Of Weimar's First and Last Things: Montage, Revolution, and Fascism in Alfred Döblin's November 1918 *and* Berlin Alexanderplatz

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By the mid-1920s, montage had established itself as the dominant syntax in the formal language utilized by writers, artists, and architects on the left in the Weimar Republic. For the Berlin Dadaists, photomontage provided the technical means for the figurative destruction of the old order–the order of art as well as that of society–as well as for the construction of a series of figures of a new, sometimes utopian social space. The development of a montage-syntax soon began to have an effect on a broad range of cultural objects ranging from advertising and photojournalism in the popular press through the application of Dada techniques (often by the former Dadas themselves) to the staging of political theater pieces by Erwin Piscator. In the early twenties, a parallel instance of montage practices became evident at the Weimar Bauhaus; first the experimental houses and then the *Siedlungen* influenced by Gropius and his colleagues show the possibilities inherent in a combination of montage with new construction materials and techniques centering on prefabrication. In 1925, with the widespread showing of Eisenstein's *Battlecruiser Potemkin,* a second wave of montage fever swept through Germany. First evident in such films as Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin, Symphony of a Great City,* cinematic montage initially served mainly to replicate the frantic, discontinuous space and pace of the urban metropolis. But, often with film as a proximate example, montage soon began to exert a widespread influence in literature, where its uses were more diverse. Walter Benjamin's *One Way Street* invents a form of verbal montage derived in equal parts from photomontage and cinema. Benjamin's intricate interlacing of the erotic and the political in this text not only pushes the limits of the representation of things, but also draws on Dadaist visual techniques in an attempt to figure a new kind of social space. Montage served, in short, as the primary means to the figuration of a new, visionary social space in the 1920s.

Alfred Döblin's adaption of montage techniques in his novels was, if not the first, then certainly the most widely recognized such novelistic practice in Weimar. Beginning with the novel *Wallenstein* in 1919, Döblin had developed what he at first termed a "cinema style" *(Kinostil),* but gradually came to term montage. His great novel of 1928, *Berlin Alexanderplatz,* was only the best known of his novels to employ montage. Within five years of the feverish success of *Berlin Alexanderplatz,* however, Döblin's works were added to the lists of books banned in fascist Germany, and Döblin became part of the flood of German intellectuals forced to flee Hitler and seek refuge abroad. In exile in France and the United States, Döblin continued to write and publish, producing a series of works

in which he attempted, among other things, to analyze the rise and final victory of fascism in Germany. After an attempt at the traditional form of the novel in *Pardon wird nicht gegeben* of 1934, Döblin in his next two works–a historical novel on the colonization of the Amazon, *Das Land ohne Tod* of 1937–38, and *November 1918: Eine deutsche Revolution*–returned to the formal vocabulary of modernism that had characterized his work in the 1920s, and especially to literary montage. The reasons for that return are complex and form the crux of the present essay.

Döblin's novel of the German revolution, *November 1918,* has a composition and publication history that bears painful testimony to the problems of exile and to the truncations of world history at the time. Döblin began work on the novel in 1937 in Paris and finished it in 1943 in Hollywood; the first volume was published in 1938, the last three only in 1948–50. Döblin's novel portrays the revolutionary events of the period from 10 November 1918 through 6 January 1918; in a sort of epilogue, the novel follows the fortunes of Friedrich Becker, one of its central figures, in the years after the revolution. The particular, and particularly complex, temporal relationship of the time of composition–the acceleration and seeming success of fascist war policy–and the narrated time–the revolution that marked the birth of the Weimar Republic itself–informs every aspect of Döblin's work. *November 1918* attempts to occupy both temporal and political extremes of Weimar. It is written as a history, critique, and eulogy of the German Revolution of 1918 and it explores the ways in which the hope and the failure of that revolution are related to and in part responsible for German fascism.[1] Döblin's novel, moreover, offers poignant testimony to the particular strains, fissures, and contradictions that the rapidly changing political formations, deformations, and allegiances that dominated the Republic and the antifascist exile produced in the self-understanding of a representative bourgeois novelist. More so than most works of fiction, it exists as a simultaneously symptomatic, critical, and transformative text.[2]

For many readers, the critical aspects–Döblin's excoriation of a failed revolution–will dominate their experience of the work. *November 1918* is in no way merely a eulogy for the nobility of the German revolution; more often than not, the narrative voices in the novel conspire to offer a withering critique of the conduct and course of that revolution. The uncompromisingly critical stance of *November 1918 vis-à-vis* the events it represents stems in equal parts from Döblin's remembrance of the failure of Germany's one chance at social equity on the one hand and from the conviction on the other that the ground was laid for the victory of National Socialism by the majority Socialists when they put down the workers' revolt with the help of the General Staff. His intended priorities emerge clearly in a letter of November 1938, early in the composition process: "Hauptsächlich [bin] ich mit einer epischen Arbeit wie immer beschäftigt, mit der Schilderung der deutschen Zusammenbruchzeit und 'Revolution.'"[3] The first volume, in fact, of *November 1918,* entitled *Bürger und Soldaten,* is an intensive analysis of the conditions which prepared for

the revolution; for Döblin, those conditions were wholly negative ones, defined by the "time of collapse."[4] Döblin sides here with those historians who have argued against the use of the word "revolution," stressing that the events of late 1918 and early 1919 were instead a spontaneous, fragmented, and largely local series of reactions to the demise of the imperial war machine.[5]

Even the geography of the novel serves as a figure for the negativity with which much of the revolution is presented. While the novel as a whole is set largely in Berlin as the site of the major workers' uprisings, the first volume, which analyzes the historical structures from which the revolution arose, takes place entirely in Alsace, mainly in a small provincial garrison town, and in Strasbourg. Döblin's motivations for the choice of Alsace were certainly in part biographical: he had been stationed as an army doctor in the small town of Hagenau, thirty kilometers from Strasbourg. More importantly, though, Döblin is able, through the juxtaposition of the return of the German army through Alsace and the events in Berlin, to trace the beginnings of the revolutionary actions to the Imperial war policies and especially to the situation which followed immediately upon the armistice. In choosing to represent the collapse of the old order on the battlefield in France rather than the events traditionally associated with the beginning of the revolution–the sailors' mutiny in Kiel–Döblin emphasizes the deeper structure of the historical situation, and especially that the Republic was born from defeat and failure, a fact relentlessly exploited by the National Socialists in particular and the antidemocratic right in general.

