of fate that

²²Reid, p. 218.

Franz must suffer (BA, 140, 246).²³ That Franz is a "kolossaler Dussel" (BA, 15, 196, 355, 364, 370, 384) renders these military values impotent, even comic. As a parting shot, the song is parodied at the close of the story: "Lieb Vaterland, kannst ruhig sein, ich hab die Augen auf und fall so bald nicht rein" (BA, 500). The new-found independence in Franz' maturity mocks the old ways of unthinking acceptance. The Junker heritage so honored before 1918 is in Berlin Alexanderplatz held up to ridicule.

With a military metaphor, Döblin indicates Franz' view of his activities with the Pums gang. He does not cooperate with the gang on account of the money alone ("Ich tus ja auch nicht wegen Geld, Mieze", BA, 353), but for glory. Like the professional soldier he loves the trappings of glory, blind to the gore on the battlefield:

Trompeten! Die Schlacht ist im Gang, die
Regimenter marschieren, trara, trari, trara,
die Artillerie und die Kavallerie, und die
Infanterie, und die Infanterie und die Flie-
gerei, trari, trara, wir ziehen in feindli-
ches Land hinein. worauf Napoleon sagte: Vor-
wärts, vorwärts, ohne Unterlaß, oben ist
trocken und unten naß. Aber wenn unten ist
trocken geworden, erobern wir Mailand, und ihr
kriegt ein Orden, trari, trara, trari, trara,
wir ziehen an, wir sind bald da, o welche
Lust, Soldat zu sein.

(BA, 355)

Since it is wildly exaggerated to compare life in the Pums gang with life as a soldier, the military glory for Franz is

²³Reid, p. 219.

malevolently ironical.

Deep in their hearts, the German people are still faithful to their prewar society. According to Döblin, the Germans look backwards in their history instead of forward into the future. As models for rhetorical elegance, Franz admires Otto von Bismarck and August Bebel, opposite sides of the political coin; but both are the currency of militarism. Franz holds Bismarck and Bebel up as models to Lina:

"Lina, ich kann nicht reden, ich bin kein Volksredner. [...] Weißt du, was Geist ist?" [...] "Kuck dir die Jungens auf dem Alex an, die haben alle keinen Geist. [...] Stell dir aber vor, son Redner im Reichstag, Bismarck oder Bebel, die jetzt sind ja nichts, Mensch, die haben Geist. Geist, das ist Kopf, nich bloß son Deetz. [...]"

(BA, 72)

Why does Franz not choose an example closer at hand? Obviously he has no respect for the oratory in the Weimar Republic. Such taste heightens the comedy when Franz compares the sharp "Jungens" on the Alex with the statesmen Bismarck and Bebel.

Franz flirts briefly with politics as far right as Nazism on the one hand and on the other, as far left as Communism. He is equally at home selling the Nazi "Völkischer Beobachter" and attending Communist beer-hall meetings. Despite Aristotle's definition of man, Franz is not a political animal.

Und Franzeken Biberkopf sumpt noch ein bißchen weiter in der Politik. (BA, 306)

After dabbling with both extremes, Franz gives up politics with no strain because he does not see that politics is going to accomplish anything that is worth his effort. The colloquial tone of the sentence corresponds to the easy-going nature of Franz. Instead of the proper name "Franz", Döblin mockingly baptizes him with the childish nickname "Franzeken", emphasizing his immaturity.

Politics in the Weimar Republic is shown to be empty rhetoric:

Deutsche Volksgenossen, nie ist ein Volk
schmählicher getäuscht worden, nie wurde
eine Nation schmählicher, ungerechter be-
trogen als das deutsche Volk. Wißt ihr
noch, wie Scheidemann am 9. November 1918
von der Fensterbrüstung des Reichstags uns
Frieden, Freiheit und Brot versprach? Und
wie hat man das Versprechen gehalten! -
Kanalisationsartikel, Fensterreinigungsge-
sellschaft, Schlaf ist Medizin, Steiners
Paradiesbett.

(BA, 131)

The promises sound good, but they are not of central concern to the man-in-the-street. Here a Nazi ideologue is whipping up the emotions of the crowd against the Republic for having failed the Germans. He asks how well has Scheidemann kept his word. Jeeringly the montage technique answers the Nazi: the consumer goods promised in the advertisements are the "fulfillments" of the political promises, especially a bed for sound sleep. In other words, the desires of the middle class are neither politically responsible, nor even political-ly active. By avoiding a direct answer, the juxtaposition in

the text implies that the Germans do not want any politics.

The conservative nature of the Germans is not entirely to blame if they do not take the Republic seriously. The instability of the government reduces it to a farce:

Zum guten Geschäft gehören Sportkämpfe,
Regierungswechsel. (BA, 185)

The staid business of government is reduced to the ignominy of being diversions for the populace, like boxing matches. The image denies the act of capable governing and the qualities of responsible leadership. The Republic is only a decorative, entertaining touch in the lives of the people and as that alone it is good for business.

A government crisis has the same impact as any other newsworthy event:

Krisenalarm im Reichstag, man spricht von Märzahlen, Aprilwahlen wahrscheinlich, wohin, Josef Wirth? [...] Krisenalarm im Reichstag, das Haus Hebbelstraße 17 geräumt wegen Einsturzgefahr, Bluttat auf dem Fischdampfer, ein Meuterer oder ein Wahnsinniger. (BA, 184)

Dutifully the newspaper announces the crises in the Reichstag; by its repetition, the state of alarm has become routine. Ironically the more important government crisis is less dramatically headlined than the less significant incident on the fishing boat.

How ineffective the government is we can see in the following:

Damals führt Stresemann nach Paris, oder führt er vielleicht nicht hin, in Weimar stürzt die Decke vom Telegraphenamt ein [...]. Wenn man so was liest, staunt man; ist man dabei, so kommt einem gar nicht so großartig vor; passiert eigentlich in jedem Haus was. (BA, 282)

The author makes a statement, then immediately qualifies it with "vielleicht". No matter what happens, the author seems to say, it really makes no difference. Apathy is the reaction to overwhelming and constant change; the final sentence yawns with disinterest. The drama and passions which mark the unstable course of the Weimar Republic belie the blasé unconcern. By any definition the Weimar Republic was not a boring event.

Since the Germans cannot take politics seriously, Franz can think of selling a "Völkischer Beobachter" to the Jews (BA, 184); he himself does recognize the perverted humor in such a thought.

While Döblin holds a low opinion of a bourgeois, militaristic and ineffective Republic, he holds a lower opinion of the German intellectuals and theorists, who get drunk on their own words before they can proceed to sober action. A man in a pub cynically remarks:

Ob einer ne rote Bauchbinde hat oder ne goldene oder ne schwarzweißBrote, davon schmeckt die Zigarre auch nicht besser. (BA, 86)

To judge political parties and their programs by the measure

of tobacco is odd indeed; yet the irrelevancy of such a criterion speaks volumes on the relevancy of the political parties.

Revolution? [...] Laß dir von Müttern die
Hausschuhe bringen und binde den feuer-
roten Schlips ab. Ihr macht die Revolution
immer mit der Schnauze, eure Republik - ein
Betriebsunfall!

(BA, 88)

Those who only talk about revolution ("mit der Schnauze") are no true revolutionaries. Scornfully the author reduces a revolution made in Germany to a bow-tie that mamas' fingers undo from the necks of their sons. The soap-box speech of the revanchist Richard Werner lists the betrayals which lost Germany the war, then lost the Revolution of 1918. The "Bonzen" (BA, 90) surrendered at Versailles and killed Rosa and Karl. He admires Lenin, holds Russia up as an example. But how does he end his pub oration? "Aber abwarten" (BA, 90). Werner himself proposes no action, only tells his audience to wait to see what the actions of others are.

Of one of the political disputants, the author writes:

Die Worte, tönende Wellen, Geräusch-
wellen, mit Inhalt gefüllt, schaukeln hin
und her durch die Stube aus der Kehle
Dreskes, des Stotterers [...].

(BA, 91)

Meaning is expunged from the words whose sounds establish a weird, independent existence of their own. Later Franz contemptuously rejects the pub politics:

Und wovon wollt ihr denn leben, ihr Groß-
schnauzen? Ihr macht euch ja mit Redens-

urten besoffen!

(BA, 98)

Law and order, he feels, are endangered by the "Radau". The irony is that Franz himself lacks a punctilious respect for the law and order he so hotly defends.

Further left than the Socialists on the political spectrum are the Anarchists. The principles of the anarchist who tries to influence Franz are met by suspicion and distrust. They are delightfully absurd exercises in illogic. The anarchist correctly points out to Franz that in order to strike, one must first have work. Franz refuses: "Die verweigere ich" (BA, 298), thus proving to have a truly anarchistic nature in declining to integrate himself into society even this far. The anarchist is incensed at such lack of cooperative spirit. "Das nützt uns nichts. Da kannst du dir einfach ins Bett legen. Von Streik hab ich geredet, Massenstreik, Generalstreik" (BA, 298). Even the anarchist needs disciplined ranks in order to achieve his vision of glory.

On the international level, non-German diplomats are also enamored with words to the detriment of meaningful action:

Wer ist es denn? Sind es die Delegierten der Völker, die in Paris den Kelloggspakt unterzeichneten, umringt von 50 Photographen, das richtige Tintenfaß konnte seines großen Umfangs wegen nicht herbeigebracht werden, man mußte sich mit einer Sèvres-garnitur begnügen?

(BA, 212)

The Kellogg Pact of 1928 effectively won signatures to an

agreement to outlaw war but made no provisions for enforcement of the articles. Mockingly Döblin makes the inkwell, the source of all the inked signatures, too large for the picture. Even more mockingly he replaces it with a delicate, fine Sévres porcelain inkstand, an ironic symbol of impractical theory triumphing over coarse reality.

In general, Döblin distrusts the efficacy of those who lead the life of the mind to alleviate pressing social ills.

Buchhandlung, die Bibliothek des modernen Menschen, unsere Gesamtausgaben führender Dichter und Denker setzen sich zusammen zur Bibliothek des modernen Menschen. Es sind die großen Repräsentanten des europäischen Geisteslebens. - Das Mieterschutzgesetz ist ein Fetzen Papier. Die Mieten steigen ständig.

(BA, 131)

Montage ironically comments on the relevance of the collected works of leading poets and philosophers to rent control laws: the greatest representatives of the European intellectual tradition are not able to prevent the rents from rising.

Germany has changed from monarchy to republic; the Germans are suspicious of the new and long for the old; change is doomed to failure because it relies more on words than deeds. The current state of affairs in Germany, says Döblin's irony and satire, is in desperate need of change. Things cannot continue as they are. Döblin drily inserts a resumé of grim social conditions into his description of Franz' political argument in Henschke's pub:

Die stehn an ihrem Tisch, der Lange sitzt und trinkt. Die Holzindustriellen pochen auf ihren Schein, Krupp läßt seine Pensionäre verhungern, anderthalb Millionen Arbeitslose, in 15 Tagen Zunahme um 226 000.

(BA, 100)

These statistics viciously comment on Franz' stubborn adherence to his simplistic, militaristic view of life. The cloud of anger on Franz' face passes "Gott sei Dank" (BA, 100). By repeating this the author is being ironical of the restoration of Franz' "normality" in contrast to current social conditions.

Franz' friends are as blind as he is to the necessity of change. Hoping to hear news of Franz, who has disappeared, Cilly buys a newspaper one day:

Sie kaufte sich von einem fremden Händler ein Blatt, sah selbst hin. [...] Na ja, ein Eisenbahnunglück in den Vereinigten Staaten, in Ohio, und Zusammenstoß mit Hakenkreuzlern, nee, da macht Franz nicht mit, großes Schadenfeuer in Wilmersdorf.

(BA, 218)

The approaching political catastrophe is referred to, but lies buried between a train accident in far away Ohio and a fire in a Berlin suburb. Ironically the one event of the three which should be of most concern to Franz and Cilly is also the one which by their disinterest is as far away as Ohio.

Reforms are needed to insure social justice. Wealth is unfairly distributed: a lawyer is too miserly to spend money

for a vacuum cleaner so that the cleaning woman's work might be done more easily (BA, 133). The woman herself works her fingers to the literal bone:

[...] sie ist unheimlich dürr, aber elastisch, für ihre beiden Kinder schuftet sie. Die Bedeutung der Fette für die Ernährung, das Fett überkleidet die Knochenvorsprünge und schützt das darunterliegende Gewebe vor Druck und Stoß, hochgradig Abgemagerte klagen daher über Schmerzhaftigkeit an den Sohlen beim Gehen. Das trifft aber für diese Aufwärterin nicht zu.

(BA, 133)

The brief digressive lecture on the purpose of body fat is ironically concluded by being declared irrelevant in this case. The miserly lawyer who is also hard-working, on the other hand, suffers ill health. Perhaps there is a sort of justice in the world; however, as a result of his overwork and "Unpäßlichkeit", the lawyer cannot fulfill his obligations to his client Frau Groß.

Franz is almost caught in the coils of state justice. He applies for welfare (BA, 262). Mechanically the official processes Franz; equally mechanically he answers Franz' multitude of questions. The wheels of city administration are too smooth. The description falls just short of a crusading reformer's caricature. The criticism of the welfare system is indeed emphasized by the bored, matter-of-fact tone the official uses. What should not be acceptable, as we perceive by Franz' financial dilemma, is the accepted. The replies have the air of being inevitable, unchanging

and unchangeable. Tensions arise when the needs of a well-ordered, smoothly functioning state must be combined with humane care of the poor.²⁴

Having castigated both the German fatal love of order and the failure of German politicians and intellectuals, what then is the solution to the problems of man's ills? In Berlin Alexanderplatz the moment Franz "opens his eyes" he is on his way to a solution. At that moment too, he is no longer a comic figure. Döblin relies on the individual power "to see", not on ideologies to provide an answer. Satire and irony are reserved for those "oxen" who deny their human power of reason "to see".

²⁴The irony of applying the rules of efficient business practices to charity is perhaps most critically and viciously presented in Pardon wird nicht gegeben:

Entwicklung und Entwicklung ist schließlich noch zweierlei. Alles muß seinen gesunden Boden behalten. Wie steht es aber mit der sozialen Fürsorge? Es muß alles sein Maß haben. Daß der Gesetzgeber an Fürsorge für Krankheit, Unfall und so weiter gedacht habe, in Ehren. Die Humanität beherrscht das Denken jedes zivilisierten Menschen. Aber wenn das Geschäftsleben von der Humanität beherrscht werden soll, wo kommen wir da hin? [...] Wenn ich human sein will, dann ist das mein Privatvergnügen und geht auf Sonderkonto. Das Geschäftsleben kann nicht von der Humanität unter Druck genommen werden.

(Pardon, p. 186)

No trace of humanity survives in the businessman's speech. The unadulterated inhumanity in his general principles wipes out the balance of humanity in his "Sonderkonto".

Summary

Without the knowledge that there is a discrepancy between what would be right and what is wrong with man and the world as they are there would be no satire or irony. As an author, Döblin is conscious that his world is primarily his own imagined, created world with his own unique order. In his earliest work Döblin demands completely objective, observant narrative, in which the author's voice is silent. As Döblin comes to see man's place in the world more positively, his authorial voice, subjective and commenting, is more frequently heard. If man is no longer a frightened victim of the world order, as in the early stories, but a worthy, self-consciously confident participant, then the author has the right to comment audibly on the world order, thereby satirizing it. The first target then of his satire is his own novel. Intruding his presence into his own plot and onto the readers, Döblin, finger raised, is telling us what we should notice, so that in the end the story may be real to us. By confusing the lines between the imagined story and reality, we cannot so easily dismiss Franz' fate as a pretty tale. Otherwise we might not react to what Döblin shows us to be Franz' goal and what Franz had to undergo to achieve it.

Throughout Döblin's works there is the assumption that nature, the world, operates according to its own logic, rather than man's logic which may be faulty. Whether or not the

animation of nature is reason to quake in fear or to rejoice depends on how optimistically Döblin views man's ability "to see". In Berlin Alexanderplatz, he guides his hero toward this goal; hence Döblin reaffirms the world whose order his logic tampers with. By inverting our world according to a logic we have never encountered before, Döblin is challenging our assumptions about the order of the world. Our logic enables us more or less to go through life; Döblin's absurd logic shows that we are blinding ourselves to the faults and weaknesses in the existing order when we rigidly adhere to our old habits of thought. We are depriving ourselves of joy and delight if we reject what seems to be beyond our understanding.

Of all subjects for satire, man must surely be the richest, for he is ever imperfect. It is doubtful whether the room for improvement will ever lessen due to satirical exposure of his faults. Late in life Döblin turned to religion with whose vocabulary he preached to improve man. Yet, the satiric voice is still heard in the late novellas, in November 1918 and in Hamlet. Just what the ideal man would be is established in Berlin Alexanderplatz only by negative definition. He would be purified of warped human relationships; he would be cleansed of false values; he would be blessed with inner strength. Any human weaknesses that might be left he could then overcome, no longer tenaciously holding onto

his old habits.

In Berlin Alexanderplatz, Döblin is sanguine about man's capacity to start afresh. It is difficult, but possible. "Wir wissen, was wir wissen, wir habens teuer bezahlen müssen" (BA, 501). Once on the path towards the ideal, man ceases to be a subject for satire.

Döblin never shook himself loose from the events in Berlin. As the capital of Germany it was the central stage for the public events which eventually were to drive Döblin away into exile. Even then, he felt the obligation to be Germany's political prophet. In Berlin Alexanderplatz, he directs his satire of human weakness and of a faulty world order against political and national habits, specific to the Weimar Republic and to Germany. Like the satire of human nature in general, political satire brings us to reflect about the lot of man.

V The Picaresque Elements

A picaresque novel has a plot in which an anti-hero in the course of his adventures bests society at its own game and thereby exposes its hypocrasies and failings. Picaresque elements are humorous because they demask the imperfections of the established order and puncture the complacency of those who uphold it.¹ In Berlin Alexanderplatz Döblin is satirical of society through the picaresque traits to be found in Franz; moreover, Döblin is satirical of these elements themselves.

What are the qualities of the picaro and picaresque novel and to what extent do we find these traits in Berlin Alexanderplatz?

The traditional picaro is an outsider who rejects society instead of being rejected by it.² The origins of the

¹Robert Alter, Rogue's Progress. Studies in the Picaresque Novel (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. viii. Alter considers that the "episodic account of wanderings, adversity and ingenious role-playing incorporates a satiric view of society".

