

Alfred Döblin



Alfred Döblin

Paradigms of Modernism

Edited by

Steffan Davies

Ernest Schonfield

Walter de Gruyter · Berlin · New York

This volume is also published as vol. 95 in the series
Publications of the Institute of Germanic Studies
(Institute of Germanic & Romance Studies,
School of Advanced Study, University of London)
ISBN 978 0 85457 222 9

⊗ Printed on acid-free paper which falls within the guidelines
of the ANSI to ensure permanence and durability.

ISBN 978-3-11-021769-8

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Alfred Döblin : paradigms of modernism / edited by Steffan Davies, Ernest Schonfield.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-3-11-021769-8 – ISBN 978-0-85457-222-9

1. Döblin, Alfred, 1878–1957 – Criticism and interpretation. 2. Modernism (Literature) – Germany. I. Davies, Steffan, 1978– II. Schonfield, Ernest.

PT2607.035Z57 2009

833'.912–dc22

2009038765

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie;
detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

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Printed in Germany

Cover photo: Pressebildagentur Schirner/DHM, Berlin.

Printing and binding: Hubert & Co. GmbH & Co. KG, Göttingen.

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Acknowledgements

This volume originated in a conference entitled “Alfred Döblin (1878-1957) – Beyond the Alexanderplatz”, held at the University of London Institute of Germanic and Romance Studies (IGRS) in 2007 with the generous support of the British Academy. Special thanks are due to Jane Lewin of the IGRS for her invaluable assistance in preparing and organizing both the conference and this volume. The editors also wish to thank Godela Weiss-Sussex, Elizabeth Boa, Susanne Kord, Rüdiger Görner and Frank Reinicke for their assistance in planning the conference, and the Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach a.N., and M. Stephan Döblin for permission to reproduce material from Döblin’s *Nachlass* on pages 140-43. We are indebted to Martin Swales and David Midgley for their expert comments which have helped to bring about the final shape of this book, and to Manuela Gerlof and Svenja Weyh for their careful attention to the manuscript in the later stages of its preparation.

Abbreviations

Döblin's Writings

BA	<i>Berlin Alexanderplatz</i>
BF	<i>Die beiden Freundinnen und ihr Giftmord</i>
BMG	<i>Berge Meere und Giganten</i>
Br I	<i>Briefe I</i>
Br II	<i>Briefe II</i>
DHF	<i>Drama – Hörspiel – Film</i>
DM	<i>Der deutsche Maskenball</i>
EB	<i>Die Ermordung einer Butterblume.</i> <i>Sämtliche Erzählungen</i>
G	<i>Giganten. Ein Abenteuerbuch</i>
H	<i>Hamlet oder Die lange Nacht nimmt ein Ende</i>
IN	<i>Das Ich über der Natur</i>
JR	<i>Jagende Rosse, Der schwarze Vorhang</i> <i>und andere frühe Erzählwerke</i>
KdZ	<i>Kritik der Zeit.</i> <i>Rundfunkbeiträge 1946-1952</i>
KE	<i>Der Kampf mit dem Engel</i>
KS I	<i>Kleine Schriften 1: 1902-1921</i>
KS II	<i>Kleine Schriften 2: 1922-1924</i>
KS III	<i>Kleine Schriften 3: 1925-1933</i>
NLP	<i>Der Nürnberger Lehrprozeß</i>
N I	<i>November 1918. Bürger und Soldaten 1918</i>
N II/1	<i>November 1918. Verratenes Volk</i>
N II/2	<i>November 1918. Heimkehr der Fronttruppen</i>
N III	<i>November 1918. Karl und Rosa</i>
OD	<i>Der Oberst und der Dichter</i> <i>oder Das menschliche Herz</i>
PW	<i>Pardon wird nicht gegeben</i>
RP	<i>Reise in Polen</i>
SÄPL	<i>Schriften zu Ästhetik, Politik und Literatur</i>
SR	<i>Schicksalsreise</i>
SjF	<i>Schriften zu jüdischen Fragen</i>

SLW	<i>Schriften zu Leben und Werk</i>
SPG	<i>Schriften zur Politik und Gesellschaft</i>
UD	<i>Unser Dasein</i>
UM	<i>Der unsterbliche Mensch</i>
W	<i>Wallenstein</i>
WK	<i>Wadzeks Kampf mit der Dampfturbine</i>
WL	<i>Die drei Sprünge des Wang-lun</i>
WV	<i>Wissen und Verändern!</i>

Full bibliographical references are provided on pp. 377-78.

Writings by Others

B	Gottfried Benn, <i>Sämtliche Werke</i> , Stuttgarter Ausgabe, ed. by Gerhard Schuster, 7 vols., III (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1987)
DHA	Heinrich Heine, <i>Historisch-kritische Gesamtausgabe der Werke</i> , ed. by Manfred Windfuhr, 16 vols. (Hamburg: Hoffmann & Campe, 1973-97)
Diss.	W. G. Sebald, "The Revival of Myth: A Study of Alfred Döblin's Novels" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of East Anglia, 1973)
KSA	Friedrich Nietzsche, <i>Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe</i> , ed. by Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, 15 vols. (Munich: dtv, 1999)
MZ	W. G. Sebald, <i>Der Mythos der Zerstörung im Werk Döblins</i> (Stuttgart: Klett, 1980)

Introduction

Alfred Döblin is one of the most important writers of the twentieth century, ceaselessly inventive and productive, and comparable in stature, though not in subsequent critical attention, to his contemporaries Thomas Mann, Musil, and Kafka. His works are unique because of what David Midgley in this volume calls “their engagement with the particularity of earthly experience, with the sensory immediacy of our perceptions of the world we inhabit”.¹ Döblin’s constantly changing themes and tones can seem confused – perplexing to readers, and a challenge to critics – but the polyphonic, kaleidoscopic nature of his *oeuvre* lies at the core of its importance. The central concern of his fiction – to register and articulate sensory experience and to open up his prose to new areas of knowledge – relies on leaving no approach barred, and makes him more interdisciplinary than any of his modernist competitors.

Döblin’s literary texts emerge from a hybridisation of discourses: medical, psychiatric, biological, socio-historical, anthropological, ethnological, philosophical, and theological. In 1913 he coined two terms, “Döblinismus” (SÄPL, p. 119) and “Tatsachenphantasie”, factual imagination (SÄPL, p. 123), to describe this interdiscursive, factually-inspired poetics. The breadth of the palette takes both author and reader closer to reality, not further away. His contemporaries and rivals in the field of modernist prose are famous for their exploration of consciousness and individual subjectivity, but Döblin’s texts, with their use of “Tatsachenphantasie”, move beyond subjectivity itself, according objects and facts a high degree of narrative autonomy. Many of the great modernists employ forms of perspectivism and montage, and Döblin is no exception; but his use of these techniques is more adventurous than that of his rivals, more emphatically expressive of the disjunctions between different significations. In his works, the narrative voice becomes depersonalised: frequently detached from any human perspective, it flickers between different discourses and orders of knowledge.²

1 As Midgley shows in his essay, this engagement with sensory data does not exclude metaphysical perspective; rather, it is informed by it.

2 Otto Keller, *Döblins Montageroman als Epos der Moderne* (Munich: Fink, 1980), pp. 220-21.

Döblin's interdisciplinarity means that his texts are paradigms of the encounter between literary and scientific modernity. He plays a decisive role in the modernist development of what Sabina Becker and Robert Krause call a "Poetik des Wissens".³ Influenced by Fritz Mauthner and Arno Holz, his writings explode conventional language, seeking a new connection with the world of objects and things. As Otto Keller puts it, Döblin aims at "Sprachsubversion, um dadurch die Dinge neu in die Sprache einfließen zu lassen" – a position which entails the deliberate fragmentation of the narrative voice.⁴ Döblin's tactical move beyond the traditional modalities of narrative was a key influence on Brecht's development of epic theatre. As Brecht wrote in 1943: "Von Döblin habe ich mehr als von jemand anderem über das Wesen des Epischen erfahren. Seine Epik und sogar seine Theorie über Epik hat meine Dramatik stark beeinflusst".⁵ As in Brecht's epic theatre, the keynote of Döblin's epic prose is its hybridity, its use of anti-heroic protagonists and the disjunction between different modes of discourse, not least of which is the colloquial pulse of Berlin dialect. Döblin had a decisive influence not only on Brecht, but also on Günter Grass, Wolfgang Koeppen, Arno Schmidt, and, as Richard Sheppard explores in this volume, W. G. Sebald.

Fifty years after Döblin's death, German literary scholarship has only recently started to do justice to the complexity and scale of his monumental body of work. In the immediate post-war context, Döblin's literary corpus was too politically controversial for it to receive an adequate reception. For several decades the reception of his work remained partial, with scholars concentrating on a handful of works to the exclusion of the rest. To this day, the popular perception of Döblin, in Germany and overseas, rests almost solely on *Berlin Alexanderplatz*. His reputation grew steadily throughout the sixties, however, encouraged by Grass's speech "Über meinen Lehrer Döblin" in 1967. Even so, the aesthetic, work-immanent model of criticism which predominated in the Federal Republic in the sixties led scholars to concentrate on those of Döblin's works written before 1933. Those written afterwards, with their outspoken historical references, were often characterised as lacking in aesthetic quality and were marginalised.⁶ Thus Klaus Müller-Salget's

3 *Internationales Alfred-Döblin-Kolloquium Emmendingen 2007. "Tatsachenphantasie": Alfred Döblins Poetik des Wissens im Kontext der Moderne*, ed. by Sabina Becker and Robert Krause, Jahrbuch für Internationale Germanistik, Reihe A – Band 95 (Bern: Lang, 2008), p. 9.

4 Keller, *Döblins Montageroman*, p. 231.

5 Bertolt Brecht, "Über Alfred Döblin", in *Werke. Große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe*, ed. by Werner Hecht, Jan Knopf et al., 30 vols (Berlin, Weimar: Aufbau-Verlag, 1993), XXIII, p. 23.

6 Oliver Bernhardt, *Alfred Döblin und Thomas Mann. Eine wechsellöbliche literarische Beziehung* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007), pp. 188-89.

standard monograph *Alfred Döblin. Werk und Entwicklung* (1972; revised edition 1988), focuses mainly on *Berlin Alexanderplatz* and on the early work. The landscape changed in the mid-1980s, with Erwin Kobel's balanced study *Alfred Döblin. Erzählkunst im Umbruch* (1985) and through the concentrated critical analysis given to the later works for the first time in Helmuth Kiesel's monograph *Literarische Trauerarbeit* (1986). Seminal studies of a range of Döblin texts have appeared since, aided by the expansion and, in some cases, re-editing of the *Ausgewählte Werke in Einzelbänden*.⁷ In English, David B. Dollenmayer's *The Berlin Novels of Alfred Döblin* (1988) paved the way for present-day interest in Döblin and the city; the recent Camden House *Companion to the Works of Alfred Döblin* (2004) provides a broad English-language survey of his texts. Döblin scholarship in the past twenty years has decisively moved on from narrow, repetitious lines of interpretation and over-emphasis on a confined group of works.

