

## **A study of Georg Hermann's pre-First World War novels with a special reference to the presentation of the city of Berlin.**

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**A STUDY OF GEORG HERMANN'S PRE-FIRST WORLD  
WAR NOVELS**

**WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE REPRESENTATION OF THE CITY  
OF BERLIN**

**presented by**

**Godela Weiss-Sussex**

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## Abstract

The method of analysis employed in this thesis includes the comparative study of Hermann's novels with contemporary aesthetic and sociological writings as well as with works by other contemporary writers and visual artists. This approach places Hermann's pre-First World War novels in a cultural historical context and helps to re-establish Hermann as a writer whose works mirror in a representative way the developments of turn-of-the-century aesthetics and of the contemporary depiction of Berlin.

For each novel in turn, I first show how Hermann adapts the formal aspects of his writing to the thematic concern at hand: experimenting with the aesthetic principles of Naturalism in the autobiographical *Spielkinder* (1897); with Realism in the tradition of Fontane in the Biedermeier 'Doppelroman' *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte* (*Jettchen Gebert* (1906) and *Henriette Jacoby* (1908)); and with Impressionism in *Kubinke* (1910); until, in *Die Nacht des Doktor Herzfeld* (1912), he largely abandons the presentation of a plot-based narrative in favour of the Modernist concept of the novel as reflecting the hero's consciousness.

The second strand of analysis for each novel follows the development of Hermann's representations of the emerging metropolis of Berlin from 1897 to 1912. The detailed description of physical and social reality is, over the years, increasingly complemented by the depiction of atmosphere and by analysis of the new metropolitan society. A critical attitude to the modern aspects of the city is expressed through direct social criticism in *Spielkinder* and, in a less pronounced form, by the nostalgic mood of the *Jettchen* novels. However, in the two following novels this makes way for a non-judgemental depiction of city society, expressed in a detached, aestheticising panorama of the city (*Kubinke*) and in a psychological analysis of the metropolitan person's mental make-up (*Die Nacht des Doktor Herzfeld*).

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## **Declaration**

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## 1 Introduction

This is a study of Georg Hermann's pre-First World War novels in terms of their formal construction, their aesthetic contexts and their different representations of the city of Berlin. While individual novels by Hermann have previously been looked at from specific viewpoints, no in-depth analysis of them has previously been presented which sets them in the context of his other works and in the context of the range of aesthetics existing at the turn of the century. My comparisons of Hermann's pre-First World War novels with other contemporary texts, both fictional and non-fictional, and with the visual arts, yield new insights into his work. So also does the detailed investigation of Hermann's representations of Berlin presented in this study. These approaches reveal Hermann's art to have been more open to contemporary developments than has hitherto been assumed.

Before setting out in detail the objectives and methods of my dissertation, I provide, as background, in the following paragraphs, a survey of the existing body of research into Hermann's work.

### 1.1 Georg Hermann Research: A Survey

During the first third of the twentieth century, Georg Hermann achieved a reputation as a highly valued and popular writer. In 1922, the Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt Stuttgart published a four-volume edition of his *Gesammelte Werke*, a fifth volume followed in 1932. An anonymous reviewer of this edition claimed: 'Georg Hermann gehört zu den fesselndsten Erzählern unserer Zeit.'<sup>1</sup> His novels were translated into many European languages, including Finnish, Swedish, Russian, Hungarian and English.<sup>2</sup> Since his persecution as a Jew and the banning of his books in Nazi Germany, however, the memory of most of Hermann's work has faded. In the German Federal Republic, although *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte* and *Kubinke* were published in several new editions, his other novels were largely forgotten. In 1974, when he published his doctoral thesis on Hermann's work, Cornelis van Liere felt obliged to state: 'Von einer

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<sup>1</sup> In *Stuttgarter Neues Tageblatt* (no date), quoted in advertisements of the Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt Stuttgart on the final pages of Georg Hermann, *Der kleine Gast* (Stuttgart, Berlin, Leipzig, 1925).

<sup>2</sup> For a list of translations, see Cornelis Geeraard van Liere, *Georg Hermann. Materialien zur Kenntnis seines Lebens und seines Werkes*, diss. University of Leiden (Amsterdam, 1974), pp. 78-80.

wiederauflebenden Popularität, wie sie neuerdings manchem exilierten Dichter zuteil wird, kann jedoch – wenigstens in der Bundesrepublik – bei Georg Hermann nicht gesprochen werden.’<sup>3</sup> In the German Democratic Republic, the situation was different as Hermann was interpreted as a writer with socio-political intent. From 1964 to 1973, a series of seven *Ausgewählte Werke in Einzelausgaben* by Hermann was published under the editorial guidance of Bernhard Kaufhold by Das Neue Berlin. Other occasional editions of individual novels were issued by the same publisher as well as by the Kupfergraben Verlag.<sup>4</sup>

Since the mid-1980s, however, interest in Hermann has slowly started to re-emerge. Distinguished writers and critics such as Peter Härtling, Hans-Otto Horch, Hermann Kähler and, most recently, Gert and Gundel Mattenklott, have called for a reassessment of Hermann’s novels.<sup>5</sup> Especially in the last couple of years, the recognition that Hermann is worth saving from oblivion has been gathering momentum in Germany. 1996, the 125th anniversary of Hermann’s birth, was marked by the publication of the first two volumes of a new twenty-one volume edition of his works which is being prepared under the editorial guidance of Gert and Gundel Mattenklott. Four more volumes followed in 1997 and the first half of 1998, and a further two are due to appear later in 1998. A colloquium was held at the Literaturhaus in Berlin in November 1996 to provide a forum for the discussion of Hermann’s work and a forthcoming contributed work, edited by Kerstin Schoor, is devoted to the same purpose.

A vital source of material for this dissertation, and indeed for any research into Hermann’s life and works, is to be found in the Georg Hermann Collection of the Leo Baeck Institute, New York. This collection holds a mass of primary and secondary material most of which was collected by Hermann himself. Details of the Leo Baeck Institute’s Hermann Collection are summarised in appendix 2 of this dissertation.

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<sup>3</sup> Liere, p.7.

<sup>4</sup> Most of this information is taken from Liere’s partial survey of editions (Liere, pp. 62-97).

<sup>5</sup> See Peter Härtling, ‘Ein verlassener Held. Über Georg Hermanns “Kubinke”’, in Härtling, *Zwischen Untergang und Aufbruch. Aufsätze, Reden, Gespräche*, ed. by Günther Drommer (Berlin, Weimar, 1990), pp. 131-35; Hans-Otto Horch, ‘Über Georg Hermann. Plädoyer zur Wiederentdeckung eines bedeutenden deutsch-jüdischen Schriftstellers’, *Bulletin des Leo Baeck Instituts*, 77 (1987), 73-95; Hermann Kähler, *Berlin - Asphalt und Licht. Die große Stadt: in der Literatur der Weimarer Republik* (Berlin, 1986); Gert and Gundel Mattenklott, ‘Georg Hermann - ein Porträt’, in *Georg Hermann. Werke und Briefe in 21 Bänden. Ankündigung*, prospectus issued by Das Neue Berlin (Berlin, 1996), pp. 10-21.



The body of critical research on Hermann's work is still comparatively small. Liere's 1974 study remains the only substantial monograph in this area. The value to the Hermann scholar of contemporary reviews continues to be great, therefore. In addition, there are smaller studies, which have been concerned with particular aspects of Hermann's writing and which, taken together, present very diverse views of his achievements.

Hermann has variously been studied as:

- a chronicler of Jewish life. Siegfried Jacobsohn should be cited in this context. He stated, in his review of the dramatisation of *Henriette Jacoby* (1915), that he saw in Hermann's work 'mein Volk in hundert Vertretern; mein Geschlecht bis ins vierte und fünfte Glied; mein Fleisch, meine Knochen und meine Nerven'.<sup>6</sup> Hans Kohn also emphasises the Jewish context of Hermann's work, characterising the main protagonist of Hermann's *Die Nacht des Doktor Herzfeld* (1912) as 'Typus des entwurzelten, seiner Familie und seinem Volke fremden jüdischen Literaten, wie er durch unsere Tage geht, die letzte Verkleidung, in der Ahasveros auf seiner endlosen Wanderung vor uns erscheint'.<sup>7</sup> The novel *Jettchen Gebert* (1906) is interpreted by him as 'Roman der beginnenden Entwurzelung des Berliner Juden';<sup>8</sup>
- a chronicler of the Biedermeier period. The studies by Vera Wentworth and Walter Perl are especially relevant in this context.<sup>9</sup> Wentworth concentrates on Hermann's depiction of the Biedermeier period 'as a cultural entity'.<sup>10</sup> Her first concern is with the authenticity of Hermann's representation. Rather than directly going back to source material from the Biedermeier period, however, she merely compares Hermann's fictional representations with his own selection of texts in his anthology *Das Biedermeier im Spiegel seiner Zeit* (1913) and thus does not escape a certain bias. Wentworth's second main concern is with Hermann's treatment of what she identifies as the main theme of the novels, namely the decline of the bourgeoisie.

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<sup>6</sup> Siegfried Jacobsohn, 'Alt-Berlin', *Die Schaubühne*, 11 (1915), 515-16 (p. 516).

<sup>7</sup> Hans Kohn, 'Der Roman des Entwurzelten. Georg Hermann: "Die Nacht des Doktor Herzfeld"', in Gustav Krojanker (ed.), *Juden in der deutschen Literatur. Essays über zeitgenössische Schriftsteller* (Berlin, 1922), pp. 27-40 (pp. 35/36).

<sup>8</sup> Kohn, p. 39.

<sup>9</sup> See Vera Wentworth, *Georg Hermann und das Biedermeier*, diss. Univ. of Maryland 1973 (Ann Arbor/Mich., 1977); Walter H. Perl, *Georg Hermanns Berliner Biedermeierromane* (Berlin, 1931), typescript, 53 pages, Georg Hermann Collection, section XIII.

<sup>10</sup> Wentworth, abstract.



Concluding, rather sweepingly, that Hermann contrasts a positive view of the old order with a negative depiction of the new, she fails to recognise the ambivalence in his attitude to the Biedermeier period. Perl follows a more differentiated approach, avoiding the trap concerning the question of authenticity that Wentworth falls into. Concentrating on *Jettchen Gebert*, he investigates Hermann's combination of a historical subject with turn-of-the-century literary techniques. Perl comes to the conclusion, 'daß die Geschichte Jettchen Geberts zur Synthese des rückschauenden Romans mit modern psychologischer Einfühlung geworden ist';<sup>11</sup>

- a bourgeois author, whose work is nevertheless motivated by social concern for the lower classes. Criticism originating in the German Democratic Republic has approached Hermann's work from this aspect, mainly focussing on his novel *Kubinke*. In his introduction to the 1951 edition of *Kubinke* [1910], Christfried Coler, for instance, largely attributes the 'Daseinsberechtigung' of the novel to its social criticism. From this perspective, he considers Hermann's later works, in which the social criticism is significantly reduced, as 'Rückschritt'.<sup>12</sup> Marilyn Fries shows a similar approach to Hermann's work, by treating *Kubinke* as a Naturalist city novel with a critical intention – and concluding her analysis based on this premise by stating the novel's inadequacy in those terms;<sup>13</sup>
- a writer exiled by the Nazi regime. Laureen Nussbaum has worked in this field since the mid-1980s. She has, in several publications, assessed the impact of exile on Hermann's writing.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, she has edited and published Hermann's essay 'Weltabschied', written in exile in Holland, and letters by Hermann written from there to his daughter Hilde.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Perl, p. 51.

<sup>12</sup> Christfried Coler, 'Vorwort', in Georg Hermann, *Kubinke* (Berlin, 1951), pp. 7-15 (p. 15).

<sup>13</sup> See chapter IV in Marilyn S. Fries, *The Changing Consciousness of Reality. The Image of Berlin in Selected German Novels from Raabe to Döblin* (Bonn, 1980), pp. 101-22.

<sup>14</sup> See Laureen Nussbaum, 'Verliebt in Holland. Ein wichtiges und wechselndes Verhältnis in Georg Hermanns reiferen Jahren', in Sjaak Onderdelinden (ed.), *Interbellum und Exil* (Amsterdam, 1986), pp. 181-98; Nussbaum, '“Das Kleidungsstück der europäischen Geistigkeit ist einem besudelt worden ...”. Georg Hermann – Jettchen Geberts Vater – im Exil', in *Exilforschung. Ein internationales Jahrbuch*, 5 (1987), pp. 224-40; Nussbaum, '“Und es kam wie es kommen mußte”. Das Schicksal Georg Hermanns und seiner Spätwerke im niederländischen Exil', *Neophilologus*, 71 (1987), 252-65 and 402-12; Nussbaum, 'Assimilationsproblematik in Georg Hermanns letztem Exilroman “Der etruskische Spiegel”', in Hans-Otto Horch and Itta Shedletzky (eds.), *Conditio Judaica: Deutsch-jüdische Exil- und Emigrationsliteratur im 20. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen, 1993), pp. 195-203.

<sup>15</sup> See Laureen Nussbaum (ed.), *Unvorhanden und stumm, doch zu Menschen noch reden. Georg Hermann* (Mannheim, 1991).

All of these aspects contribute important facets to the description and evaluation of Hermann's work. However, it is difficult to construct, from this kaleidoscopic range of approaches, a convincing picture of his achievements in the context of his time.

In addition to the publications concerned with specific aspects of Hermann's novels, some more general evaluations of his work exist. In these, the following aspects are stressed repeatedly.

#### A. The eidetic quality of Hermann's writing and its affinity to painting

Hermann's power of visual evocation has been stressed by many critics. His art has often been compared to that of a draughtsman or painter. Hans Scholz described him as 'ein Meister des Auges. Der größte Eidetiker [...] unter den Dichtern des 20. Jahrhunderts'<sup>16</sup> and Menno ter Braak concluded, on the basis of an interview with Hermann: 'Es ist also verständlich, daß Hermann vom Standpunkt des Malers aus an die Literatur herantritt.'<sup>17</sup> Analogies between Hermann's writing and contemporary painting, particularly in the context of the representation of Berlin, have been noted again and again. His work has been compared to that of Adolph Menzel and Max Liebermann,<sup>18</sup> Lesser Ury,<sup>19</sup> Walter Leistikow,<sup>20</sup> Heinrich Zille and Käthe Kollwitz.<sup>21</sup> However, these comparisons have been made in throw-away lines, based more on intuition than analysis. Thus, Lulu von Strauß u. Thorney, for example, stated in her review of *Jettchen Gebert*: 'Man fühlt es seinem Buche an, daß er von der Kunst herkommt.' Yet, her explanation of this remains vague: 'nicht nur äußerlich der Sicherheit seiner Schilderung nach. Es ist ein feines Verstehen und Lebendigmachen der toten Dinge in dem Buche, das uns empfinden läßt, wie nah und tief die Dinge mit dem Leben der Menschen verbunden sind.'<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Hans Scholz, 'Georg Hermann und die Berliner Dichtung', in Hermann, *Rosenemil* (München, 1962), pp. 343-68 (p. 368).

<sup>17</sup> Menno ter Braak, 'Georg Hermann "plaudert"', *Het Vaderland*, 16 March 1937. Translated and quoted by Liere, p. 58, footnote 94.

<sup>18</sup> See Mario Krammer, *Berlin im Wandel der Jahrhunderte. Eine Kulturgeschichte der deutschen Hauptstadt. Ergänzt von Paul Fechter* (Berlin, 1956), p. 213.

<sup>19</sup> See Jacobsohn, p. 516.

<sup>20</sup> See Kohn, p. 31.

<sup>21</sup> See Peter Härtling, 'Nachwort', in Hermann, *Kubinke* (Frankfurt a.M., 1974), pp. 289-94 (pp. 292/93); see also Karl Krolow, 'Ein Roman aus dem Berliner "Milljöh"'. Neudruck von Georg Hermanns "Kubinke"', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 10 August 1974.

<sup>22</sup> Lulu von Strauß und Thorney, ' "Jettchen Gebert" ', *Hochland*, V,1 (1907/08), 101-02 (p. 102).



## B. Hermann as an upholder of tradition

In a positive sense, Hermann has been called an epigone by Gert and Gundel Mattenklott. They explain their use of the term in respect to Hermann as follows:

Könnte es gelingen, die Bezeichnung 'Epigone' von ihrem pejorativen Klang zu befreien, so müßte man Hermann als einen der ersten unter den Epigonen des 20. Jahrhunderts nennen. Zu seiner Epigonalität gehört, was die rasche Abwertung nicht verdient: die Treue zum Alten.<sup>23</sup>

Two aspects of this 'Treue zum Alten' have been stressed in Hermann research: first the stylistic and structural character of his writing; and second its thematic concern with chronicling the past. Hermann's novels have been described as continuing the narrative traditions of nineteenth century Realism.<sup>24</sup> The closeness of his art to that of Theodor Fontane has been particularly stressed in this context.<sup>25</sup> Due to the brevity and the survey character of most of the studies of Hermann's work, these observations, like those on the eidetic and pictorial quality of Hermann's writing, have not been underpinned by in-depth analyses.

## C. Hermann as a chronicler of the changing city of Berlin

Hermann's attachment to his native Berlin has been stressed in critical assessments of his work as one of the determining factors in his art. Coler writes: 'Untrennbar schien er, nach Werk und Wesen, mit Berlin verbunden'<sup>26</sup> and in the laudatory articles written on the occasion of the author's fiftieth and sixtieth birthdays, it is this aspect which is highlighted more than any other.<sup>27</sup> Many critics, among them Paul Wiegler,<sup>28</sup> praise Hermann's atmospheric depictions of life in the city and Kunz von Kaufungen even goes so far as to describe Hermann and Arthur Schnitzler as 'Ausdruck zweier Städte'.<sup>29</sup> Hermann's writing has been seen as continuing the tradition of the Berlin novel

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<sup>23</sup> Gert and Gundel Mattenklott, 'Georg Hermann. Ein Porträt', in G. and G. Mattenklott, *Berlin Transit. Eine Stadt als Station* (Reinbek, 1987), pp. 71-86 (p. 79).

<sup>24</sup> See for instance Hans Kaufmann, 'Fortsetzung realistischer Erzähltraditionen des 19. Jahrhunderts bei L. Thoma, A. Schnitzler, E. von Keyserling, G. Hermann und dem frühen H. Hesse', *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschriften der Universität Jena*, 20 (1971), 499-511.

<sup>25</sup> See for instance Krammer; Horch; Scholz; Liere; Gert and Gundel Mattenklott 1987 and 1996.

<sup>26</sup> Christfried Coler, ' "Es kam alles, wie es kommen mußte". Erinnerungen an Georg Hermann', *Aufbau* 3,2 (1947), 182-83 (p. 183).

<sup>27</sup> See, among others, Ludwig Fürst, 'Georg Hermann zum 50. Geburtstag', *Berliner Börsen-Courier*, 7 October 1921; Arthur Galliner, 'Ein Besuch bei Georg Hermann', *Israelitisches Familienblatt*, 8 October 1931; and Karl Escher, 'Georg Hermann zum Sechzigsten', 6 October 1931, cutting, Georg Hermann Collection, section XI, provenance unknown.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Wiegler, 'Georg Hermann', *Die Gesellschaft*, 17,1 (1901), 289-95.

<sup>29</sup> Kunz von Kaufungen, 'Berliner mit allen Konsequenzen. Erinnerungen an den Dichter Georg Hermann', *Deutsche Rundschau*, 86 (1960), 343-45.



established by Willibald Alexis and Fontane. Scholz explicitly places him in this tradition<sup>30</sup> and an anonymous reviewer of Hermann's *Gesammelte Werke* specifies the relationship with these predecessors as follows:

In der feinen Pinselführung bei der Charaktermalerei seiner Menschen steht er auf gleicher Stufe mit Fontane, in der durchgeistigten Belebung einer von der Gegenwart kaum mehr zu verstehenden Zeit hat er sich als der bedeutendste Nachfolger von Willibald Alexis erwiesen.<sup>31</sup>

The representation of Berlin in Hermann's novels has, however, never been investigated systematically and in detail.

In the following paragraphs I describe the main contributions to Hermann research in some more detail. Some of the ideas raised in these, along with the limitations of their analyses, provide the starting points for my analysis.

In his doctoral dissertation *Georg Hermann. Materialien zur Kenntnis seines Lebens und seines Werkes* (1974), Liere laid the foundations for Hermann scholarship. Liere's biographical survey and his extensive bibliography of Hermann's works, including translations and adaptations of them as well as critical literature, provide a sound basis for research in this area. In the analytical part of his study, Liere's main emphasis is on discovering the common elements in Hermann's novels and thus on characterising his writing as a whole. To this end, he considers the novels' openings and endings, common structural techniques and elements of characterisation. In his findings, he stresses the fatalistic attitude he perceives in Hermann's writing and the author's concentration on society's outsiders.

In the provision of factual information on Hermann's life and works and the detection of common structural and thematic elements in his novels, Liere's study is fundamental. It is less convincing in other areas, however. The first of these is his description of Hermann's 'Romanstruktur als jüdisches Substrat'.<sup>32</sup> Liere describes the structures and

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<sup>30</sup> Scholz, p. 395: 'Eine bestimmte Linie spezifischer Dichtung Berlins ist, soweit ich sehe, durch folgende Namen bezeichnet: Friedrich Nicolai, Willibald Alexis und, vor Georg Hermann, Theodor Fontane.'

<sup>31</sup> Quoted from publisher's notes, final page of Georg Hermann, *Die Zeitlupe und andere Betrachtungen über Menschen und Dinge* (Stuttgart, Berlin, Leipzig, 1928). Kähler, too, sees Hermann as 'ein Altmeister des Berlin-Romans' (Kähler, p. 195).

<sup>32</sup> Liere, p. 179. The following paragraph particularly refers to chapters II ('Charakter und Schicksal') and III ('Romanstruktur als jüdisches Substrat') of Liere's study (pp. 161-78 and 179-98).

style of Hermann's novels as specifically Jewish, pointing out the affinities of Hermann's writing to that of the Old Testament. In this context, he cites the use of the (often sevenfold) 'Leitwortwiederholung', the emphasis of mood and the characters' fatalistic submission to predestination. He furthermore likens Hermann's style to the 'sprunghaft-impressionistische[n] Stil der altjüd. Literatur'. Interesting though these observations are, they are problematic as they largely disregard the fact that these elements are to be encountered, too, in the non-Jewish literature of the turn of the century.<sup>33</sup>

The very restricted analysis of Hermann's work in the contemporary literary context is another problematic aspect of Liere's study. In his fourth chapter ('Literarhistorische Stellung'), he refers to Impressionism and Realism only. Interesting connections and comparisons are hinted at, but as Liere is concerned with showing the influences of these aesthetic movements on Hermann's work as a novelist in general, they are not backed up by in-depth analyses of particular works or techniques and thus remain very general.

This brings me to my third and final criticism of Liere's analysis, namely the lack of depth in his analyses of individual novels, which springs from his generalising intent. Individual elements of the novels are sometimes considered but only in so far as they are relevant to the study's focus on techniques common to all of Hermann's work as a novelist.

The following two contributions to Hermann criticism are more limited than that of Liere's monograph. Horch (1987) criticises and rejects Liere's identification of a specifically Jewish style for its want of clarity and for a lack of serious study on the subject: 'Zumindest müßte man solche stilistischen Untersuchungen in einen erheblich größeren Kontext stellen, wenn man nicht zu enthusiastischen Kurzschlüssen gelangen will.'<sup>34</sup> He maintains that most of Hermann's novels should be seen as 'Alltagsgeschichte des deutsch-jüdischen Bürgertums',<sup>35</sup> and goes on to stress that Hermann refrains from depicting the German-Jewish bourgeoisie as a racial minority, but, rather, portrays them 'geradezu als Exempel positiver oder negativer Bürgerlichkeit

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<sup>33</sup> See Richard Hamann and Jost Hermand, *Impressionismus* (= Epochen deutscher Kultur von 1870 bis zur Gegenwart, vol. III) (München, 1972).

<sup>34</sup> Horch, p. 79.

<sup>35</sup> Horch, p. 74.



schlechthin'.<sup>36</sup> In the context of a brief discussion of Hermann's style, Horch emphasises the importance of Fontane's model. However, Horch also detects a mixture of contemporary aesthetic influences in Hermann's writings and specifically refers to Naturalism and Impressionism in this context. Unfortunately, this important impulse is not then further developed.

Finally, it is necessary to mention Gert and Gundel Mattenklott's essay 'Georg Hermann. Ein Porträt' (1987), which was republished in a slightly changed version in the 1996 prospectus of the new edition of Hermann's works.<sup>37</sup> Like Liere, the Mattenklotts stress Hermann's interest in the figure of the individualist outsider and the passivity of many of his characters. Emphasising the theme of forgetting and remembering in Hermann's work, his novels are interpreted as memorials. Concerning the Mattenklotts' assessment of Hermann's relationship to the nineteenth century tradition of the novel, a slight change of emphasis is noticeable between their two contributions. In the 1987 essay, Hermann's 'Treue zum Alten' is stressed. The 1996 version continues mainly to emphasise his debt to Fontane, but also introduces the formula 'Grenzgänger zwischen Tradition und Innovation'.<sup>38</sup> Because of the introductory nature of the Mattenklott's essay, this last point, like Horch's reference to the contemporary aesthetic influences on Hermann's work, is not developed further.

The above survey has shown the main directions of Hermann criticism to date. It has also indicated the need, and the possible directions, for further investigation. In the following sub-section, I shall detail the ways in which my dissertation responds to both the suggestions and the weaknesses of the existing Hermann research by providing original approaches to the analysis and evaluation of Hermann's art as a novelist.

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<sup>36</sup> Horch, p. 80.

<sup>37</sup> For detailed references, see footnotes 5 and 23 above.

<sup>38</sup> G. and G. Mattenklott 1996, p. 10.

## 1.2 Aims and Methods of this Dissertation

In the preceding paragraphs, I identified the following main elements needed in further investigation of Hermann's art:

- an analysis of the eidetic quality of Hermann's writing and of its affinity to the art of painting;
- an investigation of Hermann's art as positioned between traditionalism and openness to contemporary aesthetic movements;
- a thorough analysis of Hermann's representations of the changing city of Berlin.

In all of these aspects, the evaluation must go beyond the rather vague and generalising statements of similarities and affinities made so far in Hermann literature and must be based on detailed analysis of individual novels as well as the development of Hermann's writing over time.

In my reassessment of Hermann's pre-First World War novels and hence of his position in German literary history, I shall cover all of the aspects just listed. My study is composed of two strands of investigation. The first provides an analysis of the novels in terms of their formal construction and aesthetic contexts, while the second concentrates on Hermann's representation of, and attitude towards, Berlin. This dual focus is reflected in the dissertation's structure: each of the novels is accorded two chapters of analysis. In the first chapter of each pair I assess each novel in terms of its formal qualities and its use of aesthetic strategies, while in the second chapter I investigate how Berlin is represented.

The first strand, and hence the first chapter of each pair, contains two main elements of analysis. It is concerned with the development of Hermann's art from *Spielkinder* (1897) to *Die Nacht des Doktor Herzfeld* (1912) and with assessing his novels from this period in the context of contemporary German culture and aesthetics. In order to determine the first part of this strand, I take into account aspects of genre, structure, narrative situation, characterisation and style, as well as the thematic concerns of each



novel and the tone that Hermann uses. This diachronic survey includes comparisons with his other writings, both fictional and non-fictional.

The second part of this first strand of my research is the consideration of each of Hermann's novels in the context of contemporary aesthetics. This is helped through synchronic comparisons with other contemporary texts and the visual arts. For each of the four novels studied, I concentrate on the aesthetic concept that can be determined as dominating it and identify how that concept defines the novel. Of particular importance in the period 1897 to 1912 were the aesthetic movements of Realism, Naturalism and Impressionism, and it is in the context of these that the novels will be analysed.<sup>39</sup> For the analysis of the last of Hermann's pre-First World War novels, *Die Nacht des Doktor Herzfeld*, however, it is useful to operate not within the context of any individual aesthetic movement, but instead to consider the novel as positioned on the cusp between the nineteenth century aesthetic tradition and Modernism, defined as the plurality of styles developed in German literature between the 1890s and 1914 as a reaction against this tradition.<sup>40</sup> In this way, it is possible to establish how far Hermann's art has developed in the period under consideration. Because of the dual focus within my first strand of inquiry, it is possible to examine both the development of Hermann's fundamental and unmistakable individual authorial voice as well as his experimentation with genre and contemporary aesthetic concepts, and thus his position within turn-of-the-century German literature.

The second overall strand of my dissertation analyses Hermann's representations of the rapidly changing city of Berlin in the Wilhelmine period. In all four novels considered here, Berlin is more than a background. Hermann's representations of Berlin thus have to be considered first in the context of their function in the novel. As Gerd Hurm points out, 'fictional city images are crucially shaped by the particular issues chosen for

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<sup>39</sup> The influence of the Expressionist movement is detectable only in some rather isolated instances in Hermann's novels, for example in certain metaphors used in *Kubinke* and *Die Nacht des Doktor Herzfeld*. I shall draw attention to this influence at the appropriate places, but the minimal reflection in Hermann's work of this movement does not warrant specific analysis. G. and G. Mattenklott hold the same view: 'So unspektakulär wie sein Habitus sind seine Bücher, in denen weder der Aufschrei des Expressionismus noch der Unsinnslärm der Dadaisten einen Nachhall fand' (G. and G. Mattenklott 1987, p. 78).

<sup>40</sup> For discussions of the scope and definition of Modernism, see Helmut Kreuzer, 'Zur Periodisierung der "modernen" deutschen Literatur', in Kreuzer, *Veränderungen des Literaturbegriffs* (Göttingen, 1975), pp. 41-63 and Jürgen Habermas, *Der philosophische Diskurs der Moderne* (Frankfurt a.M., 1985).



treatment'.<sup>41</sup> It has to be asked on which aspects of city life Hermann concentrates and to what extent they are dictated by the plot of the particular novel. Attention must also be focused on the techniques of city representation that he uses to achieve the evocative image that readers and critics have attested to again and again in his depiction of the urban environment and experience.

Furthermore, I shall investigate whether Hermann's form of the Berlin novel is to be classified as 'nostalgische Rückzugsliteratur'<sup>42</sup> or whether his representations take into account new developments in the changing city and make use of new aesthetic possibilities appropriate to representing this new reality. Heinz Brüggemann has shown how in texts of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries 'die tradierten Wahrnehmungsmuster in der Auseinandersetzung mit dem neuen Gegenstand (Großstadt) in einen Prozeß der Auflösung und Umformung geraten'.<sup>43</sup> A similar process can be observed in the development of Hermann's Berlin depictions. An intimate knowledge of Berlin and a desire to record the reality of the city are constants in Hermann's work. As the city changes, however, his perceptions and depictions change with it.

The combination of the two overall strands of inquiry of this study provides a model which allows me to evaluate the development of Hermann's art against a constant element, namely his thematic concern with chronicling the development of Berlin. This analytical approach allows me to show clearly the extent of Hermann's experimentation with genre and contemporary aesthetic concepts.

Limiting the study to Hermann's pre-First World War novels is justified with regard to both strands of investigation. The development of Hermann's writing in structural terms was largely complete by 1912. Thus, Liere, who considers Hermann's works as belonging to three stages, namely 'Jugendwerke', 'mittlere Periode' and 'reifere Werke', considers *Die Nacht des Doktor Herzfeld* as exemplary for the last category.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, the time span covered, more or less the Wilhelmine period, equals the

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<sup>41</sup> Gerd Hurm, *Fragmented Urban Images. The American City in Modern Fiction from Stephen Crane to Thomas Pynchon* (= Neue Studien zur Anglistik und Amerikanistik, vol. 52) (Frankfurt a.M., 1991), p. 10.

<sup>42</sup> Term used by Christof Forderer, *Die Großstadt im Roman. Berliner Großstadtdarstellungen zwischen Naturalismus und Moderne* (Wiesbaden, 1992), p. 19.

<sup>43</sup> Heinz Brüggemann, *Aber schickt keine Poeten nach London* (Reinbek, 1985), p. 9.

<sup>44</sup> Liere, p. 137.

period of greatest change and variety both in aesthetic concepts and in the development of the city of Berlin towards a metropolis. For an assessment of Hermann's novels, this is, therefore, the crucial period.

The comparative aspects of this study have their basis in references to: other contemporary literary works and non-fictional aesthetic writing; painting; and sociological and psychological analyses of the changes affecting Berliners around the turn of the century. These last two approaches are less well established within literary studies than the first. In the following paragraphs, I shall therefore explain how and why I use these analytical frameworks.

Before he was able to establish himself as a novelist, Hermann not only studied the history of art, he also earned his living as an art critic, following closely the developments in contemporary painting. He repeatedly stressed his affinity to the visual arts. In his autobiographical essay 'Im Spiegel', for instance, he confesses: 'Hänge mit meiner ganzen Seele an den stummen und so beredten Dingen der bildenden Kunst. Liebe sie ganz rein - weit mehr als alle Literatur, [...] weil ich durchaus sinnlich und keineswegs geistig bin.'<sup>45</sup> Some insight into how far his view of his environment is guided by his knowledge of painting, can be gained from the autobiographical novel *Der kleine Gast* (1925). Among a number of instances in which the view of the city is rendered in analogy to that of a painting is the following description of the Leipziger Straße:

In seiner Jugend war sie noch solch ein Rest von farbiger Lithographie, Meyer Lüdtkke, und von 'Familie Mendelssohn' gewesen [...]. Und nun war sie bei den Impressionisten in die Schule gegangen. Nur der Ton war etwas anders, nicht so violett, mehr grau und etwas glasig, der Ton war noch Monet 1866, mit schärferen Konturen und härteren Schatten. Aber in Deutschland ist die Malerei ja immer zwanzig bis dreißig Jahre zurück.<sup>46</sup>

Further, in several instances the novel's characters are likened to portrait paintings.<sup>47</sup> These overt comparisons do not appear in Hermann's pre-First World War novels. But it can be assumed that the writer's imagination in many cases has recourse to the same

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<sup>45</sup> Georg Hermann, 'Im Spiegel (Pfeilerspiegel, ganze Figur)', in Hermann, *Vom gesicherten und ungesicherten Leben. Ernste Plaudereien* (Berlin, 1915), pp. 206-16 (p. 211).

<sup>46</sup> Hermann, *Der kleine Gast*, p. 543.

<sup>47</sup> See Hermann, *Der kleine Gast*, pp. 171, 191, 195, 210 and 573-75.



process of filtering and sorting the direct visual impression through reference to the visual arts, before transforming it into descriptive, literary writing.

Thus to study Hermann's work in the context of interart comparison is a useful complementary approach which clarifies the stylistic and structural qualities of Hermann's novels, elucidates their underlying aesthetics and puts into context his view and representation of Berlin. Indeed, one of the leading scholars in the field of interart comparison, Ulrich Weisstein, specifically includes the study of 'the work of writers [...] who served as art critics and whose art criticism, an applied form of *ekphrasis*, had a bearing on their literary activities' as a valid field of study in the context of the discipline.<sup>48</sup>

To be valid, the comparison has to be based on objectively describable structural, stylistic and/or thematic correspondences. Indeed, many critics and scholars in the field of interart comparison have warned against indiscriminate and intuitive comparisons.<sup>49</sup>

James D. Merriman has stipulated:

A feature [selected for comparison] must be capable of literal presence in all the objects to be compared. One of the most frequent methodological errors in interarts comparisons has been the failure to recognize that a feature literally present in one art is only figuratively present in another.<sup>50</sup>

However, I agree with Weisstein, who rejects the logic of Merriman's overcautious scepticism in the introduction to the handbook edited by him in 1992 under the title *Literatur und bildende Kunst*:

Das [...] Kriterium [...] ist nicht stichhaltig und widerspricht Merrimans Grundauffassung. Denn bei Vergleichen, die über die Mediengrenzen hinausgreifen, ist nur in Ausnahmefällen mit völliger Kongruenz zu rechnen, und die metaphorische Redeweise muß deshalb dominieren.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ulrich Weisstein, 'Literature and the Visual Arts', in Jean-Pierre Barricelli and Joseph Gibaldi (eds.), *Interrelations of Literature* (New York, 1982), pp. 251-77 (p. 262).

<sup>49</sup> Alastair Fowler, for instance, states in a reference to Rosemond Tuve's critical writings that she has shown that comparisons between the arts 'often contain only the vaguest impression of unspecified similarity' and he goes on to deplore that a 'soft atmosphere of whimsy still envelops the field of interart comparison' (Fowler, 'Periodization and Interart Analogies', in Ulrich Weisstein (ed.), *Literatur und bildende Kunst. Ein Handbuch zur Theorie und Praxis eines komparatistischen Grenzgebietes* (Berlin, 1992), pp. 86-101 (p. 93)).

<sup>50</sup> James D. Merriman, 'The Parallel of the Arts: Some Misgivings and a Faint Affirmation. Part I', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 31 (1972), 153-64 (p. 160).

<sup>51</sup> Ulrich Weisstein, 'Einleitung. Literatur und bildende Kunst: Geschichte, Systematik, Methoden', in Weisstein (ed.), *Literatur und bildende Kunst*, pp. 11-31 (p. 30).



In his analysis of Katherine Mansfield's *Her First Ball*, Weisstein explains:

While, in principle, I share Merriman's cautionary stance, I see a need for stating, most emphatically, that those phenomena which, with obvious condescension, he calls 'non-relationships' - by which term I take him to mean parallels and analogies - also have their place in the mutual illumination of the arts.<sup>52</sup>

The determining factor for the validity of the study is the soundness of the basis of the analogy.

This basis is established in Weisstein's theoretical framework, as summarised in the introduction to his 1992 *Handbuch*.<sup>53</sup> Among the types of literary works that lend themselves to a study of interart comparison, he lists 'literarische Werke, in denen versucht wird, verbale Entsprechungen zu bildkünstlerischen Bewegungen oder Strömungen zu erarbeiten'.<sup>54</sup> This category of analysis looks at the 'transliteration' of a complex movement style and is based on, but goes beyond, looking at the transfer of particular techniques from the visual arts into literature.<sup>55</sup> Weisstein stresses the need to take into account, but go beyond, the study of stylistic parallels:

Literary Impressionism [...] operates on several levels and is by no means confined to the obvious grammatical, syntactical and lexical equivalents to which it, and other verbal byproducts of the movement, have so often been

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<sup>52</sup> Ulrich Weisstein, 'Butterfly Wings Without a Framework of Steel? The Impressionism of Katherine Mansfield's Short Story "Her First Ball"', in Weisstein (ed.), *Literatur und bildende Kunst*, pp. 279-97 (p.283).

<sup>53</sup> Weisstein's framework is based on Austin Warren's and René Wellek's 1949 survey and evaluation of the four then existing approaches in the field of interart comparison (Warren and Wellek, *Theory of Literature* [1949] (Harmondsworth, 1985). While the comparison of two works of art on the sole basis that 'this picture and that poem induce the same mood in me' is dismissed as imprecise and unverifiable (Warren and Wellek, p. 127), the three others are seen - with some reservations - as useful tools of analysis. Warren and Wellek consider the comparison of the artists' intentions and theories to be potentially misleading, as consciously stated intentions do not always tally with individual, completed works of art. However, if complementary to the comparison of works of art themselves, as in chapter 6 of this dissertation, this approach is valid and helpful to the establishment of aesthetic connections. The third and the fourth of the approaches that Warren and Wellek list are the most fruitful to scholarly analysis of interart comparisons, namely the 'comparison of the arts on the basis of their common social and cultural background' (Warren and Wellek, p. 129) and the 'analysis of the actual objects of art, and thus of their structural relationships' (Warren and Wellek, p. 130). Taking Warren's and Wellek's fundamental ideas further and developing them in detail, Ulrich Weisstein has been working since 1981 on a 'catalogue raisonné of the various types of interrelations that are of interest to the literary scholar'. He presents the latest version of this in his 1992 handbook (pp. 20-27). Earlier versions have been published elsewhere, for instance as Weisstein, 'Literature and the Visual Arts' (for references see footnote 48 above).

<sup>54</sup> Weisstein, 'Einleitung', p. 24.

<sup>55</sup> Weisstein's analysis of Katherine Mansfield's short story *Her First Ball* (for reference see footnote 52 above) is an example of this type of study based on a 'Nachvollzug impressionistischer Denkart und Verfahrensweise' (Weisstein, 'Einleitung', p. 24).



stereotypically reduced. Although the search for such equivalents is not futile, [...] it needs to be complemented by a more philosophical approach to the whole range of phenomena which [...] are the direct or indirect outgrowth of an esthetic which has, after all, produced a kind of period style.<sup>56</sup>

Hermann's novels are influenced by different aesthetics, but cannot always be said to be conscious transliterations of particular styles. His novels all fall into another category of literary works, however, to which Weisstein considers the application of interart comparative study to be relevant: 'literarische Werke, die an den optischen oder haptischen Sinn des Lesers appellieren'.<sup>57</sup> Although Weisstein's concern is here mainly with the use of images and metaphors in literature, so also must colour attributes, detailed descriptions and evocations of atmosphere be subsumed in this category. All of these play an important role in Hermann's writing and contribute to its particular pictorial quality.

Weisstein also refers to a category of works which demands a form of comparison that does not involve the stylistic analysis of the objects compared, but revolves around the content: 'literarische Werke, die Motive, Themen oder Figuren darstellen, die auch in der Bildenden Kunst behandelt werden'.<sup>58</sup> A comparison of themes and motifs is seen as a justifiable approach, as long as it is carried out within a framework of the history of thought ('Geistesgeschichte').<sup>59</sup> 'Geistesgeschichte', in order to be a functional tool, must be defined as the history of aesthetic movements across the cultural spectrum, determined not by an elusive idea of 'Zeitgeist' or by the assumption of an 'innere Gesetzmäßigkeit des schicksalsverbundenen parallelen Entwicklungsgangs',<sup>60</sup> but by

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<sup>56</sup> Weisstein, 'Butterfly Wings', p. 292.

<sup>57</sup> Weisstein, 'Einleitung', p. 22.

<sup>58</sup> Weisstein, 'Einleitung', p. 24.

<sup>59</sup> This inclusion stands in contrast to Weisstein's earlier rejection of comparisons based exclusively on content (see Ulrich Weisstein, 'Comparing Literature and Art: Current Trends and Prospects in Critical Theory and Methodology', in Zoran Konstantinovic et al. (eds.), *Literature and the Other Arts. Proceedings of the IXth Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association* (= Innsbrucker Beiträge zur Kulturwissenschaft, Sonderheft 51) (Innsbruck, 1981), pp. 19-30 (p. 23). It is also interesting in view of the ambivalent stance that Weisstein has shown to studies carried out within the parameters of 'Geistesgeschichte'. To clarify the uses and abuses of this concept, it should be said here that 'Geistesgeschichte' as a sweeping generalisation of individual elements to be subsumed under a broad definition of period style can lead to inaccurate and intuitive statements rather than providing well founded scholarly research. This is especially the case when, rather than referring the style and content of different periods back to historical or social background and concrete events and circumstances, a loosely defined spirit of the age ('Zeitgeist') is assumed, which cyclically renews itself. It is in this context that Wellek, referring to studies by Mario Praz, among others, has condemned 'Geistesgeschichte' as potentially leading to premature and immature conclusions and that Weisstein, in his 1981 paper, stressed the danger of the concept.

<sup>60</sup> Julius Petersen, 'Nationale oder vergleichende Literaturgeschichte', *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literatur und Geistesgeschichte*, 6 (1928), 36-61 (p. 51).



mutual influence between the arts and a common cultural and sociological and historical background.<sup>61</sup> Fowler reminds us: 'Since the styles are also chronologically structured, diachronic analysis and even external history must be taken into account. Thus it should not be found in any way surprising that artists often move from one style to another.'<sup>62</sup> If it is taken as a rough heuristic tool rather than a rigid system of mutually exclusive characteristics, in order to describe particular works of art and their relationships to one another, and if it is used in combination with a detailed stylistic analysis, the interart comparison of content in the context of 'Geistesgeschichte' or aesthetic movements gains scholarly validity as a 'handmaiden of "Stilgeschichte"'.<sup>63</sup>

In this dissertation, I use a combination of the methods listed by Weisstein.<sup>64</sup> The comparison of particular texts or text extracts with contemporary painting is applied in stylistic comparisons, comparisons of motif and of underlying concepts of city representation, and in references to Hermann's journalistic writing on art. Underlying this approach is the understanding of correspondences as being based on common aesthetics, developed as a result of mutual influences and socio-historical causes.

As highlighted earlier, the analysis of Hermann's representation of the social and psychological changes in Berlin has an important place in my study. However, my concern is not with the authenticity of the Berlin picture that Hermann presents in his novels. Accordingly, this dissertation does not contain any comparisons of Hermann's fictional representations of Berlin with the actual city of the time. My interest lies instead in Hermann's fictional transformations of this reality and in what they reveal about the author's view of, and attitude towards, the development of the city. I will determine how this attitude vis-à-vis the new metropolitan reality fits within the context of contemporary city discourse. It is in this context that the comparison of Hermann's Berlin representations with non-fictional discourses reacting to and assessing the same reality will be of interest.

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<sup>61</sup> For this approach, see also Fowler.

<sup>62</sup> Fowler, p. 92.

<sup>63</sup> Weisstein, 'Literature and the Visual Arts', p. 260.

<sup>64</sup> In a recent study on Katherine Mansfield, Julia van Gunsteren employs a similar method. She combines several of Weisstein's types of investigation to construct a 'more structured method of investigation, based on a discussion of literary techniques related to the basic aesthetics of Literary Impressionism and Impressionism in painting' (Julia van Gunsteren, *Katherine Mansfield and Literary Impressionism* (Amsterdam, Atlanta, 1990), p.10).



Among the sources used for the comparisons with contemporary sociological and psychological writing, Georg Simmel's observations and analyses are of especial importance. These resulted directly from his experience of turn-of-the-century Berlin. Simmel was, in the early years of the twentieth century, of seminal significance to the development of city sociology as a scholarly discipline. He profoundly influenced Robert E. Park and Louis Wirth who went on to become the two leading figures of the Chicago School of Sociology.<sup>65</sup> David Frisby judges him to be the 'first sociologist of modernity'.<sup>66</sup>

Others, however, have criticised what they see as Simmel's unbalanced view of metropolitan life.<sup>67</sup> His analyses of metropolitan life may indeed be judged as biased, insofar as his view is determined by his middle-class perspective.<sup>68</sup> But this is irrelevant to my investigation, which centres on comparing Hermann's views of Berlin with those prominent in contemporary discourses. My interest is in Hermann's particular attitude towards Berlin, which differed from that of other novelists of the time but which shows remarkable affinities with Simmel's (and others') sociological and psychological insights.

The use of Simmel's writings as a frame of reference for this study is supported by Lothar Müller's suggestion: 'Zum literarischen Porträt des Großstädtlers liefern Simmels Analysen der 'inneren Urbanisierung' das soziologische Röntgenbild.'<sup>69</sup> Müller, as if

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<sup>65</sup> For further information, see David Frisby, *Georg Simmel* (Chichester, 1984) and Martin Bulmer, *The Chicago School of Sociology* (Chicago, 1984). In the German context, see Helmuth Lethen, who presents Simmel as a forerunner of the generally positive evaluation of the metropolis which, according to Lethen, only starts in the 1920s in Germany (Helmuth Lethen, 'Chicago und Moskau. Berlins moderne Kultur der Zwanziger Jahre zwischen Inflation und Weltwirtschaftskrise', in Jochen Boberg, Tilman Fichter et al. (eds.), *Die Metropole* (Berlin, 1986), pp. 190-213).

<sup>66</sup> David Frisby, 'Soziologie und Moderne: Ferdinand Tönnies, Georg Simmel und Max Weber', in Otthein Rammstedt (ed.), *Simmel und die frühen Soziologen* (Frankfurt a.M., 1988), pp. 196-221 (p. 212).

<sup>67</sup> The historian Schäfer, a contemporary of Simmel, recommended to the cultural minister in Baden that he should not award Simmel a chair of philosophy at the university of Heidelberg, on the grounds that Schäfer deemed Simmel incapable of 'solid and systematic thinking' and that 'it is hardly possible to treat the mental life of the metropolis in a sparser and more biased way than he did' (Schäfer, letter to the Kultusministerium in Baden, quoted from Lewis A. Coser (ed.), *Georg Simmel* (Englewood Cliffs, 1965), pp.37-39 (p. 39)).

<sup>68</sup> Frisby, for instance, referring to Simmel's generalisation of anonymity and reserve as standard features of the metropolitan way of life, states: 'Reserve and indifference as defence mechanisms in the metropolis are most likely to be used by those social strata who, from a relatively secure social position, can afford to adopt this response.' (David Frisby, *Fragments of Modernity: Theories of Modernity in the Work of Simmel, Kracauer, and Benjamin* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 83.) Hurm condemns the whole discipline of urbanism on this ground: 'Notions of an urban ontology have prevailed because they most perfectly fitted the dominant white middle-class perception of the [...] city.' (Hurm, p. 72.)

<sup>69</sup> Lothar Müller, 'Die Großstadt als Ort der Moderne. Über Georg Simmel', in Klaus R. Scherpe (ed.), *Die Unwirklichkeit der Städte. Großstadtdarstellungen zwischen Moderne und Postmoderne* (Reinbek,

writing a preface to this dissertation, highlights the mutual influences and close connections between the areas of literature, painting and Simmel's sociology:

Wie der Roman so nimmt auch die bildende Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts die Indifferenz als ästhetische Wahrnehmungsstrategie in sich auf. Die Entdeckung der Großstadt als Ort des Schönen hat man in diesem Sinne in den Kontext einer 'Ästhetik der Indifferenz' gestellt.<sup>70</sup>

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1988), pp. 14-36 (p. 31/32). For an interesting account of this concept of 'inner urbanisation', see Gottfried Korff, ' "Die Stadt aber ist der Mensch" ', in Korff and Reinhard Rürup (eds.), *Berlin, Berlin. Die Ausstellung zur Geschichte der Stadt* (Berlin, 1987), pp. 643-63.

<sup>70</sup> L. Müller, 'Großstadt', pp. 32/33.



## 2 Autobiography and Naturalist Social Novel: *Spielkinder* (1897)

*Spielkinder* was the first of Hermann's novels to appear in print, following some shorter works of fiction. Written in 1894 and 1895, it was published by Fontane & Co in 1897 after having appeared in serialised form in *Die Neue Welt*, the supplement to the social democrat journal *Vorwärts* (6/1/1897 - 23/4/1897). In *Spielkinder*, Hermann portrays chronologically part of the protagonist Georg's life (approximately from his fourth to his twenty-third year). Hermann depicts Georg's boyhood in 'Gründerzeit' Berlin, marked by his family's sudden plunge into poverty following a failed speculation by his father. As Georg grows up, his involvement with an art society founded by himself and his friends, first experiences at work, and, most importantly, his problematic relationship with the proletarian girl Lies are highlighted. The novel ends with Lies' death from consumption.

The uniqueness of *Spielkinder* in the context of Hermann's work is noticeable not only in its structure, its use of narrative situations and its style, but also in respect of the concerns of the novel and in the tone that Hermann uses. Autobiographical material and social criticism are combined here in a personal account, which is at the same time representative of late nineteenth century experience and literary expression. The aesthetics of Naturalist literature, although mixed with suggestions of Hermann's later, more Impressionist style, characterise this first novel. A second edition of *Spielkinder* appeared in 1911. When Hermann reflects on the reactions of his readers to his works in the preface to this second edition, he recognises that his aesthetics have changed since the novel first appeared:

- Naja, alter Junge,- es ist ganz nett, was du so in den letzten fünf bis sechs Jahren geschrieben hast, - und das bißchen armseligen Erfolg mißgönnen wir dir gewiß nicht. Aber - es bleibt unter uns - damals, als du noch Krawatten packtest und eben deine 'Spielkinder' schriebst, da warst du begabter als heute - vielleicht weil du jünger warst.<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter, an analysis of the elements that shape *Spielkinder* and that make the novel unique in Hermann's works will be provided. So far, critical analyses of *Spielkinder* have been conspicuously absent. Apart from a few comments in two short

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<sup>1</sup> Georg Hermann, *Spielkinder*, in Hermann, *Gesammelte Werke*, 5 vols (Stuttgart, Berlin, Leipzig, 1922-1932), vol. II (1922), pp. 1-259 (p. 9). Further references to *Spielkinder* in this and the following chapter are to this edition and appear after quotations in the text.

articles from 1901 and 1914<sup>2</sup> and the passages devoted to the novel in Liere's monograph on Hermann, no critical assessment of the work has been published to my knowledge. The reasons for this must be sought at least partly in the difficulties inherent in the novel: a duality of structure and content as well as a variety of intentions that sit together somewhat uneasily.

In my analysis of *Spielkinder*, I intend to show how Hermann combines the subjectivism of the autobiographer with the social concern of the Naturalist writer, attempting to capture reality objectively and truthfully, an attempt characteristic of both Naturalist and Impressionist literature. *Spielkinder* emerges as an experiment, which, even if not wholly successful, suggests the directions that Hermann's writing was to take later.

This chapter is organised in three sections. The first is a short introduction to the autobiographical aspect of *Spielkinder*. In the second, I investigate the effect that the organisation of the material in the form of a novel, rather than an autobiography, has on the work. In this context, I provide an analysis of the strangely dual structure of *Spielkinder*, as well as of the elements Hermann employs to guide the reading process of the novel, such as: narrative voice and perspectives, the use of the title as leitmotif, the juxtaposition of individual segments of the novel and the use of tone. In the third section of this chapter, I turn to an interpretation of the novel in the context of Naturalist writing. Formal as well as ideological aspects will be taken into consideration, with the aim of assessing the novel in the context of contemporary aesthetic considerations.

## 2.1 The Autobiographical Aspect of *Spielkinder*

It is useful, in the context of this thesis, to establish Hermann's motivations and aims in writing *Spielkinder* as distinct from those in writing his later works. It is in this light that I consider the autobiographical component of the novel in the following paragraphs, bringing in autobiographical essays such as 'Bismarck und Menzel', 'Im Spiegel', both published in 1915, 'Mein Geburtshaus' (undated) and 'Meine Eltern' (1928) at relevant points.

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<sup>2</sup> See Wiegler, also Anselma Heine, 'Georg Hermann', *Literarisches Echo*, 17 (1914/15), cols. 326-32.



When the novel's plot is compared to Hermann's autobiographical essays, it becomes clear that the story of *Spielkinder* is that of Hermann's own childhood and youth. Hermann, whose real name was Georg Borchardt, suffered from the financial decline of his family which followed a failed speculation by his father, Hermann Borchardt. In an essay entitled 'Mein Geburtshaus' he identifies the location of the house the family moved to after they were struck by financial catastrophe: 'Das Haus der "Spielkinder" liegt in der Siegesmundstraße dem des alten Menzel gegenüber'.<sup>3</sup> That this is not only a geographical anchoring of his fiction, but is indeed the house in which the Borchardt family lived for a time, is supported by an account of the neighbourly relations between Adolph Menzel and the young Georg: 'Wenn wir da Knieabschwünge übten, und uns dabei sachlich unterhielten, daß man es drei Nebenstraßen weit hören konnte, dann riß diese kleine, alte Kröte da oben ein Fenster auf und brüllte herunter, wir sollten das Maul halten. Was uns verdroß.'<sup>4</sup>

In the essay 'Im Spiegel', Hermann also refers to the social situation of his family, which he describes as poverty behind a facade of respectability. He mentions the misery with which he experienced this situation: 'In mein viertes bis sechstes Jahr - es ist das die 'Gründerzeit' - fällt der völlige finanzielle Zusammenbruch meines Elternhauses, den ich mit Bewußtsein und Erkenntnis mit durchlebte, und unter dessen Druck ich Jahrzehnte bleibe.'<sup>5</sup>

The narrator of *Spielkinder* echoes the feelings of misery and oppression evident in these lines. He refers to his identity at the time of writing only relatively late in the novel, namely on page 28. He refers here to the process of writing his novel as a retrieval from memory by the older 'I': 'Besonders einmal - ich erinnere mich noch, wie wenn es heute gewesen wäre, - [...]' (p. 28). Later on, he explains that this retrieval of memory is impaired by the suppression mechanisms which have relegated the suffering of his youth to the subconscious:

Jene schrecklichen Tage [...] haben sich in meinem Gedächtnis verschleiert, und nur Träume können diesen Schleier lüften. Träume, die mir die Kehle zuschnüren, die mich erschauern, aufschreien lassen, so daß ich emporfahre, die Augen

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<sup>3</sup> Georg Hermann, 'Mein Geburtshaus', typescript, 3 pages, undated, Georg Hermann Collection, section III, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Georg Hermann, 'Bismarck und Menzel', in Hermann, *Die Zeitlupe und andere Betrachtungen über Menschen und Dinge* (Stuttgart, Berlin, Leipzig, 1928), pp. 5-13 (p. 9).

<sup>5</sup> Hermann, 'Im Spiegel', p. 208.



aufreißt, ins Dunkel starre, ohne daß es mir zum Bewußtsein kommt, was ich geträumt habe. (pp. 98/99)

The narrator can thus to a large extent be seen as identical with the author. Even though not entitled an 'autobiography' and even though Georg Hermann's father, Hermann Borchardt, is named Geiger in the novel, the content of *Spielkinder* can be interpreted in an autobiographical context. The novel even fits the rather narrow - and indeed for this reason sometimes rejected<sup>6</sup> - definition of autobiography given by Philippe Lejeune as a 'retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his own personality'.<sup>7</sup>

One of Hermann's intentions in writing this novel, it may safely be assumed, is, as in many autobiographical writings, 'the urgent need to exorcise a childhood which was not paradise'.<sup>8</sup> Not only in 'Im Spiegel', the essay quoted above, but also in a review of his life, written in the late 1920s, Hermann states: 'Die "Gründerzeit" hat die Wohlhabenheit meines Elternhauses von Grund auf ruiniert'. In the same text, Hermann describes his parents: 'Hatte einen lebenszähnen, starrköpfigen Pechvogel von Vater und eine prächtige Mutter von witziger Eigenart'.<sup>9</sup> In the essay 'Meine Eltern', he elaborates on this short characterisation. The father is remembered in the last ten years of his life as 'ein kranker und gebrochener Mensch, [...] der in ewigen Sorgen, Erregungen, Hoffnungen und materiellen Nöten war'.<sup>10</sup> The mother appears as a spirited woman who kept the family from 'proletarianisation'. Her original and imaginative way of speaking, evident in the episode in *Spielkinder* in which she tells her son a story about the jungle (p. 30), is mentioned too in 'Meine Eltern'.

The family constellation described in *Spielkinder* is the same as that which emerges from Hermann's autobiographical writings. It is also, as Coe points out after extensive research on autobiographical writing, archetypal for the situation from which the autobiographer's need to 'exorcise' his past arises:

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<sup>6</sup> For criticism of Lejeune's definition, see Robert Folkenflik, 'Introduction: The Institution of Autobiography', in Folkenflik (ed.), *The Culture of Autobiography* (Stanford/Cal., 1993), pp. 1-20 and Julia Watson's essay in the same volume ('Toward an Anti-Metaphysics of Autobiography', pp. 57-79).

<sup>7</sup> Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography*, ed. by Paul J. Eakin (Minneapolis, 1989), pp. 4-5. Hermann varies the retrospective stance of the narrator with other narrative situations, however. This point will be taken up again later in this chapter.

<sup>8</sup> Richard N. Coe, *When the Grass Was Taller. Autobiography and the Experience of Childhood* (New Haven, London, 1984), p. 67.

<sup>9</sup> Georg Hermann, typescript, untitled and undated, 3 pages, Georg Hermann Collection, section III, p.1.

<sup>10</sup> Georg Hermann, 'Meine Eltern', in Hermann, *Die Zeitlupe*, pp. 194-99 (p. 194).



The dead father, the absent father, the failed father: these are the archetypes, the subtly varied degrees of inadequacy which leave a void to be filled, an ideal somehow to be sought, a kind of quest which, consciously or subconsciously, provides one of the more powerful motivations for recording the past.<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, coming to terms with the relationship with the father takes an important place, especially in the first part of *Spielkinder*, and can be seen as one of the main motivations for the work. It is carried out not only through a narrative re-creation of the events in the young Georg's life, but also through the narrator's reflections on his father and through the re-creation of the thoughts of the young boy about his father (pp. 51, 84 and 139). At one point, the narrator directly addresses his dead father in a kind of soliloquy:

Ja, wenn ich Maler wäre, und ich sollte die Hoffnung darstellen, so würde ich dich als Modell nehmen. [...] Ja, Vater, nimm's mir nicht übel, wenn ich es jetzt so bedenke, du warst doch ein richtiges, großes Kind, gläubig, gutherzig - aber doch ein Spielkind! (p. 44)

Although the relationship of the author/narrator with his father is of great importance, the novel also provides a more general coming to terms with the past. Other relationships and events are touched on in the self-revealing passages of the narrating 'I'. He mentions his fear of showing emotions (p. 52), gives revised judgements of his mother (p. 142) and of his uncle, the 'aristocrat' (p. 140), and describes his retrospective thoughts and feelings about his relationship to his first love, Lies (p. 148).<sup>12</sup>

In short, the personal and cathartic function of writing is clearly a major intention motivating the novel. Yet, it appears that many of the reading public did not understand the novel in the way that Hermann had intended. In 'Im Spiegel', Hermann expresses his disappointment at the readers' lack of understanding of his personal message: 'Aber - man hätte doch den Schrei hören müssen - den Schrei!'<sup>13</sup> In his study on autobiographical writing, John Sturrock quotes a very similar disappointment experienced by Rousseau who had entrusted a clergyman with his autobiographical tract *Rousseau juge de Jean Jacques*, in order to make the other understand his thoughts and emotions and consequently take his side.<sup>14</sup> The problem, in Hermann's just as much as

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<sup>11</sup> Coe, p. 142.

<sup>12</sup> No autobiographical information on Hermann's first girlfriend, possibly the model for Lies, could be found.

<sup>13</sup> Hermann, 'Im Spiegel', p. 210.

<sup>14</sup> John Sturrock, *The Language of Autobiography. Studies in the First Person Singular* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 1/2.



in Rousseau's case, is that of the 'literary medium having interposed itself as a fatal barrier to the emotional togetherness he had been craving'.<sup>15</sup>

In the second edition, therefore, published in 1911, Hermann framed *Spielkinder* by a preface and an epilogue in which he stressed the autobiographical element of the novel. These additions have been taken over into the *Gesammelte Werke* edition. The preface is particularly interesting because it not only sketches the context of the novel's creation and first reactions to its publication, but also gives valuable insights into Hermann's artistic intentions in writing *Spielkinder* and into his attitude to his work.<sup>16</sup>

Hermann stresses his emotional involvement in the novel. He finds himself incapable of making any changes to it 'nicht, weil ich es etwa für vollendet halte, sondern weil ich [...] nicht mit Tinte in ein Buch hineinschreiben möchte, das mit Blut geschrieben wurde' (p. 1).<sup>17</sup> The deeply personal character of this novel that is highlighted here is stressed again several times in this preface. Thus, Hermann writes:

Was ich gegeben habe und geben will, sind Kristallisationsformen meines Ichs, bittere und süße Niederschläge, Selbstüberwindungen, schwermütige und heitere Exaltationen. Ich gab sie und ich will sie geben, um meinem Sein, das verrinnt, feste Formen zu verleihen. (p. 8)

It is interesting, however, that in spite of the reading public's apparent misunderstanding of the aims explicitly claimed here, the first edition of the novel had been successful. In the essay 'Im Spiegel', Hermann mentions that Fontane had commented favourably<sup>18</sup> and in the preface to the second edition of *Spielkinder*, Hermann refers to the success that the novel had by then achieved. The fact that it was reprinted in the social democrat journal *Die Neue Welt*, a supplement to *Vorwärts*, indicates that it was seen and valued in a different capacity to that of a subjective autobiography, a psychological exercise.

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<sup>15</sup> Sturrock, p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> Reprinted in Hermann, *Spielkinder*, pp. 1-9.

<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, Hermann takes up the same metaphor again thirty-seven years later in his *Rosenmil*. The value that Hermann attributes to the personal involvement in writing is stressed here: 'Von allem Geschriebenen liebe ich nur das, was jemand mit seinem Blut schreibt' (Hermann, *Rosenmil* (Berlin, 1988), p. 102).

<sup>18</sup> See Hermann, 'Im Spiegel', p. 210: 'Aufnahme bei der Jugend besser, als ich ahnte. Auch Fontane spricht günstig.' Liere interprets this remark to refer to Theodor Fontane (Liere, p. 146), but I have not found any evidence for this assumption. It might just as well refer to the writer's son, who, after all, published the first edition of the novel.

When considering Hermann's own claim that the novel should be read as a personal account first and foremost, one has to keep in mind that the preface in which this statement was made, was written thirteen years after the original publication of *Spielkinder*, at a time when the Naturalist concept of literature had been generally rejected, and at a time when Hermann himself acknowledged that his aesthetics had changed. It would not be surprising, therefore, if his stressing of the personal to the detriment of a more generally critical function of the novel is a retrospective interpretation rather than the original intention.

Similarly, his stress on the consciously subjective perception of social injustices has the ring more of an apology, written to pacify his critics, than of a statement of his original intention: '[...] mag ich in manchem durchaus nicht im Recht sein und vieles schief, sehr schief gesehen haben [...]. Aber Literatur ist nicht Historie. Und die Erlebnisse der Seele gleichen nicht den Geschehnissen, und sie erheben auch keinen Anspruch darauf, es zu tun.' (p. 4)

*Spielkinder* is certainly autobiographical to a large extent, but Hermann adopts the form of a novel for his material, rather than that of an autobiography. This allows him to deviate from the truthfulness that the autobiography would demand. Of his five brothers and sisters, for instance, only two sisters are mentioned in *Spielkinder*. The material is clearly shaped to suit the intention of a literary expression, which has to be more focussed than a personal collection of memories. The writing does not only have a cathartic function for Hermann but is also shaped to express a more general concern with depicting city life in the context of a social novel that shows clear influences of the Naturalist literary movement. In the following pages, I analyse how this dual purpose is expressed in the form of the novel.



## 2.2 The Reflection of the Novel's Dual Purpose in Its Form

### 2.2.1 Structure

To a large extent, the structure of *Spielkinder* corresponds to the model of an autobiography. It provides a chronological account of a period in the author/narrator's life. However, the structuring of autobiographical writing is itself a creative process, which may be indebted to rules established by literary tradition just as much as to the structure of the life that is to be presented. It is useful here to work with a concept of autobiography that is not primarily based on the tale of a 'life as lived', a concept which the psychologist Jerome Bruner has pointed out is not at all in keeping with research into the storage and recall of memory.<sup>19</sup> Given that all remembrance is a process of reconstruction, it is important to ask what the organising principles of this reconstruction are. In view of structure and content, it is thus possible to identify components of a genre of autobiography, or, more precisely, of the 'canonical form of autobiographical telling of our culture'.<sup>20</sup> Bruner sees these components as: chronological telling; orientation around emblematic events and 'stages' of life; focus on the voyage from the private to the public domain (home to school to work); the voluntaristic motivation; and the reconstruction of life as marked by 'life crises'.<sup>21</sup> An analysis of the structure of *Spielkinder* shows a general adherence to these defining elements of the autobiographical genre.

*Spielkinder* consists of sixty-eight individual segments of varying lengths, separated by either one or three asterisks. In some segments the narration simply carries on from the preceding text but in others it starts and ends abruptly without any obvious link. The sixty-eight individual segments are arranged into three larger sections, the boundaries of which are indicated by blank spaces in the text. These larger sections broadly fulfil the functions of: firstly, the 'Vorgeschichte', providing the basis for the main part of the novel by informing the reader about the father's speculations (segments 1-5; pp. 11-26); secondly the main part, containing the account of the continuing downfall of the family, the father's death and Georg's relationship with Lies (segments 6-61; pp. 27-217); thirdly, an epilogue, concerning Lies' decline and death (segments 62-68; pp. 218-58).

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<sup>19</sup> See Jerome Bruner, 'The Autobiographical Process', in Folkenflik, pp. 38-56.

<sup>20</sup> Bruner, p. 48.

<sup>21</sup> Bruner, pp. 48/49.

It is striking that the beginning and the end of the novel do not relate to one another. Indeed, a closer look at the novel, going beyond the obvious boundaries established by the printface, reveals a second compositional structure apart from the simple schema outlined above. Within the general chronological framework, the novel falls into two interlinking parts. The first part of the novel (segments 1-40; pp. 11-139) begins with the father's business mistake which will lead to the family's ruin and continues with the depiction of the family's misfortunes, their lifestyle and environment, up to the father's death. This part is made up of many, sometimes very short, segments, which are often juxtaposed without any link having been established between them. They differ widely in style and content and frequently change the narrative perspective, especially in the beginning. As a consequence, a multifaceted mosaic emerges.

The second part (segments 40-68) starts with Georg falling in love with Lies. It concentrates on a more dramatically structured and focussed account of Georg's and Lies' relationship and ends with Lies' death. An action curve roughly relating to that of the classical drama can be detected in this part. It follows the plot of the love relationship. The introduction of the characters has occurred in the first part of the novel. The second part starts with an account of Georg's and Lies' love (rising action) and finds its turning point in the scene in the Novania theatre club. The ensuing catastrophe, Lies' decline and death, is briefly halted by the 'retardierende Moment', Georg's decision to stand by her and help her. In contrast to the first half of the novel, longer segments prevail in the second part and in many cases the links between these are emphasised. The narrative perspective of the retrospective 'I'-narrator is maintained throughout.

The two major strands of plot which form the respective contents of the novel's two main parts are complemented by minor plot lines weaving through them, which connect the novel's parts and reflect the themes developed in the main plots. Among these lesser strands, the principal ones revolve around: the servant girl Luise and her husband; the 'aristocrat' and his family; Lies' parents; and Georg's friends Eugen, Ernst and Walter.

The dual structure of *Spielkinder* becomes even clearer when the novel is analysed in terms of the structural typology proposed by Eberhard Lämmert in his *Bauformen des*



*Erzählens*.<sup>22</sup> The first two of Lämmert's 'Typenreihen' are of particular relevance here. Considering the polarities between 'Krisengeschichte' and 'Lebensgeschichte', and between 'einsinnig erzählter Geschichte' and 'aufgesplitteter Geschichte', *Spielkinder* starts out as a work that has its place on the proposed continua near the 'aufgesplittete Lebensgeschichte'. It goes on, however, to turn into a form of novel that has to be located near the 'einsinnig erzählte Krisengeschichte'. The tightening of the plot, i.e. the concentration on the Georg-Lies story in the second half, goes hand in hand with a tightening of the narrative structure. The mosaic of the first part is replaced by a linear curve of action.

I suggest that the dual compositional structure of *Spielkinder* reflects the clash between Hermann's two intentions for this, his first, novel. Whereas the first part sets out to present an objective, mosaic-like account of a childhood affected by the social and economic vagaries of the 'Gründerjahre', Hermann lets an emotional plea for pity and understanding for the novel's hero, the narrated 'I', dominate the second part.

### 2.2.2 Narrative Voice and Perspective

These disparate intentions are not only expressed in the novel's structure. They are also clearly visible in Hermann's use of narrative voice and perspective. Comparing the two underlying parts of the novel, a change in the use of narrative situations is clearly noticeable. In the first part, the complexity of the text is enhanced by the use of many, sudden and unexpected, changes of perspective and narrative situation. These reinforce the impression of a mosaic that is created by the structure of the text. An overview of just the first three of the sixty-eight segments of the novel is already sufficient to illustrate this. The first segment of the novel is told by a third person narrator, using the external perspective. Hermann is careful not to impart any information that could not be gathered from an observation of the scene itself. The effect is quite cinematic. As if approaching from afar, the reader is made aware of the visual elements of the scene first; the characters are described but not named. All further information is gathered from the dialogue and from summaries of it provided by the narrator. Only twice does Hermann slip out of this external perspective to provide us with some background

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<sup>22</sup> Eberhard Lämmert, *Bauformen des Erzählens* (Stuttgart, 1955), pp. 35-43.

information: the first time to elaborate on the characterisation of the 'aristocrat', which is not really necessary and somewhat detracts from the effect created thus far, and the second time to inform us that the 'aristocrat' and Geiger are brothers-in-law.

In the second segment, Hermann switches the perspective, so that the narrative is now developed through Geiger's consciousness. This perspective is only held for the length of one paragraph. The perspective of Geiger's wife is then taken for the remaining five paragraphs of this segment.

The background history having been told, the third segment switches to the perspective of a retrospective 'I'-narrator, presumably at the point where his memories begin.<sup>23</sup> He occasionally reminds us of his existence and function with phrases such as 'Ich habe noch zu erzählen, daß [...]' (p. 129) or 'Zu meinem Bedauern muß ich erzählen, daß [...]' (p. 142). At other times, however, his perspective is abandoned in favour of that of his younger self. This change occurs often and, as the following example shows, quite suddenly: 'Am Nachmittag spielte ich auf dem Hof und sah grad durch die offene Haustür nach irgend etwas Wunderbarem, als zwei Möbelwagen vorfahren. Was wollten die denn nur? Ich wußte doch nicht, daß jemand im Haus zöge?' (p. 37).

In the first part of the novel, Hermann thus experiments with a wide range of narrative situations. The figural narrative situation is used extensively. Moreover, retrospective narrations alternate with uncommented scenic representation of dialogue. In the latter, the fictional world is witnessed directly by the reader rather than mediated by the narrator (see for example p. 53). The illusion of randomly chosen extracts of reality and of an objective immediacy is thereby created.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> This points to the identity of 'I'-narrator and author, as it is in keeping with Hermann's autobiographical writings. In 'Meine Eltern' for instance, he writes that he only remembers the aftermath of the financial catastrophe, not the event itself, nor, indeed, the carefree and relatively wealthy situation of the family before this.