²There is a distinction between the picaro and the outsider as defined by Herman Meyer, Der Sonderling in der deutschen Dichtung (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1963). The perspective of the picaro is different from that with which the "Sonderling" (an eccentric, an outsider) views the world. The picaro is an outsider because he chooses to reject society; the eccentric cannot fit into society. Both the picaro and the eccentric are conscious that they are separated from the normal and usual social standard, which was at first the aristocratic one, later the bourgeois. The picaro is a quick-change artist, adapting himself to the situation, turning it to his advantage.

picaro are very humble, being no more than a rogue, who very quickly advanced to become the author's standard bearer of social and religious criticism; the modern picaro is the individual defending his free existence against the forces of a modern, technological, specialized, highly organized collective society.³ In his struggle to maintain an absolute freedom, every reputable and disreputable recourse is his weapon;⁴ the battle is marked by an élan, a daring and impudence. This bravura manifests itself in comic and impudent behavior.⁵

The latter seeks to surmount the situation: "Der springende Punkt [...] ist somit die Frage nach der Möglichkeit, dieses Leiden an der Wirklichkeit zu überwinden" (Meyer, p. 86). The eccentric's characteristics, which are helpless inability to adapt to society and the desire to rise above daily pettiness, are foreign to Döblin's Franz Biberkopf.

³For an account of the historical development of the picaro novel, see Alter; Alexander A. Parker, Literature and the Delinquent. The Picaresque Novel in Spain and Europe 1599-1753 (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1967); Rainer Diederichs, Strukturen des Schelmischen im modernen deutschen Roman. Eine Untersuchung an den Romanen von Thomas Mann 'Bekenntnisse des Hochstaplers Felix Krull' und Günter Grass 'Die Blechtrommel' (Düsseldorf-Köln: Eugen Diederichs Verlag, 1971), pp. 15-31. For a discussion of the modern picaro, see Wilfried van der Will, Pikaro heute. Metamorphosen des Schelms bei Thomas Mann, Döblin, Brecht, Grass (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1967).

⁴Cf. Gero von Wilpert, Sachwörterbuch. In the entry "Schelmenroman" he defines the central character as "der sich mit allen erlaubten und unerlaubten Mitteln, List und Betrug, Lügen und Schlichen, gerissen durchs Leben schlägt [...]".

⁵van der Will, p. 25. He notes the picaro's "Neigung zu Gaukeleien".

Although he defies conventional good conduct, the picaresque hero is no social rebel;⁶ although he is no defender of the status quo, he shrinks from the mental commitment of the revolutionary.⁷ He refuses to take sides because he suspects the simplifications of any ideology: he is open to all possibilities and rejoices in the multiplicity in the world.⁸ Such sensibilities make him a utopian, searching for a paradise on earth.⁹

All these traits support the crowning virtue of the modern picaresque hero: in opposition to society's falseness and shortsightedness, he preserves his integrity. He is a touchstone for all that is right and good, for all that we consider human.¹⁰

Döblin very consciously follows in the picaresque tradition: often he refers to Cervantes' Don Quixote, the novel which is mainly responsible for the subsequent development in the picaresque literature. We find direct references to Don

⁶van der Will, p. 27.

⁷Ibid., pp. 27-28.

⁸Ibid., pp. 29 ff.

⁹Ibid., pp. 30-32.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 32-34; Alter, p. 12. Alter speaks of the incorruptibility of the picaresque hero. Further, see Richard W. B. Lewis, "Der pikarische Heilige", Pikarische Welt. Schriften zum europäischen Schelmenroman, Wege der Forschung, Bd. 163, ed. Helmut Heidenreich (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1969), pp. 314-33.

Quixote and Sancho Panza in Döblin's theoretical writings.¹¹ In a private letter he states that he considers his own characters Wadzek and Schneemann to be in the Cervantes tradition.¹² In Amazonas, Döblin mentions Don Quixote to characterize by contrast and comparison his own Quesada;¹³ in Heimkehr der Fronttruppen, to depict Woodrow Wilson.¹⁴ Döblin even sees himself as a quixotic figure when he describes his entanglement in a law suit.¹⁵

In Berlin Alexanderplatz we find many hallmarks of the modern picaresque in the "hero" Franz Biberkopf. He adequately fulfills the primary requirement of being the outsider. In the first sentences of the prologue, Franz' status is established: he is an ex-convict and an unemployed casual laborer (BA, 9). On leaving prison, Franz leads the picaresque's traditional "low" life: his haunts are pubs like the "Kleine Kneipe am Rosenthaler Platz" (BA, 54 ff), where the workers and drifters congregate; his companions are casual laborers, whores and pimps. Stealing, which is acceptable in Franz

¹¹Döblin, "Bau des epischen Werks", AzL, p. 106; "Über de Costers 'Tyl Ulenspiegel'", AzL, p. 297.

¹²Döblin, Briefe, p. 80.

¹³Döblin, Amazonas, p. 177.

¹⁴Döblin, Heimkehr der Fronttruppen, pp. 483-84.

¹⁵Döblin, Prosa. Von Prozessen und Vergleichen. Durchschlag. 6 Bl. Dabei: Entwurf und 1 weiteres Exemplar. Unvollst. 18 Bl., Nl.

milieu, contravenes the middle class code of honesty. When Franz gives Minna some aprons, she assumes they have been stolen. Franz is, however, an honest man and assures her otherwise (BA, 41). Meck laughs at Franz when he questions Meck's honesty in his trade (BA, 187).

As an outsider, the picaro maintains the absolute freedom to be himself.¹⁶ For Franz, freedom has, however, only a literal meaning: his existence outside the prison in Tegel. The formalities of parole contrast with his exhilaration in being free:

Herr Franz Biberkopf hat sich unserer
Schutzaufsicht unterstellt, werden nach-
forschen, ob Sie arbeiten, und Sie haben
sich jeden Monat vorzustellen. Gemacht,
Punkt, alles, alles in Butter. (BA, 44)

Franz' belief that everything is in apple-pie order bespeaks a staggering optimism - the hallmarks of a picaro's self-image. In the next paragraph the author, however, is cynical of Franz' jubilant self-confidence:

Vergessen die Angst, vergessen Tegel
und die rote Mauer und das Stöhnen und

¹⁶ van der Will, p. 35. He sums up as the essence of the modern picaro the highest degree of personal responsibility and the refusal to cooperate in a less than perfect world. Such a world is impossible, for the lack of cooperation is anarchy; still, this perfect degree of personal responsibility remains a moral imperative, "um überhaupt Hoffnung auf ein jenseits der totalen Verwaltung noch mögliches Ordnungsgefüge zu rechtfertigen". See further, Claudia Guillén, "Zur Frage der Begriffsbestimmung des Pikaresken", Pikarische Welt, p. 374-96. She speaks of the modern anti-hero who remains at least the "halber Außenseiter".

was sonst, - weg mit Schaden, ein neues
 Leben fangen wir an, das alte das ist
 abgetan, Franz Biberkopf ist wieder da
 und die Preußen sind lustig und rufen
 Hurra.

(BA, 44)

The repetition of "vergessen", the sing-song rhyme and the image of the Prussians cheering reveal Franz' complacency to be based on childish high notions. While Franz feels himself to be gloriously free, the narrator sceptically jeers at such freedom. He directs satire at Franz.

Although an outsider and free at heart, the picaresque does outwardly conform. By seeming to obey the rules of prevailing social values the picaresque not only serves his self interest, but demasks the conventions. On the one hand, Franz is concerned with honestly making his living:

Gottlieb, du weißt, über Anstand lass ich
 nicht mit mir spaßen. [..] Ne solide
 Existenz, darauf kommt es an, ne solide.

(BA, 60)

On the other hand, Franz sees nothing wrong with letting Lina exhaust herself selling his papers while he looks on (BA, 80). The author shows the reader how dubious the moral value is of such conformity. In satirically undercutting this particular picaresque trait, the author ever broadens the discrepancy between the most positive meaning of "Anständigkeit" and Franz' interpretation of it. Directly from the beginning, Franz is "anständig" for reasons of expediency rather than out of moral conviction. The difference between the appearance

and the essence of decency leads to the first betrayal: Franz' boasting to Lüders of his sexual success finally ruins his incipient "business career" of selling shoelaces. In the second stage, Franz is mistakenly decent with Reinhold; he becomes, however, morally more degraded, taking over the other man's girl-friends and living from their meager earnings from prostitution. The eventual reward for such loyalty is the loss of his arm. In the third stage, the author observes Franz while promenading in seeming respectability:¹⁷

Auf welcher Höhe steht jetzt unser Franz Biberkopf! Wie geht es ihm, wie hat sich alles gewandelt! Er war schon dicht am Tode, wie hat er sich gehoben! Welch sattes Geschöpf ist er jetzt, dem nichts fehlt, nichts am Essen, Trinken, nichts an der Kleidung. Ein Mädels hat er, [...] Geld hat er [...]

(BA, 290)

As Franz' morality decreases, the contents of his pockets and his physical comforts increase; the more he outwardly conforms, the more society rewards him. The author's irony is evident. The same passage spoken by Franz instead of the narrator would be boasting of the good life, not a sharp critique of its moral hollowness. The narrator undermines his apparent admiration for Franz' present success. There

¹⁷Cf. the third book of Grimmelshausen's picaresque novel, Der abenteuerliche Simplicissimus (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1961). The high point of the hero's success as the Hunter of Soest corresponds to the lowest point of his moral corruption.

are too many exclamation marks. He is not lacking a girlfriend, money, food and drink, all of which are purely physical possessions, the "Butterbrot" of the prologue. Directly after this paragraph there follows the author's direct warning:

Du hast geschworen, Franz Biberkopf, du willst anständig bleiben. Du hast ein dreckiges Leben geführt, [...] das war fürchterlich. Und jetzt? Sitzt auf demselben Fleck, Ida heißt Mieke, der eine Arm is dir ab, paß auf, du kommst auch noch ins Saufen, und alles fängt dann nochmal an, dann aber schlimmer, und dann ists aus.

(BA, 290)

The loss of Mieke will climax the discrepancy between the appearance and reality of Franz' "Anständigkeit". Only after Franz has confronted death does he truly know what "Anständigkeit" means. At this point he ceases to be picaresque.

The modern picaro's self-indulgence is his defense of his absolute freedom in a society that demands each man to conform. Franz glories in exercising his brute strength, eating and drinking, all of which done to excess are expressions of non-conforming physical enjoyment of life. He revels in his gift of muscular prowess, unabashedly enjoying the prestige he can win by feats of strength. Franz equates his strength with courage. When Franz helps firemen rescue a horse which had stumbled into an excavation ditch for the metro (BA, 264), Meck admires the courage as well as the muscle of his friend. The author, however, mocks such an

evaluation. After the first hesitant attempt at reconciliation with Reinhold, Franz, the stronger of the two quivers in fear:

Derweil sitzt unser Franz Biberkopf,
die Kobraschlange, der eiserne Ringer,
allein, ganz allein, derweil sitzt der
an seinem Fenster, krallt seine Hand um
das Fensterbrett [...].

(BA, 325)

Where is his pluck now? "Kobraschlange" is an ironical epithet for the effectiveness of brute strength. What Franz thought was the bulwark of his individuality fails him in a crisis.

Much stress is laid on Franz' capacity to consume large quantities of food and drink, as if eating were a proof of Franz' free existence. His attack on food is impudent defiance of society's sense of propriety. His first and second day out of prison he consoles himself for his impotence with eating and drinking: "Und frisst sich satt und schläft sich aus [...]" (BA, 37). Significantly the word for eating is the one usually reserved for animals. Life for him is over, he thinks; there is nothing now but eating, drinking and sleeping. Of course, he finds that he is not impotent: in gratitude to Minna he sends her a veal cutlet (BA, 43). To eat is to confirm his status in his own eyes: "Dann hat er sich vier Wochen lang den Bauch mit Fleisch, Kartoffeln und Bier vollgeschlagen [...]" (BA, 44). It is also to confirm his status in the eyes of others. Other men seek renown in politics or business; Franz, in alimentation. After the scene in Henschke's pub, where he, Georg Dreske and Richard Werner argue

about politics, Franz returns for dinner. The men sing the "Internationale" while he slowly chews his dinner. When they invite him to sing, meaning to provoke him, he answers, "Ich eß lieber. Wenn ich fertig bin mit Essen, singe ich mit oder singe auch was" (BA, 93). While they talk, Franz concentrates on eating. Franz is quite proud to be the center of their attentions. His pleasure is expressed in terms of food. He punctuates the end of the provocative "Wacht am Rhein" which he has sung with a hearty toast:

Franz grüßt am Schluß seines Liedes das
 ganze Leben, er schwenkt sein Seidel:
 "Prost", schlägt auf den Tisch, strahlt,
 es ist alles gut, er ist satt, [...] er
 ist ein kräftiger Mann, gut im Fleisch
 mit Fettansatz.

(BA, 96)

His Rabelaisian appetites and attitudes inspire a certain fearful respect in his listeners.

As the story unfolds, innumerable "Wurst-" und "Käse-
 stullen" are eaten; countless glasses of schnaps and beer
 are drunk. Reinhold's abstemious habits are an ominous con-
 trast to Franz' more lighthearted gluttony. In a pub Franz
 sits in front of his "Molle", "sitzt im Fett" (BA, 211). In
 high spirits at the thought of reforming his friend, Franz
 also wants him to learn to drink:

Ich mein bloß so, auf mich kannst du dich
 verlassen, mußt dir ein Schnaps ange-
 wöhnen, leichter Kümmel.

(BA, 214)

He defends his drinking: "Er sagt: dann setzt man Fett an

und denkt nicht soviel" (BA, 315). In the light of the conclusion of the novel, not thinking is precisely the cause of Franz' sorrows. Eating and drinking give one a sense of well-being and are, as well, the expression of overwhelming confidence. The man whose lunch ends with a trip to the men's room (BA, 335-36) epitomizes the ephemeral security of a filling meal. Franz enjoys the picaresque's enormous appetites; the author shows their folly.

In his struggle to maintain his freedom, the picaresque often resorts to comic roguery. Franz' sexual adventures belong in this category. The first adventure is bawdily comic. Aroused as he exits from a movie, Franz picks up a prostitute. Nervously he follows her to her room. She, however, is all patience and practicality: "Mensch, laß mich doch erst den Schirm hinlegen" (BA, 33). When Franz presses himself to her, the narrator avoids clinical description, yet manages to be delightfully direct: "Putt, putt, putt, mein Hühnchen, putt, putt, mein Hahn" (BA, 33). However, Franz is, to his distress, impotent. Irritably he demands that the landlady stop walking about in her kitchen just outside the door. With haughty elegance the prostitute informs the woman, "Frau Priese, ein paar Minuten sind Sie mal ruhig, ich hab hier mit einem Herrn zu reden, Wichtiges" (BA, 34). For Franz the matter is truly important; for the prostitute, it is an indifferent matter - she contemplates what she can

buy with her fee of three marks; for neither is it a question of talking.

Whereas Franz' unsuccessful attempts with whores are farcical jewels, in the sexual adventure with Minna the narrator treats Franz with irony, thus showing his disapproval of such picaresque roguery. At the very moment of sexual success Franz is "der alte gute Franz Biberkopf" (BA, 40). He is committing adultery and rape, two actions which scarcely qualify for such an avuncular description.

Sexual prowess is not the only distinguishing trait of the picaro's élan. There are other roguish tricks that we find in Franz. To rid himself of an unwanted girl-friend Franz starts an argument:

Sofort am nächsten Mittag, bevor er wieder auf die Straße ging, machte Franz der Kutscherfrau wegen nichts und wieder nichts einen Höllenkrach. Die ging in die Höhe. Er schrie sich freudig ein.

(BA, 196)

Franz' evident enjoyment of the fight contrasts impishly with the fight itself. Franz conspires with Reinhold's current girl-friend Trude and his own girl-friend Cilly to warn the potential rival, Frau Labschinsky of Reinhold's low character. With all the cunning of Cicero orating against Cataline, Franz claims not to want to blacken his friend's character as he does exactly that:

[...] ich tu das nicht, daß ich bei Sie komme, um meinen Freund, oder wer es ist, schlechtzumachen. Das beileibe nicht. Ich

misch mich absolut nich in andere Leute
ihre schmutzige Wäsche. Nanu, aber was
recht ist, muß recht bleiben. Ein Weib
nach dem andern auf die Straße stoßen,
dazu steh ich nich grade. Und das ist
auch die wahre Liebe nicht.

(BA, 209)

Franz himself is no model of virtue; nonetheless he presumes to lecture on the topic. That Franz wants to hold Reinhold to an ideal of "true love", in the light of his own philanderings, falls just short of being hypocritical; Franz sincerely means what he says.

In his struggle against society and for his freedom the picaro is akin to the social rebel; but to submit to the ideological commitment necessary would be to relinquish his absolute individualism. Nor does the picaro defend the status quo. We have seen how Franz wants to be "anständig"; Franz insists, however, on the right to be true to himself alone:

Gottlieb, was soll unsereins mit Gericht
und Polizei und Politik? [...] Aber lieber
nisch mit die andern haben. Das ist Selbst-
mord. Immer laufen lassen. Anständig blei-
ben und für sich bleiben.

(BA, 67)

Events are to prove the weakness in Franz' logic. Despite the pledge to society, ("Anständigkeit"), he is declaring faith in himself alone. Thus he can admire both the Nazis and then the Communists. His reasons for not becoming politically committed do not lie in a sophisticated superiority, but simply in an instinctive refusal to complicate his life. His conversation with the anarchist (BA, 294 ff) shows his inability to reject

an ideology for ideological reasons; he ingenuously distrusts any system. No man, however, can ignore the consequences of politics - one must take a position. Thus when Franz abjures politics, the narrator treats Franz with irony:

Und wieder gibt es nichts Zufriedeneres
als unsern Franz Biberkopf, der die Politik
zum Deibel schickt.

(BA, 314)

The modern picaro is open to all possibilities in the world. His existence is positive affirmation of life. Even Franz' wrong-headed view affirms the goodness of the world in its multiplicity. As he walks or takes the trolley about the city, as he goes about his affairs - selling bow-ties, shoelaces or newspapers, sitting in pubs and beer-halls - the world as manifested in the city of Berlin, in all its complexity is open to him. For example the chapter "Franz Biberkopf betritt Berlin" starts with visual heraldic devices of the city, quotes from city documents, has local weather reports, follows trolley number 68 on its run, observes a near traffic accident, cites advertising texts, describes the buildings in the Brunnenstraße, the Invalidenstraße and the Rosenthaler Straße, cites more advertising texts, describes a construction site in the Elsasserstraße, watches four people at a trolley stop in the Lothringerstraße, describes them and even gives a future biography of a young boy.

In the stream-of-conscious passages the author lets us

see into Franz' mind as he absorbs the sights and sounds of the city. He boards a trolley and we gather that he is observing the other passengers and thinking of the events in his day:

Zieht ab, soll sich lieber die Stiefel putzen lassen, pennt wohl in der Palme in der Fröbelstraße, steigt in die Elektrische. Der fährt sicher mit einem falschen Fahrschein oder hat einen aufgehoben, der versucht. Wenn sie ihn erwischen, hat er den richtigen verloren. Immer diese Nassauer, schon wieder zwei. Nächstens mach ich ein Gitter vor. Muß mal frühstücken. (BA, 68)

We see the city through Franz' eyes:

Franz ging rascher, stampfte um die Ecke. So, freie Luft. Er ging an den großen Schaufenstern ruhiger. Was kosten Stiefel? Lackschuh, Ballschuh, muß tipptopp aussehen, so am Fuß, sone Kleene mit Ballschuhe. Der affige Lissarek, der Böhme, der alte Kerl mit den großen Nasenlöchern draußen in Tegel, der ließ sich [...] alle paar Wochen ein Paar schöne seidene Strümpfe bringen [...]. Ist zum Piepen. (BA, 139)

Not only do we observe Franz taking stock of the objects in his world, but we have his editorial comments as well. Noticing shoes in a store window leads him to reflect on life's oddity: an ugly prisoner regularly receives luxurious silk stockings.