This volume contributes to the ongoing reassessment of Döblin's literary achievements. It contains the revised versions of papers given at "Alfred Döblin (1878-1957) – Beyond the Alexanderplatz", an international conference held in 2007 at the Institute of Germanic and Romance Studies, University of London, to mark the fiftieth anniversary of Döblin's death. As the volume's title indicates, it is not intended as a comprehensive survey of Döblin's entire career. Instead, it aims to provide a series of analyses which, whilst reflecting the diversity of his literary output, offer challenging new perspectives on key works. The main concern of this volume is to reassess the uniquely interdisciplinary quality of Döblin's "Tatsachenphantasie". In this spirit, it analyses not only some of Döblin's best-known works, but also some that researchers have tended to neglect: the early medical essays (*Leib und Seele*, *Die Nerven*, *Die Arterienverkalkung*), political journalism, autobiographical texts (particularly *Erster Rückblick*), and, after 1945, the addressing of guilt and responsibility not only in *Hamlet oder die lange Nacht nimmt ein Ende*, but in the lesser-known *Der Nürnberger Lehrprozeß* and *Der Oberst und der Dichter*. Many of the contributions question previously held assumptions or biases within the existing secondary literature on Döblin. Thus Stephanie Catani examines Döblin's early stories, not in terms of expressionism, but in the context of the *fin de siècle* aestheticism to which they are a reaction; Anke Detken's investigation of *Die drei Sprünge des Wang-lun* is not in terms of Oriental philology as is usually the case; instead she shows that the novel's use of masks prefigures the *Verfremdungseffekte* of Brechtian epic theatre; and

7 On Döblin scholarship, see especially Wulf Koepeke, *The Critical Reception of Alfred Döblin's Major Novels* (Rochester and Woodbridge: Camden House, 2003).

Julian Preece considers *Reise in Polen*, which is usually read for its ethnographic interest or as a guide to Döblin's attitudes to his Jewish heritage, for the first time as an instance of travel writing.

David Midgley's introductory essay explores Döblin's prose fiction up to and including *Berlin Alexanderplatz* in terms of the philosophical concerns (Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, Fritz Mauthner) that inform his creative endeavour. The volume then follows Döblin's works from his early short stories, tracing the development of his interdisciplinary poetics as it gradually unfolds. The first four essays analyse Döblin's early works in the context of his intellectual development. Midgley links fiction to philosophy; Stephanie Catani and Torsten Hoffmann show how Döblin's early medical essays inform his early stories. Ruth Neubauer-Petzoldt relates the early stories to mythological syncretism. Poetological concerns are also highlighted in Anke Detken's reading of *Die drei Sprünge des Wang-lun*, in Barbara Wildenhahn's analysis of Döblin's narrative persona "Linke Poot", and in Susanne Komfort-Hein's account of intertextuality in *Erster Rückblick*. Julian Preece's discussion of "ways of seeing" in *Reise in Polen* considers the varying perspectives Döblin brings to bear on his travel experiences. *Berge Meere und Giganten* is one of Döblin's most complex and radically experimental novels: Ritchie Robertson and Gabriele Sander analyse the function, respectively, of the physical sciences and of ethnological discourse within the text, pointing out what Robertson calls Döblin's "respect for fact" amongst his eclectic sources and imaginative fictions. Andrew Webber explores the relation between psychoanalysis and topography in Döblin's Berlin cityscapes. The poetological dimension continues with narratological reflections on *Berlin Alexanderplatz* by Stephanie Bird; a debate about the status of genre in *November 1918* – a long-standing, central question in the interpretation of the novel – between Alan Bance and Klaus Hofmann; and Marion Schmaus's exploration of Döblin's late epic style in *Der Oberst und der Dichter*.

Biographical work on Döblin, and biographical interpretations of his works, still lag behind other areas of scholarship, despite the data assembled by Louis Huguet and (in far more widely available form) by Jochen Meyer,⁸ and the texts collected in 1986 as the *Schriften zu Leben und Werk*. Oliver Bernhardt points out the impetus given to biographical readings of Thomas Mann's work by the opening of Mann's diaries in

8 Louis Huguet, "Alfred Döblin: éléments de biographie et bibliographie systématique" (doctoral thesis, University of Paris-Nanterre, 1968), and "Pour un centenaire (1878-1978). Chronologie Alfred Döblin", *Annales de l'Université d'Abidjan*, series D, vol. 11 (1978), 7-197; and *Alfred Döblin 1878-1978. Eine Ausstellung des Deutschen Literaturarchivs im Schiller-Nationalmuseum Marbach am Neckar*, ed. by Jochen Meyer, Marbacher Kataloge, 30 (Marbach: Ausstellungskatalog des Deutschen Literaturarchivs, 1978).

1975 and their subsequent publication;⁹ there has been no comparable impetus yet in the case of Döblin. The short studies by Sander (2001) and Bernhardt (2007) are much-needed replacements for the overviews by Klaus Schröter (1978) and Armin Arnold (1996), but by and large, recent Döblin scholarship has been defeated by his diversity, with few monographs surveying the broad span of his life or *oeuvre*. This volume claims no exception to that rule, but has Döblin's aestheticisation of his own identity and history – the understanding of which will be central to effective biographical criticism – as one of its continuous themes. Chapters by Preece, Komfort-Hein and Christoph Bartscherer focus on aspects of Döblin's biography and autobiographical writings; Wildenhahn examines the different personae he adopted in his political journalism in the late 1910s and early 1920s. (The image of the mask appropriately links Wildenhahn's chapter on *Der deutsche Maskenball* with Detken's study of *Wang-lun*.) Webber, like Komfort-Hein, gives substantial attention to *Erster Rückblick*, Döblin's first significant aestheticisation of his own biography, and a polyphonic self-reflection which invokes multiple discourses: medical, psychological, criminological and artistic. Catani and Hoffmann both draw on the dichotomy Döblin suggested between his identities as a doctor and poet; Steffan Davies argues that we must go beyond the face value of autobiographical comments in reconstructing the genesis of his *Wallenstein*. Our final chapter, by Richard Sheppard, turns from Döblin's biography to the life of W. G. Sebald, and one of the most notorious episodes in Döblin reception history, namely, Sebald's vitriolic criticism of Döblin in the early eighties, in his monograph *Der Mythos der Zerstörung im Werk Döblins* and two further essays.¹⁰ Sheppard's study casts light on an author whose reaction to Döblin was itself, in turn, the projection of a self-image informed by personal circumstances and concerns.

Two further strands in these essays are Döblin's engagement with German history, and his place within the German modernist canon. Döblin's fictional explorations of German history are extraordinarily inventive texts which continually disrupt and challenge accepted historical narratives. This important strand in his work is represented by essays on *Wallenstein* (Davies), *November 1918* (Bance, Hofmann, Schonfield), *Der Oberst und der Dichter* (Schmaus) and *Hamlet* (White). Four essays in this

9 Bernhardt, *Alfred Döblin und Thomas Mann*, pp. 193-94, 199. Bernhardt's call for a critical Döblin biography (*Alfred Döblin und Thomas Mann*, p. 200) echoes that of Matthias Prangel, *Alfred Döblin*, 2nd edition (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1987), p. 120.

10 Winfried Georg Sebald, *Der Mythos der Zerstörung im Werk Döblins* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1980); "Alfred Döblin oder die politische Unzuverlässigkeit des bürgerlichen Literaten", and "Preussische Perversionen", in *Internationale Alfred-Döblin-Kolloquien 1980-83*, ed. by Werner Stauffacher (Bern, New York: Lang, 1986), pp. 133-39 and 231-38 respectively.

volume situate Döblin in comparison with other major writers: as well as Detken (on Döblin and Brecht) and Sheppard (on Döblin and Sebald), Bartscherer examines Döblin's religious turn in the light of Heinrich Heine's own conversion; and Hoffmann links Döblin's interest in physiology to Gottfried Benn, who was, like Döblin himself, a practising doctor. Further, smaller clusters also interlink the essays: Döblin's relation to medical discourse (Catani, Hoffmann, Komfort-Hein); his relation to ethnology (Sander, Preece); his topography of Berlin (Webber, Schonfield), and his depiction of sexual violence (Bird, Catani, Neubauer-Petzoldt, Komfort-Hein, Sheppard).

Döblin's works have lost none of their power to stimulate and provoke. Constantly he allows different frames of reference to collide. At the current juncture of literary studies, in which concepts of "intertextuality" and "interdisciplinarity" have become ubiquitous, Döblin's texts appear especially timely. His texts are more permeable than those of many other modernist writers: they *let other discourses in*. That is why his texts function so well as paradigms and repositories of modernism. In his works, through a blizzard of montage, the modern era emerges in all its multidimensionality.

Metaphysical Speculation and the Fascination of the Real: On the Connections between Döblin's Philosophical Writings and his Fiction before *Berlin Alexanderplatz*

DAVID MIDGLEY

In his comments on his own works and in his poetological writings, Döblin often indicates that his narratives are formed, or at least guided, by specific philosophical concerns. But he is reticent and sometimes inconsistent when it comes to describing how those concerns relate to his literary practice, and the heterogeneous character of his fiction makes it difficult to recognise a coherent intellectual orientation within it. This article examines the main themes of Döblin's philosophical writings in the period before the publication of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* and notes particular ways in which he was responding to Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and a number of other authors whose thinking was attracting intense public interest in the early decades of the twentieth century. Finally, for the benefit of readers who know of Döblin only through *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, it briefly characterises the relationship in which his early novels stand to his underlying philosophical concerns.

In seinen poetologischen Schriften sowie in Bemerkungen zu einzelnen Werken weist Döblin vielfach darauf hin, dass seine Werke von bestimmten philosophischen Überlegungen beeinflusst oder gar geprägt sind. Über die genauen Beziehungen zwischen philosophischen Ideen und seiner eigenen literarischen Praxis äußert er sich dabei eher zurückhaltend und stellenweise widersprüchlich, und der recht heterogene Charakter seines Erzählwerks macht es sehr schwierig, an ihnen eine kohärente intellektuelle Orientierung zu erkennen. In diesem Beitrag werden die Hauptthemen von Döblins philosophischen Schriften in der Zeit vor der Veröffentlichung von *Berlin Alexanderplatz* gesichtet und auf ihre Beziehungen zu Nietzsche, Schopenhauer und einigen anderen Denkern, die im frühen zwanzigsten Jahrhundert lebhaftes öffentliches Interesse erregten, hin untersucht. Für Leser, die Döblin nur durch *Berlin Alexanderplatz* kennen, wird im letzten Teil des Beitrags auch das jeweilige Verhältnis seiner anderen frühen Romane zu den so ermittelten Merkmalen seines Denkens kurz umrissen.

The reader who approaches *Berlin Alexanderplatz* in the expectation that it will provide a direct sense of the social and cultural atmosphere of the 1920s will encounter a number of puzzles. Alongside the passages that

evoke the sights and sounds of the Berlin streets and the language of its inhabitants with a vividness that was hailed by Döblin's contemporaries as an extraordinarily authentic representation of the city's ambience,¹ there are also frequent allusions to literary and historical figures, reworkings of well-known parables from the Old Testament, allegorical episodes that draw on the Book of Revelation, and quasi-mystical evocations of the forces of nature, particularly in connection with the crisis and revival of the protagonist, Franz Biberkopf.² Moreover, Döblin's own comments on the work often suggest a substantially different sense of purpose than mere mimetic representation of the immediate social world of Berlin in the 1920s. In the *Nachwort* that he wrote for the 1955 edition of *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, for example, his opening sentence reads: "Ich kam damals sozusagen frisch aus Indien, damals um die Mitte der Zwanzigerjahre" (SLW, p. 463). What he is alluding to is the verse epic – in itself an extraordinary literary phenomenon in the world of the twentieth century – that he had based on Hindu myth and published in 1927 under the title *Manas*, a text in which the eponymous hero visits the kingdom of the dead in order to experience pain and destruction, and subsequently emerges revitalised. When Döblin, in 1955, speaks of the story of Franz Biberkopf as "Manas auf berlinisch" (SLW, p. 463), he is foregrounding the sense in which the humiliation and devastation suffered by Biberkopf follows a pattern that had been established in advance by his Indian epic.