<sup>24</sup> Hermann also makes use of a narrative perspective that is halfway between the narrator's and the figural perspective, the 'erlebte Rede' ('free indirect style'). The figural perspectives of individual characters surreptitiously insert themselves into the 'I'-narrator's tale, thus allowing the 'doppelte [...] Sicht eines dargestellten Sachverhaltes durch einen Erzähler und durch eine Romanfigur' (Franz K. Stanzel, *Theorie des Erzählens* (Göttingen, 1979), p. 246). The illness of the 'aristocrat's' wife, for instance, is reported in the following words: 'Und dieser Schatten, der ihm nun treulich über zwanzig Jahre gefolgt war, der nie sich irgendwie unangenehm bemerkbar gemacht hatte, wollte mit einemmal kontraktbrüchig werden und nicht weiter mitspielen!' (*Spielkinder*, p. 66). The phrases 'sich unangenehm bemerkbar machen' and 'kontraktbrüchig werden' mirror the wealthy businessman's language of the 'aristocrat', just as the indignation reflected in these lines is that of the man who sees his marriage as a convenient facade behind which to hide his dissipations.



In the second part of *Spielkinder*, the use of the authorial narrative situation increases. The nearer in time to the narrator's present, the more the levels of narration and narrator merge into one another and the more the narrator intrudes with his own thoughts.<sup>25</sup> The 'I'-narrator at times assumes an omniscient authorial narrator position, giving insights into other characters' thoughts that he cannot possibly possess (p. 25, for example), or by 'recording' conversations that he cannot possibly have heard (e.g. p. 26). This omniscience is in fact the characteristic that distinguishes the novel marked by the narrative perspective of the retrospective 'I'-narrator from autobiography. As Wolfgang Kayser has pointed out, 'der Ich-Erzähler eines Romans ist keineswegs die geradlinige Fortsetzung der erzählten Figur'.<sup>26</sup> Rather, he appears as the 'allwissende, überall gegenwärtige und schaffende Geist [der Welt des Romans]'.<sup>27</sup>

The increased intrusion of the omniscient narrator in the second part of the novel points to the greater need of the author to control the reading process there, in order to plead for understanding of the hero. The other techniques that the author uses to provide guidance to the way he wishes his work to be understood are considered in the following paragraphs.

### 2.2.3 Leitmotif, Textual Correspondences and Tone

In the preface, Hermann explains the title *Spielkinder*. He uses the word synonymously with the term 'Dilettanten' and refers with it to people who do not take their occupation, or even their life, seriously. He explicitly includes himself in this group of people. Many further references are made in the text to the term 'Spielkinder' and it is taken up again in the epilogue, both to round off the narration and to ensure the direction of the reader's understanding of the novel. The references in the main body of the novel are to Georg's father, who is ever hopeful but never recovers financially (p. 44), to the colleagues in the office of the tie factory whose lives are dominated by routine and 'deren ganzer Kreis nicht über gestern und morgen wegging' (p. 152), to the 'aristocrat' and his (and Georg's) ancestors (p. 214), and to himself (p. 108). However, the epilogue makes clear

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<sup>25</sup> The passage on directing the play for the Novania club (*Spielkinder*, pp.176/177), for instance, is interspersed with 'asides'.

<sup>26</sup> Wolfgang Kayser, 'Wer erzählt den Roman?', in Volker Klotz (ed.), *Zur Poetik des Romans* (Darmstadt, 1965), pp. 197-216 (p. 209).

<sup>27</sup> Kayser, pp. 213/14.

that all the characters portrayed in the novel are to be seen as 'Spielkinder'. The negative connotation of the term is made most explicit here: 'Spielkinder' lack uprightness and strength of character:

Keiner, der die Kraft und den Mut hatte, trotzig und still seinen eigenen Weg zu gehen, unbekümmert um die großen Menge; keiner, der sich zur Klarheit rang, keiner! – Alle nur Spielkinder, ihr Leben lang; Spielkinder, ohne Ernst, ohne Streben.- (p. 259)

Many of the individual segments that make up the novel stand by themselves. But the connections between them and the mirroring, supporting, contrasting and complementing of themes in the arrangement of individual segments, are almost as striking as their separateness. They are used to direct the reader's sympathies. Two examples may serve to support this.

Firstly, Geiger's financial collapse is mirrored by the eventual bankruptcy of his brother-in-law, the 'aristocrat', who is partly responsible for Geiger's demise. Both fiascos are caused by speculation. The parallelism of the situation is complemented by the contrast in the reactions of the other party. Where the 'aristocrat' cut Geiger and his family off in their misfortune, Geiger's widow takes care of her brother when he is financially ruined and deserted by his wife. A moral tale is combined here with a depiction of Hermann's own closest family as morally superior.

Secondly, the segment concerning Geiger's death is immediately followed by a gruesome description of the speculator Rewald's death (see pp. 138-40). The death of the good but weak and unlucky Geiger, and the familial support and grief for him, are contrasted vividly with the loneliness and decrepitude of the greedy, inhuman usurer in his last hour. This contrast serves a similar purpose to the parallelism described above. Again, a kind of moral justice is invoked, which works in favour of the unfortunate Geiger family.

The tone of the novel, clearly also a means to influence the reading process, is variable. In this first novel, Hermann already displays the warm and gently ironical view of past that will appear again in *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte*. An example of this is the narrator's account of the ways in which Georg's mother copes with the family's sudden poverty: 'Sie verstand es, galvanische Butterüberzüge über die Brotschnitten zu machen,



mit einem Ei vier Stullen zu belegen, eine Apfelsine in dreißig Teilchen zu schneiden, so daß keiner etwas von ihr bekam' (p. 64). In many instances, however, there is a severity and bitterness, sarcasm, malice and sneering in Hermann's writing that suggests serious hurt or criticism. Thus, he reports on the 'aristocrat':

Er lebte vergnügt in den Tag hinein und war selbst von seiner eigenen Herzensgüte und Unfehlbarkeit - jener Geistesgröße der Reichen - überzeugt. Er kümmerte sich blutwenig um seine Anverwandten, um seine arme Schwester, die jetzt das Strümpfestopfen so ausgezeichnet erlernt hatte. (p. 65)

In some instances, the tone becomes downright hateful. The description of Rewald's death is an example of this. Rewald is said to be 'hocherfreut' to see Geiger dead at last, a statement that is not entirely plausible given that Geiger owed him large sums of money. In the description of his death, Hermann uses not 'sterben', but the venomous term 'verrecken' (p. 140). In such instances as these, Hermann's emotional involvement seems to stand in the way of a fair or even believable literary treatment of his material. This is a phenomenon that Coe has observed in a number of texts he used for his study on the representation of childhood in autobiographies:

Occasionally, it would seem that the very obsessive quality of [...] unhappiness can lead to slightly facile or poorly controlled writing: the adult, one feels, is still so livid with anger that he can make little or no attempt to understand either himself or those who oppressed him.<sup>28</sup>

To summarise, the form of *Spielkinder* is based on two distinct, basic parts. In the first part, the multi-perspectival presentation dominates. This makes for an objectivity of representation that is sharply reduced in the second part of the novel. The increased amount of guidance that Hermann provides here, mainly seems to be oriented towards a better understanding of the Geiger family. Geiger may be presented as weak, he may be a 'Spielkind', but he and his family emerge as the victims of a cruel society, and are clearly shown to be morally superior to many of the other characters in the novel. In the centre of *Spielkinder*, however, stands Georg himself. He may be a 'Spielkind', too, but ultimately what Hermann wants the reader to concentrate on is Georg's suffering: his suffering in a poverty-stricken childhood, his suffering under the failure of his weak

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<sup>28</sup> Coe, p. 68. Comparing *Spielkinder* with Hermann's essay 'Meine Eltern', published in 1928, there is a striking difference in tone, although the subject is the same. The gap of about thirty years that lies between the two publications has enabled Hermann to turn some of the bitterness and shock that still speaks from *Spielkinder* into a more forgiving and mellow attitude to the events that marked his childhood.

father, under the mind-numbing work he does and under the doomed relationship with Lies and her ultimate death. The general socio-critical intention, expressed mainly in the stark presentation of reality of the first part of the novel, to a large extent makes way in the second for a more personal purpose. Hermann's lament 'Aber - man hätte doch den Schrei hören müssen - den Schrei!' makes clear how much the aim of inciting understanding pity for his hero outweighs, in Hermann's concerns, the aim to present a balanced and multifaceted account of a 'Gründerzeit' childhood and youth.

However, the fact that the novel was printed all the same, and printed by a social democratic journal, highlights the more general aspects of *Spielkinder*. It suggests that the novel was read not as the personal outcry of a suffering soul, but as a more widely significant expression of an individual's struggle with society. I aim to show in the third part of this chapter that *Spielkinder* can indeed also be read as such a social novel reflecting the concerns and the aesthetics of the Berlin Naturalist writers of the 1880s and 1890s.

### 2.3 *Spielkinder* as 'naturalistisches Erstlingswerk'?<sup>29</sup> Stylistic and Ideological Aspects

In the following paragraphs, I consider *Spielkinder* both in respect of the stylistic innovations introduced by the Naturalist movement and also in the context of its ideological basis. Hamann and Hermand describe the Naturalism of the 1880s as an impulse, a revolt against the empty formalism and the denial of reality of the 'Gründerzeit' literature.<sup>30</sup> Peter Sprengel takes this argument further and, pointing to the closeness in age of most Naturalist writers, describes the Naturalist movement as a protest of a generation.<sup>31</sup> This protest or revolution found expression in new aesthetic maxims propagated by exponents of 'konsequenter Naturalismus' such as Arno Holz and Johannes Schlaf.

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<sup>29</sup> Liere, p. 120.

<sup>30</sup> See Richard Hamann and Jost Hermand, *Naturalismus*, in (= Epochen deutscher Kultur von 1870 bis zur Gegenwart, vol. II) (München, 1973).

<sup>31</sup> Peter Sprengel, *Gerhart Hauptmann. Epoche - Werk - Wirkung* (München, 1984), p.35.



Summarising the novelty of the Naturalist aesthetics, Heinz-Georg Brands writes: 'Das Charakteristische der neuen Prosa [...] wird nur vor dem Hintergrund des eigentümlichen Erzähler-Leser-Verhältnisses einsichtig.'<sup>32</sup> The Naturalists propagate

eine neue Form des Erzählens, die den Leser in den medialen Prozeß miteinbezieht. Der intendierte Mitvollzug des Lesers ist der Grund für das Fehlen sowohl expliziter erzählerischer Vorausdeutungen als auch einer eigenständigen festen Erzählebene, was durch die Mehrsprachigkeit der Dialog- und Berichtspartien, die inhaltliche Bedeutung, graphische Gestaltung und Interpunktion ausgeglichen wird.

As I have shown in the second part of this chapter, Hermann makes use, especially in the first part of *Spielkinder*, of this new relationship between narrator and reader.

The analysis of *Spielkinder* so far has revealed that, especially in the first part of the novel, an effect is created that makes the reading process similar to that of rapidly leafing through a snapshot album: a series of individual, disjointed scenes combine to unfold the story. Chronology is the primary organising principle, but the chronological pace that the narration follows is uneven. The passage of time is not always clearly marked and must be inferred from the context.

In the first part of *Spielkinder*, Hermann also uses a radical form of scenic representation, namely passages of uncommented dialogue, for example in the rendering of conversations between Georg and the servant girl Ulrike (p. 53) or with Lies (p. 59). The combination of the mosaic of scenes and uncommented dialogue is very reminiscent of the dramatic form. Especially in the first segments of *Spielkinder*, the dramatic style is reinforced by descriptions which read like stage directions. The café scene at the beginning of the novel, in which the men are described almost exclusively by an external narrator, is an example of this practice. Later on, when Hermann describes a conversation between Georg's parents which the boy overhears, the dramatic style with stage directions is used again:

Diese Lumpen! Ich schlage ihn über'n Kopf! Nicht wert sind sie von mir - - die -  
- - - - - mit dreißigtausend ist die Sache noch zu machen - [...]  
Hab keine Angst, Kind, ich bin nur augenblicklich so erregt, - dieser, - dieser,  
dieser Lump, dieser Gauner!  
- - - Leises Weinen. - - - - - (p. 22)

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<sup>32</sup> Heinz-Georg Brands, *Theorie und Stil des sogenannten 'konsequenten Naturalismus' von Arno Holz and Johannes Schlaf* (Bonn, 1978). This and the following quotation: pp. 228/29.

In this passage, the stage direction ('leises Weinen') relates not to the visual but the auditory impressions to be gained from the scene.

The technique of stringing along individual scenes without giving any indications as to their relationship, like the technique of varying the narrative situation, described earlier, is demanding of the reader. It requires the reader both to piece together the actual facts of the life retold and, in a second stage, to interpret the events presented and form an attitude towards the narrated events and the characters involved. The result is an active and touching reading experience (see for instance the passage on the confiscation of the family's furniture (pp. 36 - 38)).

*Spielkinder* also displays the stylistic elements cited by Brands as the corollaries of the new narrative form propagated by the exponents of the 'konsequente Naturalismus'. There are passages in the first part of *Spielkinder* which have an experimental character that is reminiscent, for instance, of Holz and Schlaf's narrative sketch *Papa Hamlet* (1889), one of the best-known realisations of Naturalist aesthetics. In the predominantly scenic representation of the first part of *Spielkinder*, approximations to the phonographic reproduction, the Naturalist 'Sekundenstil' as it was used most stringently and famously in *Papa Hamlet*, are to be found. For instance, in the parental conversation overheard by Georg (and quoted above), an elliptic sentence structure and repetitions contribute to the directness of the scene. An impression of authenticity is created and, through the use of a reporter's sketchy style and syntax, the objectivity of the presentation seems to be ensured. At times, Hermann also makes use of the 'Telegrammstil' favoured by many Naturalist writers. In *Spielkinder*, it appears predominantly at the beginnings of segments, where the time is indicated, again in a manner akin to stage directions or reporter's notes, by single word sentences, such as: 'Sonnabend' (p. 55), 'Oktober' (p. 56), 'Herbstabend' (p. 59).

To summarise the foregoing paragraphs, it can be stated that in terms of aesthetic considerations, *Spielkinder* clearly shows, especially in its first part, influences of Naturalist writing as developed by propagators of the 'konsequente Naturalismus'. However, many of the stylistic and structural elements developed by the exponents of the 'konsequente Naturalismus' were also adopted in Impressionist literature. A look at the second part of *Spielkinder* in which the experimental style of early Naturalism is



largely abandoned is therefore revealing as it establishes a relationship for Hermann's first novel to both of these movements.

In the later parts of the book, the predominant use of 'I'-narration demands a return to more conventional sentence structures. The changes between the earlier and later parts of *Spielkinder* in style, structure and narrative situation are furthermore complemented by a change in tone. The brief, sober and direct tone of the early segments, which relies on the material itself to elicit the reader's emotional involvement and judgement, is at times replaced in the later parts of the novel by a pathos that is bordering on the sentimental and trivial.<sup>33</sup>

Although the form and style of the second part of *Spielkinder* are different from the experimental variants of early Naturalism, they are by no means untypical of Naturalist writing. Especially in the longer prose narratives, for instance in the Berlin novels by Max Kretzer, Conrad Alberti or Clara Viebig, a tight control by the narrator over his material and over the reader's reception process is noticeable. The mosaic form of the 'Mehrsprachigkeit der Dialog- und Berichtspartien' (Brands) and the sketchy, factual syntax, as pioneered in texts of the 'konsequente Naturalismus', such as *Papa Hamlet*, proved to allow insufficient room for the expression of emotions and thoughts.

So far, I have investigated the aesthetic properties of the novel. It would be misleading, however, to consider only these. Indeed, there is a consensus in the scholarly literature that the Naturalist movement should principally be described in ideological terms. Hamann and Hermand, for instance claim in their analysis of Naturalism: 'Man sollte [...] mit diesem Terminus weniger die ästhetischen oder stilistischen Phänomene als die revolutionären Grundantriebe umschreiben.'<sup>34</sup> The Naturalist writers saw as the driving force for their art the need for an unembellished truthful representation of reality, often described as an unmasking of society or a destruction of the mendacity of the 'Gründerzeit' literature. Carl Bleibtreu, for instance, demands in his programmatic essay *Revolution der Literatur* (1886) the three elements 'Wahrhaftigkeit des Lokaltons', 'Erdgeruch der Selbstbeobachtung' and 'dralle Gegenständlichkeit des Ausdrucks' as fundamental for the new kind of writing.<sup>35</sup> The representation of truth

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<sup>33</sup> One of the final scenes between Georg and Lies (*Spielkinder*, pp. 240-41) and the preceding scene with Eugen (pp. 239-40) may serve as examples here.

<sup>34</sup> Hamann and Hermand, *Naturalismus*, p. 7.

<sup>35</sup> Carl Bleibtreu, *Revolution der Literatur* [1886], ed. by J. J. Braakenburg (Tübingen, 1973), p. 31.

had to include an unflinching description of the new reality of industrialism; it had to be based on exact observation and on the newly developed positivist scientific knowledge, which included a changed understanding of man 'nicht mehr als autonomes moralisches Ich, sondern als vielfach determiniertes Produkt biologischer (Vererbung) und sozialer (Milieu) Faktoren'.<sup>36</sup>

Hermann shares these concerns in *Spielkinder*. Although deeply personal, this autobiographical novel takes on a more general social significance. The life and circumstances of the young Georg are representative of a generation of the impoverished middle class, of the victims of the speculation boom of the 'Gründer' years. The following quotation from the preface to the second edition of the novel points to this wider social concern: Hermann explains 'daß es die Sache der Jugend, der niedergedrückten, dumpfen, tränenschweren Jugend war, die ich führte' (p. 3).

Contemporary reviews show that the book was received in this sense. In 1901, Wiegler commented: 'Nie ist das Weh jener Großstadtjugend, die zum Lichte will und doch ziellos zu Grunde geht, so aufrüttelnd dargestellt worden wie in Hermanns Anfangsroman mit seinen entmutigenden helldunklen Hintergründen'<sup>37</sup> and Anselma Heine interpreted the novel in an even more general sense as showing 'das Wundwerden des Individuums im Kampfe mit der Gesellschaft'.<sup>38</sup>

The subject matter of *Spielkinder* indeed shows that Hermann's concerns go beyond the autobiographical to reflect issues that were common to many Naturalist novels. The concern with the victims of the 'Gründer', with the declining middle classes and the city proletariat, is but one of these, albeit the main one. Hermann also describes the de-individualising effect of the division of labour (pp. 144/45), even though he does not follow it up by exploring the impact that this industrialised way of working has on the development of the workers' characters. Essentially keeping to his own area of experience, Hermann restricts his descriptions of the social conditions of workers to their impact within the family. Hermann's depictions of the proletariat centre, like those of many other Naturalist writers, on the men's alcoholism and violence (Weise and

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<sup>36</sup> Hamann and Hermand, *Naturalismus*, p. 39.

<sup>37</sup> Wiegler, p. 291.

<sup>38</sup> Heine, col. 327.



Bergemann) and on the women's sexual infidelity (Frau Weise) or saintly suffering and loyalty (Luise).

In its concentration on the depiction of the declining middle class and of the working classes in the city environment, *Spielkinder* reflects the aims of the social novel which came to be seen by the Naturalists as 'die höchste Gattung des Romans'.<sup>39</sup> Most Naturalist writers, however, did not only demand the observation and representation of the city proletariat in the new social novel, but also an expression of sympathy with the proletariat and a humanitarian will to change their predicament.<sup>40</sup> A revolutionary socialist intention finds expression in many of the theoretical manifestos of the Naturalist writers, for instance in Max Kretzer's preface to his novel *Die Verkommenen* (1883) which was seen by Bleibtreu as the culmination of the Naturalist social novel. Kretzer states: 'Ich habe ein Ziel vor Augen, ein großes, uneigennütziges Ziel: ich möchte beitragen zur Veredelung der Menschheit, möchte die gähnende Kluft zwischen Arm und Reich verringern helfen.'<sup>41</sup> Art is seen as a weapon in the fight for better social conditions, as the programmatic title of Julius and Heinrich Hart's *Kritische Waffengänge* (1882) suggests.

Hermann by contrast always stressed the personal and non-functional quality of his writing. In the 1911 preface to *Spielkinder*, he writes: 'Und ganz so schlimm ist die Sache ja auch nicht geworden. Vielleicht weil ich in den ganzen Jahren bisher mich davor bewahrt habe, die Literatur als mein Handwerk aufzufassen.' He continues: 'Ich bin mir bis zum heutigen Tage nicht bewußt, irgendwie zum deutschen Schrifttum in persönlichen Beziehungen zu stehen' (p. 7). This independence of literary models or movements is expressed, too, in the unpublished novella *Bist du es oder bist du's nicht?*, written in the 1930s. Looking back to the writing of *Spielkinder*, Hermann claims: 'Ich hatte nicht 10 Romane in meinem Leben gelesen, und war, was Literatur und so [...] anbetrifft doch ein vollkommen unbeschriebenes Blatt.'<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Bleibtreu, p. 36.

<sup>40</sup> See, among others, Helmut Scheuer, 'Zwischen Sozialismus und Individualismus - zwischen Marx und Nietzsche', in Scheuer (ed.), *Naturalismus. Bürgerliche Dichtung und soziales Engagement* (Stuttgart, Berlin, Köln, Mainz, 1974), pp. 150-74. This observation stands in contrast and opposition to Franz Rhöse's sweeping contention that Naturalist novels are not interested in solving social problems (see Rhöse's *Konflikt und Versöhnung. Untersuchungen zur Theorie des Romans von Hegel bis zum Naturalismus* (Stuttgart, 1978), pp. 205-06).

<sup>41</sup> Max Kretzer, *Die Verkommenen* (Berlin, 1883), no page number.

<sup>42</sup> Georg Hermann, *Bist du es oder bist du's nicht?*, typescript, no date, 83 pages, incomplete, Georg Hermann Collection, section II, p. 42. From a letter by Hermann to his daughter Hilde, it can be inferred

However, even if Hermann did not count himself among the members of the Naturalist movement, references to his reading and to writers he valued in the period before writing *Spielkinder*, clearly point in the direction of a Naturalist concept of literature. Among the writers whom Hermann had approached for advice were Paul Schlenther and Gerhart Hauptmann (see pp. 6-7). Schlenther was, with Otto Brahm, Theodor Wolf and others, one of the founding fathers of the Naturalist theatre club 'Freie Bühne'. Hauptmann had, in 1889, created a theatre scandal with the starkest representation of human depravity yet to be seen on a German stage in his social drama *Vor Sonnenaufgang*. Hermann read this play in the year of its first staging. Almost forty years later, he describes the impression that it made on him:

Als ich nach einer Stunde fertig war, war ich gebadet in Tränen. Ich war achtzehn Jahre. Und ich empfand wohl die Ähnlichkeit, den Dreiklang meiner Jugend voller Bekümmernisse und dieses herben Vorfrühlingstages [...] und dieses Stücks, das selbst wie ein junger, herber Vorfrühlingstag war. Es gab mir eine Erschütterung, wie sie noch nie von einem gedruckten Wort auf mich eingeströmt war.<sup>43</sup>

Given the extraordinary intensity of Hermann's reading experience of *Vor Sonnenaufgang*, it is worth asking whether the play may have influenced the writing of his first novel. The style clearly shows many similarities, especially in the first part, in which Hermann makes much use of the scenic presentation. The same intention to render dialogue in an unadulterated form speaks from both Hauptmann's and Hermann's texts.

In terms of content, Hermann explicitly refers to the similarity he saw between *Vor Sonnenaufgang* and the experiences of his own youth that he worked into *Spielkinder*. The protagonists - Loth in *Vor Sonnenaufgang* and Georg in *Spielkinder* - both have as fathers honest and upright men who have been cheated out of their money and, as a consequence, have plunged their families into social decline.<sup>44</sup> Both Loth and Georg speak out in favour of social justice. Furthermore Loth must have lent himself as an

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that he started writing this novella in 1937 (see letter dated 2 July 1937, in Nussbaum (ed.), *Unvorhanden*, pp. 136-38).

<sup>43</sup> Georg Hermann, 'Der junge Hauptmann und seine Modelle', in Hermann, *Die Zeitlupe*, pp. 54-62 (p. 61).

<sup>44</sup> See Gerhart Hauptmann, *Vor Sonnenaufgang*, act II, in Hauptmann, *Gesammelte Werke in sechs Bänden* (Berlin, 1913-1921), vol. I (1913), pp. 9-108 (p. 51).





identificatory figure to Hermann with his anti-militarism and his opposition to the idea of a state religion, both topics which were important in Hermann's thinking.<sup>45</sup>

In a comparative reading of the two texts, the parallels in the relationship of the middle class protagonist (Loth, Georg) to the lower class girl (Helene, Lies) are especially striking. Georg's and Lies' love, like that between Hauptmann's Loth and Helene, is not a love between equals. Georg's feelings are initially sparked off by pity. His superiority, as a member of the middle class who has merely fallen on hard times, over the proletarian girl is taken as given. It is expressed mainly as an intellectual and a moral superiority. Georg sets out to educate Lies: 'Ich versuchte, für Bildungsgüter ihr Interesse zu erwecken' (p. 148). Their love prospers as long as she is 'willig' and 'folgsam' (p. 148). But when the initial attraction wanes, she declines back into a superficial consumerism (see p. 149). The other aspect which has defined their relationship from the start, namely Georg's sexual attraction to Lies, takes over their life together and lets the pseudo bourgeois idyll of the early stages of their love recede in the background. Georg is constantly fighting his attraction to Lies, he sees it as a dependency unworthy of himself. Even at the beginning of their relationship he comments: 'Vergebens versuchte ich gegen diese Leidenschaft anzukämpfen. Wie eine tückische Krankheit im Augenblick überkam sie mich' (p. 147). This passion and Lies' non-intellectual self-indulgence have a destructive influence on him: he follows her into intellectual decline and becomes, as the narrator says, 'denk-und lesefaul' (p. 150).

The depiction of love as sexual dependency is a theme common to many Naturalist texts. It is taken up in Hermann Bahr's *Die gute Schule* (1890) and in Bleibtreu's *Größenwahn* (1888), to name but two. In his essay *Die naturwissenschaftlichen Grundlagen der Poesie* (1887), Wilhelm Bölsche explains and criticises this representation of love. He refers to the situation of Naturalist literature as an area of tension between the pressure to take scientific knowledge as a base of writing and the belief surviving from an older, idealist concept of literature, to represent the individual as a spiritual and self-determined being. Bölsche maintains that, as most studies in the areas of psychology and physiology have been carried out not on healthy but on diseased bodies, literature based on them has put an inappropriate weight on representations of the abnormal. The representation of love has thus often shown a

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<sup>45</sup> See for instance: Georg Hermann, *Schnee* (Berlin, 1921); Georg Hermann, 'Weltabschied' [1935], in Nussbaum (ed.), *Unvorhanden*, pp. 221-61.

Zwang [...], der auf dem freien Bewußtsein lastet, der die Seele knechtet und zu Gemeinem treibt. [...] Um das freie Bewußtsein, die unabhängige göttliche Seele zu retten, erklärt man den einfachsten und logischsten Naturtrieb für eine unwürdige Fessel, die uns ans Gemeine kettet.<sup>46</sup>

This analysis is applicable to Hermann's description of the love between Georg and Lies, but a further factor has to be taken into account. Hermann's description is not only a question of holding on to the concept of the fundamentally independent individual, as which the author undoubtedly sees himself, but also of highlighting the difference between the social classes. In his study on the representation of workers by the Naturalist writers, Klaus-Michael Bogdal points out: 'Die proletarische Sexualität erscheint als ein Zeichen jenes von den Schriftstellern gefürchteten Absturzes, weil sie 'radikal' die Mechanismen bürgerlicher Selbstkontrolle abbaut.'<sup>47</sup>

Indeed, in *Spielkinder*, the relationship between Georg and Lies is ended and the narrator/protagonist preserves his identity and superiority. After the separation from Lies, Georg feels 'glücklich, endlich frei und dem Zwange entronnen' (p. 189) and later, having distanced himself from her, he is disgusted by her (see pp. 230 and 239). Again, this sequence follows a pattern recognised by Bogdal as typical for Naturalist literature. The turning away of the middle-class protagonist from the proletarian is often arranged as a 'rettende Bewahrung der moralischen Integrität, der Soziabilität und Humanität des Helden. [...] Der notwendige "Reinigungsprozeß" wird dabei mit den tradierten Krankheitsmetaphern dargestellt (Ekel, Ohnmacht, Heilschlaf usw.).'<sup>48</sup>

The vice that has been threatening Georg's integrity, manifested in Lies' self-indulgence, is, in Hermann's view, at least partly determined by heredity. After their separation, Georg comments:

Denn sowie Lies meinen leitenden Händen entronnen, so waren auch all die zarten und feinen Regungen ihrer Natur spurlos verschwunden, und das von den Eltern ererbte Unfeine, jener mir unerklärliche Zug drückte dem Gesicht, den Bewegungen und dem Wesen seinen Stempel auf, überwucherte das Gute an ihr, wie Disteln die Hafersaat.' (p. 189)

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<sup>46</sup> Wilhelm Bölsche, *Die naturwissenschaftlichen Grundlagen der Poesie*, ed. by Johannes Braakenburg (Tübingen, 1976), pp. 42/43.

<sup>47</sup> Klaus-Michael Bogdal, *Schaurige Bilder: Der Arbeiter im Blick des Bürgers am Beispiel des Naturalismus* (Frankfurt a.M., 1978), p. 104.

<sup>48</sup> Bogdal, pp. 79/80.



An educating influence can only have a limited effect: ultimately the inherited characteristics will keep the upper hand. This biologicistic concept of the human character, here in its aspect of the Darwinist belief in the power of heredity, is one widely held in Naturalist literature. It corresponds to the demand for literature to be based on the results of positivist science. Indeed, Dieter Kafitz goes as far as suggesting the 'biologische Grundlegung des Naturalismus' as its defining characteristic.<sup>49</sup> That this belief does not condemn the Naturalist writers to a de-individualising representation of entirely instinct-led characters, as was suggested for example by Hamann and Hermand,<sup>50</sup> is also made clear by Kafitz. Referring, among others, to Bölsche's and Hauptmann's writings, he points out that their belief in an individualistic principle that contributes to the formation of an elite is firmly rooted in the Darwinist theory of selection.

Again, the parallel to Hauptmann's *Vor Sonnenaufgang* is interesting. Both Loth and Georg show their girls an alternative way of living to the depraved circumstances in which they found them. In both cases, the protagonist's belief in the hereditary depravity of the girl contributes to the termination of the relationship. Even though examples are cited in which individuals have been able to overcome their inherited weaknesses (in Hauptmann's play), and even though the protagonist's idealism makes him consider a continuation of the relationship (see *Spielkinder*, p. 200), Loth's as well as Georg's fundamental belief in the power of heredity prove insuperable. They can only preserve their individuality and save their natural superiority by separating from the girls. Most striking is the similarity of the protagonists' expressions of their emotional severing of their relationships. Loth's 'leben! kämpfen! - Weiter, immer weiter'<sup>51</sup> finds an echo in the last words of *Spielkinder*: '--- Vorüber! --Weiter! ---'.

There is, however, a clear difference between Loth's and Georg's attitudes. Whereas the belief in the hereditary determination of the character is reason enough for Hauptmann's Loth to cast off Helene even though no manifestation of the negative effects of her heredity has been proven, Lies has actually shown herself to be weak. Her weakness is not however attributed entirely to heredity. She is described as partly innocent and as forced into her exploitative behaviour by Eugen (see p. 248). The possibility is at least

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<sup>49</sup> Dieter Kafitz, 'Tendenzen der Naturalismus-Forschung und Überlegungen zu einer Neubestimmung des Naturalismus-Begriffs', *Der Deutschunterricht*, 40 (1988), 11-29 (pp. 27/28).

<sup>50</sup> Hamann and Hermand, *Naturalismus*, p. 178.

<sup>51</sup> Hauptmann, act V, p. 105.



considered that through a thorough education and continual guidance, she might reform. Furthermore, the restless consumerism that Georg criticises in her can be seen to have its roots to a certain extent in her working conditions. In a description of the guests of a shady 'Tingeltangel', Hermann writes:

man sah ihnen die Wut an, mit der sie sich amüsieren wollten, und doch langweilten sie sich so herzlich. Aber was blieb ihnen anderes übrig, um die nach des Tages Mühen und Arbeiten [...] stumpf gewordenen Sinne zu kitzeln, als zu diesen Gewaltmitteln zu greifen! (p. 196)

Unlike Loth's, Georg's belief in the effects of heredity, though clearly present, is thus not the only nor the deciding factor in the characterisation of Lies and in the motivation for Lies' and Georg's separation.<sup>52</sup> Social conditions and the influence of education also play a role.

Ultimately, however, another factor is more important than Lies' behaviour or her heredity, namely Georg's bourgeois moral concepts. In his battle with himself, trying to come to a decision for or against Lies, it is his own understanding of morality that proves hardest to combat: 'Ihre Vergangenheit wird stets zwischen mir und ihr liegen', he recognises, for he is unable to forget his sense of honour and pride (p. 250). This middle class morality, which in others, he recognises as inappropriate (see his criticism of Frau Salle (p. 230) and of his own mother (p. 216), is so deeply ingrained in himself that it determines his own feelings and actions. Therefore, the decision he takes at the end in favour of Lies remains unconvincing. Georg himself describes this decision as recklessness, as madness and as motivated by erotic desire. Hermann evades this issue to a certain extent, as Lies' death frees Georg from the consequences of a decision taken with the consciousness that it might be his downfall: 'Ich mußte sie wiederhaben [...] und wenn wir auch beide darüber zugrunde gingen' (p. 251). The importance of the moral dimension in Georg's and the narrator's thinking is apparent, too, in an allegorical

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<sup>52</sup> The question whether Hauptmann shared the beliefs of his protagonist has often been raised. Loth was modelled on Hauptmann's friend Alfred Ploetz who, like Hauptmann, was a member of the 'Deutsche Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene'. A closeness between the ideology of the author and of his figure has therefore sometimes been assumed. However, in a draft reply to the critics of *Vor Sonnenaufgang*, Hauptmann distanced himself from Loth's opinions and actions (see Hauptmann, '“Vor Sonnenaufgang”. Erwiderung auf die Kritik', in Hauptmann, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. by Hans-Egon Hass, M. Machatzke and W. Bungies (Frankfurt a.M., Berlin, 1962-1974), vol. XI (1974), pp. 753-56). Following Peter Szondi, Sprengel furthermore points out that Loth's leaving is necessary in structural terms (see Sprengel, *Hauptmann*, p. 72.).



vision Georg has. In this, he sees his relationship with Lies destroyed by the forces of poverty and vice (see p. 175).

Not only in Georg's relationship with Lies is the moral dimension clearly decisive, it also colours other aspects of the novel. Hermann does not, for instance, connect the description of alcoholism to the social situation of the alcoholic. We are told that both Weise and Bergemann work as stone carriers ('Steinträger'), but Hermann says nothing about the nature of this work. It is Bergemann's laziness (see p. 143) and Weise's brutality (see p. 57), both described as character traits rather than as results of or reactions to dehumanising conditions, that are, in Hermann's representation, to blame for their alcoholism. His middle class morality determines his depiction of the working classes to a greater extent than his sympathy with their social condition. In the following paragraphs, this will be shown more clearly.

Hermann certainly shows sympathy with the situation of the proletarian workers. Georg displays his socialist convictions when he stands up for Lies against the managing clerk Winder who is about to dismiss her. Georg attacks the concepts of morality that have led Winder to take his decision as irrelevant and bourgeois in the face of poverty: ' "Dann bezahlt doch eure Arbeiterinnen besser!" fuhr ich auf. "Faßt die Sache am richtigen Ende an und kommt nicht mit einer vollkommen verfehlten Moral" ' (p. 204). On another occasion, too, Georg vents his - rather half-baked - revolutionary views: 'In der Konfektion hielt ich den Arbeiterinnen einen sozialistisch angehauchten Vortrag über Frauenarbeit, und daß sie nur selbst an all diesem Elend schuld wären, weil sie eben nicht zusammenhielten und solchen Hundelohn sich bieten ließen' (p. 153). Even if an ironical, world-weary tone is to be detected in Hermann's descriptions of Georg's hot-blooded outbursts, it is evident that the author essentially shares his criticism both of the inadequacy of bourgeois moralistic judgements and of factory working conditions.

In another passage, Hermann describes a gathering of the workers at his cousin's machine factory (see pp. 207-10). They have assembled as the news of the bankruptcy of the factory, which is a result of ruthless speculations, is becoming known. With empathy, Hermann describes the fear and despair of the workers. The overriding feeling evoked in the scene, however, is not one of pity or sympathy, but one of threat of revolt amongst the workers. The great number of the assembled workers is emphasised, who press the factory bookkeeper with increasingly urgent questions and demands. As a

mass, they emit a 'dumpfes Murmeln und Summen', and as Georg leaves the scene, the threat in this mass manifestation is still growing: 'Auf dem Hof wuchs das Murren der Arbeiter von Sekunde zu Sekunde'. The workers are not described as individuals but as a mass of bodies with 'schwarzigen, narbigen Armen und [...] schweren schwieligen Händen' as well as black, sooty faces which contrast with the whites of the eyes. Most revealing is the metaphor 'die Zyklopen in den blauen Kitteln und den brüchigen Lederschürzen', as Hermann enhances the menace of the situation by characterising the workers as giants.<sup>53</sup> The underlying perspective that is revealed here is that of the middle class writer. This is also indicated in Hermann's subsequent concentration on the effects the factory's collapse has on his uncle, the 'aristocrat', rather than on the workers.

Bogdal has shown how the use of metaphors often reveals distancing attitudes in middle class Naturalist writers which contradict their stated intentions. Bogdal's characterisation of the majority of the Naturalists' attitude to the social problems they describe clearly applies to Hermann, too: 'Die Kenntnis proletarischer Lebensverhältnisse [...] vermittelt zunächst Verständnis [...]. Dennoch schlägt die vorgebliche Vertrautheit bei unmittelbarer Realerfahrung in Erschrecken und Angst um.'<sup>54</sup>

Hermann's *Spielkinder* thus shares many traits with better known examples of Naturalist literature. However, it is important to remain aware of his distance from any particular movement. Not only has he, as I have described above, described his writing as intensely personal, but in *Spielkinder* he has also presented a critical view of certain aspects of the Naturalist movement in his description of the 'Verein der Geistesbrüder'. The aims of the 'Verein' are propagated by Eugen: 'Ich will den Menschen zum Menschen machen und den Kampf aufnehmen gegen eingefleischte Unrechte, gegen Geld- und Geburtsaristokratie und hauptsächlich gegen alles konventionelle Lügenhafte!' (p. 104). The attack on social inequality and the criticism of conventional mendacity, which can be read to mean the ideology and literature of the 'Gründerzeit', represent two of the main principles recurring in the Naturalist manifestos of the 1880s. Similarly, the eradication of all prejudice and the intention to open the eyes of the

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<sup>53</sup> The same metaphor is used earlier in the novel where it is applied to asphalt workers (see *Spielkinder*, p. 83).

<sup>54</sup> Bogdal, p. 62.



narrowminded 'Spießbürger' which are also part of the 'Verein's' purposes, echo Naturalist objectives.

Georg's and, by implication Hermann's, attitude to Eugen's foundation speech remains detached. He states explicitly his dislike of societies and associations and his resentment against Eugen's attempts to profit personally from the newly founded 'Verein'. The overdrawn rhetoric and the pathos and arrogance of Eugen's speech also disqualify its content. The hollowness of the professed aims is especially obvious when the contrast to the youth and immaturity of the 'Verein's' members is taken into consideration. Eugen, having just proclaimed the need to fight 'mit Gut und Blut' for his convictions, immediately knuckles under to his mother when she interrupts the foundation meeting to remind him of his homework. The judgement that Hamann and Hermann make about the early Naturalist writers comes to mind: 'Sie [...] erschöpften sich [...] in einer revolutionären Pose, die deutlich "pubertäre" Züge trägt.'<sup>55</sup>

Hermann's attitude to the 'Verein der Geistesbrüder' is however not entirely negative, but rather shows an inner conflict. On the one hand, he is disdainful of Eugen's hollow phrases: 'Ich sagte ganz brutal, man solle nicht solche Phrasen abwickeln, dadurch brächte man der "jammernenden Allgemeinheit" keinen Nutzen, man sollte mit der Tat sie glücklich machen' (p. 124). On the other hand, he envies the other members of the 'Verein' for their glowing enthusiasm and their ability to believe in the good cause. His lack of enthusiasm and of serious application stand in contrast to their 'glühende Jugendbegeisterung'. Partly, Georg's detachment is caused by his feeling of responsibility for his family which has contributed to his greater maturity. But there is also an element of pessimism and 'Weltschmerz' in his attitude, which contrasts sharply with the revolutionary spirit of the Naturalist movement and the pseudo-Naturalist rhetoric of the 'Geistesbrüder':

Und mich erfaßte dieses deprimierende Gefühl eigener Nichtigkeit, ein namenloses Mitleid mit mir selbst, mit meiner Schwäche, so, daß ich mich auf eine Bank setzte, die Ellbogen auf die Knie stützte, den Kopf zwischen beide Hände nahm und weinte. (p. 109)

I hope to have made clear in the foregoing analysis of *Spielkinder*, that Hermann has created a novel which mixes a Naturalist's social concern and desire for a truthful

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<sup>55</sup> Hamann and Hermand, *Naturalismus*, p. 279.

representation of reality, with an interest in the understanding of the personal which is best served by the form of the autobiography. The novel thus combines the first and second phases of Modernism as Hermann Bahr sets them out in the following passage of his essay *Die Überwindung des Naturalismus* from 1891:

Der Naturalismus ist entweder eine Pause zur Erholung der alten Kunst; oder er ist eine Pause zur Vorbereitung der neuen: jedenfalls ist er Zwischenakt.

Die Welt hat sich erneuert; es war alles ganz anders geworden, ringsum. Draußen wurde es zuerst gewahrt. Dahin wendete sich die unstete Neugier zuerst. Das Fremde schildern, das Draußen, eben das neue. Erste Phase.

Aber gerade darum, damit, dadurch hatte sich auch der Mensch erneut. Den gilt es jetzt: sagen, wie er ist - zweite Phase. Und mehr noch, aussagen, was er will: das Drängende, Ungestüme, Zügellose - das wilde Begehren, die vielen Fieber, die großen Rätsel.

[...] das Erwachen aus dieser langen Selbstentfremdung des Naturalismus, das Wiederfinden der forschenden Freude an sich, das Horchen nach dem eigenen Drang.<sup>56</sup>

Hamann and Hermand see the same development in the literature around the turn of the century. However, they describe the return of the subjective into writing as the second phase of Naturalism itself. In contrast, Sprengel points out that to most Naturalist writers literature has always remained determined by subjectivism, as literary works have continued to be seen as creations of genius.<sup>57</sup> Which of these schools of thought one follows, and hence whether, accordingly, one classifies *Spielkinder* as 'Naturalist', 'second-phase-Modernist' or 'second-phase-Naturalist' is, however, of secondary importance. The important conclusion to draw from the analyses made in this chapter, especially in view of Hermann's subsequent literary development, is that in his first, autobiographical, novel, *Spielkinder*, Hermann has used a largely Naturalist concept of literature and has furthermore combined the different aesthetic concepts that coexisted in the literature of the 1890s. Hermann's *Spielkinder* shows the tension between subjective narration and objective description that has been described as characteristic of the literature of the period.<sup>58</sup> A Naturalist concept of literature which aims to show the general in the representation of the individual, combines not only with the interest in objectivity leading to formal innovation, but also with a post-Naturalist interest in the consciousness of the individual. In his first novel, Hermann, like many other writers of

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<sup>56</sup> Hermann Bahr, 'Die Überwindung des Naturalismus', in Bahr, *Essays von Hermann Bahr. Kulturprofil der Jahrhundertwende*, selected and introduced by Heinz Kindermann (Linz, 1962), pp. 129-175 (p. 153).

<sup>57</sup> See Sprengel, *Hauptmann*, p. 40.

<sup>58</sup> See for example Günter Helmes, 'Max Kretzer, "Meister Timpe"', *Der Deutschunterricht*, 40 (1988), 51-64.



the time, may be said to have used Naturalism as a 'literarische Suchbewegung'<sup>59</sup> which allowed him to experiment with literary forms and to define his position as a writer.

As has become clear in this chapter, Hermann experiments, in the first part of *Spielkinder*, with a panoramic, seemingly objective representation of reality, which elicits the reader's understanding and sympathy by subtle management of the reception process. In the second part of the novel which, in a single, linear action curve concentrates on the doomed relationship between Georg and Lies, this freedom is restricted by a heavier use of comments from the omniscient narrating 'I'. The abandoning of the open form and the relative freedom of interpretation in the beginning of the novel<sup>60</sup> for a more stringently guided narrative process shows the way for Hermann's subsequent novels. It may be assumed that, although the objective, scenic representation allowed him a truthful reproduction of objectively describable scenes, it proved inadequate for revealing psychological insight, reflections and emotional and mental development. By abandoning the open form, Hermann loses directness but he gains the opportunity to describe the 'seelische Provinz', in which, as Wiegler claims, Hermann is 'ein Schöpfer wie nur ein paar andere'.<sup>61</sup> In this first novel, unfortunately, the subjective expression of emotions and thoughts turns into sometimes larmoyant outbursts, a fact which can be attributed largely to the author's close emotional involvement in his autobiographical material, as in his later novels the problem does not present itself.

The personal aspect of the autobiographical material and the wider and more generally relevant social concern, which have been highlighted above, are combined positively for the greatest part of the novel. Through the depiction of Georg's boyhood, the harshness of the social decline of the middle class victim of the 'Gründer' boom is made vividly clear. However, there are instances in the novel, where the author's emotional involvement in the conditions or situations described dominates his writing, and it is in these instances that the emotional involvement of the writer harms his wider social intention - as well as the literary quality of his writing.

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<sup>59</sup> Helmut Scheuer, 'Der Beginn der Moderne', *Der Deutschunterricht*, 40 (1988), 3-10 (p. 8).

<sup>60</sup> As Liere points out, *Spielkinder* offers the reader the greatest freedom of interpretation of all of Hermann's works (Liere, p. 147).

<sup>61</sup> Wiegler, p. 291.

The relationship between these two concerns, and indeed the third function of the novel cited in the preface to the 1911 edition, namely 'den kurzen Schrei der Lust über die Schönheit der Sinneseindrücke nicht ganz verhallen zu lassen' (p. 8), will receive further attention in the following chapter in which I consider Hermann's representation of Berlin in *Spielkinder*.



### 3 Between Personal Attachment and Critical Observation: The Representation of Berlin in *Spielkinder*

In the previous chapter, *Spielkinder* has emerged as a novel that combines the social criticism of a Naturalist work with an interest in subjective experience that goes beyond the primarily critical intention of Naturalist literature. In this chapter, I investigate how the representation of Berlin in *Spielkinder* reflects the bridging between the objective and the subjective, between the critical and the autobiographical intentions that have emerged as characteristic of the novel. Furthermore, I shall explore how the third intention that Hermann claimed for his novel, namely 'den kurzen Schrei der Lust über die Schönheit der Sinneseindrücke nicht ganz verhallen zu lassen' (p. 8), manifests itself in the depiction of the city environment and combines with the first two intentions. Where it is useful for the clarification of Hermann's position, I shall refer to his novella *Aus dem letzten Hause*, published only three years after *Spielkinder*. The staple topoi of Naturalist city novels, such as the description of working life, alcoholism or brutality among the working classes, have been covered in the previous chapter and to avoid unnecessary repetition are therefore largely disregarded here.

*Spielkinder* is an autobiographical novel that concentrates on the development of the main protagonist rather than setting out to make the representation of the city of Berlin its focal interest. In some instances, accordingly, the references to the city environment in *Spielkinder* are used as backdrop only. This is the case, for instance, in the first scene of the novel: the café in which the men meet is not described and the discussion of the city's news, although lengthy, is not central either to the author's or to the protagonists' concerns but is simply used as a foil against which the main developments of the novel can be unfolded. The discussion of city affairs, which might have been given a prominent function as a commentary with political significance, is instead no more than a diversionary tactic. Hermann has the speculator Rewald employ it to gain the confidence of his victim Geiger by engaging him in an unthreatening conversation on matters of general, mutual interest. In a similar way, Jason and Kößling will, in Hermann's later novel *Jettchen Gebert*, discuss city affairs when they cannot bring themselves to address the matter of the relationship between Kößling and Jason's niece Jettchen.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Georg Hermann, *Jettchen Gebert* (Reinbek, 1989), p. 212: 'Jason [...] schob absichtlich den Augenblick, von Jettchen zu beginnen, immer weiter hinaus. Er nahm die Bücher vom Tisch, eines nach

However, in large parts of *Spielkinder*, the representation of the city is much more than incidental. The city environment not only provides the protagonist with essential experiences but is also used by Hermann to accentuate some of the central themes of the novel, such as the social divisions under which the young Georg suffers. My analysis concentrates on these elements of city representation, which assume a greater significance than the provision of a backdrop.

This chapter consists of three sections. In the first, I consider Hermann's representation of urban living conditions. In the course of *Spielkinder*, four homes are described which represent different social levels of city accommodation. The Geigers' home is contrasted on the one hand with the bourgeois apartment of the 'aristocrat', and on the other with the squalid quarters to which Lies moves. The description of the seedy tenement house in the new suburbs in which Georg's friend Walter lives, warrants particular attention, as it is the first of a string of representations of the city's suburbs in Hermann's work. The uneasy combination of the personal and the socio-critical, which I identified in the preceding chapter as characterising the novel, will be highlighted and a definition of Hermann's position as a critical interpreter of the living conditions in the city will be attempted in comparison with the two visual artists Zille and Baluschek. In the second part of this chapter, I concentrate on the descriptions of the metropolitan streets in *Spielkinder*. As well as analysing the functions they fulfil in the context of the novel, I shall discuss the relationship between the observing individual and the environment in Hermann's depictions of the urban world. The chapter concludes with a focus on some of the traits of behaviour featured in *Spielkinder* that have been described by contemporary sociologists and psychologists as specifically urban. I concentrate on two, namely: compulsive consumerism and pleasure-seeking and, connected with this, a cultural hyperactivity.



### 3.1 Living Conditions in the Metropolis

I start this section of the analysis by looking at the depiction of the house in the Tiergarten area of Berlin that becomes the Geiger family's home after the father's financial ruin. Hermann combines a critical view of the living conditions with a fondness that springs from a sense of belonging and the nostalgic remembrance of childhood days. When the house in Tiergarten is first mentioned, it is remembered by the narrator as an environment which accords both excitement and a sense of belonging, despite being marked by poverty and decay; it appears as a kind of adventure playground for the young Georg (see pp. 45-50). The courtyard, the stable and the cellars with their damp walls, rotten stairs and floorboards, the high fence to the deserted neighbouring plot, and even the 'immerfort pustende und stampfende Fabrik' adjacent to the house, are filtered through the boy's perception and remembered as 'geheimnisvoll' and 'reizvoll'. But Hermann does not romanticise the poverty and decay of the house. In later passages, he refers to the lack of privacy (see pp. 71/72) which not only projects the servants' talk from the kitchens all over the house, but makes it unavoidable, too, that all the inhabitants hear the noises of domestic fighting emanating from the cellar rooms (see p.118).

However, the slightly nostalgic voice of the narrator, which combines the child's attitude to his home and the more objective description of the detached observer, infuses the description with warmth. This is especially clear in the first evocation of the house, which looks back to Georg's childhood. Exclamations such as 'Das war meine Welt! Da war ich daheim!' or 'Ja, das war ein Leben' underline this warmth. This nostalgia not only seems to be at odds with the author's characterisations of his childhood - in other parts of the novel, and in his autobiographical essays quoted at the beginning of the last chapter - as marked primarily by poverty and unhappiness; it also contradicts the critical intention behind the description of the house.

When the other inhabitants of the house are described, a similar mixture of a nostalgic evocation of a sense of belonging and a critical attitude is evident. Hermann mentions boys' pranks and domestic brutality in one and the same paragraph. Similarly, the special adeptness of one child at throwing a ball left-handed is recalled in the same breath as is the battering of another child (see pp. 48/49). Here, however, the two voices of nostalgia and criticism combine rather than being at odds with each other. In this

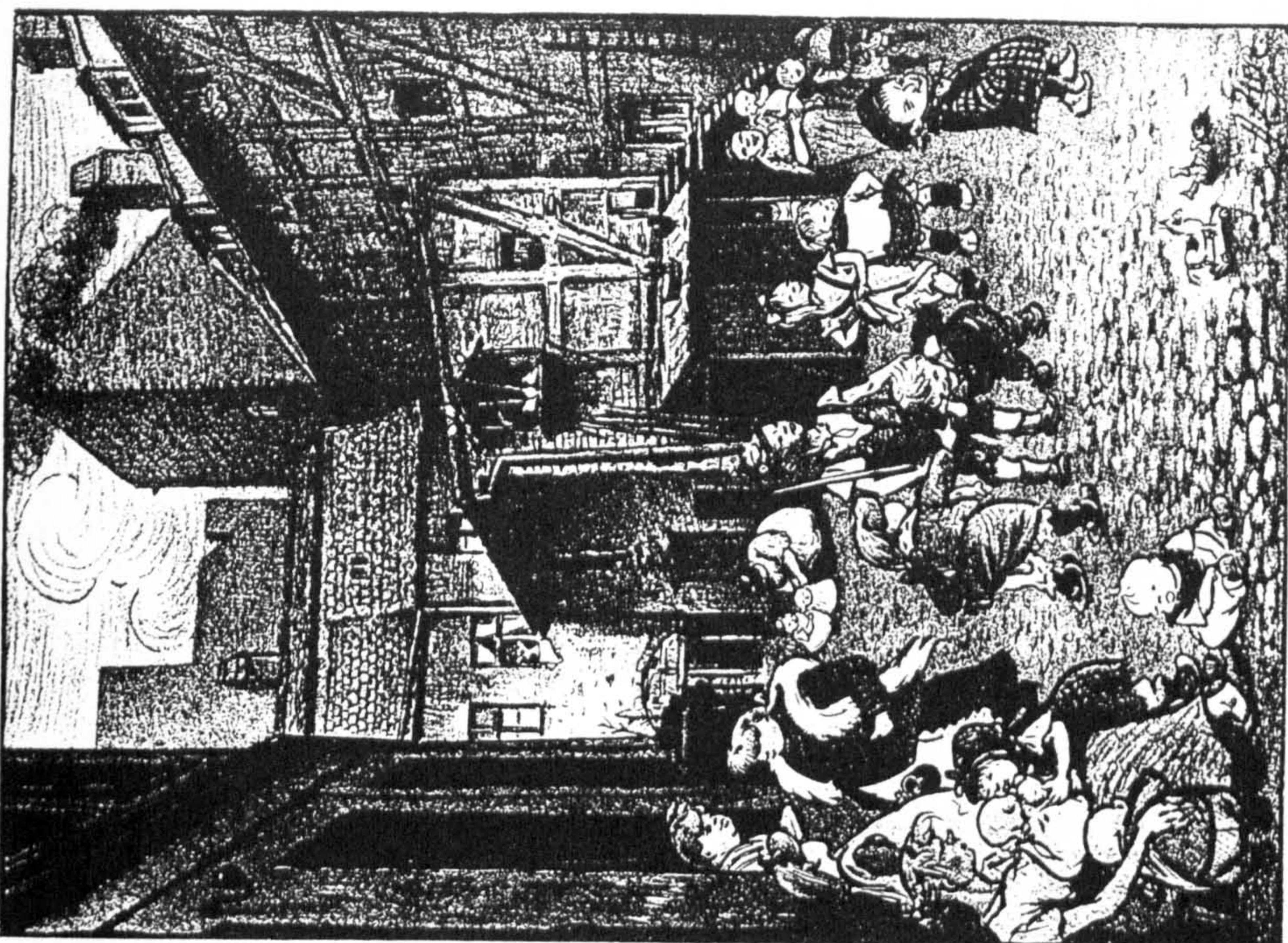
instance, Hermann uses not the perspective of the reminiscing narrator, but the perspective of the innocent child for whom these different aspects of reality have equal importance. He is thus able to expose, without sentimentality, a less than perfect social reality. In the same way, the naiveté of the young Georg is used to show by contrast the harsh reality in which he lives when he makes friends with the tax collector and finds out only too late on whom he has unsuspectingly bestowed his trust and friendship. The effect of Hermann's depiction of the boy playing happily, while the tax collector ('mein Freund mit der blauen Mütze') supervises the confiscation of the family's furniture (see pp. 37/38), is much more poignant than any tearful and emotional description of the dispossession of the family could have been.

This technique contributes to the mosaic-like illusion of an objective representation of reality that I described in the previous chapter as a characteristic of the first part of the novel; it is reminiscent of the work of Hermann's friend, the Berlin draughtsman Heinrich Zille. Zille's main subject was the squalid living conditions of the urban proletariat. One of his mottos was the dictum 'Man kann einen Menschen mit einer Wohnung geradeso erschlagen wie mit einer Axt.'<sup>2</sup> Zille does not explain or comment but only observes, listens and reports. Working mostly with charcoal and chalk, drawing sparing but energetic lines, he is never sentimental and concentrates only on the essential. His concern is with authenticity and atmosphere. The visual fundamentals that both Hermann and Zille draw on are the same: the backyards of tenement blocks, bow-legged toddlers and children, shabbily dressed women. Compare for instance the drawings *Fußball* or *Spiel* by Zille (illustrations I and II) with the following description in *Spielkinder*: 'Die Kleine wackelte auf ihren O-Beinen die Treppe hinunter, und sofort stürzte die Mutter, ein schlampiges Frauenzimmer, das fast immer, wie die meisten Waschweiber, die Röcke aufgeschürzt trug, heraus wie ein Hamster aus seiner Höhle' (p. 38).

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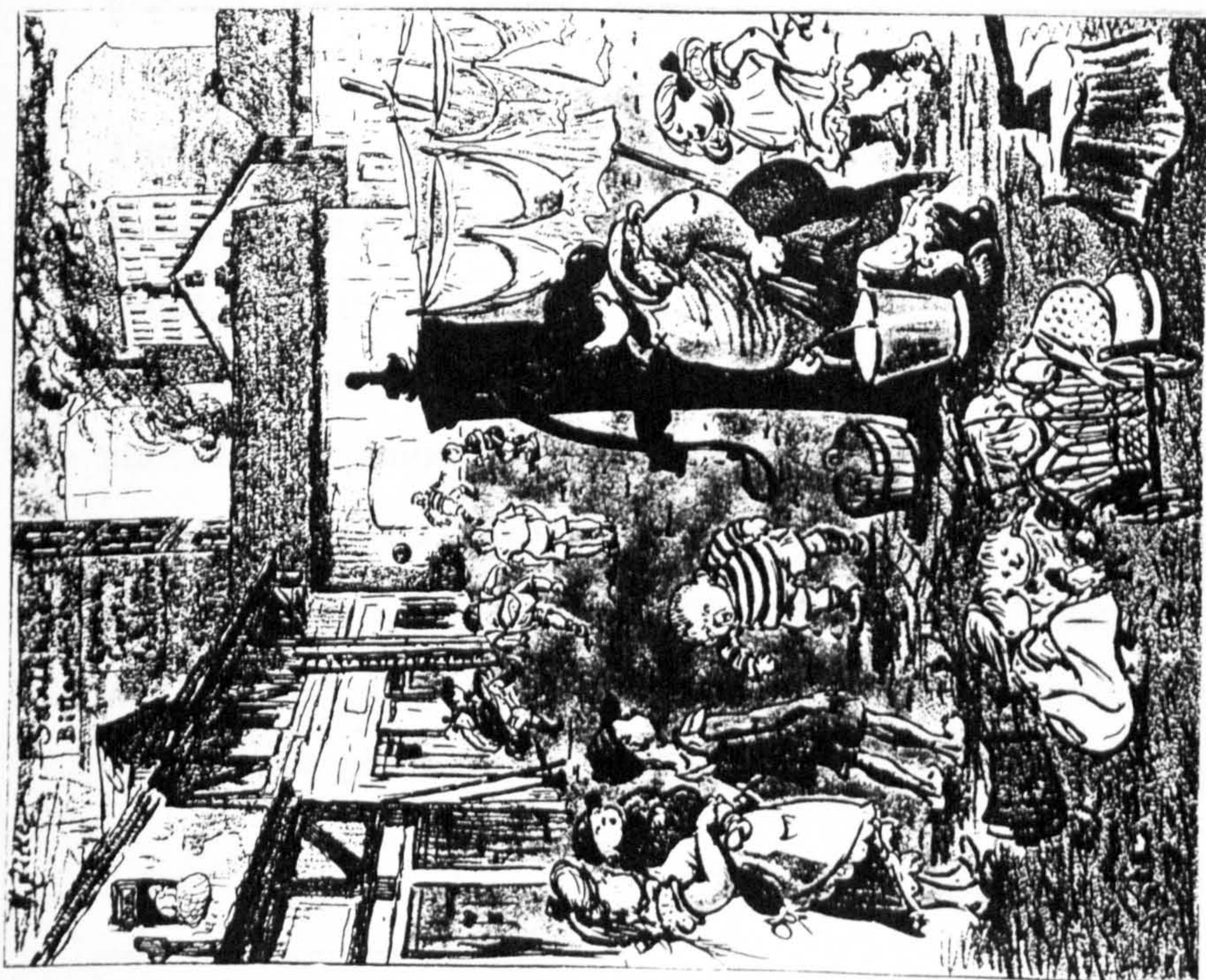
<sup>2</sup> See Geerte Murmann, *'Heinrich, lieber Heinrich!' Zille und seine Zeit* (Düsseldorf, 1994), p. 43. As Murmann points out, the quotation originates with the SPD politician Albert Südekum.





*'Herr Schutzmann, der Mann hat mir eben anjesprochen!'*

**III. II:** Heinrich Zille, *Spiel*, from Zille, *Mein Milljöh* [1914] (Berlin, 1925), p. 57



*'Schport treiben un' heulen? Det is nischt for unsern Kronprinz, wenn er dir sonntags  
auf Tempelhofer Feld zukiekt!'*

*'Aba Mutta! Doch ... grade ... in ... de ... Schnauze!'*

**III. I:** Heinrich Zille, *Fußball*, from Zille, *Mein Milljöh* (Berlin, 1914); reproduced in  
Zille, *Das große Zille-Album*, ed. by Werner Schumann (Stuttgart, Hamburg, 1963), no  
page number



Concern for children was recognised by Hermann as one of Zille's main motives. In the preface he contributed to Zille's book *Mein Milljöh*, Hermann writes:

Ja, versteht man denn nicht, wie durch all seine Blätter stets wieder nur der eine Schrei geht: Aber die Kinder! Aber die Kinder! Da ist dieses wundervolle, junge, oft noch unverdorbene Menschenmaterial, alles kann aus ihnen werden, alles! - gesunde, glückliche, kräftige Menschen. Aber Armut und Elend, schlechte Wohnungen, Laster und Alkohol machen das daraus, was ich euch hier zeige! <sup>3</sup>

The same concern for the young shows itself in Hermann's *Spielkinder*, where the author declares in the introduction to the 1911 edition of his novel, his intention to 'die Sache der Jugend führen'.

The technique of using the naive child's voice to highlight a brutal reality through contrast is used to great effect in many of Zille's works. Most of the characters in his drawings are given speech, which is recorded underneath the drawings. Both drawings and quotations are suffused with knowledge of the situation and the milieu. This is obvious for instance in the depiction of the group of children, showing off in front of one another: 'Wenn ick will, kann ick Blut in den Schnee spucken!' (ill. III). The poignancy that Zille achieved in this way was recognised by Hermann: 'Selten ist Zille Kläger. Wenn er es aber ist, so wirkt er doppelt überzeugend dadurch, daß er meist einem Kind die Worte in den Mund legt, das selbst nicht weiß, was für eine letzte grausige Wahrheit es ausspricht'.<sup>4</sup>

There are also many similarities between the two artists in their use of language. The Berlin dialect is used throughout Zille's works. Similarly, Hermann's description of the house and its inhabitants is interspersed with 'Berlinish' expressions such as 'ausgestunkene Lügen', 'ulkige Kruke' and 'scherwenzelte'. These turns of phrase underline the author's closeness to the described 'Milieu'. The proximity to the style and tone of Zille's drawings is remarkable and so is the use of humour. Zille's humour, like Hermann's, is full of serious concern and humanity, the kind that makes the laughter stick in the throat. Max Liebermann pertinently described Zille's art with the words: 'Das große Mitleid regt sich in Ihnen, aber Sie beeilen sich, wie Figaro sagt,

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<sup>3</sup> Georg Hermann, 'Heinrich Zille', in Zille, *Mein Milljöh. Bilder aus dem Berliner Leben* [1913] (Berlin, 1925) pp. 3-6, (p. 5).

<sup>4</sup> Hermann, 'Heinrich Zille', p. 6.





*'Wenn ick will, kann ick Blut in den Schnee spucken!'*

**III. III:** Heinrich Zille, from *Kinder der Straße* (Berlin, 1908); reproduced in Otto Nagel, *H. Zille* (Berlin, 1956), p. 39



*'Wo wohn' Se denn? Keller, zweetes Quergebäude? Da könn doch keene Wanzen sinn; wo's so feucht is!'*

**III. IV:** Heinrich Zille, *Der Haustyrann*, reproduced, without reference, in Otto Nagel, *H. Zille* (Berlin, 1956), p. 91



darüber zu lachen, um nicht gezwungen zu sein, darüber zu weinen.’<sup>5</sup> He must have been thinking of works such as the drawing showing a landlord triumphing over his complaining tenant: ‘Wo wohn’ Se denn? Keller, zweetes Quergebäude? Da könn doch keene Wanzen sinn; wo’s so feucht is!’ (ill. IV).

There is a difference in emphasis and tone, however. Hermann recognises that Zille depicts mainly the survivors of social problems; he shows the coming to terms with reality: Hermann explains Zille’s art as an expression of maturity:

Gewiß - wenn man wie Zille als reifer Mann zu seiner Kunst kommt, dann ist man kein Ankläger mehr, wenigstens nicht der Ankläger mit pathetischen Gebärden. Dann hat man gesehen, daß auch die Letzten und Niedrigsten [...] den Ausgleich mit der Welt finden, und daß auch über ihrem Dasein goldene Lichter spielen. Und Zille gibt nicht ihre Tragödien, sondern er gibt ihren Ausgleich mit der Welt.<sup>6</sup>

At the time of writing *Spielkinder*, Hermann himself had not yet reached this maturity. While some passages, especially in the first part of the novel, mirror Zille’s stance, he still uses ‘pathetische Gebärden’ in the latter part. As I shall show in the subsequent chapters of this dissertation, Hermann’s style evolved and by the time he came to write *Kubinke*, he had reached the maturity he describes in connection with Zille’s work.

The mixture of concern and humour, of criticism and warmth, springing from an emotional closeness to the subject, which characterises Hermann’s depiction of the Geigers’ home, is not to be encountered in the description of the ‘aristocrat’s’ house. Rather, the latter description is built up in contrast to the former. Also an apartment building, the house in which the ‘aristocrat’ lives with his wife Agnes is situated in the fashionable city centre. Not only is it equipped with a porter’s lodge, but the staircase sports ‘breite Marmortreppen, dicke schalldämpfende Teppiche, Spiegel, Stuck, Holzschnitzereien’ (p. 78). In the perception of the young Georg, through whose consciousness the description is filtered, the luxury of the house is equated with the assumed happiness of its inhabitants: ‘Oh, die Leute, die hier daheim sind, müssen aber glücklich sein! Immer so schön gesättigt diese Treppen heruntergehen zu können, keine Sorgen, sich um nichts zu kümmern brauchen!’ (p. 78). The first impression of the apartment itself, with its large rooms and heavy carpets and curtains, elicits the same

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<sup>5</sup> Max Liebermann, ‘Lieber Zille!’, in Heinrich Zille, *Berliner Geschichten und Bilder* (Dresden, 1930), no page numbers.

<sup>6</sup> Hermann, ‘Heinrich Zille’, p.5.



longing admiration from the boy who remembers: 'So ähnlich hat's ja bei uns auch mal ausgesehen!' (p. 79).

The choice of adjectives used, however, betrays a less pleasant atmosphere. The words 'schwül' and 'dick und schwer verhangen' point to a rather oppressive environment. This is entirely in keeping with the atmosphere of suffering that surrounds the dying Agnes. Reminded of the contrast between his poor but relatively cheerful home and these luxurious but unhappy and stifling surroundings, the young Georg concludes: 'Ich möchte doch nicht hier wohnen! Da gefällt mir doch meine Hintertreppe mit dem schadhafte Wandbewurf, den muldigen, ausgetretenen Stufen besser' (p. 80). The naive first impression and admiration of the external appearance is replaced by the recognition that luxury and happiness do not necessarily come together after all.

The illusory character of the aristocrat's environment is revealed further when daylight seeps into the room: 'Alle diese feinen Sachen und Säckelchen machen in tagesheller Nüchternheit einen so trivialen Eindruck, und jetzt sieht man erst, daß jedes an sich hübsch, alles im Gesamteindruck aber zusammengewürfelt, kalt und ungemütlich ist' (p. 89). When the sham of the 'aristocrat's' marriage is revealed later on, the opposition of appearance and reality that is presented in the comparison of the two living environments is supported further. What might have been a rather trite statement about the relative merits of cheerful poverty and a united family life compared to a life of luxury marred by personal unhappiness, is redeemed by being reflected through the eyes of the young boy Georg, and thus presented as an original experience. However, again, conflicting messages are conveyed. The depiction of the contrast in living conditions between the comfortable bourgeoisie and the declining middle class is undermined by the autobiographer's nostalgic remembrance. On the one hand, Hermann evokes the poverty and unhappiness of his childhood days, sharing with the reader memories of hunger, need and misery. He emphasises the gulf between rich and poor, thus conforming to the model of the Naturalist city novel as described by Klaus Scherpe: 'Im sozialkritischen und naturalistischen Roman des 19. Jahrhunderts wird die Land-Stadt-Opposition ersetzt durch den Gegensatz der Klassen.'<sup>7</sup> On the other hand however, a

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<sup>7</sup> Klaus R. Scherpe, 'Von der erzählten Stadt zur Stadterzählung. Der Großstadtdiskurs in Alfred Döblins "Berlin Alexanderplatz"', in Jürgen Fohrmann and Harro Müller (eds.), *Diskurstheorien und Literaturwissenschaft* (Frankfurt a.M., 1988), pp. 418-37 (p. 422).

certain nostalgia for his childhood days and a desire to present his immediate family as a happy unit, works against this depiction.

However, Hermann does not sentimentalise poverty. His critical stance towards the gulf between rich and poor is clear where his emotional involvement does not hamper the expression of his social criticism. It is emphasised in the descriptions of Walter's and Lies' living quarters in the poorest areas of the city. The house in which Georg visits Lies for the last time before her death in the Charité hospital, is referred to as 'elender Winkel' (p. 242) and 'menschenunwürdiges Loch' (p. 252). It is situated in an area of the city in which many prostitutes live (see p. 244), in a labyrinth of streets near the canal. This description foreshadows that of the area in which the Polenliese lives in Hermann's novel *Rosenmil*, written in 1933.<sup>8</sup> In the description of the tenement itself, the proximity of squalor and vice is striking. The house is suffused with the smells of 'Müllkuten, kleinen Kindern, Schmutz und Laster' and it is presided over by 'Lies' Wirtin, ein Weib, dem Gemeinheit und Kuppelei auf dem Gesicht standen' (p. 231). In Lies' apartment, poverty is combined with uncleanliness ('wenig einladende Bezüge', 'schmutzige Wäsche') and bad taste ('chinesische Fächer in allen Größen, Formen und Farben, überall da, wo sie nicht hinpaßten').

In the case of Walter's accommodation, the anonymity of the new tenement building at the very edge of the city is compounded by the depressing darkness and the piles of rubble with which he has to put up as a tenant in a brand new house. Georg's judgement is short and clear-cut: 'Wie konnte man sich nur hier einmieten?' (p. 220).

Seen in the context of the novel's plot, the different types of housing in the city are used as indicators to characterise their inhabitants. Walter's depression, the 'aristocrat's' life in external appearances and Lies' moral corruption are all reflected in their respective environments. Hermann also makes a more general point by underlining the relationship between poverty and vice, and showing the wider social differences within the city. Especially in the case of Lies' final dwelling, the referential character of the description is made explicit when Hermann characterises the house as 'echtes Massenquartier für großstädtisches Elend' (p. 231).

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<sup>8</sup> The constellation of figures, too, foreshadows that in the later novel: an alter ego of the author, here his younger self, in *Rosenmil* doctor Levy, trying to comfort and save a consumptive 'fallen girl' by promising her, amongst other things, a trip to Italy.



This criticism is independent of the plot requirements of *Spielkinder*. It is directed in a general way against the social conditions evident in the metropolitan environment. The fact that Hermann does not name or describe the localities in the context of the Berlin street map, underlines the generality of his intention. He sets social co-ordinates but never mentions street names. He does not provide topographically recognisable views of the Berlin cityscape but instead combines particular observations into representations of the typical.

The same technique is observable in Hermann's depiction of the new suburb where Walter lives. A comparison of Hans Baluschek's chalk and watercolour painting *Neue Häuser* from 1895 (ill. V) with Hermann's depiction of the city's suburbs highlights this approach. The similarities between the two artists' representations help to explain the context of Hermann's novel.