Although Franz is confronted with the multiplicity of the world, he does not accept a responsible role in it:

[...] mir geht es gut, was geht mich das an und geht mich das an, und die Politik geht mir nichts an und wenn die Menschen

so dämlich sind, sich ausbeuten zu lassen,
kann ick nichts für. Wer soll sich für alle
Leute den Kopp zerbrechen. (BA, 315)

The rejection of responsibility for his fellow man is in harmony with the picaro's refusal to submit to any society less than ideal. As the ideal is never realized, the picaro, as long as he stays in the world, remains forever the free individual on the outside. However, these thoughts (BA, 315) of Franz are melancholy, not proudly defiant. Thus the narrator is casting doubt on the value of a degree of personal freedom. Only after his spiritual rebirth does Franz accept responsibility. Like a coda, the Alexanderplatz is once more presented in all its complexity (BA, 494-6). The world is affirmed anew and this time with Franz' conscious agreement: "Da sind viele Dinge, die einen gesund machen können, wenn nur das Herz gesund ist" (BA, 494).

For the reader, the picaro in his struggle to be free is the embodiment of individual, personal integrity.²² That this virtue is found in a knave, and not in a knight, pleases our sense of the incongruous. The picaro may be a rogue, but he is not a scoundrel. There is a qualitative difference between the honesty of personal integrity and the fraud of respectability. Franz may be unsocial, but he is not asocial. Franz is disturbed if he must sell "hot" goods. He disapproves of Meck's unconcern on this point:

²²van der Will, pp. 34-35.

"Und wo kriegst du die Sachen [clothing] her?" "Bist doch immer der alte Franz, immer nach dem Woher fragen. Das fragen bloß die Mädchen, wenn sie Alimente wollen." Franz trollte wortlos neben Meck, schnitt eine Miene: "Ihr macht euren Schwindel, bis ihr reinschliddert." "Was heißt hier reinschliddern, was heißt Schwindel, Franz, man muß Geschäftsmann sein, muß sich auf den Einkauf verstehen."

(BA, 187)

Meck has correctly assessed Franz' naïveté, even if he has undervalued his friend's basic honesty.

Innocence subverts Franz' first reaction to Reinhold, which is a negative one. He is curious about the man who drinks only coffee and lemon soda, whose eyes are so sad, who wears an old soldier's coat and stutters. Franz discovers that Reinhold deals "in fruit", a business, which for some reason disquiets him: "Er wurde aus der Sache nicht klug. Er sagte sich: lieber Zeitungshandel" (BA, 193). There is a certain irony that Franz prefers the honesty of selling newspapers, even if they are Nazi propaganda, to the flourishing "fruit" business. It is not a strict sense of honesty, however, that makes him cling to the newspaper trade; he is particularly slow in realizing what "fruit" is. Franz is credulous: "[...] die meisten hier handelten merkwürdigerweise 'Obst' [...]" (BA, 193).

Even after Franz has abandoned the newspaper trade to participate in the "fruit" business, even after he has lost an arm, he will not inform on Reinhold; his sense of honor

forbids him to betray a friend, even so wretched a friend as Reinhold (BA, 245). On this point he is adamant: "Und Franz verrät nicht, wer ihn vors Auto geschmissen hat" (BA, 253). The author ironically judges Franz' sense of honor. The Pums gang decides to give Franz some money as a reward for his silence.

Man muß seinen guten Willen zeigen, für
den Franz muß man sammeln, weil er sich
doch schließlich anständig gezeigt hat,
man muß für eine Erholung sorgen für den,
und was das Krankenhaus gekostet hat.
(BA, 254)

Like Franz, the Pums gang uses the word "anständig". By the standards ~~of~~ the thieves who had pushed him out of the moving car, Franz is most virtuous, truly "anständig" when he refuses by his silence to deliver the Pums gang up to justice. In such a context, the meaning of the word "anständig" is fully perverted.

The picaro rejects the established order because he sees it as a hollow, empty system which can offer him nothing. His refusal to condone any of society's failings is the basis of his personal integrity. Where the picaro's absolute inner freedom is based on perspicacity, the author presents Franz' integrity as naïveté, which he shows to be unwarranted irresponsibility. The story of Stefan Zannowich, which is meant as an exemplum stupefies him, Franz: "Dem Mann im Sommermantel stand der Mund offen: 'Das ist wahr?'" (BA, 28). He could only appreciate the significance of the story if he opened-

his mind; all he can open is his mouth. Franz is stupid, a "Kamel" (BA, 372), a "Dussel" (BA, 15, 196, 355, 364, 370, 384). He is a "Dickschädel" (BA, 357), who cannot understand anything. Franz is unable to recognize the evil in Reinhold; his easy-going good nature assumes that all men are the same as he is. After Mieke is murdered the narrator ironically remarks, "Franz merkt nichts und die Welt geht weiter" (BA, 393). While puzzled that Mieke should disappear, he shrugs off his worry with the help of Eva's consolation. Although Franz could not have come to Mieke's aid in the park, although he does not know what has happened to her, he is still responsible for her fate. Integrity based on naïveté is not the moral virtue of the picaresque whose integrity is scornful contempt for treachery in the established order.

Many hallmarks of the picaresque are found in the character of Franz; but he is no picaresque. With irony the author subverts each of the picaresque's virtues into a vice. Although Franz and a picaresque share the same goal, which is to find a meaning in life, on closer inspection, this purpose radically differs in each.

While Franz is the social outsider, this does not give him the moral freedom of the picaresque. The author satirically jeers at Franz' rejoicing in his literal freedom outside prison walls. While the traditional and modern picaresque outwardly conform to society when it suits their purposes, Franz,

it is satirically shown, makes no distinction between the essence and mere appearance of respectability. While the picaresque indulges himself, thumbing his nose at society's standards of propriety, the author satirically denigrates Franz's strength and physical appetites because these qualities are shown to be self-deluding; they are qualities of vanity, blinding Franz and benumbing his mind. His sexual freedom is satirically condemned as an uncontrollable instinct. The author's satire turns Franz's picaresque élan and roguery into foolishness and blindness when Franz helps Reinhold with his girl-friends or tries to reform him. The picaresque's non-commitment is, in Franz's case, ironically shown to be not for intellectual reasons but for the reason that Franz is intellectually "blind". While the modern picaresque joyfully affirms the multiplicity of the world while staying the outsider, Franz affirms the multiplicity of the world only after he divests himself of the picaresque elements in his character. For the reader the picaresque's rejection of society's false values is the embodiment of personal integrity. Franz's integrity is ironically shown to be naïveté. Indeed it is this very naïveté which brings down on his head the blows of Fate.

Franz is no picaresque, either traditional or modern. Until his crisis, Franz is of the world, but not in it. Unlike a traditional picaresque figure like Simplicissimus, Franz does not reject the world at the end of the novel. Unlike a modern

picaro like Günter Grass' Oskar Matzerath, whose final refuge is a mental hospital, Franz stays in the world, but he is not of it.

The modern picaro wants to preserve his absolute personal freedom. He has no plan of life; he conforms when it suits his purposes. To submit to any order other than himself is to sully the purity of his ideal. Franz, to be sure, has a life's plan (BA, 10); the author shows that this plan is false. It is not justifiable, but a moral blemish which must be overcome. What replaces this false view of life - Franz "opens his eyes" and reflects and stays in the world - differentiates him most clearly from the picaro. A rogue always rejects society, by his roguish tricks as well as by a specific renunciation at the end of the book. Franz, while careful not to accept blindly, affirms society. Franz is not a picaro, but he is in the picaresque tradition.

VI The Grotesque Elements in Berlin Alexanderplatz

The history of the definition of the term "grotesque" begins with the problem of what one wants to define as such: is it an aesthetic phenomenon, a form in art and literature with a specific structure or is it a psychological category which determines the perspective through which the artist views and interprets the world?¹ The problem has not been resolved. The grotesque has the same structure as humor: both are categories of incongruity.² Laughter at the grotesque, however, has a different quality than laughter at incongruity in general. To rhyme the unrhymable is humorous or grotesque, depending on the psychological effect. If it is threatening, oppressive, disconcerting, or ominous, then we have the grotesque.³ As a category of incongruity, the grotesque can lean

¹Wolfgang Kayser, Das Groteske. Seine Gestaltung in Malerei und Dichtung (Oldenburg and Hamburg: Gerhard Stalling, 1962), pp. 20 ff. The concept "grotesque" began as a description of a specific style in art history.

²Norbert Kassel, Das Groteske bei Franz Kafka (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1969), pp. 24-25.

³See Wolfgang Kayser, p. 16. His definition of the grotesque consists of two equally important factors: it produces laughter and the quality of laughter is oppressive: "[...] aber allmählich ist das Lachen zum beklommenen Lächeln geworden [...]." Therefore we do not accept Kassel's proviso that the grotesque depends on the source of the contrasted elements, these being what he calls "im Bereich des Gegenständlichen" (p. 25). The simply humorous can also be so defined. For example, it is "gegenständlich", but not necessarily grotesque to illustrate literally a metaphor or an idiom. Lewis Carroll's famous "bread-and-butterfly" is scarcely grotesque.

towards the simply humorous; as a psychological category, it includes the horrible and the terrors of a nightmare.

What are the incongruities which can produce this special quality of laughter? A topsy-turvy world in which man has lost or is losing control is a grotesque world. Man's disharmonious, alienated position in such a world can best be shown where inorganic, mechanical things take on life and the living is reduced to mechanical behavior. Objects come alive, plants and animals threatening. The human desire for a harmonious and benevolent order is disappointed by the perception of the world as a disharmonious, threatening order which is depicted by distortion, emphasis of animalistic qualities and the demonic. The harmony, which a rationally constructed order believes is possible proves illusive or is overwhelmed by the disharmony.

Throughout Berlin Alexanderplatz there are elements which reveal an incongruity in such a way that the reader is both repelled and fascinated at the same time; these elements are grotesque. Running through the novel is the idea of "Ordnung" with its peculiar vision that threatens to destroy man's autonomy; in such an order, where man has no inner core of selfhood, the world is made to seem grotesque.

A. The "Dunkel"-motif

The threatening world whose chaos swallows up the in-

dividual is a theme found in the earliest works of Döblin. It is summed up in one word, which exposes the helplessness of rational, self-confident man, in the word "dunkel". This motif is established early and is confirmed in Berlin Alexanderplatz.⁴ Where the word "dunkel" or related words, such as

⁴In the early novel Der schwarze Vorhang, the word "dunkel" appears where the characters are distorted almost to caricature by their uneasy, guilty feelings about sex and love that overwhelms them. The feelings of sexual awakening are "dark"; and so is the object of Johannes' love, Irene, who both fascinates and terrifies him. In the second half of the book, as a crescendo in the relationship's intensity precipitates disaster, the word "dunkel" appears with increasing frequency, until finally all those nameless powers which are "dunkel" triumph over Johannes' self-immolation.

So too in the early stories, the word "dunkel" indicates all that is incomprehensible in sex and death. In the story "Die Memoiren des Blasierten", the narrator, hysterically fulminates against love as an enemy that murders in the dark. The word "dunkel" is found at significant turns in the stories "Der Kaplan", "Der Dritte", "Die Segelfahrt", "Die Helferin", "Die Tänzerin und der Leib" and in the story "Die Ermordung einer Butterblume". In the last we can trace Michael Fischer's mental breakdown, using "dunkel" as a signpost.

In Döblin's full-length novel Die drei Sprünge des Wang-lun, the anonymity and enormity of nature dwarfs man; we find the "dunkel"-motif. In Wallenstein, the motif takes on satanic, demonic qualities, describing a war which unleashed apocalyptic forces. In Berge Meere und Giganten, "dunkel" marks man that has gone out of control as well as his technology run amok. "Dunkel" dominates the frenetic love scene between Marduk and Marion, in which each isolated individual is struggling to subject the other; "dunkel" dominates the description of the forces unleashed by the melting of Greenland. Even the countermovement by White Baker to withdraw from the "dark" cities into the country is dubious; there is still something ominous, threatening and distorting about nature's primeval forces. In Manas, the word "dunkel" appears as signposts for moments which can lead, not to the zenith of human presumption, but to the nadir of depression.

"finster" or even "schwarz", appear they conjure up the vague and unknown forces over which Franz has no control. When the world order or death are mentally overwhelming, Franz is anxious and frightened, despite his vaunted courage.

When Franz leaves prison, panic sweeps over him; leaving the trolley, he dashes into the narrow Sophienstraße. "Er dachte, diese Straße ist dunkler, wo es dunkel ist, wird es besser sein" (BA, 14-15). Life's wretched joke, the grotesque incongruity, is that Franz' release from prison is the beginning, not the end of his punishment. The darkness of the street incorporates the vague, inchoate forces threatening Franz. He mistakenly believes it will be better in the dark street, but the darkness here signals to the reader the terrible extent of Franz' error.

In the livingroom of the Jews, Franz collapses onto the floor, groaning, "In den Boden rin, in die Erde rin, wo es finster ist" (BA, 20). Again, Franz is seeking refuge, where there is none to be found.

After Franz has lost his arm, confused thoughts race through his head; he is frightened and threatened:

Die Häuser, die rutschenden Dächer, ein
hoher finsterer Hof, es braust ein Ruf wie
Donnerhall, juvallerallera, so hat es an-
gefangen.

(BA, 246)

Objects come alive, we hear the snatches of the military song whose spirited jollity seems eerily out of place in

the "dark" courtyard. The elements underline darkness as a grotesque category belonging among the images which express Franz' terror of a hostile world.

If our instincts are out of control then they force us to surrender to the powers of darkness. Meck is incensed at Lüders, who, he is convinced, is responsible for Franz' sudden disappearance.

Sie gehen in einem scheinheiligen Gespräch
die Ramlerstraße rauf bis zur Grenzstraße.
Und da, wo es stockfinster ist, ist Meck
ganz unversehens über den Kleinen Lüders
her. Er hat ihn furchtbar geschlagen.

(BA, 124)

Contrasting to the "innocent" conversation are the destructive forces exploding from Meck. Meck falls on Lüders precisely where it is the darkest. The literal darkness of the street corresponds to the breakdown in Meck; he suddenly turns on the smaller man, beats him unmercifully and even threatens him with a knife.

Likewise, literal darkness expresses the condition of Franz' soul. A shadow through which Franz passes in a trolley is falling on his heart as well as on the front of the building. "Die Elektrische hat im Finstern das Rathaus passiert" (BA, 311). The "darkness" here embodies the confusion in Franz who has been walking about the city, bewildered and unable to sort out either public, political events or private setbacks in his life. In this mental condition he boards the trolley passing the city hall, which takes him back to Tegel.

In one sense it is paradoxical that in his distress Franz should return to the prison when he has so enjoyed being free. In another sense it is appropriate that he should return to prison, for he cannot handle his freedom. Similarly, the street is dark in which Franz finally turns himself in to a policeman (BA, 444). He sees his surrender to the law as a war-like act. Thus, there is the paradox that having given himself up, he has not yet surrendered. He is still in the grip of the powers of darkness, for he does not yet acknowledge his guilt.

When Reinhold inquires after Fränze, the first girlfriend inherited, Franz suspects something is wrong, but cannot articulate his fears: "Nur stieg ihm ein dunkler Verdacht auf, als der Stotterer sich nach etwa vier Wochen nach der Fränze erkundigte und ob Franz die schon abgeschoben hätte" (BA, 195). Here "dunkel" expresses the inadequacy of words. What is inexpressible is all the more frightening and threatening to Franz.

The powers of darkness assault Franz; acts of defiance are in vain:

Er hebt gegen die dunkle Nacht die Faust,
er fühlt etwas gegen sich stehen, aber er
kann es nicht sehen, es muß noch geschehen,
daß der Hammer gegen ihn saust. (BA, 235).

When Franz does not "see", his defiance brings an even more devastating blow. "Darkness" is a force which not only

threatens Franz, but attacks him.

Darkness embodies the overwhelming temptation to wrongdoing, which cannot be mastered, which is beyond control: man is a helpless creature at the mercy of what he does not understand. The first time that Reinhold takes Mieke to the woods in Freienwalde, he desires to possess the girl, although he knows his desires are wrong:

Es zittert in ihm. War das schön. Der dunkle Wald, die Vögel. Was will ick eigentlich von dem Mädcl. [...] Reinhold atmet noch immer tief und langsam an seinem Glimmstengel, der dunkle Wald, wir gehen im Kreise, sie führt mich wieder zurück [...].
(BA, 377)

The dark wood eventually triumphs and claims Mieke in grisly death:

Es ist acht Uhr, der Wald ist mäßig dunkel. Die Bäume schaukeln, schwanken. [...] Sagt die noch wat? Die japst nicht mehr, das Luder. [...].
(BA, 387)

Es ist stockfinster. Ihr Gesicht ist erschlagen, ihre Zähne erschlagen, ihre Augen erschlagen, ihr Mund, ihre Lippen, ihre Zunge, ihr Hals, ihr Leib, ihre Beine, ihr Schoß, [...].
(BA, 387-88)

In pitch darkness there is this terrible inventory.

Wrong-doing itself is characterized as "dark". Without being tempted in the least, Franz stumbles into a "dark" business with the Pums gang (BA, 193). Later, the "darkness" of the business is to lose its mystery for Franz, but it remains nonetheless "dark" (BA, 289). His first outing with

the Pums gang takes place in the dark ("stockfinster ist es draußen", BA, 227); the courtyard into which one of the robbers abruptly disappears is dark (BA, 228); Franz stands alone in a black hallway (BA, 229). He recalls the prison regime which allows the men to remain up until dark (BA, 229); it is as if they might be more contaminated if permitted contact with darkness. Franz is terrified, the world is a nightmarish, grotesque monster which exists in the dark, repellant but unavoidable:

Und er kam nicht weg vom Fleck, er war an die Stelle gebannt; seit Reinhold ihn geschlagen hatte, war das, da war er angenagelt. Er wollte, er mochte, aber es ging nicht, es ließ ihn nicht los. Die Welt ist von Eisen, man kann nichts machen, sie kommt wie eine Walze an, auf einen zu, da ist nichts zu machen, da kommt sie, da läuft sie, da sitzen sie drin, das ist ein Tank, Teufel mit Hörnern und glühenden Augen drin, sie zerfleischen einen, sie sitzen da, mit ihren Ketten und Zähnen zerreißen sie einen. Und das läuft, und da kann keiner ausweichen. Das zuckt im Dunkeln; wenn es Licht ist, wird man alles sehen, wie es daliegt, wie es gewesen ist.