Döblin traces the spread of the negativity resulting from the initial collapse in Alsace to the rest of Germany through the device of a military hospital. Hospitals have by now certainly emerged as one of the century's favorite general figures for a society in collapse; Mann's *Berghof* in *Der Zauberberg,* Peter Weiss's asylum at Charenton in *Marat / Sade,* and Lindsay Anderson's *Britannia Hospital* come readily to mind. Döblin's metaphor distinguishes itself from these, though, through its mobility. After the defeat, the hospital moves onto a train and rolls slowly through most of Germany, spreading the sick and the broken throughout the interior. The internal collapse and resulting internal disease of a nation is figured most fully in the chief doctor, who dies during the journey of blood poisoning. Döblin's use of the "blood" rhetoric of the conservative revolution of the early twentieth century, with its prefascist emphasis on the purity and power of German blood, is subtle here.[6] The corruption and lethal character of the leader's blood, together with the slow withering of the hospital train, are symbolic of larger developments in the nation. "Das Lazarett, das sein Haupt verloren hatte, brauchte nicht mehr lange Zeit, um sich ganz aufzulösen" (*November 1918,* I, 183).

In *Bürger und Soldaten,* the reader experiences not merely the news of the Kaiser's abdication and the declaration of the Republic, but especially the ways in which internal decay had come to dominate the adherents of imperial ideology in all classes. This decay, exacerbated by class interest,

reveals itself at all levels of the novel. The confrontation between the old and the as yet unformed is thematized in a astonishing variety of ways in the first volume. Red soldiers invade a military hospital; the first Council of Soldiers and Workers is formed in Strasbourg, only to flee before the French; while the soldiers in the little town abolish all officer ranks, a telegram arrives from Ebert acknowledging that the generals will retain command of the field troops; a loyalist major is forced to attend the burial of two revolutionary soldiers murdered by a loyalist officer; patrols of soldiers charged with keeping the peace clash with a similarly charged "citizen's militia"; a new, ethically tarnished entrepreneurial class arises as citizens loyal to France expropriate the property of their "old German" neighbors fleeing eastward. Döblin's novel reminds the reader in powerful ways of the microhistory of any revolutionary action. Such moments in the novel, all of which remain highly ambiguous in the first volume, come to bear a progressively negative charge as the novel grows–the resistance to change by the middle classes and the gradually reawakening confidence of capital are aided by confusion and human weakness within the revolution itself.

But it would be a mistake to overemphasize the critical aspects of Döblin's novel to the exclusion of its attempt to unearth and commemorate the positive, emancipatory contributions of the time. For all its ironic, often devastatingly naked assessments of the effects of the revolution, *November 1918* nonetheless clearly sets itself many of the challenges inherent in a commemorative or, in Walter Benjamin's terminology, redemptive historiography. For the dozens of prominent German novelists writing in exile, the historical novel was a privileged form. For most of them, the historical object was more distant, the political allegories more deeply embedded and less directly presented than is the case in *November 1918.*[7] Nevertheless, all these works reveal a common conviction that German culture in exile was concerned above all else to look backward, and an impulse to move not only the "treasures of German culture," but key moments of the German past itself above the foreseeable high-water mark of the fascist advances. Döblin's novel was of course not the only novelistic account of the revolution. The events of 1918–19 figure prominently in many novels of the period such as Joseph Roth's *Das Spinnennetz* and Bernhard Keltermann's *Der neunte November.* But Döblin's was the only text to combine a modernist technique fully adequate to the revolutionary events with the scope and consciousness of detail of a major history. Döblin proceeded, over large stretches of his novel, to conform to the Benjaminian assertion: "A chronicler who recites events without distinguishing between major and minor ones acts in accordance with the following truth: nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history" (*Illuminations* 254). As was his practice for most of his novels, Döblin compiled an enormous archive of historical data before beginning to write. The resultant historical sweep and specificity of *November 1918* establish it as one of the earliest histories of the events in question. The revolutionary days triggered a number of *immediate* reactions in works

published between 1919 and 1922, the best-known of which is Eduard Bernstein's *The German Revolution* of 1921. Yet aside from memoirs of participants, the revolution then sank with astonishing rapidity into oblivion, recounted in no single historical study–either in Weimar or in exile–until Döblin's novel. It is surely not an exaggeration to claim, then, that the revolution was effectively suppressed as a valid moment in German history and in particular the history of the Republic. We cannot discount the historiographical significance of the mere act of remembering the revolutionary actions. And Döblin was clearly aware of the historiographical implications of his novel, as I will argue below; *November 1918,* in fact, is in many ways an attack on the generic boundaries between history and literature erected in the nineteenth century.

We must read Döblin's massive–and massively flawed–novel in a way that acknowledges its attempt to save from oblivion a historical constellation central to German history. This does not, of course, necessarily mean that Döblin offers "straight" historical fiction. Throughout the novel, the historical voice is tempered and even undercut through various narrative devices. Particularly in the first volume, *Bürger und Soldaten,* which bears an emancipatory content that will gradually diminish in the course of the novel, the omniscience of the traditional narrative-historian is supplemented, and balanced, finally called into question through the creation of a veritable polyphony of voices from every segment of German society; these voices are lent a specificity, gravity, and autonomy such that a kind of perspectivism comes to replace traditional historical narrative. In displacing the pulse of representation from the univocal perspective of an authorial narrator to the multiple viewpoints of representatives of every class and occupation in the early days of the revolution, Döblin implicitly questions the adequacy of a traditional narrative history to events such as the November days. Narrative, with its privileging of broad generalization over discrete facts and events, its constraints, and its production of a sense of inevitability conveys a kind of history at odds with Döblin's individualistic, idiosyncratic vision.[8]

For his primary means of representation in *Bürger und Soldaten,* then, Döblin makes extensive use not of narrative history writing, but of montage, the technique that had made him famous in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* in 1928. He builds some montages in *November 1918* out of many of the same materials prevalent in the earlier novel: excerpts from newspapers and diaries, political manifestos and flyers, posters, and dozens of found objects. This montage, what we might call a montage of concrete particulars, is in fact thematized directly in the first volume. A dead soldier's possessions, including at the express wish of his mother everything found in his pockets, had been sent home: books, military travel passes, theater tickets, war bonds, a receipt for a nightshirt, letters, empty postcards, even a dispatch from the Kaiser to his army. The narrator inventories the entire package, and inserts frequent excerpts from the textual materials. Like the Dadaists and Benjamin, Döblin was intensely aware of the status of the material in the montage: the disparate, forlorn nature of these personal

effects speaks movingly of the historical situation, which is too often remembered through abstraction and narrative. The Dadaists and Benjamin, working in the early years of the Republic, could draw on new kinds of resources in order to construct figures of a new social space. Their selection of concrete material (represented in visual or textual form) from the detritus of Imperial and early Republican society is telling: they chose material that had been discarded by the powerful, material that could play no role in the old order. This ideologically untainted material was exploited for its emancipatory potential. Döblin, however, writing in exile and looking back on two decades from which the hope for change had gradually drained away, treats this same detritus simply as detritus, as the broken remnants of a wasted life.

This is not, however, the dominant use of montage in *November 1918.* Instead, the montages in the first volume in particular are made up primarily of bits and pieces of human voices. Montage in *November 1918* is more often than not a literary analogue to polyphony. Why, though, does Döblin favor a form of montage primarily concerned to bear the sound of human voices over one primarily concerned to represent the lived environment? The story of Döblin's changing conception of the nature and function of montage–and the ways in which his society determined those changes–is instructive.