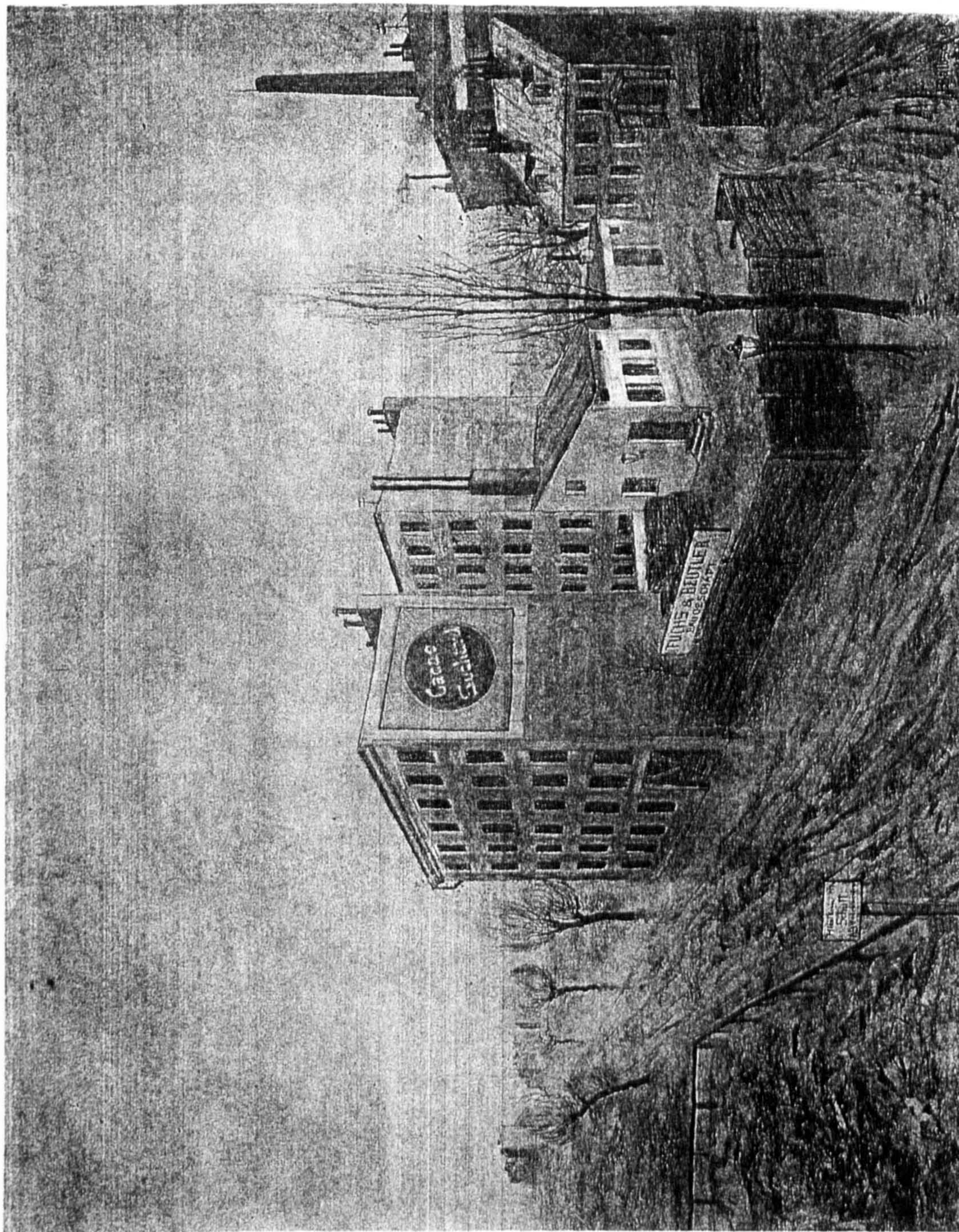
Baluschek, like Zille, was a member of the Berlin Secession, the movement of the artistic avant-garde at the time. Far from presenting a united style or policy, the movement collected a great diversity of painters and styles.<sup>9</sup> Within this diverse group, Zille and Baluschek, together with the more decidedly political Käthe Kollwitz, represented socially motivated art and concentrated on the proletarian and lower middle class milieu. They were seen as acting as the agents of the lower classes.<sup>10</sup> While both Zille and Baluschek set out to further the general public's awareness of the living conditions of the proletariat, the means they used differed significantly. Where Zille worked with drawings, using humorous sketches to show the truth as immediately as possible, Baluschek used a more epic approach in representing the working class milieu in painting.

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<sup>9</sup> For more information on the Berlin Secession, see Peter Paret, *Die Berliner Secession. Moderne Kunst und ihre Feinde im kaiserlichen Deutschland* (Frankfurt, Berlin, Wien, 1983) or Nicolas Teeuwisse, *Vom Salon zur Secession. Berliner Kunstleben zwischen Tradition und Aufbruch zur Moderne, 1870-1900* (Berlin, 1986).

<sup>10</sup> See Margrit Bröhan, *Hans Baluschek 1870-1935* (Berlin, 1985), p. 52.





III. V: Hans Baluschek, *Neue Häuser*, 1895; chalk and watercolours; 76 x 98 cm; Märkisches Museum, Berlin



At a time when the focus of most artists, visual and literary, was either on the inner city of the expanding metropolis, be it on the fashionable West or the working class quarters in the East and North of Berlin, or on the contrast between city and country (see Wilhelm Bölsche, *Die Mittagsgöttin* (1891)), the city's suburbs did not receive much artistic attention.<sup>11</sup> The attention that Hermann gives to these areas in his writing is matched, however, in painting by Hans Baluschek. In *Neue Häuser*, he depicts two new, obviously still uninhabited, tenement buildings. Their black windows and the nailed up door of the building bordering on the street make the lifelessness of these buildings apparent. Lifelessness permeates the whole scene: there is no one on the street, even the trees are bare. The only movement provided in the scene is the wafting of the smoke from the factory chimneys in the background. The street is as yet unpaved and a single gas lamp can only provide inadequate lighting. The fenced building plot next to the new houses belongs to a building company with the eloquent name of 'Fuchs and Beutler', referring sarcastically to the business practices of the building speculators.<sup>12</sup> Another sign proclaims 'Hier kann Schutt abgeladen werden'. Placed as it is, in another fenced-in building plot, it can be read to refer to the future inhabitants of this site: the scrap-heap of society.<sup>13</sup>

The individual elements of paintings such as *Neue Häuser* may be read as metaphors of the city. They all contribute to defining the milieu at hand and taken together are used as 'Stigmata einer explodierenden, massenhaften Großstadtzivilisation der Wilhelminischen Ära'.<sup>14</sup> The same process of representing the typical as metaphor can be recognised in Hermann's writing. The descriptions of city dwellings are a case in point.

It is interesting to compare the depictions of these two artists, because the similarity does not end at the choice of themes but also extends to the evocation of atmosphere. The sober melancholy of Baluschek's painting<sup>15</sup> mirrors that of Hermann's description of Walter's street on the city's edge in *Spielkinder*. Hermann describes the new suburb as a hostile environment (see pp. 219/20). Darkness and a deadly quiet envelop an area

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<sup>11</sup> Notable exceptions are Max Kretzer's *Der Millionenbauer* (1891) and Clara Viebig's *Die vor den Toren* (1910) both of which focus on the land speculation leading to Berlin's expansion.

<sup>12</sup> See Günter Meißner, *Hans Baluschek* (Dresden, 1985), p. 24.

<sup>13</sup> See Ursula Cosmann, 'Berlin ist eine graue Stadt', in *Hans Baluschek 1870-1935*, exhibition catalogue, Staatliche Kunsthalle Berlin (Berlin, 1991), pp. 30-50 (p. 36).

<sup>14</sup> Meißner, p. 22.

<sup>15</sup> Margrit Bröhan has pointed to this quality of Baluschek's work as an anticipation of the style of painting of the 'Neue Sachlichkeit' movement of the 1920s (Bröhan, p. 48).



in which the only living beings are the odd night-watchman of a building site, a barking dog and a group of drunken workmen. The area seems not only uninhabited and unsafe in its semi-finished state, but it is also drenched in anonymity and desolation. Walter lives in a street, 'der der Magistrat noch nicht einmal einen Namen gegeben hat.' The 'schwarze Fensterhöhlen' of the house he lives in and the references to death ('tot', 'reglos', 'ausgestorben') in this passage enhance the atmosphere of desolation.

The correspondences are not accidental. Not only were the two artists born within a year of each other, they both made the changing city of Berlin one of their principal themes. If Hermann's *Spielkinder* has been shown in the foregoing chapter to be close to the literature of the Naturalist movement, Baluschek was part of the literary Naturalist circles in Berlin. It is from this movement that he derived his particular style: 'In Analogie zum literarischen Naturalismus erarbeitete Baluschek seine Bildsprache, d.h. er schuf sich eine charakteristische Maltechnik, die alltägliche, oft spießig-banale, oft abstoßend-ordinäre Ausschnitte aus dem Volksleben mitzuteilen in der Lage war.'<sup>16</sup>

In his capacity as art critic, Hermann wrote about Baluschek several times, always showing his respect for the painter's work.<sup>17</sup> In 1901, Hermann published a substantial study entitled *Die deutsche Karikatur im 19. Jahrhundert*. He includes Baluschek's art in this context and emphasises the painter's importance for the cultural history of Berlin. He characterises Baluschek's representational style as 'hart, hölzern, gegensätzlich, bei erster Betrachtung ohne jede intime Reize'<sup>18</sup> and goes on to defend the artist, stating that this is the only style adequate to Baluschek's subject. Even if in subsequent years, the two artists' aesthetics were to drift apart, at this point they shared the fundamental principles of their art.

Another example may highlight the extent to which Hermann and Baluschek, via their different media, use similar techniques to express similar experiences. It is useful here to draw on an extract from Hermann's novella *Aus dem letzten Hause* to show the remarkable correspondences between the two artists' views of the city in the years up to the turn of the century. The description Hermann gives here of a city street by night shares its requisites (a windy night, a locomotive, a high wall next to the pavement, a

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<sup>16</sup> Bröhan, p. 34.

<sup>17</sup> See among others, Georg Hermann, 'Moderne deutsche Karikaturisten', *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, 17 March 1901; and Hermann, 'Hans Baluschek', *Nord und Süd*, 33 (January 1909), 171-77.

<sup>18</sup> Georg Hermann, *Die deutsche Karikatur im 19. Jahrhundert* (Bielefeld, Leipzig, 1901), p.126.



hunched figure) with Baluschek's 1900 painting *Berliner Landschaft* (ill. VI) to a striking extent<sup>19</sup>:

Der Wind schlägt mir voll ins Gesicht mit tausend prickelnden Nadelstichen, zerrt mir an den Beinen, fährt in die Flügel meines Mantels, rüttelt mir an der Hutkrempe. Stoßweise klirren die Scheiben der Laternen, die Flammen zittern und biegen sich und lassen bewegliche Strahlen an den Häusern und den blanken Pflastersteinen auf und niedergleiten. Langgezogen gellt der Schrei einer Lokomotive durch die Nacht, und drüben aus der Eckdestillation schallt das Gejohle trunkener Arbeiter. [...] An der roten Ziegelmauer eines Schulhofes gleitet eine Gestalt entlang. Sie bewegt die Füße nicht, auch die Arme hält sie fast ruhig, den Kopf hat sie nach vorwärts gesenkt.<sup>20</sup>

The desolate atmosphere evoked both in the description of Walter's street in *Spielkinder* and in the passage quoted above from *Aus dem letzten Hause* is developed further in the novella. The lack of character in the area and in the new house, the loneliness and isolation at night when the quiet of the deserted streets is only disturbed by the howling of a dog, and the high fences of the building sites limiting view and movement, are elements that are taken up again in the description of the area 'hier draußen in den letzten Häusern'.<sup>21</sup> However, the protagonist of the novella (also called Walter) makes this area at the city's edge his home. The house in which he lives is new, but it is not a 'Mietskaserne' like the ones Baluschek depicts in *Neue Häuser*. The description of its extravagant exterior rather locates it in one of the new middle class areas such as Friedenau or Wilmersdorf. As his apartment is in one of the upper storeys of the building, his viewpoint is raised above the limitations of the high fences and house walls. As there are no houses yet on the other side of his street, he enjoys a view over open fields, across 'Laubenstädte' to the park belonging to the castle, to tenement blocks and barrack buildings, to a 'Villenort' and to some factory chimneys. As these landmarks may be seen as representative of the different elements constituting the city, he is thus in a position not only at the edge of the city and therefore in near-isolation, but also above the city, able to survey its manifestations and developments.

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<sup>19</sup> For an account of the metaphorical 'staging' of this painting, see John Czaplicka, 'Pictures of a City at Work, Berlin circa 1890-1930: Visual Reflections on Social Structures and Technology in the Modern Urban Construct', in Charles Haxthausen and Heidrun Suhr (eds.), *Berlin: Culture and Metropolis* (Minneapolis, 1991), pp. 3-36.

<sup>20</sup> Georg Hermann, *Aus dem letzten Hause* [1900], in Hermann, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. V (1932), pp. 3-141 (pp. 131/32).

<sup>21</sup> Hermann, *Aus dem letzten Hause*, p. 5.





**III. VI:** Hans Baluschek, *Berliner Landschaft*, about 1900; chalk and watercolours; 96 x 63 cm; Bröhan Museum, Berlin



The individual elements of the view are not all equally enjoyable. For instance the description in *Spielkinder* of the tenement blocks Walter sees across the fields as ‘massige, behauene Blöcke, [...] lange quadratische Flächen [...] mit tausend Schießscharten von Fenstern’ clearly carries a sense of menace. Walter consciously enjoys the view, however, and feels attached to it: ‘von meiner Aussicht möchte ich nichts missen’ (p. 5).<sup>22</sup> He has made the environment his home, especially from his surveyor’s position in the safe distance from the street.<sup>23</sup> The change in the attitude to the expanding suburbs that is to be detected when comparing *Spielkinder* and *Aus dem letzten Hause* is that of a better acquaintance with the area and of a coming to terms with the constantly changing and growing, eternally provisional environment. It is a long way yet to the wholehearted expressions of fascination with the new suburbs that Hermann voiced in 1912 in the essay ‘Um Berlin’,<sup>24</sup> but a change is certainly detectable. Again, the parallels with Baluschek’s work are striking. After the turn of the century, Baluschek repeatedly depicted workers and petit bourgeois creating their homes or enjoying their leisure in an idyllic enclave within the surrounding and rather hostile city environment.<sup>25</sup>

I have introduced comparisons with Zille and Baluschek in order to help locate and explain Hermann’s influences and position. I have shown, in his depictions of the living conditions in the city, that the contrast between the social classes is critically emphasised. The character of Hermann’s social criticism in his representations of Berlin in *Spielkinder* is sometimes harsh, like Baluschek’s, but at other times it is dressed in the drastic humour of Zille’s work. Hermann’s positive emphasis on nostalgia and what he terms ‘schnoddrige Lustigkeit’ of representation in his essay on caricature<sup>26</sup> point the way to his subsequent development. In his subsequent novels, he will abandon the harshness of his representation and turn to a more humorous and nostalgic vein (*Jettchen Geberts Geschichte*) or to a ‘schnoddrige’ concentration on the survivors of the social struggles in the city (as in the case of the servant girls in *Kubinke*).

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<sup>22</sup> The *Gesammelte Werke* edition of *Spielkinder*, which I am using, reads ‘wissen’; in the context it becomes clear, however, that the correct version must be ‘missen’.

<sup>23</sup> His experience of walking in the street below, contrasts however starkly with the view from his apartment. Only venturing out at night (‘am Tage sind mir die Unmenge fremder Menschen peinlich’ (p. 12)), he feels desperate loneliness among the strangers he encounters and an almost morbid disgust with his environment: ‘Die Häuserwände schwitzen einen so weißen schimmligen Überzug aus, und auch das Eisen der Zäune starrt von diesem weißen Pelz’ (p. 13).

<sup>24</sup> Georg Hermann, ‘Um Berlin’, *Pan*, 2 (22 August 1912), 1101-06. This article will be discussed further in the context of the analysis of Hermann’s *Kubinke* in chapter 7 of this dissertation.

<sup>25</sup> See for instance *Feierabend* (1910) or *Sommerabend* (1928).

<sup>26</sup> Hermann, *Die deutsche Karikatur*, p. 32.



In his depiction of the Geigers' home, Hermann's attachment to Berlin has been shown to shine through. In spite of his socially motivated criticism, he maintains his fondness for the city and remains susceptible to its positive aspects. This is also clear in Hermann's representation in *Spielkinder* of the experience of the individual in the city streets.

### 3.2 The Experience of the Metropolitan Streets

As I have shown in reference to the depiction of the urban living conditions, Hermann integrates his representation of the city in a system of meaningful references that at the same time support the development of plot and characters in the novel. Similarly, the experience of the individual in the city streets is in many instances used to illustrate and enhance the description of a situation or the mood of the protagonist.

In its supporting function as characterising particular moods or situations, the description of the city environment is used in *Spielkinder* in two ways: as contrast and as parallel. I shall illustrate these two methods by referring to Hermann's account of the Geiger family's cab ride through Berlin to see Georg's father off at the railway station (pp. 32-36). The oppressiveness of the situation, which to the boy is all the more unsettling as he does not know the purpose or destination of this journey, is enhanced by the contrast with the radiant and exuberant spring atmosphere in the suburban streets:

Greller Frühjahrs Sonnenschein, weißblauer Himmel, die Scheiben blinken. In den Vorgärten gucken die Hyazinthen neugierig aus den schwarzen Beeten hervor; einige überwinterte Gelblinge haben sich bis in die Straßen verirrt. Kinder, die aus der Schule kommen, jagen ihnen nach und werfen jubelnd die Mützen nach ihnen.

Wir schweigen. (p. 33)

When, later on in the novel, Georg runs through the streets in order to call the doctor to his dying father, the same technique is employed. In that passage, the description of the environment is given up for a more direct expression of Georg's experience of the city. Here, as in many other instances, Hermann uses the inner monologue in order to make the contrasting impacts of inner and outer experience explicit:



Ein prächtiger Morgen. Dieser infame Frühstücksjunge! der Bengel pfeift, als ob gar nichts in der Welt passiert wäre. [...] Und der Himmel, anstatt sich in trauerndes Grau zu hüllen, hat sein unverschämtestes, blendendstes Blau aufgezogen. [...] Und alle die Menschen! Gefühlloses Lumpenpack! Alle sehen sie so vergnügt aus. (p. 136)

The second method, namely intensifying a mood by mirroring it in a parallel atmosphere in the city environment, is used in an extension of the passage quoted above, describing the cab ride to the railway station. The station itself, the 'Schlesische Bahnhof', is not associated with the bustle and excitement of travel; instead the adjectives 'kalt', 'öde', 'verrußt', 'rauchgeschwärzt' and 'trübe' which describe it (p. 34), reflect the desolation Georg feels.

In a similar vein, the first love scene between Georg and Lies takes place against a congenial background of twinkling stars and sweet-smelling trees. The quiet of the streets is only broken by a woman's voice singing a Schubert song and by the trill of a nightingale (pp. 133/34). Hermann's reliance on these traditional requisites for a love encounter shows that he cannot consider the city environment 'proper' as a place in which romance can exist. For his love scene, he needs in effect to deny the city environment.<sup>27</sup>

A third example of the use of the city environment as a reinforcement of mood or atmosphere can be found in the darkness, fog and rain that Georg encounters on leaving the consumptive Lies after their last meeting before her death. They mirror his fear for her life and his despair (see p. 243). The prostitutes ('wie gehetztes Wild') and 'das schwarze, gurgelnde Wasser' of the canal not only deepen the mood but go further to foreshadow disaster (p. 244).

There are however instances in *Spielkinder* in which the subjectivity of the viewer's perception of the city environment is emphasised. In these cases, the representations of the city, while still fulfilling certain functions in the preparation and development of characterisation, atmosphere and plot, are also significant as depictions of city experience in their own right and may be evaluated in this context.

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<sup>27</sup> This location of love scenes outside the city environment recurs in *Jettchen Gebert* and *Kubinke*.



In a scene that is central to the novel, Hermann provides a consistent representation of a subjective city view in the account of Georg's night-time walk with his father into the city centre (see pp. 74-77). The episode is built up in an emotionally cumulative structure with a clear crescendo of impressions in the progress from outer suburb to city centre. It is reported throughout through the consciousness of the narrated 'I', the young Georg. Father and son start their walk in the deserted suburban streets whose quiet and darkness frighten the boy. Metaphors likening the environment to animate beings, such as 'lebendige Ruhe', 'tote Häuserfronten' and 'schwarze, grinsende Fensterhöhlen' (p. 74) express the frightening atmosphere of a stillness that is suspected of hiding evil. Unusually for Hermann's writing, nature does not enliven or embellish the scene but the trees and bushes in the gardens instead contribute to the alarming atmosphere: 'hinter jedem konnte doch ein Räuber oder Mörder sitzen!' (p. 74).

The description enters a second stage when they walk on into a street that is 'heller und belebter' (p. 74). Hermann does not name the street but characterises the area by focussing his description on the well-to-do occupants of the passing carriages and cabs. In their majority, they conform to a type which, defined by posture and expression, is qualified by a semantic field connoting bourgeois comfort ('zurückgelehnt', 'angenehme Lässigkeit', 'gutmütig' and 'Behagen'). The area between the western suburb in which the Geigers live and the city centre is thus sociologically defined as a living area of the middle or upper classes. Whereas the environment of the dark suburban streets was experienced to an important degree as the sounds of eerily invisible phenomena ('das Rollen einer Equipage, die kurzen, taktmässigen Schläge der Traber auf dem Asphalt'), the brighter lighting of this area allows perception by sight to recover its habitual importance.

The further transition into the city centre is reported as a sudden, instantaneous event. Sentence structures dissolve into enumerations, indicating the overwhelming wealth of impressions, aural and visual, which cannot be rationally processed at the same speed as they strike the boy's consciousness: 'Ein Laufen und Drängen, ein Lärmen und Rollen! Diese Menschen, diese Wagen! [...] Das Läuten der Pferdebahn, das Rufen der Kutscher!' (p. 75). The descriptions of the streets themselves, already shortened in the transition from the outer suburb to the area crossed on the way to the centre, now give way entirely to an evocation of the traffic in the streets and on the pavements. The passers-by cannot anymore be perceived or described in terms of a particular type, let



alone as individuals. They are nothing but a crowd ('diese Menschen', 'die Passanten') which moves on like a force of nature ('Vom Bahnhof flutet ein dicker, schwarzer Menschenstrom'). Only one group of people is singled out in the description: the prostitutes. Epitomising for the innocent child Georg the strangeness of the night-time experience of the city, they are described from his innocent and wondering viewpoint:

Jetzt sollten sie schon längst alle in den Betten liegen; diese Menge einzelner Damen! Wie fein sie aber angezogen sind, wie hübsch sie sind! Diese frischen Farben! [...] Pfui! Sie hebt aber auch wirklich die Kleider etwas zu hoch! [...] Und sieh nur 'mal, die da, die Rotblonde - so rotblondes Haar habe ich doch noch nie gesehen. (p. 75)

Hermann provides in this episode a rhythmical and powerful representation of the boy's subjective perception of the external phenomena of the city environment. The walk into the city centre is thus represented as an intensification of experience in terms of light and sound and the density of people and traffic encountered, culminating in the boy's first sight of prostitutes; but little interest is shown in the psychological impact the city experience has on the child. Georg shows fear in the darkness of the suburb and amazement at the city centre but he is not engulfed in the whirlpool of city reality. Hermann conveys a picture of him as an unperturbed observer who systematically singles out in the crowd less conspicuous types than the colourfully and indecently clad prostitutes, such as: 'Arbeiter, Kaufleute, Studenten, Soldaten, alte Herren mit großen Radmänteln und dicken Nacken, viel junges Volk, meist paarweise' (p. 77).

What Forderer has described in reference to Conrad Alberti's Naturalist Berlin novel *Die Alten und die Jungen* (1889) is also true here: 'So unfaßbar der "Strom" der Masse auch vorüber "flutet", so kann er sich doch problemlos in ein Panorama typischer Repräsentanten von Standesgruppen aufgliedern.'<sup>28</sup> For Hermann, as indeed for most of the writers of Naturalist Berlin novels of the 1880s and 1890s, the city environment does not yet fragment into distinct facets of reality, thus defying artistic definition, but remains describable as a structure. On the basis of his analysis of works by Bölsche, Alberti, Mauthner and Kretzer, Forderer concludes: 'Dennoch näherten sich Erzähler [...] noch einmal der Großstadt, als läge vor ihnen eine überschaubare, einsehbare Wirklichkeit. Der Glaube an eine unmittelbar reproduzierbare Konsistenz der Wirklichkeit war ungebrochen.'<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Forderer, p. 142.

<sup>29</sup> Forderer, p. 293.



With the subsequent systematic classification of the elements of the crowd, the diminuendo in the description of the city sets in. In fact, after the first shock of the blinding brightness of the scene and of the wealth of impressions it holds, the child Georg remains physically unaffected by the night-time crowd. He shows no insecurity in the face of the busy street scene, even when he is sent by his father to cross the street and go to the 'aristocrat's' apartment by himself. He does not become part of the crowd, but maintains his position as a slightly detached observer. In this context, it is worth noting that the metaphor of the 'Menschenstrom', a staple image in the description of city experience which obviously refers to the overwhelming nature of the force and density of the crowd and to its de-individualising effect, also accommodates the observing individual's desire to unify and thereby reduce and make graspable the number and diversity of impressions that assail him in the urban environment.<sup>30</sup> Hermann takes the de-individualisation in his description of the mass of people as far as referring to that mass by the pronouns 'das' and 'es': 'Das läuft alles so eilig, als ob es Geld dafür bekäme' (p. 75), and again later: 'Nun [...] kann [man] hinaus auf die Straße sehen, wo es immer noch wogt und flutet, drängt und sich staut, wie brandende Wellen' (p. 77). Having thus, as it were, confined the crowd in a graspable concept, it can be observed from the outside without any danger of the observer being engulfed in it.

The depiction of the street scene is continued after Georg's visit to the dying Agnes. The traffic has calmed down and the sentence structure used in the description of the scene has settled back into a hypotactical narrative calm. After a second visit to the 'aristocrat's' apartment some time later - after Agnes' death - all the excitement of the city life by night has died down. Hermann takes up the themes of traffic and light again, the two main indicators in the crescendo of city experience described before, but the street is now almost entirely quiet and the lighting has been reduced (see p. 82). It is, however notable that Hermann does not present a symmetrical representation of intensifying and relaxing city experiences linked to the approach to and the departure from the city centre. Rather, the tension is relaxed not on Georg's and Geiger's return to the suburb, but after the death of the aunt. The structure of the scene is ultimately orientated around the plot and on the development of the relationship between the Geiger family and the aristocrat, not on the city experience as such. The requirements of

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<sup>30</sup> For a description of the same phenomenon in other contemporary novels, see Forderer, p. 143.



the autobiographical novel have here overridden the concern to represent city experience, just as the detached and calm perspective of the observer shows that Hermann does not allow the experience of the city environment to overwhelm the observer's individuality.

While this is the stance that prevails in *Spielkinder*, Hermann does present one instance in which, for a moment, he relinquishes his narrator's grasp of the city and allows his adherence to the nineteenth century belief in the representability of the city to be challenged by the modern recognition that the metropolis escapes any systematic description and is experienced by the individual in fragmentary subjective impressions only. In the passage in question, Georg struggles through the city's streets in the oppressive heat of a sultry day. He is overcome by a paralysing faintness and by 'jene unheimliche, nervöse Gereiztheit, die an das Zittern einer Uhrfeder gemahnt' (p. 207). Having, in the paragraph before, used a detached, objective description to depict the street scene with its passers-by, with horses and with the gathering thunder clouds, Hermann now switches to a presentation of the city as experienced by the afflicted Georg:

[...] schleppe ich mich an den fast endlosen Ziegelmauern entlang, hinter denen Kohlenberge und die plumpen Halbkugeln der Gasometer hervorsehen. Vor mir stehen in planlosem Wirrwarr langgestreckte, rote und graue Steinkästen und, wie ein Mastenwald im Hafen, mit hundert wulstigen Rauchfahnen hundert Schornsteine und Schlote.' (p. 207)

The comprehensive overview of the scene is thus now given up for a very restricted perspective. Where the narrator used generalisations before, acknowledging a system ('auf den Sonnenseiten waren die Straßen wie ausgestorben'), the protagonist can now no longer recognise any order in the city environment. He only sees disjointed individual elements, and even these either only partially or as abstract shapes devoid of any function. The exaggeration of the numbers of smoke trails and chimneys highlights Georg's feeling of being overpowered by what he experiences as a chaotic, meaningless and alien environment. In the context of the novel's plot, this experience prepares the atmosphere of the next scene in which a threatening assembly of workers is depicted. But it is also revelatory in its own right, as it presents an essentially modern city experience, one that points forward to twentieth century literary representations of the



city in which the nervous individual is overwhelmed by the overabundance of stimuli provided in the city environment.

The view of the city that is distorted by illness, fever and the perception of the hallucinating or deranged person, are, in their distortion, revelatory, and occur already in Dickens' and Dostojewski's descriptions of the modern urban experience. Philip Fisher points out that these changed modi of viewing the city are

Bewußtseinsformen [...], die auf dramatische Weise im Gegensatz zu dem reflektierenden Bewußtsein jenes Betrachters stehen, der [...] die Stadt noch von außen, gestützt auf die Klischees zur Beschreibung städtischer Schauplätze, beurteilt und lokalisiert.<sup>31</sup>

Through the use of this distorted perception of the city in *Spielkinder*, Hermann suggests the fragmentation of city experience and, consequently, of city representation. However, it has to be seen that this acknowledgement of the need for a new way of perceiving and describing city experience remains an isolated incident in the whole of the novel. The Naturalist belief in the representability of the city as a system remains generally intact.

Hermann however goes beyond the confines of Naturalist city descriptions in his sensitive descriptions of the atmosphere in the city, especially at night. What is to develop into one of Hermann's greatest strength in his subsequent novels, is already detectable in *Spielkinder*: a masterly skill in the evocation of the atmosphere of particular areas and situations. Disregarding traditional rules of syntax, Hermann combines sight and sound to evoke for instance a park at dusk: 'Ein farbiges Dunkel; ein Rauschen und Knistern über uns; ein Dämmern vor uns' (p. 134). Or he gives a description of a street at night, in which the emphasis on the descriptive participle points towards Hermann's later development towards Literary Impressionism: 'Diese lebendige Ruhe, die langen, sich verjüngenden Lichterreihen, der glitzernde Asphalt, die toten Häuserfronten mit den schwarzen, grinsenden Fensterhöhlen' (p. 74). Even the description of a working process, here that of asphalt workers at night, can take on the aspect of an atmospherically dense, eerie scene rather than the rational, mundane activity it is:

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<sup>31</sup> Philip Fisher, 'City Matters: City Minds. Die Poetik der Großstadt in der modernen Literatur', in Klaus R. Scherpe (ed.), *Die Unwirklichkeit der Städte. Großstadtdarstellungen zwischen Moderne und Postmoderne* (Reinbek, 1988), pp. 106-28 (p. 111).



Eingehüllt in Dunst und Qualm verschwammen mir ihre Bewegungen. Hier tauchte ein Kopf auf - dort eine Mütze - dort ein nackter, nerviger Unterarm - dort ein gebeugter Rücken - dort eine Holzpantine und ein Fuß, um sofort wieder in dem sich ballenden Rauch verschleiert zu werden und dann ganz zu verschwinden.

(p. 82)

However, instances like this, in which a subjective depiction of atmosphere replaces the detailed and systematic observation of the city environment, remain rather rare in *Spielkinder*. Largely, the city is depicted, in the Naturalist tradition, as the solid and graspable object of narrative reconstruction. As I intend to show in the last section of this chapter, Hermann extends his detailed observations, which are at the root of this depiction of Berlin, beyond his representation of the houses and street scenes, to the behaviour of the city's inhabitants.

### **3.3 Berliners' Behavioural Characteristics: Consumerism and Cultural Hyperactivity**

In *Spielkinder*, Hermann takes up and criticises psychological and behavioural aspects that were seen by contemporary sociologists and psychologists as definitive characteristics of the modern metropolitan dweller. The crowd, the manifestation of the modern city experience, though not endangering the identity of the protagonist himself, is seen as the manifestation of a mass society which reduces individual characteristics to quirks (see p. 81) and degrades factory workers to the equivalent of cogs in a machine (see p. 144). The indifference displayed by members of a society characterised by loose social ties and by a multitude of encounters with strangers, is highlighted in a touching passage describing how Georg tries to read from a servant's face whether his father is still alive:

Ach er lebt noch! Ach ja! Dort oben steht ja das Dienstmädchen am Fenster, ganz ruhig. An ihrem Gesicht merkt man keine Veränderung.

Ach ja, er lebt sicher noch! Wie ich mich auch gleich so ängstigen konnte!

Ganz gelassen gehe ich die Treppen hinauf. Ohne daß wir läuten, öffnet sich die Tür. Mutter kommt mir entgegen.

'Dein - armer Vater - !' (pp. 137/38).



The greatest attention however is given in *Spielkinder* to the modern city dweller's consumerism, pleasure-seeking and materialist (mis-) understanding of culture.

In the previous chapter, I set out how Hermann describes consumerism and pleasure-seeking as a vice but also sees it as, at least partially, caused by the working conditions of the people succumbing to it. Indeed, both of the examples I gave in the last chapter (the description of Lies' behaviour and the picture Hermann presents of the customers at a shady public house), point to an understanding of consumerism as a problem which is, if not confined solely to modern metropolitan society, at least experienced more clearly here than anywhere else.

A public house - or 'Tingeltangel', as Georg calls it disdainfully - combines a tasteless but provocative decor, in which an industrial setting clashes with bourgeois stuffiness and a 'puppenhafte Ausschmückung' (p. 196), with the noise of bad music and the shoving of a mass of people longing for some distraction. The house is patronised by the demimonde and prostitution is openly discussed. Hermann hints at the fact that prostitution is the logical extension of de-individualised pleasure-seeking by repeatedly combining the themes of a pub visit with prostitution (see also p. 76). The atmosphere of this pub is that of a desperate restlessness forbidding any real relaxation.

The same hysterical restlessness is tangible in Hermann's description of Lies:

Sie [...] hätte mit ihren Wünschen und Wünschchen vollkommen den Geldsäckel eines Millionärs beschäftigt. Alles wollte und mußte sie sehen und haben. Ihr Hauptgedanke war stets: 'wie vergnüge ich mich?' Unersättlich war sie, jeden Tag wollte sie Neues, oft weinte sie, umschmeichelte mich und küßte mich, ich sollte doch mit ihr mal wieder ins Theater oder in den Zirkus gehen. (p. 150)

In this representation of the compulsive nature of Lies' consumerism, Hermann anticipates the writings of psychologists and sociologists around the turn of the century who recognised pleasure-seeking and consumerism as modern afflictions, especially of the metropolitan dweller. Georg Simmel and the social psychologist Willy Hellpach were important voices in this debate. They both described pleasure-seeking not as a complement and opposite to the hectic lifestyle of the metropolis but, on the contrary, as the very expression of the metropolitan way of life characterised by an overabundance of nervous stimulation and by the never-ending creation of new desires by the capitalist



market system, even if their explanations differed in regard to the role of the gratification of desire.<sup>32</sup> Müller has concisely highlighted the difference in their approaches :

Während Georg Simmel in seiner Analyse des unausschöpfbaren Möglichkeitsreservoirs, das mit dem Geld als abstraktem Vermittler zwischen Mensch und Dingwelt gegeben ist, die Bodenlosigkeit der Zweckreihen betont, in denen das Geld zirkuliert und in der mythologischen Figur des Tantalus ein Bild für die chronisch unerfüllte Erwartungsstimmung des modernen Menschen findet, entwickelt Hellpach gerade aus dem Gelingen immer neuer Befriedigungen, aus der Erhöhung des Güterverbrauchs und der Vervielfachung der Kaufakte die moderne Disposition zur nervösen Unrast im Umgang mit den Waren.<sup>33</sup>

Lies' frivolous interests in fashion, obscene jokes and horse racing complete the picture of her desire for distraction and amusement. It is clear that her passion for the theatre has its roots in the search for thrills only and not in cultural interests. By contrast, the members and the audience of the Novania theatre club combine a desire for amusement with a hunger for culture and thus represent another typical characteristic of Berlin society around the turn of the century. The audience at the opening night of the new production is described in a most evocative passage. Hermann presents the superlatives of the spectators' affected speech, their conversation which consists entirely of the reproduction of hearsay and their utter incapacity to give an informed judgement on the production in a biting satire. The first sentence of this passage speaks volumes: 'Zwar war auf ihren Gesichtern nichts zu lesen, was auch nur mit Ernst und Urteilskraft eine Ähnlichkeit gehabt hätte, aber die Vorhenden der Herren waren unbedingt tadellos sauber und frisch gebügelt' (p. 185).

In 1910, this kind of audience was described as typical of the new metropolitan society in Berlin by the cultural critic Karl Scheffler. In his book *Berlin - Ein Stadtschicksal*, he presents a portrait of the modern Berliner, who is defined by three characteristics: 'die [...] Ungeistigkeit, die unfeine Genußsucht und der plumpe Materialismus des Kolonialmenschen'.<sup>34</sup> Scheffler ascribes these attributes to Berlin's lack of tradition as a

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<sup>32</sup> See Georg Simmel, *Philosophie des Geldes* [1900], ed. by David P. Frisby and Klaus C. Köhnke (Frankfurt a.M., 1989); and Willy Hellpach, *Nervosität und Kultur* (= Kulturprobleme der Gegenwart, ed. by Leo Berg, vol. V) (Berlin, 1902), p. 91.

<sup>33</sup> Lothar Müller, 'Modernität, Nervosität und Sachlichkeit. Das Berlin der Jahrhundertwende als Hauptstadt der "neuen Zeit"', in *Mythos Berlin. Zur Wahrnehmungsgeschichte einer industriellen Metropole*, exhibition catalogue (Berlin, 1987), pp. 79-92 (p. 89).

<sup>34</sup> Karl Scheffler, *Berlin - ein Stadtschicksal* [1910], ed. by Detlev Bluhm (= Berliner Texte, vol. III) (Berlin, 1989), p. 130.



cultural centre and to the market orientation of the Berliners, who, consisting for the greatest part of immigrants from the countryside, are still provincial at heart and attempt to make up for a missed cultural education by buying culture in great quantity:

Dabei ist der Bildungshunger dieser Großstadtmenge unersättlich. Sie peitscht die Furcht, man könne ihr die Unsicherheit anmerken; darum bemächtigt sie sich Dessen, was nur langsam von innen begriffen werden kann, mit aller Hast von außen. Sie raubt und stiehlt, was sie an fertigen Kulturformen vorfindet, im Glauben, sie hätte auch geistig, was sie materiell besitzt. Bei dieser Jagd steigert sich das Tempo bis zum Fieberhaften.<sup>35</sup>

As the members of this new metropolitan society do not possess any criteria for the evaluation of art, a levelling of all cultural and pseudo-cultural manifestations and products is the consequence. In a specific reference to the Berlin theatre, Scheffler explains: 'Es entstehen Theater, in denen mit einer gewissen Selbstlosigkeit neue Bühnenideen gepflegt werden und es gibt andere Gründungen, in denen mehr als irgend sonstwo die rohste Industrialisierung des Theaters zutage tritt.'<sup>36</sup> He goes on to deplore the 'unendlich falschen Wertungen der Unwissenden':

Jedes Talent ist auf diesem großen Bildungsmarkt willkommen; sogar das Genie ist es, wenn es sich nur deutlich zu erkennen gibt. Aber mehr noch sind die selbstbewußten Dilettanten willkommen; dem literarischen Schwindler gehört der Markt so gut wie dem ernst Strebenden.<sup>37</sup>

The latter kind of theatre is depicted in the Novania theatre club in *Spielkinder*. The members of the club and the activities they indulge in are characterised as both brainless and tasteless. Described by Georg's friend Ernst as 'gediegener Literaturpöbel' and 'geistiges Proletariat' (p. 163), they are presented as vain and vulgar. Once the roles of the new play have been distributed, the club members are interested more in sociable games, drink and dance than in the production.<sup>38</sup> The play itself is dismissed by Georg as 'eine richtige Dilettantenkomposition, ein Wirrwarr von Reminiszenzen, nirgends etwas Eigenes, etwas Selbständiges' (p. 162).

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<sup>35</sup> Scheffler, p. 132. This criticism of the 'Parvenu' character of Berlin and its society was voiced by many more cultural critics around the turn of the century. For an (unusually) positive look at Berlin as 'der Parvenu der Großstädte und die Großstadt der Parvenus' see Walther Rathenau, 'Die schönste Stadt der Welt', *Die Zukunft*, 15 (1899), 36-48.

<sup>36</sup> Scheffler, p. 144.

<sup>37</sup> Scheffler, p. 145.

<sup>38</sup> The description of the dance is interesting for its dual perspective. First, Hermann gives an Impressionist description of the beauty of the movements, then his perspective changes and the dance is seen as an expression of unbridled sexual desire ('wilder Geschlechtshunger') (see p. 171).



Scheffler's description of the Berlin art scene captures the same spirit that is expressed by Hermann in the Novania scenes: 'Die Kunstaussstellung als Unterhaltungs- und Bildungsmittel, die Verquickung von Kunst, Biermusik und Liebesmarkt, die Profanierung, Proletarisierung und Theatralisierung der Kunst: das ist ganz im Geiste des neuen Berlin.'<sup>39</sup>

Hermann thus depicts in *Spielkinder* attitudes that were considered characteristic of the new metropolitan society developing in Berlin. Indeed, though he does not provide much topographical anchoring, city depictions that are specifically evocative of Berlin emerge. In the depictions of the city's cultural scene, as in the descriptions of housing for the poor and of the new suburbs of the city, the social criticism is built on an intimate knowledge of Berlin and shows Hermann's ability to re-create in his representation of the city elements that define Berlin as a specific environment rather than just another Naturalist 'moloch city'. In 1921, in a tribute to Georg Hermann on his 50th birthday, I. Wolfstein recognised this when, referring to *Spielkinder*, he wrote: 'Über das Berlin seiner Jugendjahre ist nichts Plastischeres geschrieben worden.'<sup>40</sup>

As I have said in the introduction to this study, a detailed knowledge of Berlin and the wish to portray the reality of the city remain constants in Hermann's works. In this first of his novels, Hermann displays the belief of the Naturalist writer in the representability of the city, even in its increasingly fragmented shape. Similarly, his socio-critical intention reflects that found in other Naturalist city novels. Yet, the ways in which Hermann expresses his criticism are varied and deserve to be looked at in a differentiating way, as they change between techniques corresponding to Zille's and Baluschek's art respectively. At times, the view Hermann presents of Berlin goes beyond the confines of Naturalism and points to his later works. The subjective, at times almost Impressionist, evocations of city scenes are a case in point.

The depiction of Berlin in *Spielkinder* is in fact characterised by a state of tension between Hermann's fondness of the city, which suggests itself in glimpses of nostalgic reminiscences and Impressionist descriptions, interspersed in the more generally prevailing harsh criticism of the social conditions in this new metropolis. This tension

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<sup>39</sup> Scheffler, p. 147.

<sup>40</sup> I. Wolfstein, 'Georg Hermann', *Israelitisches Familienblatt*, 20 October 1921.



mirrors that between the autobiographical and the socio-critical that characterises the novel as a whole. As far as the representation of Berlin is concerned, the multiplicity of intentions is however beneficial: the view of Berlin that Hermann presents in *Spielkinder* is multi-faceted and varied.



#### 4 A Historical Novel in the Realist Tradition of Fontane:

##### Jettchen Geberts Geschichte (1908)

*Jettchen Geberts Geschichte*, consisting of *Jettchen Gebert* (1906) and its sequel *Henriette Jacoby* (1908), is Hermann's best-known work.<sup>1</sup> At the centre of the 'Doppelroman' is the long-established and cultured Jewish Berlin family Gebert, connected through marriage to the East European Jewish Jacoby family. Jettchen Gebert, since being orphaned, has been brought up in the house of her uncle Salomon. Through another uncle, the artistic Jason, she meets Fritz Kößling, Doctor of philosophy, a Christian and from a lower middle class background. Jettchen's family objects to their liaison on social more than on religious grounds and Jettchen's marriage with a cousin from the provincial Jacoby side of the family is arranged. Jettchen, out of a sense of duty to the family, does not resist but, in despair, runs away on her wedding night. *Henriette Jacoby* continues Jettchen's story as, having found refuge in Uncle Jason's house, she slowly rebuilds her relationship with her family and with Kößling. Finally, however, she recognises the irreconcilable differences that separate her from Kößling and, realising her true love is for Jason, she kills herself.

In laudatory articles on the occasion of his sixtieth birthday, Hermann was invariably celebrated as the author of *Jettchen Gebert*.<sup>2</sup> In his autobiographical writings, he himself considered its publication to be the breakthrough to his recognition as a novelist.<sup>3</sup> The composer Leo Blech asked Hermann for a libretto for an opera based on *Jettchen Gebert*,<sup>4</sup> and although this project was not realised, the novel was adapted as a musical.<sup>5</sup> Even today, the Jettchen novels are the works by Hermann that best survive in people's memories. An exhibition of the art collection of the Leo Baeck Institute mounted in 1985 relied on this when it took as its title 'Jettchen Geberts Kinder'. Moreover, by comparison with other Berlin novels of the turn of the century, *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte* has proved to possess a longer lasting appeal to readers. The London Germanist Jethro Bithell recognised this when he described *Jettchen Gebert* as

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<sup>1</sup> References in this and the following chapter are to the following editions: Georg Hermann, *Jettchen Gebert* (Reinbek, 1989) and Georg Hermann, *Henriette Jacoby* (Reinbek, 1990). They are marked as *JG* and *HJ* respectively and appear in the text.

<sup>2</sup> See - among others - articles in *Generalanzeiger Dortmund*, 5 October 1931, and in *Berliner Morgenpost*, 6 October 1931.

<sup>3</sup> See Hermann, 'Im Spiegel', p. 213.

<sup>4</sup> See letter from Leo Blech to Hermann, dated 2 April 1916, Georg Hermann Collection, part B.

<sup>5</sup> Under the title *Jettchen Gebert*, it was premiered on 22 December 1928 in Berlin (libretto by Willi Wolff and Martin Zickel, music by Walter Kollo).



‘certainly the one Berliner Roman of the period which is likely to live’.<sup>6</sup> Setting it off against Naturalist novels like those by Kretzer, Alberti and others, he judged it to be the culmination of the ‘genre’ of the Berliner Roman.

In the following pages I hope to be able to show the reasons for the novel’s continuing appeal. They consist mainly in the skilful way in which Hermann adapted his art to the subject at hand, the depiction of a personal story in the context of the socio-cultural realities of the Biedermeier period. Leaving behind the Naturalist beginnings of *Spielkinder* and *Aus dem letzten Hause*, Hermann primarily relies in *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte* on the conventions of the Realist novel. His representation of the Biedermeier culture and family life reflects the Realist writers’ concern with authenticity, elevated from the everyday by a process of nostalgic ‘Verklärung’. An analysis of this representation of the Biedermeier period as well as of the structural and stylistic techniques Hermann employs in *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte* will show how closely Hermann followed the tradition of the novel established by Scott and Fontane. As I shall show in the final section of this chapter, Hermann integrates some of the thematic and aesthetic concerns of the turn of the century into his otherwise mainly Realist novel.

#### 4.1 Hermann’s Representation of the Biedermeier Period in *Das Biedermeier im Spiegel seiner Zeit* (1913) and in *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte*

The choice of the Biedermeier topic certainly accounts in part for the success of *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte*. At the end of the nineteenth century, Berlin saw a revival of interest in and a re-evaluation of the Biedermeier period. Indeed, the name ‘Biedermeier’ for the period 1815-1847 was only created at the century’s end. This revival of interest was due not only to a nostalgia for what was considered a more tranquil way of life, but also for the last true expression of a middle class way of life with its emphasis on family life and of a specifically Berlin culture. This culture was seen to have been submerged later on, especially after 1870, in the efforts to create an all-German identity.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Jethro Bithell, *Modern German Literature 1880-1950* (London, 1959), p. 320.

<sup>7</sup> See Hans Mackowsky, *Häuser und Menschen im alten Berlin* (Berlin, 1923), p. 9.



The art historian Hans Mackowsky, one of the leading voices of this revived interest in the Biedermeier period, clearly links this revival to the modern metropolitans' desire for a greater knowledge of their roots and a better understanding of their local history. Mackowsky explains the interest at the turn of the century in Berlin's recent past as a result at least partly of Fontane's success. Whereas other artists' depictions of Berlin, for instance those of the novelists Lindau, Mauthner and Kretzer had remained 'farblos and unbestimmt' and might have been representations of any big city, Fontane achieved a unity of subject and treatment that brought out the unique character of Berlin.<sup>8</sup> Mackowsky continues: 'Entscheidend war aber doch die Abwendung neuzeitlichen Kunstwillens von den Ekstasen der Stilgelehrsamkeit.'<sup>9</sup> Modern movements in the visual arts, especially in architecture and the arts and crafts, turned against the emptiness and the excesses of the art of the 'Gründer' period, recognising that 'diese traditionslose Kultur einer politisch wie wirtschaftlich gesättigten Gesellschaft kein Nährboden [war], in dem das Verständnis und die Liebe zur engeren heimatlichen Vergangenheit Wurzel treiben konnten'.<sup>10</sup> Following Fontane's writing and Menzels' painting, new movements in the creative arts offered a re-orientation towards a local identity, sought primarily in the Biedermeier past.

It is not surprising that Georg Hermann shared this revived interest in the Biedermeier. By 1906, he had made a name for himself mainly as an arts and crafts connoisseur and as an art critic close to the Secession movement. Before publishing his Jettchen novels, he spent years in detailed study of the Biedermeier period. These studies found expression in *Das Biedermeier im Spiegel seiner Zeit* (1913), an anthology introduced by a historical essay. In his anthology Hermann collects extracts from a wide variety of historical and contemporary Biedermeier sources to collate a multi-faceted picture of the period. His representation of Biedermeier Berlin was the result of these studies. Vera Wentworth has looked at the Biedermeier anthology as background literature to Hermann's Biedermeier novels; however, she has concentrated almost exclusively on the cultural aspects. Looking for parallels between anthology texts and the novels in the cultural area only, she comes to the conclusion that Hermann 'is ignoring the political aspects of the period'.<sup>11</sup> This statement is incorrect. Indeed, the anthology consists of

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<sup>8</sup> Mackowsky, p.12.

<sup>9</sup> Mackowsky, p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> Mackowsky, p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> Wentworth, abstract.



two parts: 'Die Kultur' (276 pages) and 'Das politische Leben' (93 pages). In the introductory essay in particular, Hermann shows his awareness of the tensions and frictions of the period, of the regressive anti-democratic political climate.<sup>12</sup> His political sympathies are clearly with the liberal opposition.

In the introductory essay to the anthology, the balance between the cultural and the political is maintained, and an objective view of the period emerges. While he praises the simplicity and genuineness of the middle class taste of the period, for instance, he at the same time explains that the reason for this restrained style lay in the poverty that oppressed Berlin after the Napoleonic wars.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, after describing the brilliance of the literary salons and intellectual life of the time, he is quick to add: 'Die starke Rolle, die Theater und Literatur in der Biedermeierepoche spielen, war mit Naturnotwendigkeit dadurch bedingt, daß der Nachrichtendienst noch schlecht organisiert war und daß die Presse durch die Zensur unterdrückt wurde.'<sup>14</sup> It was precisely this objectivity, as well as the balance between the critical and the nostalgic that made this Biedermeier study influential. Jost Hermand writes: 'Als dieses Buch 1913 zum erstenmal erschien, wirkte es durchaus wie eine "Entdeckung" und trug viel dazu bei, den ursprünglich rein komisch gebrauchten Begriff "Biedermaier" in ein objektiv verstandenes Epochenkonzept umzuwandeln.'<sup>15</sup> However, in the anthology, the political content is accorded less importance than in the introductory essay. Hermann's overriding interest is clearly in the cultural aspects of the period. His use of the term 'Biedermeier' is deliberate in this sense:

Noch vor einem Jahrzehnt dachte ja niemand an 'Biedermeier', sondern man bezeichnete eben jene Zeit als 'Vormärz', das heißt als die Jahre, in denen sich die Umwälzungen der Märztage des Jahres 1848 vorbereiteten. [...] Heute - gerade in den letzten Jahren - aber ist [...] die rein politische Betrachtung jener Periode fast völlig zurückgedrängt worden von der kulturellen Betrachtung.<sup>16</sup>

Like Hermand, Wentworth and Perl have stressed the truthfulness of Hermann's representation of the Biedermeier as a cultural epoch, but a closer look at Hermann's

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<sup>12</sup> See Hermann, *Das Biedermeier im Spiegel seiner Zeit* (Berlin, 1913), p. 13: 'Nicht nur, daß jetzt gegebene Versprechungen nicht eingelöst wurden; nein - die Zeit sollte vielmehr um 10 Jahre zurückgeschraubt werden, [...] alle die bürgerlichen Rechte, die gesetzliche Gleichheit der Volksschichten, das sollte nun mit einem Federzug wieder gelöscht werden.'

<sup>13</sup> Hermann, *Biedermeier*, p. 9.

<sup>14</sup> Hermann, *Biedermeier*, p. 23.

<sup>15</sup> Jost Hermand, 'Georg Hermann, "Das Biedermeier im Spiegel seiner Zeit"', *Germanistik*, 8 (1967), p. 140.

<sup>16</sup> Hermann, *Biedermeier*, pp. 6/7.



sources reveals an interesting bias which also colours his Berlin representation in the Jettchen novels.

A look at the extracts from Friedrich Saß' and Ernst Dronke's Berlin books, both from 1846, that Hermann includes on the subject of 'Konditoreien' may serve as an example here. Saß and Dronke were extremely critical authors,<sup>17</sup> but Hermann only quotes the least offending paragraphs from their works.

Saß, a socialist, was made to leave Berlin in 1849, because of his criticism not only of undemocratic military monarchy, but also of bourgeois society. In his book *Berlin in seiner neuesten Zeit und Entwicklung*, he shows the living conditions of the lower classes, describes poverty and homelessness and what he calls the 'Tyrannei der Kapitale'.<sup>18</sup> He gives an overview of the whole range of establishments that were run in Berlin at the time under the heading 'Konditorei'. He starts with those located in cellar rooms:

Da ihr Schild 'Konditorei' nur allzuhäufig ein Vorwand für andere Zwecke und Erwerbsmittel ist, so pflegen ihre ärmlichen Besitzer nicht allzu strenge Ladendemoisellen zu halten, deren Aufgabe es ist, junge Menschen anzuziehen und mit ihnen, wenn das Geld fließt, Orgien der niedrigsten Art zu arrangieren. (p. 41)

Saß describes the 'Demoralisation und Entartung' that is rife in these places (p. 42). The next stage up, the 'mittlere Sphäre der Berliner Konditoreien' (p. 46) are those frequented by the middle classes. Not, however, by what Saß scathingly calls the 'ordinäre, indifferente, versumpfte und versauerte Berliner Bürgertum' (p. 42), but by the liberal middle classes, by clients interested in current affairs. The establishments belonging to this middle stratum of 'Konditoreien' are described as the places 'in denen sich beim heiligen Rauschen der Zeitungsblätter die "ersten Flügelschläge einer neuen Zeit entfalten"' (p. 43). D'Heureuse and Courtin are specifically mentioned in relation to the liberal merchant clientele. On the next stage up are houses like Koblack, visited by the upper middle classes: by civil servants, students, professors and even the odd lieutenant of the guard. Only after all of these the highest class of 'Konditorei' is

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<sup>17</sup> Wentworth describes Saß as part of a group of 'Heimatschriftstellern, die um die Jahrhundertwende als Gegenbewegung zum Naturalismus stärker hervortraten und akzeptiert wurden' (Wentworth, p. 49). This classification is very misleading, as it ignores Saß' political intentions.

<sup>18</sup> Friedrich Saß, *Berlin in seiner neuesten Zeit und Entwicklung* [1846], ed. by Detlef Heikamp (Berlin, 1983), p. 35. In the rest of this paragraph page numbers in brackets refer to this edition.



mentioned: Josty, Spargnapani, Stehely, Fuchs and Kranzler; all of which were frequented by the upper strata of society.

The paragraphs that Hermann chooses to reproduce from Saß in his Biedermeier anthology are those describing this last and uppermost stratum of 'Konditoreien' only.<sup>19</sup> A similar treatment is given to Dronke's descriptions of 'Konditoreien'. Dronke's book<sup>20</sup> was as critical of contemporary Berlin society as Saß'. Dronke was made to leave the city even before the publication of his book for the communist tendencies he adopted.<sup>21</sup> Like Saß, he gives graphic accounts of the lower classes' establishments. But all that Hermann quotes from Dronke in the context of the coffee houses is a passage about the 'red room' in Stehely. It becomes evident that the picture of the Biedermeier period that Hermann conveys through the choice of contributions included in his anthology is limited in social scope. Hermann deliberately excludes the more sordid sides of city life and uses only the parts that deal with the upper strata of society.

Further, almost half of the sources that Hermann quotes are memoirs, history books, etc., in other words, documents written in retrospect and this contributes to a certain bias in Hermann's anthology. It colours the view of the period that they present, particularly as at the turn of century, the Biedermeier seemed to many to be a lost Golden Age. The nostalgic element is very strong in Hermann's selection of sources: 'Ein besonderes Faible aber habe ich für die Alten gehabt, die am Ende ihres Lebens fühlen, daß mit ihnen ein Stück Zeit schwände, und die sich nun bemühten, [...] den Sinn ihres Daseins zu fixieren.'<sup>22</sup> However, he is not merely aware of this nostalgia but also critical of it:

Überhaupt können wir uns doch nicht ganz verhehlen, daß bei unserer Vorliebe für das Biedermeier eine Sentimentalität mitspricht. [...] Alles das zusammen ergibt [...] naturgemäß eben kein ganz richtiges Bild von der Biedermeierzeit. Aber jedenfalls schafft es uns ein sehr liebenswürdiges.'<sup>23</sup>

This evaluation of the period as 'liebenswürdig' is emphatically taken up again by the grande dame of Berlin art history, Irmgard Wirth, in her book *Berliner Biedermeier*.

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<sup>19</sup> See Hermann, *Biedermeier*, pp. 60-65.

<sup>20</sup> Ernst Dronke, *Berlin* [1846], ed. by Rainer Nitsche (Darmstadt, 1974).

<sup>21</sup> See 'Verfügung der preußischen Regierung zur Ablehnung des Einbürgerungsantrags', quoted in Rainer Nitsche, 'Nachwort', in Dronke, pp. 371-97.

<sup>22</sup> Hermann, *Biedermeier*, p. 4.

<sup>23</sup> Hermann, *Biedermeier*, p. 8.



Surveying the historical research of the period 1815 to 1848, she concludes that neither of the extremes 'erhaben' or 'belächelnswert' really fits the period in respect to its cultural significance. In terms of its influence on social history, the period was not either as revolutionary or as hopelessly petit-bourgeois as it has sometimes been represented. 'Liebenswürdig' encompasses, to Wirth, the fitting description of the period amidst all these extremes.<sup>24</sup>

Hermann justifies his nostalgic and sympathetic, but often also gently mocking view of the Biedermeier by clarifying his position: in his Biedermeier anthology he is deliberately setting out not to present a rounded, complete account of the period. Instead, he compares his anthology to 'Prismen aus Spiegelglas, vielfach geschliffen, lustig und facettiert'.<sup>25</sup> Like them, his anthology was intended to be 'vielleicht einmal etwas verzerrt, etwas karikiert, aber immer überraschend und belustigend'. In these facets, he attempted to catch the reflection of everyday life, 'noch blutwarm und ohne die Blässe der Abstraktion'.<sup>26</sup>

In his Biedermeier novels, Hermann's main interest is again in the epoch as cultural, rather than as a political phenomenon. It is the 'kulturelle Geschlossenheit' of the period, and the 'bürgerliche Stil, der in sich [...] fest und sicher war'<sup>27</sup> which fascinate Hermann. However the political aspects of the period are not ignored. Hermann's representation of the Geberts' and the Jacobys' family life is a portrayal of everyday culture as well as of social conflicts determined by political realities. It is important to recognise that the political plays an important role in Hermann's depiction of the cultural aspects of the period. Many of the discussions in *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte* have just as much political as social and cultural significance. Clear examples of this include: when Kößling talks to Jettchen about the powers of the censor which make the expression of political opinions impossible and turn writers into candidates for suicide (*JG*, p. 112); when Jason speaks about the alienation of the middle classes (*JG*, p. 96); or when he states in reference to post-Napoleonic restoration politics 'Wir haben uns nämlich als Franzosen [...] hier wohler gefühlt' (*JG*, p. 70). In these instances, the inseparable intertwining of the cultural and the political realm is obvious.

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<sup>24</sup> See Irmgard Wirth, *Berliner Biedermeier* (Berlin, 1972), p. 7.

<sup>25</sup> Hermann, *Biedermeier*, p. 5.

<sup>26</sup> Hermann, *Biedermeier*, p. 6.

<sup>27</sup> Georg Hermann, 'Ernst Heilborn, "Zwischen zwei Revolutionen. Der Geist der Schinkelzeit"', *Die Literatur*, 29 (1927), 385-87 (p. 385).



Political comments and accounts of current cultural events are transposed from the documents collected in the anthology and from other contemporary sources to the Jettchen novels. In several instances, Hermann allocates quotations from Biedermeier diaries or letters to his characters. Jason and Kößling, culturally and politically the most aware of the novel's figures, are used especially as representatives of the Biedermeier spirit in this way. Jason, for instance, tells his family: 'Nun - der König von Hannover, hab' ich gehört, geht zur Hochzeit von der Königin Viktoria nach England 'rüber. In Hannover hofft man allgemein, daß sie ihn da vielleicht totschiagen werden.' (HJ, p. 91) The source of this statement can be found in the diary of Karl August Varnhagen von Ense. On 21 December 1839, Varnhagen wrote:

Es heißt der König von Hannover wolle zur Vermählung der Königin Viktoria nach London reisen. O, Thät ers doch, sagt ein Hannoveraner, da wird er vielleicht totgeschlagen. Das könnten doch die Engländer für uns thun, bei uns geht es nicht an, dort ist es viel leichter.<sup>28</sup>

Hermann's interest in the Biedermeier period in his Jettchen novels is twofold: first, to present a detailed and sensitive picture of Jewish Berlin middle class life, and, secondly, to represent, in the example of Jettchen and her family, the social conflicts that confronted this particular class. I shall look in the following paragraphs at his way of realising both these aims.

*Jettchen Geberts Geschichte* has been acclaimed for its detailed and sympathetic depiction of everyday Biedermeier culture and family life. Horch, for instance, praises the novel for the 'Authentizität der jüdisch-bürgerlichen Milieuschilderung'<sup>29</sup> and lists a number of reviews written when it was first published which share this view. In a letter to Perl, Hermann described his concept of the Jettchen novels:

Mir schwebten Interieurs aus der Biedermeierzeit im Sinne von Jacobsens *Marie Grubbe* vor; und da ich wußte, daß der sehr lange Studien in der Kopenhagener Bibliothek gemacht hat so nahm ich, um das Kolorit möglichst genau zu treffen, den gleichen Weg. [...] Eigentlich hasse ich nämlich historische Romane, die ich, selbst die besten, für grenzenlos verschwindelt halte - vor allem so, wie sie die Figuren aus der Geschichte geben wollen! - und, um nicht auch in diesen Schwindel zu verfallen, habe ich mir gesagt, wenn man schon die Gegenwart verläßt, ist es Vorbedingung, solche ferne Zeit in allen ihren Äußerungen und

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<sup>28</sup> This as well as a number of other examples is quoted in Perl, pp. 30-33.

<sup>29</sup> Horch, p. 90.



geistigen und seelischen Strömungen bis zum letzten Hosenknopf zu kennen. Die einzige Zeit, in die wir uns noch hineinleben können, ist die unserer Eltern, da sie jung waren.<sup>30</sup>

It may be useful to look at this description of his working method carefully. In referring to his interest in 'Interieurs', Hermann stresses the static and the descriptive element in his writing. Indeed, Hermann describes with the greatest attention to detail the rooms and their furnishings, Jettchen's knickknacks and Jason's china. Similarly, he takes the greatest care in the description of the fashion of the period. The authenticity of his descriptions is ensured by the fact that they are firmly based on the study of period prints and written descriptions. Wentworth has shown in detail how closely Hermann's descriptions match with those to be gleaned from the documents that he included in his anthology.

Hermann certainly devotes much space to descriptions and it has to be asked whether this attention to detail takes over his Jettchen novels and turns them into a form of annotated cultural history books. The criticism voiced by Russell A. Berman points in this direction.<sup>31</sup> Berman interprets the 'Doppelroman' as a perversion of high Realism and claims that Hermann has brought about in it 'the transformation of the descriptive detail into an element of empty spectacle'.<sup>32</sup> I would reject this interpretation, however, and claim that the descriptions of material possessions are not given in *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte* as ends in themselves, but to bring alive the cultural epoch of the Biedermeier, and that they are deeply integrated into the presentation of the intellectual and social realities of the time. The description of the 'gute Zimmer' in Salomon and Rikchen's house, for instance reflects the care and pride of its inhabitants and the importance that was accorded to the heart of the family home. Jettchen's room reflects her clarity and simplicity of character, but also her penchant for sentimentalities.<sup>33</sup> Far from culture being 'present only as possessions', as 'material for conspicuous consumption', as Berman claims,<sup>34</sup> - a claim that leads to his evaluation of *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte* as trivial literature - the cultural details are integral parts of the 'Doppelroman'. The characters' reading is thus used throughout the book to describe their interests, political leanings and character. Börne and Heine in particular, Jason's

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<sup>30</sup> Letter by Hermann to Walter Hermann Perl, dated 30 April 1931, quoted in Perl, p. 6.

<sup>31</sup> Russell A. Berman, 'Culture Industry and Reification: Georg Hermann', in Berman, *The Rise of the Modern German Novel. Crisis and Charisma* (Cambridge/Mass., London, 1986), pp. 161-78.

<sup>32</sup> R. A. Berman, 'Culture Industry', p. 166.

<sup>33</sup> See the description of Jettchen's china 'Rokokoschäferin' (*JG*, p. 26).

<sup>34</sup> R. A. Berman, 'Culture Industry', p. 172.



favourite writers, are not only mentioned, but also quoted and discussed in some detail (*HJ*, p. 112 and p. 234). Jason's preference for these authors reflects the liberal political thinking of the period's intellectuals. Similarly, Jason's and Julius' conversation about Glaßbrenner, apart from revealing the first's sure and informed judgement and the latter's superficiality, gives the reader an insight into the middle class taste of the time:

Julius erzählte, er hätte sich jetzt etwas von Glaßbrenner gekauft: *Der Guckkasten auf achtzehnhundertneununddreißig*, *Herrn Buffeys schönster Tag* und auch *Die Landpartie nach Französisch-Buchholz* - weil alle so viel davon hermachten -, aber er hätte nicht darüber lachen können.

Jason meinte, daß in diesen Sachen doch eine gewisse volkstümliche Lustigkeit stecke, die vielleicht sehr roh, aber auch sehr wirkungsvoll sei, und wenn Glaßbrenner eben feiner organisiert und künstlerischer wäre, so hätte er bei seiner natürlichen Anlage das Zeug zu einem Humoristen großen Stils haben können. (*JG*, p. 242)

In view of these examples, I agree with Kaufmann who concludes: 'Die städtekundlichen, außen- und innenarchitektonischen, kunsthistorischen, bibliographischen Details sind Teile eines Geschichtsbildes, das Wesenszüge der Epoche erfaßt.'<sup>35</sup>

The Jewish middle class world that Hermann describes is marked by the following three kinds of social tension, which form the bases for the main conflicts in *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte*:<sup>36</sup>

1. The Jettchen - Kößling story shows the conflict between the old assimilated Berlin Jewish bourgeoisie and the Christian intellectual from lower middle class background. The conflict has two aspects: the differences between Jettchen and Kößling exist on grounds both of religion and social class. Hermann shows that this conflict can be bridged intellectually, but is - according to the laws of the new bourgeois - insurmountable socially.

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<sup>35</sup> Kaufmann, p. 510. That Hermann himself was exasperated with some readers' excessive attention to detail, divorced from the novel's content, is clear from the following quotation: 'Ich platze vor Wut, wenn ich das Wort "Mürbekuchen" höre! Sie haben gar nichts mit dem Sinn des Buches zu tun, sind ein Nebenher, eine Belanglosigkeit, ein Farbfleckchen im Zeitkolorit, wie das Rubinglas und die Sinumbralampe. Und ich weiß genau: noch fünf Minuten vor meinem Tod wird mich jemand anbrüllen: "Jettchen Gebert! Ach Gott - Onkel Eli und die Mürbekuchen".' (Georg Hermann, 'Was von Büchern übrigbleibt', in Hermann, *Die Zeitlupe*, p. 154)

<sup>36</sup> Also recognised by Gert Mattenklott, 'Jettchen Gebert und das Shtetl. Jüdische Lebenswelten in der deutschen Literatur', in Andreas Nachama, Julius H. Schoeps and Eduard van Voolen (eds.), *Jüdische Lebenswelten. Essays* (Berlin, 1991), pp. 221-38.



2. The decline of the educated and cultured bourgeoisie, rooted in the Enlightenment tradition, is exemplified in the history of the Gebert family.

3. The inevitable transition from an old to a new order is shown mainly in the contrast between the assimilated Berlin Jewish bourgeoisie, with its combination of culture and financial success, and East European Jews characterised in the novel by a brash commercialism and bigotted adherence to rituals.

‘Es ist die Tragödie der Haus- und Wanderratten - und die Wanderratten sind stärker’, this is the summary Hermann gives of the latter two points listed above.<sup>37</sup> In fact, this conflict that Hermann describes, mirrors Mackowsky’s description of the social changes of the period:

Die alten Familien starben aus oder zogen sich still zurück [...]. Die oberen Schichten aber ergriff ein neuer Geist, dessen Unternehmungslust meist mit ein wenig Schwindel verbunden war, dessen Ruhelosigkeit kein Behagen kannte. [...] Die vielen namentlich aus dem Osten zuziehenden Elemente sorgten für die unablässige Zersetzung des alten kräftigen Teiges.<sup>38</sup>

This has been described as a typical constellation for the historical novel. Richard Humphrey points out that the portrayal of a period ‘not as a unified age but as two or more co-existent ages’ is a topic taken up in the historical novel from Scott onwards.<sup>39</sup> The conflict between the two ages or social orders is palpable in Berlin: local history and tradition are set against immigrants’ culture and business behaviour.

Hermann clearly follows a dual purpose in his Jettchen novels. He combines a sympathetic and detailed physical description of the period with a representation of social tensions of the time and their psychological effects on the characters involved. In his letter to Perl quoted above, Hermann refers to the necessity of studying the ‘geistigen und seelischen Strömungen’ of the period. This indicates that Hermann was more aware of the importance of representing the social and psychological aspects of

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<sup>37</sup> Hermann, ‘Was von Büchern übrigbleibt’, p. 153.

<sup>38</sup> Mackowsky, p. 8.

<sup>39</sup> Richard Humphrey, *The Historical Novel as Philosophy of History. Three German Contributions: Alexis, Fontane, Döblin* (London, 1986), p. 8.



the characters and their interactions in the context of their period than his reference to Jacobsen's *Fru Marie Grubbe* (1876) quoted earlier, might lead one to expect.

Georg Lukàcs, in his work on the historical novel, cites Jacobsen's *Fru Marie Grubbe* as an example for the 'privatisation of history' which characterises historical novels written in the post-1848 period. In these, he criticises the fact that 'die Geschichte erscheint als eine große und pompöse Kulisse, die als Rahmen zu einem rein privaten, intimen, subjektiven Geschehnis dient.'<sup>40</sup> Lukàcs' criticism of *Fru Marie Grubbe* has to be seen in the context of his rather narrowly Marxist perspective.<sup>41</sup> But even discounting this, it remains true that Marie Grubbe's story, as that of a dissatisfied wife fighting for a life in love and self-respect, takes up a theme that is more typical of Jacobsen's time than of the Renaissance Denmark in which it is set. More importantly, the character of Marie herself is essentially modern. Hermann, by contrast, achieves a representation of the Biedermeier in which the psychology of the characters and the material manifestations of the period are shown as a unified whole, determined by the same socio-historical circumstances. This integrated depiction of a historical epoch is closer to Sir Walter Scott's historical novels than to Jacobsen's. Kaufhold supports this as follows:

Entscheidend ist, daß Jettchen und Kößling, Jason und auch Salomon Gebert typische Vertreter des Bürgertums ihrer Zeit sind; daß ihre individuellen Schicksale in abgestuften Graden widerspiegeln, was dem liberalen Bürgertum des Vormärz eigen war: Schwäche und Inkonsequenz, Hoffnung und Enttäuschung, ein ständiges kompromißlerisches Schwanken zwischen Kampf um politische Befreiung und ängstlicher Beugung vor den Mächten der Restauration.<sup>42</sup>

Indeed, this weakness and passivity of the middle classes in the Biedermeier period has been pointed out by many historians. In an article in the catalogue to the exhibition *Berlin zwischen 1789 und 1848. Facetten einer Epoche* at the Akademie der Künste in Berlin in 1981, Martin Greiffenhagen explains this passivity and melancholy as the 'Grundströmung' in the attitude of those members of the old middle classes who saw

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<sup>40</sup> Georg Lukàcs, *Der historische Roman* (Berlin, 1959), p. 211.

<sup>41</sup> He condemns Jacobsen's novel as follows: 'Da der Roman nicht von den Problemen des Volkslebens ausgeht, sondern seelische Probleme einer Oberschicht *ohne Zusammenhang* mit den allgemeinen gesellschaftlich-geschichtlichen Problemen behandelt, ist jedes Band einer Beziehung zwischen den geschichtlichen Ereignissen und den Privatschicksalen zerrissen.' (Lukàcs, p. 211)

<sup>42</sup> Bernhard Kaufhold, 'Nachwort' to *Jettchen Gebert* (1964), quoted in Liere, p. 162. Liere however correctly points out that all of Hermann's characters share this fundamental weakness.



themselves as the pillars of an idealised humanitarianism, of Enlightenment ideals of society. In Jason, Hermann captures the ambivalence of the alienation of this middle class which now saw itself confronted with a new bourgeoisie, based on commerce and capitalism. He describes 'das Gefühl geistiger Überlegenheit und gleichzeitig die tiefe Niedergeschlagenheit in diesem Rückzug vom tätigen Leben.'<sup>43</sup>

In this sense, the Realist novel's quest to show the typical in the representation of the individual is realised in Hermann's work. In the following pages, I shall expand on the author's indebtedness to the Realist tradition in his construction of *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte*.