(BA, 229)

Fear and terror are without relief: Franz stands rooted to the spot, in a grip so strong that he cannot free himself. His own paralysis grips him, but it is seen as a force external to him, submitting him to an outside enemy. Hence the world is given cold, implacable qualities: it is of iron, it is a roller that moves faster and faster. The image refracts, allowing more horrible distortions to be seen: the

roller becomes a tank with satanic horns and glowing eyes. Instead of mechanically flattening man, this monster gorges itself on human flesh. Most horrible, most grotesque of all, it is inexorable. Darkness breeds this demonic vision. It can be dispelled by the opposite, by light.

The ultimate dissolution of personality is death, and in Berlin Alexanderplatz, death is darkness. The end of Stefan Zannowich, who lived by his wits, was "black" (BA, 28); he committed suicide. Undeterred by such an example, Franz treads the same path until he too faces death: "Er fällt der dunklen Macht in die Hände, die Tod heißt und die ihm als Aufenthaltsort passend erscheint" (BA, 453). Paradoxically, Franz must know death in order to know life. When Franz tries to kill himself with hunger, Death speaks to him:

"[...] Komm, nähere dich mir, damit du mich siehst, Franz, sieh, wie du unten in einem Abgrund liegst, ich will dir eine Leiter zeigen. [...]"
 "Ich kann im Dunkeln keine Leiter sehen [...]"
 "Wenn du nicht Mut hast, im Finstern zu kommen, ich mach dir Licht [...]" (BA, 475-76)

Death is a dark abyss into which Franz inexorably must descend. Franz must respect the presence of darkness before he can become well again. After this encounter, Franz does not reject bouillon (BA, 480) for the first time, signaling that he is about to become well again, both physically and spiritually.

In Berlin Alexanderplatz in contrast to the early stories, there is hope of a victory at the end over darkness: "[...] er braucht in keine dunklen Höfe zu kriechen" (BA, 493). The dark path which Franz had to take has an end which is bright and well-lit.

Wir sind eine dunkle Allee gegangen, keine Laterne brannte zuerst, man wußte nur, hier geht es lang, allmählich wird es heller und heller, zuletzt hängt da die Laterne, und dann liest man endlich unter ihr das Straßenschild. Es war ein Enthüllungsprozeß besonderer Art. Franz Biberkopf ging nicht die Straße wie wir. Er rannte drauflos, diese dunkle Straße, er stieß sich an Bäume, und je mehr er ins Laufen kam, um so mehr stieß er an Bäume. Es war schon dunkel, und wie er an Bäume stieß, preßte er entsetzt die Augen zu. Und je mehr er sich stieß, immer entsetzter klemmte er die Augen zu. Mit zerlöschtem Kopf, kaum noch bei Sinnen, kam er schließlich doch an. Wie er hinfiel, machte er die Augen auf. Da brannte die Laterne hell über ihm, und das Schild war zu lesen.

(BA, 499)

The threat inherent in the word "dunkel" is at last balanced by the optimism embodied in the words "heller und heller". But even if one finally escapes the dark street where one has stumbled along, the street, and its darkness, are still there.

The "dunkel"-motif encompasses the feelings of overwhelming panic in the face of the unknown. It is impenetrable and incomprehensible; it is beyond rational control and cannot be articulated; it is a force within man too powerful to

be easily vanquished. These forces render a human figure impotent. If human qualities associated with the fully integrated personality are reduced to impotency, a man is rendered ridiculous, a caricature of a human. If the loss of positive, human qualities simultaneously is repellant and hypnotic, the figure or caricature is rendered grotesque. "Dunkel" is a cue word which sums up all the inescapable nightmarishly overwhelming forces. In Berlin Alexanderplatz, there is a balance to "dunkel": "hell". The unknown must be faced even unto death; then there is victory.⁵

B. Colors

Darkness is not a color, black is. In Berlin Alexanderplatz, colors are used to illustrate the same grotesque qualities as "dunkel".⁶ They serve as cue words to indicate

⁵We find the "dunkel"-motif also in the later works. In Amazonas the natives are "dark-skinned" and are one with nature that is a paradoxically ominous - even satanic - paradise to the white conquistadors. In November 1918 the revolution is a "deutsche Dunkelheit" (Heimkehr der Fronttruppen, p. 370). In Hamlet darkness reigns in many of the stories which delve into the subconscious of the family; Edward himself describes the purgatory through which he and his family have gone as a lighting up of the darkness: "Aufhellung alles Dunkels" (p. 572).

⁶In the novel Der schwarze Vorhang and the early stories we are confronted with a grotesque bouquet of reds, whites, blues, greens and yellows. In "Ermordung einer Butterblume", for example, the hues are sickly and for Michael Fischer hypnotically repellent: "Ein gelber stinkender Matsch wird aus ihm [the stem of the buttercup], grünlich, gelblich schillernd, schleimartig" (GesE, p. 45). In Wallenstein the very

overwhelming, oppressive, unknowable forces that are threatening to man. Threatened, living beings become incongruous, alienated from themselves. The resultant caricature simultaneously repels and fascinates the beholder. Colors evoke inarticulated emotion. A human face with an inhuman color is both funny and frightening; it is grotesque. Colors natural to their objects can be grotesque emphasis of repellent and uncontrollable qualities lurking within the object. As a counterweight to a world refracted into colors there is the radiant sun.

Not every color has a grotesque effect, but especially yellows, reds and greens often indicate properties which are dangerous or repellent. The first reference to Reinhold is to his coloring: "Meck flüsterte Franz zu: [..] Kuck dir mal den Gelben an, der ist hier Hauptmacher" (BA, 192). Incongruously a man is reduced to one trait: his color; a jaundiced teint is a sickly, repulsive hue for the human face. The rest of the description confirms the first impression

first scene is alive with color; the shimmering red and purple stockings of the papal ambassador contrast with the white, jerking legs of the Kaiser (p. 9); the eventual demoralizing conflict between the Empire and Rome is thus anticipated. In Berge Meere und Giganten sickly body colors change with the aid of technology, chameleonlike, grotesque and repellent. In Manas, the greens and blues are off-shades. In Amazonas the greens and blues of the tropical landscape contrast with the white and yellow-white skin of the destructive Spaniards. In Hamlet, Pluto, king of the underworld, has a grotesque, greenish tinge.

that Reinhold is an isolated, paradoxically both a fascinating and repellent phenomenon:

Diesen Gelben, den ihm Meck bezeichnete, beobachtete Franz den ganzen langen Abend. Franz fühlte sich mächtig von ihm angezogen. Er war schlank, trug einen verschossenen Soldatenmantel - ob das ein Kommunist ist? -, hatte ein langes, hohes, gelbliches Gesicht, und auffällig an ihm waren die starken Quersalten an der Stirn. Der Mann war sicher erst Anfang Dreißig, aber von der Nase zum Mund liefen beiderseits solche klaffenden Einsenkungen. Die Nase, Franz betrachtete ihn genau und oft, die Nase war kurz, stumpf, sachlich aufgesetzt. Den Kopf ließ er tief herunter gegen seine linke Hand, die die brennende Pfeife hielt. Er hatte schwarze hochstehende Haare. Wie er nachher zum Schanktisch rüberging - er zog seine Beine hinter sich, das sah aus, als ob ihm die Füße immer wo stecken blieben -, da sah Franz, daß er gelbe elende Stiefel trug, und die dicken grauen Strümpfe hingen über Bord. (BA, 192)

Reinhold's face is indeed a "mug". Its distorted features are a mockery of even a plain face; but the twisted features are menacing. This close-up examines only the external features of Reinhold and these purely physical traits betoken his inner personality. The description of the face dwells on every feature, emphasizing its yellowness and the lines etched crosswise on the forehead. Although he is young, he has the sunken cheeks of an old man. The nose merits Franz' fascinated attention. Altogether, Reinhold has an ugly body and an awkward gait. He is all that is opposite to a harmonious, integrated man.

Reinhold does not improve upon closer acquaintance; in

fact, the effect of his appearance becomes more pronounced, more ghastly: He is like some horribly animated wood carving (BA, p. 215). Reinhold's presence disturbs even Pums himself:

[...] sogar der alte Pums kommt nicht ran an den. Der Junge kuckt einen ja schon so an, daß einem angst werden kann, das gelbe Gesicht und die schrecklichen Querfalten auf der Stirn. [...] Dem ist zuzutrauen, daß er mal kaltlächelnd in die Tasche faßt und Losknallt. (BA, 251)

Reinhold's features are seen through a distorting lens that makes them not human. Because his face is disquieting it is a grotesque mask, not merely the comic mask of a clown. The grotesque exterior holds promises of terror; Reinhold would kill in cold blood. His smile chills instead of warms ("kaltlächelnd"). Reinhold does not fit into any milieu, he is incongruous everywhere.

The color of sickness emphasizes the distorted ugliness of the human body. Franz lies in the asylum in Buch:

Besinnungslos und abwesend ist Franz Biberkopf, sehr weiß, gelblich, mit Wasserschwellungen an den Knöcheln, Hungerödem, er riecht nach Hunger, nach dem süßlichen Azeton, wer in den Raum tritt, merkt gleich, hier geht was Besonderes vor. (BA, 472)

Franz is reduced beyond incongruous caricature; the body is a repellent residue of colors and odors. Color and smell assault the senses; they mark Franz out as he undergoes a lonely process that eventually "cures" him and also leaves him emotionally segregated from those around him.

Red is a cue word for the motifs of alienation and incongruity found in the grotesque. The red walls of the prison in Tegel (BA, 13, 17, 20, 108, 427), or the red movie poster (BA, 31) or the red plush sofa on which Lüders betrays Franz with the widow (BA, 116) are not particularly dramatic, but they do help to set the mood of alienation. Prison represses life, yet its red walls are ironically the symbol of refuge for Franz. The movie panders to sexual voyeurism; a "gentleman", bright scarlet, is depicted with a delectable young thing clutching his leg but the promotional text is a pathetic cliché about the fate of an orphan. Lüders devastatingly betrays Franz in a setting, on the red plush sofa, which exudes petit bourgeois pretensions of respectability.

Red is the color of murder. Dark red fire ("Das dunkelrote Feuer, glührot", BA, 106) welcomes Agamemnon home, not to his wife's loving embraces, but to the blows of her knife. His death unleashes the fury of the Erinyes, classically grotesque figures. The narrator notes the preparations made to welcome the hero home, the welcome is "glührot". He notes ironically the failure of the modern age to be able to compete with antiquity. Mieke's murder, however, is the modern "up-to-date" version of the classical story; it is far more grisly than the ancient tale. When Mieke is lured to go with Reinhold a second time into the woods, she, like Agamemnon, is going to her death, which is also marked by red light;

instead of being "glührot" it is "gelbrot". In both the ancient and modern story, red is the color of murder: Agamemnon expects a welcome and he finds a sudden end; Mieke expects a pleasant walk in the woods and she too finds sudden death. In every atmosphere, the woods of modern Berlin compete with the strangely glowing Greek fires. Mieke is lying, beaten to death, alone in the red darkness. The light is strange and unusual; it is incomprehensible; it does not evoke laughter but fear.

[...] es ist Nacht, die Sonne ist weg, huh, huh, uu, huh, es fängt wieder an, er ist da, er ist jetzt unten und oben und ringsherum. Gelbrotes Licht am Himmel und wieder Nacht, gelbrotes Licht, Nacht, das Winseln und Pfeifen wird stärker.

(BA, 388)

In Berlin Alexanderplatz, the sun embodies the harmony of all living and non-living things; it represents positive mental repose in opposition to the anxiety-ridden, distorting existence found in the grotesque. The first mention of sunshine is its path to a spot on a table in a pub; it telescopes time and distance into a peaceful whole (BA, 89). Sunshine bestows life: a prisoner pleads eloquently for a ray of sunshine (BA, 109). In jail the prisoners are like heliotropic plants: to deprive them of light is to deprive them of vigorous, beneficent life. Sunshine is life itself: the blood spurting forth from the just butchered cattle in the slaughterhouse was once the fluid of life (BA, 152).

The sun is life and life is a mystery, incomprehensible and beyond our knowledge. In a hymn of praise to the sun, the author celebrates the unknowable that is not threatening and hence, not a source of the grotesque. It is a joyful mystery:

Freuen wir uns, wenn die Sonne aufgeht
und das schöne Licht kommt. [...] Es ist
nicht sicher, was diese Sonne ist. [...] Wenn so die Sonne aufgeht und man sich
freut, sollte man eigentlich betrübt sein,
denn was ist man denn, 300 000mal so groß
wie die Erde ist die Sonne, und was gibt
es alles noch für Zahlen und Nullen, die
alle nur sagen, daß wir eine Null sind oder
gar nichts, völlig nichts. Eigentlich lä-
cherlich, sich da zu freuen.

[...] Es muß ein Irrtum, ein Fehler sein
in den schrecklichen Zahlen mit den vielen
Nullen.

Geh nur auf, Sonne, du erschreckst uns
nicht. [...] Warme Sonne, geh nur auf,
helles Licht, geh auf. Du bist nicht groß,
du bist nicht klein, du bist eine Freude.

(BA, 232-33)

The sun provides an order in this universe. Even if we do not notice the source of the order in the smallest, trivial daily detail, the sun is there. Its vastness, its tremendous distance from the earth has potentially the same ability as the "dunkel" elements to overwhelm an unimportant man on a tiny planet; for the individual the enormous numbers are astonishingly huge. Here lies the possibility of having grotesque elements, in these "schrecklichen Zahlen". Although understanding the enormity of the sun is beyond man's rationality, the sun bestows not fear but joy. It endows men with all pleasant things. This hymn to the sun occurs where Franz lies

in the street, run over by a car; in contrast to the sun's benevolent order, Franz is the victim of his own "order" which binds him to Reinhold and his treachery. The narrator is presenting us with the underlying order that is both unknowable and at the same time, benign. Unquestioning belief, that is, to take the leap beyond mere reason, is on the one hand, reassuring; on the other hand, unquestioning belief, that is, to be blind to evil, distorts and destroys.

The sun shines on the whole world, both on good and on evil. The chapter in which Franz mopes about the loss of Mieke, without knowing yet of her death has a title taken from Ecclesiastes: "Und ich wandte mich und sah an alles Unrecht, das geschah unter der Sonne" (BA, 417).⁷ The goodness of God does not prevent evil from happening. The Biblical verses remind us that to avoid seeing injustice, one would be better off dead or unborn. Franz is, in a sense, yet unborn until he later learns "to see". The sun does not prevent evil. "Die Kobraschlange ringelt, liegt in der Sonne, wärmt sich" (BA, 419). Thus is Franz described just before Eva comes with the newspaper bearing the pictures of Mieke and of Reinhold and himself as the murderers. For Franz there is no immunity from this evil, "alles Unrecht, das geschah unter der Sonne".

⁷Cf. "Der Prediger Salomo", 4:1. "Wiederum sah ich alles Unrecht an, das unter der Sonne geschieht, und siehe, da waren Tränen derer, die Unrecht litten und keinen Tröster hatten."

While the sun symbolizes a benevolent order, good and evil are still the responsibility of the individual.

C. Grotesque Distortion

In a world that is not grotesque, a living being acts and moves harmoniously, or if at all incongruously, it does so without inspiring fear or horror in the eyes of the beholder. To be grotesque, a body is alienated from its inner self; it is reduced to caricature in a repellent way. The movements of a living being out of control are distorted. To indicate funny and frightening distortion, the word "zappeln" epitomizes movement that does not originate from an integrated core of self. It is a cue word for a mortal's helpless struggle that might evoke both laughter and pity. To laugh at the movements reduced to distorted "jerking" is sadistic; at the same time, we pity the victim. The incongruity of such movements evoking both sadistic laughter and our pity is grotesque.

The hogs crowded into the slaughterhouse are confronting death, but remain unaware of their fate:

Das zappelt unten. Das strampelt. Das
schleudert sich auf die Seite. Das weiß
nichts mehr. Und liegt da. (BA, 149)

The animal jerks and struggles out of sheer instinct; its death is undignified, unworthy of a living creature. Mieke's death throes are like the panicked spasms of the hogs: jerking

and instinctively trying to cling to life. Death swoops down on her, extinguishing, snuffing out life.

Laß mir los. Sie wirft sich noch, sie zap-
pelt, sie schlägt hinten aus. Das Kind wer-
den wir schon schaukeln, da können Hunde
kommen und können fressen, was von dir übrig
ist.

(BA, 387)

Like the butcher who slaughtered the frightened hogs, Reinhold kills without mercy. He is all the more terrible and fearsome by his vengeful joy, expressed in casual, vulgar idiom. The hogs were turned from animals into meat on the counter in the butcher shop; Mieke is even more abandoned in her death - she becomes carrion.

Distortion accentuates the body as an object. A figure is both ridiculous and lacks control. The loss of human personality is comically revealing and frightening. The spirit of life is violated. Although Franz is full of zest, vibrant with life, strong and endowed with an enormous appetite, he is rendered peculiarly helpless in his struggle with existence. Metaphors emphasize the mechanical, jerky motion lacking self-control.

At the Jews' house, Franz collapses onto the floor:

Und der Mann rutschte wie eine Puppe von
dem Sofa herunter auf den Teppich, den
Tisch schob er im Sinken beiseite. (BA, 20)

A doll is an object with no ability to move on its own; all motion is imposed from without. So too is Franz: an object, incapable of exercising the will that makes him a human and

not an absurd marionette.

Upset at Lüders' betrayal, Franz' legs carry him back to the Jews: "Rechtes Bein, linkes Bein, rechtes Bein, linkes Bein, immer langsam voran, drängeln gibts nicht, Fräulein" (BA, 141). The stream-of-consciousness shows him concentrating on the purely physical process of walking; the impressions of the street force their way into his brain. The triviality, the mundaneness of the "drängeln gibts nicht, Fräulein" underscores the alienated peculiarity of the motion.

The news of Mieke's death hits Franz hard; his jerky body movements are outward signs of inward confusion:

[...] er hält das Blatt auf der flachen Hand, sein Kopf zittert, er liest und spricht, stoßweise, es knarrt. Mord bei Freienwalde, Emilie Parsunke aus Bernau [...].

Sein Oberkörper schaukelt. "Um Gotteswillen, um Gotteswillen, Eva. "Ihr wird ängstlicher und ängstlicher, sie hat einen Stuhl neben seinen Sessel geschoben. Er schaukelt immer seinen Oberkörper. "Um Gottes willen." Er schaukelt immer so weiter. Jetzt fängt er an zu pusten und zu blasen. Jetzt hat er schon ein Gesicht, als ob ihn lächert.

(BA, 421-22)

He meaninglessly repeats his movements and his words. His face is contorted as if the news makes him laugh: this laughter is a pitiable, desperate cry of pain.

If the loss of control goes far enough, life is so well extinguished that the mechanical motion is frozen into paralysis. Not only are Franz' movements incongruously mechanical,

but even they cease to be. In a political argument, Franz loses his temper:

Eine Tobsucht, Starre ist Franz Biberkopf. Er kräht blind aus seiner Kehle heraus, sein Blick ist gläsern, sein Gesicht blau, gedunsen, er spuckt, seine Hände glühen, der Mann ist nicht bei sich. Dabei krallen seine Finger in den Stuhl, aber er hält sich nur am Stuhl fest. Jetzt wird er gleich den Stuhl nehmen und losschlagen.