In the essay of 1919, "An Romanautoren und ihre Kritiker," Döblin calls for the creation of a "Kinostil" capable of depicting the "entseelte Realität" which confronts the modern individual (*Schriften* 121). Döblin's conception of this reality is considerably broader than that propounded by the Futurists, upon whose representational techniques he clearly draws. In each of the novels that followed this essay in the early 1920s, Döblin struggled to find a technique that could represent not only the physical, but the spiritual, invisible, and irrational elements of the world as well. In his great novel of 1928, *Berlin Alexanderplatz: The Story of Franz Biberkopf,* Döblin achieved, if not a full realization of his early goals, then certainly a paradigm of the use of montage in the modernist novel. The full title of Döblin's novel is crucial. It makes explicit the antagonistic relationship between Biberkopf and the area of Berlin around the Alexanderplatz, then one of the main working-class areas of the city. *Berlin Alexanderplatz* does not, then, represent Berlin, as is often claimed; Döblin is rigorous in the exclusion of all aspects of the city alien to the specific class milieu around the Alexanderplatz, with its mixing of class types: proletarians, petit-bourgeois merchants (though no *Beamten,* or civil servants, a far more numerous and important component of the German bourgeoisie), and especially *Lumpenproletariar,* impoverished workers wholly without class consciousness.

For the depiction of this and the chaotic, explosive life it holds, Döblin exploits the full range of representational possibilities. His montage contains statistics, pictures of street signs, slang, dialect, excerpts from streetcar timetables, proclamations, the technical discourse of medicine, political jargon, headlines, posters, and, to some extent, voices: voices of

conductors, of sugar daddies, passersby, newspaper sellers, disobedient sons, and fearful mothers.[9] And Döblin hardly limited himself to the prose adaptation of static pictorial montage; by the time he wrote his novel, Eisenstein's films, and especially *Battlecruiser Potemkin,* had had an enormous impact in Germany; Walter Ruttman's *Berlin, Symphony of a Great City* was only the first sign of Eisenstein's reception. The influence of cinematic montage is everywhere evident in Döblin's novel: in the cuts between "shots," in the changes in the order in which events are depicted, in juxtapositions of scenes. Cinematic montage in fact largely substitutes for linear narrative; we find contrast montage, parallel montage, and a form of montage which represents events occurring simultaneously.[10] The aim of all these techniques was immediacy.

Döblin's creation of a totalizing environment by use of the montage is brilliant. Better than any of his predecessors, he achieves in art the concrete objectivity of life in the metropolis. *Berlin Alexanderplatz* was immediately recognized as a breakthrough in the modern novel. As Brecht wrote to Döblin: "ich möchte die aufmerksamkeit möglichst vieler also auf meinen außerordentlichen fleiß lenken, mit dem ich Ihre literarischen werke studiert und die vielfachen neuerungen, die Sie in die betrachtungs und beschreibungsweise unserer umwelt und des zusammenlebens der menschen eingebracht haben, mir zu eigen gemacht habe."[11]

Problematically enough, however, the very brilliance and force of this evocation is the crux of the central difficulty in the novel: Biberkopf's role as human agent. It is the montage technique itself, with its inherent appearance of chaos and fragmentation, which most powerfully suggests to the reader the confusions inherent in Biberkopf's encounter with his world: the political, economic, and social subsystem within which he lives. One factor needs to be singled out here: unlike other Weimar artists such as the Dadaists in their photomontages, the followers of Eisenstein in the cinema, or even other pioneers in textual montage such as Walter Benjamin in his *One Way Street,* Döblin uses montage to focus in a concentrated way on the debris of the city in its singularity. There is no systematic will behind the individual evocations other than the effort to replicate mimetically the chaos and shock-character of the individual impressions in their cumulative effect. Had Döblin sought to evoke some such system or figure in the city's carpet, he would have had at his disposal either the optical or, in the case of prose, figuratively optical strategies employed in photomontage and the prose essay–the construction of associations and reverberations among the discrete elements in the montage–or, more directly, the intervention of an authorial narrator who could control the montage and mediate its effects. That Döblin does neither is significant. The discrete elements–street sign or proclamation–are most often simply inserted into the texture of the novel, suddenly interrupting the narrative flow, like a rock in a stream.

> Seine Nasenspitze vereiste, über seine Backe schwirrte es. "Zwölf Uhr Mittagszeitung", "B.Z.", "Die neuste Illustrirte", "Die Funkstunde neu"

> "Noch jemand zugestiegen?" Die Schupos haben jetzt blaue Uniformen. (8–9)

In this description of Biberkopf on a street car, the rapid alternation of narrative modes–from authorial narration to direct quotation of the conductor's voice as Biberkopf hears it and further to the narrated monologue of Biberkopf's reaction (clearly signalled by the slang term "Bulle" or cop)–is punctuated by the unmediated insertion of the advertisements for newspapers and magazines displayed just below the streetcar's ceiling.

This combination of montage, narrated monologue, and neutral authorial narration is an accurate representation of Biberkopf's thought processes, which are limited throughout the novel to immediate association. The montage technique suggests to the reader the confusions inherent in Biberkopf's encounter with the world. It becomes visible and palpable that he is overcome by his world because he has nothing with which to counter it. In fact, so powerful is that evocation of environment, and so correspondingly weak are the resources given Biberkopf–and the other main characters as well–that the novel's characters are systematically determined by the represented world. They are little more than mirrors of external events, reacting to those events in their interiority.[12]

The forms of thought and feeling represented in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* are relentlessly tied to the chaos of the city. Since Döblin's portrait of that city is intensely critical, these thoughts and feelings are inevitably devalorized as denatured or sick. Biberkopf after his release from prison progressively loses the ability to distinguish exteriority and internal resolve, to distinguish the proper sequence and value of the manifestations of the world around him. "Bloß sind die Straßen da, da hört man und sieht man allerhand, fällt einem von früher wat ein, was man gar nicht will, und dann zieht sich das Leben so hin...(258). The tempo of this stream of associations, of Biberkopf's inner film, is determined solely by the varying pace with which external stimuli reach him. The sequence works both ways. In one case, Biberkopf encounters as an element of the montage a series of scenes from a pornographic movie; these images trigger not merely sexual desire, but also the memory of his crime, the rape and murder of his mistress. These reactions remain distinct until they are integrated in an action informed by repetition compulsion, the seduction/rape of the sister of his dead mistress. In a more complex manner, though, the environment as narrated can call up remembered associations which are themselves represented through montage.