## 4.2 The Realist Tradition in *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte*

### 4.2.1 Hermann's Form of the Historical Novel

Going back to the extract from the letter to Perl quoted above, it is worth looking at Hermann's reference to the representation of historical figures in retrospective novels as 'grenzenlos verschwindelt'. Indeed, his representation of the Biedermeier refrains from involvement with 'official' history. Whereas in Fontane's and in Scott's works, historical figures are present, not so in Hermann's. They are the subject of conversations, but, apart from a brief appearance in the distance by Bettina von Arnim and Karl August Varnhagen (see *HJ*, p. 212), they do not appear in person.

In this respect, *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte* has many characteristics described by Humphrey as typical of the historical novella. In contrast to the historical novel, it concentrates on unknown characters and tells an unknown story. In *Der kleine Gast*, Hermann sets out his concept of the art and of the significance of novel writing:

[Romane] sind das einzige, in dem das Leben sich dauernd bewahrt. Wie von Registriermaschinen werden die letzten und feinsten Seelenschwingungen eines Stammes, einer Epoche von ihnen aufgezeichnet. Das einfache, vorüberfließende, tägliche Dasein mit all seinen hunderttausend kaum deutbaren Nuancen wird in ihm zum Rang der Historie erhoben.'<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Martin Greiffenhagen, 'Zwei Seelen in der Brust? Zur politischen Kultur Preußens zwischen 1789 und 1848', in *Berlin zwischen 1789 und 1848. Facetten einer Epoche*, exhibition catalogue, Akademie der Künste (Berlin, 1981), pp. 7-15 (p. 13).

<sup>44</sup> Hermann, *Der kleine Gast*, p. 336.



Elsewhere, he summarises his concept of the novel as 'die eigentliche Geschichte neben der Geschichte'.<sup>45</sup>

This understanding reflects the Realist novel's claim to make the everyday, which has traditionally been the realm of comedy, its concern. Not a re-interpretation of history as given by historians is intended but a chronicle of the characters' lives. As Humphrey summarises: 'Its frequent claim is not "This is what really happened", but "This also happened"'.<sup>46</sup> This mirrors the stance voiced by Hermann in the preface to *Jettchen Gebert*. Hermann refers to Jettchen and her family as historical figures and declares his intention to chronicle their lives and thereby preserve their memory:

Denn erzähle ich nicht diese Geschichte, so wird niemand sein, der sie euch erzählen wird, und sie könnte verlorengelassen, könnte ungeschehen werden - und das wäre schade! Sie selbst nämlich, die an den Vorgängen Anteil hatten, werden nichts mehr von ihnen verraten [...]; denn sie sind ein wenig schweigsam, seitdem sie sich vom Geschäfte dieses Daseins vor einigen Jahrzehnten zurückgezogen haben. (*JG*, p. 5)

Peter Demetz points out that whereas Scott still described the actions depicted in his novels as probable and close to the truth, later Realist writers, such as Fontane, went so far as to claim veracity for their works.<sup>47</sup> Hermann follows Fontane in this respect. In order to establish his reliability as narrator, he even invents gravestones for his characters (as Fontane does in *Vor dem Sturm* (1878) and *Effi Briest* (1895)). Hermann quotes the inscription on Jettchen's stone in the introduction to *Jettchen Gebert* in order to arouse the readers' interest in the character who, although married, is remembered only as niece, but not as a wife: 'daß unsere teure Nichte, Henriette Jacoby geb. Gebert, am 15. Mai 1812 das Licht sah und sich am 3. Oktober 1840 allhier zur Ruhe begab' (*JG*, p. 6).

If in intention and subject matter, *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte* shows some of the defining elements of the historical novella, it is however different in its scope. Hermann does not primarily present 'ein herausgerissenes historisches Ereignis' which has been seen as the defining moment of the novella since Schleiermacher. By contrast, he

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<sup>45</sup> Georg Hermann, entry in a notebook held in the Georg Hermann Collection, section XIII, no date.

<sup>46</sup> Humphrey, p. 41.

<sup>47</sup> See Peter Demetz, *Formen des Realismus: Theodor Fontane* (München, 1964), pp. 20/21.



intended to create 'eine ganze breite Symphonie mit Andante und Allegro und Rondo verklungener Zeiten und verklungener Menschen [...], über denen die Grazie einer verwehten Kultur lag.'<sup>48</sup> This declared intention suggests a breadth of composition, which is not actually realised in *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte*. Unlike Fontane in *Vor dem Sturm*, Hermann does not attempt to give an overview of society in its entirety. Instead, he concentrates on a small group of characters, who despite their individuality are also to be understood as typical representatives of their social position in their time. His scope thus lies between that of the novella's representation of the single event and Fontane's panoramic historical novel as the mirror of the whole of society. Hermann gives an exemplary depiction of middle class culture, while centring on one particular family.

In other respects, however, the comparison with Fontane elicits striking similarities. These will be explored in the following pages.

#### 4.2.2 Comparisons with Fontane's Art of the Novel

Hermann valued Fontane highly: he kept Liebermann's Fontane portrait above his desk and when his daughter considered becoming a writer too, Hermann suggested Fontane as one of the authors she should read and model her style on.<sup>49</sup> The closeness of the art of the two writers has often been pointed to in critical literature from newspaper articles celebrating Hermann's fiftieth birthday<sup>50</sup> to criticism published in the 1980s and 1990s. In the catalogue to the exhibition 'Jettchen Geberts Kinder' from 1985, Hermann is described as 'the great Berlin Realist and successor to Theodore [sic] Fontane'<sup>51</sup> and Peter Härtling, in 1990, called *Jettchen Gebert* 'vielleicht die beste Leistung der Fontaneschule'.<sup>52</sup> It is worthwhile, however, to go beyond the generalising statement and investigate in which ways Hermann follows Fontane's particular variant of the Realist novel and in which ways he deviates from it.

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<sup>48</sup> Hermann, *Der kleine Gast*, p. 278.

<sup>49</sup> Georg Hermann, letter to Hilde Villum-Hansen, dated 19 January, 1941, quoted in Wentworth, pp. 17-19.

<sup>50</sup> See for instance anon., 'Georg Hermann', *Heidelberger Tageblatt*, 7 October 1921.

<sup>51</sup> *Jettchen Geberts Kinder*, exhibition catalogue, Berlinische Galerie and Leo Baeck Institute (Berlin, New York, 1985), p. 21.

<sup>52</sup> Härtling, 'Ein verlassener Held', p. 131.



The reference in the letter to Perl to the grandparent period is clearly reminiscent of Fontane's claim, derived from Scott, that the subject of a historical novel should be the 'Widerspiegelung eines Lebens, an dessen Grenze wir selbst noch standen oder von dem uns unsere Eltern noch erzählten'.<sup>53</sup> Not the distant, fantastic past of the romances, but the verifiable middle past is seen as the ideal time to be dealt with in the Realist historical novel. Both Hermann and Fontane set their historical novels in an older Berlin and both shared the concern for authenticity.<sup>54</sup>

In the structuring of *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte* too, Hermann's affinity with Fontane's art of the novel is very visible. I shall show this in an exemplary way for the first of the two novels, *Jettchen Gebert*. The novel is clearly structured. The Realists' belief that reality is not only knowable but also recordable, that it is possible to master it in a narrative, finds its expression in this tight structure. The novel consists of five sections, roughly analogous to the structure of classical drama:

- ◆ introduction of characters and situation (pp. 7-97);
- ◆ rising action: further meetings Jettchen - Köbling and Jason - Köbling (pp. 102-55);
- ◆ culmination of the action and *peripeteia*: Köbling's visit in Charlottenburg (pp. 167-200) and its consequences (pp. 200-91);
- ◆ falling action (preparations for Jettchen's wedding with Julius) with 'retardierendem Moment' (Jettchen meeting Köbling for the last time) (pp. 305-71);
- ◆ catastrophe: the wedding day (pp. 380-89).

The five sections are framed by narratorial reports. The sections themselves consist of a series of individual scenes. The scenic technique of presentation dominates the novel. As in Fontane's social novels, the bulk of the action takes place indoors. This not only allows Hermann to present the cultural realm of the family in detail but also reflects the fact that conversation and not action is the main element of the novel. The structural motif of the dinner party allows Hermann not only to introduce all the members of the

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<sup>53</sup> Theodor Fontane, 'Gustav Freytag: "Die Ahnen"' [1875], in Fontane, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. by Edgar Gross et al. (München, 1959-1975), vol. XXI/1 (1963), pp. 231-48 (p. 242).

<sup>54</sup> Even the wording 'bis auf den letzten Hosenknopf' reflects a phrase of Fontane's who recommended Dickens' and Thackeray's novels with the words: 'Der letzte Knopf am Rock und die verborgenste Empfindung des Herzens werden mit gleicher Treue wiedergegeben.' (Theodor Fontane, 'Gustav Freytag: "Soll und Haben"' [1855], in Fontane, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. XXI/1, pp. 214-30 (pp. 216/17))



family but also to present the family life and everyday culture of the Jewish middle class household. In the conversations, the current cultural events can be introduced and discussed. The historical and cultural setting can thus be confirmed with greater authenticity and directness than if the narrator were to set the scene in lengthy introductions. Again in a manner similar to Fontane, Hermann shows the dinner party guests reflecting, as they walk home, on the events of the evening and on the characters of their fellow guests, and thereby develops the characters of the walkers in an intimate way. Most significant in this respect is Jason's and Kößling's discussion after Kößling's first evening spent at Salomon's house. Starting out with a reflection on his family and with an explicit exposition of the conflict between the Geberts and the Jacobys, Jason is given much room to express his alienation not only from the family, but also from the social world the Jacoby element represents (see *JG*, pp. 89-97).

Hermann mixes scenic presentation and the use of the omniscient narrator. Within the scenic representations, direct speech alternates with indirect speech and with narratorial summaries. Hermann thus at times conveys the speech of individual characters filtered through the consciousness of the narrator. Scenes are introduced in much the same way as in Fontane's novels: detailed descriptions of the rooms precede the action (or conversation).

Hermann, like Fontane, uses an unequal distribution of time. While in the first part of the novel, much time is needed to 'set the scene' and Hermann takes ninety-five pages to cover one day, the relationship narration/ narrated time changes as the novel continues, more time is covered in less space. The narratorial reports between the sections include descriptions of the progress of nature as indication of the passing of time, and brief accounts of the activities of the various members of the family. Having set himself up in the preface as a rather dictatorial presence,<sup>55</sup> the narrator makes himself heard throughout the novel, commenting on the characters' actions and addressing the reader directly. This practice gets in the way of the authenticity suggested by the scenic representation. At times, Hermann overuses the narrator and

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<sup>55</sup> The preface starts with the words: 'Man lasse mich hier eine Geschichte erzählen, einfach deshalb, weil es mich gelüstet, es zu tun.' The last paragraph concludes: 'Ihr seht nicht ein, warum ihr euch [...] um fremde Dinge kümmern sollt und gar noch um solche, die über ein halbes Jahrhundert zurückliegen! Aber ich werde darauf keine Rücksicht nehmen.' (*JG*, pp. 5 and 6)



destroys his own literary world. In *Henriette Jacoby*, for instance, he comments on the departure of the Jacoby cousins and Uncle Naphtali back to Silesia:

Und wie dieser Reisewagen gemach Ferdinand Geberts Blicken entschwindet, so entschwinden uns hier nun auch die beiden - Pinchen und Rosalie - und als dritter der brave alte Onkel Naphtali, und wir werden nichts weiter von ihnen hier mehr hören und lesen. Sie kehren nach Bentschen zurück, woher sie gekommen sind, tauchen wieder unter für uns in das Heer der Namenlosen, werden ausgelöscht aus diesem Buche. (*HJ*, p. 169)

However, this does not call into question the reliability of the narration as a whole, since the narrator has set himself up as a knowledgeable source in the preface.

*Jettchen Gebert* is framed by a preface and an epilogue. As shown above, Hermann follows the traditional function of the preface by using it to declare his reason for telling Jettchen's story. But he goes beyond this traditional function by arousing the reader's sympathy and interest, hinting 'daß sie nicht dreißig Jahre wurde und es vielleicht mit ihrer Ehe etwas haperte' (*JG*, p. 6). In the beginning of the main body of the novel, Hermann starts out in typical Realist tradition, by setting the time (spring 1839) and the place (the centre of Old Berlin). However, as the story has already been marked as narration by the use of a preface, it is clear that this detailed anchoring of the narration in historical reality here springs at least partly from a different intention to that which is behind its use in Realist literature. The indications of the time of the beginning of the narration and of Jettchen's death make clear that Jettchen will only have another year and a half to live. Hermann's intention here is to set the nostalgic, elegiac tone of the novel.<sup>56</sup> Once more, the tight control of the narrator over his story and over the reader's reactions is obvious.

The marked presence of the narrator can be interpreted in different ways. Wentworth suggests the following motivation: 'Es ist möglich, daß der Erzähler durch seine Präsenz der Sehnsuchtfunktion des Biedermeierromans Ausdruck verleiht und den Leser bewußt an die "gute, alte Zeit" erinnern will.'<sup>57</sup> Looking at the narrator's comments in detail, however, this function does not seem to me very important. Hermann does not

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<sup>56</sup> This function of 'Aspektbetonung' of Hermann's beginning of the novel has also been pointed out by Liere, pp. 112-26.

<sup>57</sup> Wentworth, p. 112.



take up the opportunity in his narratorial comments to praise the Biedermeier environment at the expense of the modern world of the turn of the century. He does not use what Demetz calls the 'Rhetorik des Damals- und- Heute'.<sup>58</sup> The narrator has instead two different functions in the novel. The first is the establishment of a closeness, a complicity, which embraces the narrator and the reader and which allows Hermann to guide the reading process very closely. The second, which is connected to this function and follows on directly from the firm grasp the author has thus established over the reader's understanding and reactions, is the preparation of the tragic turn of the action and the establishment of the theme of destiny.

After all, the leitmotif sentence used both in *Jettchen Gebert* and in *Henriette Jacoby* is 'Es kam wie es kommen mußte'. This not only underlines the omniscience of the author and reduces the reader's room for interpretation and re-creation of the narrative, but also expresses the fatalistic character that Hermann gives his story.<sup>59</sup> This fatalistic attitude and a strong sense of inevitability suffuse other works by Hermann, too. In *Kubinke*, for instance, the life of the passive protagonist is, as Hermann points out explicitly, directed by destiny.<sup>60</sup> The emphasis, both in *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte* and *Kubinke*, on the depiction of the changing seasons must be seen in this context. Hermann stresses the power of destiny over individuals by showing the development of his characters' lives to be as inevitable as the passing of the seasons.

The use of the omniscient author and the fatalistic tone not only reduce the autonomy of the reader, but also that of the characters: they appear to be puppets in the narration of their author. In the case of Hermann's Biedermeier novels, the passivity of the characters is rooted in historical social reality, as I have shown above. The example from *Kubinke*, however, which is set in turn-of-the-century Berlin, makes clear that the

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<sup>58</sup> Demetz, p. 18.

<sup>59</sup> Interestingly, it is this trait of the novel, the idea of destiny, that Gustav A. Flach took up when writing a third volume to *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte*, entitled *Jason und Henriette Gebert*. In a long, grovelling letter to Hermann, who must have objected to Flach's 'literarischem Diebstahl', he explains his motivation for writing: 'Wenn ich Ihnen ehrenhaft und feierlichst erkläre, daß mir der "Karma-Gedanke", wie er hier einen Kreis geschlossen hat, vorherrschend war, daß ich den Faden Ihrer in so genialer Weise erdachten Liebe Jason-Jettchen weitergesponnen habe, um die Gestalten unter dem "Muß" ihres Schicksals dahin zu führen, wo uns erst klar wird, "warum" das alles so war und nicht anders kommen konnte, wie es kommen mußte' (letter dated 3 December 1917, Georg Hermann Collection, section X).

<sup>60</sup> See for instance: 'Und wenn das Schicksal es gut mit Emil Kubinke gemeint hätte, so hätte es ihn jetzt schlafen lassen.' (Hermann, *Kubinke* [1910] (Berlin, 1951), p. 4)



passivity of the protagonists and their limited radius of action is a convention Hermann uses independently of when his novels are set.

The characters in *Jettchen Gebert* and *Henriette Jacoby* are recruited from the middle classes. The two novels are 'Romane der guten Gesellschaft', similar to those of Fontane. At first sight, the social setting and characters of Hermann's 'Doppelroman' seem to be different from Fontane's; *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte* is set firmly in the Jewish middle class. This is dangerously close to the economic interests of the middle classes, which Demetz argues with reference to Fontane's *Stechlin*, is below the world of Fontane's characters.<sup>61</sup> However, in the framework of Hermann's contrasting representation of the old and the new bourgeoisie, the old Gebert family distinguishes itself by its connection to the Court and the cultural elite.<sup>62</sup> Their work as jewellers to the crown and silk merchants is long established trade and manufacture. The family are proud of this work, which after all has created the basis for their social position, but it is not described or made part of the plot. They are contrasted with the Jacoby family precisely for that uncultured family's interest in the modern form of commerce, in speculation, money and dishonest dealing.<sup>63</sup>

The social radius in *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte* is very limited. Apart from one very minor lower middle class character, the Charlottenburg landlady Könnecke who is depicted as a comic figure in genre tradition, Hermann describes only the bourgeois world. Kößling, born into lower middle classes, but now as an artist and as doctor of philosophy between all social strata, is clearly marked as an outsider. The growing proletariat is ignored entirely, members of the working classes only appear as genre figures.<sup>64</sup>

Again, Fontane's novels with their exclusion of particular areas of social reality may be cited as the model. Hermann's rather exclusive vision of the past, which ignores the beginnings of overcrowding in the city caused by the development of industry and the

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<sup>61</sup> Demetz, p. 123.

<sup>62</sup> See p. 140 of this dissertation on the Gebert family's involvement with Berlin high culture.

<sup>63</sup> That the contrast between Geberts and Jacobys is not quite as clear-cut as it seems at first sight, will be shown in a later section of this chapter.

<sup>64</sup> This will be taken up again and commented on in more detail in the following chapter on the representation of Berlin in *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte*.



influx of labour from the rural areas, may be paralleled in this respect with Fontane's often cited idyllic representation of a factory during a break, in *Irrungen Wirrungen*.<sup>65</sup>

Another aspect of Fontane's novel writing should be considered here. Fontane demanded from the novel, 'daß er mich wohltuend berühren und mich entweder über das Alltägliche erheben oder aber - das schön Menschliche darin mir zeigend - mir auch das Alltägliche wert und teuer machen soll.'<sup>66</sup> Even more clearly, he formulated a basic definition of the Realist novel as follows: 'Darauf kommt es an, daß zwischen dem erlebten und erdichteten Leben kein Unterschied ist als der jener Intensität, Klarheit, Übersichtlichkeit, die die verklärende Aufgabe der Kunst ist.'

To those readers of Hermann who know him only by his first novel *Spielkinder* and the bleak novella *Aus dem letzten Hause*, it must seem unlikely that the principle of 'Verklärung', which is an integral part of the Realist novel and in particular of Fontane's work, should play any role in Hermann's work. Yet, in his Biedermeier novels and particularly in *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte*, 'Verklärung' in its particular historical guise, nostalgia, suffuses the works. The attitude that Hermann expresses in his Biedermeier essay, a slightly sentimental fondness for a more tranquil period, is noticeable in his Jettchen novels, too. Hermann refers to this change in attitude, and consequentially in literary representation, explicitly:

Früher, als ich jung war und heiterer denn heute, da meinte ich, daß es richtig und stark wäre, das Leben so mitleidlos zu schildern, dieser schönen Bestie, die uns zerfleischt, die Maske herunterzureißen und ihr bluttriefendes Maul zu weisen. Heute, da ich weniger heiter bin und diese Bestie nun wirklich kenne, da setze ich nur zu gern ihr die Maske wieder vors Gesicht, und ich bemühe mich, sie noch rosig und zart zu schminken, nur um das bluttriefende Maul zu vergessen.' (*HJ*, p. 283)

Hermann's writing is not uncritical, though, and his gentle irony and social awareness keep it from declining into the merely affirmative and trivial. The mixture of literary 'Verklärung' and clear-eyed criticism, together with an eye for psychological and social truth, are at the basis of Hermann's Fontane-like tone and style in *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte*. Comparing Hermann's writing to Fontane's, Härtling however stresses that

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<sup>65</sup> See Theodor Fontane, *Irrungen, Wirrungen* [1887], in Fontane, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. III (1959), pp. 93-232 (p. 171).

<sup>66</sup> This and the following quotation: Theodor Fontane, *Schriften zur Literatur*, ed. by Hans-Heinrich Reuter (Berlin 1960), p. 109.



Hermann is not simply an epigone. He concludes: '[Hermann] erfindet vorsichtiger, umständlicher. Aber ebenso wach und kritisch wie Fontane beobachtet er Spannungen und Veränderungen in der Gesellschaft.'<sup>67</sup>

In adopting, in *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte*, techniques and a tone close to those of Fontane, Hermann adapts his writing to the topic at hand: his Biedermeier 'Doppelroman' can largely be described as a historical novel in the Realist tradition of Scott and Fontane. However, it has also to be seen that Hermann's use of Realist conventions is complemented by other, more modern techniques and themes that fit better in the context of turn-of-the-century literature than in nineteenth century Realism. In the following paragraphs, I shall exemplify this, concentrating on the construction of his characters and, connected with this, the importance that Hermann accords to the working of destiny. His stress on the importance of tone and atmosphere must also be mentioned in this context.

#### 4.3 The Inclusion of Elements of Turn-of-the-Century Aesthetics

In the characters of *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte*, Hermann presents a mixture of the individual and the typical. Some of the minor characters, especially the Jacobys from Eastern Europe (Uncle Naphtali and the cousins Rosalie and Pinchen), are portrayed as rather two-dimensional types. The central characters, on the other hand, have both a typical, representative quality and a sensitively delineated individuality. Jason especially stands out as a rounded, interesting character next to Kößling and Jettchen, who are both a little pale - and remarkably passive.

This passivity of central characters is more typical of the literature of the turn of the century than of the Realist tradition that Hermann has hitherto been shown to make use of in *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte*. R. Berman explains the passivity and weakness of Hermann's characters 'vis-a-vis an ineluctable destiny' as an expression of the crisis of bourgeois culture at the turn of the century. However, Berman misinterprets Hermann's

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<sup>67</sup> Härtling, 'Ein verlassener Held', p. 131.



work when he classifies it as a typical example of 'the novel of the culture industry [which] becomes the novel of monopoly capitalism'. 'The lesson designed for mass distribution', he continues, 'is a melancholy acceptance of fate, hence a passive submission to monopolistic interests.'<sup>68</sup> In my opinion this interpretation goes against the grain of Hermann's 'Doppelroman', because it ignores not only the explicitly voiced political opinions, which are without exception of a pro-democratic, anti-authoritarian nature, but also the novel's underlying criticism of an oppressive society whose rules make happiness for the obedient Jettchen impossible.

It is true that, unlike Fanny Lewald's Biedermeier heroine Jenny, for instance, Jettchen is strikingly passive.<sup>69</sup> Jenny is in a similar situation to Jettchen's. She too comes from an established, even wealthy Jewish family background. She, too, is in love with a Christian. Unlike Jettchen, however, she takes decisive action to ensure her happiness with the beloved Reinhard. She opposes the wishes of her parents and vehemently refuses to marry her cousin Joseph:

Mutter! Den Joseph heirate ich niemals. Niemals, Mutter! - Sage ihm das, und auch dem Vater. Ich weiß, daß ihr es wünschet, daß Joseph es erwartet und mich nur erzieht, um eine gute Frau an mir zu haben; die Mühe aber kann er sparen. [...] Man kann mein Herz brechen, aber es niemals zu schmählichem Nachgeben, zu schwankender Gesinnung überreden - und das schwöre ich dir, lieber will ich sterben, als Josephs Frau werden.'<sup>70</sup>

Jettchen, by contrast, never voices her opposition. In the run-up to her wedding, her state is described as not much different from death. Throughout Hermann's 'Doppelroman', Jettchen shows no real awareness of the society around her. Her inactivity and passive acceptance of her fate are motivated by her gratitude to her family, the patriarchal setup of the Biedermeier family and by the manipulations of Salomon and Rikchen. But the barriers put up by society are only part of the reason for Jettchen's tragic ending. When, in *Jettchen Gebert*, she intends to speak to Salomon about the wedding, her intention is thwarted only partly by Aunt Rikchen's interventions, partly by a readiness to accept fate. This passivity becomes even more marked in *Henriette Jacoby*. When all obstacles are removed from a relationship

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<sup>68</sup> R. A. Berman, 'Culture Industry', pp. 174/75.

<sup>69</sup> See Fanny Lewald, *Jenny* [1842], ed. by Ulrike Helmer (Frankfurt a.M., 1988).

<sup>70</sup> Lewald, pp. 36/37.



between Jettchen and Kößling they realise the impossibility of their connection is not only due to outside pressures, but also to internalised differences (racial and social) which stand in the way of real closeness. When Hermann presents Jettchen's passivity and the impossibility of her liaison with Kößling as fate, this does not reflect a 'submission to monopolistic interests'. Rather, in this as well as in the love between Jettchen and Jason, Hermann was interested to show the culturally, socially and psychologically defined problem of the assimilated Jew:

Als Motiv reizte mich das hochkultivierte Wesen der jüdischen Frau, das weder zum Christentum, noch zum Ostjudentum die Brücke finden kann und durch die einzig mögliche Liebe zu einem Mitglied der eigenen Sippe, eigentlich wie die Herbstzeitlose Selbstbefruchtung begehen muß.<sup>71</sup>

As this problem is far deeper than anything a rebellion against her family could solve, Jettchen submits to passivity. Hermann's criticism of the situation of the assimilated Jew is however undiminished. Thus, the social criticism of the Realist novel is here interwoven with the turn-of-the-century concern with the theme of destiny.

Again, compare Lewald's *Jenny* for the eventual fate of the heroines. For a while, Jenny suppresses her independent spirit to please Reinhard. She even converts to Christianity to overcome all obstacles to the union with him. However, Lewald makes clear that this is an unviable option. When Jenny admits that she is unable to truly adopt the Christian faith, Reinhard dissolves the engagement. The self-denial that love initiates is shown as negative and Jenny progresses to a calm happiness in which rationality and independence, not love reign. In comparison to Jettchen, she emerges as the more emancipated of the two and she shows more self-awareness - both in respect to her relationships with Reinhard and later on with Walter - and in respect to her identity and religion. While Jettchen may experience a very similar development in her detachment from Kößling, she is not able to express herself. In fact, it is the avoidance of self-expression that leads both to her disastrous marriage and to her suicide.

Hermann does not describe the contrast between the Jewish and the Christian background as insurmountable. In fact, to cite just one example, in *Henriette Jacoby*, it

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<sup>71</sup> Hermann, letter to Walter Perl, dated 30 April 1931, quoted in Perl, p. 19.



is Jettchen to whom the celebration of Christmas is important. Jason joins in, while Kößling, utterly unprepared for this, cannot connect with the two and leaves as soon as he can. Objections from the family as well as from outside society are mainly raised on social, not on religious, grounds. Hermann is more interested here in developing the theme of inevitability and the atmosphere of quiet resignation, than in the dissection of the problem itself.

His concern with an all-pervading unifying atmosphere is expressed in the autobiographical novel *Der kleine Gast*, in which he records the process of writing *Jettchen Gebert*. He describes as one of his main concerns: 'die gleiche Grundstimmung durchhalten' and 'keine Sekunde, keine Zeile, die Tonlage aus dem Ohr verlieren'.<sup>72</sup> The importance of a 'stimmungsvolle Gesamteindruck' is very scathingly described by Hamann and Hermand as an element of the decadent and deliberately aestheticising movement of 'Neuromantik' (Hamann and Hermann call it 'Neuro-Mantik').<sup>73</sup> They see the novels about women written at the turn of the century in the wake of Jacobsen's *Fru Marie Grubbe* as particularly prone to this accentuation of 'Stimmung' as a 'reizsame Flimmerschicht, die je nach Situation mit den dazu passenden jahres- oder tageszeitlichen Attributen ausgestattet wird.'<sup>74</sup> Hermann certainly uses this technique. The moon and the stars, the balmy spring air and the giggling of a happy couple form the background to Jettchen's first feelings of love for Kößling (*JG*, pp. 88/89). When Kößling cries, a grey rainy sky mirrors his feelings (*JG*, p. 214), and the drama of Jettchen's and Kößling's last meeting before the wedding is underlined by the storm which is raging through the streets at the same time (*JG*, pp. 370-71). However, the representation of the atmosphere does not take over the novel. Hermann does not dissolve his novel into a 'Folge stimmungshaft verbrämter Stilleben'.<sup>75</sup> In *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte*, the atmospheric tint is an element that is added to the fundamentally Realist, tightly structured construction of the novel. Indeed, Hermann distances himself explicitly from the purely aestheticising forms of literature.<sup>76</sup> The attention to atmosphere is thus another instance, which shows the mixture of Realist tradition and turn-of-the-century thematic influence.

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<sup>72</sup> Hermann, *Der kleine Gast*, p. 277.

<sup>73</sup> Hamann and Hermand, *Impressionismus*, p. 308.

<sup>74</sup> Hamann and Hermand, *Impressionismus*, p. 316.

<sup>75</sup> Hamann and Hermand, *Impressionismus*, p. 316.

<sup>76</sup> See Georg Hermann, 'Vom gesicherten und ungesicherten Leben', in Hermann, *Vom gesicherten und ungesicherten Leben*, pp. 1-51 (p. 39).



The construction of the character of Jason demonstrates a last instance of this mixture. As I have already shown, Hermann presents in Jason and Kößling characters who are historically deeply implanted in the Biedermeier period. The introduction to the characters, with detailed descriptions of their external appearances as well as characterisations by their conversation rather than by a psychological account of their feelings and thoughts (as for instance Rilke provides in *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910)) follows Realist conventions. However, as types they are typical of the repertoire of the turn-of-the-century writer. Hermann's most developed character, the intellectual Jason, is reminiscent of Mann's Christian Buddenbrook. He attends the family business, but only in a most irregular way, and even when he does, his effect is more disruptive than useful.<sup>77</sup> He once opened his own silk goods shop, but could not keep it (see *JG*, p. 15). He is positioned at the edge of his family and thus of the middle class society that Hermann depicts. Hermann makes clear that the reason for this is that Jason represents the values of the old, cultured, idealistic Gebert family, while in the houses of his brothers, the old Gebert tradition has been diluted by the influence of their Jacoby wives, representing the new small-minded and materially oriented bourgeoisie. This becomes clear for instance in Jason's speech on his first evening walk with Kößling: 'Wir gehören nicht zu denen da [...]. Für die gibt es nur eins: Habe einen Beruf - sei etwas - mache Geld! [...] Für all die berechtigten Gebrochenheiten haben sie kein Verständnis.' (*JG*, p. 91)

The conflict between Jason and the Jacobys constitutes a theme that pervades all of Hermann's work. In all his novels to different extents and degrees of harshness, he depicts the alienation of the sensitive and cultured person from a society governed by commercialism. In the essay 'Vom gesicherten und ungesicherten Leben', published in 1915, Hermann develops this theme. 'Gesichertes Leben' is described not in material terms, but as an unconscious philosophy, as 'ein Schutzwall gegen tausende von Eindrücken', as 'das Fehlen dieses Untertons [leiser Nachdenksamkeit] im Blick'.<sup>78</sup> Like Hannchen and Rikchen, the adherents of the 'secured life' are always sure of

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<sup>77</sup> See *JG*, p. 100: 'Jason ging später täglich mehrere Stunden ins Geschäft von Salomon und hielt Buchhalter, Korrespondenten und Lagerverwalter bis herab zum Hausdiener von der Arbeit ab. Sie betrachteten ihn als eine Art schadlosen Geistesgestörten, dessen Minderwertigkeit einzig durch seine Freigebigkeit in jeder Art von Getränken quitt und wettgemacht werden konnte.'

<sup>78</sup> Hermann, 'Vom gesicherten und ungesicherten Leben', pp. 6/7.



themselves and their position in the world. They are the elements the State rests upon. From the vantagepoint of the 'unsecured life', by contrast, the State must always appear as 'retardierendes Moment'.<sup>79</sup> 'Das gesicherte Leben findet immer seinen Ausgleich mit der Welt, das ungesicherte nie',<sup>80</sup> Hermann concludes.

In a letter to Hermann written in 1915, Georg Simmel, the sociologist of the new metropolis Berlin, embraced this description of a duality in society.<sup>81</sup> It is as true a description of early twentieth century society as it is applicable to the Biedermeier context. Hermann's description of Jason's experience of the city, described in the following chapter of this study, reinforces this point. The alienation from society described here also forms the basis of the popularity of the artist novel of the turn of the century, a genre and a theme typical of Literary Impressionism.<sup>82</sup>

I have established in this chapter that in the construction of *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte*, Hermann has mainly followed the Realist tradition of the novel. In the thematic respect, however, he has reached beyond the limits of nineteenth century Realism. The concerns and realities of the time of writing are detectable in the 'Doppelroman' as are the influences of turn-of-the-century (Impressionist) literature. This integration of traditional and contemporary elements in the Jettchen novels is clearly evident on the thematic level in the representation of Berlin, which will be analysed in detail in the following chapter.

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<sup>79</sup> Hermann, 'Vom gesicherten und ungesicherten Leben', p. 45.

<sup>80</sup> Hermann, 'Vom gesicherten und ungesicherten Leben', p. 28.

<sup>81</sup> Simmel wrote to Hermann: 'Tatsächlich scheint mir der Titel in bedeutsamer Weise eine der Ebenen zu markieren, die man durch die Menschenwelt legen kann, um sie jeweils in zwei Parteien zu sondern.' (Letter dated 28 December 1915, Georg Hermann Collection, part B.)

<sup>82</sup> See Hamann and Hermand, *Impressionismus*, pp. 152-54.



5 An Ambivalent View of Biedermeier Berlin: The Representation of the City in *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte*

The Biedermeier revival at the turn of the century motivated contemporary artists for the first time to depict the remnants of the old parts of Berlin, seen as threatened now with the accelerated development of the modern city. Often, the depiction of these oldest parts of the city took a sentimentalised and inherently anti-modern form. An example is Ernst Fischer-Cörlin's triptych *Am Mühlengraben* from 1880 (ill. VII). The format of the triptych, usually reserved for altar paintings, raises the subject to a sanctified status. The flat treatment of the surface and the brilliant colours, such as the bottle green water, contribute to the trivialising treatment as do the subject elements of the boy fishing and the white doves. Compared with an earlier painting, Albert Schwendys *Blick über den Mühlengraben auf die Schloßkuppel* from 1849 (ill. VIII) and a contemporary photograph of the same scene (ill. IX), it is interesting to note that Fischer-Cörlin ignored the new elements of the city. The dome of the castle, erected in 1853, does not feature in his small-town, backwater scene.

As in Fischer-Cörlin's painting, the nostalgic concentration on the past was in many cases motivated by a rejection of the modern developments of the city. A better past was equated with small-town life, of course, a heavily used topos in German nineteenth century literature in general, - within the Berlin context most notable in Raabe. The elegiac tone of *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte* and the almost exclusive concentration on the middle class and on the oldest nucleus of Berlin, the Königsstadt, have led critics to attribute a similar anti-urban motivation to Hermann's writing and to describe his depiction of Berlin as 'kleinstädtisch'. This view has been extolled by critics from Walter Perl in 1943<sup>1</sup> to Hermann Kähler (1986), who called Hermann the old master of the Berlin novel, but then went on to claim that what he presented was the 'Kleinstadt inmitten der Großstadt: die Gasse, abseits vom Lärm, der idyllische Winkel.'<sup>2</sup> *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte* has been described by Perl and others as having been written 'mit dem negativen Vorzeichen gegenüber der modernen Großstadtentwicklung.'<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Perl, p. 16: 'Berlin zeigt in den Hermann'schen Romanen vielleicht in einem gewissen Gegensatz zur objektiven Historie [...] ein recht kleinstädtisches Bild.'

<sup>2</sup> Kähler, p. 195.

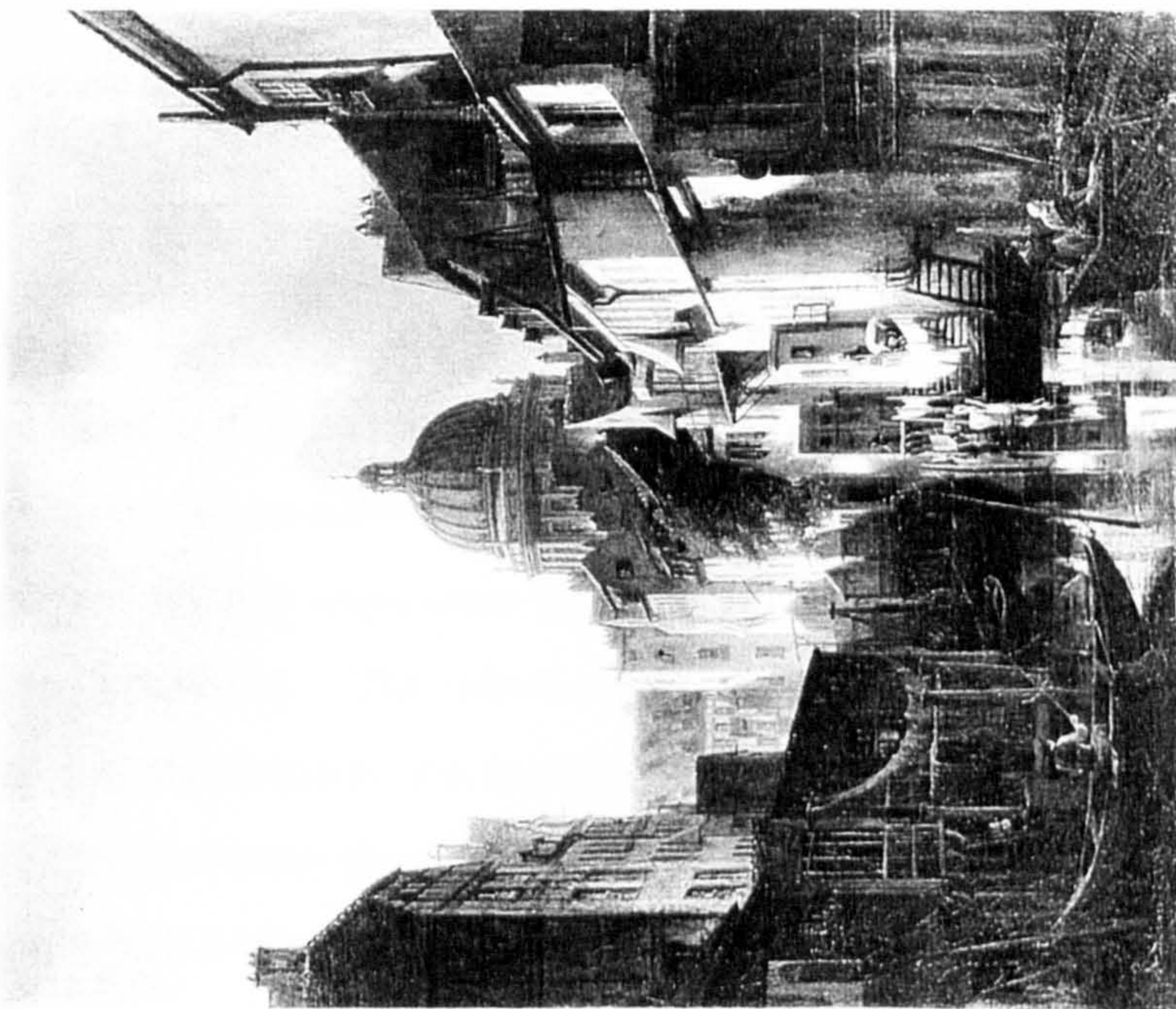
<sup>3</sup> Perl, p. 5. Interestingly, Perl refers to *Kubinke* to support his statement. As I will show in chapter 7 of this thesis, however, *Kubinke* is not characterised by an anti-urban attitude as Perl suggests.



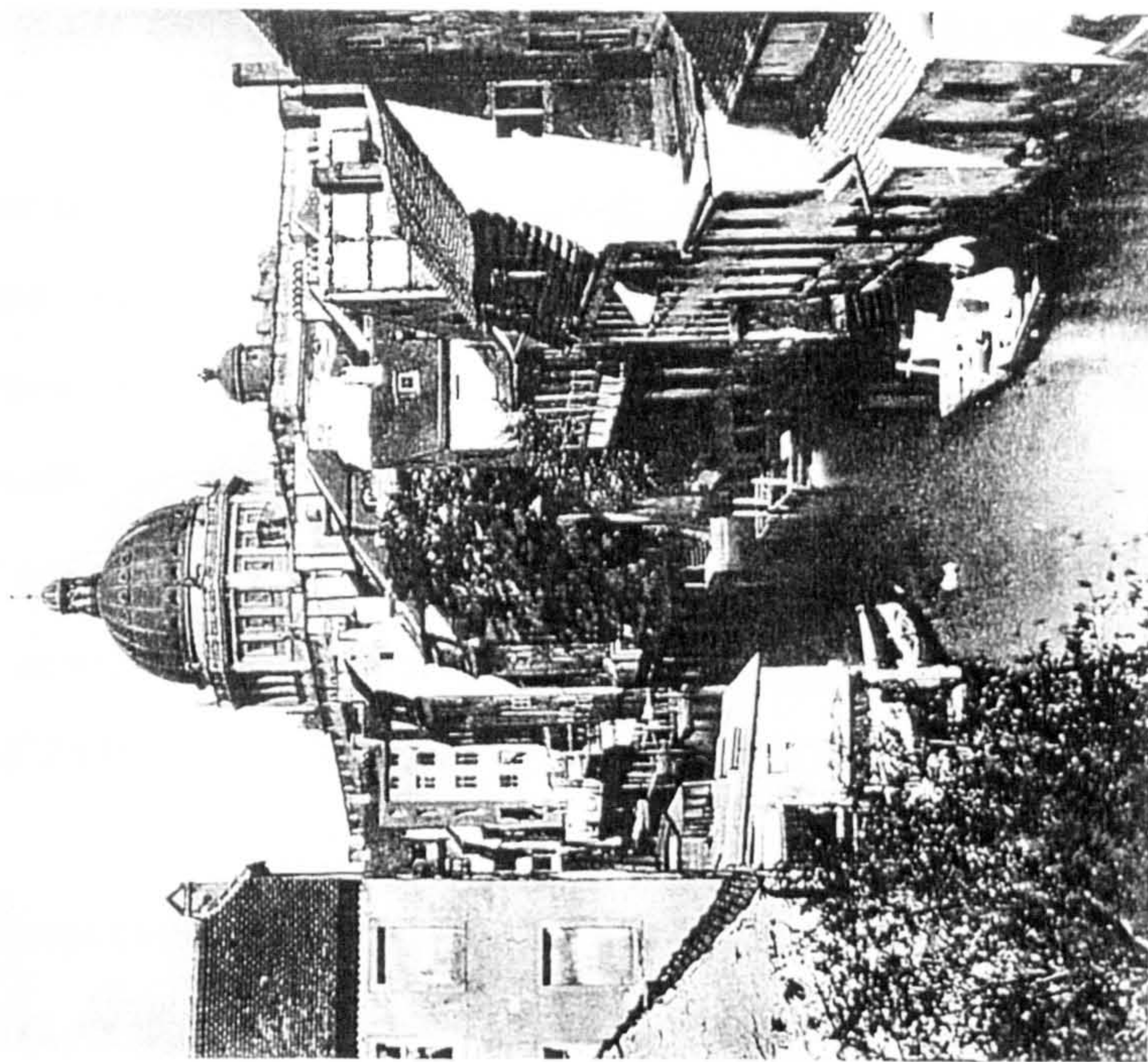


**III. VII:** Ernst A. Fischer-Cörlin, *Am Mühlengraben* (triptych), 1880; oil on canvas; 27 x 47; private collection





**III. VIII:** Albert Schwendy, *Blick über den Mühlengraben auf die Schloßkuppel*, 1849; oil on canvas, 63.4 x 53.2 cm; Stadtmuseum Berlin



**III. IX:** Albert Schwartz, *Der Mühlengraben*, about 1870; photography; Landesarchiv Berlin



In this chapter, I want to investigate to what extent Hermann's Jettchen novels are part of the largely anti-urban and anti-modern Biedermeier revival. I am going to ask how Hermann constructs his representation of Berlin: is it a small-town enclave or does Hermann go beyond the nostalgic depiction of a better past and is his Berlin more complicated? The answer becomes clear in the first part of the 'Doppelroman', *Jettchen Gebert*.<sup>4</sup> It initially describes an idyllic Old Town Berlin, using the requisites and conventions of a genre picture, reinforced by Impressionist elements. But this idyll is then questioned, when tested against the experience of the female protagonist, Jettchen. Going beyond the backward looking idealisation, by complementing traditional city motifs with turn-of-the-century city experience and the conventions of early twentieth century city description, Hermann shows a heterogeneous Berlin as a city in transition. A picture emerges, in which the Biedermeier genre painting is mixed with elements of Fischer-Cörlin on the one hand and with Lesser Ury on the other.

In a retrospective novel such as *Jettchen Gebert*, the interrelationship between old and new ways of perceiving the city is particularly complex and interesting. The reality perceived by the characters and described by the author is that of the Biedermeier, but the mental concept of the author includes the later experience of turn-of-the-century Berlin.

At the same time, I shall show that in *Jettchen Gebert*, the representation of the city of Berlin does not just provide the setting of the novel. In addition to the nostalgic depiction of Biedermeier Berlin, Hermann, like other nineteenth and twentieth century novelists, uses city experience as 'Konzentrat der alltäglichen Lebenswelt bürgerlicher Vergesellschaftung'.<sup>5</sup> The relationship between the characters and the city becomes the key to and the focus of the main issues in the book. It is used as a touchstone for the relationship between the characters and Biedermeier society. The three kinds of social tension which I identified in the previous chapter as central issues in *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte*, are reflected in the city experiences of the characters.<sup>6</sup> In Jettchen's experience of Berlin, limited to the old nucleus of the Königsstadt and Charlottenburg, Hermann demonstrates the ambivalence of her social situation. This is characterised by a

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<sup>4</sup> I shall concentrate in this chapter on *Jettchen Gebert*, as no new aspects of the representation of Berlin appear in *Henriette Jacoby*.

<sup>5</sup> Brüggemann, p. 19.

<sup>6</sup> See pp. 99/100 of this dissertation.



sense of belonging to her family and background, on the one hand, and by the feeling of constraint, where her relationship to Kößling is concerned, on the other. The confrontation between the assimilated Berlin Jews and the East European Jews is represented in terms of a contrast between city and provincial culture.

In the next section I shall describe how the Old Town idyll is set up with the help of an established inventory of genre depictions and other traditional motifs and narrative strategies of city representation.

### 5.1 Berlin as Biedermeier Genre Picture

After a short preface by the author, the first sentence of *Jettchen Gebert* reads: 'Es kann sich wohl kaum noch einer erinnern, wie damals Jettchen Gebert die Königsstraße entlangging.' This is the technique of a storyteller engaging his audience. By evoking a potential common experience, Hermann creates a feeling of integration and identification. Berlin functions as the agent of this identification. Rather than describing the general characteristics of the urban landscape, as he did in *Spielkinder*, he now highlights the specific environment of historical, Biedermeier Berlin.

Details of the city's geography are mentioned but, as no context is given, it remains unclear to the non-Berliner what they refer to. Hermann, for instance, mentions the 'Puppen der Königskolonnen oben auf dem Dach' in the second sentence, without further specifying what kind of 'Puppen' on which roof the reader is meant to imagine. Street names are mentioned, but the streets are not described. A similar device is used in Fontane's novels; the reader's knowledge of the city is assumed. Whereas Fontane uses this knowledge to indicate the social status of his characters by their addresses,<sup>7</sup> Hermann uses it to engage the reader by a process of identification based on a common history.

At the beginning of *Jettchen Gebert*, a scene of total integration and harmony between city and nature is evoked. The atmosphere of a sunny spring morning pervades the city. The streets are lined with budding trees; jackdaws are circling the spire of the

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<sup>7</sup> See Demetz' description of Fontane's literary geography as 'die "Welt der richtigen Adresse"' (Demetz, p. 117).



Parochialkirche; flower sellers all but cover the pavements with their merchandise. Parts of the city are described as part of nature itself, with market stalls likened to mushrooms, for instance (*JG*, p. 7).

In the description of the houses, their unpretentious smallness, simplicity and orderliness are stressed: 'Die schmalen Häuser [...] mit den vielen kleinen blanken Scheiben im weißen Rahmen, mit den Spionen an den Fenstern jedes Stockwerks - sie standen da wie zwei Reihen Grenadiere, die Spalier bildeten und präsentieren.' (*JG*, p. 7). Here, the old topos of the city as the idea of social order is used to support the picture. However, here it does not have the same function as it had in Enlightenment philosophy, where it was connected to the idea of civilisation, encompassing rationalism, freedom and commerce, and progress.<sup>8</sup> Hermann, by contrast, presents a nostalgic look back to a medieval concept of city, in which the protected, secure community is the main principle. Interesting here is the reference to the 'Spion' and to the military. Already Hermann indicates that the ideas of control and constraint are never far from this idea of close-knit community. But this constraint is at first presented as a positive attribute. In this Biedermeier idyll, peace and order are marked by control and the protection of the private.

Jettchen is described by the narrator. Hermann uses the external perspective only: he describes her posture, her walk, her clothing and her looks, but does not give any insights into her thoughts or emotions. Jettchen is thus represented as an integral part of the scene. Strictly conforming to the Biedermeier rules of propriety, Jettchen's walking is described as purposeful, rather than self-indulgent: she is on her way to the market.

The streets of Alt-Berlin are enlivened by carriages and horses with tinkling bells in the braids of their manes. Stock characters from Adolf Glaßbrenner's scenes and Theodor Hosemann's sketches people the streets: there is the 'Lumpenmatz' surrounded by children and the formidable market woman with her brash Berlin humour and dialect. The similarity to Glaßbrenner's texts may be exemplified here by the encounter between Jason and this 'Hökerweib'. Her appearance is as Glaßbrenner stated in the second book of *Berlin wie es ist und trinkt*, entitled *Hökerinnen*, 'eine bewußte Kopie der ländlichen

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<sup>8</sup> See Sylvia Thrupp, 'The City as the Idea of Social Order', in Oscar Handlin and John Burchard (eds.), *The Historian and the City* (Cambridge/Mass., 1966), pp. 121-32.



Bäuerinnen',<sup>9</sup> and her character also conforms to Glaßbrenner's description. He claims: 'Jede Hökerin unserer lieben Residenz is eine personificirte Empfindlichkeit.'<sup>10</sup> Far from being intimidated by her customers or showing deference to their wishes, she vents her anger when Jason lifts one of her fish up by the tail: 'Er hinkebeiniger Lulatsch mit seinen steifen Jaromire an seine uffgeblasenen Kalbsbacken [...] meine Hechte werden nich an'n Schwanz jekriegt. Wie möchte Ihnen denn det gefallen?' (*JG*, pp. 19/20). The risqué connotation of the fish seller's outburst is very reminiscent of Glaßbrenner's own scenes. The use of the Berlin dialect is, both in Glaßbrenner's writing and in this scene from *Jettchen Gebert*, determined less by a desire for a naturalistic portrayal than by the traditional demands of the Realist writer for a comical depiction of the lower classes.

The genre character of this city view is clear. Michael Schmitt points out that Glaßbrenner, writing in the 1830s, was already describing a disappearing reality, concentrating on old structures of city life and a concept of pre-modern urban life.<sup>11</sup> By modelling his depiction on Glaßbrenner's writings, Hermann follows this tendency. Both Glaßbrenner's writings and the street scenes Hermann presents in *Jettchen Gebert*, stand in clear contrast to contemporary sources like Saß' and Dronke's Berlin books from 1846. The social problems of the time are omitted entirely, neither industrialisation nor the growing proletariat are mentioned. Even Glaßbrenner writes of the Königsstraße as a 'schlangenartig sich windenden, von hohen Häusern gebildeten Engpaß', blocked from morning to evening by the 'Gewühl von Menschen' and 'Toben der Wagen'.<sup>12</sup> Instead of the jostling crowds described in these contemporary sources, however, Hermann evokes a tranquil, stable and harmonious social ensemble. Even when poverty and hunger are mentioned, as in the case of a little girl selling flowers, the emphasis of the description is on the 'typical Berlin' quickness of wit and cleverness of the working class child whose directness is not hampered by middle class reserve (see *JG*, p. 17). The function of this kind of genre representation of the city is clearly not social criticism, but rather entertainment for the reader.

This representation may be compared to a Biedermeier view of Königsstraße, painted by Wilhelm Brücke in 1840 (ill. X). It shows a very similar genre scene to that which

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<sup>9</sup> Adolf Glaßbrenner, *Berlin wie es ißt und trinkt*, book II: *Hökerinnen* (Berlin, 1833), p. 5.

<sup>10</sup> Glaßbrenner, *Berlin*, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Schmitt, *Der rauhe Ton der kleinen Leute. 'Grcße Stadt' und 'Berliner Witz' im Werk Adolf Glaßbrenners* (Frankfurt a.M., Bern, New York, Paris, 1989), pp. 201/02.

<sup>12</sup> Adolf Glaßbrenner, *Schilderungen aus dem Volksleben* (Berlin, 1841), p. 31.



Hermann presents in *Jettchen Gebert*; hawkers stand on the pavements, there is room for chats in the streets. Carriages are to be seen in the street, but none of them moves. It is a tranquil, static depiction of a street scene.

However, Hermann did not simply convert Biedermeier paintings into text.<sup>13</sup> This is very clear in relation to another element in these paintings. Brücke's Königsstraße view is in fact rather untypical for the period. The Berlin architectural painters of the 1830s and 40s, such as Brücke and Eduard Gaertner, mostly depicted the representative aspect of the residence town. King Friedrich Wilhelm I being their most important buyer, they concentrated on the celebration of new public buildings, the width of the streets, the size and details of the new houses. A typical example is Brücke's *Ansicht auf das Zeughaus* from 1842 (ill. XI). The painting shows Karl Friedrich Schinkel's Neue Wache, completed in 1818, and Christian Daniel Rauch's statues of the generals Bülow and Scharnhorst, erected in 1822. In the background, Brücke has even included sculptures, which at the time of painting, existed only as designs and were not to be installed until the mid-1850s.<sup>14</sup> This underlines the fact that a wish to record the present and pride in the modern, not a preservation of the old aspects of town, were the driving forces behind these Berlin Biedermeier paintings.

By contrast, in *Jettchen Gebert*, no representative buildings are described or even mentioned. This is an obvious and intentional omission, reminiscent of Fischer-Cörlin's Mühlengraben painting. Hermann presents us with a nostalgic look back to a common past in an identifiable space. Old Berlin is depicted as an idyll, not only in the dictionary sense of 'tranquil happiness', but also as it is defined by Jens Tismar: as a refuge, a kind of utopia projected into the past, as 'Wunschbild von einem in sich ruhenden, ungefährdeten Dasein, das in eingestandener Selbstbeschränkung sich von den Sensationen der sozialen und politischen Veränderung fernhält.'<sup>15</sup>

The idyllic representation is supported by the use of Impressionist techniques. A premium is put on the reflection of sensory experiences. Colours and forms at times

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<sup>13</sup> See the suggestion made by Perl (Perl, pp. 38/39). He refers to the fact that the Biedermeier genre painters represented empty and quiet streets for aesthetic reasons. However, the art historian Hermann is not likely to have ignored this fact and to have uncritically followed the pictorial representations.

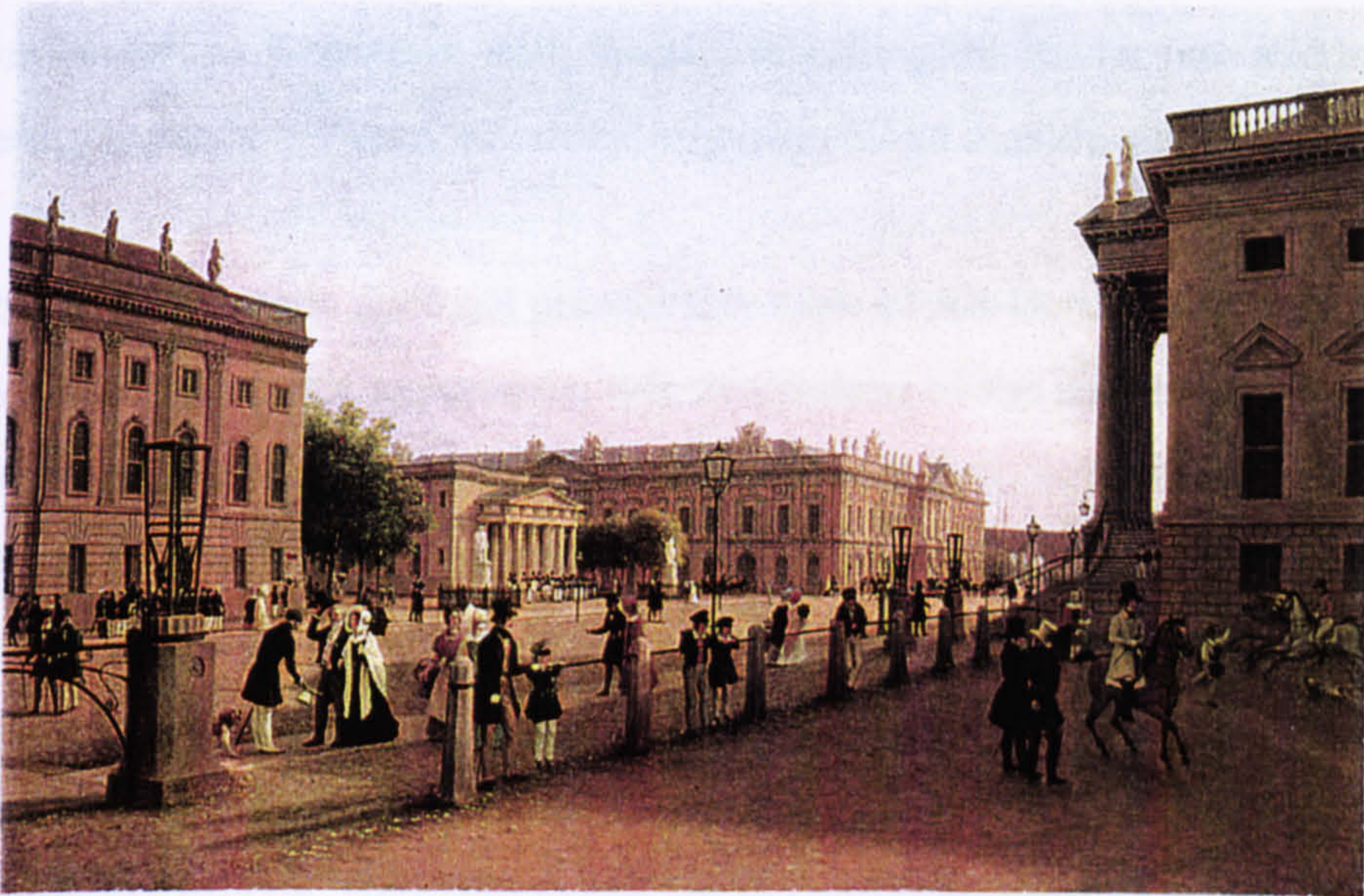
<sup>14</sup> See Sybille Gramlich, 'Königliches Spree-Athen. Berlin im Biedermeier', in *Stadtbilder. Berlin in der Malerei vom 17. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*, exhibition catalogue, Berlin Museum (Berlin, 1987), pp. 95-172 (p. 131).

<sup>15</sup> Jens Tismar, *Gestörte Idyllen. Über Jean Paul, Adalbert Stifter, Robert Walser and Thomas Bernhard* (München, 1973), pp. 7/8.





III. X: Wilhelm Brücke, *Ansicht auf den ehemaligen berlinischen Rathausturm*, 1840; oil on canvas; 48.5 x 55 cm; Stadtmuseum Berlin



III. XI: Wilhelm Brücke, *Ansicht auf das Zeughaus zu Berlin*, 1842; oil on canvas; 70.7 x 106; Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum, Hannover



take precedence over objects and much importance is accorded to nuances in descriptions. A pronounced pictorialism, evident for instance in the description of flowers as 'Blütentupfen' (*JG*, p. 7) or 'ein Meer von Farbe' (*JG*, p. 18), reinforces the effect of the Impressionist techniques. The evocation of atmosphere also contributes to the sensual depiction of the city environment. The description of Kößling's and Jason's view from the Lange Brücke on their evening walk may serve as an example here:

Der Mond schob, sich nähernd und weichend, sein glitzerndes Abbild über die Wasserfläche, während er selbst oben, ganz oben, rechts von ihnen, klein in der wolkenlosen Himmelsluft stand, gerade über dem phantastisch versilberten Giebel der Schloßapotheke.[...] Dort drüben auf dem hellen, menschenleeren Schloßplatz brannten ganz unnötig die roten, zuckenden Flammen des Gaskandelabers. Vom Mühlenwehr herauf kam das Rauschen zu den beiden gurgelnd und brausend durch die stille Nacht. Der Stromlauf lag vor ihnen in einer grünen, hellen Dämmerung, und wie Träume zitternd und fein spannen sich Brücken darüber. (*JG*, pp. 94/95)

Similarly atmospheric depictions of the city recur throughout *Jettchen Gebert*. Sometimes, the city is described as reinforcing or exemplifying a particular mood of one of the protagonists,<sup>16</sup> and at other times the influence works the other way: the city environment is shown to evoke the protagonist's mood.<sup>17</sup> But always the protagonists are described in harmony with their environment. The city view is no longer used, as in *Spielkinder*, as a contrast, with the aim of jolting the reader into sudden recognition of the discrepancy between individual experience and outside environment.<sup>18</sup>

However, Hermann does not present this view of Alt-Berlin as an unquestioned idyll. In respect to Jettchen's experience, this description of the nucleus of Berlin looking like a genre picture not only engenders a sense of belonging, but also imposes constraints. The elements of social order and control, mentioned earlier, gain importance in the course of the novel and find expression in a number of established narrative conventions. The closed, not the open space primarily characterises the fictional space of the novel. The marked prevalence of interior scenes mirrors the Biedermeier withdrawal into the family, the private. Hermann expresses the ambiguity of this withdrawal for instance in Jettchen's attitude to her bedroom: to her, it is refuge and prison in one.

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<sup>16</sup> See *JG*, p. 279. Kößling's dejection and his loss of hope are mirrored in the fall of dusk: 'Langsam breitete sich die beginnende Dunkelheit schwül und trübe über die Dächer und löschte die Fernen.'

<sup>17</sup> See for example Jason's remark about Kößling's room: 'Mit dem Blick ins Grüne kann man gut arbeiten. Das ist einem, als ob die Gedanken aus den Bäumen kommen oder vom Himmel herunter.' (*JG*, p. 211)

<sup>18</sup> See pp. 77/78 of this dissertation.



## 5.2 Jettchen's Experience of Biedermeier Berlin: Questioning the Idyll

The two motifs that Hermann most uses to express his ambivalent attitude to the Biedermeier idyll of Old Berlin are the window view and the walk through the city. These will be explored in some detail in the following paragraphs.

The window motif was popular already in nineteenth century painting and literature, as it underlined the relationship between the home and the 'outside world', between the private and the public. As I shall show below, Hermann uses it with various intentions, ranging from the merely decorative to the symbolic.

A technique popular in the Biedermeier period was to frame a portrait by a door- or a window frame and thus to transform it into a picturesque view. Hermann follows this tradition when he describes Jettchen during the first dinner party: 'Jettchen stand dabei in der Fensternische, hoch, aufrecht, stand mit dem hellen Kleid gegen die weiße Füllung gelehnt, hatte die vollen, bloßen, rosigen Arme leicht gehoben und hinter den Kopf gelegt.' (*JG*, p. 65) Here, the purely aesthetic aspect of the scene is emphasised.

Even more typical for the Biedermeier tradition of the window motif is the description of Jettchen, framed by the window in the rented summer flat in Charlottenburg, engaged in needlework (see p. 167). The Biedermeier connection is made explicit when the arriving Kößling remarks: 'Sie stehen da in einem so hübschen Rahmen von Flieder und Goldregen, Fräulein Jettchen; wir haben zu Hause ein Bild von einem Mädchen, das am Fenster steht und einen Vogel füttert, gerade so sehen Sie da aus.' (*JG*, p. 168) The Biedermeier 'Lackbild' depiction is perfect when Kößling's picturesque view of Jettchen through the window is complemented by an equally picturesque view she gets of him out of the window. Lifting up a pink glass bead in precisely the moment when Kößling arrives, she sees him not through the pink glass - that really would have been too much - but still 'an dem rosigen Glasstückchen vorüber' (*JG*, p. 168).

This scene exemplifies a technique that Hermann uses throughout the novel: he gives an idealised description suffused with nostalgic atmosphere. By overstating the idyllic aspect and turning it into the sentimental, however, Hermann gives at the same time a



gently ironical interpretation of the scene. This mirrors his attitude stated in the introductory essay to his Biedermeier anthology: 'Überhaupt können wir uns doch nicht ganz verhehlen, daß bei unserer Vorliebe für das Biedermeier eine Sentimentalität mitspricht. Ebenso wie ein ganz geheimer, leicht spöttelnder Unterton von Belustigung [...] mit dabei ist.'<sup>19</sup>

In the descriptions of Jettchen's views from her window in Berlin which I shall describe below, the ambivalence in Hermann's view of the Biedermeier period is not only that of sentimentality and mockery. The view from the window is here used to emphasise the double-faced nature of the family-oriented Biedermeier middle class society.

Jettchen's window does not face the street, the outside world; instead it looks onto an idyllic courtyard, which, with its smells of the nut tree and its quiet, takes on the function of a *hortus conclusus* for Jettchen. However, the narrowness of the courtyard is mentioned already in its very first description (*JG*, p. 26). The double function of refuge and constraint is established from the beginning.

Shortly after Hermann's first description of the room and the courtyard, he has Jettchen sit down in her room by the open window. 'Die Mullgardinen wehten und bauschten sich leise', the smell of the tree, the utter quiet of the scene complete the atmosphere (*JG*, p. 33). But: 'Jettchen war unmutig', and she does not look out of her window. Again the positive nostalgic picture is complemented by its negative side. Hermann indicates Jettchen's sense of isolation in her narrow confines: 'Sie fühlte etwas wie Verlassenheit, wie Unzufriedenheit, fühlte eine Einsamkeit und Fremdheit zu Haus und Menschen, mit denen sie nun schon über zwei Jahrzehnte hier verbunden war. [...] Nichts im Zimmer schien ihr freundlich gesinnt.' (*JG*, pp. 33/34)

In this instance, the use of the window motif is reminiscent of that in Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1857). Jettchen's feelings are similar to those of the dissatisfied Emma Bovary in Tostes. Finding that her marriage does not accord her the feelings of romantic love or passion that she was expecting, Emma experiences her home more and more as a prison. Especially after having tasted the atmosphere of romance at a ball in a

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<sup>19</sup> Hermann, *Biedermeier*, p. 8.



neighbouring chateau, the feeling of longing for another, more exciting, life is enhanced. The view from the window symbolises Emma's longing:

The night was dark. A few drops of rain were falling. She inhaled the damp air that felt so cool upon her eyelids. The music from the ball was still buzzing in her ears, and she made an effort to keep herself awake, so as to prolong the illusion of this world of luxury which she was so soon to relinquish.<sup>20</sup>

From her window, Emma watches the ever-repeating routine of the village, with growing feelings of boredom and with the increasing sense of a wasted life.<sup>21</sup> Flaubert and Hermann describe their heroines' resentment against their immediate environments in similar terms: as a discontent caused by the protagonists' feelings that their true place is elsewhere.

After Jettchen falls in love with Kößling, the view out of the window is used as an expression of Jettchen's longing for him (see *JG*, pp. 88, 132, 136) and even as a point of contact between the lovers. At the same time as Jettchen gazes at the stars from her window in Charlottenburg (*JG*, p. 148), Kößling is also looking up at the sky, thinking of his hopes and wishes for their future (*JG*, p. 152).<sup>22</sup>

The symbolic quality of the closed window is nowhere made clearer than when the narrow-minded Aunt Hannchen and the liberal Uncle Jason quarrel about whether Jettchen's window should be shut or kept open. The closed window, which keeps Jettchen not only from Kößling, but also from contact and interaction with society more generally, stresses the limits of her autonomous action and her dependency on her family. In their research into the use of the window motif in nineteenth century literature, Horst and Ingrid Daemmrich conclude: 'Das aufkommende Fenstermotiv unterstreicht [die] Absonderung der Menschen.'<sup>23</sup> They connect the window motif to the experience of isolation, breakdown of autonomous action and to growing alienation. This is precisely the way in which Hermann uses the motif here. Entirely in keeping

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<sup>20</sup> Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary* [1857], transl. and with an introduction by Geoffrey Wall (Harmondsworth, 1992), p. 42.

<sup>21</sup> See Flaubert, pp. 50/51.

<sup>22</sup> This theme is taken up and developed in romantic detail in the film version of the operetta *Jettchen Gebert* (see Ralf Roland, 'Filmsynopsis: "Jettchen Gebert"', typescript, 20 pages, dated 1935, Georg Hermann Collection, section XII).

<sup>23</sup> Horst and Ingrid Daemmrich, *Wiederholte Spiegelungen. Themen und Motive in der Literatur* (Bern, München, 1978), p. 101.



with this interpretation, Jettchen ceases to look out of her window during the last phase of the preparations for her wedding.

The same duality that Hermann expresses in his use of the window motif, the ambivalence of belonging and constraint, is also expressed in the descriptions of Jettchen's walks through Old Berlin. On her second walk, accompanied by Kößling, the idea of social constraint becomes especially clear.

Initially, the scene is set by a genre depiction similar to that which introduced the novel. There are peach blossoms and green leaves, people are sitting on the stone benches in front of their houses, and to top it all: 'rosa Wölkchen' complete the picture (*JG*, p. 99). This is again an idyllic description to the point of parody. But this small-town idyll soon shows its negative side:

Denn dort drüben saß schon [...] die Tante Hannchen auf der Steinbank neben der Haustür. Tante Hannchen hockte auf dem niederen Bänkchen wie die Bulldogge vor dem Schlächterladen. Sie hatte die Beine auf ein gesticktes Fußkissen gestellt, musterte wortlos und aufmerksam die Passanten und glubschte giftig in den schönen Frühlingsnachmittag hinein. (*JG*, p. 106)

The aunt sees Jettchen with Kößling. Moral outrage ensues as a result of which Jettchen's isolation is reinforced and her family's plot to marry her to the Jacoby cousin is hatched. The stone benches, essential requisites of the genre scene, have turned into a source of control.

This incident gives the depiction of the old town community a different tone. The description of the market which follows (*JG*, pp. 115/16), emphasises the sense of foreboding that the encounter with Hannchen has initiated and prepares for the barbaric behaviour of Hannchen and the rest of the family towards Kößling and Jettchen.

This description of the market deviates starkly from the typical nineteenth century motif of the market as 'ein treues Abbild des ewig wechselnden Lebens'<sup>24</sup> as it is used for instance in E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Des Vetters Eckfenster* (1822). Hermann does not use a genre depiction here; he represents no types. In fact, he does not show any interest in the individual shoppers peopling the scene at all. Nor does he attempt a social or moral

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<sup>24</sup> E.T.A. Hoffmann, *Des Vetters Eckfenster*, ed. by Gerard Kozierek (Stuttgart, 1993), p. 37.



interpretation of the scene. The description of the scene is purely sensual. The reader is presented only with an amorphous and anonymous mass put together from disjointed elements: 'das Gewühl', 'der Lärm, das Durcheinander von Frauenstimmen und der Staub von den vielen Schuhen und Röcken', 'Menschenstrom', 'Geruch von Blut', 'Klappern der Waagen und Gewichte, [...] Klirren der Geldstücke, [...] Hin und her von Angebot und Nachfrage, all den Witzen und Redensarten', 'das Getön'. About half of the depiction of the market is given over to the description of the meat stands. A scene of horror is presented there, a 'wilde Orgie in Rot'. Amidst bleeding limbs and severed heads, stall holders move like fat white maggots. The noises ('ewig knirschten und klirrten die Beile') complete the atmosphere of horror.

The description of this market scene has several functions in the novel. Hermann shows Kößling's and Jettchen's very different attitudes to the scene and thereby uses it for the characterisations of the two protagonists. Kößling's perspective is that of a detached artist. His alienation from the practical world, which again marks him as an outsider, is contrasted with Jettchen's pragmatism, which grows out of a familiarity with the scene. The contrast between their two perspectives is brought to a point when Kößling comments: 'Auch das ist schön [...] Es ist nicht nur lustig - wie Gläßbrenner meint - , es ist geradezu *schön*, weil es Leben ist, heiß und zuckend' and Jettchen answers: 'Möglich, aber darüber habe ich noch nie nachgedacht. Ich habe immer nur gedacht, wo ich das beste Fleisch herbekomme.' (JG, p. 116)

With Kößling's comment, furthermore, Hermann gives the reader more than an indication of this figure's character. He spells out his own philosophy of art, mirroring opinions he expressed repeatedly in his art criticism. In the essay 'Der tote Naturalismus', for instance, Hermann writes: 'In der bildenden Kunst, das beschwöre ich, dreht es sich immer nur um eins: das ist die Vergegenwärtigung des Lebens, die Stärke des Lebensgefühls, [...] die durch die Kunst [...] andern mitgeteilt wird.'<sup>25</sup> He continues: 'Und genau das gleiche gilt von der Literatur wie von der bildenden Kunst. Alles Große, heute noch Lebende vom Schrifttum [...] wirkt nur durch die ihm innewohnende Lebensfülle!'<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Georg Hermann, 'Der tote Naturalismus', in Hermann, *Vom gesicherten und ungesicherten Leben*, pp. 52-66 (p. 54).