(BA, 99)

Opposite qualities are fused together: frenzy and paralysis wage for control over Franz. From his throat sounds come blindly - a word associated with the eyes and grotesquely misapplied to speech. Franz is not "himself" during these moments of mental paralysis. It is during such flashes that Franz commits murder. He mortally injures Ida with the blows of a wooden whisk; he almost fatally thrashes Mieze the time Reinhold is hidden in the room; and again, his face is significantly "steinhart" (BA, 318) when in his thoughts he murders Mieze as he did Ida in reality. His face loses all human expression, as he recollects murdering Ida and transfers his thoughts to Mieze. As in a trauma's nightmare, his thoughts return again and again to the point which frightens most; the evil done, about which one is guilty, preys on the mind, allowing no escape. This feeling of entrapment in a hostile situation despite the ease with which one may escape belongs to the grotesque.

In his struggle with death during his catatonic state

in the asylum Buch, Franz suffers the ultimate consequences of abdicating control over his will. He is delivered up to the torture of remorse: he cannot avoid the mental pain and anguish.

Sein Körper schiebt sich weiter vor.
Es werden auf dem Block geschlagen von
seinem Körper Stück um Stück. Sein Körper
schiebt sich automatisch vor, muß
sich vorschieben, er kann nicht anders.
Das Beil wirbelt in der Luft. Es blitzt
und fällt. Er wird Zentimeter um Zentimeter
zerhackt. Und jenseits, jenseits
der Zentimeter, da ist der Körper nicht
tot, da schiebt er sich vor, langsam
weiter vor, es fällt nichts runter, lebt
alles weiter.

(BA, 476-77)

Here is a traumatic nightmare in which the dreamer is unable to tear himself away from the source of pain. The grotesque joke of nightmares is that one imagines the most frightening and horrible events and to escape, one needs only to awaken, but the mind returns again and again to the pain. Moreover, the body acts with a volition of its own. The body is mutilated again and again, there is no escape, for the body is not dead; the grim process has left the body alive, subject to being pushed forward once more. Franz is being racked and the image within the nightmare of his mental ordeal is grotesque.

Due to Franz' mental confusion normal actions become grotesquely independent, like the body seeking the falling ax as in the example above, as if remotely controlled.

Schreck fuhr in ihn, als er die Rosenthaler Straße herunterging und in einer kleinen Kneipe ein Mann und eine Frau dicht am Fenster saßen: [...] ja was war dabei, sie tranken eben, sie hatten Gabeln und stachen sich damit Fleischstücke in den Mund, dann zogen sie die Gabeln wieder heraus und bluteten nicht.

(BA, 14)

The ordinary act of eating becomes a strange and alien process. Instead of viewing the mouth as a natural opening through which nourishment is taken, Franz sees men as closed surfaces; he expects them to bleed when they "stab" themselves with forks.

When Franz meets Meck, the two shake hands. Again, the act becomes an alienated process which seems to lurch out of control:

Sie schüttelten sich die Hände, schüttelten sich die Arme bis zu den Schultern, schüttelten sich die Schultern bis zu den Rippen, klopfen sich die Achseln, der ganze Mensch wackelte und kam in Bewegung.

(BA, 187)

Eventually the entire body is set in motion by the vigor of the handshake. Excessive joy merits an exaggerated image, which, as it is devitalized and mechanical, casts doubt again on the joy.

Smoking is a procedure seen as a mirror reflection of ingestion:

Um 9 gaben sie die Ellbogen frei, steckten sich Zigarren in die fetten Mäuler und fingen an, mit Rülpsen den warmen Imbißrauch von sich zu geben.

(BA, 188)

The "gemütlich" image of smoking is distorted, revealing the disgusting nature of the smokers.

Franz observes his own body as if he were standing outside of it: he is alienated from himself:

Da ist ein Ding in ihm, ist es das Herz,
die Lunge, die Atmung, das innere Gefühl,
das ist da und wird gedrückt, gestoßen,
von wem denn? Es weiß nicht, das Ding,
von wem. Es kann nur sagen, es ist schlaf-
los.

(BA, 205)

His mind and body are not one. There is a note of irreverent mockery to call the heart, the lungs, the inner core of self "das Ding". Franz is frightened of the unknown that he faces within himself, he feels threatened by it.

When volition is attributed to inanimate objects, the effect is incongruous and frequently grotesque. The houses seem to sway and the roofs, to slide (BA, 15, 16, 99-100, 140) each time that Franz must readjust to the city. The houses mock him outright in the depth of mental confusion after Franz knows that Reinhold has killed Mieke. He tries to stalk Reinhold in his house, a futile, helpless effort:

Das Haus schlägt ein Gelächter an, wie
es ihn dastehn sieht. Es möchte sich be-
wegen, um seine Nachbarn, Quer- und Seiten-
flügel zusammenzurufen, um sich den anzuse-
hen. Da steht einer mit einer Perücke und
einem künstlichen Arm, ein Kerl, der glüht,
ist mit Schnaps gefüllt, steht und brabbelt
was.

(BA, 432)

In his disguise to avoid the police dragnet, Franz has turned himself into a clown, whose tears are however real, grotesque-

ly crying over the loss of Mieke, under the cover of his wig and prosthetic arm. So ridiculous is Franz that even the inanimate houses mock him.

In the following example an inanimate substance is endowed with a volition of its own:

Es wird gequalmt, Wolken aus Pfeifen, Zigarren, Zigaretten in die Luft, daß die ganze Riesenhalle vernebelt. Der Rauch sucht, wenn es ihm zu rauchig wird, vermöge seiner Leichtigkeit oben zu entweichen, findet auch richtig Ritzen, Löcher und Ventilatoren, die bereit sind, ihn zu befördern. Draußen jedoch, draußen ist schwarze Nacht, Kälte. Da bereut der Rauch seine Leichtigkeit, sträubt sich gegen seine Konstitution, aber es ist nichts rückgängig zu machen infolge einseitiger Drehung der Ventilatoren. Zu spät. Von physikalischen Gesetzen sieht er sich umgeben. Der Rauch weiß nicht, wie es ihm ist, er faßt sich an die Stirn und sie ist nicht da, er will denken und kann nicht. Der Wind, die Kälte, die Nacht hat ihn, und ward nicht mehr gesehen.

(BA, 82)

Once in the cold dark night the smoke regrets its folly (Leichtigkeit) of having wished to escape and at the same time its physical properties (Leichtigkeit) by which it could escape. Not only is the smoke made to be alive, but the physical laws themselves become menacingly alive in a conspiracy against a fellow object. The curling path of the smoke becomes the gesture of doubt and reflection; even that is impossible for the smoke. Thinking, instead of being Descartes' proof of existence, requires existence. The smoke thinks, yet has no being. The volition given to the smoke

at the beginning of the paragraph is grotesquely stranded without a host body.

The macabre is part of the grotesque. The spirit of life is violated - made both ridiculous and frightening beyond the grave. Even in death we venerate the spirit, and if human dignity is destroyed, the reader's laughter becomes uneasy and anxious. Franz is incensed at the ending of the Jew's story in which man finds his final resting place on a garbage heap.

Das ist keene Gerechtigkeit, einen auf den Mist zu schmeißen wie einen Köter und schützen noch Müll rauf, und das ist die Gerechtigkeit gegen einen toten Mann. Pfui Deibel.
(BA, 30)

A corpse is in cold fact carrion, but memory of the dead does not allow us normally to treat the dead with disrespect. To do otherwise is to deny to the living the spirit of life. This explains Franz' shudder, a Berlin flavored "Pfui Deibel".

One imagines the dead eerily and emptily performing gestures of the living while putrefying. Franz shudders when he pictures Ida in her coffin:

Da liegt sie unten, schon fünf Jahre, wage-recht auf dem Rücken, die Holzbretter faulen an, sie zerfließt in Jauche, sie, die einmal in Treptow im Paradiesgarten mit Franz getanzt hat in weißen Segelschuhen, die geliebt und sich herumgetrieben hat, sie hält ganz still und ist nicht mehr da.
(BA, 108)

How can she be so still lying on her back for five years when he can so vividly remember her warm and dancing? The

contrast between her pretty white dancing shoes then and that she is, vulgarly, turning into manure underlies the grotesqueness of death.

The parable about Bornemann is macabre. He is known as the living corpse ("den haben sie nachher den lebenden Leichnam genannt" BA, 356) because he exchanged identity papers with a dead man in order to hide from the police.

Da trifft unser Bornemann auf seinem Spaziergang aus Neugard einen Toten, schwimmt im Wasser, in der Spree, und Neugard, nee Bornemann aus Neugard, sagt: "Ick bin eigentlich tot", geht hin steckt dem seine Papiere ein, und nu ist er tot.

(BA, 356)

The language used is disconcertingly nonchalant for the subject of the scene. It is treating a cold-blooded crime as if it were a bourgeois outing in a park. During a promenade Bornemann meets a dead man; he does not stumble across it or see it, but he meets a lifeless corpse with whom he exchanges pleasant civilities along with the papers. The name change is in the language a *fait accompli*, needing only the substitution of the papers to confirm it. The corpse is now a living man, and the living man, a corpse, capable of speaking, talking - and avoiding the law.

The story is repeated a few pages later with more grotesque, macabre elements.

Wie der Bornemann also ans Wasser kam,
im Wasser eine frische Leiche schwamm. In
Bornemanns Haupt da ein Lichtlein glomm.
Aus der Tasche zog er alle seine Papier

und gab sie ihm und gab sie ihr. Das ist zwar schon erzählt vorhin, jedoch ist es jetzt ein Gedächtnisgewinn. Dann band er die Leiche an einen Baum, sie wär davonschwommen, und man fände sie kaum. Er selbst fuhr darauf schnurstracks mit der Kleinbahn nach Stetting, nahm ein Billet, und wie er ankam in Berlin, ruft er aus einer Kneipe Mutter Bornemann an [...]. Sie versprach, die Leiche zu identifizieren, er werde ihr Geld schicken, wenn er welches hätte, aber habe du mal. Dann mußte er rasch, rasch wandern, sonst findet die Leiche noch ein anderer.

(BA, 363)

The corpse in the water is useful because it is fresh like a fish. To preserve its usefulness, it is tied to a tree so that it cannot swim away. It is to be identified as Bornemann; this must be done quickly or someone else will find and appropriate the corpse, implying the demand for dead bodies exceeds the supply. This dwelling on the fate of an unburied corpse produces a feeling of irreverence, of repugnance in the reader. One laughs at Bornemann's ruse, but it is embarrassed laughter.

Bornemann is mentioned one more time (BA, 370); he has finally been called to account. The story in doggerel is a fittingly mocking parable for the cold and merciless Reinhold, of whom Klempner Karl remarks, "der Reinhold, der geht über Leichen" (BA, 412).

Franz addresses the dead directly. When he learns of Mieke's death, he goes through purgatory, but not yet hell; the shock of the news alone is not enough to redeem him. In a

graveyard Franz searches for Mieke. The dead souls are macabre apparitions, they cling to the vain chimeras of their lives. Death has not "opened" their eyes to life. Emotionally distorted and crippled, they are grotesque. The first soul is that of a young woman in a fur coat (BA, 428). She is filled with bitter resentment against a lover. The second soul is a pedantic, affected professor who carefully counted the injections of morphium he gave himself (BA, 428-29). He believes that both life and death are ephemeral, not to be taken seriously. He unwittingly proves the fatuousness of such a belief when he brags of having the newest hit tunes played and Plato's Symposium read to him. In this dialogue Socrates defines as abstract the highest degree of love. Franz does not comprehend a word. Concretely he stammers, "Vorlesen, Morphium? Wo ist bloß Mieke?" (BA, 429).

The third soul is a man who refuses to rest in his grave. Again and again he hangs himself, nightmarishly dangling crookedly each time. Having no special grace, the dead do not help Franz learn "to see". They themselves have not been weaned from their misconceptions in life. Not only are the quick blind, but so are the dead. When Franz leaves the graveyard his movements are awkward, still in the realm of the grotesque:

Und dann steht er auf, kann schlecht
gehen, rafft sich zusammen, schwankt
zwischen den Gräberreihen raus. (BA, 430)

To learn "to see", Franz himself must experience death, who comes to him singing a terrifying melodic aria.

Der Tod hat sein langsames, langsames Lied begonnen. Er singt wie ein Stammer, jedes Wort wiederholt er; wenn er einen Vers gesungen hat, wiederholt er den ersten und fängt noch mal an. Er singt, wie eine Säge zieht. Ganz langsam führt sie an, dann führt sie tief ins Fleisch, kreischt lauter, heller und höher, dann ist sie mit einem Ton zu Ende und ruht. Dann zieht sie langsam, langsam wieder zurück und knirscht, und höher, fester wird ihr Ton und kreischt, und ins Fleisch führt sie hinein.

Langsam singt der Tod.

(BA, 473-74)

The song is distorted, shrill and grating: Death stammers, repeats each word. It is like a saw. The tones are discordant and cracked, piercing the flesh.

The grotesque makes vivid the aberration from the natural and harmonious elements. The distortion of life is tinged with the shades of hell. The city is a riotous Gehenna. The disappointments and difficulties make life treacherous: "Ein höllisches Ding, nicht, das Leben?" (BA, 259). When Franz finally realizes Reinhold's perfidy, everyone whom he had relied upon seems to be a denizen of Hades:

Wir fahren in die Hölle mit Pauken und Trompeten, für diese Welt haben wir nichts übrig, sie kann uns bleiben gestohlen mit-samt allem, was drauf und drunter und drüber ist. Mit ihren ganzen Menschen, mit Männern und Frauen, mit dem ganzen höllischen Gelichter, es ist auf keinen zu bauen. Wenn ich ein Vöglein wär, nimm ich ein Haufen Dreck, schmeiß es mit beiden Füßen hinter mich und flieg weg.

(BA, 437)

The parody of the line from a popular song "Wenn ich ein Vöglein wär, flög' ich zu dir", is obscenely exaggerated. The bird is no longer a sentimental, trite metaphor for the messenger of love, but a small, yet potent harbinger of the apocalypse. Instead of bringing fire and brimstone, however, the bird excretes on earth, which is, in the following paragraph, referred to as "der höllische Dreck", "der höllische Mist" (BA, 437).

When Franz realizes that he has been stupid, he undergoes the hell of having his sins paraded before his mind's eye. As the most serious offense was his trust in Reinhold, this figure is the most grotesquely depicted:

Und da geht er, und das höllische Feuer
blitzt dem aus den Augen und ihm wachsen
Hörner aus dem Kopf und der kreischt: "Box
doch mit mir, komm, zeig, wat du bist,
Franzeken, Franzeken Biberkopf, Biberköpf-
chen, ha!"

(BA, 483)

Reinhold stands as an infernal judge over Franz: He is a terrifying ghost rising from Hell. The fire, the horns and the shrill, piercing voice distort Reinhold, alienating him fully from human and humane qualities.

Animalistic imagery illustrates the distortion of positive human qualities in a fascinatingly repellent way. The repulsive attributes from animals are transferred and applied to humans and their social order. The confusion of the intense construction activity that characterizes Franz' Berlin of

1928 is menacingly expressed in an animal metaphor:

Wie die Bienen sind sie über den Boden
her. Die basteln und murksen zu Hunderten
rum den ganzen Tag und die Nacht. (BA, 179)

The excessive activity intimidates the single observer.

"Basteln" implies that there is no co-ordinated plan; "murksen" implies that the bustle is destructive. Part of the bustle is Franz' street spiel for his bow-ties. His comparisons tend more to the comic than the grotesque: he likens the traditional ties to flattened bedbugs: "Das sieht aus, als wenn eine plattgedrückte Wanse an der Wand klebt, ein Tapetenflunder" (BA, 71). The comparison is absurd, ludicrous, also a bit repulsive.

The men in the city are as if seen through a cracked mirror, reflecting strange fauna:

Zwei große ausgewachsene Tiere in Tüchern, zwei Menschen, Männer, Franz Biberkopf und George Dreske, ein Zeitungshändler und ein ausgesperrter Schleifer aber stehen am Schanktisch, halten sich senkrecht auf ihren unteren Extremitäten in Hosen, stützen sich auf das Holz mit den Armen, die in dicken Mantelröhren stecken. Jeder von ihnen denkt, beobachtet und fühlt, jeder was anderes. (BA, 89-90)

The communication between the two men is severed; each is isolated from the other. In their mutual alienation they become strange, distorted forms: clothed animals.

Franz' landlady is distorted into an animal. Her slovenly housekeeping and her curiosity turn her into a spider:

Kommen Sie nur rein Frau Schmidt. Zwischen den Spinnweben oben (schwarzes Kleid, lange Zähne). Das ist ne Hexe (kommt aus der Decke). Puh!

(BA, 137)

The battle to survive in the city renders Frans grotesque. He seeks comfort in alcohol, drinking especially heavily after Lüders betrays him. His visage and movements are likened to animals. Looking at himself in the mirror Franz is repelled by his own reflections:

Hat der Kerl eine Visage. Striemen auf der Stirn, wovon bloß rote Striemen, von der Mütze, und die Gurke, Mensch, sone dicke, rote Neese, das braucht aber nicht vom Schnaps zu sein, das ist kalt heute; bloß die gräßlichen ollen Glotzaugen, wie ne Kuh, woher ich bloß sone Kalbsaugen habe und so stiere, als wenn ich nicht mit wackeln kann.

(BA, 171-72)

His excuses are pathetic, that it is only the cold that discolors his face. He cannot, however, avoid the hard fact that it is schnaps that has incongruously wrenched his nose, his eyes and entire face, strangely, out of kilter.

Continuing in the same passage, the great number of people on the street confuses him:

Raus aus dem Loch, auf die kalte Straße. Viel Menschen. Kolossal viel Menschen gibts am Alex, haben alle zu tun. Wie dies nötig haben. Der Franz Biberkopf lief ihnen, der drehte die Augen rechts und links. Als wenn ein Gaul ausgerutscht ist auf dem nassen Asphalt und kriegt einen Tritt in den Bauch mitm Stiebel und krabbelt hoch, und nun kariert er los und läuft wie verrückt.

(BA, 172)

His gait is awkward, like that of an old nag, betraying his

fright and loneliness. The eyes are reminiscent of the frightened animals in the slaughter house; the desperate running and pushing through the crowd are reminiscent of the herding animals there.

Just before Franz meets Reinhold for the first time, the narrator repeats the fate of the hogs beneath the ax wielded by a pale young man (BA, 188). Then, a young man is warning Franz by telling the story about the millions and millions of sheep in Australia (BA, 189-90), rushing to their doom. Again there are the legion numbers as there are in the teeming metropolis; again there is the anonymous death as in the slaughterhouse. In fear of being rounded up, the sheep, lemminglike, throw themselves to their death into the sea. In their stupidity, the animals panic; their fate is drowning in the brine. Their death is useless, undignified, alienating: so many die so needlessly, so stupidly. The very picture of the sheep rushing over the edge of the cliff is comic, except for the sadness of their useless death.