> Er wanderte die Rosenthaler Straße am Warenhaus Tietz vorbei, nach rechts bog er ein in die schmale Sophienstraße. Er dachte, diese Straße ist dunkler, wo es dunkel ist, wird es besser sein. Die Gefangenen werden in Einzelhaft, Zellenhaft und Gemeinschaftshaft untergebracht. Bei Einzelhaft wird der Gefangene bei Tag und Nacht unausgesetzt von andern Gefangenen gesondert gehalten. Bei Zellenhaft wird der Gefangene in einer Zelle untergebracht, jedoch bei Bewegung im Freien, beim Unterricht, Gottesdienst mit andern zusammengebracht. (9-10)

Here, Biberkopf instinctively seeks isolation in a dark street which seems to offer freedom from the demands placed upon him by contact with others, any capacity for which was taken from him in prison. The causal sequence is thus reversed; he has a dim sense of the causes for his actions, while those causes themselves are called up not through Biberkopf's memory of the prison, but through the montage of the text of the prison regulations in the novel.

So powerful is this evocation of a life lived as a series of shocks with concrete causes that the novel at times–the beginning of books two and four, for example–threatens to become little more than an archive of stimuli and associative processes. Döblin attempts to check this tendency through use of narrative voice. The authorial narrator's voice moves freely between a distanced reportage and that of a highly stylized, moralizing *Moritatensänger*. The introductions to each book evince with cumulative force the attempt on the part of the narrator to lend shape to the narrative, to direct the reader's understanding. This desire for form and control reveals itself, for example, in the increasing use of rhyme and meter in the prose introductions: "Er hebt gegen die dunkle Macht die Faust, er fühlt etwas gegen sich stehen, aber er kann es nicht sehen, es muß noch geschehen, daß der Hammer gegen ihn saust" (191). The localized effect of this narrator is Brechtian. The particular combination of neutral reporting and sententious evaluation which characterizes the authorial narrator, together with the unmediated, at times bestial immediacy of Biberkopf's responses, ensures that the reader is constantly distanced from the protagonist. Empathy for Biberkopf comes at a high price: to maintain empathy, the reader must in some sense become complicitous with a false subjectivity. Döblin sought more than this, however.

In attempting to chronicle Biberkopf's life, the narrator also attempts to make of him an exemplary figure, as seen in the increasing use of mythological references and tonality. In his principal attempt to construct a theory of the novel, "Der Bau des epischen Werks" of 1928, Döblin argues that the novel is concerned with a "super-real" sphere beyond the "historischen, aktenmäßig belegten Fakten," "eine wahre Sphäre" which can be achieved through the representation of "das Exemplarische des Vorgangs und der Figuren"; "diese menschlichen Ursituationen stehen sogar an Ursprünglichkeit, Wahrheit und Zeugungskraft über den zerlegten Tageswahrheiten" (106f). The dense symbol complexes, which include parables, individual symbols, and allegories; the complex web of foreshadowings and warnings, intertextual allusions, and symbolic exaggerations all contribute to this claim for exemplary stature.

Leaving aside the relative merit of this position, it is excessively clear in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* that Döblin could not achieve for Biberkopf the exemplarity he sought. The coercive effect of the montage discussed above militates strongly against this; moreover, the narrative voice, with which Döblin sought to claim for Biberkopf's life a paradigmatic quality, escapes his control. The novel is narrated not by one narrative voice, but

by many. Aside from the sententious narrator discussed above, the first three pages of the novel alone hold the voices of a neutral, reportorial narrator, interior and narrated monologues associated with various characters, and a voice we might call the exemplary narrator whose tone and intentions vary consistently from those of the sententious narrator. The distinction between these narrators is clear in the contrast between statements such as the sententious narrator's "Damit ist unser guter Mann, der sich bis zuletzt stramm gehalten hat, zur Strecke gebracht," and the exemplary narrator's "Die Strafe beginnt" (4). The reader who is aware of these voices encounters a vexing number of assertions whose origin and perspective are simply indeterminate. As a technical achievement, Döblin's narrative has undeniable brilliance; the multiplicity and complexity of his voices compare favorably with the deconstructive irony of Musil's narrators or even the genius of Kafka's strategies for ensuring readerly complicity in his narratives of guilt. Yet, in the end, the narrative voices of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* are too many, their effects too diverse.

Compounded by the coerciveness of the montaged environment, these indeterminate perspectives culminate in the final political ambiguity of Döblin's novel. The sententious narrator claims that the ending–which finds a putatively rehabilitated Biberkopf observing, from his post as a nightwatchman, a political rally as it marches past–is unambiguous and that it brings with it a political enlightenment. "Wir"–that is, the readers of the novel–"sind eine dunkle Allee gegangen, keine Laterne brannte zuerst...allmählich wird es heller und heller, zuletzt hängt die Laterne, und dann liest man endlich unter ihr das Straßenschild" (409). Biberkopf, by contrast, was forced to run a gauntlet to reach that same state of illumination. "Mit zerlöcherten Kopf, kaum noch bei Sinnen, kam er schließlich doch an. Wie er hinfiel, machte er die Augen auf. Da brannte die Laterne hell über ihm, und das Schild was zu lesen" (409). Yet this costly enlightenment shows itself very soon to be nothing more than the deepest ambiguity. The final pages of the novel intersperse sententious authorial narration with large swatches of interior monologue, much of which is self-contradictory. "Viel Unglück kommt davon, wenn man allein geht," Biberkopf can assert in one paragraph, while in the next, "Wenn wir zwei sind, ist es schon schwerer, stärker zu sein als ich" (409). The issue of the integration of the individual into a larger social ensemble, which is the central issue of the novel and in many ways of Döblin's career, is resolved only in negative and even contradictory terms. The dominant impression–that the represented environment is a coercive force which determines absolutely the social, economic, and political shape of human lives–is reinforced by the book's ending. Its deliberate ambiguity mirrors the fragmentation of the narrative voice and of the ambient environment. The area around the Alexanderplatz (in the figure of the Whore of Babylon) has, to be sure, been banished from the narrative; there are relatively few montage effects in the final chapters. But the aftershocks remain: Biberkopf is deprived of rational choice and even volition. Far from imagining new social forms, the montage in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* figures social space

as absolute negativity. This is the final paradox of the novel: Döblin's aesthetically most fully realized text is given its decisive shape by political uncertainty. How are we to approach this paradox from our much later vantage point?

Writing *November 1918* in the late 1930s, Döblin confronted not merely a changed audience and a changed historical situation but a new task for the montage form. The new conception of montage is immediately evident in the first volume of the tetralogy. In the first place, montage is less frequently employed as the unmediated insertion of elements of the experienced world. When objects, excerpts from texts, or other concrete manifestations do enter the novel, they consistently display their relation to their immediate context.[13] In an early episode, a newspaper enters the novel as a montage element. But we experience the newspaper from the perspective of a character reading; as the newspaper reader's eye strays from a serialized novel to the report of Max von Baden's relinquishment of the chancellorship, the reader of the novel receives a clear, even heavy-handed thematic message: for the average bourgeois reader in 1918, the momentous political events were marginal, even coincidental, coequal to the fictions of the popular novel. Insofar, then, as the sensuous detail of everyday life is evoked through the montage in *November 1918,* Döblin is careful to put that detail into perspective, avoiding the necessity of representing an environment–as he had in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*–that is coercive because of the contrast between the evocative brilliance of its technique and the pervasive passivity of the represented humans. In order that his characters retain some power of resistance, Döblin in *November 1918* resorts to an aesthetically conservative though politically stable form of montage.