The sense in which this paper looks "beyond the Alexanderplatz" is that it focuses on the character of Döblin's writings before the publication of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* in 1929, tries to identify the intellectual interests that helped to give his writings that particular character, and considers the relationship in which these interests stand to the dominant impulses of the intellectual culture of the turn of the century, when Döblin's conception of himself as a writer was being formed.

On the occasion of Döblin's fiftieth birthday in 1928, two substantial essays appeared which together provide a useful initial sense of how the development of his writing up until that time had been perceived. One, by

1 For reviews of the first edition of *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, see *Alfred Döblin im Spiegel der zeitgenössischen Kritik*, ed. by Ingrid Schuster and Ingrid Bode (Bern and Munich: Francke, 1973), pp. 207-66; and *Materialien zu Alfred Döblin, "Berlin Alexanderplatz"*, ed. by Matthias Prangel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975), pp. 53-116.

2 For detailed discussion of these aspects of *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, see Otto Keller, *Döblins Montageroman als Epos der Moderne* (Munich: Fink, 1980), pp. 140-96; also David Midgley, "The Dynamics of Consciousness: Alfred Döblin, *Berlin Alexanderplatz*", in *The German Novel in the Twentieth Century. Beyond Realism*, ed. by David Midgley (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), pp. 95-109.

Oskar Loerke, appeared in a special celebratory volume issued by Döblin's publisher, the S. Fischer Verlag; the other, by Ferdinand Lion, appeared in the *Neue Rundschau*, also published by S. Fischer.³ Both authors, as one might expect in such congratulatory publications, spoke of the richness of the texture of Döblin's narratives, of the vividness of their imagery and the powerful feel for specific natural phenomena that they evoked. At the same time they evidently felt the need to look for an intellectual key to his fiction. Loerke repeatedly looks to Döblin's recently published disquisition *Das Ich über der Natur* for explanations of the relation between the evocations of the natural world in his novels and the human destinies they depict. He emphasises that Döblin's fiction is above all concerned with the objects and experiences of the material world, relates the graphic character of his descriptions to his scientific studies, and notes that his interest in spirituality is pantheistic and very much of this world.⁴ But he also recognises in Döblin's major works – *Die drei Sprünge des Wang-lun* (1916), *Wallenstein* (1920), *Berge Meere und Giganten* (1924), and *Manas* (1927) – articulations of the metaphysical ideas expounded in *Das Ich über der Natur*: the integration of human existence into a cosmic vision and the sense of organic connection between life, death and sexuality within the universal play of natural forces.

Lion's approach to the question of Döblin's intellectual orientation is more analytical. He sees Döblin as having begun by participating in the vitalism that was characteristic of the intellectual culture of the pre-war world, and he distinguishes between two complementary phases in his development as a writer, each of which he attributes to a personal intellectual event (*Erlebnis*). It was Döblin's perception of how individual lives are subordinated to the inexorable forces of nature and to their manifestation in collective human activities, Lion argues, that led him to look for a sense of overarching cosmic meaning in the play of those impersonal forces, and thus by his own route to a Taoist outlook on life. That intuitive identification with a philosophical world-view in turn determined his choice of a Chinese legend for his novel *Die drei Sprünge des Wang-lun*⁵ and his emphasis on the forces of nature at work in an episode

3 Oskar Loerke, "Das bisherige Werk Alfred Döblins", in *Alfred Döblin. Im Buch – Zu Haus – Auf der Straße*, vorgestellt von Alfred Döblin und Oskar Loerke (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1928), pp. 127-200; Ferdinand Lion, "Das Werk Alfred Döblins. Zum fünfzigsten Geburtstag des Dichters am 10. August 1928", *Neue Rundschau* 39 (1928), II, 161-73.

4 Loerke, op. cit., p. 132; cf. also *ibid.*, p. 173: "Es gibt keine Zweiteilung, die, summarisch vergrößert, heißen würde: hier der Klotz Materie, dort der Schemen Gott."

5 Lion (op. cit., p. 162) is mistaken in partly attributing the emphasis on overwhelming impersonal forces in *Die drei Sprünge des Wang-lun* to the experience of how individual lives were swept up into a collective destiny in the First World War. The manuscript of the

from European history – the Thirty Years’ War – in *Wallenstein*. Like Loerke, Lion recognises the relevance of the arguments in *Das Ich über der Natur* to all of Döblin’s novels to date, particularly his espousal of panpsychism, the notion that all elements of the natural world are in some sense animate, which manifestly informs his evocation of continuities between the organic and the inorganic world in *Berge Meere und Giganten*. But what Lion sees coming out in the latter work and becoming dominant in *Manas* is a shift of emphasis from the overwhelming power of collective and impersonal forces to an exploration of the role of individual agency within that constellation of forces, and thus also of individual identity, of the individual soul or psyche (*Seele*, or in the vocabulary of Hinduism, *Atman*). According to Lion it is the combination of active and passive attitudes, of the “Indian” preoccupation with specific active entities and the “Chinese” interest in over-arching meaning (*Tao*), that gives rise to the particular world-view that underlies Döblin’s visionary fictions, making him appear, paradoxically, both a “weltbejahender Buddhist” and a “Taoist der Seele”.⁶

Both Lion and Loerke were relating what they saw as key aspects of Döblin’s thinking to an intellectual heritage with which they could expect readers in the 1920s to be somewhat familiar, even if Döblin’s particular elaboration of it nevertheless seemed idiosyncratic and even abstruse in places. But since that heritage is no longer likely to be familiar to readers of the early twenty-first century, I shall summarise the evidence we have of Döblin’s early intellectual orientation and the senses in which it relates to the intellectual climate of the early twentieth century before discussing its significance for the interpretation of his early novels. It will become apparent as we explore Döblin’s early writings that the distinction Lion makes between a “Chinese” and an “Indian” Döblin is really just a shorthand way of referring to those dimensions of his intellectual concerns that relate to the mass existence of human beings as a phenomenon of nature on the one hand and to the nature of the life and experiences of the human individual on the other.

Alongside his medical studies in Berlin (1900-1904) Döblin studied philosophy under Friedrich Paulsen, a popular exponent of Kant and Schopenhauer,⁷ the Neo-Kantian Max Dessoir, and the Hegelian Adolf

novel was in fact completed by May 1913: see Gabriele Sander, *Alfred Döblin* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2001), p. 132.

6 Lion, op. cit., p. 169.

7 Paulsen is also remembered as the greatest of the pupils of Gustav Theodor Fechner and for having promoted, in his *Einleitung in die Philosophie* (1892), Fechner’s doctrine of panpsychism, to which Lion alludes in his article.

Lasson; and according to Loerke, when he transferred to Freiburg in 1904, where he wrote his doctoral thesis on a psychic disorder, Döblin had a reputation for being an uncompromising Hegelian.⁸ There are few explicit traces of the young Döblin's philosophical reading in his published correspondence, but by his own testimony in a letter to the literary scholar Werner Milch in December 1927, he had avidly read Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Hegel – whose *Phänomenologie des Geistes* he claims to have devoured “wie einen Roman” (Br II, p. 54). At a still later date, responding to an enquiry in 1950, Döblin acknowledges that both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche had excited his intellectual interest at particular times, but he now distances himself from the philosophy of Hegel – “sie hat mich gefesselt, aber völlig kalt gelassen” – and highlights instead his interest in “höhere Naturschau” as practised by “Spinoza und andere” (Br II, p. 359). This is consistent with a remark he makes about his early philosophical reading in his “Epilog” of 1948 (SLW, p. 306), and there are clear indications that the writings of both Spinoza and Hegel were indeed in his mind while he was writing his early novel *Der schwarze Vorhang* in 1902-03.⁹ But the most explicit evidence of the young Döblin's own philosophical orientation comes from a pair of essays on Nietzsche which also date from 1902-03, but which were not published until 1978.¹⁰

The title of the first essay, “Der Wille zur Macht als Erkenntnis bei Friedrich Nietzsche”, is taken directly from a section heading in that posthumous compilation of notes which had been presented to the world in 1901 as Nietzsche's crowning achievement, *Der Wille zur Macht*. Some of the specific vocabulary that Döblin deploys in his Nietzsche essays, as well as the general cast of his argument, also indicates that he was responding in the main to propositions that he had found in *Der Wille zur Macht*, although his essays also contain specific textual references to *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, *Zur Genealogie der Moral*, and *Also sprach Zarathustra*.¹¹ The

8 Loerke, op. cit., pp. 140-41.

9 The manuscript of this work had contained a sentence reflecting on what the young protagonist might have recognised if he had read Spinoza (JR, p. 262), and it had borne a motto from Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (JR, p. 253). See also Otto F. Best, “Zwischen Orient und Okzident. Döblin und Spinoza. Einige Anmerkungen zur Problematik des offenen Schlusses von *Berlin Alexanderplatz*”, *Colloquia Germanica*, 12 (1979), 94-105.

10 Alfred Döblin, “Der Wille zur Macht als Erkenntnis bei Friedrich Nietzsche” and “Zu Nietzsches Morallehre”, in *Nietzsche und die deutsche Literatur*, vol. 1: *Texte zur Nietzsche-Rezeption 1873-1963*, ed. by Bruno Hillebrand (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1978), pp. 315-58. For the purposes of this chapter, page references will be given to the version published in KS I, pp. 13-55.

11 Textual references to works that Nietzsche published in his lifetime are documented in KS I, pp. 377-82. Passages from the first edition of *Der Wille zur Macht* (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Werke*, XV, Leipzig: C.G. Naumann, 1901) to which Döblin directly or indirectly

essays do not develop philosophical arguments so much as elaborate Döblin's personal reflections on what he takes to be Nietzsche's key ideas, and these involve thinking along with Nietzsche to some extent, as well as arguing against him. It is precisely their spontaneous character, however, that provides useful indicators of the young Döblin's dominant intellectual concerns. He has fundamental objections to Nietzsche's treatment of moral judgements as psychological phenomena and to his attempt to place morality on biological foundations. He senses that the concept of evolution is central to Nietzsche's thinking, comparing its importance with that of "substance" in the philosophy of Spinoza; and he criticises Nietzsche's conception of "Höherentwicklung" from the vantage point of a trained biologist, stressing that what matters for the process of evolutionary development is differentiation of species rather than any notion of a particular species living more intensively (KS I, pp. 46-47). He rejects the implication of determinism in Nietzsche's reasoning (KS I, pp. 39-40), repudiates the notion of moral evaluation based on "strength" and "weakness" (KS I, p. 41), is suspicious of Nietzsche's deployment of racial categories in connection with morality (KS I, p. 42), and displays an instinctive revulsion towards the notion of the "will to power" as an ultimate cosmic principle, calling it a monstrous concept and a wilful myth (KS I, p. 35). There is therefore clearly substance to Ferdinand Lion's conjecture, in 1928, that Nietzsche was the "invisible opponent" of Döblin's philosophy.¹²

Döblin raises a further objection to Nietzsche's thinking, however, which provides a still more telling indicator of his own intellectual orientation at the time. The young Döblin regards it as a fundamental error to try to reduce the dualism of spirit and matter by treating the spirit (*Geist*) as a derivative of the material realm (*Natur*), and it is this aspect of Nietzsche's thought that prompts Döblin to attack him as a representative spokesman for "Naturwissenschaft" (KS I, pp. 23-24). The manner in which Döblin asserts the need for metaphysical ideas in the face of Nietzsche's efforts to undermine them also makes it understandable why – as Loerke was to recall in 1928 – he was remembered from his student days as a passionate Hegelian. The fervour of Döblin's commitment to metaphysics rings through his characterisation of Nietzsche's antipathy for traditions of metaphysical thought as the "Heftigkeit des renegatischen

alludes are identified in Beat Knüttig, *Die Nietzsche-Aufsätze des jungen Alfred Döblin. Eine Auseinandersetzung über die Grundlagen von Erkenntnis und Ethik* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1995). In *Das Ich über der Natur* (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1928), p. 136, Döblin explicitly mentions having consulted *Der Wille zur Macht*, but without indicating when he did so.