The killing instinct within man, who thereby diminishes his humanity is embodied in the animals. Clytemnestra is a cold-blooded beast who "does in" her husband: "Die antike Bestie murkst ihn ab, suckt nicht mit der Wimper" (BA, 107). Reinhold's callous consumption of girl-friends is compared to worms eating up dirt and reconsuming their own filth they left behind:

Denn wenn auch die Würmer Erde fressen und die hinten immer wieder rauslassen, so fressen sie sie immer von neuem. Und da können die Biester keinen Pardon geben, wenn man ihnen heute den Magen vollstopft, morgen müssen sie schon wieder ran und müssen schnappen. Das ist mit dem Menschen so wie mit dem Feuer: wenn es brennt, muß es fressen, und wenn es nicht fressen kann, geht es aus, muß es ausgehen. (BA, 327)

In the preceding paragraph Reinhold contemplates taking Miese from Franz. In the next paragraph Franz enjoys the innocence of babes, his happiness with Miese and his friend Reinhold being all he wants to see. Such naïveté throws into sharper relief the grotesqueness of the preceding paragraph.

Animal metaphors make vivid the uneasy, anxious feelings one labels as nightmarish: the feeling of being entrapped, hypnotized into helplessness in the face of danger or evil. Franz is a bird entranced in front of a snake's mouth:

Sitzt ein Vogel auf seinem Baum, eben im Schlaf ist eine Schlange an ihm vorbeigeglitten, vom Rascheln ist der Vogel erwacht, und nun sitzt der Vogel mit gestäubten Federn, er hat keine Schlange gefühlt. Hah, immer atmen, ruhig Luft holen. Franz wirft sich. Der Haß von Reinhold liegt auf ihm und streitet mit ihm. (BA, 205)

Reinhold's hatred sits on him like a succubus, suffocating him. Hatred, an abstract noun, has been made concrete. Uneasily Franz tosses and turns, the victim of an abstract noun, like a tiny bark pitched to and fro on an immense wave.

The hypnotized, self-destructive passion impelling Franz into the clutches of Reinhold is summed up in the

following animal image, seen in close-up:

Die Fliege krabbelt und krabbelt, sie
sitst im Blumentopf, der Sand rieselt von
ihr ab, der macht ihr nichts aus, sie
schüttelt ihn weg, sie streckt den schwar-
zen Kopf vor, sie kriecht heraus. (BA, 319)

The fly reenacts the labors of Sisyphus, each motion magnified by repetition. The sand runs off the fly, just as the warnings go unheeded by Franz, who returns again and again to Reinhold. One cannot bury a live fly in the sand; it fights its way free. One cannot warn Franz; he obstinately clings to Reinhold's friendship. The ugly, black-headed fly is triumphant. It is successful, but it is, seen through the magnifying lens, a hideous success.

Physical strength, when expressed in animal imagery, often becomes the grotesque symbol for the folly of false confidence that prevents Franz from overcoming his mental cowardice. It is often mentioned that Franz is strong as a cobra (BA, 103, 139, 328, 419); as he recovers from the loss of his arm, he proudly clings to life: "Es ist noch die alte Kobraschlange, wenn auch mit schwarzen Ringen um die Augen, und das dicke Tier ist mager und eingefallen" (BA, 259).

In his struggle over all that is threatening and malevolent, Franz sinks to the level of beasts. In conversing with them, he is expunging the beastly qualities from his soul (BA, 472-73). Ironically it is from the animals that Franz learns how beastly and distorted man is. Although an odd fac-

ulty of philosophy, the mice effectively tell their pupil Franz in their own animal terms how terrible man is:

Der Mensch ist ein häßliches Tier, der Feind aller Feinde, das widrigste Geschöpf, das es auf der Erde gibt, noch schlimmer als die Katzen. (BA, 472)

The most spectacularly repellent animal imagery is found in the whore of Babylon. She embodies the awesome might which prostrates Franz. She is the golden calf, whose glitter seduces Franz into blindness. Because she is a whore, her rewards are tawdry; striving in such a world is vanity and foolishness. She is both an animal and seductress, an incongruous combination of the revolting and the irresistible.

When, for one brief moment after the loss of his arm, Franz suspects that there is something amiss with the world order, the narrator calls to him to confront him with the nature of what he has acquiesced to, the repulsive harpy that is the city:

Und nun komm her, du, komm, ich will dir etwas zeigen. Die große Hure, die Hure Babylon, die da am Wasser sitzt. Und du siehst ein Weib sitzen auf einem scharlachfarbenen Tier. Das Weib ist voll Namen der Lästerung und hat 7 Häupter und 10 Hörner. Es ist bekleidet mit Purpur und Scharlach und Übergüldet mit Gold und edlen Steinen und Perlen und hat einen goldenen Becher in der Hand. Und an ihrer Stirn ist geschrieben ein Name, ein Geheimnis: die große Babylon, die Mutter aller Greuel auf Erden. Das Weib ist trunken vom Blut der Heiligen. (BA, 260)

Babylon, the opposite of the heavenly Jerusalem or Paradise,

is a traditional symbol for a fallen and corrupt existence. Corruption and decadence are colored glitteringly and richly. Here Babylon is a woman riding on a scarlet-colored beast; a human being is coupled to a shocking, mythological beast. The woman is a repellent, frightening hydra, topped unsymmetrically with seven heads and ten horns. She is richly, but garishly garbed. She is a vampire, drinking blood - a destructive, invitiating force; she is drunk with blood, rejoicing in devitalizing and corrupting those in her grasp. With her jewels and robes she is the essence of attractiveness; with her bloody intoxication, she is the essence of repulsiveness. Beauty revealed as loathesome belongs to the grotesque.

Franz is warned, but heeds not. When he becomes a "fence" after losing his arm, the grotesque image reappears (BA, 277-78). Just before Franz marches through the city to reconcile with Reinhold, the image appears again, more fantastic and more menacing: Babylon rejoices over every step he takes; she mangles with her teeth the pious; she herself comes from an abyss and leads one into damnation; she bares her teeth behind thick, puffy lips; she has yellow eyes and mocks her victim (BA, 320). She has the features of a human, but they are deformed beyond recognition. She is both a human and a beast, a specter, a horrifying phantasm.

When Mieke is murdered it is a while before Franz knows. He is about to know, the last blow is about to strike with

full fury:

Du wirst keine Gelder verlieren, Franz, du selbst wirst bis auf die innerste Seele verbrannt werden! Sieh, wie die Hure schon frohlockt! Hure Babylon! Und es kam einer von den sieben Engeln, die die sieben Schalen halten, und redete: Komm, ich will dir zeigen die große Babylon, die an vielen Wassern sitzt. Und da sitzt das Weib auf einem scharlachroten Tier und hat einen goldenen Becher in der Hand, an ihrer Stirn geschrieben ein Name, ein Geheimnis. Das Weib ist trunken vom Blut der Heiligen.

Du ahnst sie jetzt, du fühlst sie. Und ob du stark sein wirst, ob du nicht verloren gehst.

(BA, 419)

Franz must awaken from his dream to face this nightmare; only then can he conquer her. Her rejoicing over Franz' probable defeat and despair in life is sadistic; it adds a deeper dimension to her grotesque qualities. While Death sings his song to Franz, "die böse Babylon hört ihm zu" (BA, 474). Death is her rival. At last, she is vanquished; grotesquely, Babylon must acknowledge surrender:

Verloren hat die Hure Babylon, der Tod ist Sieger und trommelt sie davon.

Die Hure keift und spektakelt und sabbert und schreit: "Was ist mit dem, was hast du von dem Kerl, Franz Biberkopf, koch ihn dir sauer, deinen Gottlieb Schulze."

(BA, 488)

Spitting and slobbering, the whore Babylon is repugnant in her disappointment. She becomes a detestable animal, a "Hyäne" (BA, 488). In an absurdly incongruous touch to this portrait of an inhabitant from a grotesque bestiary, she contemptuously dubs Franz "Gottlieb Schulze", a name unsuited

to the emblem of Babylon, but appropriate to the city of Berlin.

In her final rout, the movements of the woman on her beast are awkward, ungainly and grotesque:

Das Weib mit den sieben Köpfen serrt
an dem Tier, das Tier kommt nicht hoch.
(BA, 489)

Die große Babylon kann endlich ihr Tier
hochzerren, es kommt in Trapp, es rast über
die Felder, es sinkt in den Schnee. Sie
dreht sich um, heult gegen den strahlenden
Tod. Unter dem Tosen bricht das Tier in
die Knie, das Weib schwankt über dem Hals
des Tiers.
(BA, 490)

The whore of Babylon helplessly, grotesquely bounces about, hanging over the neck of her beast, screeching in frustration back at triumphant Death. In her fall from a position of terrible rule she is piteous in her rage; but her piteous state is hideous.

Not always do animals evoke the laughter of the grotesque. We find animals used to affirm the ultimate harmony in the world order, especially for those who can "see". Hence the first stages of Franz's cure stresses oneness with nature (BA, 473). In the beginning of the book, the Jew, who is the first to warn Franz with the parable of Stefan Zannowich, is confident in God's order:

Habt Ihr nicht gelesen, was Noah in die
Arche getan hat, in sein Schiff, als die
große Sintflut kam? Von jedem ein Pär-
chen. Gott hat sie alle nicht vergessen.
Nicht mal die Läuse auf dem Kopf hat er
vergessen. Waren ihm alle lieb und wert.
(BA, 20-21)

Even the lowly and therefore comic louse irritating someone's scalp is included. The red-haired Jew can accept with equanimity the epithet "Affe" because God puts each animal on earth (BA, 24). This optimistic view of the Orthodox Jew is the opposite perspective of the cynical urbanite, which distorts a fly into a horse with the aid of a microscope (BA, 58).

D. Franz Biberkopf's Vision of Order Which Renders Man Grotesque

The theme of order runs through Berlin Alexanderplatz. To triumph over the whore of Babylon, Franz is triumphing over the order she represents. This order is the overwhelming, destructive order which underlies Franz' vision of the city, of the world. It is a grotesque order for it distorts the individual, making him ridiculous and at the same time helpless. Franz' vision of order is one on which authority is unquestioningly obeyed, even honored. As an order imposed from without, it is potentially a grotesque one: the individual, unable to determine his own fate, is made into a ridiculous, mechanical cog; he is rendered helpless and existence meaningless.

Where an inflexible order is vividly shown to be grotesque is in the slaughterhouse, in the chapter "Denn es geht dem Menschen wie dem Vieh; wie dies stirbt, so stirbt er auch" (BA, 145ff).⁸

⁸Cf. "Der Prediger Salomo", 3:19. "Denn es geht dem Menschen wie dem Vieh: wie dies stirbt, so stirbt er auch, und haben einerlei Odem, und der Mensch hat nichts mehr als das Vieh; denn es ist alles eitel."

The slaughterhouse is a universe complete within itself, coldly and efficiently organized and overwhelmingly large and complex: it is physically enormous (47.88 hectares - roughly 120 acres); enormously costly to build (more than 27 million marks); requires a sophisticated administration (275 officials and employees); and has a well-organized constitution and system of tariffs. It is a microcosm, a small kingdom; but its subjects are animals, not people, who have no other function except to die. They are "Exemplare der Gattung" (BA, 146). Because they do not and cannot reflect, they do not "see" their impending doom; they are easily led to their death. "Die Schweine grunzen und schnüffeln am Boden, sie sehen nicht, wo es hingeht [..]" (BA, 146-7). In the steam of the cleansing bath, the animals, now frightened, cannot see, are butchered and then boiled. Red blood grimly hallows their death: white, motionless bodies are all that are left of the hogs. Grotesque is the cold, efficient order in contrast to the squealing fear of the pigs.

In Franz' world, order is imposed on him. He accepts it unthinkingly. When Franz is released from prison he is free only as the result of a mechanically well-constructed bureaucracy: "Sie mußten mich ja entlassen, die Strafe war um, hat seine Ordnung, der Bürokrat tut seine Pflicht" (BA, 14). For Franz or for society, release from prison is not a question of rehabilitation; Franz is left to do that on his own. Against

Meck, Franz defends the Jews for having helped him, "wie alles seine Ordnung hatte" (BA, 64). A cognac would have helped he says (BA, 64) just as well. This is Franz' idea of readjustment, of "Ordnung" and how it is achieved. In stark contrast stands the slaughterhouse scene with its pigs squealing in terror; Franz' simplistic idea of "order" is directly negated: "mit Kognak allein gehts nicht" (BA, 148); no cognac, the narrator tells us, is proof against the animal's terror of death.

In the kingdom of the slaughterhouse, man mechanically, impersonally, but officially carries out the carnage:

Ein junger Mann von blasser Farbe, mit angeklebtem blondem Haar, hat eine Zigarre im Mund. Siehe da, das ist der letzte Mensch, der sich mit euch beschäftigt! Denkt nicht schlecht von ihm, er tut nur, was seines Amtes ist. Er hat eine Verwaltungsangelegenheit mit euch zu regeln. Er hat Stiefel, Hose, Hemd und Hosenträger an, die Stiefel bis über die Knie. Das ist seine Amtstracht. Er nimmt seine Zigarre aus dem Mund, legt sie in ein Fach an der Wand, nimmt aus der Ecke ein langes Beil. Es ist das Zeichen seiner behördlichen Würde, seines Rangs über euch, wie die Blechmarke beim Kriminal.

(BA, 149)

Like a policeman or a judge, the butcher wears the regalia of office. He represents authority and order. In the execution of his duties he is inexorable. Mechanical butchery, legitimized, even sanctified, by some unseen higher authority, is absurd, but real and frightening; it is grotesque.

The authority by which the butcher is privileged to ex-

tinguish life is legitimized by the show of force. "Der Mann ist flink, er hat sich legitimiert, das Beil ist heruntergesaut [..]" (BA, 149). So too the authority of the judicial courts, the bulwark of order, is based on power rather than impartial justice. Discovering that the court supports two cattle dealers in a dubious business, Meck cries out, "Das muß in die Zeitung gegeben werden, daß das Gericht so was unterstützt, das ist keine Ordnung, die Herren mit dem Monokel" (BA, 66).

Order for the sake of order ignores justice and mercy. In the slaughterhouse the butcher's choosing the hog is ludicrously, yet ominously elevated to being a judicial process:

Es handelt sich um ein Ermittlungsverfahren gegen eine gewisse Person, eine gewisse Person in Sachen x gegen y. - Hatz! Da ist ihm eins vor die Füße gelaufen, hatz! noch eins.

(BA, 149)

It is, however, the justice of force, not due process of law. The "order" of the authority here swoops down and seizes the animal, selected without rhyme or reason. His ax establishes order indiscriminately. So too the order of Nazism is indiscriminate and hostile to justice. Unthinkingly Franz welcomes law and order:

Er hat nichts gegen die Juden, aber er ist für Ordnung. Denn Ordnung muß im Paradies sein, das sieht ja wohl ein jeder ein.

(BA, 85)

The faulty logic of the first sentence satirizes Franz' own

muddled thinking. The diction of the second sentence, which is rhymed doggerel, shows the author to be mocking the premise that "law and order" are necessary. One associates paradise with order - and justice. If one insists on order in heaven too, the implication is that the natural characteristics of heaven no longer are true. If "Ordnung muß sein" becomes an article of faith, then faith is grotesque. Heaven is the last refuge our hope has created against the injustices of the world; if the last refuge is ruled by "Ordnung", what bitter irony is the last reward. Franz is so distorted by his blind acceptance of order that he can rhyme the unrhymable: he is not anti-Semitic, but he welcomes the Nazis.

There must be an order, Franz says, so that one can work (BA, 98). In the slaughterhouse the result of ordered work is the assembly-line butchering of animals. Alive they are eerily endowed with personality ("drollige rosige Tiere, lustige Schenkel, lustige Ringelschwänze", BA, 149). Grotesquely, after their death parts of the body continue to move, as if alive. Their personality, their dignity is ignored, extinguished: "Jetzt läßt das Zucken nach. Jetzt liegst du still. Wir sind am Ende von Physiologie und Theologie, die Physik beginnt" (BA, 150). The order, which is the work of the slaughterhouse, depersonalizes and blindly snuffs out the spark of life.

When Reinhold contemplates seducing and murdering Miese

he thinks only of her subordination into his cruel order:

Ist schon alles vorbedacht [...]. Bist die
fünfhundertste oder tausendste Frau, die
ick habe, ging alles gut und in Ordnung
bisher, wird auch jetzt in Ordnung gehen.
Sie sitzt da und weiß nicht wies weiter geht,
ich weiß es und das ist gut. (BA, 377-78).

Er drückt sie an seine Brust, da wären
wir, schön, da ist das Mädel, geht alles
in Ordnung [...]. (BA, 382)

Like the poor pigs, Miese is unaware of the man's power over her. Like the child who cries "Mama" in vain (BA, 150), Miese calls for Franz in vain (BA, 386). Like the butcher "mit unveränderter friedlicher Miene" (BA, 158) who washes the blood from his hands and walks away, Reinhold slays Miese without passion, with efficient calculation. Both butcher and Reinhold leave their victim: the calf, "jämmerlich auf der Seite" (BA, 158); Miese her face destroyed (BA, 387-88). This terrible and swift end is sanctioned by an inimical order and authority. This order is anti-life. It reduces the pigs to ludicrously wiggling carcasses, and Miese to a butchered animal. Because we pity both the hogs and Miese, our laughter is the uneasy, anxious laughter of the grotesque.

The "higher" purpose fulfilled by the order in the slaughterhouse is to put meat on the counter:

Der gut beleuchtete Fleischerladen. Die
Beleuchtung des Ladens und die des Schau-
fensters müssen in harmonischen Einklang ge-
bracht werden. Es kommt vorwiegend direktes
oder halb indirektes Licht in Betracht. Im

allgemeinen sind Leuchtkörper für vorwiegend direktes Licht zweckmäßig, weil hauptsächlich der Ladentisch und der Hackklotz gut beleuchtet werden müssen. [...]

(BA, 153)

In the butcher shop the animals are now nothing but meat which must be properly displayed. The dry, official tone of the paragraph affirms the impersonal, misanthropic order of the slaughterhouse. There is a recipe for stuffed pig hocks. The "higher" purpose of this order is revealed to transcend nothing; it is no more than to satisfy man's sense of physical well-being. Because we have seen the hogs pushing and crowding in panic and heard them squeal in terror, this conclusion must be questioned: is physical well-being enough?

Is this order satisfactory? For a brief moment, after the loss of the arm, Franz catches a glimpse that this accepted order of things is no order.

Ein höllisches Ding, nicht, das Leben?
[...] Und ich habe gedacht, die Welt ist ruhig, es ist Ordnung da, und es ist etwas nicht in Ordnung, die stehen da drüben so schrecklich. Das war im Moment, hehlerisch.