More important than this strategy of contextualization, though, is a major rethinking of the concept of montage itself. The structure of *Bürger und Soldaten* derives in equal parts from Döblin's own experience with montage and from his study of the principles of Brecht's epic theater. The Brechtian influence in the novel is unmistakable. Like the scenes in Brecht's plays, each short section of the first volume of the tetralogy achieves a high degree of autonomy; although each section may eventually take its place in a larger narrative development, it is just as likely to function formally or thematically as a comparison or a counterpoint to another section from another plot strand.

Döblin's use of the epic technique, however, differs finally from that of Brecht. Where Brecht sought to create a distanced space in the theater for the sort of informed reflection which might lead to political action, Döblin adapts the main virtues of the technique to the achievement of a new diversity in the novel. Within each autonomous section, the human voice of the figures portrayed there also achieves a profile and autonomy otherwise impossible. The formal device of separating typographically each short section only enhances this effect. When, as is frequently the case, Döblin embeds within a short section the montage of many voices, this effect is intensified. This is nowhere clearer than in the representation of a meeting

of the Strasbourg Workers' and Soldiers' Council. The sailors from Alsace who have just returned from the marine revolt at Kiel launch into the "International," but the narrator reports that many of the local insurgents do not know the words. For them it was "kein Klassengesang, sondern Kriegsende, Friede, menschliche Freiheit" (46).

Döblin was of course not the only European literary figure in the late 1930s interested in polyphony and diversity in the novel. Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas on heteroglossia figure here not so much as interpretive devices, but as exemplification of a utopian hope for the novel that parallels Döblin's own.

> What is involved here is a very important, in fact a radical revolution in the destinies of human discourse: the fundamental liberation of cultural-semantic and emotional intentions from the hegemony of a single and unitary language, and consequently the simultaneous loss of a feeling for language as myth, that is, as an absolute form of thought. (Bakhtin 366)

The rhetoric of this passage–with its use of terms such as liberation, revolution, and hegemony to describe a process occurring within the autonomous world of the genre of the novel–hints at the subterranean critique of totalitarianism intended by Bakhtin. And his is not an isolated theoretical endeavor. In exile in Paris in the 1930s, Walter Benjamin tried to construct what he thought of as a "primal history" of the nineteenth century that bore the working title "The Arcades Project" (*Das Passagen-Werk*). Just as Bakhtin's theories emphasize the polymorphous quality of the human voice in the novel, so Benjamin's theory, constructed through the montage, brings to the fore a vast array of French and other voices that had been suppressed from conventional histories of the era. Spoken discourse from all classes, popular song, political rhetoric, overheard conversations, and many other forms appear in order to give voice to those who had been forgotten.[14] Bakhtin, Benjamin, and Döblin clung to a leftist position that sought to counter the totalitarian regimes under which or against which they wrote. But Döblin's novel, like the theories of Bakhtin and Benjamin, has an ostensible countertheme: the failure of the socialist revolution, which was too German, too privatized, too theoretical, and could not sustain the tremendous weight of signification–and of hope–borne in each case by the human voice.

With astonishing frequency, the voices of the first volume remain anonymous or are tied to characters involved in tiny, transitory subplots within this massive text. And those voices are raised most often in a kind of counterpoint to the larger, historical movements in the novel. The German retreat, with its air of doom and resignation, plays against literally dozens of vignettes in which common soldiers, officers, bourgeoisie, workers, and farmers find opportunities for renewal on an individual level; when several of these individuals come together in loose networks, the effect is created of a potential break in the weave of seeming inevitability that is the history of the revolution. At times, Döblin goes so far as to at-

tribute a consciousness of the mendacity of larger historical structures to the anonymous voices themselves:

> Lies, was sie schreiben über uns, wer wir sind. Das ist aus uns geworden.–Ja, und das ist wahr. Jetzt werden einem die Augen geöffnet. Wie man uns belogen hat. Die drüben. Ruinert haben sie uns.–Hätten wir's doch erkannt. Hätten wir's nicht mitgemacht. Hätten wir uns zur Wehr gesetzt.–Hätten, hätten. (I, 353)

From almost any conceivable later perspective, the modicum of resistance offered here must seem pathetic. Döblin's brilliant evocation of a concrete environment in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* was undercut, as we have seen, by an ultimately incoherent mix of narrative voices to lend to that novel at best a political ambiguity, at worst a social untenability. That novel was free, however, of the particular historical doubleness that shaped *November 1918.* Döblin's attempt to review the revolution as at once an important step toward fascism and a quarry for images and impulses that might allow for resistance makes for a difficult relationship between narrative and montage. At an important point in volume two, in fact, the narrator reflects on the tension between traditional historical explanation, with its emphasis on causality, and the sudden, spontaneous emergence of discrepancy and resistance.

> Es gibt eine Sorte von Erzählern und Geschichtsschreibern, die auf Logik, auf nichts als Logik schwören. Für sie folgt in der Welt eins aus dem andern, und die betrachten es als ihre Aufgabe, dies zu zeigen und die Dinge entsprechend auseinander zu entwickeln. Sie machen für jeden Vorgang der Geschichte einen andern ausfindig, aus dem er sich dann ergibt....Wir sind nicht von einer solchen logischen Strenge. Wir halten die Natur für viel leichtfertiger als die genannten Geschichts- und Geschichtenschreiber. (II, 385)

The montage of the human voice is very often that which breaks into and disrupts the seemingly inevitable narrative flow in *Bürger und Soldaten.* It remains the site of a lonely and perhaps unobtainable hope for Döblin. Through this device he does not so much figure a social space–the lived environments of the later novel, particularly in comparison to the 1928 evocation of the Alexanderplatz, remain almost abstract–as a disembodied society itself, a collection of voices that speak out of a no-place, a utopia, and toward another no-place, a hell on earth.

In the subsequent volumes, which depict the revolutionary events themselves, an unusually thoroughgoing analytic pessimism comes gradually to dominate, and that pessimism is borne primarily by a unified and highly intrusive narrative voice: the montage of voices characteristic of the first volume all but disappears. On the broad historical plane so important to the novel, Friedrich Ebert and the majority socialists bear the brunt of Döblin's scorn for their complicity with the generals, for their butchery of the workers in January, for the hypocrisy with which they understand socialism. But the SPD is by no means made the scapegoat for the more general failure of the revolution. No position, no party, no individual escapes the mixture of sarcasm, pity, and scorn which characterizes much of the narrative. Much of the analysis and criticism in *November 1918* was, in fact, common to the period immediately following the war. In his satirical depiction of war profiteers, of the mania for stability at any cost evinced by the *Großbürger,* of the poverty of effective leadership, of the mentality which formed and served in the *Freikorps,* of the allied peace policy, and of the impoverished theory and practical bumblings of the leftist leaders of the revolution, Döblin finally only echoes frequently-heard laments from 1919 on. He himself had in fact given voice to many of these sentiments in *Der deutsche Maskenball von Linke Poot* of 1921, a text based on occasional, pseudonymous cultural commentary which he had written for newspapers and journals in the period during and after the revolution.