<sup>26</sup> Hermann, 'Der tote Naturalismus', p. 59.



Principally, however, the depiction of the market scene creates a sense of impending disaster. For the greater part of his nostalgic representation of the Biedermeier past, Hermann sees it as appropriate to use nineteenth century Realist conventions, to show a world in which, as in Glaßbrenner's scenes, reality is seen through a 'verschönenden Schleier'.<sup>27</sup> In the market scene, however, Hermann for a short moment, removes the veil in favour of a more direct, lifelike depiction, in order to show the full, brutal force of reality. To create the intended effect, the shock of a brutal reality, he complements the nineteenth century conventions by a more contemporary, Naturalist depiction of the scene.

Jettchen and Kößling walk on through the 'Scheunenviertel', one of the oldest parts of town. In a narrow street, they find people sitting in front of their houses, enjoying the spring day. The smells of leather, cotton, coffee, and even horses and cattle are in the air. The communal aspect of the scene is underlined by the fact that many of the people working in the street or sitting outside their houses know and greet Jettchen. But as they do, they step across the couple's path. Again, the elements of the idyllic genre scene, the narrow rough pavements, the woodcutters working in the street, all these combine to make the communication between Jettchen and Kößling impossible: 'Bei diesem Hinterherspazieren, Nebeneinanderstolpern, bei dem Ausweichen und Ausbiegen war nicht viel an ein zusammenhängendes Geplauder zu denken gewesen.' (JG, p. 117) Furthermore, in contrast to the friendly greetings that Jettchen receives, Kößling, clearly a stranger here, is merely stared at.

The theme of the ambivalence of both belonging and being constrained is here complemented by that of familiarity and strangeness. The contrast between Jettchen's at-homeness in the old part of town and Kößling's unease and unfamiliarity is stressed by the fact that the viewpoint in this scene changes between the narrator's account and Kößling's perspective. Jettchen is so much a part of her surroundings that she does not reflect on them. Hermann uses the city experience here as a touchstone and a symbol for the relationship between Jettchen and Kößling. In a comment made by Jason, the incompatibility of the couple's respective social circles is made explicit: 'Sie gehören nicht ins Bürgertum hinein', he says to Kößling, 'und Jettchen kann man nicht daraus herausreißen, sie hat alle ihre Wurzeln da.' (JG, p. 215)

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<sup>27</sup> Hermann, *Biedermeier*, p. 8.



Significantly, Jettchen's and Kößling's romance takes place in Charlottenburg, outside the city and outside society, as it were. The park of the castle is described as a paradisaical garden and their exit from it is clearly reminiscent of the exit from paradise (see *JG*, p. 195). It is however interesting that Hermann does not locate the romantic climax of the novel in the country, but in the park of Sophie Charlotte's castle, which was a meeting place for the European intelligentsia of her time, a place of culture and refinement. The implication is that Jettchen and Kößling's relationship is possible on the intellectual and cultural level, but impossible socially.

The ambiguity of Jettchen's encounters with the Berlin old town mirrors the ambivalence of her social position. She is part of the community that Old Berlin is presented as and feels secure in it, but, at the same time, the community constitutes a barrier to her autonomy and to the crossing of social strata. In the perspective of Jettchen's experience, Hermann questions his own nostalgic depiction of Biedermeier Berlin as an idyll.

### **5.3 The Biedermeier World Complemented by a Turn-of-the-Century Motif: Jason's Flânerie**

I intend to show in the following paragraphs, how Hermann goes on to open up the representation of Berlin in his novel by juxtaposing with the confined representation of the old town nucleus, a far more modern experience, that of the liberal intellectual Uncle Jason. Jason moves outside the Alt-Berlin nucleus, along the boulevard Unter den Linden. The topos Hermann uses here is that of the individual in the crowd.

The crowd is described at first as an adverse mass against which Jason moves, urgently in search of Kößling. After a while, Jason starts looking around, noticing his environment and gradually relinquishes his aim: 'schlenderte ganz gemächlich und ziellos' (*JG*, p. 262). His mood changes. The exhausted determination with which he set out, gives way to an undefined longing ('unbestimmtes Sehnen') and to a thirst for adventure and conquest. He starts following a woman's flirtatious glances, hoping for an erotic adventure. Following her against the movement of the mass of people who are



leaving the city for a day out, he abandons himself to chance ('ließ er sich gänzlich vom Zufall treiben') and to the temptation of the fleeting encounter.

This is essentially the experience of the flâneur described by Benjamin in his essay on Baudelaire,<sup>28</sup> and indeed, many of Benjamin's notes on the flâneur read like a description of Jason. The flâneur is a relatively wealthy 'Privatier', not 'der Mann der Menge' or 'Passant', but the 'Privatmann, der als solcher schon aus dem Rahmen fällt'<sup>29</sup> in a society which is beginning to be taken over by the 'work-a-day pressure of the punch-clock'.<sup>30</sup> A figure that is often close to that of the dandy and the bohemian, the flâneur seeks enjoyment 'nicht in, sondern an der Gesellschaft'.<sup>31</sup> At times, he escapes from the middle class confines which have turned the home into the 'Futteral des Menschen',<sup>32</sup> to stroll along the city streets, observing, and lets himself succumb to the intoxicating influence of the crowd, while preserving both his anonymity and his separateness. The flâneur, Rob Shields notes, is 'consistently represented as a *native* of the crowded spaces. [...] However, he is not 'at home' [...] the flâneur is a displaced native.'<sup>33</sup> Indeed, in the context of Hermann's theme of the juxtaposition of an old order with a new, it is to be argued that the Berlin that Jason moves in is not his anymore, as he is part of an older Berlin which was suffused by enlightenment thought and culture. Jason, like the figure of the flâneur, stands 'at the margin, of the great city as of the bourgeois class. Neither of them had yet overwhelmed him, in neither of them was he at home'.<sup>34</sup> Benjamin refers to the erotic aspect of flânerie, which Hermann also takes up in his description of Jason's walk along Unter den Linden quoted above: the flâneur, Benjamin writes, is more 'Erotiker' than 'Bürger'.<sup>35</sup>

Hermann's subjective depiction of the city through Jason's individual experience is analogous to the Impressionist approach in the Berlin paintings of Lesser Ury. They both contrast with Hermann's earlier genre description of Alt-Berlin, presented from the external viewpoint of the novel's narrator. A look at Lesser Ury's painting *Leipziger*

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<sup>28</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire', in Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt a.M., 1972 f.), vol. I.2 (1974), pp. 605-53.

<sup>29</sup> Benjamin, 'Über einige Motive', p. 627.

<sup>30</sup> Rob Shields, 'Fancy footwork: Walter Benjamin's notes on flânerie', in Keith Tester (ed.), *The Flâneur* (London, New York 1994), pp. 61-80 (p. 64).

<sup>31</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Der Flâneur', in Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. I.2, pp. 537 - 569 (p. 561).

<sup>32</sup> Benjamin, 'Der Flâneur', p. 549.

<sup>33</sup> Shields, p. 66.

<sup>34</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire*, here quoted by David Frisby, 'The flâneur in social theory', in Tester (ed.), *The Flâneur*, pp. 81-110 (p. 87).

<sup>35</sup> Benjamin, 'Der Flâneur', p. 549.



*Straße* from 1889 illustrates this point (ill. XII). As on Jason's walk, neither buildings nor individual people's occupations are noted. Similarly, Ury shows no interest in topography, not even in the naturalistic reflections of the light. His depiction centres on conveying the atmosphere of the city, the experience of the individual within the city environment. The city view is filtered through the individual's consciousness. The woman's glance out of the picture involves the spectator and invites a flirtation.<sup>36</sup> The atmosphere of adventure, excitement and promise, felt by Jason, is palpable in Ury's painting, too.

Whereas the Old Berlin genre scenes are tranquil and static, with actions limited to those motivated by custom and tradition, in both Hermann's description of Jason's experience and in Ury's painting, the old established characters and their traditional activities have been replaced by chance as the moving force. The fleeting moment is emphasised: the change from one moment to the next. The old town ambivalence of belonging and constraint is contrasted here with the alienating and at the same time liberating experience of the anonymous stroller. However, Ury's city paintings date from the late 1880s and the 1890s. They reflect the experience of a modern metropolitan city. Similarly, Benjamin's flâneur may historically be rooted in the Paris of the 1830s and 1840s, but the flâneur as a literary topos, and flânerie as a narrative strategy in the description of the city of Berlin, do not occur before the turn of the century. They were most notably taken up by Franz Hessel, whose *Spazieren in Berlin* was not published until 1929.<sup>37</sup> Previously, Berlin had been described as either a residence town with a stratified society, in which case the focus was not on the individual's experience in the city, but on social interaction, or, later, as the moloch of Naturalist literature.

The experience of the leisured individual in the city, the happy self-abandon in the crowd, the exhilaration resulting from the abundance and the fleetingness of anonymous encounters spelling promise, are all elements of descriptions of city experience in

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<sup>36</sup> Compare Simmel's description of the body language of flirtation: 'Der Koketterie in ihrer banaleren Erscheinung ist der Blick aus dem Augenwinkel heraus, mit halbabgewandtem Kopfe, charakteristisch. In ihm liegt ein Sich-abwenden, mit dem doch zugleich ein flüchtiges Sich-geben verbunden ist [...]. Dieser Blick kann physiologisch nie länger als wenige Sekunden dauern, so daß in seiner Zuwendung schon seine Wegwendung wie etwas Unvermeidliches präformiert ist. Er hat den Reiz der Heimlichkeit, des Verstohlenen, das nicht auf die Dauer bestehen kann, und in dem sich deshalb das Ja und das Nein untrennbar mischen.' (Georg Simmel, 'Die Koketterie', in Simmel, *Philosophische Kultur. Gesammelte Essays* (Leipzig, 1911), pp. 101-23 (p. 103))

<sup>37</sup> Viktor Auburtin und Siegfried Kracauer, whose texts also date from the late 1920s and early 1930s, must also be mentioned in this context.





III. XII: Lesser Ury, *Leipziger Straße*, 1889; oil on canvas; 107 x 68; Berlinische Galerie, Berlin



sociology and psychology at the turn of the twentieth century. They have been most famously described by the sociologist Simmel, who recognised the promise and sense of adventure inherent in the momentary meeting of strangers as the positive side of the coin of anonymity in metropolitan life.<sup>38</sup>

Hermann's use of the flâneur topos in his Biedermeier novel is interesting. Like the depiction of the market scene, it is an instance in which elements of city representation developed from the experience of the early twentieth century are integrated into the novel in order to critically reflect the representation of Biedermeier Berlin. In the context of the novel's plot and the characters' experiences, Hermann thereby highlights the difference between the male and female radius of action. Jason's active experience and enjoyment of the city outside its old confines parallels his active opposition to social constraints by taking Jettchen's and Kößling's side against his brothers. By contrast, Jettchen is described by Hermann as an integral part of the Alt-Berlin townscape.<sup>39</sup> The fact that she simply operates within the Old Town community without reflecting on her surroundings, mirrors her acquiescence to the rules that society imposes, shown most clearly in her passivity in the face of her family's plans to marry her to the Jacoby cousin Julius.

On the level of the depiction of the city, Hermann stresses the heterogeneity of Biedermeier Berlin. His awareness of the complexity of the time is clearly expressed in his Biedermeier essay, where he describes the years 1815 to 1847 as 'diese zweiunddreißig Jahre, in denen alles sich in stillen Kämpfen formte, in denen Altes und Neues, Vergangenheit und Gegenwart immer wieder gegeneinander stießen und hart miteinander rangen'.<sup>40</sup> This perception of the heterogeneity of the period, most visible in the city of Berlin, is accentuated by the use of a topos that refers to the subsequent development of the expanding metropolis.

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<sup>38</sup> See Georg Simmel, 'Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben' [1903], in Simmel, *Brücke und Tür*, ed. by Michael Landmann and Margarete Susman (Stuttgart, 1957), pp. 227-42; and Simmel, 'Exkurs über den Fremden', in Simmel, *Soziologie. Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung* [1908], ed. by Otthein Rammstedt (Frankfurt a.M., 1992), pp. 764-71. This topic will be taken up again and developed further in chapter 7 of this dissertation.

<sup>39</sup> The impossibility of the concept of the female flâneuse has been pointed out repeatedly in sociological literature, as 'any deviation from a purposive mobility such as shopping, immediately renders a woman suspect - as a loiterer, as unrespectable' (Janet Wolff, 'The artist and the flâneur: Rodin, Rilke and Gwen John in Paris', in Tester (ed.), *The Flâneur*, pp. 111-37 (p. 125). See also Elizabeth Wilson, *The Sphinx in the City* (London, 1991).

<sup>40</sup> Hermann, *Biedermeier*, p. 5.



With Jason's walk along Unter den Linden, Hermann shows the opportunity accorded by more open and modern city environments to experience the exhilarating freedom of the individual in a society that does not constrain by tight social ties. This is where the city culture comes into its own as opposed to the Alt-Berlin nucleus that has so much of the small-town community about it. In Jason, Hermann shows his twentieth century readership the possibility of being both rooted in the culture of the past, and at the same time being part of the new developing metropolis.

I do not wish to overstate the case; *Jettchen Gebert* is not a Modernist novel. Hermann certainly looks back to a more tranquil time with nostalgia. But his depiction of the Biedermeier is not sentimentalising escapism. A pre-urban 'Gemeinschaft', in the sociologist Tönnies' terms, is shown by Hermann in its dialectic character and the look into the past is reflected through the experience of the early twentieth century.

#### 5.4 An Anti-Modern and Anti-Urban Depiction?

Hermann repeatedly deplored Berlin's lack of a sense of history. In *Der kleine Gast* for instance, the artist Lena Block, who propagates Hermann's own ideas, admiringly describes Paris as 'ganz jung und ganz alt zugleich. Während hier in Berlin das Alte mit dem Jungen völlig unverbunden sei, wüchse es dort aus dem gleichen Boden'.<sup>41</sup> A very similar observation can be found in the 1912 essay 'Um Berlin': 'Zwischen dem Alten und dem Neuen besteht keine Harmonie - wie in Paris. Und keine Kunst versteht es, eine Brücke über diesen klaffenden Riß zu schlagen.'<sup>42</sup>

City dwellers' sense of their city's history is, in Hermann's thinking, intimately connected to their awareness of its culture, and, interestingly, to the concept of flânerie.

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<sup>41</sup> Hermann, *Der kleine Gast*, pp. 232-33.

<sup>42</sup> Hermann, 'Um Berlin', p. 1102. Interestingly, in his essay 'Wie ich Berlin wiederfand', written in 1921, seven years after leaving Berlin, Hermann sees a possibility for the new 'Weltstadt' Berlin to incorporate its heritage into a unified development of a modern city. Berlin seems to have achieved in his eyes the combination of old and new, of history and the contemporary: Hermann describes the city as 'ein großes gemeinsames Ganze [sic], [...] [das] sich zu einem neuen amerikanischen Stadttyp entwickeln wird, aber nicht blind amerikanisiert, sondern amerikanisch geworden, ohne die Seele seiner alten Kultur [...] dabei zu verleugnen' (typescript, 6 pages, Georg Hermann Collection, section VII). One further article is interesting in this context. In 'Das große Haus und der neue Laden', written in the 1920s or 30s, Hermann describes Berlin as a fundamentally old city in which the new elements form only a thin facade which does not impinge very much on the lives of its inhabitants: 'Das aber ist Berlin. Eine riesige Sache, gar nicht sehr modern, sogar altmodisch. Und vorn ein Schaufenster aus Glas und Bronze mit einem halben Dutzend Kostümpuppen.' (Typescript, 4 pages, Georg Hermann Collection, section II)



Furthermore, like Benjamin, Hermann sees a causal connection between flânerie and literature. In *Der kleine Gast*, Hermann claims:

Paris ist eine Stadt doch zum Flanieren [...]. Wien ist eine Stadt zum Flanieren; selbst Kopenhagen ist es [...] aber Berlin ist es nicht! Und deshalb hat es auch keine Literatur. Es hat vielleicht den Rhythmus der Arbeit, aber nicht die selbstgewachsene Linie und Lässigkeit und Schönheit für den Nichtstuer. [...] Da drüben und da unten ist eben Kultur ein Kleid, und hier in diesem Kolonialland im besten Fall eine Tätowierung.<sup>43</sup>

In a review of Max Osborn's book *Berlin*, published in 1909, Hermann offers several explanations for the Berliners' underdeveloped interest in the cultural history of their city.<sup>44</sup> He refers to the Berliners' work ethic, which leaves them little time to enjoy their cultural heritage. He also points out that, as a centre of commerce and industry, Berlin has always attracted outsiders. Among a population that to a large extent have immigrated into the city, the development of local pride ('Lokalpatriotismus') has naturally been stunted.

Benjamin follows the same line of argument that Berliners lack a consciousness of 'Heimat'. However, like the cultural critic Mackowsky who was quoted in the previous chapter, Benjamin attributes this to the negative influence of the 'Gründerzeit' culture. In his review of Franz Hessel's *Spazieren in Berlin*, Benjamin claims that flânerie only became possible in Berlin in the 1920s: 'Langsam beginnt [der] problematische Gründerstolz auf die Hauptstadt der Neigung zu Berlin als Heimat Platz zu machen.'<sup>45</sup> This feeling of 'Heimat', of belonging, is essential for the writer who sets out to encapsulate the essence of a city. Benjamin writes here in reference to Hessel, but his description of the author who is best qualified to give a true picture of the city seems to describe Hermann: 'Man meine aber nicht, ein pietätvoll am Musealen haftender Blick sei genug [...]. Nur ein Mann, in dem das Neue sich, wenn auch still, so sehr deutlich ankündigt, kann einen so originalen [...] Blick auf dies [...] Alte tun.'<sup>46</sup>

In *Jettchen Gebert*, Hermann takes just such an 'originalen Blick' when describing Biedermeier Berlin. His stance is not anti-modern: the Jettchen novels are not motivated

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<sup>43</sup> Hermann, *Der kleine Gast*, p. 327.

<sup>44</sup> Georg Hermann, 'Ein neues Buch über Berlin', cutting, no date, Georg Hermann Collection, section VII. Provenance unknown.

<sup>45</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'Die Wiederkehr des Flaneurs', in Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. III, ed. by Hella Tiedemann-Bartels (1972), pp. 194-99.

<sup>46</sup> Benjamin, 'Wiederkehr', p. 197.



by a longing for a better past and a rejection of the present, but rather should be read as interested in bridging between the old and the new. Hermann's intention is to create a link between the city's past and present, and provide a sense of history and identity for the twentieth century Berliner. It was important to him to bring his readers to appreciate the cultural history of their city. That *Jettchen Gebert* was not only intended, but also understood by his readership, to fulfil this function is made clear in Lulu von Strauß u. Thorney's review of the novel. She writes:

Und das ist es, was uns sein Buch bedeutet. Nicht das Biedermeierbuch, das Berlin liest und gelesen haben muß, weil Biedermeiermöbel eben Mode sind, - dafür ist es zu gut und zu fein. Sondern ein schönes Band mehr, das die junge, neuerungssüchtige Zukunft verbindet mit der lieben, alten Vergangenheit.<sup>47</sup>

It is appropriate now to return to considering the description of Hermann's Berlin in *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte* as 'kleinstädtisch'. I have shown in this chapter that Hermann's attitude to the small-town aspects of Old Berlin, with their elements of belonging and constraint, is very ambivalent. His critical attitude to small-town life is also evident in the fact that he treats one of the central themes of the novel, the contrast between Western and Eastern Jews, almost entirely in terms of a confrontation between city and small-town (rather than rural) life. Again, the city experience and the author's description of the characters' relationships to the city are used as a touchstone for characters and relationships.

The Geberts are rooted in Berlin. This is, in the case of the old Uncle Eli, almost to be taken literally. Several times, he is pictured as a static, integrated element of the townscape, standing for hours on end in the same spot in the street, watching the horses of the post carriages go by. At another moment, Eli and Minchen are described as 'throning' at the open window of their house, surveying the street. The Geberts are furthermore connoisseurs of Berlin high culture. Before their connection to the Jacoby family, they would hold musical soirées, to which the musicians of the opera came (*JG*, p. 86), and artists like Glaßbrenner, Angeli and Rellstab visited (*JG*, p. 45). Jason used to be acquainted with Rahel Varnhagen (*HJ*, p. 212) and in his conversation, books, exhibitions, paintings, prints and china take an important place. His brothers also talk about the cultural events of the city, but their treatment is far more superficial: Salomon is amazed by the fact that the violinist Boucher can play while holding his instrument on

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<sup>47</sup> Strauß und Thorney, p. 102.



his back (*JG*, p. 47) and Ferdinand praises the theatre in Steglitz: 'da könne man wenigstens ruhig rauchen' (*JG*, p. 59). For these Gebert brothers who serve Hermann to show the negative influence of the philistine Jacoby family, culture only has a meaning as superficial diversion. The sensational and the mentally unchallenging have replaced true culture. While at least Salomon shows some regret about the loss of cultural activity that the Jacoby influence has brought about (see *JG*, p. 86), the Jacoby wives, Rikchen and Hannchen, have no connection to the city's high culture at all. Their perception of Berlin is filtered through what is considered 'bon ton' in society. This shallowness exposes them as essentially unconnected to the core of the city. Not only in cultural terms, but also in terms of their experience of city life, this shallow unconnectedness characterises them.

A key scene at the beginning of the novel shows Salomon and Rikchen, leaning out of their windows, watching the street. They present a picture of Biedermeier comfort, characterised by the conjugal 'unity' in the own home and their safe distance from the street. This distance and lack of direct encounter with the city reality is further accentuated by the use of the 'Spion'. Klaus Scherpe has stressed the function of the 'Spion', which replaces direct perception by a 'Reflexion des "zweiten Blicks" [...] als optischer Vermittler zwischen dem kleinbürgerlichen Interieur und Handlungsraum und der großstädtischen Außenwelt der Straßenszene'.<sup>48</sup> Scherpe gives an example from Fontane's *Stine* and comments:

Die im Außenspiegel gebrochene Wahrnehmung ist im Fontane-Roman noch kein Anlaß für die ästhetischen Phantasmagorien eines in Stücke zerbrochenen Menschenbildes. Im Gegenteil, das optische Gerät bestärkt die joviale Menschlichkeit des Romans, indem es die großstädtische Außenwelt auf Distanz hält bzw. als 'hübschen' Bildeindruck integriert.

The same function is fulfilled in Hermann's *Jettchen Gebert*. The game that Salomon and Rikchen play, further underlines the distanced relationship these two Biedermeier characters have to the city. In a reduced version of the situation that E.T.A. Hoffmann presents in *Des Vetters Eckfenster*, they guess the professions of the passers-by, thereby fictionalising them to a certain extent and precluding true encounters.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Klaus R. Scherpe, 'Nonstop nach Nowhere City? Wandlungen der Symbolisierung, Wahrnehmung und Semiotik der Stadt in der Literatur der Moderne', in Scherpe (ed.), *Die Unwirklichkeit der Städte*, pp. 129-52; this and the following quotation: p. 139.

<sup>49</sup> See Benjamin's description of Hoffmann's *Des Vetters Eckfenster* as typically Biedermeier in expressing 'Freude an lebenden Bildern' (Benjamin, 'Über einige Motive', p. 629).



Julius Jacoby, the cousin from the provinces, encounters the city from the perspective of the tourist only. The superficiality of his city encounters is even more pronounced than that of the Gebert brothers. Unable to understand the originality and creativity of true art, he can only be impressed by the sheer cost and dazzle of conspicuous pomp like the opera's candelabras. Julius understands culture as a commodity, the importance of content has for him been entirely replaced by that of style. The fact, already mentioned in the last chapter, that he buys some of Glaßbrenner's books for the sole reason 'weil alle so viel davon hermachten' (*JG*, p. 241), but is not actually able to understand and enjoy them, is just one indication of this attitude. Julius is the archetypal consumer, reducing art to a fetish, as Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno described in their 'Kulturindustrie' essay: 'Was man den Gebrauchswert in der Rezeption der Kulturgüter nennen könnte, wird durch den Tauschwert ersetzt, anstelle des Genusses tritt Dabeisein und Bescheidwissen, Prestigegewinn anstelle der Kennerschaft.'<sup>50</sup> In Hermann's novel, this superficiality shows not merely an inability to understand the true nature of art, but as the mention of Glaßbrenner supports, it is clearly also an inability to experience and understand the core of the city and its culture which utterly disqualifies him in Hermann's eyes.

The level of understanding that the novel's protagonists show for the city culture is used by Hermann as a measure of their education and even their human value. The incapacity to understand and integrate in the true Berlin way of life is matched, in the case of the Jacobys, by intolerance and insensitivity towards others.

Hermann makes his disdain for the small town even clearer in the explicit contrasting of city and small-town cultures in his characters' conversations. Various aspects are mentioned, and a real discussion of the pros and cons of the city versus the small town takes place:

Kößling recognises the idyllic nature of the small town, but praises Berlin's cultural openness and comes to the conclusion: 'Lieber soll es mir in Berlin schlecht gehen als in Braunschweig gut!' (*JG*, p. 75). He also criticises the fixation with the past and the

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<sup>50</sup> Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, 'Kulturindustrie. Aufklärung als Massenbetrug', in Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente* (Frankfurt a.M., 1969), pp.144-96 (pp. 185/86).



lack of future in the small town (Braunschweig): 'Ein rechter Poetenwinkel. Alles wäre so still und zehre nur von dem Einst.' (JG, p. 174) The intellectual stimulation that Kößling needs as a writer, is not offered in the small-town environment (see JG, p. 174). Jettchen's position is even clearer. She decidedly rejects small-town life: 'Leben möchte' ich nirgends anders als in Berlin - nur nicht in einer kleinen Stadt.' (JG, p. 104)

Jason does not explicitly engage in the discussion, but he clearly embodies the sophisticated, tolerant and culturally interested city person. With his statement 'Ein einziger Lastwagen, der die Scheiben zittern läßt, genügt von je, um mich auf zwei Stunden für jede Tätigkeit unbrauchbar zu machen' (JG, p. 270), he shows himself closely related to the turn-of-the-century 'Neurastheniker' type, i.e. the city dweller whose nerves are under a continually heightened tension due to the rush of stimuli in the modern city.<sup>51</sup> Jason is not only the character in *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte* who most clearly incorporates traits of the modern metropolitan dweller, but he is also used, throughout the 'Doppelroman', as the exponent of Hermann's views. Jason can in many respects be considered the author's *alter ego*. His connectedness to the city thus most prominently expresses Hermann's own positive attitude towards it.

The last doubt is removed by the fact that the adjective 'kleinstädtisch', invariably appearing in connection with the Jacoby family, is used as the ultimate put-down.

Julius is described as 'eine recht klägliche und kleinstädtische Figur' (JG, p. 133); the Jacoby family's conversation is disqualified as 'schnatternde Plattheit, das kleinstädtische Gerätsche' (JG, p. 325); and Pinchen and Rosalie, the cousins from Bentschen appear as 'kleinstädtische Mädchen von altmodischer Häßlichkeit' (JG, p. 352).

In the representation of Berlin in *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte*, Hermann presents a picture of society that is nostalgic, but not without critical overtones. The classification of the image of Berlin in this Biedermeier 'Doppelroman' as anti-modern is therefore unjustified, as is its classification as anti-urban. On the contrary, *Jettchen Geberts*

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<sup>51</sup> In the early twentieth century, neurasthenia was considered a typical affliction of the metropolitan dweller, reflecting the hectic lifestyle, the traffic, the tangle of communication and the rush for material gain. The psychologist Hellpach was probably the most important German disseminator of this equation of the big city environment with an attack on the nervous system of its inhabitants. In his 1902 book *Nervosität und Kultur*, he exposed nervousness as the underlying factor of all city culture. Hellpach specifically identifies the metropolis Berlin as 'die Stätte der ruinierten Nerven' (Hellpach, p. 91). For a discussion of people's readiness to adopt this new term of neurasthenia as based on an underlying scepticism towards the progress of civilisation, see L. Müller, 'Modernität'.



*Geschichte* shows up the strong ties that bind Hermann to Berlin in both its past and present forms. The small town is not presented as a better alternative to the city. Quite the reverse: Uncle Eli's prayer 'Gott soll hüten vor kleinen Städten' (*JG*, p. 355) resounds throughout the Jettchen novels and might stand as their motto.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> As Hermann reveals in his autobiographical story *Die Reise nach Massow* [1916], this prayer originates from a story told by his mother about his grandfather. *Die Reise nach Massow* is interesting, because it reveals that some of Hermann's family background was worked into *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte*. See Hermann, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. V, pp. 228-40.



## 6 Towards the Impressionist City Novel. Formal and Aesthetic Analysis of *Kubinke* (1910)

In *Kubinke*, his third novel, Hermann tells the story of the shy and awkward barber's apprentice Emil Kubinke who comes to Berlin and makes the acquaintance of the three servant girls, Hedwig, Emma and Pauline. Hedwig and Emma, fun-loving and loose-moralled, take him under their wings and introduce him to the metropolitan lifestyle. They each engage in half-hearted and brief affairs with Kubinke, before he finds true love with Pauline. However, the lovers' happiness is disturbed when both Hedwig and Emma blame their unwanted pregnancies on Kubinke and take him to court. Knowing himself to be innocent, Kubinke underestimates the need to defend himself and when he is convicted to pay for their support, hangs himself out of shame.

*Kubinke* was published in 1910, two years after *Henriette Jacoby*, the second part of the Jettchen Gebert novels. There are common elements to *Kubinke* and *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte* which show a continuity in Hermann's writing. Hermann's interest in a detailed, atmospheric anchoring of the story in local reality is again palpable, even if the milieu and time chosen in *Kubinke* are very different from that of the Biedermeier 'Doppelroman'. Everyday occurrences are again given a deeper meaning by being represented as agents of destiny, leading the passive main character through the story. Thus, April 1st, the day on which the plot begins, is characterised as 'ein Schicksalstag [...], ein Tag, der Fäden knüpft und löst, Menschen bindet und trennt',<sup>1</sup> and it is destiny's hand which makes the hero wake up in time to go to the rendezvous with Emma which leads to Kubinke's brief affair with her. As in the previous novel, the changing seasons support the sense of the natural inevitability of the main character's fate.<sup>2</sup> A strong sense of 'Es kam wie es kommen mußte', the leitmotif of *Jettchen*

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<sup>1</sup> Georg Hermann, *Kubinke* (Berlin, 1951), p. 63. Further references to *Kubinke* in this and the following chapter are to this edition and appear in the text.

<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, these elements were singled out as characteristic of Hermann's writing in the parody that Robert Neumann wrote in 1927 on Hermann's novels and which it is worth quoting here in full: 'Vielleicht wäre alles anders gekommen, wenn damals die schöne Modistin von der Oranienstraße das Geld der kranken Rieke gegeben hätte, statt damit nach Partenkirchen zu fahren. Aber so kam es, wie es kommen mußte, und als sie mit einem kleinen Zucken im Herzen auf ihren geborgten Skiern den Abhang hinunterglitt, da hätte auch der Krämer Senneke von Ecke Hallesches Tor, bei dem sie abends die Wurststulle holte, sie nicht erkannt. So schmerzlich bleich verklärt war sie. Und da ahnte keiner, daß es nur der losgegangene Knopf der Reformhose war, der ihr Angst machte. Doch dann geschah es eben, wie es eben geschah, und wer weiß, wie es noch gekommen wäre, wenn ihr nicht der Mann von der Schutzhauskantine mit dem dollen süddeutschen Namen in seiner ulkigen Sprache zugerufen hätte, sie solle sich vorsehen. Aber da war es zu spät, und da war nichts mehr zu ändern. Sie stürzte, und wäre sie nicht gestürzt, so wäre das sehr verwunderlich gewesen. Es wurde Tag und es wurde Nacht und es wurde wieder Tag, die Trambahnen bimmelten, und dann wurde es Sommer und wieder Winter, und nur



*Geberts Geschichte*, also pervades *Kubinke*. Finally, references to mythology are used in *Kubinke* to elevate the plot onto a more general level. Emil Kubinke is likened to Paris but, in keeping with his lowly status, is given an orange rather than a golden ball. The three servant girls Kubinke must choose between are compared to the three graces (p. 63).

Even more clearly, however, the novel reveals itself as another new departure in Hermann's writing. One contemporary reviewer went as far as to state: 'Wer in *Kubinke* eine Verwandtschaft mit dem Jettchen-Gebert-Kreise sucht, auch nur den Schimmer einer geistigen Verwandtschaft zu finden hofft, wird enttäuscht sein.'<sup>3</sup> This reviewer saw *Kubinke* in the line of development that started with *Spielkinder*. Indeed, with *Kubinke*, Hermann returns to the depiction of contemporary Berlin (the novel is set in 1908). However, the differences in tone, style and construction between *Spielkinder* and *Kubinke* are striking.

My aim in this chapter is to reassess *Kubinke*. I will show that some misconceptions about it stem from the fact that its critics have started out by expecting a Naturalist novel - and have been disappointed. I shall follow one particular critic's approach, that of Marilyn S. Fries, who compares *Kubinke* with another Berlin novel set in the milieu of maid servants, Clara Viebig's *Das tägliche Brot* (1901). I will first contrast the narrative situation and characterisation in these two novels, and then go on to show, on the basis of a stylistic analysis of selected passages, that the values of Hermann's novel become apparent only when seen in a different aesthetic context from Viebig's Naturalist *Das tägliche Brot*, namely the context of Impressionism. The importance of the Impressionist element of *Kubinke* will then be corroborated by a comparison of Hermann's text with a painting by the Berlin Impressionist painter Max Liebermann. Further comparisons of Hermann's and Liebermann's aesthetic writings confirm the proximity of their stylistic approaches. A structural analysis of *Kubinke*, in which the position of this novel between the hero-centred 'Bildungsroman' and the modern city novel is determined, will conclude this chapter.

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manchmal an klaren Abenden konnte man Auguste noch begegnen, wie sie zur Station Oranienstraße der Ringbahn hinaufstieg, aufrecht, doch mit der einsamen Bleichheit der Erinnerung auf den Zügen.' (Robert Neumann, 'Der Sturz - Nach Georg Hermann', in Neumann, *Parodien I. Mit fremden Federn* (Reinbek, 1978), p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Dr. E.A., 'Georg Hermann: "Kubinke"', *Die Gegenwart*, 44 (1910), 875-76 (p. 875).



*Kubinke* has had a mixed critical reception. In the year of its publication, it was celebrated by Theodor Heuß for Hermann's sensitive use of language, tone and style,<sup>4</sup> but it was criticised by others mainly for what was seen as a callous depiction of servant girls. Marilyn S. Fries included a chapter on Hermann's *Kubinke* in her 1980 study on *The Changing Consciousness of Reality. The Image of Berlin in Selected German Novels from Raabe to Döblin*. In this, the novel is presented as a formulaic 'Heimatroman'. Fries dismisses the 'narrow provincialism of Hermann's perspective' as 'biased and shallow'<sup>5</sup> and criticises the 'stereotypical presentation of characters' as well as the 'somewhat artificial background' of the novel.<sup>6</sup> Her inquiry is led by 'the question of why this novel gives a sense of superficiality; what qualities are lacking which prohibit profundity of statement or depth of character'.<sup>7</sup> Fries bases her negative judgement of *Kubinke* on a comparison of the novel with Viebig's *Das tägliche Brot*, written ten years earlier. In both, the main characters have come from the country to the city - a device which makes the description of the city, as a contrasting world to the provincial home, more poignant. However, I shall argue that the differences between the two novels' styles and intentions are even more striking than their similarities.

*Das tägliche Brot* can largely be described in terms of Naturalist aesthetics. Indeed, the novel exemplifies Gero von Wilpert's description of the typical Naturalist novel as a psychological or socio-critical city novel concerned with recording the new social structures in minute descriptions of conditions.<sup>8</sup> Viebig in particular aims to show the 'sadness' of life in an atmosphere of spiritual and material poverty such as was endured by the poor in the rapidly growing metropolis.<sup>9</sup> She depicts this through the story of Mine, a servant girl from the country. Representative of the proletariat, Mine encounters the exploitation, poverty and oppression exerted by that urban capitalist society, exemplified in the metropolis.<sup>10</sup> Viebig concentrates on her central character to the

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<sup>4</sup> See Heuß, 'Berliner Romane: "Kubinke"', *Das literarische Echo*, 13 (1910/11), cols. 711-12.

<sup>5</sup> Marilyn S. Fries, *The Changing Consciousness of Reality. The Image of Berlin in Selected German Novels from Raabe to Döblin* (Bonn, 1980), p.121.

<sup>6</sup> Fries, p. 102.

<sup>7</sup> Fries, p. 103.

<sup>8</sup> See Gero von Wilpert, 'Naturalismus', in Wilpert, *Sachwörterbuch der Literatur* (Stuttgart, 1989), pp. 611-14 (p. 613).

<sup>9</sup> See statement by Viebig herself, quoted in Friedrich Düsel, 'Clara Viebig', *Westermanns Monatshefte*, 128 (July 1920), 541-47 (p. 543): 'Vor allem aber möchte ich zum Ausdruck bringen, wie traurig das Leben im Grunde, in dem sich geistige und leibliche Armut paaren.'

<sup>10</sup> At times, Mine's perceptions of the strange world of the metropolis are rendered in Impressionist plasticity. These passages, however, are sporadic and do not affect the underlying Naturalist intention of the novel. (For a discussion of this partial Impressionism in Viebig, see Hartmut Marhold, *Impressionismus in der deutschen Dichtung* (Frankfurt a.M., 1985), pp. 297-300.)



extent that all other elements of the city world are relegated to the background. Mine, the naive country girl, stands for the natural, humane person, as associated with unspoilt nature. She is shown to be the victim of the unnatural, exploitative world of the big city. The subjective and sympathetic treatment of Mine limits the author's representation of Berlin to its darker side: to the dirty, rotting, overcrowded basement flats and narrow backyards. Viebig in effect maintains the old motif of the opposition of country and city which portrays the city in a negative light.

Fries bases her criticism of *Kubinke* on the assumption that, written at roughly the same time, in the same place and about the same social class, Hermann's novel encompasses the same Naturalist aesthetics as *Das tägliche Brot*. Consequently, Fries judges both novels against the yardstick of Naturalist aesthetics. In view of the social and ethical concerns with the proletariat which were the driving force of the Naturalist credo, she can perceive Hermann's novel only negatively, only in terms of 'lacking qualities'. Fries' categorization of *Kubinke* as a Naturalist work which sets out to 'show the suffocating class structure of the early twentieth century city' and the 'destructiveness of the society in which such characters as Emil Kubinke are forced to exist or die',<sup>11</sup> has been shared by other critics. A similar view was taken by Coler, who claims in the introduction to the 1951 edition of *Kubinke* that Hermann set out to show how Emil Kubinke capitulates before life.<sup>12</sup> In keeping with this interpretation, the city of Berlin in Hermann's novel is seen as a devouring moloch (Coler) or a 'metaphor of destruction' (Fries).

In the following paragraphs, however, I argue that the interpretation of *Kubinke* purely against the background of Naturalist aesthetics cannot lead to a full understanding of the novel. *Kubinke* - and this is what makes the novel so interesting - is a work that occupies an aesthetic space created by overlapping traditions. Passages of critical social comment certainly point to a Naturalist interest in detail and in a truthful depiction of milieu, paired with a socio-political intent. The structural clarity of the novel and the use of the, rather intrusive, omniscient narrator can be considered legacies of the Realist tradition. There are also suggestions of Expressionism in the choice of subject matter (man in mass society) and in the dynamism of certain passages (most strikingly in a turbulent dance scene), as well as in the choice of metaphors describing the city and

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<sup>11</sup> Fries, p. 120.

<sup>12</sup> Coler, 'Vorwort', p. 12.



some of its particularly modern aspects.<sup>13</sup> Most striking, however, are the Impressionist aspects of the novel, and it is on these that I concentrate in the following pages.

### 6.1 A Comparative Analysis of the Narrative Situation and Characterisation in *Kubinke* and Clara Viebig's *Das tägliche Brot*

The treatment of a common social practice, namely the change of name required of a servant girl taking up a new position, serves to introduce the aesthetic and thematic differences between *Kubinke* and Viebig's *Das tägliche Brot*. In *Das tägliche Brot*, the employer is represented as treating the renaming light-heartedly: as a simple expedient to avoid using the servant's actual name which is very similar to her own. However, the description of the renaming incident is immediately followed by a paragraph in which the reader gains an insight into Mine's very different reaction to it: 'Warum war Mine nur so traurig?! Hier würde sie es ja so gut haben. Sie hielt mit Spülen inne, ließ die nassen Hände an der blauen Schürze herunterhängen und stierte vor sich hin. Thräne auf Thräne kollerte über ihre Wangen - nicht einmal ihren Namen sollte sie behalten!'.<sup>14</sup> Viebig portrays the change of name as a crisis of identity and a loss of dignity for the girl. Although the new masters will treat her well, they do not see Mine as a person. They see in her nothing but the function she fulfils, namely that of the servant. Through the employment of the internal perspective and the use of a newcomer to the metropolitan society as a reflector-character, Viebig exposes the cruelty inherent in the thoughtless practice of renaming. This echoes concerns expressed by a number of traditionalist critics of the modern metropolis as it was emerging around the turn of the century.<sup>15</sup> The sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies, although more objective than most contemporary critics of modern metropolitan society, expresses concern about the rational and commercial principles taking over all spheres of life.<sup>16</sup> They lead, in Tönnies' view, to a functionalisation of people and their relationships. In contrast to an older form of communal life, 'Gemeinschaft', where people deal with one another as

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<sup>13</sup> See for instance the description of a railway station: 'Diese breiten Eingänge in das Häusermeer, das die Züge ordentlich in sich einzutrinken schien! Seltsame Türme, mit einem Rätselwort bezeichnet, blockierten diese Rachen, seltsames Geäst von Signalstangen streckte vor ihnen seine langen, schwarzen Arme gen Himmel.' (p. 247).

<sup>14</sup> Clara Viebig, *Das tägliche Brot*, 2 vols. [1901] (Berlin 1903), vol. I, p. 221.

<sup>15</sup> For an account of contemporary German urban criticism, see Andrew Lees, 'Critics of Urban Society in Germany, 1854-1914', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 40 (1979), 61-83.

<sup>16</sup> See Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft. Abhandlung des Communismus und des Socialismus als empirischer Culturformen* (Leipzig, 1887).



individuals, his concept of 'Gesellschaft', of which the modern metropolis is the prime example, is characterised by this functionalisation and reification of relationships.

In Hermann's *Kubinke*, the change of name is dealt with rather differently. Rather than commenting on the depersonalising effect of the practice, which the servant herself might have felt, Hermann mentions the re-naming of the servant girl only in passing:

Und damit verklärten sich Herr Löwenbergs Züge zu heller Freundlichkeit, und er sah das neue Hausmädchen nicht ohne begründetes Wohlgefallen an. 'Wie heißen Sie denn, mein Kind?'

'Ich heiße eigentlich Bertha, aber meine vorige Herrschaft hat mich immer Pauline gerufen.'

'Also, Pauline', sagte Herr Löwenberg, 'nun bringen Sie mal erst mit Ihrem Bräutigam Ihren Korb ins Mädchenzimmer.' (p. 59)

The new master, offered the choice of calling Bertha/Pauline by her real name or by that given to her in her capacity as a servant, decides without hesitation to call her by the servant name although there is no necessity for it whatsoever. This is not commented on further. Hermann only presents us with the dialogue. He treats the scene from a purely external perspective, the girl's reactions are not conveyed. It is up to the readers to evaluate the scene and draw their own conclusions. Hermann makes only subtle reference to Herr Löwenberg's insensitivity by showing his unthinking and unnecessary use of the name Pauline and by having him make wrong assumptions about the girl's relationship with Kubinke who, far from being engaged to her, has only just met her. Hermann's main intent, however, is not critical but humorous.

This impression may be supported by another text of Hermann's, written around 1890, in which a very similar situation is described. In an unpublished manuscript, entitled 'Anna', Hermann introduces a wet-nurse with the following words:

Eigentlich hieß sie Louise Bergemann. Aber als sie in die Familie kam, war schon ein Hausmädchen da, das hieß Anna - nannte sich aber Louise - und wurde deshalb auch Louise genannt. Und damit nun nicht zwei Louisen wären, wurde Louise Bergemann Anna genannt. Von da an hieß sie für uns Anna Bergemann. Als sie aber von uns ging, verheiratete sie sich mit einem gewissen Lackmann - Und nun hieß sie für uns Anna Lackmann. Nicht? Das ist eine höchst verwickelte Geschichte.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Georg Hermann, 'Anna', unpublished manuscript, 6 pages, in a notebook under the title *Skizzen 1889-1890*, Georg Hermann Collection, section XIII.



These extracts are typical of the styles of the two novels. They point to the differences in narrative situation and characterisation as well as in the authors' intentions. The narrative situation in Viebig's novel is essentially figural (or 'personal' in terms of Franz Stanzel's definition).<sup>18</sup> The two servant girls Mine, and to a lesser extent Bertha, are used as reflector characters. Servant life in Berlin is revealed through their eyes and experiences. The reader feels with Mine, whose loneliness and sorrows are depicted in most extensive detail. Viebig thus draws us into her fictional world and achieves a powerful immediacy for her narrative. Hermann, in contrast, denies the reader this access to the servant girls' deepest thoughts and feelings. He only skims the surface of the motivations for their actions. The story of Emil Kubinke's encounters with Emma, Hedwig and Pauline is told, like that of Jettchen Gebert, by the authorial narrator. As in the Jettchen novels, Hermann explicitly refers to his story as artefact: in the first paragraph of the novel, for instance, Hermann asks: 'Und - frage ich -, könnte ich vielleicht einen besseren Tag finden, an dem meine Geschichte anfängt, als den ersten April?' (p. 17). The narrator even addresses the reader directly: sentences start with assertions such as 'Man wird sich vielleicht wundern [...]' (p. 47) or 'Jeder wird mir - denke ich - nun zugeben [...]' (p. 63). In Stanzel's typological cycle, this situation of a narratorial 'I outside the world of characters' takes the most extreme position within the continuum of the authorial narrative situation.<sup>19</sup> As the author-narrator is in absolute control of the material, he can hint at future developments, thus directing the readers' expectations and colouring the reading experience. Before the dance evening that leads to the fatal affair with Emma, for example, Hermann remarks: 'Und wenn das Schicksal es gut mit Emil Kubinke gemeint hätte, so hätte es ihn jetzt schlafen lassen [...]. Und dann wäre es ihm vielleicht zu spät gewesen, noch fortzugehen. Aber das Schicksal meint es eben nicht gut mit Emil Kubinke.' (p. 143)

In contrast to his previous novels where Hermann also uses the authorial narrator, here, the relationship between author and reader remains anonymous and detached. Hermann neither wants to elicit our sympathy for the author/narrator, as was the case in *Spielkinder*, nor does he wish to create a sense of nostalgic complicity as he did in *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte*.

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<sup>18</sup> See Stanzel, *Theorie*, pp. 79/80: 'Die personale Erzählsituation [ist] primär durch die Dominanz einer Reflektorfigur, sekundär einerseits durch das Überwiegen der Innenperspektive, andererseits durch die Nicht-Identität der Seinsbereiche, d.h. Er-Bezug (auf die Reflektorfigur) charakterisiert.'

<sup>19</sup> See Stanzel, *Theorie*, diagram of the typological cycle facing p.1.



The external perspective of the narrator often switches to give way to insights into the thoughts of individual characters, especially those of the barber's apprentice Kubinke. This change of perspective usually highlights the limitations of Kubinke's understanding of the ways of metropolitan life, the futility of his dreams, and the weakness and passivity of his character. His grasp of reality is thus contrasted to the reality that can be perceived as a whole by the narrator.<sup>20</sup> The result for the reading experience is the opposite of that achieved by Viebig. Where the reader of *Das tägliche Brot* feels with Mine and identifies with her troubles, Hermann invites us to look at his characters in a detached way. Kubinke, as Liere puts it, is '[das] Opfer, das der Dichter, das Einverständnis des Lesers voraussetzend, milde belächelt'.<sup>21</sup>

Kubinke is indeed represented as a victim, passive in the face of his destiny. Especially before his engagement to Pauline, he drifts along, forgetting and almost missing dates by oversleeping and yielding to the seductions of the moment, but never strong enough to create opportunities for himself. He is shown to be shy towards the servant girls and naive in the face of the metropolitan way of life. Again and again, Hermann stresses this naiveté of the newcomer who is used by the city girls, made the butt of his colleagues' jokes and finally innocently condemned by a flawed legal system. Like the outsiders in Hermann's previous novels, the hapless Geiger and the indecisive Kößling, Kubinke is a weak character, a loser in the world into which he has been thrown. The attitude of the author/narrator to this weak character, however, has changed. Whereas in Hermann's characterisation of Geiger the sympathetic view predominated, he exposes the weakness of Kubinke's character with some detachment. The sympathy has not disappeared entirely and will recur in all his subsequent novels, as is made clear by the final assessment of Kubinke: 'Er war nicht stark genug, er war nicht roh genug.' (p. 327) However, the sympathy is tempered by a more ironical and detached stance.

To continue the comparison between *Kubinke* and *Das tägliche Brot*, which is to lead us to an appreciation of the different aesthetic concepts behind the two novels, it is useful also to investigate their very different characterisations of the servant girls. Viebig implies clear moral judgements in the presentation of her protagonists. This becomes

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<sup>20</sup> Hermann uses this change of perspective to particularly comical effect in a description of Kubinke's evening stroll with Hedwig (pp.103-17). Whereas Kubinke's expectations and thoughts are romantic, Hedwig's most decidedly are not.

<sup>21</sup> Liere, p. 168.



evident in the juxtaposition of Bertha's ambition and vanity with Mine's contentment and humility.<sup>22</sup> Mine's limited ambition and her contentment are also contrasted with the unrealistic ambitions of her good-for-nothing husband Arthur.

The living and working conditions of Viebig's servant girls are depicted in great detail. A whole range of different relationships between servants and employers is shown. The good-hearted employer features in her novel as well as the stingy and suspicious. Viebig depicts the desperate situation of a servant girl who has to suffer unwelcome advances from her master. The loneliness, hunger and exhaustion of servant girls are vividly presented, and the resulting illness and alcohol addiction highlighted. The novel also gives an insight into the overcrowded job market for servants: Viebig demonstrates the dependence of maids on good references and shows how business was conducted in hiring bureaux. Her descriptions are so detailed and accurate that extracts from the novel were used in 1985 by the Museum für deutsche Volkskunde, Berlin, in the catalogue to its exhibition 'Dienstbare Geister' on the lives and working conditions of urban servants.<sup>23</sup>

In an essay on Clara Viebig, Georg Hermann comments on this attention to detail in her writing. While praising her for her 'masculine'(!) vision which enabled her to see not only details but also the entirety of problems and their interrelationships, he criticises her novels because they 'wirken wie großzügige dichterische Berichte, die ein künstlerisch veranlagter Beamter seiner Behörde einsendet.'<sup>24</sup> The limitation of this way of writing as Hermann sees it, is '[daß] für den feinen Schiller aller Lebensgebrochenheiten und für alle Zweideutigkeiten und für das Lächeln des Humors

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<sup>22</sup> Viebig's morally determined characterisations of Mine and Bertha mirror a duality that is characteristic of the fictional representation of servant girls at the turn of the century. In her study on this subject, Karin Walser shows that two topoi dominated the portraits of servant girls in turn-of-the-century novels, namely the fiction of the servant girl as prostitute and the fiction of female service as sacrifice (see Walser, *Dienstmädchen: Frauenarbeit und Weiblichkeitsbilder um 1900* (Frankfurt a.M., 1985), particularly part II, pp. 57-79). The same observation has been made by Susan Yates who summarises the two prevailing types of servant maids in French literature of the nineteenth century under the headings 'Perle' and 'souillon' (see Yates, *Maid and Mistress. Feminine Solidarity and Class Difference in Five Nineteenth-Century French Texts* (New York, 1991). This basic duality can be found in Viebig's *Das tägliche Brot*. Viebig, however, adds her own emphasis to this dual topos by stressing the attitude displayed by the girls towards their situation. The contrast between the content Mine and the over-ambitious Bertha complements the more traditional contrast outlined in Walser and Yates.

<sup>23</sup> Heidi Müller, *Dienstbare Geister. Leben und Arbeitswelt städtischer Dienstboten* (Berlin 1985), pp. 61, 66, etc.

<sup>24</sup> Georg Hermann, 'Clara Viebig', typescript, 7 pages, no date, Georg Hermann Collection, section IV (p. 4).



kein Raum bleibt.<sup>25</sup> Among her characters, Hermann points out, are 'keine Gestalten, [die] uns haften bleiben, die [...] mit uns leben'; they do not achieve the level of general truth that would make them recognizable in everyday life. He attributes this diminished vividness of characterisation to a lack of sparkle and succinctness. In Hermann's eyes, Viebig's detailed descriptions make for a rather unliterary, pedestrian style of writing: 'Sie läßt die Dinge nicht auffunkeln, sie schildert sie, packt an, erschließt.'<sup>26</sup>

From these remarks we may infer how Hermann's intention differs from that of *Das tägliche Brot*. The difference is exemplified in the treatment of the living and working conditions of the servant girls. Hermann gives us glimpses rather than descriptions of his servant girls' social environment and of their characters. The work they do is hardly described at all. We are informed only in very general terms that Pauline works hard and occasionally we catch a glimpse of Hedwig fetching the paper or of Pauline giving a bath to her employers' child. The relationships between employers and servants are largely represented as good-humoured and flirtatious. Hermann hints at the masters' sexual advances towards their servants, but only to ridicule this behaviour gently as rather hypocritical.<sup>27</sup> The masters' behaviour is exposed but it is meant to be amusing rather than shocking. The emphasis is clearly on a slightly ironical characterisation of the master rather than on the situation that results for the servant girl. Where the feelings of the servant girl are taken into account, she seems to condone the master's flirtatious behaviour:

Und es wäre nun falsch, anzunehmen, daß Hedwig etwa die Scherze des Herrn Markowski übel aufgefaßt hätte. Nein, wenn sie auch verschämt sagte: 'Aber Herr Markowski, lassen Sie doch bitte das', so lag keineswegs ein Widerspruch darin, und man hörte ihrer Stimme den geheimen Stolz an, daß das Schicksal sie und gerade sie mit dem süßen Glück ihrer Liebe gesegnet hätte. (p. 86)

Only the exaggerated and rather sarcastic turn of phrase 'mit dem süßen Glück ihrer Liebe' indicates narrative detachment from Hedwig's interpretation of the situation and thus hints at the author's critical stance.

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<sup>25</sup> This and the following quotation: Hermann, 'Clara Viebig', p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> Hermann, 'Clara Viebig', p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> See Hermann's description of Herrn Markowski: 'Ja, um es gerade heraus zu sagen, Herr Markowski hätte sogar nicht ungern zur Vervollkommnung von Hedwigs Glück das Seinige beigetragen, wenn er nicht ein Mann von strengen, moralischen Grundsätzen gewesen wäre. Und einer seiner ersten Grundsätze, von dem er nie ohne Not, ungern und nur selten abwich, lautete: "Das Haus wenigstens muß rein bleiben; sonst gibt's zum Schluß nur Unannehmlichkeiten." ' (p. 86)



This may be seen as an instance in which Hermann makes 'die Dinge auffunkeln', rather than describing and interpreting them at length. Certainly, the humour which pervades the whole novel and which is created by exaggeration and a convoluted way of expressing simple facts, as in the extract above, by malapropisms (see 'Der Chef ist gegenwärtig nicht momentan', p. 33) and by unexpected and surprising comparisons (see for example the description of the 'hochherrschaftliche Haus' in the opening pages of the novel), lends the novel a playful lightness. However, this humour also hides a lack of sensitivity in the representation of the girl's situation, which betrays an interest in playing down rather than highlighting gender- and class-based problems in the relationship between masters and maids.

It is in this respect that Karin Pauleweit criticises Hermann's ridiculing of the bourgeois masters in her study of the literary representation of servant girls around the turn of the century: 'Doch in der Bloßstellung durch Ironie und Komik liegt zugleich die Verharmlosung ihrer realen Herrschaftsgewalt. Die Dienstmädchen erscheinen in einer Weise souverän innerhalb des Dienstverhältnisses, die durchaus nicht realistisch ist.'<sup>28</sup> All employers are shown as easygoing; the girls encounter no problems concerning free Sundays or evenings off, for instance. Pauline is able to meet regularly with Emil Kubinke in the kitchen of the Löwenberg household and, indeed, Hermann stresses repeatedly that Pauline's masters are utterly dependent on her.

Like their working conditions, Hermann's characters are sketched rather than fully rounded. The girls' thoughts and feelings are not presented to us in the same detail as in Viebig's novel but they do have a presence and vividness that Viebig's characters lack. His three servant girls are flirtatious, cool, practical, independent, and - to varying degrees - quite amoral. One 'borrows' underwear from her mistress and they all take food from their masters' larders. Emma and Hedwig have also obviously gone through a string of relationships with married as well as unmarried men.

A further motif shows the contrast in characterisation between Hermann's and Viebig's novels, namely the pregnancy of a servant girl. In *Das tägliche Brot*, Viebig describes the pregnant Mine's suffering, which is caused by the fact that she has to carry on

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<sup>28</sup> Karin Pauleweit, *Dienstmädchen um die Jahrhundertwende - im Selbstbildnis und im Spiegel zeitgenössischer Literatur* (Frankfurt a.M., Berlin, 1993) p. 126.



working in order to earn her living. Several times she is likened in her suffering to an animal: '[...] wie ein armes Tier, das klagen möchte und doch nicht sprechen kann';<sup>29</sup> 'Sie konnte nicht aufstehn, sie lag wie niedergeschmettert, wie ein Tier auf allen vieren.'<sup>30</sup> Viebig stresses most emphatically her shame, her despair and, above all, her helplessness. Mine is portrayed as a suffering victim of circumstances beyond her control, whose shame hinders her from returning home to her parents.

Hermann's *Kubinke* handles the subject differently. The issue is first tackled in an interview between the servant girl Hedwig and her mistress Frau Markowski: 'Und wirklich, die runde Hedwig schämte sich ganz und gar nicht. "Nee", sagte sie nur, "des is zu dumm. Ich begreife auch nich, wie das möglich sein konnte. *Ich* habe wirklich nichts dafür jekonnt.'" ' (p. 268)

Hedwig rejects four times, without giving a reason, Frau Markowski's insistence that she go back to her parents. The reader, like Frau Markowski, is led to believe that it is moral scruples that hold Hedwig back, until she relents and states her reason in the face of Frau Markowski's insistence: 'Ick hab et Ihnen doch zehnmal jesagt: es jeht un jeht nich - - meine Schwester is ooch schon da!' (p. 271). Hedwig writes to the father of her child for financial support. When she receives his negative reply, her reaction is practical and simple: she knows that she cannot expect any help from this quarter and draws her conclusions. A new plan is made, she simply claims that Kubinke is the father. When it comes to the court case, in which she demands alimony from him, her behaviour is described as follows:

Ihr Gesicht glänzte vor Freude, weil nun jemand für ihren Gustav zahlen mußte, und weil sie den Prozeß gewonnen hatte, gewonnen sogar, ohne daß es zum Schwur gekommen war. Denn Hedwig hätte Stein und Bein geschworen, geschworen hätte die dicke Hedwig, daß sich die Balken bogen, sie hätte, ohne mit der Wimper zu zucken, einen glatten Meineid hingelegt [...]. Denn sie hatte das Gefühl, daß sie hier kämpfen müsse - und für einen Kampf waren alle Mittel erlaubt. (p. 321)

Hermann's treatment of the subject has been criticised as callous. In his review of *Kubinke* written in the year of the novel's publication, the young Theodor Heuß reports: '[daß] die "klassenbewußten" Dienstboten - und von sich aus nicht ohne Recht -

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<sup>29</sup> Viebig, vol. I, p. 223.

<sup>30</sup> Viebig, vol. I, p. 225.



protestieren. Sie glauben nämlich, das Buch verspötte ihren Beruf und erschwere ihnen, in der Hand der "Herrschaft", den mühsäligen Kampf um die soziale Achtung.'<sup>31</sup>

The main criticism - then as well as in later reviews - has centred on the characterisation of Hedwig. She - and Emma, too - have been taken as coarse and devoid of feeling, only motivated by sexual desire and greed. However, I would argue that these are judgements of the characters which are not warranted by the author's representation. Rather, they are the critics' own moral judgements. I shall take up this argument again in the context of Hermann's representation of the urban personality in the following chapter.

At this point, it is necessary to consider which factors lead to such different representations of such similar subject matter. One explanation might be expected to be rooted in social class. Hermann clearly writes from the bourgeois employer's perspective. The social distance from the servant girls he describes may well be a reason for his detachment in the treatment of his subject. Heuß describes Hermann's bourgeois attitude very fittingly: 'Eine temperiert bürgerliche Atmosphäre, aus deren Behaglichkeit man teilnahmsvoll, ohne den Luxus tragischer Gefühle, hin und wieder durch die Narrheit des Lebens erheitert, sich zu diesem kleinen Schicksal herabbeugt.'<sup>32</sup>

Another source of the differences between Viebig's and Hermann's attitudes to, and treatments of, servant girls in their novels may, of course, lie in the authors' genders. Feminist critics such as Inge Stephan maintain that for the understanding of literature, the author's gender is as important a variable as the socio-political situation and the relevant ideological and literary traditions.<sup>33</sup> A female author shares a background, if not of exactly the same experiences as those she describes in the life of her protagonists, then at least the experience of being a woman in a patriarchal society. A certain partiality is therefore likely to colour her writing. Male authors, to whom this access to women's experience is denied, construct their female characters on different bases. According to different schools of feminist criticism, female characters created by male authors are seen either as ideological constructs which disguise the true relationships of

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<sup>31</sup> Heuß, col. 712.

<sup>32</sup> Heuß, col. 712.

<sup>33</sup> See Inge Stephan, ' "Bilder und immer wieder Bilder ...". Überlegungen zur Untersuchung von Frauenbildern in männlicher Literatur', in *Die verborgene Frau. Sechs Beiträge zu einer feministischen Literaturwissenschaft mit Beiträgen von Inge Stephan und Sigrid Weigel* (= Argument- Sonderband AS 96) (Berlin 1983), pp. 15-34.



power within a society<sup>34</sup> or as male fantasies, i.e. expressions of wishes, projections, repressions, etc.<sup>35</sup> In both cases, it may be argued, no representation of the real gender relationships is given.

However, I want to highlight another strand of explanation. I intend to show in the following paragraphs that the two novels can be seen as expressions of the changing aesthetic climate in the first decade of the twentieth century.

## 6.2 *Kubinke* as a Novel Primarily Influenced by Impressionism

### 6.2.1 Aesthetic Considerations

When Heuß reviewed *Kubinke* on its publication in 1910, he saw the novel as an expression of the changing approach to depicting social reality, which went with a changing aesthetic climate. Interestingly, he also based his comments on a comparison of *Kubinke* with Clara Viebig's *Das tägliche Brot*:

Es ist gut, einen Augenblick an das 'Tägliche Brot' der Viebig zu denken. Der Unterschied, wie dort und hier dieselbe Schicht angefaßt wird, ist nicht nur ein Unterschied von Personen, sondern ein deutlicher Beleg für die Wandlung des literarischen Ausdrucks und für die geänderte Temperatur in der künstlerischen Behandlung sozialer Probleme.<sup>36</sup>

*Das tägliche Brot* is a prime example of a Berlin novel that is firmly rooted in the Naturalist tradition. The composition of *Das tägliche Brot*, as Michel Durand has pointed out, reflects Zola's concept of the 'roman expérimental'.<sup>37</sup> Viebig sets up her protagonists in a given social environment and then shows how the need to survive in this environment shapes their development. Viebig sets out to create understanding by showing the servant girls' living conditions in detail, and she evokes pity by concentrating on the dark, rotting basement flats of a Berlin workers' quarter and the misery of the poor in such an environment. Her intention of fostering mutual

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<sup>34</sup> See Silvia Bovenschen, *Die imaginierte Weiblichkeit. Exemplarische Untersuchungen zu kulturgeschichtlichen und literarischen Präsentationsformen des Weiblichen* (Frankfurt a.M., 1981)

<sup>35</sup> See Klaus Theweleit, *Männerphantasien* (Frankfurt a.M., 1977).

<sup>36</sup> Heuß, col. 712.

<sup>37</sup> See Michel Durand, *Les romans berlinois de Clara Viebig* (Bern, 1993) pp. 80-82.



understanding and humane interaction between the classes clearly puts her art in the service of a social cause.

*Kubinke* may be seen as the expression of a changed attitude not only to social questions but also to the tasks and aesthetic concepts of literature. It may be better understood against the background of Literary Impressionism, which significantly reduces the social interest in the description of milieu. The basic aesthetic principle of Literary Impressionism is instead the attempt to capture as fully as possible the immediate impression gained of a transitory, momentary scene. This impression, filtered through the consciousness of the artist, is to be rendered in its full sensory impact. Causal and moral explanations are relinquished as interfering with the pure pre-intellectual rendering of the sensory impact of a scene.<sup>38</sup>

Hermann's representation of Kubinke's relationships with Hedwig and Emma as the results of his inability to resist a momentary attraction ties in with Impressionist aesthetics. When Kubinke abandons his wait for Pauline in order to accompany Hedwig on a flirtatious evening walk, simply because she crosses his path first, the narrator comments, withholding judgement entirely:

Nicht mit einem Gedanken dachte dabei Emil Kubinke an die rotblonde Pauline oder die lange, weiße Emma. Denn ähnlich wie wir nicht zwei oder drei Melodien auf einmal im Kopf haben können, und wie immer eine die andere ablösen muß, so können wir auch nicht drei Frauen auf einmal im Herzen haben, und wir müssen immer warten, bis die eine die andere ablöst. (p. 124)

The principle of fleetingness is at the centre of this concept of relationships, and the understanding of the human character not as a self-directed, accountable agent, but as a passive nervous unit, which is unable to resist certain stimuli.<sup>39</sup> Hermann's evocation of a 'Quadrille der Liebe' corresponds to the Impressionist ideal of relationships between

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<sup>38</sup> The debate around the definition of Literary Impressionism is complex and still rather confused. For comprehensive critical discussions see Marhold and Gunsteren. My approach follows in essence that of Paul Ilie who maintains that Literary Impressionism is understood not as a literary style that tries to emulate the work of the Impressionist painters, but rather as one that has developed from the same basic philosophical recognition, namely that life is 'in an incessant state of rapid flux, with an infinite number of sensory phenomena occurring in as many moments in the time continuum' (Paul Ilie in Michel Benamou et al., 'Symposium on Literary Impressionism', *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature*, 17 (1968), 40-72 (p. 51)).

<sup>39</sup> This concept of human behaviour, which was widely shared at the turn of the century, is based on the writings of the psychologist Wilhelm Wundt. See especially Wundt, *Grundzüge der physiologischen Psychologie* (1874).



the sexes being based on flirtation. It is the ideal of the ‘ “Episodenliebe”, wie sie sich in jeder Großstadtkultur entwickelt’,<sup>40</sup> which is based on the passive surrender to a libidinous nervous excitement rather than emotional commitment. ‘An die Stelle der naturalistischen Mitleidsethik tritt [...] die Genußmoral’,<sup>41</sup> state Hamann and Hermand in their seminal study of Impressionism, which describes the movement as the ideological and aesthetic expression of a ‘spätbürgerliche Trägerschicht, die bereits auf dem Boden des Imperialismus steht, sich jedoch von den aggressiven Tendenzen dieser politisch-ökonomischen Entwicklungsphase zu distanzieren versucht und an ihre Stelle einen unverbindlichen Ästhetizismus setzt’.<sup>42</sup> It is this aestheticising approach which must be seen as lying behind Hermann’s humorous depiction of the maidservants and their situation.<sup>43</sup>

The authorial narrative situation, with its stress on the external perspective, is appropriate to this aesthetic concern. The Impressionist writer does not ask for any causal connections and is not concerned with the feelings and thoughts of the characters described, but instead aims to portray them purely through their observed behaviour. As Gunsteren acknowledged in her book on Katherine Mansfield: ‘Characters in Literary Impressionist works have a tendency to seem shallow. Only the surface of the characters is presented in their thoughts and action, without the depth of any philosophical or psychological analysis.’<sup>44</sup> The unreliability of the narrative stance, which shows up the difference between the perception of reality by a character and reality as presented by the authorial narrator, a device that Hermann uses especially with respect to the barber’s apprentice Kubinke, is also typical of Impressionist aesthetics. For if reality is recognised to be the result of individual perception, the subjectivity of reality and the variety of possible responses to experience must be recognised.

The difference in the aesthetic approach by comparison with not only Viebig’s *Das tägliche Brot* but also Hermann’s previous novels, is marked. In the detachment that Hermann displays in *Kubinke*, he is far removed not only from Viebig’s social concern,

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<sup>40</sup> Hamann and Hermand, *Impressionismus*, p. 47.

<sup>41</sup> Hamann and Hermand, *Impressionismus*, p. 37.

<sup>42</sup> Hamann and Hermand, *Impressionismus*, p. 8.

<sup>43</sup> With reference among other novels to Hermann’s *Kubinke*, Hamann and Hermand set out the Impressionist attitude to the lower classes: ‘Anstatt das “niedere” Leben unter das Signum des Allgemein-Menschlichen zu stellen, behandelt man es wie in der älteren Mimesistheorie als Ausdruck des Komischen’ (Hamann and Hermand, *Impressionismus*, p. 110).

<sup>44</sup> Gunsteren, p. 20.



but also from the nostalgic and empathetic tone of *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte* and from the emotional urgency that speaks from *Spielkinder*.

In the following paragraphs, I shall set out an analysis of style which confirms the view of *Kubinke* as based on different aesthetic premises from *Das tägliche Brot*.

### 6.2.2 Comparative Stylistic Analysis of Selected Passages from *Kubinke* and *Das tägliche Brot*

I shall provide a close stylistic analysis of one representative passage from each novel. The extracts to be compared depict a Sunday morning in Berlin. The following extract taken from *Das tägliche Brot* is not the only description of a city Sunday occurring in the book but it is the one which is most generalised in terms of describing a setting rather than following Mine's particular story:

Draußen erwachte allmählich der Großstadtsonntag. Fenster öffneten sich, Türen klappten. Ein Bollewagen kam klingelnd vorbeigerasselt. Bleiche Arbeiterfrauen schlichen aus den Toren der Miets-Kasernen der Kirchbachstraße, unter dem Tuch die schäbige Einkauftasche tragend. Verschlafne Mägde, denen die noch ungebrannten Haare wirr in die Stirn hingen, huschten über die Göbenstraße; die Stube der Plätterin in Nummer vier wurde gestürmt. Heut wurde gutes Ausgehewetter, da wollte man noch einmal Staat machen in hellen Blusen und weißen Unterröcken.

Nach und nach sammelten sich Kindertrüppchen auf dem Trottoir vor den Kellerwohnungen. Kleine Mädchen in Filzpantinen, die dünnen Haare in unzählige Zöpfchen geflochten, liefen zum Bäcker nach frischen Schrippen. Ein halbwüchsiger Bursche nutzte die sonntägliche Morgenstille der Straßen zum Erlernen des Radfahrens aus; ungeschickt lenkte er sein Rad und wackelte unsicher hin und her. Knaben mit rotgeriebenen, wie poliert glänzenden Gesichtern, ganz wie erwachsene Lungerer die Hände in den Hosentaschen haltend, umstanden einen Laternenpfahl und berieten einen Streifzug über's Tempelhofer Feld. Spielende Hunde jagten, vergnügt kläffend in lustigen Sprüngen über die wagenleere Straße; an einem Fenster schmetterte ein Kanarienvogel, dessen Lied sonst im Lärm des Alltags erstarb.<sup>45</sup>

The passage opens with a brief setting of time and place. The next two sentences introduce the sounds of the Sunday morning. The same syntactical constructions are used three times, each time just giving a brief statement of the subject and verb. This

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<sup>45</sup> Viebig, vol. I, pp. 85/86.



brief and simple structure is slightly extended to include a participle ('klingelnd') in the second repetition of the basic structure, in order to convey the additional sound. Two out of the three following sentences in this paragraph use the same structure. The subjects are, however, qualified each time by an adjective. These adjectives, for instance 'bleich' and 'verschlafen', do not primarily create a visual impact but help to illuminate Viebig's social intention, as they highlight the bad health of the workers' wives and underline how hardworking the servant maids are. The mention of the tenement blocks underlines the social setting. Repeated references to street names leave the Berlin readership in no doubt that she is writing about Schöneberg, one of the exploding suburbs which, with their crowded basement flats, were typical of the rapidly expanding metropolis of Berlin.

The general drive to go out on a Sunday and dress up in one's 'Sunday best' reflects accurately the metropolitan servant girls' habits. Viebig goes beyond the description of the sounds and sights of the Sunday morning street scene. She interprets the maids' intentions and thus stresses her understanding of the situation of these girls for whom it is something quite special to dress up in lightly coloured blouses and white petticoats. The social comment is here closely connected to the description.