(BA, 259-60)

This order is frightening, demonic. It comes from some unknown, and therefore uncontrollable source ("die stehen da drüben so schrecklich"). In order to survive, it requires a man to become himself a grotesque monster; the narrator peeks into Franz' mind:

Einiges ist dem alten Burschen, der sich jetzt durch die Straßen schleppt,

um nicht in der Bude zu verrecken, einiges ist dem alten Burschen, der vor dem Tod wegläuft, doch schon klarer als vorher. Das Leben hat ihm doch etwas genützt. Jetzt schnüffelt er in der Luft, beschnüffelt die Straßen, ob sie ihm noch gehören, ob sie ihn annehmen wollen. Er begafft die Litfaßsäulen, als wären die ein Ereignis. Ja, mein Junge, jetzt läufst du nicht breit auf zwei Beinen, jetzt krallst du dich an, klammerst dich fest, jetzt nimmst du soviel Zähne, Finger, wie du hast, zusammen und hältst dich fest, bloß um nicht abgeschmissen zu werden. (BA, 259)

Like the pigs in the slaughterhouse, Franz sniffs the city streets. To survive he is reduced to an alien creature: his fingers are claws which can hold on to life, his teeth are set in grim determination. To survive in this world order, Franz has become a ludicrous, but horrible figure: he has become grotesque.

The Biblical title of the slaughterhouse chapter states that man is as the cattle. Man's existence in the world, like the hogs grunting and squealing into a void, is meaningless. The verse from Ecclesiastes reads "Denn es geht dem Menschen wie dem Vieh; wie dies stirbt, so stirbt er auch" (Ecol. 3:19). It harshly empties life of meaning and purpose. It concludes the Biblical chapter which starts out "To everything there is a season and a time to every purpose under the heaven" (Ecol. 3:1). The Biblical verses indicate that there is an inalterable order to the world. Thus, the Biblical poet enjoins man to accept his lot: "Wherefore I perceived that

there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his works" (Ecc1. 3:22).

Döblin, however, rejects this conclusion; he rejects the moral of Ecclesiastes that the world order is rigidly fixed and that one should accept it. In the midst of Mieke's murder he interposes the refrain "to everything there is a season" (BA, 380). First, by contrast alone in the text the statement is shown to be shockingly incongruous: can there really be a time to murder? Can Mieke's horrible death really have a proper season? Secondly, Döblin misquotes Ecclesiastes, thereby mocking it:

Darum merkt ich, daß nicht Besseres ist,
als fröhlich sein. Besseres als fröhlich
sein. Fröhlich sein, läßt uns fröhlich
sein. Es ist nichts Besseres unter der
Sonne als lachen und fröhlich sein.

(BA, 380)

The idiotic repetition that man has nothing better than to rejoice in this empty, vain world while Mieke is going to her death scourges the moral implied: accept blindly the world as it is ordered. To assent to the injunction "fröhlich sein" is to accept man's helplessness in controlling himself and his world through his own efforts instead of being a victim. To accept this injunction is to abandon man to his anxieties and fears, leaving him a grotesquely jerking marionette.

Summary

When man is isolated, out of control of his world and

himself, man is devitalized, excluded from full participation in his humanity. Grotesque images exaggerate incongruities, especially those which seem threatening, oppressing or overwhelming. Inconsistencies evoke no smile of laughter but instead a grimace. The "dunkel"-motif embodies abstract fears in face of which man is defenseless. Colors emphasize the aberrant qualities by which the world is distorted and seen as threatening, the resultant incongruity causing the grotesque's anxious, uneasy laughter. As a balance to the dark and threatening incomprehensibility there is the sun, whose mystery also lies beyond comprehension, but whose order is benevolent, congenial to man.

Grotesque distortion emanates from some unknown force which seizes mastery over the human body. The sign of loss of harmony is the word "zappeln". The body becomes an object. Mechanical motion expresses the loss of the core of self. With a marionette the source of animation is the operator of the strings; so too with Franz when he is susceptible to the will of others. Grotesque distortion reduces man to something mechanical and endows inanimate objects with life.

The grotesque shows the discrepancy between the harmonious, integrated personality and the distortion in life which evokes uneasy laughter. Such a life has its source in Hell, the traditional abode of fascinatingly repulsive beasts, the traditional opposite to Heaven.

Grotesque distortion is often expressed in animal imagery, the beasts making anxious feelings incongruously tangible and real. As a balance to the uneasy laughter, which the animal comparisons evoke, there is animal imagery which stresses the ultimate harmony in the world order.

The most spectacularly grotesque embodiment of external, alienating powers aligned up against the single individual is the whore of Babylon. She is the city, the world order which is both attractive and virulently destructive. She symbolizes an alienating order over which Franz must triumph before he "sees".

The order that the whore of Babylon represents has a grotesque effect. It does not stem from within the individual, but from without. Hence, those who accept it without question are rendered helpless. This inability to face the world successfully is illustrated by the distortions - especially those of the animals in the slaughterhouse - which are both funny and pitiful, which are grotesque.

VII Why Döblin Intentionally Exploits Humor and the Grotesque in Berlin Alexanderplatz

A. Döblin's Artistic Premises

To understand the form of Döblin's humor one should understand Döblin's attitude towards art. He has an allergy against the sublime and the academic idea of the beautiful. In an ironical comment in one of his novels, Döblin shows that undiluted sublimity is dangerous: "Man muß sich vor dem Erhabenen in jeder Form schützen, sagte er [Erich], es ist nur ein Schritt von dem Erhabenen zum Gemeinen."¹ By rejecting the restraints of a sublime style, Döblin first insures himself the freedom to write as he pleases. He can be satirical, ironical, and grotesque by using unusual word combinations and word associations; most important, he can give his pen free reign to skip off into absurd digressions and episodes. Secondly, he insures himself the possession of a powerful weapon; he can chide, mock and make ridiculous whatever he feels is wrong and evil in man and in society. If the author concerns himself only with the sublime, then his art lacks any relation to reality, which is after all, a mixture of the sublime and the base. To withdraw into the sublime is to deny the author's raison d'être: to reflect and illuminate our existence.

¹Döblin, Pardon, p. 166.

Döblin's Allergy to Aestheticism

A brief look at Döblin's critical essays shows that he consistently was willing to break a lance against academic and "sublime" art. In 1912 Döblin enthusiastically puts his name to the new artistic and literary programs of Futurism.²

Futurism is progress, it is an act of liberation; the inwardness of art must give way to the new reality of a technical world. The new and brutal honesty of this art attracts Döblin like a magnet. "Ich bin kein Freund der großen und aufgeblasenen Worte."³ Thus he gives a simple but resounding yes to Marinetti's program. True, less than a year later, in March, 1913, Döblin regrets his unlimited enthusiasm. He refuses to follow Marinetti's Futuristic herd. "Pflegen Sie Ihren Futurismus. Ich pflege meinen Döblinismus."⁴ When Döblin himself looks back over this period, he admits that Expressionism did turn its back on the academic norm of beauty; but he insists that he was even more radical: "Dies genügte mir nicht. Ich drehte der überlieferten 'Schönheit' noch mehr den Rücken als meine Expressionisten [...]."⁵ Literature should be reserved for more important tasks; namely to describe the actual prob-

²Döblin, "Die Bilder der Futuristen", Ztlp, pp. 7-11.

³Ibid., p. 11.

⁴Döblin, "Futuristische Worttechnik, Offener Brief an Marinetti", AzL, p. 15.

⁵Döblin, "Epilog", AzL, p. 386.

lens of man in nature and society.

Döblin attacks the aesthetic standards of the literary critics in a defense of his novel Wallenstein. Criticism is justified only if it is committed to reality; a purely aesthetic critique is damnable. "Kunstbetrachtung ist Frivolität [...] Das Gros der Kritiker kennt [...] nur Profession, und ferner eine Schamlosigkeit: Kunst."⁶ In theoretical essays such as "Der Bau des epischen Werks" and "Die Dichtung, ihre Natur und ihre Rolle", Döblin stresses reality, not beauty. The epic poet must treat the building material the world provides for his art with respect, but not with pseudo-pathetic seriousness. "Ernst eine Form der Eiselei? Schlechte Sänger halten sich jedenfalls an den Brustton der Überzeugung."⁷ Döblin's contempt for authors of mere beauty reaches a high point in the essay "Die deutsche Literatur (im Ausland seit 1933)". He divides German literature prior to 1933 into three groups: the first is conservative, feudal and patrician; the second is humanistic and bourgeois; the third is avant-garde. Clearly Döblin's sympathies lie with the third group in which he places himself along with Georg Kaiser, Bertolt Brecht, Franz Kafka and others. Döblin rides with fully lowered visor against those in the first group: Wilhelm von Scholz, Hans Carossa,

⁶Döblin, "Der Epiker, sein Stoff und die Kritik", Ztlp, p. 19.

⁷Döblin, "Über Heines 'Deutschland' und 'Atta Troll'", AzL, p. 275.

Stefan George and others. In outmoded style, they write of outmoded subjects. Döblin dismisses their books as "das normiert Schöne".⁸ The humanistic group, which includes Thomas and Heinrich Mann, Hugo von Hofmannsthal and others, are not quite so damnable. "Sie stürzen sich eben nicht, so wie die Feudalisten, quasi Hals über Kopf in die Verehrung des Vergangenen [..]. Man kann, um ihnen zu gefallen, auch einen Zylinderhut tragen und sich im Salon bewegen. Aber anständig und gepflegt müssen die Umstände schon sein."⁹ Even the tone of the criticism as well as the contents mark Döblin as a member of the third group, which consciously breaks with literary tradition.

The essay "Mireille oder zwischen Politik und Religion" criticizes the writers who are insensitive to complex reality.¹⁰ They are blinded to reality and to truth by their respectful awe of the sublime. Such artists, Döblin mocks, are useful only in a dead condition - then at least, they provide work for academics. To glorify the past, the rural setting and the old social order is to ignore the present. In Döblin's eyes, such an author falls in his duty to deliver a

⁸Döblin, "Die deutsche Literatur (im Ausland seit 1933), AzL, p. 188.

⁹Ibid., p. 188-9.

¹⁰Döblin, "Mireille oder Zwischen Politik und Religion", Minotaurus. Dichtung unter den Hufen von Staat und Industrie, ed. Alfred Döblin (Wiesbaden: Steiner, n.d. [1953/]), pp. 9-56.

true reflection of ourselves, which we the readers need to see to understand ourselves.

Döblin judges harshly the misplaced concern for beauty. "Döblinismus" expresses not only self-irony, but also self-confidence. The term is an attack on what he feels is false or merely complacent. "Döblinismus" is more than childish delight in word play and nonsense; it is a rejection of stuffy conventions, both literary and social.

Döblin disdains the academic norm of the beautiful, hence he consciously chooses a style which is, in a traditional sense, improper, even nonsensical, and exposes religiously accepted values as hollow form. To Döblin amusing nonsense is more meaningful than self-conscious solemnity. In the following quotation from Berlin Alexanderplatz, Döblin mocks the "proper" burghers who feel threatened by nonsense:

Sie wollen anmutigen Humor nicht, ihre Lebenshaltung ist ernst, ihre Gesinnung ist betrübt, aber hoheitsvoll, es sind einige Trauerfälle in ihrer Verwandtschaft vorgekommen. Sie lassen sich auch nicht übertölpeln durch den Hinweis, daß ja tieferer Sinn mit dem bedauerlich anmutigen Humor verbunden ist. Denn nach Ihrer Meinung kann eine Unschädlichmachung, Neutralisierung des anmutigen Humors überhaupt nicht stattfinden. Tieferer Sinn muß allemal allein dastehn. Anmutiger Humor ist zu beseitigen, wie Karthago von den Römern beseitigt wurde oder andere Städte auf andere Weise, auf die sie sich nicht mehr besinnen können. Manche Leute glauben überhaupt nicht an den tieferen Sinn, der in dem Stück 'Coeur-Bube' steckt, das von den Litfaßsäulen angeprie-

sen wird. Ein tieferer Sinn: warum ein tieferer und kein tiefer? Soll tieferer tiefer sein als tief?

(BA, 208)

The stolid burghers are suspicious of humor in a comic play and pride themselves on not being fooled by humor's claim to a serious meaning. For such people, humor is humor; no matter how serious the meaning, the philistines feel threatened. In the mind of serious men, humor can never be neutralised, the ironical thrust mocking the assumption that humor is something insidiously dangerous like viral cancer wreaking havoc on the social body. The benighted play-goers are purists in their artistic standards: deeper meaning must be uncontaminated by amusing nonsense. Having mocked the philistines' concept of humor as subversive, Döblin ironically scorns their philosophic pretensions. Why do they demand "deeper" meaning; why do they turn up their noses at merely a "deep" meaning? His irony exposes the "deeper" meaning as spurious. By rejecting the purist's artistic standards Döblin is insisting that we accept his "deep" meaning in his non-traditional style and lowly hero that we find in Berlin Alexanderplatz.

The Role of the Imagination ("Phantasie")

Tilting against the enemy, irrelevant form and beauty, Döblin pleads for imagination and reality in the epic. What does Döblin mean by reality? It is something which lies hidden and its discovery and exposure is the aim of the author.

Humor is not only a means of putting the sublime into question, it is also a tool by which the author digs and bores his way to reality.

For Döblin, reality ("Realität") is a function of imagination ("Phantasie"). The more imaginative the author is, the closer he comes to the essence of things. To sense the essence of reality and to present it truthfully in prose so that the reader also comprehends it requires a large and active fantasy.

In his theoretical writings Döblin lays down the aim of an author: to search for the truth. Just as his characters are searching for the truth, the author Döblin is searching for a prose technique that reveals the reality of things. The author's fantasy must be active enough to do justice to a world bursting with realities, and it includes the comic and the tragic:

Die Welt, brüllend von Realitäten, an tausend Stellen gleichzeitig Tatsachen ausschwitzend, wäre nicht diese Welt gewesen, wenn sie nicht durcheinander burleske, tragische und reine Gestalten ans Licht stellt hätte. ¹¹

This quotation from Döblin's late prose formulates Döblin's fascination with the multitude of objective facts which somehow are all interconnected. ¹² There seems to be a difference

¹¹Döblin, Heimkehr der Fronttruppen, p. 7.

¹²For theoretical essays in which Döblin tells how the author can produce reality by means of fantasy see, for example, "An Romanautoren und ihre Kritiker", AzL, pp. 15-19; "Staat und Schriftsteller", AzL, pp. 49-61; "Der Bau des epischen Werks", AzL, pp. 103-32; "Die deutsche Literatur (im Ausland seit 1933)", AzL, pp. 187-210; and "Die Dichtung, ihre Natur und ihre Rolle", AzL, pp. 211-68.

between what one perceives and what is; he sees these facts as outward manifestations, "sweated out" by one harmonious system.

Products of fantasy, the humorous and grotesque elements are signposts to an ultimate truth in the cosmos. To use facts with fantasy is to aid in the search for truth. Even with non-facts, the author can arrive at the truth by virtue of fantasy:

Es ist der Tatbestand da, der herrliche, ungebundene, des freien Fabulierens. Was ist das Fabulieren, das freche fessellose Berichten von Nichtfakta, von notorischen Nichtfakta? Es ist das Spiel mit der Realität, mit Nietzsches Worten ein Überlegenheitsgelächter über die Fakta, ja über die Realität als solche. 13

The freedom and joy here underscores what we have seen: Döb-
lin's tendency to slip off into episodes and digressions,
which are not as frivolous as it first appears.

Significantly Döb-
lin considers using his fantasy to be
a dignified pastime, worthy of humans, for the poet creates
his art out of the same material as God created the entire
world:

Hier konkurriert einer mit dieser steiner-
nen, festen und soliden Realität und zaubert
darauf los und bläst Seifenblasen aus
demselben Stoff, aus dem der Welterschöpfer
die ganze schwere Erde, den Himmel und alle
Tiere und ihre Schicksale gemacht hat. Wir
sind auf dem sehr stolzen und sehr menschen-
würdigen Gebiet der freien Phantasie. 14

¹³Döb-
lin, "Der Bau des epischen Werks", AzL, p. 109.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 109-10.

The author's imaginative use of "facts" bespeaks a pleasure in the world. With this sense of pleasure and ability to play, the author then perceives the world in his own fashion. With the very materials of "solid reality" Döblin creates his unique reality, as if in competition with the mundane world order. The discrepancy between Döblin's own order and the "normal" one evokes the laughter of humor; paradoxically the very lack of a sense of incongruity in the author evokes laughter: the author's order and God's order are equal. We hear the laughter of delight as Döblin revels in the knowledge of a vast harmonious cosmos.

Such play is not frivolous: "[...] die Dichtung ist nicht mehr eine unehrliche, verworrene und unglaubliche Angelegenheit, die Dichtung ist nicht mehr degradiert zu einer subjektivistischen Spielerei [...]." ¹⁵ If the writer has as much right to create as God, and even with the same material, then the resulting delight must be taken as seriously as we take the entire world.

In Berlin Alexanderplatz there is a fascination with "non-facts". The author fabricates an entire biography, for example, for a fourteen year-old stutterer only glimpsed at in passing. This freedom to invent, to move about in time is indeed "impudent" in contrast to traditional conventions of the novel; it is "unfettered"; it is playing with reality.

¹⁵Döblin, "Der Bau des epischen Werks", AzL, p. 111.

There are fourteen year olds that stutter; they do go to special schools; they do grow up, marry, have children, die and they are mourned. The author has taken all these "facts" and subjected them to his unique control, mocking the "normal" chronology demanded in a tale; he is reveling in "Überlegenheitsgelächter". The story of Max Rüst (BA, 54) or of the asthmatic pensioner (BA, 219-22) or of Gerner und Guste (BA, 159-69), all of whom Franz meets and all of whom are subject to the author's whimsical omniscience, and the retold stories of Job, of Abraham and Isaac, of Agamemnon, and the figure of Death are all in the same existential dimension. All the "facts" and "non-facts" in Berlin Alexanderplatz are bound together to illuminate Franz' development, his passion in which he learns to open his eyes and "to see".

Döblin combines "facts" and "non-facts", as we have seen, to create the incongruities that make us either laugh or grimace. Also, the unique order into which Döblin's imagination casts his material is to provoke us "to see". Humor is one way among others to reflect and perhaps find an answer to the question: what does life in this world mean? Humor is more than "Eulenspiegelei".¹⁶ Indeed, reflection is itself humor. Döblin categorically states at the end of the Babylonische

¹⁶Walter Muschg, "Alfred Döblin heute", Text & Kritik, No. 13-14 (June, 1966), p. 3. "[...] die Eulenspiegelei gehörte für ihn zur vollkommenen Freiheit der künstlerischen Phantasie."

Wandlung, after Konrad has learned "to see", "Das ist der Humor davon."¹⁷

B. The Basis for Döblin's Humor

The humor that Döblin enjoys in other authors is a clue to his own. He tells us which humorous characters in fiction appeal to him. Don Quixote, as mentioned in the picaresque chapter above, is an admired classic; the adventures of the Spanish knight embody the essence of epic virtues for Döblin.¹⁸ He also values Charles de Coster's Tyll Ulenspiegel, whose practical jokes and adventures catch his attention at least as early as 1917.¹⁹ The old man Döblin is still a happy victim of the rogue's charm, as one can see in the introduction he wrote for the book in 1947.²⁰ Tyll Ulenspiegel, he writes, is full of love and laughter.²¹ Its lightness inspires Döblin to launch a miniature attack on German literary heaviness: "Nein. Lachen und Gelächter können wir von deutschen Klassikern nicht erwarten. [...] In England und Frankreich können Klassiker lachen."²²

¹⁷Döblin, Babylonische Wandlung, p. 654.