The first sign of a new relationship between narrative voice, other voices in the novel, and the course of German history is immediately apparent on the first page of volume two, *Verratenes Volk.* The initial chapter, "Sturm auf das Polizeipräsidium," begins with a summary of what is to follow: "Ein junger Mensch kehrt aus dem Krieg zurück, gewinnt dem Leben in Berlin keinen Reiz ab und trifft andere, denen es ebenso geht. Einige aufgeregte Leute stürmen das Polizeipräsidium und können danach besser schlafen. Es ist der 22. November 1918" (9). Such summaries are wholly absent from the first volume of the novel. The narrative voice here demonstrates a personal investment in the events represented, as the colloquial tone and the final irony make clear; but far from the shifting perspectives characteristic of *Bürger und Soldaten,* this voice seeks to control and shape the events, guiding the reader through the material toward a predetermined evaluation. This shift from a localized to a purportedly global perspective is underscored by the narrator's adoption of a conspicuous, ironized first-person-plural perspective: the "we" that gradually emerges as a narrative voice claims a universality and a complicity in the desire for control that the narrative itself does not justify. The narrator in fact resorts to a myriad of narrative conventions in his desire to control and comment on events. In the course of the novel's second volume, montage of voices as a device is displaced by a series of vignettes that are so juxtaposed as to drive home a thematic point, as when a portrait of Ebert and his dealings with the military is bracketed by the story of a petty war profiteer. By the middle of the volume, the narrative voice has retreated into an archaic, sententious voice appropriated from eighteenth-century novels such as *Tristram Shandy.* In a section entitled "Der Verfasser geht mit sich zu Rate," the narrator has this to say:

> Überblicken wir an diesem Punkt die Ereignisse, die verflossen sind und uns unabwendbar überströmen, und bedenken wir, von einer erklärlichen plötzlichen Müdigkeit überfallen unter dem unaufhaltsamen Ansturm der Begebenheiten (und es sind erst zwanzig Tage der Revolution vorbei), was nun kommen wird, so ist uns schon einiges klar: Mit der Revolution wird es auf diese Weise nicht vorwärtsgehen. Es wird mit ihr

> wahrscheinlich rückwärtsgehen. Bisher sind wirklich revolutionäre Massen nicht in unser Gesichtsfeld getreten. Man kann einem, wenn er eine Revolution beschreiben will, dies zum Vorwurf machen. Aber es liegt nicht an uns. Es ist eben eine deutsche Revolution. (242)

As the novel progresses, such devices become not only more frequent, but positively intrusive. In *Berlin Alexanderplatz* montage served not to figure a collective but to produce a new kind of realism in the novel, an evocation of the concrete reality of a part of Berlin; the narrative voices wove a complex pattern of indeterminacy around that represented environment. In *November 1918* the attempt to figure a collective gives way abruptly to a narrator who seeks an absolute control. Most tellingly, the montage is replaced in the last three volumes by a narrative device in which the narrator assumes the voices of a series of characters: now that of Becker, now that of an anonymous bourgeois supporter of Noske, Ebert's "bloodhound." D.H. Lawrence's injunction to trust the tale, not the teller is wholly appropriate to *November 1918*. The pretension to control and power demonstrated by the narrator of the last three volumes is symptomatic of a consciousness that is unwilling to allow historical events in their singularity to speak for themselves. It is the voice of a consciousness intent upon lacerating the historical past for its complicity in the historical present.

How do we account for the shift from the new uses of montage to a highly manipulative, even authoritarian narrative voice? This shift in tonality from the conflict between narrative history and the montage of voices characteristic of *Bürger und Soldaten* to the nearly pervasive bitterness of the remaining three volumes is of course a reflection twenty years after the fact on a failed revolution; the title of Helmuth Kiesel's study, *Literarische Trauerarbeit,* captures something of this. Some of Döblin's critics have ascribed differences in the last three volumes (without quite articulating the differences between them and the first volume) to Döblin's conversion to Christianity, which indeed occurred "between" the volumes. But this conversion itself, as much as the change in narrative pattern, seems less a cause than a symptom of a desperate search for control and significance in Döblin's life and writing.

For some understanding of this shift, it is necessary to trace, however briefly, Döblin's political path. The last three volumes make it quite clear that even a successful revolution such as the one envisioned by Karl Liebknecht and the Spartacists would have provoked a similarly negative reaction from Alfred Döblin in 1938. Much of the discussion of political theory in *November 1918* centers on internal debates on the course and goals of the revolution which take place between Liebknecht and Lenin's emissary to the German revolution, Karl Radek. Although the portraits which emerge of these historical figures are sympathetic, they also contain a marked amount of skepticism. This skepticism stems not so much from either an antirevolutionary or anticollectivist stance, nor yet from a kind of Christian resignation following Döblin's conversion, but rather from his

rejection of the actual course of the revolution in favor of his own, revisionist political theory.

At the time of the revolution, Döblin had thrown his support to the USPD, the Independent Social Democrats who occupied a position between that of the political center and the active left. His experiences under the Republic gradually moved him leftwards: he joined the "Society of the Friends of the New Russia" in 1924, and became a founding member of the "Group 1925," an association of communist and left-liberal authors which included Brecht and Johannes R. Becher. Late in the decade, however, Döblin began to distance himself from an actively engaged politics. His election to the Prussian Academy of the Arts in 1928 occasioned a bitter debate and finally a split between left-liberal and communist authors; the latter finally seceded from Group 1925 and founded the German Union of Proletarian-Revolutionary Writers (Bund proletarisch-revolutionärer Schriftsteller Deutschlands or BPRSD).[15] The general movement in Döblin's thinking away from direct engagement culminated in the philosophical monograph *Unser Dasein* of 1933. This text is worth examining not only for the light it sheds on the novel, but in particular as a document symptomatic of the position of the exiled left-liberal Weimar intellectual.

Döblin's essential position proceeds from an assertion of the absolute priority of the individual: "Die Grundposition bleibt unerschüttert: daß wir uns auszuwirken und darzustellen suchen und dabei unsere Umwelt formen" (185). So strong, in fact, is the individualistic bias here that much of the latter part of the book is given over to an attack on all forms of collectivist organization. These sections stand under the sign of a strong reversion to the Nietzscheanism of Döblin's youth: "Und wir sind selber sehr zahm geworden, Gesellschaftstiere und Herdentiere" (348). Spontaneous collectivity is, to be sure, sanctioned in the book; it is apostrophized as the precondition for an intense awareness of individual existence. But organization in any form is subjected to a virulent, if hardly stringent critique. The public sphere is a "Moloch," organizations and collectives "unwahre Gebilde" which are "das Übel von heute" (418).