The second paragraph describes how the street gradually becomes busier. After the women who are out on their errands, children and dogs appear in the street. Viebig still follows her basic sentence pattern. With the exception of the introductory statement, her sentences start with the subjects of her descriptions: little girls, a youth, boys, dogs at play. All of these are described in hypotactical sentence structures, in which their appearance or behaviour is commented on. A vivid picture of the scene emerges, but although Viebig describes a great deal of movement (running, cycling, the jumping of the dogs), the scene remains oddly static. Clearly the description of the individual elements of the scene is more important to Viebig than conveying the bustling atmosphere of the Sunday morning. The conventional sentence structure she uses ties the description down, as it were, and does not allow for particular speed or unusual emphases.

It is also interesting to note that we are presented with many of the noises of this Sunday morning scene, but are told relatively little about the colours. Only twice does Viebig mention colour: the white Sunday petticoats of the servant maids and the scrubbed, red



faces of the boys. Otherwise, the picture remains oddly grey. The mood, however, changes between the first and second paragraphs. Whereas the verbs 'schlichen' and 'huschten' and the adjectives 'bleich' and 'schäbig' project a rather drab picture of a morning that feels in no way like a Sunday, the mood gradually changes in the second paragraph. A happier atmosphere is created by epithets such as 'glänzend', 'vergnügt', 'lustig'. The freer and livelier mood is also underpinned by the verbs 'jagten' and 'schmetterte'. However, it is primarily the animals that enjoy this carefree atmosphere. The humans' concerns are all more restrained, practical and serious.

Now compare the passage from Viebig's *Das tägliche Brot* with a description of a Sunday morning from Hermann's *Kubinke*:

Ja, das war mal so ein richtiger Sonntag, ein Tag, der so schön war, so strahlend und ungetrübt von früh an, daß ihn wochentags jeder als eine persönliche Beleidigung empfunden hätte. Die Straßen lagen lang, hell und blank, und das letzte kleine, eingegitterte Bäumchen an der Bordschwelle war mit mindestens zehn grünen neuen Blättchen aufgeputzt. Und die Spatzen waren schon am frühen Morgen so verliebt in der Sonne, daß sie sich beinahe von der Straßenbahn überfahren ließen und erst in letzter Sekunde zu der Jungfrau mit dem Merkurstab hinaufschwirrten, um dort weiter piepsend, schreiend und flügelschlagend durcheinander zu wirbeln. Und alle Bahnen waren von früh an voll mit geputzten Menschen, und jeder hatte ein Kind auf dem Schoß, und sogar vorn auf der Plattform standen die Liebespaare, ließen sich den Wind um die Nase wehen und lächelten dabei einander an. An den Ecken hatten sich junge Leute in der Sonne postiert und warteten rauchend auf Freunde, um mit ihnen hinauszuziehen; oder andere, mit der Uhr in der Hand, standen da, keineswegs gleichgültig mit der Zigarre, und sie blickten sehnsüchtig straßauf, straßab nach hellen Kleidern, ob das vielleicht ihr Gang wäre, bis ihnen doch mit einemmal ein frischgewaschenes Sonntagsgesicht unter dem neuen Strohhut entgegenlächelte. [...]

Nirgends ein Arbeitswagen, nirgends ein Geschäftsrad, - der Asphalt so lang und hell und grau, [...] und nur die Wallfahrt von geputzten Menschenkindern, und nur in der Sonne diese Bahnen, eine nach der anderen, die hinausstreben, angefüllt bis auf den letzten Platz. Nirgends ist eigentlich Schatten. Gerade von Südosten her fällt das Licht ein; breit wie ein Strom zieht es zwischen den hellen Häuserreihen in den vier Baumlinien dahin, und nur in den Nischen der Fenster liegt so etwas wie Dunkelheit, und nur auf dem Bürgersteig zittert das Widerspiel der ersten grünen Blättchen, und nur wie matte, bläuliche Monde sind in regelrechten Abständen, mitten zwischen den Straßenbahnschienen, die Umrisse der Bogenlampen aus der Höhe hingezeichnet. (pp. 139-40)

Hermann sets the scene not by informing us about place and time, as Viebig does, but by giving the mood of the Sunday morning in the city with a description of the weather



and its effect on nature. In his description, he renders the response that the morning evokes in the people who enjoy it. He thus sets the tone in the first sentence by starting on a note of extreme contentment with the beautiful morning. In the ensuing description of the weather, the exactness and power of the evocation of an image catch the reader's eye. Hermann achieves this by accumulating three adjectives and participles for almost every object he mentions. The day is 'schön', 'strahlend' and 'ungetrübt'; the streets are 'lang, hell und blank'; each tree has 'mindestens zehn grüne neue Blättchen'. The syntax supports the vividness and richness of the description. The parallel construction 'so schön [...], so strahlend und ungetrübt' highlights the writer's concern to convey just the right kind of image. A nuance or a correction is introduced; an impression is being defined more closely.

The introduction of the sparrows in the third sentence continues to show the weather's influence on nature by focussing on the behaviour of living creatures. Furthermore, movement is now introduced into the scene. After the natural world, people are introduced into the scene, and to underline the mood and imagery of the spring morning, Hermann first focusses on children, lovers and young people.

Throughout the passage, Hermann makes much use of the conjunction 'und' at the beginning of sentences and clauses. He thus achieves a sense of flow and gives a rhythmic element to the text. The impression is given that images have simply been recorded, compiled and presented, unaltered and uninterpreted. Causal connections are avoided, visual impressions are simply juxtaposed. In one instance 'und' is replaced by 'oder', which is a very unusual device in the context of an enumeration and serves to underline the impression that the writer cannot describe all the elements of this vivid, overflowing street scene, but is simply picking out some details at random. None of the people described here is more important than any of the others; they all contribute to form the overall picture. All individual elements of the scene are subordinated to the aim of conveying the general impression of a happy, carefree Sunday mood.

Despite the careful and unifying structuring of the description, it reads as a spontaneous rendering of a scene just perceived by the author. The switch from the past to the present tense in the next paragraph adds to this sense of immediacy. This is particularly obvious in the first sentence of the second paragraph. Here Hermann abandons a straightforward sentence structure in order to describe the scene exactly as he sees it,



almost as if he felt urged to insert a particular element of the visual impression here and now, lest he forget it in the rush of the description. Instead of a finished and elaborate account of a scene, Hermann presents us with a sketch of an impression. Sentences are not always grammatically complete and even the print layout, interspersed with dashes and dots, contributes to this impression. The vividness and intensity of the scene is enhanced by the use of synecdoche and personification. Hermann stresses the active involvement of all the elements that make up the scene: a Sunday face smiles, trams struggle out of town, and the sunlight plays a dominating structuring role. Just as if Hermann were describing a painting, he tells us in detail about the fall of light and about the effects this creates. The stress in the sentence constructions emulates the process of visual perception. Just like the casual observer of a scene taking in what lies before him in a fleeting glance, Hermann inverts the conventional syntactic pattern and describes the elements of the scene before actually mentioning those elements themselves (see: 'Gerade von Südosten her fällt das Licht ein; breit wie ein Strom zieht es').

The findings suggest that Hermann's text, especially when compared to the extract from Viebig's novel, has a sensory quality that is remarkable. This quality is supported by the use of stylistic techniques such as the following:

- the accumulation of adjectives and participles, of synonyms or close neighbours from the same semantic field;
- parallel constructions;
- enumerations;
- giving the impression of a sketch, through incomplete sentences and breaks indicated by print layout;
- synecdoche: visual impression without reference to the object described;
- sentences broken up by the interjection of further description;
- clauses beginning with 'und', conveying the idea of linked description, of juxtaposition rather than causality;
- change of tense from past to present, for immediacy;
- sentence rhythm;
- inversion of syntactic pattern (first colour or description, then object); and
- personifications of inanimate objects.



All of these have been described by Marhold as techniques fundamental to the development of an Impressionist style in literature.<sup>46</sup> On their own, they may not have a great impact, but combined, as they appear in the extract analysed here, they contribute to the text's quality of immediacy and to giving the reader an unadulterated impression of the colours, forms and atmosphere that constitute a particular scene.

In comparing the two Sunday morning passages, it becomes clear that Viebig's description is dominated by her interest in people as representatives of a particular social class, whereas Hermann concentrates on no social class in particular: in his text, a more panoramic picture emerges.

Viebig puts her writing in the service of a humanitarian aim. As she says herself about her intentions in writing *Das tägliche Brot*, she wanted to show how much hardship there is in serving, but also how much responsibility there is in being served. It was her declared intention to bridge the gulf between the classes by fostering mutual understanding.<sup>47</sup> In Hermann's work, however, the onlooker is detached from the people he describes. He shows no social concern but registers the general atmosphere as clearly and comprehensively as possible, unconnected to any ulterior motives. In the introduction to the 1913 edition of *Kubinke*, Hermann says of his relationship to his characters:

Was gehen mich eigentlich Hedwig und Pauline [...] an?! Nichts, gar nichts! [...] Diese Irgendwers, [...] diese Namenlosen im Getümmel der Tausende [...]. O, diese Geschichte ist mehr für mich! Sie bedeutet eine letzte tiefe Reverenz, bevor ich [...] die lustige Quadrille der Jugend verlasse, mit all ihrem heimlichen Chassez-croisez, mit ihrem ewigen Changez-les-dames, mit ihrem närrischen Durcheinanderwirbeln der Paare.<sup>48</sup>

With this intention, he reveals himself as an adherent of the essentially metropolitan aesthetics of detachment that Arnold Hauser has described as one of the hallmarks of Impressionism: 'The primacy of the moment, of change and chance implies, in terms of aesthetics, the dominion of the passing mood over the permanent qualities of life, that is

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<sup>46</sup> In the context of a careful analysis of the possibilities and forms of Literary Impressionism, specifically in Germany, Marhold revises the catalogue of stylistic elements of Impressionist literature originally compiled in 1928 by Luise Thon in *Die Sprache des deutschen Impressionismus*.

<sup>47</sup> See quotation in Düsel, p. 543: 'Ich möchte zeigen, wie schwer das Dienen überhaupt ist, wie verantwortlich aber auch das Sichbedienenlassen. Vor allem aber möchte ich zum Ausdruck bringen, [...] wie notwendig es für uns ist, alles zu verstehen, um vieles zu verzeihen.'

<sup>48</sup> Georg Hermann, 'Vorwort', in Hermann, *Kubinke* (Berlin, 1913), pp. 7-10 (p.9).



implies, in terms of aesthetics, the dominion of the passing mood over the permanent qualities of life, that is to say, the prevalence of a relation to things the property of which is to be noncommittal as well as changeable.' It entails 'a standpoint of aloofness, waiting, non-involvement - in short, the aesthetic attitude purely and simply.'<sup>49</sup>

### 6.2.3 Comparisons of *Kubinke* with Max Liebermann's Painting 'De Oude Vink' in Leiden (1905) and of Hermann's and Liebermann's Aesthetic Principles

The Impressionist quality of Hermann's text is borne out in comparisons with Impressionist painting. The description of the Sunday morning from Georg Hermann's *Kubinke* may be compared fruitfully to a scene of similar content, a garden café scene on a sunny day, depicted in the Berlin Impressionist Max Liebermann's 'De Oude Vink' in Leiden (ill. XIII).

The painting is divided into three horizontal layers. The uppermost layer is taken over by the foliage of the trees, in which Liebermann shows the nuances created by the reflections of sunlight and shade. The middle layer is crowded with the café furniture and customers. Again, no details are given, no more importance seems to be attached to the representation of the café scene 'proper' than to the foliage above it. No outlines are used to delineate and define objects or people. Everything is represented by dabs of colour. The same prominence is given to customers and furniture as to the sunlight playing on surfaces. The figures are recognisable in their individuality through posture and dress but they are not defined by facial expressions. Light does not quite dissolve the forms but changes and defines the colour of all objects, be it a white dress or a green table, thereby breaking up the continuity of the material into segments of purely abstract visual reality. Light is accorded a structuring function. This is very clear too in the lowest layer of the painting, which mainly consists of sandy ground, the colour of which is broken up by sunny patches. These are arranged so as to provide a further diagonal, cutting across that of the tree-lined path, thereby reinforcing the framing of the scene.

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<sup>49</sup> Arnold Hauser, *The Social History of Art*, vol. IV: *Naturalism, Impressionism, The Film Age* (London, 1962), p. 60. Indeed, Hermann was scornful of artists who were striving to achieve something by their art rather than in their art. See Hermann, 'Neues über Böcklin', *Vossische Zeitung*, 12 June 1903: 'Ein Vorwurf aber, den [Böcklin] den Künstlern unserer Zeit macht, trifft den Nagel sicher auf den Kopf; er sagt wiederholt, daß sie mehr danach strebten, "mit ihrer Kunst etwas zu erreichen als in ihrer Kunst etwas zu erreichen".'





III. XIII: Max Liebermann,  
'De Oude Vink' in Leiden, 1905;  
oil on canvas; 71 x 88 cm;  
Kunsthaus Zürich



Just as in the Sunday morning passage from *Kubinke*, the effect in Liebermann's 'De Oude Vink' in Leiden is that of a scene in which not the individual elements but the impression as a whole is of prime importance. Details are subordinated to the creation of a strong, unified sense of atmosphere. The happy, serene mood of a sunny summer's day pervades both scenes. The same quality of atmosphere and strong sensory impact are found in Liebermann's painting and Hermann's text. In both works, the sensory image derives its strength from the nuanced and vivid composition. Put most simply, one might say that Hermann's accumulations of adjectives and participles have the same effect in his writing as Liebermann's abundance of dabs of colour which form the upper and the central layers of his painting.

In his role as an art critic, Hermann wrote about Liebermann several times. It is interesting in this context to consider Hermann's evaluations of the Liebermann's work, which always show great admiration for the painter. In 1907, in a review of the annual exhibition of the Berlin Secession, Hermann called Liebermann 'unbestritten die stärkste Befähigung der heutigen deutschen Kunst'<sup>50</sup> and already four years earlier, in his contribution to Martin Buber's book on Jewish artists, Hermann had set out the reasons for his admiration.<sup>51</sup> A look at the elements that he highlights as the most praiseworthy in Liebermann's art is very enlightening as to Hermann's own aesthetic concept.

Hermann praises Liebermann for his sense of nuance and of the interrelations of colours, which Hermann, in a sensitive and perceptive synaesthetic image, calls the painter's understanding for the 'musical element of colour'. Hermann also commends Liebermann's technique of defining space by light instead of linear composition and his temperament and verve, which allow him to give up detail for a rendition of the intensity of life. Finally, in a curiously literary form of praise, he acknowledges that Liebermann's art 'renders' rather than narrates.<sup>52</sup> All of these stylistic features are defining elements both of Impressionist art and, as I have already shown, of Hermann's writing in *Kubinke*.

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<sup>50</sup> Georg Hermann, 'Die Ausstellung der Secession', *Die Gegenwart*, 36 (1909), 293-95 (p. 294).

<sup>51</sup> Georg Hermann, 'Max Liebermann', in Martin Buber (ed.), *Jüdische Künstler* (Berlin, 1903), pp. 105-35.

<sup>52</sup> This, according to one of the most important voices of Literary Impressionism, Ford Madox Ford, is the highest aim of the writer: 'We saw that life did not narrate, but made impressions on our brains. We in turn, if we wished to produce on you an effect of life, must not narrate, but render.' (Ford, 'Techniques', *Southern Review*, 1 (1935), 20-35 (p. 31))



Neither Hermann nor Liebermann combines his depiction with a social intention. No social co-ordinates are set. The purpose of their art is the depiction of atmosphere as perceived by the artist at a given time, in a given place. People are relegated from the foreground, to be part of the panoramic and atmospheric rendition of the scene.

In his essay 'Die Phantasie in der Malerei' (1904) and in some shorter writings, Liebermann laid out his aesthetic convictions. It was his contention that art should be free from any considerations of purpose or function beyond the true rendering of a subjective and sensual experience of reality. 'Vor allem aber', Liebermann writes, 'verwechsle man Kunst nicht mit Ethik oder Moral; moralische Wirkungen gehen von der Kunst aus, aber - wie Goethe sagt - "moralische Zwecke vom Künstler fordern, heißt ihm sein Handwerk verderben".'<sup>53</sup> This is an echo of the Impressionist claim to free art from any intellectual constraints. Consequently, content is only of minor importance or, in Liebermann's own words: 'Die gutgemalte Rübe ist ebenso gut wie die gutgemalte Madonna.'<sup>54</sup>

Just as 'good art' cannot be created in the service of an idea, neither can it consist merely of the rendering of photographic detail: 'Erfindung ist Empfindung', Liebermann writes,<sup>55</sup> and in an article on the exhibition of the Secession in 1907, he expands: 'Das Talent des Malers beruht nicht in der sklavischen Nachahmung der Natur, sondern in der Kraft, mit der er den Eindruck, den die Natur in ihm hervorgerufen hat, wiederzugeben vermag.'<sup>56</sup> Thus, all technique has to be subordinated to the aim of accurate and suggestive rendering of a sensory impression.

I wish to argue that, specifically at the time of writing *Kubinke*, Hermann shared this conviction. This may be deduced not only from the Sunday morning passage analysed above, but is also hinted at in Hermann's essay 'Der tote Naturalismus' from 1915. Here, he defines good art as capable of expressing 'die Vergegenwärtigung des Lebens, die Stärke des Lebensgefühls, die Intensität der gegenwärtigen Lebensvorstellung'.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Max Liebermann, 'Zehn Jahre Sezession' [1908], in Irmgard Wirth (ed.), *Berliner Maler. Menzel, Liebermann, Slevogt, Corinth* (Berlin, 1986), pp. 175-77 (p. 176).

<sup>54</sup> Max Liebermann, 'Die Phantasie in der Malerei' [1904], in I. Wirth (ed.), *Berliner Maler*, pp. 123-53 (p. 132).

<sup>55</sup> Liebermann, 'Die Phantasie', p. 145.

<sup>56</sup> Max Liebermann, 'Zur Sezessions-Ausstellung' [1907], in I. Wirth (ed.), *Berliner Maler*, pp. 173-74 (p. 174).

<sup>57</sup> Hermann, 'Der tote Naturalismus', p. 54.



'Good art', Hermann contends, has to be naturalistic art. However, he does not use the concept of naturalism as a stylistic category, as 'eine objektive, seelenlose, verwerfliche, plumpe Abschilderung des Lebens'.<sup>58</sup> Instead, naturalistic art, in Hermann's use of the term, includes Impressionist art which, as well as a true depiction of outward reality, encompasses the representation of sensory impression on the psyche. In this context, Hermann admiringly describes works of Literary Impressionism such as Detlev Liliencron's poetry, as naturalistic: 'Was ist denn der Verdienst Liliencrons? Doch vor allem, daß er die alte Grenzlinie zwischen Lyrik und Leben verschob, daß er hundert Alltäglichkeiten zum lyrischen Erlebnis machte, die vordem weit jenseits der Dichtkunst gelegen hatten'.<sup>59</sup> The closeness of Hermann's aesthetic understanding to Impressionism becomes even clearer when he describes the ultimate aim of the born artist: 'Ich will mein Leben in einer Reihe von Kunstwerken darstellen, wenn die Sonne sinkt und wenn der Mond die Wolken vergoldet, will ich die fliehenden Geister festhalten!'.<sup>60</sup>

Interestingly, the ideas expressed in Hermann's essay are echoed - sometimes down to the very formulations - in the introduction to the second edition of Liebermann's essay 'Die Phantasie in der Malerei', published a year later, in 1916. Like Hermann, Liebermann contends that any art has to be naturalistic if it is to be good: 'Es gibt keine blödsinnigere Behauptung, als die, welche man wahrscheinlich gerade deswegen weil sie so blödsinnig ist - täglich liest und hört: der Naturalismus ist tot. Denn alle Kunst beruht auf der Natur und alles Bleibende in ihr ist Natur.' Making clear that his understanding of the term 'naturalism' is the same as Hermann's, Liebermann adds: 'Nicht die den Künstler umgebende nur, sondern vor allem seine eigene Natur. Wie er, der Künstler, die Welt anschaut, mit seinen inneren und äußeren Sinnen - das nenne ich seine Phantasie - die Gestaltung dieser seiner Phantasie ist seine Kunst.'<sup>61</sup> It is clear from these passages that Hermann and Liebermann share not only their interpretation of the term 'Naturalismus' as essentially mimetic art, but also their basic understanding of

<sup>58</sup> Hermann, 'Der tote Naturalismus', p. 57.

<sup>59</sup> Hermann, 'Der tote Naturalismus', p. 60.

<sup>60</sup> Hermann, 'Der tote Naturalismus', p. 64. In his 1925 novel *Der kleine Gast*, Hermann again underlines his admiration for Impressionist art, stating '[Der Impressionismus] ist die einzige Kunst, die den echten Violinschlüssel für das Leben hat, und sie wird es für mich auch bleiben' (Hermann, *Der kleine Gast*, p. 220).

<sup>61</sup> Max Liebermann, 'Vorwort zur 2. Auflage' [1916] (of 'Die Phantasie in der Malerei'), in I. Wirth (ed.), *Berliner Maler*, p. 123.



the purpose of art as rendering the sensory impression of reality received by the artist and conveying the intensity of the moment.

Yet this does not mean that Hermann's and Liebermann's works are devoid of careful structure. Liebermann does not go as far as the French Impressionists who saw in light the element dominating all visual impression and often went as far as to dissolve objects entirely in light. Neither did he aim for an entirely spontaneous recording of a moment. Indeed, none of the Berlin Impressionists, except Lesser Ury and later on the post-Impressionist Curt Herrmann, went that far. Heavily influenced by the local Realist tradition, embodied primarily by Adolph Menzel, the Berlin Impressionists never entirely lost their interest in the objects or people depicted, nor did they entirely relinquish traditional ideas of structure.<sup>62</sup>

Although Liebermann's *'De Oude Vink' in Leiden* appears to be a spontaneous, unarranged sketch, the painting is in fact carefully structured. The diagonal created by the path in front of the trees cuts the observer off from the scene, thus creating a distance between the onlooker and the café itself. The trees furthermore form diagonals which lead into the depth of the picture, thus giving a stable framework to the scene. The trunks of the two trees in the foreground divide the painting into three vertical segments. These segments become wider to the left (and to the foreground), but include similar contents (note for instance the repetition of the table with chair to the right of each of the segments). This structure creates a rhythm that draws the onlooker into the picture and underlines the pleasing impression of peacefulness and balance that pervades the picture. It is within this stable framework that a scene unfolds which is essentially composed of colour and light.

A similar structure can be detected in Hermann's *Kubinke*; it emerges as a second layer under the very clearly signposted, plot-based structure of the novel.

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<sup>62</sup> For representations and discussions of Berlin Impressionism, see Hans Platte, *Deutsche Impressionisten* (Gütersloh, 1971); Evelyn Gutbrod, *Die Rezeption des Impressionismus in Deutschland 1880-1910*, diss. Universität München (München, 1980); and Irmgard Wirth, *Berliner Malerei im 19. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1990).



### 6.3 A Structural Analysis of *Kubinke*: between 'Bildungsroman' and Modern City Novel

A reference in *Kubinke* to the fairy tale of *Aladdin; or, the Wonderful Lamp* gives the reader an orientation as to the immediately obvious, plot-based structure of the novel:

Ist es nicht, wenn ich mich recht erinnere, in Aladins Wunderlampe so, daß der junge Schustersohn sich in dem ersten Saal der unterirdischen Höhle alle Taschen voll Silber steckt, es dann fortwirft, als er das Gold im zweiten Saale sieht, und das wieder von sich schleudert, nur um die Edelsteine des dritten Saales einzusacken und um plötzlich jämmerlich im Dunkel zu stehen. (p. 180)

According to this basic model of the plot, Hermann divides the text into five parts, entitled 'Introduktion', 'Hedwig', 'Emma', 'Pauline' and 'Finale', thus indicating the structural progress of the novel. The first chapter, 'Introduktion', sets the coordinates of the narrative. The date and location are determined, all the main characters are introduced. Indeed, as Liere points out, all the agents involved in Kubinke's death appear in this first section, down to the postman and the beam on which Kubinke will hang himself.<sup>63</sup> The atmosphere and tone are indicated by the stress on the 'Schicksalsdatum' April 1st, which is repeated six times, and by the introduction of the leitmotif of Kubinke's quest to engage in the 'Quadrille des Lebens', Hermann's image for the 'dance' of youth, love and freedom from cares.

Each of the following four chapters is based on the same principle of construction: introduced by the author/narrator's reflection on his tale, they start with a description of the morning following the events of the previous night and dwell on their effects. Further developments are then summarised in narratorial reports and the final, culminating event that will conclude the chapter is prepared. This final event is in each case depicted in some breadth in a mixture of scenic representation and narratorial account. In each case, it has to be seen as a stage in Kubinke's life, or, as Hermann would have the reader see it, a step on his hero's path outlined by destiny. The walk with Hedwig and the dance with Hedwig and Emma conclude Kubinke's flirtations with these two girls; the excursion to the Grunewald in the Pauline chapter brings love and

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<sup>63</sup> Liere, p. 166. However, Liere's reference in this context to the scarf, 'den [Kubinke] sich [...] um den Hals binden [wird]', is based on an over-interpretation of the text. Hermann does not mention the means by which Kubinke hangs himself.



the prospect of future happiness; and finally, Kubinke's court hearing, brings the hero's demise. The leitmotif of the 'Quadrille des Lebens' is taken up in each chapter to provide further comment on Kubinke's progress: whereas he is shown as an outsider to this dance of life and love in the first three chapters, he joins it when he eventually finds love with Pauline. After his death, the dance is shown to go on without him, not missing a beat. A two-page epilogue is attached to the final chapter, set off from the main text, in which the narrator comments on his tale for the last time. Thus, as in *Jettchen Gebert*, the narrative is framed at beginning and end by the narrator's reflections.

This structure clearly follows the hero's story. Its linear construction shows its closeness to the structure of the 'Bildungsroman'. However, I would argue that a second, underlying structure, which relies on the panoramic representations as catalysts for the events in Kubinke's life, is even more relevant to the understanding of the novel.

This less obvious structure is revealed if we accept that the plot is subordinate to these panoramic descriptions. Hermann devotes long passages to depictions of Berlin life, unrelated to the immediate demands of the plot. Different aspects of the city are explored: the expansion of the metropolis, the leisure activities of Berliners, and even the aspects of Berlin as the centre of the legal system and of the military, are treated in extended passages. Again and again, Hermann evokes the hustle and bustle in the streets of the suburbs and of the city centre. In one instance, a long and detailed description and scenic account of Kubinke's medical examination by the military is included with a kaleidoscopic survey of fellow candidates and military staff (pp. 242-53), without this scene being demanded in any way by the plot or even contributing to the outline of Kubinke's destiny, which Hermann purports to be the aim of his narrative. Furthermore, the long introductory passage preceding the introduction of characters and plot, in which Hermann surveys the novel's metropolitan setting in fine detail and which stretches over more than ten pages, goes well beyond the setting of co-ordinates of time and place in the Realist tradition that Hermann used in the opening pages of *Jettchen Gebert*. This long and carefully structured introduction to Berlin supports the impression that the prime importance in this novel is attributed to the truthful and comprehensive capturing of the city and its inhabitants, rather than to the experiences of its hero.



Consequently, Hermann adapts the structure of his novel to encompass a mass of different manifestations of the city. The horizontal axis formed by the linear narration of the 'Bildungsroman', retreats into the background before a more disrupted, faceted chain of reflections of life in the city. Rather like the trees in Liebermann's *'De Oude Vink' in Leiden*, the plot of *Kubinke* gives it a framework within which the main body of the work, namely colourful impressions of Berlin life, is accumulated. This structure, in which Impressionist passages of description are inserted into a clear, linear framework, is the most common form of Impressionist longer prose. It is a 'Teilimpressionismus'<sup>64</sup> which brings together the momentariness and sketchiness of Impressionism and the breadth and length of the novel form. It may be found in Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks* (1901), for example, and has also been identified by Weisstein in Katherine Mansfield's story 'Her First Ball'.<sup>65</sup>

The story of the barber's apprentice Emil Kubinke serves as the common thread running through Hermann's novel; Kubinke is the touchstone on which metropolitan life is tested. The structural 'Teilimpressionismus' of the novel, however, with its disruption of the linear narration, points to the fact that the real protagonist of the novel is not Kubinke but the city itself. Hermann's *Kubinke* can thus be seen as standing between the traditional, linear structure of the 'Bildungsroman' and the new form of the city novel with its systematic representation of the different aspects of the metropolis and with its emphasis on the momentary recording of complex impressions. In her study on the definition of the city novel, Susanne Ledanff summarises the opposition between the two novel forms:

Es stehen also die älteren Muster von Linearität, heldenzentrierter Axe und raumzeitlichem Kontinuum der Stadtromanstruktur gegenüber - mit deren Merkmalen von Augenblickshaftigkeit, Komplexität, unvorhersehbaren Geschwindigkeiten der Abläufe. Die Oberflächenwirkung der Stadt, die sich der organologischen Durchdringung widersetzt, widerspricht der Tendenz zur Verinnerlichung im Bildungsroman. Es steht Kontinuum gegen Nebeneinander, Historizität gegen Gleichzeitigkeit, Einzelschicksal gegen Massenbewegung, Individuation gegen Anonymität.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Hamann and Hermand, *Impressionismus*, p. 199.

<sup>65</sup> Weisstein gives his analysis of Mansfield's story the telling title 'Butterfly Wings Without a Framework of Steel?', referring to the clear, supporting structure of Mansfield's Impressionist text.

<sup>66</sup> Susanne Ledanff, 'Bildungsroman versus Großstadtroman', *Sprache im technischen Zeitalter*, 78 (1981), 85-114 (pp. 88/89).



Hermann's combination of the two novel types described here shows a clear emphasis on the simultaneity of the city novel. Fries states at the end of her analysis: 'Oddly, the vague overview [of the city of Berlin] with which Hermann introduces and ends his novel provides much information about actuality, while the narrative itself is almost trivial fiction.'<sup>67</sup> Fries has grasped the central point; and why this should be odd is unclear. If one accepts that it is the recording of city life and atmosphere that is at the centre of the novel, as well as the representation of the urban frame of mind, then there is nothing odd about it.

The Impressionist 'prismatic' style which, according to Karl Krolow, was attributed to Hermann by the Germanist Klaus Günther Just, is singularly apposite for the writing of a city novel such as *Kubinke*. In *Kubinke*, as in his previous novels, Hermann adapts his style to the task presented by the material. The often rather self-pitying, but Naturalist and critical, autobiographical mode of *Spielkinder* and the elegiac and the nostalgic chronicle style of *Jettchen Gebert* have been abandoned for a detached panoramic and atmospheric account, suited to a survey of the contemporary manifestations of metropolitan life.

Read as an essentially Impressionist and consciously detached panorama of the metropolis of Berlin, rather than as an unsuccessful, because superficial, Naturalist novel with a social intention, *Kubinke* can be appreciated for what it is: an atmospherically true collection of impressions gathered in Berlin at an exciting point in its development towards a metropolis.

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<sup>67</sup> Fries, pp. 121/22.



In the preceding chapter, I described *Kubinke* as a mixture of the hero-centred 'Bildungsroman' and the more panoramic city novel. The structural definition by Ledanff was useful for a first assessment of the two major structural elements of the novel and for its elucidation of the differences in structure between *Kubinke* and Hermann's previous novels, in which the capturing of the city experience was not his primary concern. However, it is time now to question and specify the term 'city novel'. Ledanff's definition is too restrictive to be used as a means of describing all the many ways of representing city experience. Any definition of the city novel as a genre is problematic for this reason, and Karl Riha, for instance, rejects any definition which is based primarily on formal aspects or attempts to draw up a typology of the city novel.<sup>1</sup> His definition, in common with many other, more recent, critics, is based primarily on thematic considerations.<sup>2</sup>

Recognising the inherent difficulties in defining the city novel as a separate genre, but nevertheless wishing to differentiate between *Kubinke* and Hermann's earlier novels, I find it useful to work with Blanche Gelfant's model. This was formulated in 1954 and is still fundamental to much recent literary criticism on the city novel.<sup>3</sup> Gelfant defines the city novel as a product of the empirical approach of the twentieth century and describes the 'active participation of the city in shaping character and plot' as definitive to the genre. She contrast the modern city novel with 'local color fiction':

In a local color city novel, the characters act against a static urban setting that is not the vital and necessary condition for their acts. The substitution of another backdrop might alter details within the novel but not the essential patterns of plot, characterization, theme, and language.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Karl Riha, *Die Beschreibung der 'Großen Stadt'* (Bad Homburg, 1970), especially pp. 25-30.

<sup>2</sup> See for instance Klaus R. Scherpe, 'Von der erzählten Stadt', p. 421: 'Der Großstadtroman als dargestellte Wirklichkeit orientiert sich an den Brennpunkten und Symbolen innerhalb der Stadtmauern oder Stadtgrenzen [...], er thematisiert den Gegensatz von subjektivem Lebensanspruch und objektivem Zwang der städtischen Lebenswelt, er dramatisiert die Schicksale von Individuen, Klassen und Institutionen als Kriminalfall, als sozialromantische oder sozialkritische Geschichte.'

<sup>3</sup> See Gerhard Hoffmann, *Raum, Situation, erzählte Wirklichkeit* (Stuttgart, 1978); Diana Festa-McCormick, *The City as Catalyst* (Rutherford, 1979); Christine W. Sizemore, *A Female Vision of the City. London in the Novels of Five British Women* (Knoxville/Tenn., 1989); Kirsten Hertel, *London zwischen Naturalismus und Moderne. Literarische Perspektiven einer Metropole* (Heidelberg, 1997).

<sup>4</sup> Blanche H. Gelfant, *The American City Novel* (Norman/Oklahoma, 1954), p. 5.



The city novel, according to Gelfant, is not limited to exploring specific problems, but is rather 'concerned with a total way of life. [...] It has also an intrinsic interest in the city as a unique place and atmosphere. In other words, the intention of the novel is to explore the city, to show what it is, what values it lives by, and what effect it has upon the individual's character and destiny.'<sup>5</sup> Combined with Ledanff's structural definition, this description of the city novel can be used to construct a distinct genre. In terms of this combined definition, Hermann's previous works, *Spielkinder* and *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte*, are not city novels. The depiction of Berlin, especially of its social realities, is essential in both of them: for the exploration of social divisions in *Spielkinder* and for the depiction of the social tensions affecting the Biedermeier Jewish middle class in *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte*. But in neither novel does Berlin determine plot, characterisation or structure.

Having ascertained, in the previous chapter, that *Kubinke* can be seen as adhering to Ledanff's terms, I shall now test *Kubinke* against the elements added by Gelfant. I start with an analysis of Hermann's expression of his 'intrinsic interest in the city as a unique place and atmosphere' (Gelfant), in other words, his fictional representation of and attitude to the new Berlin. I investigate how he builds up his panoramic survey of Berlin and how the expository passages are integrated in the novel's body. I show that in the depiction of the environment and society of the servant class in the new Berlin suburbs, detailed and particular, often humorous, descriptions, are mixed with depictions that express Hermann's panoramic and detached Impressionist aesthetics. Whereas his stylistic closeness to Impressionism has already been demonstrated in the previous chapter, I shall lay the emphasis here on Hermann's attitude to the new metropolitan reality. This attitude will be clarified by comparisons of his depiction of Berlin in *Kubinke* with August Endell's Impressionist city aesthetics expressed in *Die Schönheit der großen Stadt* (1908) and with Lesser Ury's representation of Berlin in painting. My second main concern is to show that Hermann's perceptive awareness of the new metropolitan way of life is instrumental in his depiction of character and plot. *Kubinke* will be confirmed as a city novel in Gelfant's terms, which depicts the new metropolitan

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<sup>5</sup> Gelfant, p. 8. Gelfant distinguishes three types of city novel: 'the 'portrait' study, which reveals the city through a single character, usually a country youth first discovering the city as a place and manner of life; the 'synoptic' study, a novel without a hero, which reveals the total city immediately as a personality in itself; and the 'ecological' study, which focuses upon one small spatial unit such as a neighborhood or city block and explores in detail the manner of life identified with this place' (Gelfant, p. 11).



character of Berlin in a non-judgemental way and makes this depiction the novel's central concern.

## 7.1 The Panoramic Survey of the City

What makes *Kubinke* special among contemporary novels is its insightful description of the physical and social realities of the city of Berlin in the first decade of the twentieth century. In the year of its publication, Rudolf Pechel stressed its value as a Berlin novel, a work which sets out to encapsulate the changing metropolitan reality:

Das Buch [...] erhebt sich zu einem Denkmal literarischer Ordnung, weil hier zum erstenmal mit tauglichen Mitteln der Versuch gemacht wird, das neue Berlin festzuhalten. Die Psychologie des neuen 'Westens' ist dem Verfasser meisterhaft geglückt. [...] Das reicht weit über das doch nur ephemere Schicksal des farblosen Kubinke hinaus. Hermanns Milieukraft [...] ist wieder wie in seinen früheren Schöpfungen sehr stark.<sup>6</sup>

When major daily newspapers marked Hermann's fiftieth and sixtieth birthdays, they praised *Kubinke* for its representation of Berlin. In the *Heidelberger Tageblatt* in 1921, *Kubinke* was remembered as a novel which sought to render 'die Physiognomie der modernen Weltstadt'.<sup>7</sup> Ten years later, Karl Escher also drew special attention to the representation of Berlin in what he calls Hermann's 'episches Meisterwerk', *Kubinke*: 'Hier ist das Berlin der großen Stuckpaläste – außen fix und innen nix – hier ist das Berlin im ersten Ansatz zu dem Tempo, das uns – in ganz anderer Art allerdings – ins Blut gegangen ist.' He concludes his retrospective appraisal of *Kubinke* by commending it as 'ein einzigartiges Abbild einer auch schon versunkenen Zeit.'<sup>8</sup> In the following pages I shall investigate how this 'einzigartige Abbild' has been achieved and what attitudes are conveyed in the survey of Berlin that Hermann presents, beginning with a close look at the opening pages of *Kubinke*.

Hermann's emphasis on the importance of the Berlin environment in *Kubinke* is made clear on the first page:

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<sup>6</sup> Rudolf Pechel, 'Neuere Belletristik', *Deutsche Rundschau*, 148 (1910-1911), 155-58 (p. 158).

<sup>7</sup> Anon., 'Georg Hermann', *Heidelberger Tageblatt*, 7 October 1921.

<sup>8</sup> Escher, 'Georg Hermann zum Sechzigsten', 6 October 1931, cutting, Georg Hermann Collection, section XI, provenance unknown.



Und da die Rede- und Denkweise keineswegs an allen Orten dieselbe ist und da das Land oder die Stadt, in der wir leben, binnen kurzem auf jeden abfärbt, ihm und seiner Art Stempel und Gepräge gibt, so will ich noch hinzusetzen, daß meine Geschichte in Berlin spielt. (p. 17)

The belief in the determining force of the environment that speaks from these lines does not have the social orientation of the Naturalist writers. Rather, it is an indication that the plot and characters of the novel, just as much as the descriptions of its setting, are meant to be understood as manifestations of the characteristics of Berlin.

The technique Hermann uses at the beginning of the novel to give the reader a survey of the city is the equivalent of an extensive zooming-in shot in cinematography.<sup>9</sup> From a survey of the whole of the fragmented city, he moves on to focus on the outskirts of Berlin, the area of the new western suburbs. The focus is then further narrowed to concentrate on one street in the suburb, and finally rests on the microcosm of the tenement which houses the hairdresser's salon in which Kubinke is due to start work; the room he will share with his colleague Tesch; and the homes of the three servant girls with their respective employers.

Hermann does not introduce his survey of Berlin with a view over the cityscape from an elevated standpoint on the outskirts, nor by describing the city through the eyes of the dismayed provincial arriving in Berlin by train, both of which are techniques commonly employed in Realist and Naturalist novels.<sup>10</sup> Instead, he gives a descriptive survey of the fragmented city that mixes an abstract and metaphorical conceptualisation with vivid descriptions and comparisons, dominated by evocative participles and verbs:

Hier ist es das Thule der Gelehrten und dort die Veste der Macht. [...] Hier jagen die Eisenbahnen schlafscheuchend an rauchgeschwärzten Hinterhäusern vorüber, und dort gleiten und huschen die hellen Hochbahnzüge, wie leuchtende Glasschlangen in ihre schwarzen Löcher hinab und steigen mühelos aus ihnen empor. (p. 18)

The overall concept of the urban area of Berlin emerges as a conglomeration of individual and markedly disparate cities. Hermann acknowledges here the segregation

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<sup>9</sup> Fries uses a similar analogy when she compares this technique to the focussing process in photography (Fries, p. 105).

<sup>10</sup> For the view from an elevated point, see for instance the opening paragraphs of Karl Gutzkow, *Die Ritter vom Geiste* (1850/51). For the provincial's arrival by train, see Conrad Alberti, *Die Alten und die Jungen* (1889); Otto J. Bierbaum, *Stilpe* (1896); and Viebig, *Das tägliche Brot*.



of the urban population which is fundamental to any definition of the metropolis. Robert E. Park, one of the leaders of the influential Chicago school of city sociologists, in 1915 described the metropolis as 'a mosaic of little worlds which touch but do not interpenetrate'.<sup>11</sup> Hermann characterises the relationship between the individual city areas by contrasting them with one another: a succession of seven contrasting descriptions in terms such as wealth, economic specialisation and aesthetic beauty are introduced by the oppositional pair 'hier' and 'dort'.

Hermann's description is not only remarkable as a historical testimony of the state of the developing metropolis of Berlin, but also for the literary transformation of the city description, which presents the reader with an extraordinary wealth of conflicting impressions. While metaphors such as 'das Thule der Gelehrten' and 'die Veste der Macht' refer to archetypal city images and thus conjure up associations of established solidity in the reader's mind,<sup>12</sup> descriptions such as the one cited above of the different trains going through particular city areas stress the momentary impression of speed and noise that defines the contemporary city experience. The intensity of this particular image, stressed by alliteration, contrasts with the aesthetic detachment of the abstract description of movement by masses of people in city space and light ('Hier schiebt sich die Menschenwohle im bunten Narrenkleid [...] – immer wieder sich bindend und immer wieder sich lösend – über die Plätze hin, die, von ganz hoch oben herab, von den mattblauen Monden der Bogenlampen bestrahlt werden.' (p. 18)).

Hermann not only states his recognition of the complexity of the modern city, he also sees this complexity at the root of the problem of capturing the full variety of manifestations and experiences that Berlin has to offer. In a review of Max Osborn's artistic guide to Berlin, published in 1909, Hermann explains the lack of 'Lokalpatriotismus' and knowledge of Berlin as due, in part, to the fragmentation of the metropolis:

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<sup>11</sup> Robert E. Park, 'The City: Suggestions for the Investigation of Human Behavior in the City Environment', *The American Journal of Sociology*, 20 (1915), 577-612 (p. 608). A very similar description is given by Louis Wirth in his influential article 'Urbanism as a Way of Life', *American Journal of Sociology*, 44 (1938), 1-24 (p. 16): 'The city [...] tends to resemble a mosaic of social worlds in which the transition from one to the other is abrupt.'

<sup>12</sup> Compare U. C. Knoepfelmacher on the use of similar metaphors in English Victorian fiction (U. C. Knoepfelmacher, 'The Novel between City and Country', in H. J. Dyos and Michael Wolff (eds.), *The Victorian City. Images and Realities*, vol. 2 (London, Boston, 1973), pp. 517-36.



Endlich ist aber Berlin - schon seit langen Jahrzehnten – ein Riesenorganismus, in dem nicht, wie in kleineren Städten, alles was irgendwie kulturell in Betracht kommt, etwa auf einem kleinen Fleck zusammenliegt, sondern die Dinge liegen weit auseinander, und vor allem liegen sie weit ab von unseren heutigen Wohnstätten, die doch zumeist an der Peripherie der Riesenstadt sich befinden.<sup>13</sup>

In 1931, in a talk delivered on the occasion of a Fontane evening to the 'Gesellschaft der Bibliophilen' in Berlin, Hermann refers back to his survey of Berlin in *Kubinke*.<sup>14</sup> The context of the quotation twenty-one years after its first publication in *Kubinke* is interesting: it is a gently mocking but clearly affectionate praise of Berlin. Hermann goes on to ascribe to Berlin's fragmented nature the neglect of the city as a subject in the arts. Implicitly re-iterating an observation made by Fontane in the 1880s,<sup>15</sup> he states that Berlin is still undiscovered from a literary point of view: 'Aber Berlin ist vom Westen und von Nikolassee bis zum Alexanderplatz immer noch *litteris terra incognita* [...], soviel Schiffe auch schon ausfahren, es zu entdecken.'<sup>16</sup>

In *Kubinke*, as in *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte*, Hermann saw his task at least partly as discovering this *litteris terra incognita* and to counteract a popular criticism of Berlin that was based simply on the lack of knowledge of this difficult, complex and changeable city. This time, however, unlike in the *Jettchen* novels, he does not follow the route of stressing the continuity of the city's culture, but instead acknowledges the changed character of Berlin as that of a modern metropolis and presents to his readers the peculiar rhythm and poetry of this new Berlin. In his 1912 essay 'Um Berlin', Hermann makes explicit the attitude to Berlin which must be seen as standing behind his *Kubinke*:

All diese Gegensätze, die Berlin in sich vereint, all diese scheinbare Kulturlosigkeit, die die unruhigen Riesenformen neben die kühle Sicherheit von einst stellt – die Armut seiner Armen, der Fleiß seiner Fabriken, das wilde Jagen des Verkehrs, die sich umformende Innenstadt und die entrechtete Natur an der Lisière; Neues und Altes – alles ist noch unbesungen. Und dennoch – dennoch ist

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<sup>13</sup> Hermann, 'Ein neues Buch'. Other reasons for the Berliners' underdeveloped 'Lokalpatriotismus' given in this review are cited in chapter 5 of this dissertation.

<sup>14</sup> This talk was published under the title *Pro Berlin* (Berlin, 1931).

<sup>15</sup> Herbert Roch quotes Fontane as follows: 'Es fehlt uns noch ein großer Berliner Roman, der die Gesamtheit unseres Lebens schildert, etwa wie Thackeray in dem besten seiner Romane, "Vanity Fair", in einer alle Klassen umfassenden Weise das Londoner Leben geschildert hat. Wir stecken noch zu sehr in der Einzelbetrachtung.' (Herbert Roch, *Berlin und das neunzehnte Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 1962), p. 249). Roch does not specify his reference further, but claims that this quotation can be found in Fontane's review of Paul Lindau's *Der Zug nach dem Westen* (1886). I could not locate it, however, in the review of Lindau's book in Fontane's *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. XXI,1, pp. 282-89.

<sup>16</sup> Hermann, *Pro Berlin*, p. 5.



Berlin ein Gedicht in meinen Augen. Ein Gedicht ist es, dessen eigenartige Rhythmen ich mit jedem Schritt empfinde, der mich über sein Pflaster trägt; das zwar meine Nerven oft quält, meine Seele beunruhigt, und dessen tosenden Singsang ich doch nicht entbehren könnte.<sup>17</sup>

After the introductory survey of the whole of the urban area of Berlin, Hermann narrows his focus to concentrate on one of the facets of the expanding city, namely the new western suburbs: 'das Berlin der reichen Leute, die kein Geld haben' (p. 18). This apparent paradox highlights Hermann's ironical criticism of the ostentatious aspect of the city and his interest in the contrast between appearance and reality.

In *Spielkinder* and in the novella *Aus dem letzten Hause*, Hermann had already devoted some attention to the outskirts of Berlin. Especially in *Spielkinder*, he views the exploding metropolitan development very critically and depicts an atmosphere of desolation. An accommodation with this environment is discernible in *Aus dem letzten Hause*, where at least the view of the suburbs from above is shown to have its attractions.<sup>18</sup> In both of these earlier works, Hermann laid the emphasis on the isolation of the individual in those bleak surroundings.

The standpoint for the depiction of the Berlin outskirts in *Kubinke* differs from this. Hermann here provides a narratorial description with a historical dimension: it is dominated by the contrast between the then and the now. A past in which nature reigned in the area is opposed to a present characterised by frantic human activity, doubtful civilisation, exploitation and speculation. It is not only the destruction of nature that Hermann deplures, he also underlines the contrast between a past idyllic world of harmony and continuity and a present characterised by transience and instability. However, although the description is suffused by a general tone of nostalgia, Hermann's representation of the modern developments in the suburb is in part a positive one. The following extract contrasting the music audible in the area, then and now, describes the replacement of a very atmospheric scene by a more institutionalised and technical approach, but the greater sophistication of the latter is undeniable and a certain admiration for the achievement of modernity shines through:

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<sup>17</sup> Hermann, 'Um Berlin', p. 1102.

<sup>18</sup> See pp. 72-76 of this dissertation.



Wo aber des Abends aus der Laube der Gärtnerei, aus dem Urwald von Sonnenblumen, Goldruten, Balsaminen und Georginen heraus die milden, melancholischen Klagetöne der Ziehharmonika durch den blauen Herbstdunst schwebten, da ist jetzt durch vier Stockwerke ein richtiges Konservatorium für Musik, und den ganzen Tag schwirren die Tonwellen der Kadenzen, Fingerübungen und Läufe gleich den geheimnisvollen Strahlungen einer elektrischen Station straßauf, straßab, überall hin, vom Keller bis unter die Böden hinauf. (p. 20)

Hermann goes on to give a breathless account of the construction of the suburban streets and houses. The syntax of his description, marked by paratactic accumulation and by the heavy use of the passive throughout the passage, underlines the impersonal, businesslike brutality of man's intervention and the feverish speed of progress. Again, the affinity to a filming technique is clear: the process of change is effectively narrated in time-lapse: 'Da wurden Bäume gefällt; die Felder verkamen, versandeten und wurden aufgeschüttet; Laubenkolonien kamen und wuchsen hoch; wurden wieder fortgebrochen, rückten weiter und weiter hinaus.' (p. 20)

With a return to the date that marks the beginning of the narrative ('Jetzt natürlich, zu der Zeit, da unsere Geschichte beginnt, am 1. April 1908' (p. 21)), Hermann indicates the end of this general geographical and historical survey. He now narrows his focus further to concentrate first on the street, then on the house which is to become the centre of his narration.<sup>19</sup> In the description of the house, the tone of the narrative changes and Hermann's humorous skills come to the foreground. His criticism of the pomposity and pretentiousness of the Wilhelmine architecture is heartfelt<sup>20</sup> but, through unexpected and seemingly incongruous comparisons, he converts it into a humorous description which highlights not only his criticism, but also his fondness for this particular aspect of Berlin. The architecture and ornaments of the 'hochherrschaftliche Haus' are, for example, compared to very prosaic household items: 'Ja, es war jetzt wirklich ein hochherrschaftliches Haus, wie es so in der Sonne lag, gelbgrün wie Kurellasches Brustpulver. Unvermittelt und plötzlich, - wie Badekästen an Vogelbauern, - hingen die Glasverschläge der Wintergärten an der Fassade.' (p. 23) The incongruity of the house's decor is thus highlighted and ridiculed, but in a fashion that elicits a smile rather than aesthetic outrage.

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<sup>19</sup> In the autobiographical essay 'Mein Geburtshaus', Hermann locates this building: 'Das Haus des Kubinke und dort ist das Buch auch geschrieben, ist in der Uhlandstraße, ziemlich am Ende gegenüber der Post.' (p. 3).

<sup>20</sup> Hermann returned to this subject many times in his writings. See *Die Nacht des Doktor Herzfeld* (1912) and *Spaziergang in Potsdam* (1929).



The faux-naive personifications of the mythological sculptures adorning the facade serve the same gently ridiculing purpose: 'Und über dem gequetschten Portal saß mit dem Kopfe gegen eine Fensterbrüstung eine kaum bekleidete Dame mit einem Merkurstab und tauschte mit einem leicht geschürzten Jüngling, der einen Amboß liebte, verheißungsvolle Blicke aus.' (pp. 23/24) The unsentimental but affectionate sense of the comic that is ascribed to the Berliner speaks from these descriptions. It encourages a sympathetic and gently self-ironic attitude in the Berlin readership. The use of the Berlin dialect in expressions such as 'die Heizung schnurgelte' (p. 25), 'ein Fahrstuhl [...], [der] seine Mucken hatte' (p. 24) etc. reinforces the humorous description, and the repetition of the epithet 'hochherrschaftlich', used four times in connection with the street and a further five times to describe the house itself, underlines the sense of irony of the passage. The description is affectionate, but it does not deteriorate into a simply affirmative provision of 'local colour'. Hermann's social criticism always shines through the humorous portrait, as for instance in his description of the differences between 'Vorderhaus' and 'Gartenhaus': 'Und vorn hatten sie Zimmer zum Essen; Säle für Gesellschaften; und Hundelöcher zum Schlafen; während die hinten keine Räume für Gesellschaften hatten und auch in Hundelöchern aßen.' (p. 25)

The description of the suburb as a whole differs from those in *Spielkinder* and in *Aus dem letzten Hause*. On the one hand, especially in the historical comparisons and in the account of the construction process, a critical attitude may be detected. This is similar to Hermann's descriptions of the suburban expansion around Berlin, which are to be found in his earlier works. However, in contrast to the earlier depictions of Berlin's outskirts, in *Kubinke* he does not evoke the same sense of isolation created at the edge of metropolitan civilisation. In *Kubinke*, the narratorial voice of the detached observer describes the development in historical, economical and aesthetic terms. In Hermann's detailed description of the contemporary 1908 suburb, an underlying positive attitude is to be detected. Hermann's criticism is softened by a humour that shows affection; and his attention to light, shadow and colour in the description of the tree-lined and electrically lit street shows his Impressionist's susceptibility to urban beauty.

Des Abends, da war das, wenn man auf der Mitte des Damms stand, wie eine einzige, lange, leicht gekrümmte Kette von Perlen, die zuerst in rechter



Entfernung voneinander an der unsichtbaren Schnur hingen, und die dann immer enger und enger zusammenrückten, um in *einen* langen, leuchtenden Schweif auszulaufen. Auf dem Bürgersteig aber zeichneten sich im Winter und im ersten Frühjahr ganz fein, scharf und genau, die Schatten aller Äste, Zweige und Zweiglein ab. Später, im Frühling, Sommer und Herbst aber, wenn das Laub an den Bäumen war, ging man hier des Abends in einem schönen, mattgrünen Halblight dahin. (p. 26)

The fascination with the new, with the city's outskirts as the area that shows most clearly the principle of rapid transition and expansion governing Berlin in the first two decades of the century, comes to the fore in *Kubinke*. In the essay 'Um Berlin', Hermann recognises this ever-changing formation of new structures as 'Sinnbild dessen, was mir als Berlin erscheint'.<sup>21</sup> In that essay, Hermann makes his fascination with the suburbs explicit:

Seltsam ist dabei, daß unsere künstlerische Anteilnahme an der Weltstadt sich immer mehr und mehr nach außen schiebt, an die Lisière, in die neuen Stadtviertel, in die Vororte. Das andere kennen wir. Aber hier haben wir das Gefühl, daß unser Auge und unser Sinn mit jedem neuen Schritt Entdeckungen macht, und hier spüren wir das Leben, das Werden, das *Panta rei*. Die Natur geht mit ihren alten Gesetzen, und die Stadt mit ihren neuen Gesetzen kommt.<sup>22</sup>

The interest described here is value-free. It is an abstract interest in the development of new forms and structures, the new laws of the city. In his appreciation of this area, his capacity as art critic manifests itself:

Nirgends in der Welt scheint es heute für den Künstler so interessante Raumgliederungen zu geben, scheinen sich in so feinen Valeurs die Gegenstände voneinander abzustufen, scheint bei all seiner Kümmerlichkeit und seiner tristesse so viel Charakter einem Vorwurf innezuwohnen, wie gerade hier. Nichts ist abgespielt und langweilig.<sup>23</sup>

This artistic evaluation of the city's outskirts highlights the context in which 'Um Berlin' was written, namely to provide an introduction to a series of lithographs by Rudolf Großmann depicting scenes of the Berlin outskirts. But it also highlights

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<sup>21</sup> Hermann, 'Um Berlin', p. 1106.

<sup>22</sup> Hermann, 'Um Berlin', p. 1104.

<sup>23</sup> Hermann, 'Um Berlin', p. 1106.



Hermann's aesthetic interest in the exact capturing of nuances in the manifestations of Berlin metropolitan life and atmosphere, which is discernible in *Kubinke*.<sup>24</sup>

In the light of Hermann's interest in the modern face of Berlin, it is interesting to consider parallels with techniques, which came to be used in the medium of film. As I have shown above, he used the techniques of zooming-in and time-lapse to describe the modern development of the metropolis of Berlin. The use of techniques later to become familiar in the cinema goes further than that, though. The arrivals of the middle class Löwenberg family, and of the working class Pieseckes, are shown in a series of jump cuts which underline parallel and contrast for social comment and comic effect.<sup>25</sup> Lämmert's thesis that writers' ideological acceptance of modernity is often first expressed indirectly by their adaptation of modern literary technique, is confirmed here.<sup>26</sup> Hermann's use of 'cinematographic' literary techniques is decidedly modern, while his attitude to the expanding metropolis remains divided between a nostalgic and social criticism and a positive acceptance of the constant change that characterises Berlin.

Having narrowed his focus to the 'hochherrschaftliche Haus', Hermann uses the tenement as the base for his narration, but also broadens the scope once in each chapter to provide panoramic depictions of different areas and aspects of metropolitan life. The choice of emphasis in Hermann's expositions on the Berlin environment shows that the selection process is not random. Rather, the descriptive passages combine to present a picture of the city not only as a varied environment, but also as a system that the newcomer has to learn to understand if he is to integrate himself. The southwestern suburb, the park, the day-tripper's café, the busy city street, the barracks and the court of

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<sup>24</sup> In the novel *Der kleine Gast*, a further reference to Hermann's interest in the suburbs can be found. Here, he stresses the mixture of city and country, the hint of nature within the manifestations of the city. 'Und gerade diese Ahnung, diese Ungewißheit müßte man malen können – sie ist reizvoller als alle Bestimmtheit eines Kornfeldes, eines Waldes oder eines Flusses, der durchs Hügelland zieht.' (Hermann, *Der kleine Gast*, p. 115). The gradual change from city to country on a walk from the Stettiner Bahnhof to the woods and lakes surrounding Berlin is described in detail in an article Hermann published in the *Vossische Zeitung*, 2 April 1933, entitled 'Hundertundein Kilometer'. The article, like the passage quoted above from *Der kleine Gast*, stresses the mixture of city and country elements in the suburbs.

<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, the television adaptation of *Kubinke*, produced for the Deutsche Fernsehfunk in 1962 in the GDR under the direction of Josef Stauder, does not make use of any of these stylistic means suggested in the novel. The film rather neglects the panoramic view of Berlin, several scenes are changed or omitted which highlighted that aspect. Thus, *Kubinke* and Pauline's first date is not set in the Grunewald, and the military call-up and court scenes are omitted altogether. Instead, the social message of *Kubinke*'s story is highlighted and phrased in the lament: 'Für die einfachen Leute gibt es kein Recht'.

<sup>26</sup> See Eberhard Lämmert, 'Die Herausforderung der Künste durch die Technik', in Götz Großklaus and Eberhard Lämmert (eds.), *Literatur in einer industriellen Kultur* (Stuttgart, 1989) pp. 23-45.



justice are each characterised by their own behavioural and moral codes. They combine to form an alien world to Kubinke, the barber's apprentice from the provinces. In providing these extensive panoramic depictions of the Berlin environment within his novel, Hermann encounters the structural problem of how to integrate passages of descriptive exposition with the plot development focussing on the hero's progress.

It is useful here to introduce Gelfant's distinction between the representation of the city as antagonist or protagonist. For Kubinke, as for the heroes of the Naturalist city novels, the city is still an antagonistic force. As Kubinke makes the transition from onlooker to participant, his illusions of city life are shattered. His feelings of excitement and hope make way for those of loss and confusion. However, as I have shown, this conventional plot co-exists in Hermann's novel with a non-judgemental panoramic representation of Berlin. The city thus also becomes the protagonist which is described in great detail in its physical form and systematic function and which influences the behaviour of the novel's characters. It is the mixture of the two forms of city representation in *Kubinke*, which creates the structural difficulty.

## **7.2 Integration of Panoramic Depiction and Plot**

One way in which Hermann manages the integration is by creating a common atmosphere and mood that links the descriptive passages to the scenic representations of the main stages of the hero's progress. But it becomes clear that the depiction of the environment and the inhabitants of Berlin takes precedence over the continuation of the plot. Rather than integrating the expository passages on Berlin into the novel's action, Hermann presents them as the basis which sets the atmospheric and factual conditions for Kubinke's behaviour. The continuation of the plot development is thus seen as a reaction to or consequence of the aspect of Berlin life depicted before. The following analysis of one of the descriptive passages on Berlin will show how Hermann integrates exposition and plot.

The concluding scene of each chapter is introduced by an atmospheric and detailed account of the weather and the changes in nature, followed by a panoramic survey of the people enlivening the scene and their activities. Thus, in the 'Emma' chapter, first a seven-page description of the effects of the spring in the city, then a nine-page survey of



the activities of the multitude of day-trippers who have left Berlin for its environs, are set within the linear account of Kubinke's adventures and prepare the mood for the ensuing dance scene at a day-trippers' café.<sup>27</sup>

As Kubinke sets out to meet Hedwig and Emma in the 'Strandschlößchen', he goes against the flow of returning day-trippers. Hermann describes them not as individuals, but as types ('die Kleinen', 'die größeren Kinder', 'die Kommiss', 'die Soldaten', 'die Liebespaare'). His interest is not in individual features, but in describing the general atmosphere. Focussing on the tired small children, the singing of the older children, the abundance of courting couples and the music wafting over the scene from the nearby garden restaurants, he creates an evocative picture of a Sunday evening in spring. The atmosphere of hope, evoked by the description of the spring developments, is now mixed with a sense of tiredness and ending. Hermann reinforces this atmosphere by embedding within the scene a description of the setting sun and an approaching thunderstorm. The implication that Hermann conveys is that, arriving at the café when most people are already leaving in their tired contentment, Kubinke is too late for his own share of happiness.

Although this description prepares for the scene to come and thus ties in with the plot development, it points even more clearly to Hermann's detachment from his hero's story and towards his panoramic interest, which takes precedence over the progressing plot. This becomes obvious in the ensuing depiction of the 'Strandschlößchen' garden. Hermann reinforces the impersonal, generalist approach to his description by a technique that at first sight seems to aim in the opposite direction, namely towards expressing a more specific interest in particular individuals. He picks out individuals from the mass, citing their names and reporting on their activities: 'Und Meta Schulze schwebt ganz schräg auf dem Holzschimmel wie eine richtige Reitdame immer im Kreis umher und lächelt sauer.' (p. 147) Only when, a page later, he reports: 'eine neue Meta Schulze sitzt auf dem Schimmel' (p. 148), it becomes clear that the name, and with it the individual, is interchangeable: just one person among hundreds or thousands of others. By implication, the randomness in the choice of Kubinke as hero of this novel becomes obvious. Hermann's detached stance and panoramic approach are clearly illustrated here. Hermann shows detachment from his hero's story, depicting Kubinke as

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<sup>27</sup> Wentworth identifies this café, which is named 'Strandschlößchen' in the novel, as Schramm's Seebad Wilmersdorf (see Wentworth, p. 35).



just one in a multitude. The description of the café scene highlights that the expository passages in *Kubinke* are more than merely preparations for the next stage in the plot development. The depiction of the new metropolis of Berlin and its customs provides the body of the novel, with Kubinke's story being relegated to the role of an illustration of the impact of this new urban way of life on the newcomer.

Hermann describes the relationships between the patrons of the café. All classes mix, but they do not meet as individuals. They form a swirling mass of people whose relationships remain governed by distance and rationality. A mother tells an acquaintance how she reacted to the disappearance of her daughter: 'Ick hab ihr jleich als unbekannt verzogen bei de Polizei abjemeldet' (p. 149), a father is relieved to see himself ignored by the waiter and thus leaves with his family without having paid, a drunkard is looked at as a source of popular entertainment. Kubinke is passive and only reacts to his surroundings: 'Emil Kubinke wandert zwischen den Gängen auf und nieder, läßt sich schieben und treiben' (p. 148). He is repeatedly described as an outsider from all this activity.<sup>28</sup>

Having set out the general rules of behaviour in these cameo descriptions, Hermann lets Hedwig and Emma enter the scene. Kubinke's story takes its course, following the principles established in the description so far. Without understanding what is happening to him, Kubinke is spun around by the two girls in a dance. He is made to pay for their meals, is used as a catalyst in a quarrel between Emma and her former lover Gustav Schmelow, and finally, as the quarrel cannot be resolved to Emma's satisfaction, is allowed to stand in for one night for the disloyal Schmelow.

### **7.3 The Combination of Detail and Atmosphere**

#### **7.3.1 Naturalist Detail**

Both in the introductory exposition of the novel and in the passage discussed above, the mixture of styles and attitudes, which Horch describes as typical for Hermann, becomes

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<sup>28</sup> See p. 146: 'All das tragt dahin [...] – Aber mitten dazwischen Emil Kubinke'; or p. 158: 'Emil Kubinke aber steht ganz verdattert allein und blickt in den Saal;' and, most clearly, p. 163: 'Emil Kubinke fühlt sich verraten und verkauft. Er empfindet, daß er hier in eine geheime Gesellschaft eingedrungen ist, mit ihren eigenen Abzeichen, ihrer eigenen Sprache.'



apparent: 'Eine naturalistisch genaue Beschreibung von Personen und Dingen verbindet sich mit einem atmosphärischen Impressionismus.'<sup>29</sup> The Naturalist element in *Kubinke* is, however, much reduced in comparison to Hermann's earlier novel, *Spielkinder*. The sharpness and bitterness that spoke from the social criticism in *Spielkinder* is now softened by the use of humour with a gently ironic undertone. This humour relies on close observation and detailed knowledge of the milieu he describes. The experience of the author as writer of humorous Berlin columns in several daily papers shows through here.<sup>30</sup> Again, as in *Spielkinder*, the similarity of Hermann's and the Berlin draughtsman Zille's humorous sketches is clear. What Hermann wrote about the characters and the interiors in his later novel *Rosenemil* applies here, too: 'Einfach abbeschriebene Zilles, aber durch die Brille von Georg Hermann angesehen. Daher die Echtheit.'<sup>31</sup> The three servant girls in particular, with their unsentimental carelessness, are closely related to Zille's characters. Erwin Redslob wrote in the catalogue to an exhibition of Zille's drawings: 'Die Menschen Zilles leben jenseits von Gut und Böse und haben dabei das Herz auf dem rechten Fleck.'<sup>32</sup> Indeed, Zille produced a cover illustration for the first edition of *Kubinke*, which brings to life the girls' robustness. They appear in this drawing, as in the novel, bursting with life and energy (ill. XIV).

Hermann has now reached the maturity that he saw at the root of Zille's work. In concentrating in *Kubinke* on the survivors, namely the three girls, he has exchanged the position of 'Ankläger mit pathetischen Gebärden', which he still had as the author of *Spielkinder*, for that of the artist who depicts his characters' 'Ausgleich mit der Welt'.<sup>33</sup>

A series of letters from Zille held in the Georg Hermann Collection of the Leo Baeck Institute in New York, gives another interesting insight into the relationship between the two artists.<sup>34</sup> In January 1922, Hermann asked Zille to illustrate the new edition of *Kubinke* by the Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, which was to appear as part of the *Gesammelte*

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<sup>29</sup> Horch, p. 79.

<sup>30</sup> From 1904 onwards, the *Berliner Morgenpost*, and *Berliner Zeitung* ran Hermann's articles, partly as a series signed 'Gregor', with titles such as 'Der Nachtomnibus', 'Die Gummischuhe', 'Weltstadt und Fischerdorf' and partly as unsigned pieces ('Krauses auf dem Maskenball', 'Krauses ziehen um!', 'Sechs-Tage-Rennen' etc.). All of these: cuttings (no dates), Georg Hermann Collection, section VII.

<sup>31</sup> Georg Hermann, letter to his daughter Hilde Villum-Hansen, autumn 1935 (no date), in Nussbaum (ed.), *Unvorhanden*, pp. 65-68 (p. 67).

<sup>32</sup> Erwin Redslob, *Heinrich Zille*, exhibition catalogue, collection Axel Springer, Berlin Museum (Berlin, 1968), p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> See p. 67 of this dissertation. The quotations are taken from Hermann, 'Heinrich Zille', p. 5.

<sup>34</sup> Heinrich Zille, letters to Georg Hermann, dated 16 January 1922; 26 March 1922; and 11 July 1922; Georg Hermann Collection, part B.



# Kubinke



Roman  
von **Georg Hermann**

III. XIV: Heinrich Zille, cover illustration for Georg Hermann, *Kubinke* (1910), reproduced in Lothar Fischer, *Heinrich Zille; mit Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* (= Rowohlt's Monographien, vol. 276) (Reinbek, 1979), p. 59



*Werke*. Zille, however, turned the offer down, referring to his lack of time and, more interestingly, to the draughtsman-like style of Hermann: 'Ich halte das Buch für "gezeichnet". Will's nicht verderben.' Hermann must have insisted, because in March 1922, Zille wrote another refusal ('Das Buch ist gezeichnet, ein Zweiter kann nur ablenken, das heißt verderben'), and yet another in July of the same year, still stating the same reasons: 'Hab mit so Manchem gesprochen, alle sagen: Der "Kubinke" ist schon gezeichnet. Warum verderben?'

The pictorial quality and suggestiveness of Hermann's writing was not only seen by Zille, but turned into a staple comment by the readers of *Kubinke*. One reader sent pictures of a barber's apprentice with the comment: 'So muß Kubinke ausgesehen haben!'<sup>35</sup> Another, a certain Georg Bornhöfft, proprietor of a chemical factory, was so inspired by the novel that he wrote to Hermann as follows:

Ich trete nun heute an Sie mit einer Anfrage heran und hoffe, daß Sie dieselbe nicht falsch auffassen werden.

Ich fabriziere einen Rasircreme und war mir, wie dieses so häufig geht, über eine passende Benennung dieser Art nicht klar, bis mir nach dem Lesen Ihres drolligen Romans der Gedanke kam, mein Fabrikat mit dem Namen 'Kubinke' zu bezeichnen.

Bevor ich dieses in die Wirklichkeit umsetze, möchte ich mir die höfliche Anfrage erlauben, ob Sie irgend welche Bedenken hierbei hätten.<sup>36</sup>

Unfortunately, Hermann's answer is not preserved, neither could I trace whether a shaving cream was ever sold under the name of Kubinke.

Part of *Kubinke's* success certainly must be attributed to the humorous and evocative authenticity of Hermann's writing, in other words the 'local colour' of the novel.<sup>37</sup> Another reason, however, is his sensitive Impressionist depiction of atmosphere in Berlin. This has already been pointed out in the previous chapter in the context of a stylistic analysis, but it is worth taking up this point again here in order to highlight the mixture of concern with the particular and a detached, aestheticising view, which characterises Hermann's depiction of Berlin in *Kubinke*.

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<sup>35</sup> Arthur Peiser, letter to Georg Hermann, no date, Georg Hermann Collection, section X.

<sup>36</sup> Georg Bornhöfft, letter to Georg Hermann, 19 January 1911, Georg Hermann Collection, section X.

<sup>37</sup> For such an evaluation, see for example Josef Kliche's article 'Zu Georg Hermann's fünfzigstem Geburtstag', *Berliner Volks-Zeitung*, 7 October 1921. Kliche writes about *Kubinke*: 'Die Art, wie der Verfasser das alles gestaltet, wie er das Neuberliner Milieu der unteren Kreise treffend zeichnet und mit seinen geschickten Worten humorvoll glossiert [...], das ist zweifellos gut geglückt. Scharf geschautes Leben, Witz und Geist und originelles, temperamentvoll abgestimmtes Urberlinertum.'



### 7.3.2 Impressionist Evocation of the Beauty of the City

I will show in the following that Hermann does not confine his atmospheric accounts of the metropolitan environment to peaceful Sunday morning scenes, the outskirts of the city and the day-trippers' cafés, but that he also sees the particular beauty inherent in modernity, as discovered by the Impressionists. In several instances, he describes with relish the busy traffic in Berlin at night and the electric light which makes the whole city come to life. It is worth looking in some detail at an example of one of these scenes. In a comparison of the attitude expressed here with August Endell's contemporary essay *Die Schönheit der großen Stadt* and with Lesser Ury's art of city painting, Hermann's positive attitude to the specifically modern aspects can be shown and placed into a cultural historical context. First, Hermann's text:

Und die Dunkelheit brach herein, eine warme, milde Dunkelheit. Oben lag die Nacht mit weichem Dunst und matten, flimmernden Sternen; und unten gewannen die elektrischen Bogenlampen die Macht über die Straße und überglänzten die Dame mit dem Merkurstab, die über dem Portal saß, und zeichneten die Äste und Zweige der Bäume auf dem Bürgersteig ab. Und in den Staub von all den Straßenbahnen und von den rollenden Wagen mischte sich doch etwas von dem frischen, bitteren Geruch der steigenden Säfte in den Ulmen und Linden. So belebt aber war die Straße den ganzen Tag nicht gewesen. Die Bahnen, die oft fast leer entlangepoltert waren, waren jetzt ganz schwarz von Menschen. Auf den Plattformen standen sie nur so gekeilt. Und wenn ehemals in langen Pausen Bahn auf Bahn gefolgt war, so schienen jetzt ihre erhellten Kästen gleich zu vieren, zu sechsen hintereinander heranzurollen; und leere Bauwagen klapperten mit johlenden Kutschern nebenher; und Droschken, die für die Nacht Schicht machten, trotteten mit müden Pferdchen ganz langsam nach Hause; und die anderen, die jetzt erst begannen, kamen ihnen entgegen.

[...]

Es schwebte der prickelnde Hauch von Abenteuern in der Luft [...]. Und selbst die würdigen Eheherren, die in der Bahn saßen, konnten ihre Blicke nicht von der schönen Nachbarin losreißen, und immer wieder suchten ihre Augen über die Zeitung fort die Augen der Nachbarin. Und sie fuhren ein, zwei, drei Haltestellen weiter, ehe sie sich ganz mühselig hochrissen und herauswankten.