¹⁸Döblin, "Der Bau des epischen Werks", AzL, p. 106.

¹⁹Döblin, "Bemerkungen zum Roman", AzL, p. 21.

²⁰Döblin, "Über de Costers 'Tyll Ulenspiegel'", AzL, pp. 296-311.

²¹Döblin, "Kleines Notizbuch", Das Goldene Tor, 3, H. 4 (1948), p. 400.

²²Loc. cit.

This judgment seems unduly harsh and bitter. It is therefore significant perhaps that the German Döblin most admires is a witty Jewish emigré, whose very name provokes controversy in Germany to this day: Heinrich Heine. He bewitches and charms Döblin with a combination of "Witz, Geist, dichterischer Anschauung, Phantasie, zeitkritischer Angriffslust".²³ What further praise could Döblin lavish on an author?

With emigration to America Döblin comes into contact with the Anglo-American tradition of humor. The children's classic Alice in Wonderland fascinates him. Döblin much admires the fact that Lewis Carroll does not condescend to his audience. He respects the equality with which Carroll treats his readers. When praising James Thurber, Döblin regrets that German snobishness relegates humor to "das kleine Volk".²⁴ James Thurber is "ein halbblinder, wundervoller und kluger Zeichner und Erzähler, Neurotiker von Profession".²⁵ Not only does Döblin praise the translation of Thurber into German, but he delights in citing examples from Thurber's parables, fables and cartoons. With Cervantes, de Coster and Heine, Döblin shares the attitude that this world is best explained by depicting the incongruity between the world as it is and what we assume it

²³Döblin, "Über Heines 'Deutschland' and 'Atta Troll'", AEL, p. 277.

²⁴Döblin, "Heiterkeit und Kostümkunde", Das Goldene Tor, 6, H. 1 (1951), p. 73.

²⁵Loc. cit.

to be; for all four, the resulting humor is inextricably part of the author's serious message. The elective affinity between Döblin, Lewis Carroll and Thurber lies in the suspicion that the world is possessed by unseen spirits which cause people and things to behave in an unexpected way. We find the qualities that Döblin admires in others in Döblin himself: scepticism combined with a questing - and questioning - spirit. In addition, Döblin believes that there must be a higher, transcendental order.

Döblin, the Sceptic

When analyzing one man's humor, we should ask why does he laugh? What is his world view that determines the tenor of his humor? The Middle Ages would have easily answered that the entire problem was physiological, a humor being one of the four body fluids which determined a person's health and temperament. His sense of the serious mixes with the sense of the absurd. He believes and yet he is a sceptic. The synthesis of the two helps him to grasp and to understand who and what man is. If he can view life only with a serious mien, he might have stagnated in one dogmatic belief. He might have been convinced that only science held the key to understanding the universe. As the dark tones in his early stories show, Döblin would have been extinguished by a nihilistic anxiety. Scepticism rejects the dogmatic, be it positivistic science,

nihilistic despair or religious dogma. Scepticism admits the presence of the irrational, the surprising and the nonsensical. It saves Döblin from either giving in to despair or remaining satisfied with any one answer, which may be false. The sceptic sees the incongruous, which is humorous; hence the humorist must be a sceptic: he knows that dogmatic, scientific knowledge alone fails to explain satisfactorily men and the universe.

In Berlin Alexanderplatz, the inadequacies of science are exposed often by contrasting the precision of scientific laws with the vastness of the universe these laws claim to organize into a system. The laws of nature are far beyond the grasp of man's powers to reason; he cannot manipulate them to his own advantage. This premise is ironically presented, for example, in the glib phrases from an advertisement text, in which the consumer is urged to avoid bread made with artificial ingredients because the laws of nature avenge every abuse (BA, 181).

The vast mystery of death is shown to lie beyond the scope of man's science: the meaning of Ida's death transcends the "exact" description of the formulas; the narrator sadly notes the contrast between the police description of Mieze's body and her lost smile and heart. For Döblin the laws of science do not articulate knowledge of the soul, of the human in his totality.

What is the soul? In the asylum in Buch the soul of

Franz Biberkopf mocks the efforts of the doctors to care for his body, according to the latest medical advances. The doctors recognize the difficulty in applying a medical regimen to the soul, which is to them no more than a "moderne Gefühlskiste" (BA, 470); they resent that they must use imprecise, unscientific techniques. They are correct in that they know the most effective treatment depends on a correct diagnosis. The rub is, of course, to establish what the correct diagnosis is. The difficulty in defining a medical problem accurately is the same as the difficulty in defining any problem, medical, personal and social. Hence, throughout Berlin Alexanderplatz, the author has Franz reject ready-made solutions to political problems.

The author shows the dubious value of science and medicine and he mocks the authority with which men honor rational knowledge. The exposure of authoritarian knowledge depicts the world as it is instead of what we assume it to be. We laugh as we perceive the incongruity between the respect we give to formal knowledge and the questioning it should always be subjected to.

There is a goal towards which Döblin steers Franz: he must learn "to see", to reflect, to question. Döblin the doctor knows that a correct diagnosis is the first step in a successful cure. Döblin the sceptic knows how difficult it is to see that conventional wisdom and assumptions must be doubted

in order to diagnose correctly. The formulas of science, sterile political slogans, and outdated moral conventions prove to be inadequate. The narrator, however, clearly believes that there is a "cure", something transcendental that is the object of science's futile attempt to classify, of the politician's slogans and of morality's attempt to regulate behavior.

Döblin, the Seeker

The synthesis of belief and scepticism creates the restlessness of the seeker. That is especially true for Döblin. He questions because he is sceptical; he argues, debates and examines because he is seeking the truth, which he does believe in. "[...] jedes Buch endet (für mich) mit einem Fragezeichen. Jedes Buch wirft am Ende einem neuen den Ball zu."²⁶ Döblin has a mind which sets a question mark after every possible conclusion. Such a mind does change in the course of a long life, as it works through each possible answer. "Aber wohl auch uns, die wir zeit unseres Lebens gefragt, gesucht und geirrt haben."²⁷

The seeker after truth presumes that there is an answer; the humor of Döblin is founded on the basis of this optimism. Döblin refuses to admit futility. His humor is not "black", depending on the paradox of existence in a nihilistic world.

²⁶ Döblin, "Epilog", AzL, p. 389.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 399.

ridiculous that the quality of life is defined in terms of "Butterbrot". Yet this image defines well the limits in life of only physical pleasure. Being well-fed, having enough money, having a girl-friend and enjoying the respect of fellow-citizens is not enough; one demands more in life. Such corporeal values are ephemeral; even worse, devotion to them blinds Franz to Mieke's redeeming love. The story is the long path Franz must take "to see" that there is more in life than just "Butterbrot". There is no final answer in this quest.

Franz wins no chalice of victory from Death:

Was wahr und falsch ist, werd ich jetzt
besser wissen. Ich bin schon einmal auf
ein Wort reingefallen, ich habe es bitter
bezahlen müssen, nochmal passiert das
dem Biberkopf nicht.

(BA, 500)

Franz has won in a literal sense "in-sight". Forced to acknowledge a higher order ("vom Leben mehr zu verlangen als das Butterbrot") he has become sceptical of the glib and attractive comforts in the world. Franz can now weigh what he hears and sees, he can reflect - his eyes opened, he has become a seeker, trying to find meaning and purpose in life.

Döblin, the seeker, later states the goal of the quest such that it is in a Christian framework; but even then, Döblin questions false security found in religion. Even here God's revealed word is beyond comprehension.²⁹ His final conclusion

²⁹A parable of this human limitation is "Kain und Abel", Hochland, 46, H. 4 (1953-54), pp. 356-62. Although the human

seems to be: we only know that we cannot know.

Döblin, the Sufferer

The discovery of the necessary connection between man and the world banishes the most terrible anxieties. Despite the will to believe in a benignly ordered universe, however, Döblin suffers and sees others suffer. Anguish sets him off on the journey of the mind. At first frightened, he gradually finds self-confidence. The tears shed for the human lot force his discovery of man's worthiness in the world order. Suffering leads him to seek the truth, it also gives him the key to finding himself: "[...] im Weinen war Ich."³⁰ Suffering constitutes the basic fabric of Döblin's reflection. Man's sorrow and pain is as much a part of the whole world as tangible objects are.³¹

is limited, such helplessness does not release man from the obligation to reflect about man's responsibility within this world order. Döblin concludes that God was trying to trick Cain, whose lot it is never to be able to fathom God. He is unknowable and beyond us. Cain, however, is no stilted marionette, God's plaything without a will of his own. He had the choice to reach one way or the other. When he jealously chose to murder Abel, he is a fool for not having reflected that God's justice is beyond him. "Aber der Tölpel Kain tapert hinein" (p. 359).

³⁰ Döblin, Unser Dasein, p. 17.

³¹ Döblin, Reise in Polen, pp. 239-40. "Leid ist in der Welt, Schmerz, menschlich-tierisches ringendes Gefühl ist in der Welt. [...] Schmerz, Jammer ist in der Welt: ein ungeheueres, durchleuchtendes Fühlen. Schrecklich: und das ist überall angeschrieben in den Kirchen, das Geheimnis so offen [...]." Although Döblin is a sceptical and assimilated German Jew, the crucifix in a Cracau church embodies even then, in 1926, all of human sorrow for him.

Without passing through the shadow of death, man never becomes human. "Ohne Leiden und Unglück wächst man mit den Tieren und Pflanzen und wird niemals Mensch. Das Leiden löst uns von der Natur ab."³² If man can suffer, then he becomes human. Then and only then, can he make the breakthrough to the "truth", that elusive goal.

To learn "to see" requires terrible suffering. In Berlin Alexanderplatz, Job is the embodiment of suffering, seemingly beyond human endurance. Döblin reworks the myth to illustrate that suffering precedes and precipitates Job's cure. So too, suffering eventually propels Franz "to see".³³

Döblin is keenly aware that man suffers in this world. With a piercing eye, he sees the faults of man and his society. He does not show the world as it should be or as we blindly assume it to be, but as the world is: human inadequacies, deficiencies and immaturity. The incongruity of Franz' cocky self-confidence and his failure to be a fully mature, autonomous individual is funny and also painful. Not only does Franz come to suffer, but the people he loves most suffer too. Above all, Döblin feels for Franz. Suffering for man's condition impels Döblin to reflect, scold, satirize, preach, and

³²Döblin, Karl und Rosa, p. 435.

³³So too, subsequent protagonists of Döblin are required to go to an ultimate, radical point of suffering, before the long night of mental darkness comes to an end. Indeed, "Die lange Nacht nimmt ein Ende" is the subtitle of Döblin's last novel.

to convince others also to reflect and change themselves. Franz Biberkopf is an example, whose story is recommended to our attention: "Dies zu betrachten und zu hören wird sich für viele lohnen [...]" (BA, 10).

Döblin is acutely sensitive to the human predicament. Describing his last visit to Döblin in Paris in 1953, Hermann Kesten conjures up an image of an old and sick, but still the incorrigible, impiously pious Döblin:

Döblin, mit der alten boshaften Lust und der kessen Berliner Suada, erzählte Anekdoten und Geschichten, kritisierte und krakeelte, als wäre er noch in seinen muntersten Jahren [...] als er [...] selber am lautesten über seine eigenen komischen Geschichten lachen mußte, und noch mehr über mich und meine Freunde [...].

[...] ich mußte doch über seine unwiderstehlichen Witze lachen, über seine kolossalische Frechheit, über seine genialische Weltkrakeelerei.

Ja, auch im Himmel, an den Döblin neuerdings glaubte, ein frisch bekehrter Katholik, würde Alfred Döblin seine genialischen Geschichten erzählen und krakeelen und kritisieren und seine eigenen stets überraschenden und originellen Ansichten haben, und keine verschweigen und so laut und unge- niert lachen, das war gewiß.

Und so habe ich ihn im Gedächtnis behalten. Da sitzt er noch in seinem Stuhl am Fenster, in der Stadt Paris, leidend und lachend. 34

"Leidend und lachend." How well this motto fits Döblin. He is somewhat a modern Job in his squabbles with the world's order

³⁴Hermann Kesten, "Alfred Döblin, 'Wie lange werden wir uns noch auf unserm Floß halten?'," Lauter Literaten, Porträts, Kritik an Zeitgenossen, Erinnerungen (Munich and Zürich: Droemer Knaur, 1963), p. 298.

("Weltkrakeelerei").

Döblin's World Order, the Mystery and Totality of Nature

The basic premise that we must seek our place in the world order runs through all of Döblin's works. As we have seen, Döblin's satire questions the given, "normal" order, which at times, by Döblin's vision, distorts man into a floundering, helpless victim. Aware of the infinity of the universe, Döblin asks again and again how man in his finiteness fits in. Döblin writes that he chose to study the natural sciences in order to learn the answer. "Warum hatte ich dann begonnen, Medizin zu studieren? Weil ich die Wahrheit wollte, die aber nicht durch Begriffe gelaufen und hierbei verdünnt und zerfasert war."³⁵ He soon finds that science does not answer his questions; it does not help him to pose the right questions.

In an early letter from his student days in Freiburg he writes to Else Lasker-Schüler: "Das Beste, was wir können, ist beten."³⁶ What has moved Döblin to pray, to think of prayer as relief and help? He fears "das Unbegreifliche, Dunkle dieser ganzen Erdangelegenheit".³⁷ The mystery of this "Erdangelegenheit", man and cosmos, threatens and finally destroys the protagonists in the early works of Döblin. The difficulty

³⁵Döblin, Schicksalsreise, p. 161.

³⁶Döblin, "Briefe", Text & Kritik, No. 13-14 (June, 1966), pp. 46-47.

³⁷Loc. cit.

of understanding oneself, the other person and the world seems insurmountable.³⁸ The humblest process of nature seems to him a deeply moving wonder:

Es passierte mir, daß ich über meiner Kaffeetasse saß und mich nicht zurecht-fand vor dem, was da geschah: der weiße gepulverte Zucker verschwand in der braunen Flüssigkeit, löste sich. Ja, wie ist das möglich: "Lösung". Was tut das Fließende, Flüssige, Warme, dem Festen, so daß es nachgibt, sich hinschmiegt. Ich weiß, daß mir oft ängstlich, körperlich ängstlich, schwindlich unter diesen Dingen wurde - und, ich gestehe es, manchmal ist mir noch jetzt nicht wohl. 39

This particular image for the mystery of the world order crops up again as comic burlesque in the Märchen vom Materialismus. The revolt of nature against the tyranny of man's doctrine of materialism reaches down to lowly sugar:

An jenen Tagen sah man in den Städten oft Kaffeehausbesucher in trüber Stimmung an den Tischen sitzen. [...] Was betrübte sie? Sie sannten über ihren Tassen. Die einzelnen Bestandteile des Kaffees wollten nicht zusammengehen. Man schüttete Zucker hinein, einen Löffel, zwei Löffel, drei. Der Kaffee blieb bitter. Warum? Der Zucker legte sich auf den Boden der Tasse, in einer Schicht, und blieb da liegen. Er löste sich nicht. 40

³⁸In the novel Der schwarze Vorhang, the relationship of the hero to objects and words is a "grausame Unbegreiflichkeit" (p. 152).

The medical case history of Elli in Die beiden Freundinnen recognizes the difficulty of understanding any one human act completely. Each person is a tiny part of the whole. Our understanding of the world is limited, whereas the world is an infinite, unlimited totality.

³⁹Döblin, "Bemerkungen zu 'Berge Meere und Giganten'", AsL, p. 348.

⁴⁰Döblin, Märchen, p. 45.

In order to consume coffee man is compelled to ingest the coffee, milk and sugar separately:

Man mußte stückweise Kaffee trinken. Er wurde als "fraktionierter Kaffee" feilgeboten. Er war mehr ein Rätsel als ein Genuß. 41

The sugar in rebellion has forced man to take cognisance of its power, even if scientific man does not recognise and respect the mystery and joy of nature.

His diagnosis that things make him unwell fits Döblin from the beginning to the end of his life: the wonder of causality binding all things continues to make Döblin "unwell" until the last. His life is a quest, if not for a cure, then for relief from this sickness.

The wonder of the totality of the cosmos enjoys Döblin's praises in Unser Dasein. The most amazing part of the book and perhaps the most pleasing in its succinctness is the motto at the beginning of the first book: "Nur durch das Tor des Ich betritt man die Welt." Döblin wants the truth and finds the key: "Ich bin der, der erlebt."⁴² The world lies open before him. Döblin wants "to see" everything, from the weaknesses and faults to the underlying, benevolent coherence in the world order. The wonder, the mystery of the universe form the basis of the optimism necessary in Döblin's humor. The gift of won-

⁴¹ Döblin, Märchen, p. 46.

⁴² Döblin, Unser Dasein, p. 24.

der permits Döblin to perform feats of verbal prowess - he lists, digresses, plays with words and styles. Paradoxically it is the mature, self-confident personality, who can "see", that plays with no loss of dignity; indeed such play reaffirms the harmony of the individual with the world. Although Döblin seems at first to be mocking a chaotic, anarchical world; he is in fact also celebrating the harmonious multiplicity of the cosmos.

In Berlin Alexanderplatz, the whole universe includes, instead of excluding, the man still in error, stumbling towards the realization of his human capacities. The world is open to Franz without threatening him, only after his core of self is established. The narrator, however, long before Franz' crisis in the asylum, indicates, especially in the passages that are hymns of praise to the sun, the benevolent order awaiting those willing "to see".⁴³ After his release from the asylum, Franz walks around the Alexanderplatz, marveling at the order and complexity in just this one small corner of the world. Doubt about a chaotic world gives way in Döblin to the belief in an

⁴³In an anecdote in Döblin's last dictated fragments, a young, sad girl dies of heart trouble. She would have died of sorrow anyway, for "sie hatte sich der Welt nicht öffnen können" ["Von Leben und Tod, die es beide nicht gibt", Aus nachgelassenen Diktaten", Sinn und Form: Beiträge zur Literatur, 9, H. 5 (1957), p. 907]. Separated from the world man succumbs to mental anguish. Man cannot dwell apart, but must find himself in harmony not only with other men, but also with every other object in the universe.

ordered, coordinated world. The delight in the world is the joy of humor.

Döblin exploits humor and the grotesque to show his view of man in the world order. The split vision necessary to see incongruities both doubts and accepts the world as it is. On the one hand, blind acceptance subjects man to the tyranny of his fears and makes him a puny creature unable to control his own destiny. The humorist's task is to render authority laughable and thus impotent. On the other, the belief that the underlying order is good means that the individual's struggle towards self-realisation is rewarded. The humorist's task is to show the wonder and grandeur of the cosmic totality in the universe visible to the man who "sees". Such a man, inwardly sure of himself, laughs in pure delight.

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