> Und die tausend Millionen armer Menschen, die in den Netzen hingen, was blieb ihnen weiter übrig, als mit zu schreien und zu stammeln: Krieg, Frieden, national, international, und verbrachten ihr Leben unter dem Netz wie eine grüne Pflanze unter dem Netz des Schimmelpilzes, der Pilz saugt sie aus, aber die Pflanze hat bald keinen anderen Ehrgeiz als zu sagen: sieh mal her, was gab ich dem Pilz für Kraft, was leiste ich, wie tüchtig ich bin. (423)

At the time these words were written in 1933, the identities of the plant and fungus were hardly clouded. Certainly from our present perspective, Döblin's skepticism as to the resiliency of leftist organizations and their ability to resist appropriation by fascism seems warranted.

It is worth noting that this idea of parasitic growth persists for Döblin: the careful mix in the novel's first volume of negativity and optimism is often expressed through organically-derived figurative language similar to

that cited here. There are more than a few indications that something positive could be made to arise on the burned ground. In fact, this passage appears again, nearly word for word, in *Bürger und Soldaten,* where we find a long and botanically accurate description of the growth stages of the hops plant, followed by an equally lengthy disquisition on the varieties of pest which will feed on, infect, and finally suck the life from the new plants. The metaphors for new life–row after row of equal plants growing from newly arable ground–and the indigenous forces already in place to rob it of possibility and fruition sum up Döblin's pessimism in the first volume (*November 1918,* I, 89). But the remaining volumes of the novel cast not fascism itself, but rather an excessive, and excessively theoretical party organization in the role of the fungus that spreads over the workers' movement. In *Unser Dasein* Döblin offers an evaluation of the political party which finds its fictional counterpart in *November 1918:* parties can be positive forces insofar as they remain "flüssige Einrichtungen, bewegliche Organisationen." "Sie treten den eisernen Einrichtungen von Staat und Wirtschaft gegenüber als Feuer und Schmelztiegel auf. Schrecklicherweise verfestigen auch sie, erstarren, erlöschen. Nur eine Kraft bleibt Kraft, der lebende Mensch, der annimmt und verwirft....Wir sind weder für Individualismus noch Kollektivismus, sondern für das Ich" (*Unser Dasein* 435).[16]

In what collective shape, then, does the individual renewal called for by Döblin take place? In his political credo *Wissen und Verändern* of 1931, Döblin had called for an "protocommunist socialism" without, however, defining precisely what he meant. Much of *Unser Dasein* is given over precisely to a definition of this new political form. So strong is Döblin's resistance to theorized organization that his position becomes rigidly pragmatic: "Wir leisten, was wir für nötig halten, das genügt uns–die heutige Abwendung des Unheils, Beseitigung eines Übels, Schaffung neuer Lagen. Es ist nicht Sache der Menschen, Historie zu treiben, aber es ist ihre Sache, mit den Dingen um sich, in ihrer konkreten Lagerung, fertig zu werden....Daraus wächst Geschichte" (*Unser Dasein* 226). His primary example is Lenin, whom he praises not so much for his vision and theoretical power, but rather for his willingness to use violence against evil. Döblin's position thus rejects the sort of historical vision associated with all forms of scientific socialism. His is a Blanquist politics, a "ständige Auseinandersetzung allein mit den gegenwärtigen Zuständen" (230). The only human associations countenanced by Döblin are spontaneous, natural ones which answer to a concrete and present need; he offers the relationships between man and woman, parents and children, or common work such as communal erection of shelter, as examples. The search for a "wirklich flutende[s] Leben" (420) leads Döblin to the following statement, as close as he will come to a definitive statement of his politics after 1933:

> Die Menschen müssen deutlicher ihren Zustand und seine Ursachen erkennen und müssen von Gleichmütigkeit, Abstraktionen und Dogmen befreit und an die vernünftige Pflege ihrer Interessen geführt werden. Was Zusammenleben ist, müssen sie erst wieder lernen, und hier sind Keimzellen zu legen für die kleinen übersichtlichen Systeme, von denen ich sagte, daß sie allein imstande seien, menschliche Gesellschaftsorganismen zu bilden. (*Unser Dasein* 473)

Döblin's explicit model is the Greek city-state, with its reliance upon the collective decision-making capacity of all citizens. His model is more clearly derived, though, from the various political forms advocated and in some cases realized in the early days following the 1918 revolution. We should keep in mind the extraordinary possibility open to Germany in 1919. Every one of the literally hundreds of political associations in Germany–anarchists, syndicalists, anarchosyndicalists, monarchists, religious parties, socialists, utopian socialists, et cetera–had a particular vision of the new society. If history has chosen to remember that possibility along strictly dualistic lines–council republic or national assembly–then a multitude of other options, some of them radically new, some of them well-tested, and many of them hybrids, have been lost from memory. My point is that such historical oblivion has dulled the exhilaration and obscured those genuine attempts to imagine new possibilities that accompanied, briefly, the chance to form a new society. Döblin's is a form, then, of the sort of "basis-democracy" advocated later by the American New Left and by the Greens in contemporary Germany. It is too easy to dismiss Döblin's politics, to consign it to the dustbins reserved for utopias.

I have described, of course, the political vision that underlies only the first volume of the tetralogy. In the final three, Döblin's concern for the difficulties of the individual and in particular the difficulty of identity formation–after the war and under fascism–becomes dominant, indeed suffocating. In the final volumes, the chronicle function is balanced not by montages of voices, but by the traditional narration of the lives of Friedrich Becker and Erwin Stauffer. Döblin was equally attuned, then, to Benjamin's sense of how only the fullness of history can offer redemption: "To be sure, only a redeemed mankind receives the fullness of its past–which is to say, only for a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments" (*Illuminations* 254). Redemption, in fact, offers a note common to many discourses of the years immediately preceding the Second World War. Just as Benjamin's religiosity rises to the surface of his discourse in this period, so, too, does Döblin's novel increasingly organize itself around narratives devoted to figures in search of redemption: the war invalid Friedrich Becker and the dramatist Erwin Stauffer.[17] While Döblin never surrenders the historical sweep of the novel, and while the impressive multiplicity of characters and narrative situations is never wholly given up, these two narrative strands emerge as foci of attention. Each of these strands concerns above all else the intensely personal problem of the formation of identity after the war–and, by extension, in exile.[18] Ironically enough, then, the gradual emergence of a highly intrusive narrative voice in the last three volumes speaks not to Döblin's identification with and involvement in the events portrayed, but to his frustration with his and his

country's failure to draw the consequences hinted at by the panoply of voices heard early in the novel. Friedrich Becker, impoverished and probably insane, is drowned in a sack at the novel's end. The apparent sovereignty of the narrative voice, weighted down with Döblin's fear and despair, sinks with it.