12 Lion, op. cit., p. 171.

Hasses" (KS I, p. 31). Not only does Döblin try to counter Nietzsche's contention that human cognition is necessarily anthropomorphic, he also looks for metaphysical principles at work in Nietzsche's own writings, and claims to have found them in the notions of the *Übermensch* and of "eternal recurrence" (KS I, pp. 31 and 52). The latter notion in particular, which Nietzsche scholarship commonly interprets as either a heuristic tool or a test of philosophical fortitude, i.e. of the capacity to affirm,¹³ Döblin apprehends as betokening a metaphysical belief that stands in contradiction to Nietzsche's general insistence on the biological foundations of all perception and all sense of truth. In the same connection, he attributes Nietzsche's biological precepts to what he calls the excessive empiricism of a scientific age (KS I, pp. 18-21 and 23-24; cf. also KS I, p. 54). It is particularly when he is denouncing the intrusion of science into the domain of philosophy as a sign of the times that Döblin's rhetoric becomes vehement and we find him resorting to the sort of argument by metaphor of which he accuses Nietzsche: "das stupide Klammern an die Empirie in diesem Zeitalter verdirbt die Philosophie, die Königin, welche zur Dienerin herabgewürdigt wird. [...] Und man übersehe nicht die Konsequenzen dieses Skeptizismus und Nihilismus: wenn alles falsch ist, nun darauf los gedichtet und erfunden, wenn es nur dem Leben dient" (KS I, p. 26). When the evidence from Döblin's critique of Nietzsche is placed alongside his later recollections of his early philosophical interests, then, the picture emerges of a young man anxious to retain the unifying power of metaphysical thought in compensation for the disintegrative effects of empirical inquiry that he perceives in the contemporary development of science and looking to major representatives of speculative philosophy for persuasive integrative ideas, even if it is not clear how these ideas might be reconciled with each other: the oneness of substance and the need for a dialectical understanding of the relationship between unity and diversity, which he would have found in

13 For an excellent analysis of conceivable interpretations of the role of "eternal recurrence" in Nietzsche's thought, see Maudmarie Clark, *Nietzsche on Truth and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 245-86. Cf. also Tracy B. Strong, *Friedrich Nietzsche and the Politics of Transformation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 260-93; Laurence Lampert, *Nietzsche's Teaching* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), pp. 255-63. Brian Leiter, *Nietzsche on Morality* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 288, offers the following succinct evaluation: "the 'meaning' embodied in affirmation of the eternal return is precisely that *there is no meaning or justification for suffering*. [...] The eternal return does not so much provide a 'meaning' for suffering [...] as it provides an *aim* for the will other than the ascetic ideal: namely, to will the repetition of everything through eternity."

Spinoza,¹⁴ the workings of the spirit as expounded by Hegel, and the notion of the will as ultimate reality in Schopenhauer.

The thinking of Schopenhauer, and in particular the significance that Schopenhauer attached to music, is a recognisable stimulus for another early text, *Gespräche mit Kalypso. Über die Musik*, which first appeared in the literary journal *Der Sturm* in 1910. This is not to say that Döblin allows the dialogue in his piece to be confined to the terms in which Schopenhauer discusses music in *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*¹⁵; rather, he uses Schopenhauer's observations as points of departure for a dramatisation of the issues that draws on his general classical education, influenced in part perhaps by Nietzsche's *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, and very probably also by a number of paintings by Arnold Böcklin.¹⁶ Döblin imagines a musician stranded on Calypso's island, as Odysseus is in Book Five of the *Odyssey*, and he draws eclectically on other motifs from Homer, importing the transformation of men into beasts from the Circe episode, and giving the people of the island bird-like attributes like traditional representations of the Sirens. One scene also has the musician giving a sermon to the fishes in the manner of a well-known burlesque song from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*. But the serious purpose of the quasi-classical setting is that it allows for a mortal to enter into dialogue with a representative of the immortal realm on the subject of death and the relation of human existence to the natural order in general, as well as on the relevance of music to the grand cosmic scheme of things.

Music is the only medium in which Döblin's Kalypso permits humans to approach her, and she explicitly links it to a "Plan der Schöpfung" that

14 For the particular resonances of Spinoza's thought in Döblin's writings, see Best, "Zwischen Orient und Okzident".

15 See Arthur Schopenhauer, *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*, Erster Band, §52. In the context of his Nietzsche essays, Döblin had criticised Schopenhauer for inconsistency in separating "reine Erkenntnis" from the workings of the will (KS I, p. 23).

16 Döblin probably saw Böcklin's painting of Calypso with a harp (*Odysseus und Kalypso*, 1882) in Basel in 1905, but the imagery of *Gespräche mit Kalypso* also appears to draw on other works by Böcklin that were in the hands of art dealers in Berlin around 1900. These include the notoriously grotesque representation of the Sirens as half-women, half-birds (*Sirenen*, 1875), which was acquired by the Nationalgalerie, Berlin, in 1902, and the image of St Anthony preaching to the fishes (*Der Heilige Antonius*, 1892): see *Arnold Böcklin: Die Gemälde*, ed. by Rolf Andree (Basel: Reinhardt 1977), catalogue nos. 293, 372, and 431. The association of Calypso with music may also owe something to the eighteenth-century translation of Homer by J. H. Voß, which applies the epithet "melodisch" to her (SÄPL, p. 616). For a full discussion of the relation in which Döblin's text stands to his poetological writings and to the intellectual culture of the time, see Johannes Balve, *Ästhetik und Anthropologie bei Alfred Döblin: vom musikphilosophischen Gespräch zur Romanpoetik* (Wiesbaden: Deutsche Universitätsverlag, 1990).

transcends temporality (SÄPL, p. 18). The Schopenhauerian echoes are unmistakable when the musician refers to the sound of the sea as the “Singen der Dinge”, of things that do not readily disclose themselves (SÄPL, p. 22), and when Kalypso refers to sounds as pointing beyond the visible (SÄPL, p. 24). Specific elements of Schopenhauer’s argument are also reflected in the notion that musical sounds communicate more immediately than concepts – “Kürzer begreift der Ton als der Begriff” (SÄPL, p. 26) – and that no poet has ever caught the “Ineinander des Vielfältigen” that characterises the ultimate nature of the world (SÄPL, p. 27).¹⁷ But whereas Schopenhauer argues largely by analogy – it is the formal characteristics of music that make it, in his famous phrase, an “Abbild des Willens selbst” – Döblin’s text has much more to say about the specific nature of music as a human experience and of composition as a human practice. Schopenhauer is interested in the ability of music to express the essence (*Wesen*) of human emotions rather than any specific emotional event; Döblin’s musician insists that music knows nothing of emotion as such and that, in so far as it has a semiotic language, it is only able to articulate “Erscheinungen der Gefühle” (SÄPL, p. 72). And he expatiates at length about the organisation of music, its rhythm, its proportionality, the dynamic nature of the relation between tones, and the sense of relatedness and mutual determination that a musical composition embodies (SÄPL, pp. 32-40 and 48-50), asserting that it is these qualities that *confer* a sense of meaning on the world: “einen Sinn hat die Welt, den ihr der Satz der Beziehlichkeit leiht” (SÄPL, p. 46).¹⁸ What lends his dialogue with Kalypso its dramatic quality and its poignancy, however, is his acute awareness of the limits imposed on his understanding by his physical being and the finitude of his existence by contrast with the goddess’s intimate involvement in and knowledge of the world process.

Death is a frequent and explicit theme in this text. The musician, in his solitary “Fischpredigt”, is aware of death as a concomitant of life, as a “Lebensäußerung” indeed (SÄPL, p. 32). Intellectually he can relate it to his general observation that the inherent tendency of life is “Wachsen” or even “Wuchern” (SÄPL, pp. 32 and 100), and he speaks as someone who has moved beyond any notion of an immortal soul or an animate universe. But among the various philosophical propositions that preoccupy him in

17 Schopenhauer writes that our world is nothing other than “die Erscheinung der Ideen in der Vielheit”, and sees music, like all the arts, expressing a wisdom that eludes conceptual thought: Arthur Schopenhauer, *Werke in fünf Bänden*, ed. by Ludger Lütkehaus (Zurich: Haffmanns Verlag, 1991), I, pp. 341 and 348.

18 Cf. also Kalypso’s line, “die Musik ist kein Ding an sich, sondern am Menschen” (SÄPL, p. 92).

the course of his dialogues, the question that causes him particular anguish is that of what happens to him when he dies (SÄPL, pp. 107-08). Kalypso, who can say of herself, as an immortal, that she carries death within her because she has never lived (SÄPL, p. 90) and is associated from the outset with the notion of “der starrste Tod” (SÄPL, pp. 17, 21 and 29), can rejoice in the idea of the death of the individual (or, as we might put it in Schopenhauer’s terms, of the suspension of the *principium individuationis*) as a redemption of the world (SÄPL, p. 107); and she invites the musician to accept that the world process is one of eternal becoming, remarking that without such becoming there could also be no music (SÄPL, p. 110). In the closing sequence of the drama – in which not only is the musician killed and the island and its inhabitants swept away by a stormy sea, but the struggle between an old god and a new one ends in their mutual destruction – Kalypso is herself converted into a force of nature, a hurricane that whirls “mit dröhnendem Geschrei und Gelächter” across the dancing sea, but not before she has offered the musician one further consoling thought: that the world process in which she participates is itself inherently meaningful and “von Gedankenart” (SÄPL, p. 110). Here we have an intimation of a theme that was to continue to exercise Döblin in the 1920s, culminating in the publication of *Das Ich über der Natur* (1927) and a further elaboration of his existential concerns in *Unser Dasein* (1933). Since the present article is concerned with the development of Döblin’s thinking up until the publication of *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, it is the earlier of these two texts that is of primary interest here.¹⁹

The dominant theme of *Das Ich über der Natur* (and the explanation for its curious title) is Döblin’s quest for philosophical solace in the notion of the connectedness (*Zusammenhang*) of all things, as it is revealed in the orderedness of natural phenomena and the apparent universal applicability of mathematical principles – even if he also expresses radical doubts about the ability of mathematical abstraction to communicate the reality of that connectedness. Indeed he comes close to invoking the notion of a prime mover or designer behind the entire material world. He explicitly distances himself from the idea of a personal deity (IN, p. 42) and from any religious conception of a world beyond (IN, p. 238), as he does from the Platonic notion of a higher world of forms (IN, p. 177); but his chief

19 Alfred Döblin, *Das Ich über der Natur* (Berlin: S. Fischer, 1928). It was common practice at the time for books which appeared towards the end of a calendar year to carry the following year as the date of publication. The book draws on a number of articles Döblin had published in the early 1920s: cf. *Alfred Döblin 1878-1978*, ed. by Jochen Meyer (Marbach: Ausstellungskatalog des Deutschen Literaturarchivs im Schiller-Nationalmuseum, 1978), pp. 178-86.

consoling notion is that of a spiritual or intellectual (*geistig*) principle – which he variously calls “Urwesen”, “Ur-sinn”, “Ur-geist” or “Ur-ich” – that works in and through us (as it does through all matter), and which he suggests towards the end of his book is always near and can be summoned, as if by prayer (IN, pp. 235-36). Not the least of the consolations that this perception can bring is the thought that our individual death is merely a re-absorption into the anonymous mass condition of the matter of which we are formed (IN, pp. 102-104) and, moreover, that as creatures of the material universe we thus participate in the eternal making and unmaking of forms in accordance with the principles ordained by the “Urwesen” (IN, p. 117). In one of the most revealing phrases of the whole text, Döblin writes that the personal subject “wiegt sich” – that it is, so to speak, rocked as in a cradle²⁰ – in the integrated continuity that is constituted by the innumerable manifestations of energy and physical matter observable in the universe (IN, p. 66; cf. also IN, p. 91).