[...]

Und durch all das Getümmel wutschen die Dienstmädchen mit Körben, Netzen und Taschen; etwelche mit Häubchen, doch meist barhaupt mit ihren vollen Frisuren. Alle in Waschkleidern, mit bloßen Armen und den Hals frei. Blonde, braune, schwarze und rote; kleine trendelnde, rund wie Bosdorfer Äpfel, und



andere breit, groß, kräftig, auf zierlichen Halbschuhen. Alles an ihnen ist Hast und Eile und Frische und Lachen. Jetzt haben wir natürlich keine Zeit, sagen ihre Blicke, jetzt müssen wir zum Kolonialwarenhändler und zum Schlächter und in den Grünkrämladen, jetzt müssen wir noch Soda und Seife holen und Öl und Suppengrünes ... aber nachher ..., wenn wir abgewaschen haben, um halbzehn, dann kommen wir noch einmal. Und dann - wenn ihr noch da seid - drüben unterm Torweg oder an der Ecke, in den dunklen Nebenstraßen, - dann werden wir ja sehen, ob ihr der Rechte für uns seid. (pp. 48-50)

The sensual description of the night in the city is one of the tropes of Impressionist literature. Hermann's depiction shows a striking similarity to the turn-of-the-century architect and designer August Endell's celebration of atmosphere in his treatise on the beauty of the metropolis *Die Schönheit der großen Stadt*. Endell's essay is a good example of an Impressionist city aesthetic.<sup>38</sup> He writes a glowing declaration of love to the beauty of the metropolis. He does not focus on the conventionally accepted beauty of parks, old houses and churches, but instead 'seeks beauty precisely in what is considered ugly',<sup>39</sup> namely the essentially modern aspects of the metropolis: industry, modern street design and architecture, the transport system, traffic and the crowds.

Endell's perception of metropolitan beauty relies on a process of aestheticising abstraction. It is a beauty created by the veiling of detail through 'Luftschleier', and by the rhythmical movements of traffic and the resulting transformations of space. By looking at the transfiguration of objective reality through the effect of natural veils such as fog, lighting, dust or darkness, rather than attempting to pierce them with our gaze, Endell claims, 'eine neue Wunderwelt' presents itself to the observer.<sup>40</sup> The falling darkness especially gives rise to the peculiar beauty of the city: 'In diesem Meer von Dunst- und Schattenschichten beginnen die bunten Lichter ihr ewiges Spiel.'<sup>41</sup> He emphasises the abstract beauty of the rhythmical change of space that crowds create in the streets. All elements of the traffic contribute to this beauty by bringing movement and life. Endell stresses the enjoyment of the beholder of a street scene: 'Es gibt kaum etwas Hübscheres', he states, 'als schweigend in der Trambahn zu sitzen und die

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<sup>38</sup> See Lothar Müller's discussion of Endell's essay in the context of Impressionism: Müller, 'The Beauty of the Metropolis. Towards an Aesthetic Urbanism in Berlin at the Turn of the Century', in Haxthausen and Suhr, pp. 37-57.

<sup>39</sup> L. Müller, 'Beauty', p. 50.

<sup>40</sup> August Endell, *Die Schönheit der großen Stadt* [1908], in Klaus J. Sembach et al. (eds.), *August Endell, der Architekt des Photoateliers Elvira* (München, 1977), pp. 88-120 (p. 103).

<sup>41</sup> Endell, p. 109.



fremden Menschen nicht belauschend zu belauern, sondern betrachtend fühlend zu erleben, zu genießen.<sup>42</sup>

Like Endell, Hermann stresses the veiling elements of 'Dunkelheit', 'Dunst' and 'Staub' in his depiction of the street scene. He clearly felt the joys of observation that Endell writes about and also, like Endell, picks out the tram as a place of observation. Hermann emphasises, however, its function as a place for fleeting encounters. He takes up, to a greater extent than Endell, the psychological impacts of city life, stressing, as Simmel did, the promise and sense of adventure inherent in the momentary meeting of strangers in the metropolis.<sup>43</sup>

There is another direct correspondence between Endell's and Hermann's texts: Endell describes the transformation of the traffic with the lighting of the street lamps in the evening as a coming to life: 'Und so werden aus all den Gefährten wundersame lebendige Wesen.'<sup>44</sup> In Hermann's description, the same effect is conveyed: the trams rumble along, empty building carts clatter, and cabs (not content to be pulled) trot with their horses. This personification adds significantly to the impression of liveliness and movement, of hustle and bustle. Other stylistic techniques which enhance this impression of a bustling street are the use of enumerations, onomatopoeic verbs ('poltern', 'rollen', 'klappern', 'trotten', 'wutschen') and participles ('johlend', 'knatternd'), in one case enhanced by alliteration ('knatternde Karosserien').

The sensual quality of Hermann's description mentioned earlier, is also apparent in the description of tram cars as 'erhellte Kästen'. Hermann does not interpret the visual stimulus or set his observation into context, he merely reports the visual impression. This is admittedly one of the rare instances in which he goes this far in abstracting the purely visual from the viewed object, but it is a trend that follows on logically from his emphasis on the visual. This anti-intellectual recording of a sensory impression is also reflected in Endell's treatise on the beauty of the metropolis. Endell emphasises the joy of seeing and the recognition, 'daß die Form allein, abgesehen von allem Objekt der Darstellung, etwas Wundervolles sein kann'.<sup>45</sup> He thus propagates the viewing of

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<sup>42</sup> Endell, p. 112.

<sup>43</sup> See Simmel, 'Großstädte' and Simmel, 'Exkurs über den Fremden'.

<sup>44</sup> Endell, p. 114.

<sup>45</sup> Endell, p. 100. Similar in this respect is Heinrich Schackow's 'Berolina. Eine Großstadt-Ästhetik', *Neue deutsche Rundschau*, 7 (1896), 386-90. This essay precedes Endell's city aesthetic and anticipates some of its elements. Schackow goes even further in seeing the complete dissolution of form in the city



colours, forms and surfaces without intellectual or pragmatic connections: the pure visual impression is primary, rather than the object that is seen.

It is in this sense that Endell advocates that the metropolis should be seen in the same way as a landscape. Müller explains that the concept of landscape underlying this statement 'describes exclusively the mode of aesthetic experience that should be tested by walking through the streets - the glance freed from all pragmatic considerations'.<sup>46</sup>

Such is Hermann's representation of the city street in the evening. Rhythm and atmosphere, the concentration on colours and forms rather than objects, the accumulation of impressions rather than orderly sentence structure - all of these characteristics contribute to a sensitive atmospheric representation of an evening in the metropolis of Berlin. One element that is particularly striking in Hermann's description is its pictorialism: the street lamps sketch the branches and twigs onto the pavement; the street is described like a painting, as Hermann's distinction between 'oben' und 'unten' provides the impression of a two-dimensional scene. The abundant use of adjectives further supports the pictorial quality of the writing. Its affinity to Impressionist paintings of Berlin street scenes is striking.

Among Hermann's contemporaries, the painter who excelled before all others in the depiction of the new metropolis of Berlin was Lesser Ury. A Jewish Berlin artist, like Georg Hermann, Ury concentrated on representing the growing city in his work. Especially in the years 1887 to 1905, his subjects were almost exclusively taken from the city streets. He has often been described as the painter who 'discovered' Berlin. Of course, there had been a whole tradition of Berlin painting before, but Ury was the first to break out from the traditions of detailed topographical and architectural painting ('Vedutenmalerei') and from the painting of genre scenes that had dominated the tradition hitherto.<sup>47</sup> Ury was the first to paint modern metropolitan Berlin, as his biographer, Donath, points out:

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night at the root of the metropolitan beauty: 'Wenn der Abend sich auf diese Straßen hernieder senkt und künstliches Licht an tausend Stellen entzündet ist, [...] dann wird die Form zur Farbe. Sie blinkt in buntem Glanze und verschimmert in zartem Dunst. Die starre Form wird in der Farbe lebendig. [...] in dem fast unauflöselichen Gewirr, in dem Durcheinander von Farben und Linien [...] reift langsam die eigenartige Ästhetik der Großstadt.' (pp. 389/90)

<sup>46</sup> L. Müller, 'Beauty', p. 50.

<sup>47</sup> For further information on the tradition of Berlin city painting, see *Stadtbilder. Berlin in der Malerei vom 17. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart*, exhibition catalogue, Berlin Museum (Berlin, 1987); I. Wirth, *Berliner Malerei*; and John J. Czaplicka, *Prolegomena zu einer Typologie des Großstadtbildes. Die*



Ury ist der erste gewesen, der Berliner Straßenbilder malte: die moderne Straße mit ihrem Jagen und Fauchen, ihren geschäftigen Menschlein, ihren behäbigen Pferdeomnibussen, ihren altväterischen Droschken, die Großstadtstraße in der Dämmerung mit allen den wundersamen Sonnenreflexen auf Häusern und Asphalt, die Großstadtstraße am Abend und in der Nacht mit ihrem gelblichfahlen Gaslichterspiel und der sprühenden Strahlenglut der elektrischen Bogenlampen, das Großstadtcafé am Abend und in der Nacht mit seinem betäubenden Dunst aus Licht und Rauch. Ja, Ury war der erste, der das moderne Berlin gemalt hat und seine innere Nervigkeit entdeckte.<sup>48</sup>

Colour and light were the main elements of Ury's art. In favour of these, he neglected form and traditions of composition. Colour alone could mirror his impressions of the atmosphere of the big city and could express the relationship between objects, as Martin Buber explains in his contemporary book on Jewish artists:

Die Form sagt nichts von der Wechselbeziehung, der Wechselwirkung der Dinge. Diese aber ist das Wesentliche. [...] Das Ding ist Wirkung, nicht Substanz. Schließ es ab, und du nimmst ihm sein Leben. [...]

Nur die Farbe kann von Luft und Sonne, von Nebel und Schatten erzählen: sie stellt das Ding ins Ganze ein, sie weckt den stillen Zusammenklang.<sup>49</sup>

Following not the conventions of painting, but only his immediate impression, Ury was able to reproduce this impression in his art with an unprecedented suggestiveness.

By the second decade of the twentieth century, Ury was being recognised and honoured by renowned art critics such as Franz Servaes<sup>50</sup> and Fritz Stahl<sup>51</sup> as a pioneer not only of

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*bildliche Darstellung von Berlin 1870-1930*, diss. Universität Hamburg (Hamburg, 1984). Max Liebermann, the bestknown of the Berlin impressionists, was surpassed by Ury in the artistic representation of Berlin in two respects. Thematically, Liebermann avoided true city motifs in his work. It was not the streets of Berlin, but the parks, lakes and gardens where his interest lay. Secondly, in the emphasis on luminous colour, Ury went much further than Liebermann. In *'De Oude Vink' in Leiden*, it was clear that colour was important to him, but most of his works at the turn of the century were still firmly rooted in the tradition of historical painting which preferred more subdued hues. With polemical exaggeration, Franz Servaes wrote in 1931, looking back on the turn of the century: 'Selbst der Führer aller zukunftsweisenden malerischen Revolutionäre, der kecke Max Liebermann, steckte noch tief in brauner Soße und Grau-in-Grau!' (Exhibition catalogue *Lesser Ury. Gedenkausstellung*, text by Franz Servaes (Nationalgalerie Berlin, 1931), p.6). Menzel, who did of course free himself from tradition before Ury, only did so in his sketches. In his official paintings, he kept to the rules of historical painting.

<sup>48</sup> Adolph Donath, *Lesser Ury. Seine Stellung in der modernen deutschen Malerei* (Berlin, 1921), p. 14.

<sup>49</sup> Martin Buber (ed.), *Jüdische Künstler* (Berlin, 1903), pp. 45/46.

<sup>50</sup> See *Lesser Ury. Gedenkausstellung*, exhibition catalogue, Nationalgalerie Berlin, text by Franz Servaes (Berlin, 1931), pp. 5/6: 'Aber ein "Vorläufer" ist er geworden und der erste in Deutschland, der die Wege Manets, aus eigenem Künslernaturell heraus, weiter beschritt.'

<sup>51</sup> See Fritz Stahl, 'Lesser Ury', *Berliner Tageblatt*, 26 October 1916: 'Zu einer Zeit, da man noch nichts vom Impressionismus wußte, ging er den Spielen von Licht und Farben im Freien nach. Und hatte er



Impressionist painting in Berlin, but also of the modern artistic representation of the city. This was despite the difficulty of gaining the public's understanding and approval at first.<sup>52</sup> Hermann many times expressed his admiration for the atmospheric quality of Ury's work. Several times, he evoked Ury's paintings to support his own descriptions of Berlin streets, as for instance in the unfinished novella *Bist du es oder bist du's nicht?*, where a summer evening scene is described as follows: 'So wie das Lesser Ury nie müde geworden wäre, zu malen, wenn ihm nicht der Tod den Pinsel aus der Hand schon gewunden hätte.'<sup>53</sup> Another instance is to be found in an article entitled 'Mal wieder in Berlin', written for the Sunday supplement of the *Vossische Zeitung* on 1 March 1931:

Die Lichtreklamen schaffen immer prächtigere Feerien aus den Tagesnüchternheiten in der Dämmerung, und des Nachts, mit ihrer Buntheit und ihren Spiegelungen auf dem Asphalt. Für Lesser Ury, der schon vor Jahrzehnten so etwas malte, wie es eigentlich noch kaum vorhanden war, muß es doch jetzt eine Freude sein, in Berlin zu leben.

If some of Hermann's descriptions of the streets of Berlin in *Kubinke* sound like verbalisations of Ury's paintings, this is not a coincidence. Both artists share a number of underlying artistic principles. They are both interested in the purely aesthetic depiction of city life and make the direct visual impression a basis for artistic representation. They acknowledge the prime importance of colour and light and are interested in panoramic depiction rather than concentrating on the individual or on social comment. They focus on atmosphere rather than detail, and they depict the fleetingness of experience.

In Ury's painting *Leipziger Straße* (1889), already referred to in chapter 5, the closeness to the passage on the city night from Hermann's *Kubinke*, which I quoted on pages 194/95 is clearly perceptible. Another of Ury's works, which highlights the similarity of

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dabei ein Feld mit den Modernen gemeinsam, das freie Land bei Tage, so hatte er ein anderes für sich ganz allein, die Nacht der Großstadt. [...] Nicht nur keine Lehre, sondern auch keine Ausstellung hat die leidenschaftliche Liebe zu diesen Motiven wecken können. Sie kam aus dem Leben.' (Here quoted from Donath, p. 52).

<sup>52</sup> Thus, Max Osborn judged in 1913 as follows: 'Die Bilder dieser ersten Epoche Urys erschienen damals, als er sie zuerst bei Gurlitt in Berlin ausstellte, revolutionär und exzentrisch. Heute erblicken wir in ihnen Meisterstücke, in denen sich das beste offenbarte, was damals deutsche Malerei vermochte, und ein Teil des besten, das die europäische Kunst überhaupt zu bieten hatte.' (Max Osborn, 'Lesser Ury', *Westermanns Monatshefte* (May 1913), here quoted from Donath, pp. 27/28) Osborn admits subsequently that this may sound exaggerated, but defends himself by the no less bold statement that hardly anything said about Ury's work could ever be too strong.

<sup>53</sup> Hermann, *Bist du es oder bist du's nicht?*, p. 51.



the two artists' approaches, is the gouache *Am Bahnhof Friedrichstraße* from 1888 (ill. XV). The subject is taken from the heart of the modern metropolitan Berlin, as the steel and glass architecture of the station, completed in 1882, indicates. Ury indicates a sense of randomness in the choice of his subject, however. The station architecture as well as the people in the scene are cut off at the picture's edges. This scene is only one of many, capturing the essence of a busy metropolis. The impression of a momentary glimpse is created rather than that of a carefully composed representation. Ury's emphasis is on the atmosphere, created by the light, the air and the hurrying figures in his painting. Clouds of steam, lit by the station gas lamps, the darkness above and the falling snow evoke a cold, damp winter night. Ury's interest in the hustle and bustle of people is motivated by his focus on movement and in contrast. The elegant woman in the foreground and the street seller behind her illustrate the close physical proximity of the different social classes in the metropolis. As in Hermann's depiction of the evening street scene quoted above, there is no interest here in people as individuals, Ury's figures are painted in placard-style as types.

The following evaluation of Ury's art, which emphasises the sensitive authenticity of his work, could equally, with few alterations, be an evaluation of Hermann's work:

Er trotz dem Banalen seinen Charme ab. [...] Vielen mögen die Stadt-Ölgemälde oder Aquarelle 'schlecht' oder 'mißlungen' scheinen, andere fühlen sich durch die Ansicht in ihrem Intimwissen bestätigt: Ja, sagen sie, so ist es. Niemand stellt Ury neben Rembrandt oder Picasso, [...] doch dann gibt es jene, die ihn, entzückt von seinen Farbnuancen, [...] als einen piktoresken Chronisten des Weltstädtischen schätzen.<sup>54</sup>

Returning for a moment to Fries' criticism of Hermann's *Kubinke* which I presented in the previous chapter: Fries' contention that Hermann concentrates on Berlin merely as 'the locale most suited for the illustration of social evils and injustices'<sup>55</sup> can now easily be shown to be untrue. Rather than as a 'metaphor of destruction',<sup>56</sup> Berlin is depicted in extremely sensitive terms as a fascinating, animated and at times extraordinarily beautiful city. It is interesting to note in this context, that Hermann does not oppose the metropolis to an idyllic depiction of the rural origins of his hero. On the contrary, he depicts Kubinke's small provincial home town as a confining, grey world of misery (see

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<sup>54</sup> Joachim Seyppel, *Lesser Ury. Der Maler der alten City* (Berlin, 1987), p. 135.

<sup>55</sup> Fries, p. 121.

<sup>56</sup> Fries, p. 120.





III. XV: Lesser Ury, *Am Bahnhof Friedrichstraße*, 1888; gouache; 65 x 45; Stadtmuseum Berlin



pp. 215-18). Perhaps most significantly in the context of a discussion of the Impressionist view of the metropolis: the city of Berlin is treated as a subject that can be enjoyed from a purely aesthetic point of view. When looking at Hermann's descriptions of Berlin themselves and analysing their style and content, rather than trying to derive the author's attitude to the metropolis from the novel's plot, it is obvious that the city is not the devouring moloch that Coler, Fries and others have seen. Hermann does not deny the problems of the expanding metropolis of Berlin, as his criticism of the new suburban houses indicates. At the same time, however, his love of the modern Berlin, with its peculiar beauty and the bustle in its streets, is apparent.

Hermann is indeed, like Ury, a 'piktoresker Chronist' and his subject is not only the physical manifestation of Berlin life, be it in Naturalist detail or in Impressionist atmospheric generalisation. What Ury can only hint at, Hermann develops in his writing: the representation of the psychological make-up of the metropolitan dweller. Hermann recognises the new, metropolitan way of life as fundamentally new and depicts it without ideological or moral prejudice. This depiction is not only expressed in incidental observations, but provides the basis for the understanding of the novel. I shall devote the last part of this chapter to this aspect of Hermann's image of Berlin in *Kubinke*.

#### **7.4 Sociological Observation of the New Metropolitan Way of Life**

The metropolitan atmosphere depicted in the novel is essential to the understanding of Emil Kubinke's story. Berlin is represented as having an atmosphere of enticement and sexual promise, of hope, but at the same time of exclusion. In the passage on the city evening quoted on pages 194/95 above, this atmosphere of enticement is clearly represented. When Kubinke steps out into the street, it immediately envelops and affects him.

Er war ganz befangen von all dem Lärmen und dem Leben und dem Hin und Her von Blicken und Worten; und die Luft der Abenteuer machte sein Blut singen; und ganz gegen seine Art - denn er vergab sich nicht gern etwas - begann er sogar mit melodischen Trillern das Viljalied aus der 'Lustigen Witwe' zu pfeifen. (p. 50)

He has to return to his work, but the atmosphere of the city street keeps its hold on him:



Er hatte große Sehnsucht bekommen, die weiche Luft der Abenteuer, von der er eben nur leise genippt hatte, noch einmal in vollen Zügen einzuschlürfen. Mit kühnem Wurf drapierte er seinen Autoschal um Hals und Schultern, wie der Spanier seinen Mantel, und trat hinaus auf die Straße, das Herz voll von geheimen und schönen Hoffnungen. (p. 55)

Hermann had already depicted the promise of adventure and flirtation in the city atmosphere in a brief episode in *Jettchen Gebert*.<sup>57</sup> Whereas it strikes a rather anachronistic note in the Biedermeier novel, the atmosphere of heightened nervous tension and expectation is in *Kubinke* clearly shown to be a result of the modern metropolitan environment with its overabundance of nervous stimuli. The shy barber's apprentice from the provinces is stimulated and changed by this atmosphere, which he experiences as a sense of freedom and daring that are new to him. Kubinke's new awareness of himself is supported by the fashion accessory of the motorists's scarf: 'Und wenn er noch heute mittag ein kleines, verschüchtertes Kerlchen gewesen war, das sich seiner abgeschabten Armseligkeit schämte, so fühlte er *jetzt* seine ganze Person durch diesen neuen Halsschmuck gehoben und verziert.' (p. 50)

Simmel's observations on the significance of fashion in modern metropolitan society help to explain the specific significance of this scarf. Simmel explains adherence to fashion as an expression of the dual urge to express individuality on the one hand and belonging to a collective on the other. For city dwellers, the expression of individuality is a necessity, as it corresponds to their need to save their 'subjective spirit' from being overwhelmed and extinguished by the 'objective spirit' of the society and culture that surrounds them.<sup>58</sup>

Simmel, unlike other cultural critics of the metropolis, does not stop at deploring the dangerous or negative aspects of this situation. He describes the threat of levelling and de-personalisation presented by objective culture as also being the very agent that provokes the metropolitan person into developing and preserving his individuality. Simmel thus presents alienation as the source of individualisation.<sup>59</sup> The objectivisation

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<sup>57</sup> For a discussion of that passage, see chapter 5 of this dissertation.

<sup>58</sup> See Simmel, 'Großstädte', p. 240.

<sup>59</sup> For a discussion of this 'thought in contrast to Marx' contention that full individuality can only be restored by overcoming alienation, see Michael Landmann, 'Georg Simmel: Konturen seines Denkens', in Hannes Böhringer and Karlfried Gründer (eds.), *Ästhetik und Soziologie* (Frankfurt a.M., 1976), p. 7.



of culture results in the fact 'daß nun gerade, damit dieses Persönlichste sich rette, es ein Äußerstes an Eigenart und Besonderung aufbieten muß; es muß sich selbst übertreiben, um nur überhaupt noch hörbar, auch für sich selbst, zu werden'.<sup>60</sup> This particular metropolitan need for individualisation is expressed in externalised form, for instance, in fashion. This externalisation of individuality has a root in the fleetingness of human contacts in the metropolis, a fact referred to by Simmel when he states that the 'temptation [...] to appear concentrated and strikingly characteristic, lies much closer to the individual in brief metropolitan contacts' than in a more relaxed small town or rural environment.<sup>61</sup>

The need for individuation meets the need to belong. Simmel acknowledges this dual function of fashion in his essay 'Zur Psychologie der Mode':

Die Mode ist so der eigentliche Tummelplatz für Individuen, welche innerlich und inhaltlich unselbständig, anlehnungsbedürftig sind, deren Selbstgefühl aber doch einer gewissen Auszeichnung, Aufmerksamkeit, Besonderung bedarf. Sie erhebt eben auch den Unbedeutenden dadurch, daß sie ihn zum Repräsentanten einer Gesamtheit macht, er fühlt sich von einem Gesamtgeist getragen.<sup>62</sup>

Kubinke is just such an individual. It is this need for integration into the metropolitan Berlin environment which is expressed by the importance he accords to the motorist's scarf. Hermann makes the scarf a symbol for Kubinke's ultimately failed quest to belong to the metropolitan environment. In the passage quoted above, the scarf epitomises the surge of hope and excitement with which Kubinke first encounters Berlin. Soon, however, he discovers that the empowerment he hoped to gain from the garment was just an illusion. The next morning, while Kubinke feels again 'die merkwürdige Zaubermacht des Autoschals' (p. 65) which lets him forget his former fearful self, the porter Piesecke shows himself utterly unimpressed: 'Det wär ja det Neuste, wenn mit eenmal de Babiere über de Vordertreppe jehn wollten! Det wird ja alle Tage schöner!' (pp. 65/66). The distinctions of class, it becomes clear, cannot be effaced by fashion accessories. The power of the motorist's scarf can only work in the context of the fleeting encounters among strangers in the metropolitan streets - and not

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<sup>60</sup> Simmel, 'Großstädte', p. 241.

<sup>61</sup> Simmel, 'Großstädte', p. 240.

<sup>62</sup> Georg Simmel, 'Zur Psychologie der Mode. Sociologische Studie' [1895], in Simmel, *Aufsätze und Abhandlungen 1894 bis 1900*, ed. by Heinz-Jürgen Dahme and David P. Frisby (Frankfurt a.M., 1992), pp. 105-14 (p. 109).



always there. The girls Kubinke passes by ignore him: 'Der kleine, zierliche Emil Kubinke, sehnsüchtig und verletztlich, - er fühlte plötzlich, daß er trotz seines stolzen, flatternden Schals hier wenig Glück haben würde.' (p. 56)

Kubinke is not the kind of detached flâneur represented by Jason during his walk through Berlin in *Jettchen Gebert*. Whereas Jason is content, because his detachment is that of the aloof and secure middle class individual who knows his environment intimately, Kubinke is desperate to understand the strange surroundings and to fit in. His outsider status does not allow him the aimless and carefree enjoyment of the flâneur. On the contrary, his wandering through the streets is driven by a hungry pursuit of happiness. Consequently, he increasingly experiences his solitariness as loneliness and insignificance rather than as personal freedom. In an essay entitled 'Die Großstadteinsamkeit', Hermann explains the origin of this particularly metropolitan experience: '[Die Großstadteinsamkeit] wird geboren aus dem Gefühl des Verlorenseins in dem vielköpfigen Organismus der Gesamtheit; aus dem Gefühl des Unbeteiligtseins an alledem; aus dem schnellen Binden und Lösen; der schattenhaften Hast des Vorüberjagens.'<sup>63</sup> This is the root of the distinction between the two walkers through the city streets, Jason Gebert and Emil Kubinke: Jason's individuality is not challenged in the early nineteenth century society that still allows room for the individual. Kubinke, however, has to struggle for his place in a mass society which no longer grants this space as a matter of course.

Hermann's depiction of Kubinke's story, it becomes clear, is inextricably linked with the description of the impact which the modern metropolitan environment has on the individual. Kubinke's initial excitement, as well as his attempts at integration in what seems to him like a strange, new world, and his despair at remaining an outsider, insignificant in the overwhelming system that Berlin appears to be, are all represented as triggered by the new metropolitan way of life. Hermann depicts this specifically modern anxiety with great insight. But it would be a mistake to conclude that he therefore condemns metropolitan society. The following look at the attitude with which he views the rather questionable morality of the servant girls will prove this point.

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<sup>63</sup> Georg Hermann, 'Die Großstadteinsamkeit' [1909], in Hermann, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. V, pp. 660-63 (p. 660). In terminology that is clearly reminiscent of the 'Quadrille des Lebens' which Kubinke is so desperate to join, Hermann continues: 'Sie alle scheinen ihm in diesen bunten Reigen hineinzupassen, während er allein draußen steht' (p. 661).



Among Hermann's papers in his bequest - held at the Leo Baeck Institute in New York - is a letter to the theatre critic Alfred Kerr, which Hermann wrote but did not send. This letter throws light on Hermann's conception of his characters. Hermann writes that he has taken his lead from Kerr; in particular from a 1900 review by Kerr of Georg Hirschfeld's play *Pauline*. Hermann quotes Kerr as follows:

Hirschfeld zeigt uns das Dienstmädchen, das rein aus allen Anfechtungen hervorgeht, - ich glaube nicht an diesen Typ und er interessiert mich künstlerisch nicht. Mich würde jener Berliner Dienstmädchentyp viel mehr künstlerisch interessieren, der sich jeden Abend mit 'nem anderen Kerl herumtreibt und doch dabei seine Tüchtigkeit und innere Unberührtheit bewahrt - indem [...] das Unmoralische sich bei ihm von selbst versteht.<sup>64</sup>

Two elements of Kerr's statement are remarkable: the characterisation of the type of servant girl described as being specific to Berlin, and Kerr's attitude to the amorality of this type of girl. To take the first point, the amorality of Hermann's characters is, if not uniquely a characteristic trait of Berlin servant girls, certainly a quality associated with the metropolitan personality as described by contemporary observers like Simmel and Karl Scheffler,<sup>65</sup> and as taken up later in Hamann's and Hermand's study *Impressionismus*.

Hamann and Hermand describe life in the emerging metropolis as freeing its inhabitants from the clearly defined and controlled relationships that members of rural communities were used to. Because of the diversification of relationships and the wealth of opportunities for new encounters in the metropolis, relationships are weakened and a kind of constant readiness for new relationships comes to be seen as a trait of the urban dweller.<sup>66</sup> This has been deplored as a loss of soul and the cause of loneliness by some, but was welcomed as an opportunity for freedom by others. Hermann's girls clearly enjoy the freedom and opportunities for flirting and erotic adventures that this way of life brought with it as the weakening of social ties led to a weakening of the normative character of moral concepts. The same trait of metropolitan life, the anonymity in the

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<sup>64</sup> Georg Hermann, letter to Dr. Alfred Kerr, 18 October 1910, Georg Hermann Collection, section X.

<sup>65</sup> See Scheffler's description of the typical female Berliner: 'Im Blick dieser jungen Mädchen ist Berechnung, "Taxe", wie ein junger Wiener einmal sehr richtig sagte. Daneben findet sich dann eine gewisse slawische Hingebung und eine Gefallsucht, die erst anlockt und dann spröde tut. Auch die Liebe nimmt die Berlinerin vor allem praktisch, wie sie ihr ganzes Leben durchaus rationell lebt. Sie könnte auch kaum anders bestehen vor dem Geschlecht von Männern, dem sie sich gegenüber sieht.' (Scheffler, p. 134).

<sup>66</sup> Hamann and Hermand, *Impressionismus*, pp. 44/45.



city, which causes Emil Kubinke's feelings of loneliness, is experienced by the girls as a source of opportunity rather than of suffering.

In the depiction of his servant girls, Hermann again mirrors Simmel's positive description of metropolitan life. In 'Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben', Simmel does not deny that the freedom pervading the social climate in the city can be experienced as loneliness, but he does not stress that particular aspect. Instead, he emphasises the positive, 'intellectually liberating effect of this anonymity. Simmel considered his analysis applicable across class and gender boundaries, and Hermann, in making his servant girls exponents of the city personality described by Simmel, similarly disregards the constraining effects of power relationships. His representation may thus be criticised for a lack of social awareness. What it does reflect, however, is a changing attitude to the position of the individual in the city, expressed most prominently by Simmel and also reflected in non-Berlin city sociologists' works such as Durkheim's,<sup>67</sup> Park's and Wirth's. This new and positive attitude brings to the fore the opportunities on offer to the individual in the city rather than dwelling on the oppressive forces of the social situation.

Not only in the sexual sphere, but also in the rational and amoral behaviour displayed by Hedwig at the trial, Hermann's servant girls are almost exemplary of the city personality that Georg Simmel described in 'Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben'. Simmel identifies 'die reine Sachlichkeit in der Behandlung von Menschen und Dingen'<sup>68</sup> and 'Blasiertheit'<sup>69</sup> as the key characteristics of the metropolitan personality. He attributes these character traits to the dual causes of the overabundance of physiological stimuli and the influence of the money economy in the city. Simmel acknowledges that the urban blasé attitude, or 'reserve', to use a less pejorative term, is not neutral but latently hostile.<sup>70</sup> Unlike more traditional sociologists such as Ferdinand Tönnies, however, Simmel also indicates the necessity and the positive, protective function of this rationalist and unemotional mental attitude in the face of the fragmentation and disorientation of metropolitan life. He calls it 'Schutzorgan gegen die Entwurzelung,

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<sup>67</sup> See Emile Durkheim, *De la division du travail social. Etude sur l'organisation des sociétés supérieures* (Paris, 1893).

<sup>68</sup> Simmel, 'Großstädte', p. 229.

<sup>69</sup> Simmel, 'Großstädte', p. 232.

<sup>70</sup> See Simmel, 'Großstädte', p. 234: 'Ja, wenn ich mich nicht täusche, ist die Innenseite dieser äußeren Reserve nicht nur Gleichgültigkeit, sondern, häufiger als wir es uns zum Bewußtsein bringen, eine leise Aversion, eine gegenseitige Fremdheit und Abstoßung, die in dem Augenblick einer irgendwie veranlaßten nahen Berührung sogleich in Haß und Kampf ausschlagen würde.'



mit der die Strömungen und Diskrepanzen seines äußeren Milieus [den Großstädter] bedrohen' or, more concisely, 'Präservativ des subjektiven Lebens gegen die Vergewaltigung der Großstadt'.<sup>71</sup>

Hermann's servant girls exemplify the metropolitan person as described by Simmel. Hedwig and Emma in particular clearly display the blasé attitude and rationalism that are seen as major traits of the new type. It becomes clear that, in contrast to the servant girls portrayed in Viebig's *Das tägliche Brot*, for example, Hermann's girls are not the victims of city society but rather are a part of it; they even exemplify it. Where Viebig shows her Mine and Bertha struggling in the metropolitan climate and either surviving hardship through personal strength (Mine) or going under in the moloch Berlin (Bertha), Hermann's servant girls play the system and know how to profit from it. In the context of the novel's plot, they represent the temptation of the city and thus act as agents of Emil Kubinke's fate.

#### **7.5 Hermann's Attitude to the Modern Metropolis: Impact on the Understanding of the Novel**

The second issue alluded to in Kerr's statement above is the question of the author's attitude to his characters. Does Hermann condemn his servant girls as agents of the exploitative world of the big city? The plot of the novel suggests that he does and most critics have read it that way. Fries, for instance, claims that *Kubinke* 'show[s] the suffocating class structure of the early twentieth century city' and the 'destructiveness of the society in which such characters as Emil Kubinke are forced to exist or die'.<sup>72</sup> A similar view is taken by Coler, who claims in the introduction to the 1951 edition of *Kubinke* that Hermann set out to show how the central character, Emil Kubinke, capitulates before life and how the moloch Berlin has devoured him.<sup>73</sup>

However, by maintaining that the girls' 'innere Unberührtheit' is not affected by their behaviour, Kerr withholds moral judgement. Hermann, who states in the letter that he has taken Kerr's words as the 'Leitmotiv' for his novel, clearly agrees with Kerr's

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<sup>71</sup> Simmel, 'Großstädte', pp. 228 and 229.

<sup>72</sup> Fries, p. 120.

<sup>73</sup> See Coler, 'Vorwort', p. 112.



stance. It has to be deduced that if Hermann portrays a certain rationality, an amorality and pragmatism in the servant girls' behaviour, this behaviour, developed by living through difficult circumstances, is not seen as a vice but as the very characteristic that will save them.<sup>74</sup> Moral scruples are something they cannot afford and do not have time for. The girls know where their advantages lie and how to grasp them. Their behaviour is not represented by Hermann as evil, calculated economic thinking or immorality, but primarily as motivated by a practical survivor's instinct. Another example, less extreme than that of Hedwig's behaviour at the trial, supports this view: when Pauline, although engaged to Emil Kubinke, flirts with another man, Hermann comments:

Und Pauline hätte den sehen mögen, der dabei etwas gefunden hätte. [...] Sie handelte darin [...] gerade so wie die Skatspieler: wenn sie auch ein bombensicheres Blatt haben, so halten sie doch für alle Fälle solch einen kleinen Coeur- oder Carobuben bis zuletzt in der Hinterhand ... denn man kann nie wissen, wie das Spiel sich noch dreht. (p. 240)

Hermann's unwillingness to judge extends further than sexual morality; this is supported by an article written in 1906, in which he acclaims the new metropolitan kind of society he saw developing in Berlin. He characterises the members of this society as 'ganz neue Wesen, [...] für die uns noch jeder Maßstab fehlt, und die wir keineswegs mit alten Maßstäben von Kultur oder Moral messen dürfen'.<sup>75</sup> The new way of life, which Hermann defines as a way of adapting to new conditions in a changed urban environment, has to break with the old cultures, Hermann writes, and he applauds the society of Berlin for achieving this break.

Like Simmel and the cultural critic Egon Friedell who, in 1912, described Berlin as being 'in den Flegeljahren einer neuen Kultur, die wir noch nicht kennen, und die sich erst herausarbeiten muß',<sup>76</sup> Hermann is concerned with understanding rather than judging modern metropolitan society. In his introduction to the 1913 edition of *Kubinke*, Hermann is concerned to stress the objectivity of his stance. The servant girls, he

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<sup>74</sup> Again, the parallel to Zille's art is striking. Zille and Hermann share the same underlying attitude to their characters, a love of life and respect for those having to struggle in difficult conditions. Erwin Redslob's judgement might have been written about both: 'Er sagt nicht Nein zu den Menschen, die er darstellt - wie etwa George Grosz es [...] tut. Zilles Kunst ist als Darstellung des Lebens in sich positiv.' (*Heinrich Zille*, exhibition catalogue, Sammlung Axel Springer, Berlin Museum, text by Erwin Redslob (Berlin, 1968), p. 8).

<sup>75</sup> Georg Hermann, 'Eine Lanze für Berlin W.' (1906), cutting, Georg Hermann Collection, section VII, provenance unknown.

<sup>76</sup> Egon Friedell, *Ecce poeta* (Berlin, 1912), p. 260.



claims, should not be condemned. For although their behaviour may not be moral, his main interest as a writer was in the depiction of their youth and liveliness. His aim in writing the novel was, he claims, 'jenen goldigen, gedankenlosen Leichtsinn, jene Sieghaftigkeit der Lebensmächte vorurteilslos nachzufühlen'.<sup>77</sup>

The affinity between the unprejudiced representation of the metropolitan psychology and system of behaviour and values and the Impressionist, detached, anti-moral stance must be stressed here. The description of Impressionism as an essentially 'urban style, because it describes the changeability, the nervous rhythm, the sudden, sharp but always ephemeral impressions of city life'<sup>78</sup> is exemplified in Hermann's *Kubinke*.

A return to Gelfant's definition of the city novel, which I quoted at the beginning of this chapter, shows that *Kubinke* does indeed fulfil her criteria. I have shown in this chapter that the urban setting of the novel is more than a static background. Hermann has moved the focus from the hero to the city as the main protagonist. Relative to *Spielkinder*, Hermann has developed further the sensitive and atmospheric depiction of the metropolitan environment, in order to stress in *Kubinke* the dynamic element of the growing metropolis.

His depiction of Berlin is complex and reflects with great perception the physical and psychological reality of modern Berlin. The fragmentation of the emerging metropolis is acknowledged and the development of the new suburbs is described critically, but in an affectionate, ironical tone which points to the author's underlying positive attitude towards the city. Hermann links the expository passages on Berlin to the novel's plot through the emphasis on atmosphere. Rather than being subordinate to the hero's story, the depiction of Berlin takes precedence over the plot, setting out the preconditions and co-ordinates for an ensuing plot development that can only be seen as inevitable. The emphasis in *Kubinke* on an atmospherical depiction of the city streets, reflects the Impressionist quality of the text. The beauty of the modern city is perceived and represented in much the same way as in Endell's Impressionist city aesthetic *Die Schönheit der großen Stadt* and in Lesser Ury's turn-of-the-century Berlin paintings.

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<sup>77</sup> Hermann, 'Vorwort', p.9.

<sup>78</sup> Hauser, p. 158.



Hermann's interest in the depiction of the metropolitan way of life and the mental make-up of the urban dweller is increased in this novel to the point that it has become the underlying principle which determines plot, character and atmosphere. Kubinke's story is represented as that of the newcomer who has to grapple with the urban way of life, which is exemplified by the servant girls. Hermann's observations mirror those of contemporary sociologists, especially of Georg Simmel. Like him, Hermann does not provide a social analysis, but a perceptive and non-judgemental description of the city's impact on the metropolitan dweller's psyche and behaviour. The objective, open attitude to the modern city of Berlin displayed in Kubinke adds to an understanding of the novel as being determined by Impressionist aesthetics.



8 Towards a Modernist Exploration of Individual Consciousness:  
Die Nacht des Doktor Herzfeld (1912)

*Die Nacht des Doktor Herzfeld*, the last of Hermann's novels published before the First World War, is the first of two books which centre on the solitary aesthete Dr. Alwin Herzfeld. Together with *Schnee*, first published in 1921, the novel has been published since 1922 under the title *Die Nacht* as the first volume of the 'Doppelroman' *Doktor Herzfeld*.<sup>1</sup> The gap of nine years between the publication dates of the two Herzfeld novels underlines their distinctness from each other. While they are linked by the central figure of Doktor Herzfeld, it is legitimate to treat them as two separate entities. When Hermann spoke in 1928 about the two volume *Doktor Herzfeld* as 'das Buch von der Syphilis und vom Krieg',<sup>2</sup> he himself pointed indirectly to the difference in content between them. *Die Nacht*, written when the First World War was not yet foreseeable, is concerned with its syphilitic protagonist's stocktaking of his life, while *Schnee* expresses the author's criticism of his contemporaries' enthusiasm for war.

The plot of *Die Nacht* is quickly told. The two ageing aesthetes and intellectuals Doktor Herzfeld and Hermann Gutzeit spend the night wandering through the streets and cafés of Berlin. During this walk, both take stock of their lives and hold on to each other's company to fend off despair as their lives are revealed as shams and failures. Gutzeit contemplates first suicide then divorce. After a chance meeting with Lene Held, a prostitute who gave him syphilis many years ago, Doktor Herzfeld is taken by a violent fit of rage and despair at his wasted life. After the crisis of the night, Gutzeit nevertheless returns to his wife to continue a life of self-deceit. Doktor Herzfeld's despair, however, builds up into a nervous crisis which is, in the morning, exacerbated by his solitary wandering through unfamiliar parts of the city. Finally, however, he is purged from his rage and despair by a fit of unconsciousness from which he awakens, ready to start afresh.

The two Herzfeld novels go further than any of Hermann's other works in leaving behind the traditional narrative conventions of nineteenth century Realism in order to experiment with Modernist concepts of the novel. The leading theme of this chapter is,

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<sup>1</sup> From here on, I shall use the short title *Die Nacht* to refer to the novel. References to this work in this and the following chapter are to the following edition: Hermann, *Die Nacht des Doktor Herzfeld* (Berlin, 1912).

<sup>2</sup> Hermann, 'Was von Büchern übrigbleibt', p. 155.



therefore, consideration of the position of *Die Nacht* between the traditional and the modern. At the centre of *Die Nacht* stands the conflict of identity experienced by its hero Doktor Herzfeld. The novel delineates his coming to terms with his past, with his complex identity and with his relationship to the external world, i.e. the metropolitan environment of Berlin. This central conflict focuses the novel on the consciousness of its hero and determines major formal aspects of *Die Nacht*: its reduced plot, its structure and its narrative situation. In this first of the two chapters dealing with *Die Nacht*, I shall consider the formal implications of the thematic focus on the hero's psyche. Analyses of Hermann's treatment of fictionality and of his characterisation of the main protagonist will complement the discussion of the novel. The chapter will conclude with comparisons of *Die Nacht* with Fontane's *Irrungen, Wirungen* (1887) and Thomas Mann's *Der Tod in Venedig* (1912), in order to help place and evaluate *Die Nacht* in its literary historical context on the border between Realism and Modernism.

## 8.1 Formal Considerations for the Placement of the Novel between Realism and Modernism

### 8.1.1 The Replacement of Plot by a Psychological Portrait and by Atmospheric Depiction of Berlin

The overriding importance which Hermann attributes in *Die Nacht* to descriptions of the protagonist's consciousness, his perceptions and mental states, has significant implications for the status of the plot. It is reduced to a minimum of action and condensed to a minimum of time: one 'Schicksalsnacht' as it will be referred to in the second of the Herzfeld novels, *Schnee*.<sup>3</sup> In this respect, *Die Nacht* can be seen as the culmination of a development in Hermann's writing. Whereas the plot of *Spielkinder* extended over some twenty years, the 'Doppelroman' *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte* spanned no more than a year and a half and the action of *Kubinke* took place over the period of only nine months. But in this last of Hermann's novels considered in this dissertation, the action is contained within the span of a single night and the following morning.

The plot of *Die Nacht* in itself is almost trivial and certainly is not central to the novel. The core of the book lies in the evocation of emotional states and in the psychological

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<sup>3</sup> Georg Hermann, *Schnee* [1921] (Berlin, 1922), p. 138.



portrait of the uprooted intellectual Doktor Herzfeld. To an even greater degree than in *Kubinke*, the importance of the action portrayed in the novel has receded. The narration of events has made room for concentration on the subjective consciousness of the main protagonist and his relationship with the city environment. To this end, Hermann evokes the atmosphere of the city night, not only in his descriptions, but also in insights into the main protagonist's internal monologues, reminiscences and conversations. Almost essayistic ruminations on topics ranging from the impact of syphilis on cultural history to Japanese art now dominate the novel.

Hermann's theoretical comments on novel writing, which can be found in both his non-fictional and his fictional writing, support the understanding of *Die Nacht* as a study of individual consciousness. In the essay 'Bücher und Autor', published in 1915 in the volume *Vom gesicherten und ungesicherten Leben*, Hermann states: 'Aber zum Schluß wissen alle, daß eigentlich Geschichten gleichgültig sind. Niemand liest Fontane, Dostojewski oder Flaubert, um eine Geschichte kennen zu lernen - sie wollen nur Fontane, Dostojewski oder Flaubert kennen lernen.'<sup>4</sup> It emerges from this statement that the style and possibly the character of the author are of greater importance to Hermann than the plot of a novel. In order to realise the importance he attributes to the representation of mental states and human consciousness, it is worth remembering his comment on the function and importance of novels from *Der kleine Gast*, which I have already quoted in the context of my discussion of *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte*:

Wie von Registriermaschinen werden die letzten und feinsten Seelenschwingungen eines Stammes, einer Epoche von [Romanen] aufgezeichnet. Das einfache, vorüberfließende, tägliche Dasein mit all seinen hunderttausend kaum deutbaren Nuancen wird in ihm zum Rang der Historie erhoben.<sup>5</sup>

The representation of 'Seelenschwingungen', and of the nuances and atmosphere of daily life, are indeed Hermann's strengths, and they are developed fully in *Die Nacht*. In particular, the psychological portrayal of Doktor Herzfeld as a detached metropolitan intellectual is executed with great sensitivity.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Doktor Herzfeld has many traits of the author himself.

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<sup>4</sup> Georg Hermann, 'Bücher und Autor', in Hermann, *Vom gesicherten und ungesicherten Leben*, pp. 190-205 (p. 197).

<sup>5</sup> Hermann, *Der kleine Gast*, p. 336.

<sup>6</sup> This will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.



Liere points out that Doktor Herzfeld is used as the author's mouthpiece and considers that the Herzfeld novels and *Der kleine Gast* are the works which express 'das Anliegen des Dichters am klarsten'.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, Doktor Herzfeld offers many opinions which recur in Hermann's non-fictional writings. Thus, for instance, author and protagonist not only share an admiration of Raabe, but also their judgement of Nietzsche's and Schopenhauer's philosophies and their ambivalent attitude to the Berlin bohemian circles.<sup>8</sup> Hermann's daughter Hilde has confirmed that *Die Nacht* is based on personal experience, but does not specify this any further.<sup>9</sup> However, the Georg Hermann Collection of the Leo Baeck Institute in New York holds some documents which show how at least some personal experience has fed into the writing of the Herzfeld novels. An unpublished correspondence from 1914/15 between the forty-three year old Hermann and the twenty years younger Trude Cassel reflects, in some details, Doktor Herzfeld's relationship with his younger lover Rehchen as it is developed in the second Herzfeld novel, *Schnee*.<sup>10</sup> The young woman's precipitous departure from Berlin and from her older lover, and the scene in which she sits in her lover's armchair, dressed in her pyjamas, are motifs in *Schnee* that mirror Hermann's experiences as portrayed in Trude Cassel's letters. In one instance, Hermann indeed quotes a whole passage of one of her letters in *Schnee*.<sup>11</sup> Even if this particular experience cannot, because of its timing, have had any influence on the writing of the first Herzfeld novel *Die Nacht*, it exemplifies how Hermann anchored his literature in his personal life.

Whereas, to Hermann's disappointment, the readership of the autobiographical *Spielkinder* had not understood the personal appeal in his writing, reactions to *Die Nacht* show that this time, the personal aspect of the book was appreciated. In a letter to Hermann, Sigmund Freud acknowledges: 'Nach dem Genuß der schmerzhaften Schönheit der *Nacht des Doktor Herzfeld* [...] verblieb mir das Gefühl der Intimität mit dem Dichter.'<sup>12</sup> Another reader comments in the year of the publication of *Die Nacht*:

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<sup>7</sup> Liere, p. 159.

<sup>8</sup> These last two points will be explored further in the following chapter.

<sup>9</sup> See Hilde Borchardt, 'Georg Hermann', in Nussbaum (ed.), *Unvorhanden*, pp. 7-16 (p. 15).

<sup>10</sup> See letters in the Georg Hermann Collection, section X.

<sup>11</sup> See Hermann, *Schnee*, pp. 257/58: 'Das Gefühl des Zueinandergehörens ist noch in mir und eine klingende Freude über die heimlichen Stunden zwischen Abend und Morgen.' This passage is taken from a letter from Trude Cassel to Hermann, 20 March 1914.

<sup>12</sup> Sigmund Freud, letter to Georg Hermann, 1 February 1936, in Gert Mattenklott, ' "... daß wir nicht auch gestorben sind." Unveröffentlichte Briefe Sigmund Freuds an Georg Hermann', *Neue Rundschau*, 3 (1987), 5-21 (p. 7).



Ich glaube nicht, daß Ihr neuester Roman 'Erfolg' haben wird. Wahrscheinlich haben Sie etwas von Ihrem Innerlichsten in diesem Buch gegeben [...], unterhaltend ist der Roman nicht und das wird möglicherweise sein Schicksal besiegeln. Das ganze Buch ist eine große Aussprache. [...] Es war wieder einmal ein Berühren wunder Punkte, ein Gang nach den letzten Dingen, ein Bekenntnis einer verzweifelten Menschenseele. Oder irre ich mich? <sup>13</sup>

Indeed, Hermann acknowledged the confessional character of his writing and its function as a very personal psychological support. In the essay 'Bücher und Autor', he explains the importance of his writing for his own life: 'Selbstüberwindungen und Selbsterlösungen sind unsere Bücher. [...] Ich wäre am Leben erstickt - wenn ich nicht diesen Ausweg gefunden hätte.'<sup>14</sup> Twenty years later, in his essay 'Weltabschied', this motivation for writing is confirmed:

Der letzte Grund des Schreibens ist ein Abreagieren von Schmerzempfindungen, vielleicht sogar ein Ableiten von Selbstmordgedanken bei mir gewesen. Außerdem hat mich immer eine tiefe Furcht beherrscht, daß von meinem Dasein nichts übrigbleibt, daß es verweht und vergessen wird. Das hat mich immer wieder gezwungen festzuhalten, zu modellieren, zu gestalten, einen Hauch wenigstens von dem Sein, das in Nichtsein schon übergang, noch einzufangen.<sup>15</sup>

In *Die Nacht*, as in *Spielkinder*, this confessional aspect of Hermann's writing is particularly stressed. The distance that Hermann noticeably keeps from his characters in *Jettchen Gebert* and *Kubinke*, is here reduced to a minimum. The personal quality of the novel makes for the proximity between the author and his main protagonist Doktor Herzfeld and has influenced a change in the mode of perception towards a representation of the fictional world through Doktor Herzfeld's consciousness.

Along with the description of mental states, the evocation of atmosphere plays an important role in *Die Nacht*. Like *Spielkinder* and *Kubinke*, *Die Nacht* is set entirely in the contemporary city of Berlin. A closer look at this setting contributes to determining the position of *Die Nacht* between traditional Realist and Modernist writing. The nineteenth century Realists' precept of the novel, here formulated by Hegel, was the following:

Der Roman im modernen Sinne setzt eine bereits zur Prosa geordneten Wirklichkeit voraus, auf deren Boden er sodann in seinem Kreise - sowohl in

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<sup>13</sup> A. Garde, letter to Georg Hermann, 20 May 1912, Georg Hermann Collection, section X.

<sup>14</sup> Hermann, 'Bücher und Autor', pp. 201/02.

<sup>15</sup> Hermann, 'Weltabschied', p. 252.



Rücksicht auf die Lebendigkeit der Begebnisse als auch in betreff der Individuen und ihres Schicksals - der Poesie, soweit es bei dieser Voraussetzung möglich ist, ihr verlorenes Recht wieder erringt.<sup>16</sup>

Vischer, who adopts this concept from Hegel, sets out several strategies in which the novelist can achieve this goal. One of these is 'die Aufsuchung der grünen Stellen mitten in der eingetretenen Prosa, sei es der Zeit nach (Revolutionszustände u.s.w.), sei es dem Unterschiede der Stände, Lebensstellungen nach (Adel, herumziehende Künstler, Zigeuner, Räuber u. dergl.)'.<sup>17</sup>

In many respects, Hermann may be said to follow this strategy in *Die Nacht*. By making his main protagonist an aesthete and intellectual who lives comfortably on private means, he excludes the prosaic world of work almost entirely from the novel. Even more importantly, the setting of the greatest part of the action in the night, serves to emphasise the poetry and mystery of the fictional world, which Hermann furthermore stresses vigorously in his evocations of mood and atmosphere.

However, the setting which provides the poetry in *Die Nacht* is Berlin West's busy city centre, the Kurfürstendamm. Fontane had already gone some way in dissolving the country-city dichotomy by showing the influence of the city world in rural excursion destinations such as Hankels Ablage (*Irrungen, Wirrungen*) and the beauty of the bustling city (*Die Poggenpuhls* (1896)). But by finding his 'grüne Stelle' of aesthetic beauty and poetry in the middle of modern urban life itself, even if he concentrates on the cultural rather than the commercial or industrial realms, Hermann takes this development much further. Over the greater part of the novel, the poetic enclave in the prosaic world is indeed found in the cultural heart of the metropolis of Berlin. Only when the psychologically disturbed Doktor Herzfeld roams the city's streets in the latter part of the novel, does the author fall back on the Tiergarten as a 'rural' haven for the protagonist (see p. 271). As already displayed in *Kubinke*, Hermann's Impressionist attitude to the beauty of the city and its atmosphere becomes apparent here once again,<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Ästhetik*, ed. by Friedrich Bassenge (Berlin, 1955), part 3, section 3, chapter 3, p. 983.

<sup>17</sup> Friedrich Theodor Vischer, *Ästhetik oder Wissenschaft des Schönen. Zum Gebrauche für Vorlesungen* [1857](extracts) in Max Bucher (ed.), *Epochen der deutschen Literatur. Materialienband Realismus und Gründerzeit* (= Manifeste und Dokumente zur deutschen Literatur 1848-1880, vol. II) (Stuttgart, 1975), pp. 216-20 (p. 216).

<sup>18</sup> This topic will be further developed in the following chapter.



and again the peculiar mixture of the traditional and the modern that characterises *Die Nacht* emerges clearly.

In his review following the first publication of *Die Nacht*, Arthur Eloesser stresses the importance of atmosphere in the novel and determines its content as follows:

Diese Nacht [...] ist der eigentliche Gegenstand des Romans. [...] [Doktor Herzfelds und Gutzeits] Enthüllungen, ihre Erinnerungen tauchen wie von selbst aus der gelösten Stimmung der freieren Stunden auf, sie schwimmen sehr natürlich auf der besonderen nächtlichen Erregung, die der Erzählung die Nerven gegeben hat.<sup>19</sup>

Consequently, he judges the novel not by its plot, but by the extent to which the evocation of atmosphere succeeds: 'Das stimmt alles und scheint sehr leicht, wenn es einer einmal gemacht hat. Aber [...] man muß sich auch auf eine gewisse Ausdehnung behaupten können. Bei Hermann langt es, er sieht viel und läßt sich alles selbst geschehen.'<sup>20</sup> *Die Nacht* is thus seen as a kind of sustained and elaborated feuilleton. This observation is interesting and can be supported by Doktor Herzfeld's kinship with Baudelaire's flâneurs who roamed Paris on the look-out for experiences which could be turned into literature. Like them, Hermann's protagonist is characterised as a detached observer revelling in the aesthetic pleasures that the city offers.<sup>21</sup> The subjectivity of the city experience captured in *Die Nacht* also ties in with the style of the feuilleton.<sup>22</sup> The only objection I have to this thesis is that I would contest whether the main emphasis of the novel is that of the city feuilleton. Especially in the second part of *Die Nacht*, after Doktor Herzfeld's meeting with Lene Held, the psychological analysis of the protagonist is at least as important as the atmospheric description of Berlin. Interesting in terms of the structure of the novel, however, is the succession of independent feuilleton pieces within the development of the action.<sup>23</sup> The result is a mixture of

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<sup>19</sup> Arthur Eloesser, ' "Die Nacht des Doktor Herzfeld" ', *Das literarische Echo*, 14 (1911/12), cols. 1044-48 (col. 1046).

<sup>20</sup> Eloesser, 'Die Nacht', col. 1047.

<sup>21</sup> See Hermann's characterisations of Doktor Herzfeld as 'Flaneur, rerum novarum cupidus' (*Schnee*, p. 155) and 'ganz Aufnahmeapparat, ganz Empfangsstation' (*Schnee*, p. 159).

<sup>22</sup> See Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna. Politics and Culture* (Cambridge, 1981), p. 9: 'The subjective response of the reporter or critic to an experience, his feeling-tone, acquired clear primacy over the matter of his discourse.' Schorske's definition of the feuilleton as an illustration of the aestheticians' 'link between devotion to art and concern with the psyche' (p. 9) not only applies to Vienna, but also to Berlin.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Medicus recognised this mixture of genres in his introduction to the 1997 edition of the Herzfeld novels: 'Textuelle Gestalt erhält [die Großstadt] mittels einer in den fortlaufenden Roman eingestreuten Gattung, die wie keine andere in der Flüchtigkeit des Großstadtlebens ihren Ursprung hat. Mit seinen die Farbreflexe, Geräusche und Gerüche bannenden, passagenweise wiederkehrenden



genres and the disruption of the novel form as postulated by the nineteenth century Realists.

### 8.1.2 Replacement of Linear Structure by Additive and Circular Elements

The introduction of a series of independent feuilleton pieces brings an additive element to the novel but, interestingly, it does not read as a disruption of the novel's flow. This shows how far the descriptive and psychological contents of the novel have replaced the novelist's reliance on plot and action. Indeed, the structural unity of *Die Nacht* has been pointed out by Liere, who describes three stages, or 'Perioden', in the development of Hermann's novels in terms of a growing unity of construction.<sup>24</sup> The first novel, *Spielkinder*, can be described as a sequence of independent scenes which, especially in the first part, stand almost unconnected. In the novels of his 'mittlere Periode', namely *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte* and *Kubinke*, Hermann emphasises the connections between individual scenes. Finally, the Herzfeld novels, which Liere treats as an example of Hermann's 'reifere Werke', can no longer be described in terms of connecting scenes, they are told in one continuous narrative flow. *Die Nacht* is, to use a term coined by Hermann's contemporary Eloesser, 'ein Plauderbuch'.<sup>25</sup> Conversations, reminiscences, observations and thoughts merge into one another in an entirely undramatic and almost incidental fashion.

As in a 'Plauderei', Hermann also displays a tendency to go off at tangents and lose himself in lengthy ruminations. Several commentators have criticised this as a weakness. Stefan Zweig, for instance, wrote to Hermann to applaud his Herzfeld novels, but recommended severe cuts.<sup>26</sup> Härtling commends the Herzfeld novels for their evocation of mood and atmosphere and 'weil [Hermann] das Unscheinbare meisterte', but tempers his positive assessment with the qualification: 'obwohl er in Teilen

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Feuilletons steht Georg Hermann ebenbürtig neben Franz Hessel, Victor Auburtin, Artur Eloesser und Peter Altenberg.' (Thomas Medicus, 'Nachwort', in Hermann, *Doktor Herzfeld. Die Nacht. Schnee* (Berlin, 1997), pp. 583-89 (p. 586).

<sup>24</sup> Liere, p. 137.

<sup>25</sup> Eloesser, 'Die Nacht', col. 1046.

<sup>26</sup> See Stefan Zweig, letter to Georg Hermann, 23 July 1921, Georg Hermann Collection, part B: 'Für mein Empfinden wäre dieser Ihr menschlich stärkster Roman auch Ihr bedeutendstes Werk, hätten Sie 50 bis 100 Seiten gelegentlicher Kontemplation geopfert und so das Bild der Hauptfigur selbst verschärft und ins Plastische gesteigert.'



langatmig, mitunter ziellos ausschweifend ist'.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Gert and Gundel Mattenklott applaud the depiction of atmosphere, the conversations and the nuanced descriptions of the cityscape as the main achievement of Hermann's work, but identify a lack of concentration as the author's weakness. With respect to Hermann's later works, among which they count the two Herzfeld novels, the Mattenklotts state: 'Dabei lockert sich die sprachliche und kompositorische Dichte, der Autor verplaudert sich, schweift ab, gerät in ausufernde Redundanz.'<sup>28</sup>

Yet, *Die Nacht* is not merely a sequence of 'Plaudereien'. The additive element that the succession of conversations and reflections necessarily entails is, in fact, contained within a system of structural movements which give the novel its shape. The most important structural elements, which I shall now look at in more detail, are, firstly, the use of allusions, and secondly, an underlying thematic and spatial circular, or to be more precise figure of eight, structure.

First, Hermann creates a sense of suspense and progression through the use of allusions which elicit the reader's curiosity. These allusions are progressively intensified and consecutively substantiated until they become revelations clarifying the characters' concerns. Thus, in the case of Frau Gutzeit's infidelity for instance, the reader's suspicions are first aroused when Gutzeit reacts strangely to the news of his friend Stüber's death (pp. 66-67). Subsequently, Hermann keeps our interest alive by repeatedly referring to Doktor Herzfeld's concern over Gutzeit's unwillingness to talk about his problems (see for instance pp. 108 and 120) until Gutzeit's complaints of his wife's adultery with Stüber are finally revealed (pp. 149/50). Even then, the reader's interest in this strand of the plot is maintained as doubt is thrown on whether these complaints are justified.

The use of narratorial allusions to guide the reader's expectations is a technique that Hermann had employed in his previous novels. In *Die Nacht*, however, a further development of this technique is noticeable. Hermann abandons the narrative perspective of the omniscient author which characterised *Jettchen Gebert* and *Kubinke*, in order to use the figural perspective in this novel. In doing so, he loses the means of

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<sup>27</sup> Peter Härtling, 'Georg Hermann, "Doktor Herzfeld"', *Die Welt der Literatur* (supplement to *Die Welt*), 30 September 1965, p. 479: 'Die Gespräche verleppern im frühen Sonnenlicht, in einer wohlthuenden Müdigkeit (und Hermann meistert bravourös solche Zwischenstimmungen).'

<sup>28</sup> G. and G. Mattenklott 1987, p. 78.



foreshadowing future developments through direct narratorial comment. This device, which is typical of the Realist novel, is now replaced by a more indirect way of hinting at past or future events. Allusions now have to be contained within Doktor Herzfeld's consciousness. Indeed, making use of the diminished distance between reader and material, Hermann skilfully integrates the allusions that guide our anticipations into Doktor Herzfeld's vision and voice. In the case of the revelation of Doktor Herzfeld's own past, for instance, hints about the facts under the surface are presented in several ways. From very subtle hints of his sorrows, at first only expressed as a reticence in conversation and a bitterness of tone which is noticed by his companions (p. 86), via more direct allusions made in his conversation with Gutzeit (pp. 117 and 119), we are led to suspect the death of his wife. With the appearance of Lene Held, another strand of his past is first hinted at and then slowly revealed. Introduced by a premonition he feels as a physical shudder before entering the café in which he will meet her, allusions to the importance of Lene Held in Doktor Herzfeld's life are then taken up in his internal monologue:

Wer war denn das? - Um Himmels willen, wer denn nur? - Wo kannte er die her? - Ganz unten in seinem Gedächtnis stieg etwas auf, aber es war wie eine Blase, die nicht ganz zur Oberfläche gelangt ... Nein, nein - das war ja unmöglich! Das wäre ja zu seltsam! - - Natürlich kannte er sie; - er kannte sie. [...] Achtzehn Jahre - achtzehn Jahre hatte er sie nicht gesehen, - achtzehn Jahre sich gefürchtet, sie wiederzusehen ... Aber sie war es ja nicht - sie konnte es nicht sein - sie durfte es nicht sein! (pp. 142/43).

To remain psychologically plausible, however, these allusions have to remain undeveloped in the internal monologue. The opportunity for telling the full story could only arise in conversation with another to whom the story can be revealed. Indeed, in a subsequent conversation with Gutzeit, Lene Held's role in Doktor Herzfeld's life is expanded upon (pp. 165 and 171), but the closeness that would be necessary for the whole story to be revealed does not exist between these two solitary characters. Doktor Herzfeld's past, the connection between Lene Held and his wife and his guilt at the latter's death, all remain hinted at rather than being fully stated. Apart from having the desired effect of maintaining the reader's interest, this allusory technique of Hermann's manages to suspend the narrative between the fictional reality of the narrative and the psychological realm of the main protagonist's imagination.



Whereas the allusions and subsequent revelations contribute to a sense of linear progression in the novel, this structural movement is superseded by a second and a more important one, namely a circular principle in both the thematic and the spatial dimensions. Doktor Herzfeld's actions in *Die Nacht* consist of two circular walks through the city, separated by a conversation in his flat with Hermann Gutzeit. The first of these walks is undertaken in the company of Gutzeit and encompasses stops at cafés. At these points the momentum of the walk is interrupted to allow the scope to widen so as to include descriptions of, and conversations with, 'Stammtisch' acquaintances and the clientele of a shady all-night café. In the course of the walk, Gutzeit lives through a deep crisis, contemplating suicide. Doktor Herzfeld helps him to find his way back to the point of departure both physically, to the house in which they both live, and psychologically, to his miserable but settled life of self-deceit. Their conversation, which is continued in Doktor Herzfeld's flat, reinforces the circularity of the movement. Although spanning discussions on the respective merits of country and city life; the discovery of a new drug to cure syphilis; various debates on art and literature; and repeated contemplations of the problems of love and marriage; the conversation starts and finishes with Doktor Herzfeld's advice to Gutzeit to accept life as it is (pp. 16 and 184). Indeed, by the end of the night, Gutzeit has accepted his lot once more, with the same resignation that was described as marking his character and life at the outset of the novel.

The second walk, undertaken in the morning by the disturbed Doktor Herzfeld alone, takes him much further, out of his familiar surroundings. The first walk triggers his crisis; the second walk then develops it further. He can only return home after regaining control over himself, having overcome destructive and self-destructive temptations. Again, the return home signals the return to the familiar and accepted form of life. In Doktor Herzfeld's case this is the detached, solitary existence of the urban intellectual. Doktor Herzfeld's return to his old self thus spans both spatial circles described by the walks.

The repeated circular structure of the novel thus emerges more accurately as a figure of eight. Doktor Herzfeld returns home after the first walk with his sense of identity displaced. Only after the second walk, in a different area of Berlin, does he return to his starting point. As Eloesser observed: 'Alles bleibt beim Alten auch nach dieser wirren Nacht, in der Scheidung, Mord, Selbstmord hart vorbeiging. Die Männer behalten ihre



großen und kleinen Miseren, vor allem aber das Vergnügen, daß sie die Nächte zusammenkommen und sich satt reden.'<sup>29</sup>

Hermann makes the description of Gutzeit's psychological crisis in the first circle serve as a foil to reflect and contrast Doktor Herzfeld's ensuing crisis. The parallels are immediately striking; it is the enslaving sexual power of women and man's lust that is seen by both men to be at the root of their problems.<sup>30</sup> Both have created for themselves lives of illusions and surrogates which make their existences bearable.<sup>31</sup> The difference is that Doktor Herzfeld, unlike Gutzeit, confronts and judges himself and recognises the illusory character of his existence, whereas Gutzeit avoids this reckoning with himself. Gutzeit emerges from his life crisis unchanged. Doktor Herzfeld, by contrast, has taken a deliberate decision to revert to the role he created for himself even though the surrogate character of this role is evident to him.<sup>32</sup> When hopes of a new beginning with his former lover Rehchen are mixed into this decision, however, it becomes clear that Doktor Herzfeld is also not entirely free of the illusions and self-deceptions that characterise Gutzeit's behaviour: 'Aber wenn nun ... das letzte Streichholz brennt nie ... O, es soll aber schon vorgekommen sein, daß es *doch* einmal brennt! Und warum soll es denn nicht bei ihm einmal gut gelaunt sein?' (p. 296). There is no new beginning in intimacy for the solitary intellectual Doktor Herzfeld, as the structure and the deeply resigned and pessimistic tone of the rest of the novel make clear. For both Gutzeit and Doktor Herzfeld, the adherence to a way of life built up over decades prevails over a possibly more courageous but certainly unsettling and ultimately unprofitable revolt. Illusions emerge as life-sustaining strategies for both Gutzeit and Doktor Herzfeld in a world which is itself characterised by its illusory character.

The handling of plot and structure in *Die Nacht* show that Hermann approaches a Modernist concept of the novel. The plot merely provides a frame for the reflections, observations and psychological detail that make up the main body of the novel. In structural terms, too, Hermann goes well beyond the nineteenth century Realist novel. The Realist theorist Vischer states categorically: 'Der Romanheld [...] macht durch

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<sup>29</sup> Eloesser, 'Die Nacht', col. 1046.

<sup>30</sup> Hermann takes up a theme here which was developed already in his first novel, *Spielkinder*. The rather misogynist assessment of the relationship between the sexes in *Spielkinder*, exemplified in Lies' intellectual and ethical decline after Georg's influence has waned, is mirrored in this novel: 'Ach Gott, lieber Freund, eine Frau ist wie ein Stück Gummi. Es läßt sich so lang zerren wie man will, aber sowie man's losläßt, schnellt es wieder zurück' (Hermann, *Die Nacht*, p. 110).

<sup>31</sup> For a more detailed observation of this point, see Kohn, especially p. 34/35.

<sup>32</sup> This point will be explored in greater detail in the following chapter.



diesen Lebens-Complex seinen Bildungsgang, er durchläuft die Schule der Erfahrung.<sup>33</sup> By contrast, Hermann is not concerned with his protagonist's self-development towards an ethical ideal in active opposition to his social environment. The interspersed feuilleton elements of *Die Nacht* assume too much importance to be absorbed in the tight structural progress of the Realist novel and the figure of eight structure contradicts the Realist novel's characteristic linear development. Indeed, the spatial and thematic figure of eight structure of the novel not only makes for narrative unity, it also emphasises the author's scepticism concerning man's capacity for change. Just as Jettchen Gebert acquiesces in marriage to her unloved cousin and just as Kubinke fails to revolt against the injustices he is subjected to, the two resigned intellectuals Doktor Herzfeld and Gutzeit revert, after the crisis of the night, to their unchanged and unchanging existences. Hermann's references to the Asian concept of passivity as strength (p. 239), his representation of Gutzeit's decision in favour of change as a slightly tragicomic self-deceit and the description of Doktor Herzfeld's plans for revenge as madness, all indicate that Hermann himself sees acquiescence in the course determined by destiny as the right approach. Whereas destiny brings a tragic ending both to Jettchen and Kubinke, it is, at least in this first of the two Herzfeld novels, portrayed in a more positive light. By accommodating to the life that destiny has ordained for him, and by actively accepting his role as a detached aesthete, Doktor Herzfeld is able to view both himself and his place in the modern metropolitan environment positively.<sup>34</sup>

In *Kubinke*, Hermann still held on to vestiges of the structures of the 'Bildungsroman', even if they were superseded by those of the city novel.<sup>35</sup> In *Die Nacht*, by contrast, he abandons this pattern altogether. Identity can no longer be derived from the personal past. On the contrary, it is constructed in deliberate opposition to, and victory over, this past. Doktor Herzfeld has to overcome his past and the emotions of despair, revenge and guilt that the events surrounding the death of his wife have triggered, in order to rebuild his identity. This allows him to come to terms with his situation.<sup>36</sup>

Hermann's concentration on first two characters and then just one in *Die Nacht* also makes clear that his novel lacks any relationship to the breadth of the

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<sup>33</sup> Vischer, p. 217.

<sup>34</sup> See the following chapter for a detailed discussion of this point.

<sup>35</sup> See chapter 6 of this dissertation.

<sup>36</sup> This point will be explored in greater detail in the following chapter.



'Gesellschaftsroman', the other great form of the nineteenth century novel. Doktor Herzfeld is the archetypal outsider 'mit dem', as Medicus puts it, 'kein Gesellschaftsroman mehr zu machen ist'.<sup>37</sup> For the Realist novel in general, Vischer postulated: 'Der Heerd der Familie ist der wahre Mittelpunkt des Weltbildes im Roman.'<sup>38</sup> Doktor Herzfeld has lost this centre. Without any substantial family or friendship ties, the ageing aesthete is not only estranged from modern society, as represented by the commercialised areas of Berlin around Friedrichstraße, but also stands outside the circle of his 'Stammtisch' companions. He is unable to join in when these indulge in tales of their sexual conquests: ' "Ich finde es lustig", sagte er endlich zu Hermann Gutzeit [...], "wenn sie alle so reden und man sitzt dabei als der Mann aus dem Tukurkilande" ' (p. 81).<sup>39</sup>

### 8.1.3 Narrative Situation: The Withdrawal of the Narrator

After this analysis of the structure, I shall now focus on the narrative situation and the presentation of the fictional world of *Die Nacht*. In the nineteenth century Realist novel, which aims to portray the totality of life, albeit by focussing on an individual's experience, the task of the narrator is to give an objective, and therefore authoritative, account of the fictional world in which the protagonist has to make his way. Theodor Adorno has identified the replacement of this epic precept of objectivity by subjectivity as one of the defining contrasts between nineteenth century Realism and the modern novel.<sup>40</sup> Adorno points out that the modern writer recognises that the world is no longer objectively containable as a whole in a fictional representation. The Modernist author thus concentrates not on the objective world, but on his protagonist's subjective

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<sup>37</sup> Medicus, p. 584.