Notes

[1] The two major accounts of Döblin's production in exile are Helmut Kiesel, *Literarische Trauerarbeit: Das Exil- und Spätwerk Alfred Döblins* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1986) and Manfred Auer, *Das Exil vor der Vertreibung. Motivkontinuität und Quellenproblematik im späten Werk Alfred Döblins* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1977).

[2] On this terminology, see Dominick LaCapra, *History, Politics, and the Novel* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1987), 7.

[3] Alfred Döblin, *Briefe* (Olten: Walter, 1970), 228.

[4] The two volumes published in English as *A People Betrayed* and *Karl and Rosa* include in abridged form only the last three volumes of the tetralogy. *Bürger und Soldaten,* in many ways the most interesting and important of the volumes, was inexplicably discarded. *Karl and Rosa,* translated by John E. Woods (New York: Fromm International Pub. Corp., 1983); *A People Betrayed,* trans. John E. Woods (New York: Fromm International Pub. Corp., 1983).

[5] Detlev Peukert distinguishes between a long line of historians who date Weimar's troubles from the revolution itself, and others who see the revolutionary actions as unrealized possibilities. Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), xii.

[6] The best studies of the conservative revolution remain George Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology* (New York: 1964); Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair* (New York: 1961); and Kurt Sontheimer, *Antidemokratisches Denken in der Weimarer Republik* (Munich: 1968).

[7] Remarkably little systematic attention has been paid to the historical novels produced by the German exiles. Bruce Broermann, in his *The German Historical Novel in Exile after 1933: Calliope Contra Clio* (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1986) makes a very tentative, almost exclusively thematic start.

[8] Here, too, Döblin's practice parallels that of Walter Benjamin. In folder "N" of *Das Passagen-Werke* Benjamin argues repeatedly for the existence of compelling parallels between narrative, bourgeois history writing, and the stories of domination that such narratives convey. Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981), 571–611.

[9] Russell Berman has seen in *Berlin Alexanderplatz* a "vocalization of the collective," but the term seems misapplied, since anonymous voices play a minor role as compared to the evocation of the city as concrete environment; furthermore, these voices belong not to a class-conscious stratum of workers, i.e., a "collective," but to *Lumpenproletarier.* Berman, *The Rise of the Modern German Novel* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1985), 234.

[10] For a convincing articulation of Döblin's use of cinematic montage in his novel, see Ekkehard Kaemmerlin, "Die filmische Schreibweise," in Prangel, ed., *Materialien zu Alfred Döblins 'Berlin Alexanderplatz'* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975).

[11] Bertolt Brecht, 1932 letter to Döblin, cited in Roland Link, *Alfred Döblin* (Munich: Beck, 1981), 7.

[12] There is a considerable critical controversy on this point. Both Dollenmayer and Berman construe the city montage here as emancipatory, in that it allows the reader to construct the patterns of relation and significance; only Link argues for the denatured and denaturing effect of Döblin's use of montage here. Dollenmayer 131; Link 124–32; Berman 237.

[13] Dollenmayer simply refers to this practice as "conventional." David R. Dollenmayer, *The Berlin Novels of Alfred Döblin* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1988), 130.

[14] For a fascinating account of the role of the human voice in Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk,* see Lorenz Jöger, "Menschliche Artikulation in Benjamins Passagen-Werk," forthcoming in Klaus Garber, ed., *Internationaler Walter Benjamin Kolloquium* (Frankfurt: Piper, 1996).

[15] On Döblin's political affiliations, see Matthias Prangel, *Alfred Döblin* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1973), 53–69.

[16] It is interesting to compare Döblin's position with that espoused retrospectively by Dagmar Barnouw in *Weimar Intellectuals and the Threat of Modernity* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1988). Barnouw argues in terms very similar to Döblin's, though they are derived from Karl Mannheim, that a kind of fluidity or adaptability was precisely the Weimar disease, and that political movements, or what she designates as "ideologies," were responsible for the failure to answer fascism's threat. It can come as no surprise that Ulrich, Musil's man without qualities, emerges as the hero of her study (Barnouw 11–43, 78–121).

[17] Benjamin's religiosity did not suddenly "return" in 1939 as a reaction to the Hitler-Stalin pact. On the status of religiosity as a subtext in Benjamin's "Marxist" phase, see my *Dialectical Images: Walter Benjamin's Theory of Literary Criticism* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1987), 5–7.

[18] The Stauffer strand, with its satirical characterization of the radical impotence of the German intelligentsia, constitutes one of the novel's glaring weaknesses. Stauffer finds even the ludicrous and pathetic efforts of the Berlin "Council of Intellectual Workers" too great and dangerous a commitment; he wanders through a series of erotic entanglements, each of which brings him further from the actions and decisions in Berlin which will shape his life. Döblin devotes hundreds of pages to Stauffer's ineffectuality, yet the mood of scorn and parody–

much of it self-directed–cannot carry the sheer number of pages devoted to Stauffer.

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"Wo gehörten sie hin?" The Berlin Autobiographies of Stephan Hermlin and Ludwig Greve

David Scrase

Politics and literature have always been bedfellows. The Greeks (whose language has given us the word "politics") certainly coupled them, as did the Romans; and German literature is full of political literature from the *Hildebrandslied* on. But one might be forgiven for thinking that no other nation or age has produced quite the quantity of politically-inspired literature as Germany in the twentieth century.

It is, to be sure, not easy to define political literature satisfactorily, and dangerous to try to do so narrowly. Indeed, it could be argued that, so long as politics are seen as an essential component of human existence, and so long as literature is understood to be a product of the interaction of author and society, then all literature is in some way political. But just as one might argue where the boundary between night and day is to be found yet nonetheless distinguish quite well between them, so, too, can one distinguish political literature from *poésie pure*, even if the degree of political content varies.

The variations in political content are directly related to sociohistorical trends. The rise of the working class, the urbanization following in the wake of the industrial revolution, and the resulting social problems all had their effect on the literature of Naturalism, for instance. In the twentieth century two world wars have left their marks on all European literatures. The second of these wars, involving as it did genocide, huge civilian losses, and large-scale destruction of cities, has left a different legacy from that of the first, the Great War. These factors and their effects on the victorious allies have resulted in a different literature from that of the vanquished–one need consider only *Die Blechtrommel* by Günter Grass and *Catch 22* by Joseph Heller to perceive just how different. Even within the vanquished nations–Germany, Italy, Japan–there are differences. Germany, blasted asunder through air raids, with substantial human losses of its own, has been obliged to come to terms with its guilt and culpability. Above all, it has had to come to terms with the policy it had embraced and put into action in regard to the Jews of Europe, the policy of ultimate destruction. Even in the 1990s its attempts to come to terms with this past, and particularly the destruction of the Jews, is continuing unabated.

If the politics of the "Jewish Question," which became and has henceforth remained a major focus of literature in the decades since 1945, has a very specific character, it has long been a German preoccupation in a more general sense. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing revealed it as a major concern in the eighteenth century, especially through his play *Nathan der Weise* (1779). Theodor Fontane, the chronicler of Berlin life in the second