The implications of the religiosity that was to manifest itself in Döblin’s writings with increasing insistency after 1933 need not detain us here. The intricacies of Döblin’s attitudes towards Judaism, Christianity, and the very notion of a creator God at different stages of his life have been investigated with great thoroughness by Helmuth Kiesel and others.²¹ In *Das Ich über der Natur* Döblin is articulating a fundamental set of beliefs about the world which is self-avowedly independent of any theistic principle, and which aims to be consistent with established scientific knowledge while also reaching out for a sense of intellectual coherence that transcends the discrete discoveries of empirical investigation. At several points he alludes to specific scientific findings with a view to integrating them into his argument: he mentions the results of radio crystallography, the existence of electrons within the atom, the notion of particular chemicals being produced within the sun, and

20 The stock German metaphor is commonly used in the sense of cherishing a notion.

21 See Helmuth Kiesel, *Literarische Trauerarbeit. Das Exil- und Spätwerk Alfred Döblins* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1986); Thomas Isermann, *Der Text und das Unsagbare. Studien zu Religionsuche und Werkpoetik bei Alfred Döblin* (Idstein: Schulz-Kirchner, 1989); Christoph Bartscherer, *Das Ich und die Natur. Alfred Döblins literarischer Weg im Licht seiner Religionsphilosophie* (Paderborn: Igel, 1997); and Friedrich Emde, *Alfred Döblin. Sein Weg zum Christentum* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1999). Cf. also Christoph Bartscherer’s contribution to this volume, pp. 192-214, especially pp. 200-01 and 206-14. For a summary in English of the issues surrounding Döblin’s later conversion to Catholicism in 1941, see also David Midgley, “Döblin in Hollywood”, in *Refuge and Reality: Feuchtwanger and the European Emigrés in California*, ed. by Pól O’Dochartaigh and Alexander Stephan (Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2005), pp. 57-69.

Einstein's conception of a space-time continuum that is integral to the material universe but is also strangely bent (IN, pp. 33, 37, 39-40, and 205). The general drift of his argument, however, involves establishing that there is no overall sense of purpose or direction apparent in the world of material phenomena itself (IN, p. 49), that the piecemeal scientific understanding of physical manifestations therefore needs to be complemented with some metaphysical precept (IN, p. 66), that the evidence of overall equilibrium in the natural world should be taken as a symptom of its "nichtphysikalische Ganzheit" (IN, p. 55), and that the seat of ultimate meaning in the universe is a subject (*Ich*) that resides *above* nature (IN, p. 80). There is clearly a sense, then, in which the metaphysical entity Döblin invokes is very like a surrogate deity for a scientific age, and when he calls, at the end of the text, for a systematic inquiry into the metaphysical issues he has raised, he is content to speak of what he has in mind as a revival of theology (IN, p. 242). As Barbara Belhafaoui-Köhn puts it in her stimulating discussion of this text and its conceivable intellectual affinities, "Döblin [verehrt] mit quasireligiösem Gefühl [...], was er als Wissenschaftler nicht ergründen kann".²² In Döblin's perception, the ultimate determining force above nature, and thus the seat of meaning, is itself inherently organic, dynamic and eternally becoming – it transcends time and space, and is thus without beginning and end (IN, pp. 196 and 212). As he evokes its operation in the observable world, he speaks in terms of conditioning rather than causality (IN, pp. 186-87 and 192-96), and of its presence in all matter, both organic and inorganic, as a kind of animation (*Beseeltheit* or *Beseelung*) (IN, pp. 7-8, 11, and 181).

In a general way, the arguments that Döblin develops show him to be participating in a powerful trend in the German intellectual culture of around 1900, which had reacted against the dominance of mechanistic thinking in nineteenth-century science by asserting the need for a unifying metaphysical world-view based on organic principles, and for which the philosophy of Schopenhauer had provided fundamental impulses.²³ It is clear from his writings that Döblin had absorbed a wide range of themes and issues that had arisen from developments in biological research in the late nineteenth century. Some of these relate directly to the view that

22 Barbara Belhafaoui-Köhn, "Alfred Döblins Naturphilosophie – ein existentialistischer Universalismus", *Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft*, 31 (1987), 354-82 (p. 362).

23 See Wolfgang Riedel, *Homo Natura'. Literarische Anthropologie um 1900* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1996), pp. 41-77; Herbert Schnädelbach, *Philosophy in Germany 1831-1933* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 143-45. Cf. also Walter Gebhard, "Der Zusammenhang der Dinge". *Weltgleichnis und Naturverklärung im Totalitätsbewusstsein des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1984); Uwe Spörl, *Gottlose Mystik in der deutschen Literatur um die Jahrhundertwende* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1997), pp. 75-112.

organic phenomena can be wholly accounted for in physico-chemical terms, a view that was vigorously promoted around 1900 by the leading proponent of Darwinism in Germany, Ernst Haeckel; others relate to the opposing notion that life must be driven by some additional vital principle, which was propounded with equal vigour in the first decade of the twentieth century by one of Haeckel's pupils, Hans Driesch, and probably also to Henri Bergson's inquiries into the distinctive properties of life and his concept of "élan vital", which made a powerful impact throughout the western world in the decade after 1910.²⁴ The terms in which Döblin evokes his sense of a unifying metaphysical principle at work in nature have been found to owe much to the "godless mysticism" of Fritz Mauthner, with whom he was in personal contact from very early in his writing career²⁵; the concept of "Beseelung", with which he seeks to overcome the distinction between organic and inorganic matter, had been advanced in 1851 in the cosmological reflections of the psychologist and philosopher Gustav Theodor Fechner, which were being more widely read after 1900 than previously; and in more diffuse ways Döblin's conception of a coherent metaphysical principle at work behind the multiplicity of natural phenomena has also been linked to intellectual traditions that reach back to the nature philosophy of Schelling, to the organicist thinking of Goethe and Herder, and to the alchemy of Paracelsus, amongst other things.²⁶

From the particular ways in which he argues his case, however, it is apparent that Döblin does not simply borrow ideas from others, but develops them in his own distinctive way. He is rarely content to outline his thinking in abstract terms, and seeks rather to communicate its implications by allusion to concrete, sensory experience. As he states early in *Das Ich über der Natur*, "Ich will keine Wahrheit und keine Erkenntnis

24 See Belhafaoui-Köhn, "Alfred Döblins Naturphilosophie", p. 361; Bartscherer, *Das Ich und die Natur*, pp. 189-206; Roland Dollinger, "Alfred Döblins Naturphilosophie in den Zwanziger Jahren", in *Philosophia Naturalis. Beiträge zu einer zeitgemäßen Naturphilosophie*, ed. by Thomas Arzt et al., (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1996), pp. 135-50.

25 See Kiesel, *Literarische Trauerarbeit*, pp. 163-67.

26 Cf. Belhafaoui-Köhn, "Alfred Döblins Naturphilosophie", pp. 361-65; Helmut Mader, *Sozialismus- und Revolutionsthematik im Werk Alfred Döblins, mit einer Interpretation seines Romans "November 1918"* (PhD dissertation, Mainz, 1977), pp. 40-47; Christine Maillard, "Critique de la science et théorie de la connaissance dans les 'écrits philosophiques' d'Alfred Döblin: *Das Ich über der Natur* (1927) und *Unser Dasein* (1933)", in *Littérature et théorie de la connaissance 1890-1935. Littérature und Erkenntnistheorie 1890-1935*, études réunies par Christine Maillard (Strasbourg: Presses universitaires de Strasbourg, 2004), pp. 125-40. In 1923, when reviewing Sigmund Freud's meta-psychological essay *Das Ich und das Es*, Döblin expresses the hope that the time may be ripe for Fechner's views to receive renewed attention (KS II, p. 263).

übermitteln, sondern nur ein einfaches und ursprüngliches Gefühl" (IN, p. 16). He bases his evocation of metaphysical connections not just on scientific knowledge about the inherent properties of natural substances, but on a description of what common experience enables us to recognise of those properties, such as the feel of water, fire and warmth (IN, pp. 22-35). His demonstration of universal "Beseelung" is not based, as Fechner's is, on a mere analogy between the familiar domain of the human body and the notion of the universe as a higher organism, but on the sense that the attributes with which natural substances are endowed invest them with a kind of "life", and that these attributes in turn determine the course of our life and death as human beings (IN, pp. 40-50 and 121-23). It is an approach to the description of natural phenomena that can sometimes appear naively intuitive and anthropomorphic, for example when the combustibility of wood is explained in terms of organic substances having originated by being "released" (*entlassen*) from the domain of fire (IN, p. 76), but it has the merits of poetic immediacy – "Anschaulichkeit". The insight on which Ursula Elm bases her study of the intellectual resonances at work in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* is therefore fundamentally correct: Döblin does not pursue "Lebensphilosophie" so much as "Lebensanschauung".²⁷

It is relatively easy to demonstrate the senses in which Döblin's poetological writings are related to these features of his cosmic vision. On the one hand there is what we might call the phenomenological approach to the literary representation of objects and events which was already an insistent feature of the earliest programmatic statements he published in *Der Sturm* in 1913. When he urges the leading exponent of Italian Futurism, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, to abandon hackneyed similes in favour of more direct means of evocation (SÄPL, p. 117) and when he enjoins his fellow authors – in the manifesto that he issued under the title *An Romanautoren und ihre Kritiker. Berliner Programm* – to replace such abstract terms as "Zorn", "Liebe" and "Verachtung" with a precise description of developments in the manner of a psychiatrist (SÄPL, pp. 120-21), then he is clearly looking for ways to break through the shroud of conventional discourse and let the objects and experiences of the material world speak for themselves. As he was to put it in another short public statement in 1922, "Wir haben keine Kunstprodukte, sondern Lebensäußerungen nötig" (KS II, p. 135). It is in accordance with this policy, for which he adopts the terms "steinerner Stil" and "Tatsachenphantasie" as

27 Ursula Elm, *Literatur als Lebensanschauung: zum ideengeschichtlichen Hintergrund von Alfred Döblins "Berlin Alexanderplatz"* (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 1991).

shorthand forms of reference, that he calls in 1913 for the “Hegemonie des Autors” to be broken and for the manifest presence of a narrating voice to be suppressed: “ich bin nicht ich, sondern die Straße, die Laternen, dies und dies Ereignis, weiter nichts” (SÄPL, p. 122). This is evidently the approach that Döblin has in mind when he invokes the notion of a modern form of epic writing that should supplant or reinvigorate the novel (SÄPL, p. 123), and ostensibly it carries the implication of a thorough-going subordination of the “I” that perceives and communicates to the data of external reality.²⁸ It is in the same spirit that Döblin states, in the lecture he gave at Berlin University in 1928 (*Der Bau des epischen Werks*), “Da spricht der große Epiker, die Natur, zu mir, und ich der kleine, stehe davor und freue mich, wie mein großer Bruder das kann” (SÄPL, p. 226). But any successful act of perception implies a sense – not necessarily a conscious and rationally articulated sense²⁹ – of the distinctive coherence of that which has been perceived, and of its significance in relation to other perceptions; and Döblin alludes to his own conception of the order and meaning that lie behind the observable material world when he states earlier in the same text, “Der wirklich Produktive muß [...] ganz nah an die Realität heran, an ihre Sachlichkeit, ihr Blut, ihren Geruch, und dann hat er die Sache zu durchstoßen” (SÄPL, p. 219). When he alludes to a higher reality (*Überrealität*) that the creator of fiction should render perceptible by penetrating the surface of the material world, and when he goes on to state explicitly, “die überreale Sphäre, das ist die Sphäre einer neuen Wahrheit und einer ganz besonderen Realität” (SÄPL, p. 223), then it is apparent that his conception of the role of narrative fiction is closely related to that reaching out for a metaphysical awareness of the world that he articulates in his philosophical writings.

It would be seriously misleading, however, to give the impression that the step from recognising the nature of Döblin’s metaphysical vision to interpreting his narrative works is a straightforward one. As Erich Kleinschmidt has pointed out, Döblin’s characteristic approach in his fiction, as in much of his essayistic writing, is that of explorative inquiry

28 On the implicit connections between this aspect of Döblin’s policy on narration and his philosophical reflections on individuation, see Erich Kleinschmidt, “Döblin-Studien I. Depersonale Poetik. Dispositionen des Erzählens bei Alfred Döblin”, *Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft*, 26 (1982), 383-401.

29 It is perhaps as a phenomenon of the psychology of perception that we might hope to elucidate that ambivalence that Matthias Prangel sees as constitutive of Döblin’s “modernist” aesthetics: “Alfred Döblins Überlegungen zum Roman als Beispiel einer Romanpoetologie des Modernismus”, in *Internationales Alfred-Döblin-Kolloquium Strasbourg 2003*, ed. by Christine Maillard and Monique Mombert (Bern: Peter Lang 2006), pp. 11-29.

rather than the methodical development of a preconceived view.³⁰ It was the complex diversity of the issues presented by earthly experience that evidently triggered the imaginative and combinative processes that gave rise to Döblin's novels. For *Die drei Sprünge des Wang-lun* (1916) and for *Wallenstein* (1920) he undertook substantial historical reading about eighteenth-century China and the Thirty Years' War respectively, even if he subsequently claimed not to have retained much of the detail of actual historical events (SLW, p. 30; cf. SÄPL, pp. 231-32). He absorbed considerable quantities of geographical, geological and biological information for the project that became *Berge Meere und Giganten* (1924)³¹; and serious ethnographical reading, as well as translations of central texts of Taoist and Hindu philosophy, provided him with material for *Die drei Sprünge des Wang-lun* and *Manas* (1927) respectively.³² One of the perennial problems facing Döblin scholarship, moreover, is the manifestly heterogeneous nature of the themes and cultural situations he treats in his fictional works – we should also mention in the context of our present discussion those early novels which have a contemporary German setting, his novel of adolescence *Der schwarze Vorhang* (written in 1902-03 and published in book form in 1919) and his first Berlin novel *Wadzeks Kampf mit der Dampfturbine* (1918). Indeed, Döblin could be disarmingly frank about his capacity for becoming obsessively absorbed in factual material on a particular subject at one stage, and for subsequently allowing his attention to wander onto a new subject before he had finished the book he was working on: a notorious example of this, on which Döblin himself comments, is the fantastic and self-avowedly incongruent ending of *Wallenstein*, where the Emperor Ferdinand II disappears into a forest and is murdered by a hobgoblin (SLW, pp. 49-58; cf. also SÄPL, p. 226). There appears to be no stable focus for his narrative fictions over time, so how can we relate the heterogeneity of his novels to the relatively continuous philosophical concerns that we have noted? Within the scope of the present article I cannot do more than briefly indicate the broad nature of the connections that can be made between Döblin's fictional works and his philosophical writings, but I shall attempt to do so in ways that will encourage others to explore these for themselves.

30 Kleinschmidt, "Döblin-Studien I", pp. 393-94; cf. also SÄPL, p. 743.

31 See Gabriele Sander, "Alfred Döblins Roman *Berge Meere und Giganten* – aus der Handschrift gelesen", *Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft*, 45 (2001), 39-69.

32 See Zheng Fee, *Alfred Döblins Roman "Die drei Sprünge des Wang-lun". Eine Untersuchung zu den Quellen und zum geistigen Gehalt* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1991); Heinz Graber, *Döblins Epos "Manas"* (Bern: Francke, 1967).

To judge by the inherent character of Döblin's earliest published novel, *Die drei Sprünge des Wang-lun*, in combination with his early programmatic statements, what seems to have attracted him to the ostensibly exotic subject-matter was the opportunity to tell a story characterised by vigorous action and vivid contrasts while eschewing the conventional psychological discourse of the contemporary European novel, which he had rejected. Döblin's treatment of the Chinese material also shows him to be working empathetically with experiences of hardship, imperial oppression, autocratic power, violent revolt, and the questioning of the practical outcomes of such revolt: Wang-lun, a fisherman's son, avenges the death of a friend by killing an imperial officer, flees to the mountains, where he is initiated into the doctrine of non-violence by a former Buddhist monk, and eventually dies leading an insurrection which is defeated amid increasingly brutal atrocities on either side. The "drei Sprünge" of the title relate to the pattern that he himself ultimately recognises in his life, with each "leap" relating to the complex constellation of circumstances in the corresponding phase of his life, but they also point to the existential decisions associated with each phase in turn: to take militant action, to accept the premise that such action is ultimately futile, and to meet force with force when pressed. In the case of *Wadzeks Kampf mit der Dampfturbine*, the focus of the narrative is on business competition within Berlin society, related to technological development and the nature of capitalist enterprise; the treatment is manifestly anti-heroic, and Wadzek's struggle is presented as a futile and comically grotesque attempt to assert his individual will against the dominant trends of economic development. Built into the comic portrayal of Wadzek's bewilderment and disorientation, however, are moments of acute observation, ostensibly related to his hypersensitive state of mind, the acuity of which is likened to the "Exaktheit und Sicherheit eines physikalischen Instruments" (WK, p. 66). That determinedly phenomenological approach to the representation of objects and events that is a frequent feature of Döblin's narratives elsewhere is here built into the account of the protagonist's experiences of the world with which he is doing battle. It is in their engagement with the particularity of earthly experience, with the sensory immediacy of our perceptions of the world we inhabit, that both these texts reflect one dimension of the philosophical issues with which we have seen the young Döblin to have been wrestling.

This argument can be made more strongly still in the case of *Der schwarze Vorhang*, the composition of which dates from the period in which Döblin was working on his Nietzsche essays – 1902-03. Here it is

worth emphasising the work's sub-title "Roman von den Worten und Zufällen": the thinking that seems to have determined the desultory and often violent nature of the plot of this novel was that concrete expression needs to be found for the discrete and conflicting emotional impulses that are conventionally cloaked by the use of the term "Liebe", and that the course of an erotic relationship is determined by contingent factors rather than any telic goal.³³ The various episodes in the profoundly ambivalent and ultimately destructive relationship that the adolescent protagonist Johannes develops with a young woman exemplify both his incomprehension towards the demons that manifest themselves within him and the communicative barrier that exists between the mental experiences of one individual and another. The yearning to overcome that sense of separation and self-alienation is an implicit theme of Johannes's musing, and an intimation of the ultimate oneness of being is apparent in the motif of the all-consuming flame at the end of the text.³⁴ In this work, we may conclude, Döblin was exploring, through the physical imagery that he works with, the limits of our awareness of ourselves as biological creatures and of the manifold natural forces that determine our behaviour and our relationships with other human beings and the world in general. In other words, this early fictional work was approaching from the direction of phenomenological inquiry the baffling questions of human existence that Döblin would subsequently try to resolve with his metaphysical conjectures.

In both *Die drei Sprünge des Wang-lun* and *Wallenstein* Döblin was less concerned with the narrative representation of specific historical events than with the evocation of the fate of human populations, of what they suffer and what they are capable of perpetrating, over periods of time; and it has been shown how a sense of cyclical developments and rhythmic patterns associated with natural processes is reflected in the very style and structure of these works.³⁵ In the case of *Die drei Sprünge des Wang-lun* that effect is reinforced by frequent allusions to Buddhist culture and its special veneration of natural phenomena. In the case of *Wallenstein*, the

33 Döblin elucidated the intention that lay behind this formulation in a letter to Axel Juncker in April 1904 (Br I, p. 23). As Anthony Riley notes in his *Nachwort* to the edition of this work in the *Ausgewählte Werke*, in Döblin's manuscript the main title had been "Worte und Zufälle" (JR, p. 307). For an analysis of the work's themes in relation to the language philosophy of Fritz Mauthner, see Birgit Hoock, *Modernität als Paradox. Der Begriff der "Moderne" und seine Anwendung auf das Werk Alfred Döblins (bis 1933)* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1997), pp. 163-91.

34 Cf. Hoock, *Modernität als Paradox*, pp. 166-68 and 187-88.

35 Klaus Müller-Salget, *Alfred Döblin. Werk und Entwicklung*, 2nd edition (Bonn: Bouvier, 1988), pp. 120-31 and 165-69.

focus is on an unflinching depiction of ruthless human behaviour and – leaving aside that moment of the fantastic which brings the melancholic Emperor Ferdinand face to face with a demonic representative of the natural order in the final chapter – any sense of a transcendental perspective on the natural world is absent; but by the same token, human behaviour is often evoked here in metaphorical terms which firmly relate it to a conception of natural processes as raw, brutal and primeval. Döblin's text often deploys colourful animal epithets when characterising political and military leaders – buffalo, bison, mammoth, boar, bulldog and panther (W, pp. 9, 12, 174, 241, 242, and 356) – and his Wallenstein is an unscrupulous power-monger and profiteer who is repeatedly referred to as a “Drache”, a reptilian creature emerging from the swamp (W, pp. 241-42, 249, 469, and 583).³⁶ Both these aspects, the close association of human beings with primal natural processes and the evocation of cyclical patterns, are similarly apparent in *Berge Meere und Giganten*, in which Döblin imagines a future dominated by ever-intensifying wars and political conflicts on a global scale. The fruits of Döblin's nature studies in the early 1920s are apparent here in his evocation of the relationship between human agency and the natural world. Extrapolating from the experiences of the First World War, he evokes inter-continental competition for raw materials and food supplies, populations progressively organised into technocratic city-states, and an increasingly ingenious exploitation of natural resources, culminating in the harnessing of volcanic heat to turn Greenland into colonisable territory. When this gargantuan enterprise leads to cataclysmic disaster in its turn, a surviving remnant of the human race resolves to live in a spirit of remorse, nurturing the memory of catastrophe as the guideline for a wiser symbiosis with the natural environment. While Döblin's fascination with the connectedness of all natural phenomena, organic and inorganic, is apparent in his imaginative account of the limits to which technological inventiveness might ultimately be taken, the futuristic narrative of *Berge Meere und Giganten* aims at the articulation, not so much of a metaphysical vision, as of the need for humility and ethical responsibility towards the awesome and potentially overwhelming power of nature.

With *Manas*, which was published in the same year as *Das Ich über der Natur* (1927), we come closer to a precise sense of the relation between Döblin's narrative fiction and his cosmological speculations. Here he was drawing on elements of Hindu mythology, particularly the various manifestations of the god Shiva and the redemptive feminine power of the

36 Ibid., pp. 174 and 191.

figure of Savitri, which provided him with a ready source of vivid imagery associated with the personification of natural forces, and he embellished these from his own imagination (the “Totenfeld” that Manas visits in order to experience suffering, for example, is Döblin’s own invention).³⁷ But in order to understand what Döblin is attempting in this text, it is crucial, as Christine Maillard has recently pointed out, to recognise that the name Manas does not relate to any figure in Hindu mythology, but to a concept in Hindu philosophy which is roughly cognate with the notion of mind: as Döblin would have known from his sources, “manas” denotes the mental capacity for unifying perception, for co-ordinating sensory experiences.³⁸ If we accept the notion of the figure of Manas as a personification of such a mental capacity, then Döblin’s verse epic can be seen as a graphic representation of it as dynamic in character, malleable, and embedded in the world of nature. It is susceptible to domination by demonic impulses (the three demons that take possession of Manas’ body in the opening section) and capable of destruction and “rebirth” (through the loving and nurturing intervention of Savitri); it is capable of megalomaniac self-assertion (in the revived Manas’ dealings with the world around him) but also of facing up to the inherent destructive powers of nature (embodied in the god Shiva). On the closing pages of Döblin’s text it is also shown to have the ability to call upon the “Seele der Seelen” (the universal *Atman* and the unifying principle at work in the world at large, which parallels the status of *manas* within the individual), to summon up the powers of nature that are capable of combining to impede the destructive dance of Shiva – and thereby to endure. The affinities with C. G. Jung’s conception of individuation that Maillard recognises in this scenario are highly suggestive and would undoubtedly repay more exhaustive investigation. But the aspect of *Manas* that is of particular interest in the present context is Döblin’s deployment of a mythic mode of representation which goes beyond mere allegory and constitutes in itself a direct means of envisioning – of rendering “anschaulich” – a complex conception of the mind as a function of the dynamic interplay of natural forces and capacities (the “Ich *in* der Natur”) which corresponds to Döblin’s projection of a universal unifying principle (an “Ich *über* der

37 See Graber, *Döblins Epos “Manas”*, p. 115.

38 See Christine Maillard, “Da stieg Manas, ein leiblicher Mensch, über Klippen und das Totenfeld”. Alfred Döblins Indienrezeption – Mythopoiese und Subjekttheorie im Epos *Manas* (1927)”, in *Grenzgänge. Studien zur Literatur der Moderne*, Festschrift für Hans-Jörg Knobloch, ed. by Helmut Koopmann and Manfred Misch (Paderborn: Mentis, 2002), pp. 151-77 (p. 163). Chief among Döblin’s sources, alongside the Hindu myths themselves, was Helmut von Glasenapp, *Der Hinduismus* (1922).

Natur"). It is here above all that the concrete imagery of Döblin's narrative fiction can be seen to correspond to, and to complement, the discursive account of his world-view that we find in his philosophical writings.

Döblin's philosophical concerns in the period before the publication of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* display the characteristic impulses of a broad intellectual trend around the turn of the century which looked for a unifying metaphysical vision to transcend the disparateness of modern scientific knowledge, and which looked to Schopenhauer, Spinoza, and the legacy of Romantic nature philosophy for stimuli towards achieving such a vision. In his early fiction he can be seen to be investigating a range of particular issues that arose in relation to that broad intellectual trend. In *Der schwarze Vorhang* he explored the nature of the forces at work within an individual human life and within a sexual relationship which tend to be obscured by the conventionality of language; and in *Manas* he turned to mythic imagery to express his more fully developed sense of the relation between the integrity of the human individual and the complex and turbulent manifestation of natural forces. Where he addressed the question of human endeavour and its effectiveness – on a personal and mundane level in *Wadzeks Kampf mit der Dampfturbine*, on increasingly grandiose historical canvasses in *Die drei Sprünge des Wang-lun*, *Wallenstein* and *Berge Meere und Giganten* – his expansive narratives delve into the complex, but specific play of supra-personal forces which condition the outcomes of such endeavour: the social, the psychological, the cultural, the political, the biological, and the geo-physical. However extravagantly imaginative his fictions may sometimes appear, the substance with which they work invariably remains close to what I have called his phenomenological approach to the representation of earthly existence, his absorption in the appearance and feel of empirical reality. It is in their treatment of human agency, as a factor that is both of the natural world and at the same time also split off from it or even set against it, that Döblin's early novels can be seen to be exploring the seam between an integrative vision of the world of nature and the material phenomena of human experience.

Die Geburt des *Döblinismus* aus dem Geist des Fin de Siècle: Döblins frühe Erzählungen im Spannungsfeld von Ästhetik, Poetik und Medizin

STEPHANIE CATANI

This chapter examines the short stories published in the collection *Die Ermordung einer Butterblume* (1912) in the context of the aesthetic programme of the *fin de siècle*. It argues that Döblin developed his own poetic self-understanding in direct confrontation with *fin de siècle* literature, and in particular, with the conflation of medical and literary discourses prevalent at the turn of the century. Defining programmatic features of “Döblinismus”, such as emphases on the natural and the material, and a rejection of the personal and psychological, emerged in Döblin’s confrontation with decadence and aestheticism; he reflected on them in his autobiographical and theoretical writings, and gave them form in his stories as early as the *Butterblume* collection. The chapter thus shows that Döblin incorporated aestheticist and decadent influences into the texts of 1902-12, but never allowed them to monopolise his writing. In *Die Tänzerin und der Leib* he twisted the consumptive body, romanticised by the decadents, into a troublesome, defunct “piece of meat”; texts such as *Das Stiftsfräulein und der Tod* or *Die Helferin* countered the excesses of aestheticist figurations of death with ruthless and sometimes brutal narratives of the process of dying.

Der Beitrag untersucht Döblins 1912 veröffentlichten Erzählband *Die Ermordung einer Butterblume* ausgehend vom literaturästhetischen Programm des Fin de Siècle. In der direkten Konfrontation mit der Fin de Siècle-Literatur, insbesondere mit der die Jahrhundertwende determinierenden Diskursverschränkung von Medizin und Literatur entwickelt Döblin – so die These des Beitrags – sein poetologisches Selbstverständnis. Programmatische Merkmale seines *Döblinismus* wie Deper-sonation, Naturalisierung, Materialisierung und Entpsychologisierung entstehen gerade in der kritischen Auseinandersetzung mit Dekadenz und Ästhetizismus, werden in den biografischen und poetologischen Schriften Döblins theoretisch reflektiert und in seinen frühen Erzählungen bereits literarisch konturiert. Dabei wird gezeigt, wie Döblin in den zwischen 1902 und 1912 entstandenen Texten ästhetizistische und dekadente Einflüsse aufgreift, ohne sich von ihnen verführen und vereinnahmen zu lassen. So pervertiert der von den Décadents verklarte schwindsüchtige Körper in der Erzählung *Die Tänzerin und der Leib* in ein lästiges, nicht funktionierendes „Stück Aas“ und konterkarieren Texte wie *Das Stiftsfräulein und der Tod* oder die *Helferin* ästhetizistisch überhöhte Todesfigurationen durch schonungslose, bisweilen brutal erzählte Prozesse des Sterbens.

Am 11. August 1913 erscheint in *Der Zeitgeist*, dem Beiblatt zum *Berliner Tageblatt*, mit Albert Ehrensteins Besprechung von Döblins *Die Ermordung einer Butterblume und andere Erzählungen* eine der ersten Rezensionen zu dem im November 1912 publizierten Sammelband. Ehrenstein bemüht sich darin zunächst um eine Kurzzvorstellung des 34jährigen Autors, an dem, so stellt der Rezensent mit Bedauern fest, „der Ruhm noch vorübergehend“:

Er ist poetischer Arzt wie Arthur Schnitzler, und das Zeitraubende medizinisch-psychiatrischer Studien wie die Indifferenz der Verleger ward ihm stark fühlbar. [...] Noch mehr kommt in den kürzlich (bei Georg Müller, München) erschienenen Novellen „Die Ermordung einer Butterblume“ das zu prägnantem Ausdruck, was für Alfred Döblin charakteristisch ist: edle Leidenschaftlichkeit des Stils, Glut einer gleichwohl hartgeschmiedeten Sprache, spannend-plastische Handlung, Psychologie ohne ekelhaft-intime Selbstzerfaserung [...] Manches Ärztlich-Konstruktive erinnert abermals an A. Schnitzler.¹

Mit der Figur des „poetischen Arztes“ scheint Ehrenstein ein Autorenmodell zu bezeichnen, das mit Blick auf Döblins Doppelsexistenz als Mediziner und Schriftsteller in seiner Bedeutung sowohl für die ersten poetologischen Positionierungsversuche Döblins als auch für die formal-ästhetische Gestaltung seiner frühen Erzählung nicht zu unterschätzen ist. Besondere Relevanz, so möchte dieser Beitrag zeigen, entwickelt diese biografische Besonderheit gerade im Rahmen einer Auseinandersetzung mit Döblins Texten im Kontext des literarischen Fin de Siècle – einer Jahrhundertwende, die sich über eine kritische Auseinandersetzung mit dem naturalistischen Programm definiert, dem mit der Literatur der Dekadenz, des Symbolismus und des Ästhetizismus nun alternative Kunstmodelle entgegengehalten werden.²

Vor allem aber in der literarischen Reflexion medizinischen, speziell psychopathologischen Wissens entfaltet diese Jahrhundertwende ihre besondere Sprengkraft: Nicht nur werden medizinische Befunde nun literarisch inszeniert, sondern wird Literatur zugleich unter dezidiert medizinische Beobachtung gestellt. Döblin, so zeigt der Blick auf seine poetologischen wie auch autobiografischen Schriften, reflektiert diese populäre und eifrig vorangetriebene Grenzüberschreitung kritisch und kündigt die eigene Moderne, das ästhetische Programm seines „Döblinismus“, gerade dadurch an, dass er nicht nur Literatur, sondern vor allem die Medizin stärker in ihr Recht zu setzen scheint und dadurch auf eine Trennung beider Diskurse besteht.

1 *Alfred Döblin im Spiegel der zeitgenössischen Kritik*, hrsg. von Ingrid Schuster und Ingrid Bode in Zusammenarbeit mit dem Deutschen Literaturarchiv Marbach/N. (Bern/München: Francke, 1973), 7-10 (S. 8-9).

2 Zu Dekadenz, Symbolismus und Ästhetizismus als den relevanten literarischen Strömungen des Fin de Siècle vgl. die Einleitung von *Fin de Siècle*, hg. von Monika Fludernik und Ariane Huml (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 2002), S. 2.

Die folgende Erörterung der frühen Erzählungen Döblins erfolgt dabei keineswegs willkürlich im Kontext der Jahrhundertwende: Zahlreiche Figuren, Motive und Stoffe seiner Texte resultieren aus dem Geist eines *Fin de Siècle*, das dem naturalistischen Kollektiv die Analyse eines sich in Frage stellenden Ichs entgegenhält, das einen zwischen Traum und Einbildung schwankenden Wirklichkeitsbegriff profiliert und dekadente Lebensmüdigkeit ebenso wie einen ästhetizistisch überhöhten Seelen- und Nervenwelt literarisch inszeniert. Döblins Erzählungen legen Parallelen zu diesem keineswegs homogenen, aber doch dezidiert anti-naturalistischen literarischen Programm der Jahre um 1900 durchaus offen: Hier begegnen neoromantische und symbolisch codierte Märchenstoffe in *Die Verwandlung* und *Ritter Blaubart*, tritt mit der fragilen, schwindstüchtigen Tänzerin eine favorisierte Kunstfigur des literarischen Jugendstils auf und wenden sich Erzählungen wie *Australia* oder die Titelnovelle *Die Ermordung einer Butterblume* der Pathologie des Ichs, den Psychopathogrammen narzisstischer Helden zu, deren Weg in den Wahnsinn im Medium der Literatur nachgezeichnet wird.

„Fin de Siècle und kein Ende!“

Schwierigkeiten bei einer Lektüre Döblins im Kontext des *Fin de Siècle* bereitet sicherlich die problematische und bis heute uneinheitlich geliebene Epochenbezeichnung selbst, die bereits unmittelbar nach ihrem Aufkommen in Frankreich 1888 von Zeitgenossen kritisch reflektiert wird.³ So moniert auch Fritz Mauthner 1891 unwillig: „Fin de siècle und kein Ende“, um anschließend mit Blick auf die inflationäre Verwendung des Begriffs zur Selbstbeschreibung einer ganzen Generation festzustellen:

So wie etwa wackere Tischlermeister einem Schwerkranken noch bei Lebzeiten das Maß zum Sarge nehmen, so wie in einer tüchtigen Redaktion der Nekrolog für einen berühmten Mann, oder auch für einen bejahrten Fürsten lange vor dem Gebrauch bereitliegt, so sind wir in das letzte Jahrzehnt des neunzehnten

3 Zum Ursprung des Begriffs vgl. Wolfgang Asholt; Walter Fähnders, „Nachwort“, in *Fin de siècle. Erzählungen. Gedichte, Essays* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1993), S. 417-36 (S. 417). Zur Polyvalenz des Begriffes vgl. *Fin de Siècle*, hg. von Fludernik und Huml. In ihrer Einleitung (S. 1) sprechen die Herausgeberinnen von „Interpretationsdifferenzen einzelner Disziplinen und literaturwissenschaftlicher Auffassungen“, welche die Auseinandersetzung mit dem *Fin de Siècle* auch gegenwärtig noch kennzeichne.

Jahrhunderts mit dem erlösenden Wort fin de siècle eingetreten und gebrauchen es bald bewundernd, bald entschuldigend, immer aber sinnlos.⁴

Im Folgenden soll sich der Begriff weniger auf die lebensverneinende Stimmung im ausgehenden 19. Jahrhundert beziehen, gegen die sich Mauthners Kritik insbesondere richtet. Vielmehr fungiert das Fin de Siècle als literarische „(Mini)-Epoche“⁵ auch als Vorbote der Moderne und kündigt den Aufbruchsgedanken einer um Innovation und Weiterentwicklung bemühten Generation an, die ihr Selbstbewusstsein nicht zuletzt aus den wissenschaftlichen Erkenntnissen bezieht, die das 19. Jahrhundert erringen konnte. Gleichzeitig führt dieser wissenschaftliche Fortschritt zu einer Konkurrenz von Natur- und Geisteswissenschaften, welche die Jahrzehnte vor und nach 1900 in sämtlichen kulturellen und gesellschaftlichen Bereichen beherrscht.

Literarisch vergegenwärtigt sich dieser Dualismus besonderes deutlich, spiegelt sich geradezu in der Parallelität von Fin de Siècle-Strömungen zum einen und dem noch präsenten Naturalismus zum anderen. Marie Herzfeld erkennt in ihrem programmatischen Essay *Fin de Siècle* die Schwierigkeiten der Décadents gerade darin, sich von naturalistischen Prozessen wie der „Methode exakter Wissenschaft“ nicht emanzipieren zu können:

Ihre Kunst ist Auflehnung gegen den Naturalismus, ihre Philosophie ein Protest gegen die exakte Wissenschaft. Und doch ist das einzig Dauernde in ihrer Kunst die Anwendung der Methode des Naturalismus auf seelische Probleme und die Überführung der Methode exakter Wissenschaft auf eine spiritualistische Weltbetrachtung. [...] Wer die Gegenwart überwinden will, der muss durch die Gegenwart durch.⁶

Der Begriff, an dem sich der das Fin de Siècle prägende Konflikt zwischen naturwissenschaftlicher Präzision und ästhetizistischer Überhöhung paradigmatisch zeigt, ist der der Psychologie, der gerade im Hinblick auf die Texte Döblins seine Relevanz offen legen wird. Hermann Bahr, der in Wien und Berlin nachdrücklich die *Überwindung des Naturalismus* einfordert, macht in der Psychologie gerade jenen Schwellenbereich aus, der die Überwindung des Alten durch das Neue sichtbar machen müsse:

Jetzt wird es sich offenbaren, daß, wenn wir freilich im Grunde unserer Natur zu viel Psychologen sind, um uns an dem objektiven Naturalismus auf die Dauer zu genügen, wir doch schon zu lange unter dem Einfluß des Naturalismus gewesen sind, um jemals zur alten Psychologie wieder zurückzukehren. Das moderne

4 Fritz Mauthner, „Fin de siècle und kein Ende“, *Das Magazin für Literatur*, 60 (1891), Nr. 1, 13-15 (S. 15).

5 Fludernik, Huml, „Einleitung“, S. 1.

6 Marie Herzfeld, „Fin-de-siècle“, in *Menschen und Bücher. Literarische Studien* (Wien: Leopold/Weiß, 1893), S. 161-172 (S. 171).

Bedürfnis verlangt Psychologie, gegen die Einseitigkeit des bisherigen Naturalismus; aber es verlangt eine Psychologie, welche der langen Gewohnheit des Naturalismus Rechnung trägt. Es verlangt eine Psychologie, welche durch den Naturalismus hindurch und über ihn hinausgegangen ist.⁷

Döblin reflektiert die Konkurrenz ästhetischer und naturwissenschaftlicher Ansprüche nicht zuletzt im eigenen Existenzmodell, dem des „poetischen Arztes“, immer wieder neu – dies belegt insbesondere seine lang andauernde Beschäftigung mit den literarischen Möglichkeiten des Naturalismus und dem Innovationspotential naturalistischer Methoden für die Kunst.⁸

Döblin und das Fin de Siècle

Wenn überhaupt, hat eine Döblin-Lektüre im Kontext des literarischen Fin de Siècle bislang vorrangig am Beispiel seiner literarischen Erstversuche stattgefunden. So wurden vor allem dem Romandebüt *Jagende Rosse* (1900) dekadente und ästhetizistische Einflüsse attestiert, wohl nicht zuletzt aufgrund der Einordnung, die Döblin rückblickend selbst vornimmt: „Ein lyrischer Ich-Roman. Gar keine Handlung; nur seelischer Entwicklungsgang in lyrischer bildhafter Beschreibung. Es treten keine Personen neben dem Ich auf“ (SLW, S. 80).

Auch die darauf folgenden Prosawerke *Adonis* und *Erwachen* (1901/02), ebenso der Roman *Der schwarze Vorhang. Roman von den Worten und Zufällen* (1902/1903) zeigen sich beeinflusst von ästhetizistisch-preziösen Entwürfen der Jahrhundertwende; sie sind in der Folge häufig als erste Gehversuche Döblins auf dem Weg zu seinem eigentlichen künstlerischen Selbstverständnis gewertet worden. Die literaturhistorische Einordnung Döblins jenseits dieser frühesten Texte beläuft sich hingegen vorrangig auf Versuche, das literarische Wirken des Autors bis zum *Wanglun*-Roman (Entstehung 1912/13) in Auseinandersetzung mit dem auslaufenden Naturalismus, dem durch Marinetti initiierten italienischen Futurismus und dem beginnenden Expressionismus anzusiedeln. Eine Bezugnahme auf die dekadente, impressionistische und ästhetizistische Literatur des Fin de Siècle hat allenfalls stattgefunden, um Döblins Erzählungen als rückständig und einer eigentlich schon überwundenen

7 Hermann Bahr, *Die Überwindung des Naturalismus*, Kritische Schriften in Einzelausgaben II, hg. von Claus Pias (Weimar: VDG, 2004), S. 62.

8 Vgl. z. B. die Texte *Bekennnis zum Naturalismus* (1920, KS I, S. 291-93) *Der Geist des naturalistischen Zeitalters* (1924, SÄPL, S. 168-190), *Vom alten zum neuen Naturalismus* (1930, SÄPL, S. 263-269).

Konventionalität verhaftet zu kritisieren. Gerade den weniger prominenten Texten jenseits der Titelnovelle *Die Ermordung einer Butterblume*, die inzwischen übereinstimmend als expressionistische Pionierleistung gelesen wird,⁹ wurde eine zu schwache Loslösung von den literarischen Erstversuchen und vom überladenen Dekor des Fin de Siècle attestiert. Walter Muschg fällt diesbezüglich bereits 1965 im Nachwort zu den von ihm herausgegebenen Erzählungen ein deutliches Urteil:

Aber Döblin ist hier noch nicht der Wortführer der naturalistischen, sozialistischen Kunstrevolution, für die er nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg heftig eintrat, sondern selbst noch erstaunlich in abgelebten literarischen Konventionen befangen. Wie so viele Umstürzler seiner Generation erlag auch er noch den Stimmungszaubereien des Symbolismus, die damals in den Gedichten und lyrischen Dramen Hofmannsthals, in den Frühwerken Rilkes, in den Novellen Thomas Manns die Jugend faszinierten. [...] Von den Geschichten der „Ermordung einer Butterblume“ schwelgt die Hälfte noch derart in der morbiden Sprach- und Seelenmusik des Fin de siècle, daß sie nur noch als Zeugnisse seiner Entwicklung interessant sind.¹⁰

Auch Döblin selbst geht rückblickend in seiner *Autobiographischen Skizze* (1922) eher streng mit seinem ersten Sammelband um, bezeichnet die darin vereinten Texte später als „tröpfelnde Novellen des verflossenen Jahrzehnts“ (SLW, S. 36-37). Tatsächlich lassen sich beim Blick auf das literarische Frühwerk Döblins zumindest hinsichtlich Stoff- und Motivwahl noch deutliche Einflüsse der auslaufenden Fin de Siècle-Literatur nachweisen. Diese Auseinandersetzung mit den literarischen Vorläufern verläuft jedoch grundsätzlich selbstreflexiv und -kritisch und bereitet dem Experimentieren mit avantgardistischen Formen bereits den ersten Boden. So ist Döblins Bemühen um geeignete literarische Ausdrucksmöglichkeiten, ist seine Suche nach dem eigenen künstlerischen Selbstverständnis in ihren Anfängen nicht zuletzt in – wenngleich kritischer – Auseinandersetzung mit den ästhetischen Strömungen der Jahrhundertwende zu verstehen.

9 Vgl. den frühen Beitrag von Joris Duytschaever, „Eine Pionierleistung des Expressionismus. Alfred Döblins Erzählung ‚Die Ermordung einer Butterblume‘“, *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur neueren Germanistik*, 2 (1973), 27-43. Zu expressionistischen Merkmalen des ersten Erzählbandes insgesamt vgl. Klaus Kanzog, „Alfred Döblin und die Anfänge des expressionistischen Prosastils. Zur Textkritik des ‚Ritter Blaubart‘“, *Jahrbuch der Deutschen Schillergesellschaft*, 17 (1973), 63-83.

10 Walter Muschg, „Nachwort“, in Alfred Döblin, *Die Ermordung einer Butterblume und andere Erzählungen*, 10. neu durchges. Auflage, (München: dtv, 1998), S. 205-16 (S. 206-07).