<sup>38</sup> Vischer, p. 220.

<sup>39</sup> The reference to Raabe's *Abu Telfan* (1868) is interesting here. Sprengel confirms the parallel between Raabe's and Hermann's writing in terms of constellation of characters, humorous narrative tone and plot development, but especially emphasises: 'Raabe nachempfunden ist zunächst die grundlegende Dualität von Held und Welt und die sentimentale Parteinahme des Erzählers für eine sonderlinghafte Existenz am Rande der Gesellschaft.' (Peter Sprengel, 'Anti-Nietzsche. Georg Hermann als Kritiker der Moderne - auf den Spuren Schopenhauers und Raabes', unpublished article based on a conference paper presented at the 1996 Georg Hermann Colloquium in Berlin, typescript, 13 pages (p. 9).) It is indeed clear that Hermann felt a close affinity to Raabe. Not only in *Die Nacht*, but also in his non-fictional work, Hermann expresses his admiration for the great Realist's work (see, for instance, Georg Hermann, 'Raabe', in Hermann, *Die Zeitlupe*, pp. 13-19). The same melancholy mood pervades both writers' novels, a mood expressed in Hermann's words as the sounding of 'tiefe, schmerzhaft Grundakkorde des Lebens' (*Die Nacht*, p. 82).

<sup>40</sup> See Theodor W. Adorno, 'Standort des Erzählers im zeitgenössischen Roman', in Adorno, *Noten zur Literatur I* (Frankfurt a.M., 1958), pp. 61-72.



experience of and reflection on this world: 'Die [Suggestion des Realen] ist [...] fragwürdig geworden. Vom Standpunkt des Erzählers her durch den Subjektivismus, der kein unverwandelt Stoffliches mehr duldet und eben damit das epische Gebot der Gegenständlichkeit unterhöhlt.'<sup>41</sup> Reality is now represented as reflected in the hero's consciousness. The position of the nineteenth century authorial narrator who stood outside and in control of the fictional world is weakened in the Modernist novel. The narrator now either shares his insecurity with the reader and admits his lack of omniscience, or hides behind the figural perspective, thereby limiting his authority and range of knowledge.

Analysis of the narrative situation and perspective in *Die Nacht* further helps to locate the novel between nineteenth century Realism and Modernism. Again, an interesting mixture emerges which can be interpreted as standing on the threshold between the traditional and the modern novel.

As already mentioned, Hermann abandons in *Die Nacht* the device of the, sometimes rather intrusive, authorial narrator, identified as an 'I' outside the fictional world of the novel, which he had used in *Jettchen Gebert* and *Kubinke*. Instead he makes use of a figural narrative situation and centres, within a third-person narrative, on the point of view of the main protagonist.

The grip which Hermann retains on the reader's introduction to the fictional world is apparent in the opening pages of the novel. The introduction to *Die Nacht* follows a pattern similar to that which he had adopted in his previous two novels. Again, as in *Jettchen Gebert*, it is set off from the main text and fulfils the function of preparing the reader for the plot and for the reflections that are to follow. The protagonist Doktor Herzfeld is introduced in the first paragraph and initial indications are given as to his reclusive character: 'Den Pfiff kannten alle im Haus, während den Doktor selbst bisher kaum jemand gesehen hatte.' (p. 1) The second paragraph is devoted to Doktor Herzfeld's immediate environment, the tenement house in which he lives. Using the humorous tone of the omniscient Realist narrator, Hermann concisely characterises the house's inhabitants by giving the reader insights not only into the activities, but also the thoughts, of the different female inhabitants teaching gymnastics, painting and the

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<sup>41</sup> Adorno, p. 61.



piano. The rest of the opening section of the book is devoted to a further characterisation of Doktor Herzfeld and to the introduction of the themes that pervade the novel and determine its atmosphere. With the repeated emphasis on the song 'Ach, du lieber Augustin', Hermann sensitises the reader to the theme of loss, while the incorrect identifications of the tune introduce the theme of the relationship between illusion and reality. As this tune is, for some of Doktor Herzfeld's neighbours, the only indication they have of his personality, their characterisations of him range, according to their identification of the seven notes he habitually whistles, between a connoisseur of Wagner operas and a character so unmusical that he is incapable even of rendering a musical scale. The true characterisation, that of a character damaged by loss, is not recognised. In these references to loss and illusion, the mood of the novel emerges. Thus, the 'Akzentuierung des Aspekts', which Liere identified as one of the main functions of the introductory passages of all of Hermann's novels,<sup>42</sup> once again plays an important role.

As in both *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte* and *Kubinke*, the narration of the action of *Die Nacht* only begins after the scene is set. The general 'wenn er gegen Abend [...] über den Hof ging' (p. 1) is now replaced by the specific 'heute abend' (p. 12). The third person narration is maintained through the greatest part of the novel, Doktor Herzfeld is used as a reflector character. In the first part of the novel, the descriptions of the Berlin environment vary in their representation between the external and the figural perspective. But the novel moves in its focus to an ever closer concentration on Doktor Herzfeld's mental and emotional struggle which develops into the obsessive. There is a gradual shift from an awareness of others and participation in external life, towards a withdrawal into the self, which is only broken at the very end of the novel. To underline this development, the narrator withdraws more and more to leave room for a direct and entirely subjective expression of Doktor Herzfeld's thoughts and emotions. As the narrative progresses, it dissolves more and more into an internal monologue. Consequently, the metropolitan environment through which the troubled Doktor Herzfeld wanders in the later part of the book is largely presented through his consciousness.

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<sup>42</sup> See Liere, pp. 109-116.



This interiorization represents a shift from the Realist to the Modernist concept of the novel and therefore is crucial to the argument of this chapter. Hence it is important to trace this very gradual shift in perspective with the help of some representative quotations from the text. In the first forty-six pages of *Die Nacht*, Hermann underlines Doktor Herzfeld's characterisation as a detached outsider by maintaining the distance of the external perspective. Indeed, in these first pages, it is Gutzeit's thoughts and feelings to which the reader is given access, whereas Doktor Herzfeld remains seen from the external perspective:

Hermann Gutzeit kam sich wie ein Brettspieler vor, der überspielt worden ist. [...] Er hatte endlich einmal wieder an sich geglaubt, was er seit hundert Tagen nicht mehr getan hatte; und dieser Glaube war ihm gerade heute so wohltuend und so notwendig gewesen, - und da hatte der andere seinen ganzen Bau mit *einem* Anlauf über den Haufen geworfen. [...] Hermann Gutzeit stand nun wieder ganz kahl und fröstelnd der harten Luft der Wirklichkeit gegenüber. Doktor Herzfeld aber hatte den Kopf von neuem gesenkt, seine Augen hatten zu sprechen aufgehört, und der alte Zug von leichter Müdigkeit war wieder in die Mundwinkel zurückgekehrt. (pp. 44/45)

At the beginning of the novel, the city environment is described by the narrator. Real and fictional world correspond as is clear from the following passage:

Wie ein langgestreckter Kasten lag nun drüben die Ausstellungshalle, und hinten erhob sich, unwahrscheinlich gleich dem Hintergrund auf der Opernbühne einer kleinen Residenz, vom hellen, grünlichen Licht der Straße in das Dunkel eines schwülen und leichtverhangenen Sommerhimmels hinaufsteigend, der für den Bau allzu plumpe Turm der Kaiser Wilhelm-Gedächtniskirche. Das Ganze lag da wie ein riesiges Kamel, das seinen dicken Hals in die Nacht emporstreckt. (pp. 45/46)

Hermann takes care to make his description sensually exact, as the accumulation of adjectives indicates. The evocative image of the camel adds a personal, original note, but it is that of the voice of the narrator, not that of the protagonist. Although in this opening part of *Die Nacht*, Hermann does not mix the narratorial voice, which remains external, with that of the protagonist, he nevertheless gives us an insight into Doktor Herzfeld's view of the Berlin environment. He does this by including long passages of direct speech, in which Doktor Herzfeld, in dialogue with Gutzeit, extols the beauty of the city (see for instance pp. 24-27).

The first indication of a change in narrative perspective is given on page forty-seven, where, for the first time, the reader is informed about Doktor Herzfeld's thoughts.



Referring to the comings and goings of a great mass of people, Hermann writes: 'Doktor Herzfeld war es, als sollte ihm damit die Überflüssigkeit des einzelnen praktisch veranschaulicht werden.' From this point onwards, the internal perspective is used frequently. However, the city environment is still exclusively represented from the external viewpoint of the narrator. It is not until much later that Hermann starts to filter the perception of the external world through the experience of his protagonist. A first, isolated, instance can be seen in Doktor Herzfeld's meeting with Rehchen in the bohème café in which the girl is described from Doktor Herzfeld's point of view: 'Ihren schönen, wiegenden, selbstbewußten Gang hatte sie also noch und die gute Kopfhaltung gleichfalls. Ja, und das Gesicht war nur etwas zarter und etwas schmaler geworden, aber es hatte dadurch nichts von seiner ernsten Schönheit verloren.' (p. 97) However, it is not until Gutzeit's and Doktor Herzfeld's return to the street in which they live that representation through the consciousness of the protagonist Doktor Herzfeld is established as the predominant mode for describing the outside world:

Richtig, da waren sie ja bald daheim. Da lag schon ihre Straße. Wie schnell das zugewachsen war! Alles vierstöckige Häuser hinter ihren kleinen, hastig und spärlich begrünten Vorgärten. Nur da drüben saß noch vor einem Bauzaun der Wächter und spielte mit einem grauen Hund. Er wartete, daß die ersten Arbeiter kämen, damit er gehen könnte. Wie gut es solch Mann hatte! Der würde jetzt sicher zu Hause sich hinwerfen und schlafen - schlafen wie ein Stein, ohne auch nur zu träumen. (p. 172)

During Doktor Herzfeld's solitary second walk, the mixing of observation with reflection, already evident in the passage quoted above, becomes even stronger. Thoughts, feelings, reactions to observations and, above all, reminiscences are now tightly bound up with Hermann's depictions of the environment as perceived by Doktor Herzfeld: 'Jawohl ... Jawohl. Wo er ehemals mit seinem Vater in den Gottesdienst gegangen war - in die kleine Betschule - da standen jetzt die riesigen durchbrochenen Mauern eines Warenhauses. An Stelle der Kirche von vorgestern die Kirche von morgen! dachte Doktor Herzfeld.' (p. 282)

When hallucinations start to infiltrate Doktor Herzfeld's perceptions, indistinguishable from reality to his disturbed mind, Hermann has eliminated the dividing line between outer and inner experience. The representation of Doktor Herzfeld's environment has become one with the representation of his mind's processes: 'Die Visionen von Rot kamen ihm von neuem. Und er vernahm ganz deutlich durch Hufgeklapper das wilde



und gelle Schreien der Schüsse.' (p. 283) Raymond Williams states in his comments on *Ulysses*, differentiating this archetypal Modernist city novel from the Realist representation typical of the nineteenth century: 'This is the profound alteration. The forces of action have become internal and in a way there is no longer a city, there is only a man walking through it.'<sup>43</sup> In Doktor Herzfeld's final wandering through the city, Hermann has made this transition from the representation of the fictional world in the form of an objective description to that of a subjective experience.

Even when, in the manner of the stream of consciousness, the syntax is elliptical and thus the text is clearly identified as capturing Doktor Herzfeld's thoughts, the third person perspective is usually maintained. Even when Hermann does not frame Doktor Herzfeld's thoughts by narratorial comment such as 'er dachte', he usually identifies them as reported speech by the use of the epic preterite, as for instance in the remark: 'Ach, wie gleichgültig waren doch eigentlich all die Dinge und die Bedenken - wie lächerlich gleichgültig!' (p. 224).

Towards the end of the novel, however, there are several instances where Hermann does finally break with the form of the third person narrative in order to present Doktor Herzfeld's internal monologue in the direct technique of the stream of consciousness. In one instance, for example, Doktor Herzfeld's thoughts and memories are stimulated by the sight of a bench in the Tiergarten. His rumination starts off as a third person narrative, but then switches into the direct rendering of Doktor Herzfeld's stream of consciousness: 'Die Bank kannte er sehr gut. Aber besetzt - wieder besetzt ... Weiß nicht: früher hing da doch keine Bogenlampe drüber. Sicher nicht. Denn hätte da früher eine Bogenlampe gehangen ... Überhaupt, was haben Bogenlampen im Tiergarten zu tun?' (p. 272).<sup>44</sup>

The preceding review of the structure, plot and narrative situation of *Die Nacht* has shown that Hermann has taken important steps towards leaving behind the precepts of the nineteenth century Realist novel, precepts which were still so prevalent in *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte*. While the introductory pages of *Die Nacht* show a narratorial guidance that entirely adheres to the Realist narrator's task of providing an epic survey

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<sup>43</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London, 1985), p. 243.

<sup>44</sup> For further examples of this direct rendering of the protagonist's stream of consciousness, see pp. 227 and 243.



of the fictional world, the situation changes gradually during the course of the novel to make room for a Modernist subjective perspective. The above outline of the gradual shift of perspective has shown the parallel, gradual loss of distance between the author's narrative stance and the protagonist's perspective, to the extent of occasional convergence of the two positions in the stream of consciousness passages.

In this latter part of *Die Nacht*, Hermann thus strives to immerse the reader in an intense experience of his protagonist's psychological turmoil, by erasing the aesthetic distance between the novel and its reader. Any self-conscious reflection of the writing process itself, which indicates distance between the author and his material and which marks the work of some of the great innovators of Modernist literature, has no place in *Die Nacht*.

Adorno considers the Modernist narrator's tendency to reflect on the form and illusion of his representation as one of the characteristics which most clearly differs from the Realist tradition:

Oft ist hervorgehoben worden, daß im neuen Roman [...] die Reflexion die reine Formimmanenz durchbricht. Aber solche Reflexion hat kaum mehr als den Namen mit der vorflaubertschen gemein. Diese war moralisch: Parteinahme für oder gegen Romanfiguren. Die neue ist Parteinahme gegen die Lüge der Darstellung.<sup>45</sup>

When considering *Die Nacht* in the light of this distinction, its position on the verge between the traditional and the modern is again evident. As Hermann concentrates on the consciousness of his hero, on his complex psychological make-up, his emotions and states of mind, his treatment of Doktor Herzfeld is non-judgemental: never does the author/narrator reflect on the ethical make-up of the protagonist. Neither does he reflect on the writing process itself, for fear of disrupting the reader's direct participation in Doktor Herzfeld's emotional and mental turmoil.

#### 8.1.4 Characterisation

The characterisation of Doktor Herzfeld is also relevant to the positioning of *Die Nacht* in a Realist or a Modernist context. The conflict which Vischer identified as

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<sup>45</sup> Adorno, p. 68.



fundamental to the Realist novel, the opposition between the individual and society,<sup>46</sup> is certainly still significant in *Die Nacht*. Yet, Doktor Herzfeld's alienation is not that of the 'erfahrungslosen Herzens, das mit seinen Idealen in die Welt tritt', a constellation that Vischer defines as a fundamental premise of the Realist novel.<sup>47</sup> On the contrary, Doktor Herzfeld stands outside because of his surplus of experience, not because of his idealism. Furthermore, the conflict between protagonist and world is overshadowed in *Die Nacht* by the conflict of identity within the broken individual himself. Hermann's concern with his protagonist's inner life is no longer that of Vischer, who concentrated on it as 'die Stelle, wohin das Ideale sich geflüchtet hat, nachdem das Reale prosaisch geworden ist'.<sup>48</sup> Instead, Hermann concentrates on the reflection on Doktor Herzfeld's thoughts, moods and mental states, and with the definition of his complex, multi-layered identity.

Doktor Herzfeld thus clearly has more in common with the protagonists of other Modernist novels than with those of traditional Realist literature. The dissociation of identity and the alienation not only from society, but also from the self, are indeed basic determinants of the characters and of the thematic concern of the modern novel, just as they are basic experiences of modern man. Adorno for example, sees the anti-Realist element in the modern novel 'gezeitigt von seinem realen Gegenstand, einer Gesellschaft, in der die Menschen voneinander und von sich selber gerissen sind',<sup>49</sup> and Russell Berman defines individual alienation as 'the theme of modernism'.<sup>50</sup>

## 8.2 Comparisons with Thomas Mann's *Der Tod in Venedig* (1912) and Theodor Fontane's *Irrungen, Wirrungen* (1887)

Because of the characterisation of Doktor Herzfeld as a solitary aesthete, Liere compares *Die Nacht* to the works of the Austrian Impressionists. Referring to the protagonists of Musil's, Hofmannsthal's and Schnitzler's dramas and novels, he concludes, however, that Doktor Herzfeld is not 'wie jene Aristokraten, die sich als

<sup>46</sup> See Vischer, p. 217: 'Es folgt aus dem Obigen, daß hier, im Conflict dieser innern Lebendigkeit mit der Härte der äußern Welt, das eigentliche Thema des Romans liegt.'

<sup>47</sup> Vischer, p. 218.

<sup>48</sup> Vischer, p. 218.

<sup>49</sup> Adorno, p.65.

<sup>50</sup> R. A. Berman, *Rise*, p. 263. Similarly, Gelfant links the theme of dissociation of identity specifically to the twentieth-century city novel: 'The comprehensive theme of [twentieth-century] city fiction is personal dissociation: the prototype for the hero is the self-divided man.' (Gelfant, p. 21)



Elite weit über die Masse, über das Treiben der Welt erhaben fühlen.'<sup>51</sup> Indeed, it would not be helpful to subsume *Die Nacht* under the heading of aestheticism. As I shall show in the following chapter, aestheticism is portrayed in this novel as a strategy for survival by a deeply damaged character. Rather than embracing the concept wholeheartedly, Hermann shows it in an ambivalent light by referring to its surrogate function as a means to sublimate missing human relationships.

Another comparison, which to my knowledge has not been suggested before, seems to me to be more illuminating: that with Thomas Mann's *Der Tod in Venedig*, published in 1912, the same year as *Die Nacht*. The main protagonists of Hermann's novel and Mann's novella have much in common. Both are characterised as ageing aesthetes without any vital social ties. Both are guided by strong self-discipline and self-reliance, and both their lives are disturbed by forces they cannot control. Where the force of passion threatens Aschenbach's equilibrium, those of hate, guilt and revenge grip Doktor Herzfeld.

In terms popularised by Friedrich Nietzsche's *Geburt der Tragödie* (1872), psychological interest in the individual, particularly the artistic individual, is expressed both by Mann and by Hermann in the exploration of the relationship between the rational Apollonian aestheticism and the instinctive Dionysiac intoxication. The purely aesthetic Apollonian enjoyment of art is represented in Doktor Herzfeld's attitude both to the nocturnal Kurfürstendamm and to his own art collection, as it is in Aschenbach's first reaction to the boy Tadzio's beauty. Whereas Aschenbach is brought down because he yields to the ensuing onslaught by the Dionysian force of untamed emotion and uncontrollable ecstasy, Doktor Herzfeld finally regains his balance by withstanding such intoxication.

The struggle of the protagonists against this Dionysian force, their mental crises, are in both works represented in conjunction with their solitary wanderings through unfamiliar cityscapes. In order to determine the position of *Die Nacht* in the context of German literary history even more precisely, it is useful to focus on the representations of these walks in some detail and to compare their handling. A comparison with the treatment of a similar motif in a Realist novel, namely in Botho's ride through Berlin in Fontane's

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<sup>51</sup> Liere, p. 170.



*Irrungen, Wirrungen*, will complete this comparative analysis which aims to describe further the position of *Die Nacht* between Realism and Modernism.

In the depiction of Doktor Herzfeld's solitary second walk in *Die Nacht*, Hermann shows his protagonist in the grip of despair and of a passionate desire for revenge. Doktor Herzfeld's rational faculties are eclipsed by his mental confusion:

Und wenn ihn auch sein Verstand auf die andere Seite ziehen wollte - sein Wille rief ihn immer wieder zurück, sein Wille, der nach einer Schuld suchte, sein Wille, sie zu büßen, ein Ende zu machen, aus all dieser Jämmerlichkeit herauszukommen und jene mit sich zu ziehen, von der er glaubte, daß er sie verantwortlich machen dürfte. (p. 278)

The unfamiliar and chaotic city environment through which he wanders aimlessly, not only mirror his mental confusion, but also exacerbate his crisis and are experienced by him as posing a threat to his identity:

Und dann diese Menschen, die ihn stießen! Er wußte nichts mit ihnen anzufangen - er wußte nicht, wo sie unterbringen. Draußen bei sich kannte er jeden und jede, jede Nuance des Lebens. Aber hier war er fremd. [...] Der sich steigende Lärm - denn die Straßen der Innenstadt sind ja eng und angefüllt vom Gerassel der Wagen - störte und quälte Doktor Herzfeld unendlich. [...] Grausame Kopfschmerzen hatte er. Aber dies Berlin nahm und nahm kein Ende. Und er ging immernoch hin wie durch lange, heiße Schluchten. [...] Doktor Herzfeld wußte gar nicht, wo er war. (pp. 279-86)

The spiralling crisis can only be overcome after a cleansing loss of consciousness: this allows the forces of rationality to reassert themselves and finally enables Doktor Herzfeld to find peace in an accommodation with his situation.<sup>52</sup>

In *Der Tod in Venedig*, Aschenbach goes for three walks through Venice. In the first, his growing awareness of the epidemic in the city brings on his decision to leave Venice. In contrast to Doktor Herzfeld in the passage considered above, Aschenbach starts out on his walk in a calm, rational frame of mind. However, he is quickly drawn into the thrall of the diseased atmosphere of the city. As in Hermann's depiction of Doktor Herzfeld's walk, Mann concentrates on the sensory impressions of his protagonist rather than on his rational processes and thus stresses the power of the environmental influences over the character. The oppressive city atmosphere, its stifling

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<sup>52</sup> This paragraph is a brief anticipation of a more detailed discussion included in the following chapter.



air and jostling crowds, not only harass Aschenbach, but the climate of disease actually gains power over him: 'Je länger er ging, desto quälender bemächtigte sich seiner der abscheuliche Zustand, den die Seeluft zusammen mit dem Scirocco hervorbringen kann, und der zugleich Erregung und Erschlaffung ist.'<sup>53</sup> However, Aschenbach's rational powers reassert themselves as he decides to leave: 'Zum zweitenmal und nun endgültig war es erwiesen, daß diese Stadt bei dieser Witterung ihm höchst schädlich war. Eigensinniges Ausharren erschien vernunftwidrig.'

However, Aschenbach proves incapable of keeping to this decision. As he follows Tadzio through the streets of the city in his second and third walks through Venice, his rationality is shown to have made way for a slavish pursuit of his passion. Using an image that is reminiscent of Hermann's characterisation of the suicidal Doktor Herzfeld as a mouse in the power of a cat, Mann, too, describes Aschenbach as a helpless victim in the hands of his passion: 'Haupt und Herz waren ihm trunken, und seine Schritte folgten den Weisungen des Dämons, dem es Lust ist, des Menschen Vernunft und Würde unter seine Füße zu treten.'<sup>54</sup> Parallel to Aschenbach's loss of his established identity, Mann describes his disoriented wandering through the labyrinth of lanes and alleys. The city and the mental process of the protagonist now reflect each other, disease and confusion characterise both: 'Auf den Spuren des Schönen hatte Aschenbach sich eines Nachmittags in das innere Gewirr der kranken Stadt vertieft.'<sup>55</sup> Aschenbach's final mental breakdown is marked by his physical breakdown at the precise place where, on his first walk, he made his decision to leave Venice. The identity of the location stresses the contrast of Aschenbach's changed mental state.

In both works, the protagonists' meanderings through the city are used to mirror their labyrinthine mental processes. The city environment not only provides important catalysts for their inner life, but imposes itself onto their psyche. Both Aschenbach and Doktor Herzfeld are led by the force of their passion and in both cases, the chaotic city environment supports the resulting eclipse of rationality.

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<sup>53</sup> This and the following quotation are taken from Thomas Mann, *Der Tod in Venedig* in Mann, *Der Tod in Venedig und andere Erzählungen*, ed. by Erich Kahler (Frankfurt a.M., 1973), pp. 7-68 (p. 34). My emphasis.

<sup>54</sup> Mann, *Tod*, p. 51.

<sup>55</sup> Mann, *Tod*, p. 64.



Compare now Doktor Herzfeld's second walk through Berlin with Botho's solitary ride in chapter fourteen of Fontane's *Irrungen, Wirungen*, which must also be seen as an expression of a mental and emotional crisis.<sup>56</sup> Having received a letter from his mother, Botho has to come to a decision concerning his relationship with Lene. The initial agitation, which prompts him to go for the ride, soon recedes however. He allows the horse to reduce its pace from a trot to a walk and starts reflecting on his emotions and thoughts rationally and analytically: 'Was ist es denn, was mich hindert, den Schritt zu tun, den alle Welt erwartet?'.<sup>57</sup> Lost in his monologue, Botho lets himself be carried where the horse takes him.

However, this abandonment differs fundamentally from Doktor Herzfeld's confused self-abandonment and aimless wandering in the grip of his passionate hatred and self-hatred. Botho is never in the danger of being alienated from himself or from society; he is guided throughout by the values and directives of his social class and its ingrained ideas of order and honour. The horse itself can be seen as a symbol for Botho's secure relatedness to his class: The 'prächtige Fuchsstute [...], ein Geschenk des Onkels, zugleich der Neid der Kameraden,'<sup>58</sup> becomes restless when Botho first speaks about his love for Lene and it halts when he acknowledges this love for a second time. Finally, left to its own devices, the horse carries its master to the Hinckeldey memorial and thereby provokes the turning point of Botho's decision, finalised with the words: 'Was predigt das Denkmal *mir*? Jedenfalls das eine, daß das Herkommen unser Tun bestimmt.'<sup>59</sup>

Fontane does not use the city environment to mirror and heighten the protagonist's confusion. Botho rides out of the city into the surrounding countryside in order to gain clarity of thought, but even the elements of the cityscape mentioned at the beginning and the end of the ride serve to give a frame of reference rather than to imply an oppressive, chaotic environment. Whereas these references are purely geographical at the beginning of the passage (Moabiter Brücke, Jungfernheide), they assume a more symbolic meaning later on. In addition to the Hinckeldey memorial, the factory scene which Botho observes at the end of his ride is important in this context. Rather than

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<sup>56</sup> See Heike Lau, 'Betrachtungen zu Raum und Zeit in Theodor Fontanes "Irrungen, Wirungen"', *Fontaneblätter*, 45 (1988), 71-78.

<sup>57</sup> Fontane, *Irrungen*, p. 169.

<sup>58</sup> Fontane, *Irrungen*, p. 169.

<sup>59</sup> Fontane, *Irrungen*, p. 171.



being jolted into a contemplation of the hardship endured by the workers, Botho integrates the scene into his view of society by turning it into an orderly idyll. He can then use it to support the decision he has already reached: 'Denn Ordnung ist viel und mitunter alles. Und nun frag ich mich: War *mein* Leben in der 'Ordnung'? Nein. Ordnung ist Ehe.'<sup>60</sup>

In both the depiction of Doktor Herzfeld's crisis in *Die Nacht* and Botho's decision-making process in *Irrungen, Wirrungen*, the protagonists ultimately arrive at an accommodation recommended by rationality. However, the description of this process differs significantly in the two novels. Whereas Botho remains firmly in control of his decision making process and is guided by the framework given to him by his social position, Doktor Herzfeld has no such framework to fall back on. Doktor Herzfeld's crisis, heightened by the unsettling unfamiliar city environment, carries the threat of a loss of identity. He is represented as the victim of his destructive and self-destructive urges, whose final return to a rational way of thinking can only be reached after a mental and emotional breakdown. Botho, by contrast, quickly overcomes his emotional agitation, at no point is his identity threatened. Rather than feeling alienated and oppressed by the city environment, Fontane's protagonist can still assimilate it and find support in it for his decision making and for the confirmation of his personality.

Even in Fontane's description of Lene's walk through the streets of Berlin in chapter sixteen of *Irrungen, Wirrungen*, where the emotional shock at her chance meeting with Botho and Käthe is very tangible, the city environment remains reassuring rather than estranging. A shop window recess provides protection, a brass bar offers support and the stairs to a house give Lene the means to rest, while the inhabitants of the house show sympathy.

The Realist's trust in the individual who is supported by his material and social framework remains unbroken in Fontane's descriptions of the crises of his protagonists. In Hermann's depiction of Jettchen Gebert's walks through Biedermeier Berlin, a similar sense of the individual's belonging to, and being supported by, the city environment is apparent.<sup>61</sup> However, in *Die Nacht*, this belief in the individual's integration within a supporting environment is no longer maintained. In Hermann's

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<sup>60</sup> Fontane, *Irrungen*, p. 171.

<sup>61</sup> See Chapter 5 of this dissertation.



representation of Doktor Herzfeld's crisis in *Die Nacht*, the unfamiliar city environment has turned into an antagonistic force and the rather turbulent inner life of the isolated protagonist is the only, albeit unreliable, resource remaining to him. Although the final accommodation with their respective lots links the outcome of Doktor Herzfeld's crisis to the decision taken by Botho, the representation of the crisis itself shows Hermann's greater closeness to the Modernism of Mann.

Neither Doktor Herzfeld's nor Aschenbach's walks are represented as an opportunity to clear the mind with the help of social references provided by the city environment, as was the case in Fontane's text. The walk through the city no longer structures the mental process. In Mann's and Hermann's representations, the Modernist interest in the sensory and emotional reflection of the city environment in the protagonists' consciousness has taken over.

The change in the way that Mann and Hermann represent the city, compared to Fontane's approach, is precisely the same shift from the pre-Modernist to the Modernist city novel that is described by Fisher, Pike and others. Fisher identifies the method of representing a city through analogy with the protagonist's mental process, as a defining component of a modernist 'Poetik der Stadt': 'Für [die Schriftsteller der Moderne] ist die Stadt nicht ein Problem oder ein Gegenstand, sondern eine Bewußtseinsstruktur.'<sup>62</sup> Pike describes how the static type of description prevalent in the nineteenth century city novel, and used by Hermann in *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte*, makes way in the Modernist novel for the presentation of the metropolis as 'an irritable, nervous energy, and its inhabitants come to seem more like prowlers than citizens'.<sup>63</sup>

In a wider context, the parallels with Mann's *Tod in Venedig* help to illuminate some of the central issues of *Die Nacht*. Both authors portray self-discipline as a survival strategy while at the same time pointing out its oppressive effect on the emotions. Both support a belief in the absolute value of art, even though they are painfully aware of art's limitations. In the face of the crumbling of European civilisation, symbolised by the decaying and cholera-ridden Venice in *Tod in Venedig* and thematised by Hermann in the image of the First World War in his second Herzfeld novel *Schnee*, the purity and

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<sup>62</sup> Fisher, p. 112.

<sup>63</sup> Burton Pike, *The Image of the City in Modern Literature* (Princeton/N.J., 1981), p. 72.



value of art is the principle in which both authors keep believing, although both show art being debased and destroyed by the world in which their protagonists live.

It becomes clear when looking at *Die Nacht*, that Hermann's writing occupies a similar position to that of Mann's, at least up to 1912: lying between tradition and modernity. Both were bound to many of the narrative conventions of the nineteenth century, yet in other respects both ventured into the representation of modern reality by modern means. Mann's Modernism was described as follows by Russell Berman:

Mann's characteristic version of modernism delineates the necessity of a collective in which the substance of the individual does not disappear, in contrast to the solutions in the competing fascist and epic leftist versions of modernism [...]. In "The German Republic", Mann labels this modernism "humanity".<sup>64</sup>

This concept of humanity is one that Hermann shares. Indeed, Mann's definition of humanity in the essay 'Von deutscher Republik', on which Berman's statement is based, reads like the principle underlying Doktor Herzfeld's characterisation in Hermann's *Die Nacht*:

Zwischen ästhetizistischer Vereinzelung und würdelosem Untergange des Individuums im Allgemeinen, zwischen Mystik und Ethik, Innerlichkeit und Staatlichkeit, zwischen todverbundener Verneinung des Ethischen, Bürgerlichen, des Wertes und einer nichts als wasserklar-ethischen Vernunftphilisterei ist sie in Wahrheit die deutsche Mitte, das Schön-Menschliche.<sup>65</sup>

Doktor Herzfeld, however, a typical representative of the modern fragmented personality, cannot be shown to evolve in a simple linear development to becoming a representative of this 'German centre'. His disturbed relationship with his fellow human beings and, even more importantly, the emotional demands imposed by his fragmented identity, make him oscillate between the poles listed in Mann's definition. In the following chapter, I shall discuss in detail how Hermann describes the fragmented personality of his protagonist and how he outlines his positive accommodation to modern metropolitan life while maintaining a complex depiction of Doktor Herzfeld's character and his relationship with his environment.

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<sup>64</sup> R. A. Berman, *Rise*, p. 270.

<sup>65</sup> Thomas Mann, 'Von deutscher Republik' [1922], in Mann, *Von deutscher Republik. Politische Schriften und Reden in Deutschland*, ed. by Peter de Mendelssohn (Frankfurt a.M., 1984), pp. 118-59 (p. 159).



9 Metropolitan Atmosphere and Psychology: The Representation of Berlin  
in *Die Nacht des Doktor Herzfeld*

In *Die Nacht*, the theme of the individual in the city, already explored in *Kubinke*, is taken up again and developed further. The focus has now changed to the representation of the psychological make-up of the metropolitan person. This concentration on the psychology of the individual stands in clear contrast to the social interest and criticism that had characterised the Berlin novel at the end of the nineteenth century. It is also a development from the detailed sensual recording of impressions that characterises Impressionist literature and is so evident in *Kubinke*.

This chapter has a dual focus. First, I want to describe Hermann's depiction of Berlin and his rendering of the protagonist's encounters with the city environment. In this section, I shall look at Hermann's view of the Kurfürstendamm and its bohème society before going on to show how the novel uses Doktor Herzfeld's walk through other parts of the metropolis to reflect his identity crisis. Comparisons with the depiction of Berlin in Hermann's earlier novels, particularly *Kubinke*, will be used to show the development of his writing that *Die Nacht* represents.

Secondly, I shall focus on the mental make-up of the protagonist Doktor Herzfeld as the archetypal urban personality and on his conscious coming to terms with his identity as defined, at least partly, by the metropolitan environment. In this context, I shall analyse how Hermann deals, in the characterisation of Doktor Herzfeld, with the tension between the feeling of alienation typical of the metropolitan dweller and the protagonist's attachment to Berlin as his home-town. I aim to show how Hermann presents in Doktor Herzfeld a model for the modern individual's accommodation with a divided self and with life in the metropolis. Hermann's positive evaluation of the opportunities for individualism in the city will be contrasted with contemporary novels by Rilke and Schlaf treating the same theme.



## 9.1 The City of Berlin as Described in the Context of Doktor Herzfeld's Two Walks

### 9.1.1 The First Walk: Atmospheric Depiction of the Kurfürstendamm and its Bohème Society

The evocative depiction of the Kurfürstendamm area is one of the main qualities of the novel picked out by contemporary reviewers. Eloesser wrote about *Die Nacht*: 'Das stimmt alles und scheint sehr leicht, wenn es einer einmal gemacht hat. Aber wer hat vordem die Nacht und überhaupt das Leben des heutigen Berlin vertrauenswürdig geschildert?'<sup>1</sup> Twenty years later, in an article written on the occasion of Hermann's 60th birthday, the same critic confirmed his early judgement:

Es gibt ein Georg-Hermann-Gebiet, wie es ein Fontane-Gebiet gibt; er hat sich daneben angebaut. Wenn du nach Feierabend über den Kurfürstendamm gehst, den vielverlästerten, es ist die *Nacht des Doktor Herzfeld*, eine der berlinischsten und der besten berlinischen Sachen, die je geschrieben worden sind.<sup>2</sup>

In the first part of the novel, which comprises Doktor Herzfeld's and Gutzeit's evening and night walk in the area around the Kurfürstendamm, the city is perceived as a living organism with the Kurfürstendamm as its busy heart. Not only the trees, the light and the sky seem to be alive - lines of trees flood the streets, the sky lowers itself onto the roofs (p. 24) - but the city itself is presented as if a living being. The image is a positive one of energy and light: 'Und jetzt strömte es auch aus den Hauptadern, die hier das breite Blutgefäß trafen. Und es war, als ob all diese Menschen gleichsam Helligkeit mit sich brachten, das Licht erhöhten.' (p. 36) A locomotive bound for Zoo station is described in anthropomorphic terms as a mischievous athlete and the vicinity of the zoo is evoked through the mention of its cooling trees and the animal smell (p. 47). 'Ambivalente Details gewiß', as Sprengel states, 'die doch dem Eindruck einer uniformen, mechanisch regulierten Massengesellschaft entgegenwirken.'<sup>3</sup> Comparisons such as that of motor cars to 'große Hunde, die, den Kopf tief gesenkt, mit ihren Feueraugen eilends einer Spur folgten' (p. 28) heighten the reader's imagination of the scenes and strengthen the perception of their vitality. Interestingly, this very effective comparison reappears in a painting by Lesser Ury showing a nocturnal traffic scene in

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<sup>1</sup> Eloesser, 'Die Nacht', col. 1047.

<sup>2</sup> Arthur Eloesser, 'Georg Hermann zum 60. Geburtstag', *Vossische Zeitung*, 6 October 1931.

<sup>3</sup> Sprengel, 'Anti-Nietzsche', p. 8.



central Berlin: 'Nollendorfplatz bei Nacht' (1925) (ill. XVI). The cars appear almost as crouching animals with shining headlight eyes. The vitality of the nocturnal atmosphere is further stressed through the use of glaring colours for the light reflections on the wet asphalt. The beams of the cars' headlights take on a material substantiveness that is more tangible than the background of the street itself.

In *Die Nacht*, the depiction of the lively Kurfürstendamm area and its atmosphere relies in many ways on the same techniques used in the representation of street scenes in *Kubinke*. The beauty of the city is again evoked in similar ways: Hermann lays the same stress on the sensory quality of the descriptions, which combine renderings of visual, auditory and olfactory sensations.

Again, Hermann sees the beauty of the city not only in its natural features, but also in distinctively modern elements such as the busy traffic and the powerful locomotives of the express trains:

Von allen Seiten zogen erleuchtete Wagen heran. An der Uhr standen wartende Damen in hellen Kleidern und lächelten irgend einem zu, der aus dem Gewühl ihnen entgegentrat. [...] Oben auf der Brücke hatte sich irgend eine gewaltige Schnellzugslokomotive postiert, hoch und breitbrüstig und kurzhalsig, ein rechter Athlet, soch wohlgebauter Neunzigkilometer-Renner, und sie vergnügte sich damit, Funken, einen hübschen Regen von Funken, in den Nachthimmel zu werfen, als mache sie sich über die kleine Stadtbahnlokomotive da hinter ihr lustig, die mühselig schnaufte und pustete, ehe sie ihre Lichtkette in die Häuserschlucht hineinzog. (p. 46)

The aesthetic experience that the city affords is again highlighted in references to the pictorial quality of the visual impressions and subsequently by adding sounds and smells to complete the scene:

Das ganze Bild jedoch war überspielt von dem Wechsel der hohen und tiefen, der tiefen und hohen Signale der kommenden und weichenden Automobile. [...] Und das ganze Bild war umwittert von dem Benzinatem, in den sich ein leiser Carnivorenduft mischte. (p. 47)

A detached, aestheticising view is thus created, which is reinforced by the frequent use of musical metaphors. The sounds of the city traffic are perceived as music (see pp. 35, 47 and 52) which, though not melodious in itself, mixes and harmonises with the music supplied by the café orchestras 'zu einem seltsam musikalischen Potpourri' (p. 47).





III. XVI: Lesser Ury, *Nollendorfplatz bei Nacht*, 1925; oil on canvas; 72.5 x 54.5; Nationalgalerie Berlin



As I have shown in chapter 7, Hermann's understanding of the beauty of the city is very closely related to the city aesthetics set out in August Endell's 1908 essay *Die Schönheit der großen Stadt*. Hermann achieves the aestheticisation of the city reality not only by a process of detachment through the transformation of reality into art (as shown above), but also, like Endell, by emphasising the importance of the veiling of detail which enhances the atmosphere of the city scene. In *Die Nacht*, as in *Kubinke*, Hermann links the perceived beauty with the veiling and dissolving of objective reality by the evening twilight and, later, the darkness of the night. Beauty results when the perception of objects and scenes is dissolved into that of colours and forms, when the viewer is able to transfigure reality by abstraction:

Aber gegen Abend kann ich mir kaum etwas Köstlicheres denken, als hier entlang zu gehen. All der blöde Stuck, all die wilden Erker und Giebel, mit Goldstreifen überzogen, verschwinden dann, und es bleiben hohe, dunkle und tieffarbige Häuserketten, die mit ihren vielen Zacken und Klippen phantastisch von wechselnden Lichtern überflackert und überspielt sind. Jede Einzelheit verschwindet; es bleiben nur Ketten breiter Spiegelfenster, in denen so lustig die erleuchteten mit den dunklen wechseln, als hätte es ein Juwelier mit blitzenden farbigen und tiefen blinden Halbedelsteinen ersonnen. (pp. 24/25)

Only a detached observer is capable of this aestheticising view. Hermann expresses here the Impressionist understanding of beauty centring on the aesthetic pleasure of surface sensations. The aesthetic perception deliberately opposes the prosaic reality and elevates it to a purely sensory source of enjoyment: 'Das streichelt uns angenehm, ach so wundervoll angenehm!' (p. 26). Inherent in this aesthetic view is a criticism of the objective reality, which is in this novel directed - often with a misogynist undertone<sup>4</sup> - against the antisocial character of human nature as well as against the tastelessness and pomposity of Wilhelmine Imperial Berlin architecture. This parallels the way in which Hermann criticises 'das hochherrschaftliche Haus' and its inhabitants in *Kubinke*. Veils of darkness envelop the 'Protzenburgen [...] und [...] ihre Vasallen' as Gutzeit calls the Kurfürstendamm villas and their inhabitants (p. 24), and erase the incongruous ornaments. Eloesser refers to this aestheticising view with its inherent criticism when he

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<sup>4</sup> Doktor Herzfeld, for instance, describes the former beauty and attractiveness of Lene Held as follows: 'Sie war wirklich damals wie ein schöner Kunstgegenstand [...]. Und so wenig, wie dieser Kunstgegenstand weiß, was wir in ihn hineinträumen, so wenig wußte sie es. Sie war ganz und gar nutz- und wertlos, - eine schöne wilde Giftblume.' (pp. 166/67).



writes: 'Georg Hermann hat den Kurfürstendamm schön gemacht, obgleich er weiß, wie häßlich er ist.'<sup>5</sup>

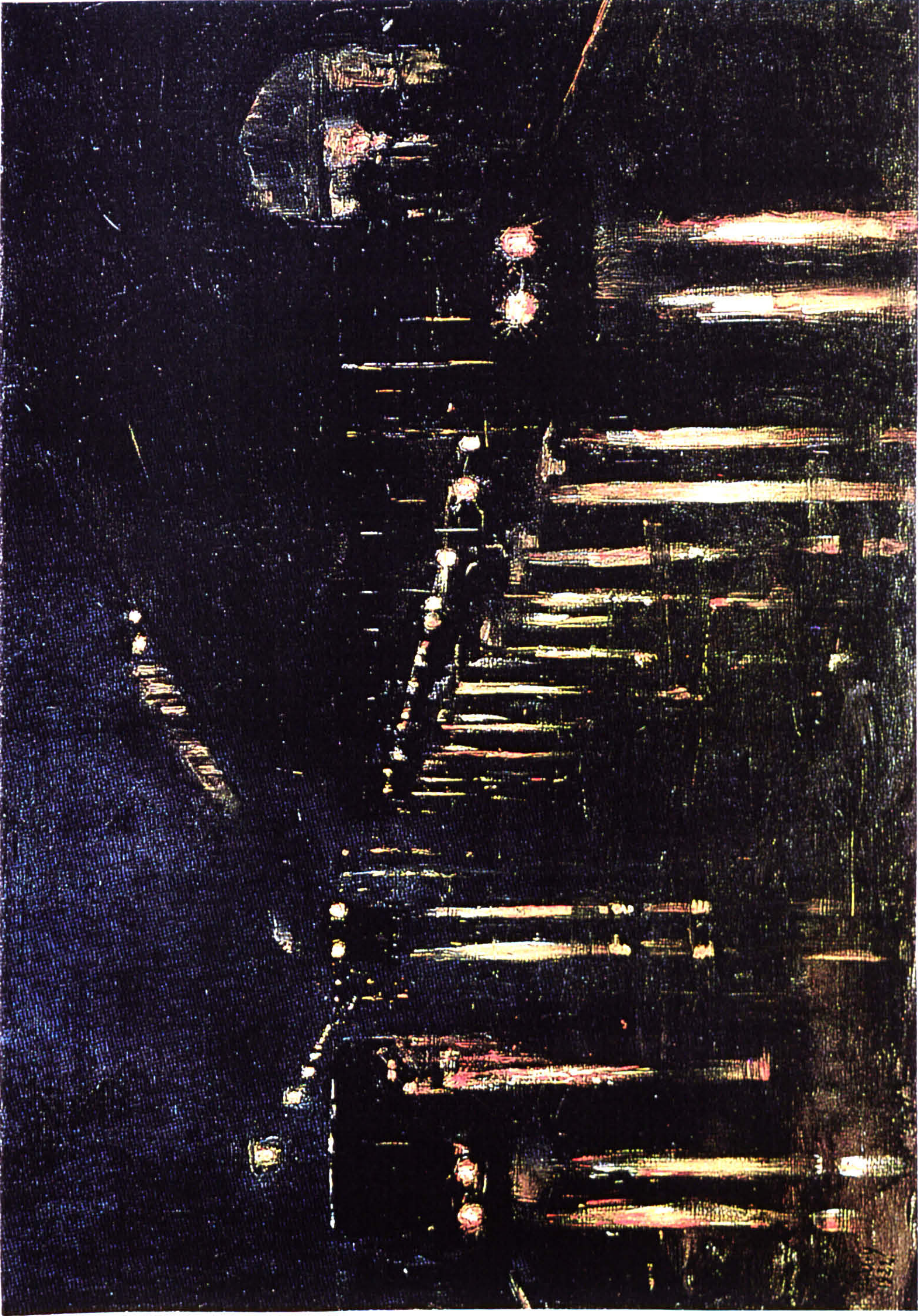
Hermann has his protagonist Doktor Herzfeld extend the concept of aestheticising transfiguration by darkness to his perception of the people taking an evening stroll along the boulevard: 'Jetzt eben - um diese Stunde - ist es nicht mehr Frau Baumeister Meyer von zweihundertzehn, es ist nur Weib, nur Eleganz, nur Schönheit jetzt.' (p. 26) The process of aestheticisation applied here is similar to that which we encountered in the descriptions of streets and buildings; again, it is a process of abstraction. A particular woman is effaced in the observer's perception to be replaced by the general concept of 'Weib', a concept charged with associations of eroticism and sexuality.

Again, as with *Kubinke*, the comparison of Hermann's representation of Berlin in *Die Nacht* with that in the paintings of Lesser Ury is apposite. Hermann's concentration on the nocturnal city in *Die Nacht* highlights the similarities in the aestheticising views of the city of the two artists, given that Ury, too, liked to present the metropolitan beauty of Berlin through the veil of darkness. One example of his nocturnal city paintings has been cited earlier in this chapter in the context of the vitalisation of the traffic. Another example may serve now to explore the more general similarity of Ury's and Hermann's art: Ury's *Hochbahnhof Bülowstraße* from 1922 (ill. XVII) shows the same abstraction on which Hermann bases his principle of aestheticisation as described earlier. The painting's subject, a street flanked by lines of cabs waiting at the elevated railway station, is hardly discernible in the darkness of the nocturnal scene. Instead of a realistically detailed portrayal of the scene, an atmospheric, almost abstract, evocation of a wet city night results. Ury represents the chains of headlights of the waiting cars and their elongated reflections on the wet asphalt as a system of golden dots and lines of light on the black background of the dark street, building and sky. Just as in Hermann's depiction of the Kurfürstendamm, where the overburdened architecture is hidden by the

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<sup>5</sup> Eloesser, 'Die Nacht', col. 1047. Interestingly, a similar view of the Kurfürstendamm was later expressed in Franz Hessel's *Spazieren in Berlin* (1929), the book that was deemed by Walter Benjamin to have introduced the concept of flânerie in a Berlin context. Unlike Hermann, however, Hessel does not rely on romanticising darkness to veil the architectural atrocities of the 'Gründerjahre'. Far more controversially, he applauds the camouflaging effect of the electric light and the building structures of the modern commercial 'Reklamearchitekturen' which now encroach the facades: 'Die aufleuchtenden und verschwindenden, wandernden und wiederkehrenden Lichtreklamen ändern noch einmal Tiefe, Höhe und Umriß der Gebäude. Das ist von großem Nutzen, besonders an Teilen des Kurfürstendamms, wo von der schlimmsten Zeit des Privatbaus noch viel greulich getürmtes, schaurig Ausladendes und Überkrochenes stehengeblieben ist, das erst allmählich verdrängt werden kann.' (Franz Hessel, *Ein Flaneur in Berlin* (originally published in 1929 under the title *Spazieren in Berlin*) (Berlin, 1984), p. 145).





III. XVII: Lesser Ury. *Hochbahnhof Bulowstraße*. 1922; oil on canvas. 70.5 x 105; private collection



night to reveal only a chain of light, the abstraction, enhanced by the veiling darkness, gives the scene a sense of structured beauty.

Ury and Hermann, in *Die Nacht*, both explore the bohemian café society as an essential part of the developing metropolis of Berlin. Hermann gives detailed and observant descriptions of the bohème society, always stressing the duality of appearance and reality. He paints a precise picture of a café which he does not name but which, by its location next to the Secession building can be identified as the Café des Westens, the focal point of the Berlin bohème in the early years of this century. The café is, in Hermann's perceptive description, frequented by: young women, who, having recently left their provincial home towns, now starve themselves in order to achieve an appearance of glamour; by young artists who confuse lack of training and education with avantgarde art; and by their hangers-on, the 'jeunesse dorée', desperate to hide their lack of artistic understanding and their parvenu characters. Again, Hermann characterises different types: the 'Entmündigungsknaben', for instance, who are busy spending money they do not have, and their women who hide their proletarian pasts under a uniform fashion of silk dresses and tinted hair.

Although Hermann exposes the make-believe character of this society, he does not condemn its shallowness. Doktor Herzfeld's attitude, which may be best described as a mellow ambivalence, is Hermann's own. In an essay entitled 'Bang. Reger', published in *Die Zeitlupe* in 1928, Hermann expresses the same attitude that he attributes to Doktor Herzfeld. That is, while being aware of the dangers and the emptiness of the fashionable eccentricity of the bohème society, he admires the courage and the will to start afresh that motivates it and values it for the artistic creativity it can engender. Like Doktor Herzfeld, Hermann always remained at the fringes of the bohème circles, a fact which he notes in the essay 'Bang. Reger': 'Ich nebenbei habe im Café des Westens nicht studiert; ich war nur mit kleiner Matrikel zugelassen und, als die abgelaufen war, später nur noch als Hospitant geduldet.'<sup>6</sup> This distance does not preclude a close knowledge based on sympathetic observation,<sup>7</sup> and it allows him to use a detached and gently ironical tone, more mocking than criticising; the tone of the sympathetic but uninvolved spectator rather than that of the affected insider or of the earnest moral or

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<sup>6</sup> Hermann, 'Bang. Reger', in Hermann, *Die Zeitlupe*, pp. 19-27 (p. 20).

<sup>7</sup> In *Schnee*, p. 137, Hermann briefly turns his fiction into a thinly veiled cultural history, by inserting an obituary to the writer Peter Baum, one of the members of 'seine [Doktor Herzfeld's] Bohème' who did not survive the First World War.



social critic. It is the same gently mocking tone that he used in *Jettchen Gebert* to describe the foibles of the Jacoby family, and the same that characterised the servant girls and their masters in *Kubinke*. It is this gentle irony, along with the melancholy tone described above and the distance kept, which have emerged as Hermann's signature. They set his treatment of the bohème apart from that in the many other turn-of-the-century novels that focus on the same subject. Where, for instance, Bierbaum, in his *Stilpe*, describes the moral and creative decline of the individual artist in the bohème environment in a bitterly ironical style,<sup>8</sup> Hermann remains sympathetic and objective and concentrates on what he is a master in; namely, the description of atmosphere.<sup>9</sup>

Like Hermann, Ury catches the atmosphere without seeking to make any particular point and without caricaturing his subjects. The detachment that is noticeable in Hermann's writing is also visible in Ury's works. In many of his café scenes, Ury depicts his subjects from a distance: he creates barriers between them and the viewer. Often, a table and chairs are used to this purpose (see *Café Gelber in Hamburg* (1887) and *Cafészene mit sitzendem Herrn* (1889)) or, in other cases, he presents his scene as viewed through a doorway (see again *Café Gelber in Hamburg* (1887) and *Café Bauer* (1906)),<sup>10</sup> or he creates distance by showing us only the back view of a person in the foreground, as for instance in *Abend im Café Bauer* (circa 1898) (ill. XVIII).

Detachment also characterises the relationships between the customers in Ury's paintings. The café is mainly shown as a place of withdrawal from the bustle of outside life, a place of individual solitude in a public environment, rather than the heaving centre of metropolitan bohemian life.<sup>11</sup> In *Abend im Café Bauer*, for instance, the distance between the customers is emphasised by the difference in scale of the man and the woman sitting at their respective tables. An atmosphere of promise, however, can also be found in Ury's depiction. The woman in the painting indicates the ambivalence of the intimacy of strangers in the same room: her withdrawn posture contradicts her

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<sup>8</sup> For a discussion of this and other novels on the Berlin bohème, see Katherine Roper, *German Encounters with Modernity* (Atlantic Highlands/N.J., 1991), pp. 127-45.

<sup>9</sup> In 1951, Wolfgang Goetz recommended *Die Nacht* primarily, because 'die Atmosphäre jener Literatenkreise [...], die um 1910 eine Signatur Berlins waren' was 'meisterlich dargestellt'. See Wolfgang Goetz, 'Der Vater des Jettchen Gebert. Erinnerungen an Georg Hermann', *Die Neue Zeitung*, 7 October 1951.

<sup>10</sup> All of the mentioned pictures by Lesser Ury are reproduced on pp. 146-49 of the exhibition catalogue *Lesser Ury. Zauber des Lichts*, Käthe Kollwitz Museum, Berlin (Berlin, 1995).

<sup>11</sup> Significantly, Ury concentrated on the cafés along Unter den Linden, rather than painting those of the new western centre which was developing into the centre of the Berlin bohème.





III. XVIII: Lesser Ury, *Abend im Café Bauer*, about 1898; oil on canvas; 32 x 45; private collection



stylish and rather conspicuous red and white outfit and her appraising gaze. Hermann's descriptions of the hopeful, glamorous young women in his own café scene in *Die Nacht* come to mind. Once again, the affinities between Ury's and Hermann's art, which I have already highlighted in chapter 7 of this dissertation, are apparent. The detached observer's concentration on atmosphere is common to both.

Although Hermann's representation of the lively Kurfürstendamm area in *Die Nacht* has so far been revealed as relying on very similar techniques of depiction and of evocation of atmosphere to those he used in *Kubinke*, there are nevertheless some important differences between his representations of Berlin in the two novels. In *Die Nacht*, Hermann significantly reduces his descriptions of the natural beauty in the city. He lavishes great attention on descriptions of plants and trees in *Kubinke* and *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte*, and even in some passages in *Spielkinder*, but they are rarely mentioned in *Die Nacht*. This last novel concentrates on the western city centre and thus dramatically narrows its focus in comparison to *Kubinke*. In *Die Nacht*, the natural world appears mainly in the more limited form of descriptions of the sky visible above the sea of houses.

The mood in *Die Nacht* is also significantly changed. The cheerful liveliness of the panoramic, kaleidoscopic street scenes in *Kubinke* is replaced by an all-pervading mood of melancholy. In the first part of *Die Nacht*, Hermann shows the city, suffused, in spite of all its frantic activity, in a lyrical atmosphere, provided by the evening light and a sky 'der [...] das Spiel leiser, melancholischer Tinten beibehalten wollte, dem letzten rosigen Traum von Licht treu bleiben wollte' (p. 51).

Most important, however, is the difference in the relationship between protagonist and city, as it has a direct influence on the representation of the city. In *Kubinke*, Hermann was interested in the capturing of impressions of the city as a whole. Berlin was shown as a new and strange environment that could be described as if seen for the first time by an impressionable outsider. Long passages of relatively free-standing description were inserted without appearing to be alien elements in the body of the novel. In *Die Nacht*, the interest in the city as a system is relegated to the background, the descriptive passages are drastically reduced. Hermann is still concerned with recording impressions of city life, but this concern is overshadowed by another: namely that with the interrelationship between the protagonist's psyche and the city environment. This



becomes especially clear in the second part of the novel, in which Doktor Herzfeld loses the protective armour of the detached aesthete.

### 9.1.2 The Second Walk: the Urban Environment as Mirror to the Hero's Crisis of Identity

As Doktor Herzfeld is shaken out of his detached and gently melancholy contemplative mood by his encounter with Lene Held, his view of the city changes. Hermann stresses here the extent to which the mental state of the observer and the observed reality are interdependent. When, in a state of mental and emotional confusion, Doktor Herzfeld ventures out into the city in the morning, the ordinariness of the daytime activities around him is, in the first instance, perceived as contrasting with his disturbed state of mind. He recognises that it is not the outside world that has changed, but his relationship with it (see p. 257). His dissociation from his surroundings is indicated by the fact that he does not talk to the little girl he usually chats to every morning, and is made even more explicit when Hermann informs us that Doktor Herzfeld, the observer par excellence, does not take in the images that surround him. He is too taken up with his own troubles to be reached by his environment (see p. 258).

During Doktor Herzfeld's continuing descent into disorientation and disequilibrium, his relationship with the city environment changes further. When he does become aware of his environment, it seems to be a different world from that which he experienced the night before. It is not only he who has lost his all-enveloping melancholy and the aestheticising mood that hitherto had protected him from the emotional turmoil in which he now finds himself. As the night with its powers of transfiguration has withdrawn, the Kurfürstendamm shows its naked prosaic core: 'Alle Heimlichkeit war fort, alle Vornehmheit. Die ganze unerfreuliche Halbheit seiner aufdringlichen Architekturen lag blank in der Sonne.' (p. 261)

In the harsh daylight of objective truth, beauty and solace can only be found in the 'grüne Stelle' (Vischer) of the Tiergarten park (see p. 271). The constancy and beauty of nature, as indeed that of the stars (see p. 275), have to be sought to counteract the objective city reality in which the individual plays no longer a meaningful role. Indeed, the city environment now becomes increasingly hurtful and oppressive to Doktor



Herzfeld. The noise and brutality of the busy Friedrichstraße clash with his aesthetic sensitivity (see p. 279) and he is painfully aware of his alienation from this modern commercial world. Whereas he is at home in the cultural centre of West Berlin around the Kurfürstendamm and is able to read and understand the area, the Friedrichstraße district is unintelligible to him: a system of signs that he does not understand. The aesthete Doktor Herzfeld is lost in a strange city, 'die Stadt der Arbeit' (p. 283) as he calls it, significantly dissociating it from the city that he can call his home. His encounter with the city environment is no longer that of the slightly aloof and appreciative observer, but that of a disoriented and clumsy stranger, of a tormented and rather frightened victim of the onslaught of heat, noise and movement (see p. 281).

As in Rilke's *Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, completed two years before *Die Nacht*, the unfamiliar city environment is experienced as a physical assault to which the protagonists find themselves exposed unprotected. The directness of the diary style that Rilke uses, his short, staccato sentences ('Elektrische Bahnen rasen läutend durch meine Stube. Automobile gehen über mich hin'<sup>12</sup>) and his evocative imagery ('Die Existenz des Entsetzlichen in jedem Bestandteil der Luft. Du atmest es ein mit Durchsichtigem; in dir aber schlägt es sich nieder, wird hart, nimmt spitze, geometrische Formen an zwischen den Organen'<sup>13</sup>), make his text very different from Hermann's. The mental experience the two writers describe, however, is the same. In both cases, the protagonist feels not only physically assaulted by the city's noise and hyperactivity, but experiences the assault as an attack on his identity.

Hermann shows in Doktor Herzfeld's walk through the tumultuous Friedrichstraße area, the counterpart to his protagonist's experience of the nocturnal Kurfürstendamm at the beginning of the novel. The structuring process of aestheticisation that characterised the earlier experience, is now contrasted with the complementary process of the fragmentation of experience and the onslaught of the city environment on the individual. Where the individual's capacity to impose form on his city environment by abstracting and ordering experience and perception is lost, the experience of the environment cannot be absorbed and the consciousness of the individual disintegrates.

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<sup>12</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke, *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* [1910], ed. by Ernst Zinn (Frankfurt a.M., 1982), p. 9.

<sup>13</sup> Rilke, p. 63.



Doktor Herzfeld tries to assert himself in the unfamiliar environment of the Friedrichstraße area by orienting himself on landmarks that make sense to his cultural frame of reference: the churches and the museum (p. 281). He attempts to use his usual mechanisms of self-identification, namely the anchoring of the self in cultural knowledge. But in this environment, where the department store has replaced the prayer house, his attempt is bound to fail. Indeed, the reference to the Berlin nicknames of the equestrian statues in front of the museum, 'der gehemmte Fortschritt und der geförderte Rückschritt' (p. 281), and the subsequent, rather flippant, rumination about the nature and causes of the 'Berliner Witz', sit very uneasily with the rest of this part of the novel which concentrates on Doktor Herzfeld's disorientation and confusion. They suggest a detachment that clashes with the emphasis on the protagonist's mental confusion. Hermann, who otherwise explains his protagonist's emotional and mental processes in a detailed manner, does not portray these flippant thoughts as Doktor Herzfeld's attempts to regain his identity and his position as an individual withstanding the onslaught of an alien city environment. Therefore, the reader cannot help feeling that, although they could be made psychologically plausible as manifestations of Doktor Herzfeld's character, these flippant remarks are actually just a distracting aside by the author. They detract from, rather than add to, the psychological congruity of the depiction of Doktor Herzfeld's crisis.<sup>14</sup>

Hermann builds up his protagonist's progress in the strange city environment as a continual increase in noise and movement and an intensification of the onslaught on Doktor Herzfeld's nerves. The author thereby repeats a technique that he used successfully in his previous novels: the individual walker's city experience is described as a crescendo; the city's effect is that of a whirlpool, sucking the individual in. Hermann's use of the same technique in his novels from *Spielkinder* to *Die Nacht* offers the opportunity to see the development in his portrayal of the relationship between the individual and the environment during these episodes of escalating city experience. Whereas Georg, the protagonist of *Spielkinder*, is to a great extent able to maintain his detached observer's stance, reporting on the sensory impact of the city experience

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<sup>14</sup> This would not be the only instance in Hermann's writing of a slip in narrative perspective. The urge to insert personal reminiscences, even if they destroy the narrative unity, is noticeable in *Schnee* for instance, where in the middle of Doktor Herzfeld's observations of the Berlin environment which are reported by an omniscient narrator in the third person narrative, Hermann switches the point of view a previously un-introduced 'I' recalling his childhood memories of seeing Theodor Fontane (see Hermann, *Schnee*, p. 143). An even more striking example of this tendency is provided in the unpublished novella *Bist du es oder bist du's nicht?*, where almost half of the 83 pages of the typescript that remain are taken over by Hermann's personal review of his life.



without being mentally affected (see p. 81 of this dissertation), Doktor Herzfeld perceives the crescendo of the city experience as a maelstrom. Within the fifteen years that separate *Spielkinder* and *Die Nacht*, the spread and change of the metropolis have gone too far for the individual to maintain the illusion of control. It is only a limited and well-defined fragment of the city, 'seine Welt' (p. 297) to which Doktor Herzfeld withdraws and in which he can enjoy the pull of the metropolis without losing himself in it. In the unfamiliar districts of Berlin, perceived as whole cities in themselves, the individual is swallowed up by the overwhelming manifestations of a world in which he has become insignificant.

As in the earlier description of the nocturnal city centre in *Die Nacht*, the metaphor of the city as a living organism recurs, this time applied to the outskirts of the metropolis. But the contrast of the two images is striking. Instead of the embodiment of life, the centre of light and energy, which was the image applied to the Kurfürstendamm, we now find a monster devouring the surrounding countryside, killing nature and brutally replacing it with infertile 'granitene, unbebaute Straßenzüge' (p. 286). We are reminded of Hermann's representation of a Berlin suburb as a hostile environment in *Spielkinder*<sup>15</sup> and of the opening pages of *Kubinke* in which the encroachment of the city into the surrounding countryside is described. And yet we also know, most clearly from Hermann's 1912 essay 'Um Berlin', that the author was fascinated by the suburbs, in which he saw nature and city blend. Taking this into account, we can see Hermann's choice here of the image of the city as a devouring monster of the countryside as being a way of underlining the displacement of his protagonist. The relatedness of the image to that of the monster or demon dominating the city, which is repeatedly used in Expressionist poetry,<sup>16</sup> supports the purpose of highlighting the oppressive effect of the city environment on the individual.

Doktor Herzfeld is repelled by the world of poverty, refuse and stench. His awareness of ugliness and brutality culminates in his encounter with a coachman beating his horses. This ultimately shakes him out of his obsessive search for retribution and brings him back to his senses. Hermann uses the image of the beaten horses which, in their despair, turn on each other, to trigger his protagonist's healing awareness of the need for

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<sup>15</sup> For discussions of the representations of Berlin suburban sprawl in Hermann's previous works, see chapter 3 (*Spielkinder* and *Aus dem letzten Hause*) and chapter 7 of this dissertation (*Kubinke*, 'Um Berlin' and other essays).

<sup>16</sup> See for instance Georg Heym's two poems *Die Dämonen der Städte* and *Der Gott der Stadt*.



sympathy with his fellow human beings as fellow-victims of a cruel power.<sup>17</sup> The image of the carhorses with their driver evokes several revealing associations in the reader. It is not difficult to recognise the horses of instinct and reason from Socrates' *Phaidros*.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, it is probably no coincidence that Hermann mirrors here an experience of Friedrich Nietzsche's in Turin in January 1889. On seeing a horse cruelly beaten, Nietzsche collapsed in sympathy with the animal. The incident was widely publicised as seen to have caused the philosopher's final descent into madness. Hermann's use of this allusion - whether consciously made or not - stresses the importance of the turning point in Doktor Herzfeld's delusion, namely the life-changing impact of the recognition of the need for sympathy. But the insight itself does not quite bring the cure, Doktor Herzfeld is not yet restored to his old self. For the aesthete Doktor Herzfeld, respite and recovery can only be found in achieving a physical distance from the unfamiliar, and therefore threatening, city environment. It is only when he boards the cab that is to take him home, that relief sets in. Hermann explains this relief:

Alle Eindrücke, die Doktor Herzfeld vorher quälten, sind jetzt für ihn freudige Überraschungen und neue Erscheinungen. Er hat nichts mehr mit ihnen zu tun, steht nicht mehr mitten zwischen ihnen; er beobachtet sie im Vorüberfliegen unter dem leisen, singenden, einwiegenden Rhythmus des rollenden Wagens. Er ist nicht mehr da draußen unter dem Volk, sondern er ist wieder das, was er sonst war: der halb schmerzliche, halb lächelnde Outsider mit der ein wenig geschürzten Miene des Spötters. (p. 293)

The city can now once again be perceived by Doktor Herzfeld as a series of impressions that, as they no longer threaten the safely protected and distanced individual, can be seen as stimulating manifestations of a positive 'joie de vivre':

Und unter dem sanften Rollen, dem souveränen Dahingleiten durch all das bunte Gewühl des Tages, das tausendfach, mit jedem gehobenen Pferdehuf und jedem Peitschenknall und jedem Pfiff eines Hausdieners, mit jeder Schutzmannsgeste und jedem wehenden Rauch eines Eisenbahnzuges tausendfach und tausendfach das Leben bejaht - damit kommt so eine ganze Flut von angenehmen Dingen in leisen, aber unaufhaltsamen Wellen in ihn eingeströmt. (pp. 294/95)

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<sup>17</sup> This position which can be recognised as a fundamental position of Hermann's, is founded in Schopenhauer's philosophy. There are many references to Schopenhauer in Hermann's writing, but one of the clearest instances in which Hermann states his debt to the philosopher can be found in the essay 'Vom gesicherten und ungesicherten Leben' from 1915.

<sup>18</sup> See Platon, *Phaidros*, in Platon, *Gastmahl. Phaidon. Phaidros*, transl. And ed. by Rudolf Kassner (Wiesbaden, 1978), pp. 73-149, particularly pp.111-13.



As he approaches 'his world', Doktor Herzfeld finds new courage for life. Hermann shows in the last pages of his novel that the individual's mental equilibrium can only be fully restored when the recognition of the self takes place in an environment in which the self sees itself reflected, in other words in an environment that can be perceived as 'home'.

The image of Berlin that emerges from *Die Nacht* is that of a vibrant, hectic metropolis which defies being captured in its entirety. Hermann shows his protagonist as a thoroughly metropolitan character, a detached aesthetic connoisseur who thrives on the stimulation afforded in one part of the city, but is lost, overwhelmed and frightened by other parts. Berlin emerges, as Andreas Nentwich puts it in a review of the 1997 edition of the Herzfeld novels, as 'riesiges, atmendes Muttertier, eine andere Natur, Quelle aller Inspirationen, und zugleich das Labyrinth eines früheren, verdrängten Lebens, in dem er sich zu verirren fürchtet'.<sup>19</sup> The distinct city areas are so disparate they can no longer even be perceived as one entity. In separating the different districts into 'die Stadt der Arbeit', 'die Stadt der Armut' etc., as he does in the opening pages of *Kubinke*, Hermann acknowledges the fragmented metropolitan character of Berlin.

As in his previous depictions of Berlin, from *Spielkinder* onwards, it is obvious that Hermann observes carefully and knows the city intimately. This concern with recording the Berlin reality is constant in his novels. As Berlin develops towards a metropolis, Hermann captures this change and adapts to it by correspondingly developing his representation of the city. At the time he was writing *Die Nacht*, Hermann had come to recognise that it had become impossible to describe unfamiliar street scenes of the metropolitan centre without showing them to have a deeply unsettling effect on the protagonist, as he did in *Spielkinder*. In *Kubinke*, Hermann presented a clash between the city as a system and the individual outsider's experience of it. In *Die Nacht*, however, the point of view from which the city is seen is not that of the newcomer who experiences the city and tries to adapt to it as to an alien society, but that of the metropolitan person himself who is part of and - to a certain extent at least - at home in the city. As in *Kubinke*, the city is still represented as a network of locations with different connotations, but the interest in the conceptualised portrayal of the city as a system is lessened and Hermann's emphasis has shifted so as to stress the psychology of

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<sup>19</sup> Andreas Nentwich, 'Ein Flaneur in Berlin. Georg-Hermann-Ausgabe: wunderschöne Großstadtromane aus der Zeit um 1910', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 24 August 1997.



the urban personality. In *Kubinke*, the focus was to a great extent on the panorama of Berlin and on the Impressionist recording of the city reality. But in *Die Nacht*, the view of the city, represented through Doktor Herzfeld's walks and his perceptions, is filtered through an individual psyche. Doktor Herzfeld is the most sophisticated as well as the most self-conscious hero of Hermann's pre-First World War novels. Hence, his relationship to the city is more complex than that of any of the central characters of Hermann's previous novels. His walk through the city becomes a search for his identity and the structures of the city reflect the structures of the protagonist's consciousness.

Hermann's belief in the objective describability of the city as a system, still intact in *Spielkinder*, is now replaced by recognition that the metropolis of Berlin can only be represented partially, and through the perspective of subjective experience. Whereas the subjective city representation was only used in very few, exceptional passages in *Spielkinder*, it underlies the entire second part of *Die Nacht*, which depicts Doktor Herzfeld's desperate wanderings through the city. Hermann has completed a development from the Naturalist to the early twentieth century city representation. In the words of Scherpe: 'Die [...] Stadt ist nicht mehr Objekt einer erzählerischen Rekonstruktion und Repräsentation, vielmehr repräsentiert sie als Objekt, selektiv und partiell, die Wahrnehmungsintensität des ästhetischen Subjekts.'<sup>20</sup>

The protagonist's encounter with the city also becomes, to a great extent, an encounter with modernity. The positive attitude to modernity appears to be dependent on the extent to which it can be appropriated by an aestheticising view of reality. In a generally congenial environment such as the cultural centre of the Kurfürstendamm, even strident elements of modernity like the traffic noise and the locomotives at Zoo station can be accommodated, as long as they can be aestheticised as music or as part of a pictorial arrangement. Where the powers of the aesthetising viewpoint fail, however, in the industrial areas, in the outskirts where poverty reigns, the shock at the modern face of the city prevails.

In the first part of *Die Nacht*, the depiction of the nocturnal western centre of the city, Hermann's aestheticising view essentially reflects what art historians such as Arnold Hauser and Michele Hannoosh have called the aesthetics of modernity. Given the

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<sup>20</sup> Scherpe, 'Von der erzählten Stadt', p. 423.



recognition of the transience of beauty, a melancholy mood has been an essential element of these aesthetics since Baudelaire.<sup>21</sup>

The relatedness of the aesthete Doktor Herzfeld to Baudelaire is also visible in another context, namely the treatment of appearance and reality. Doktor Herzfeld repeatedly emphasises his preference for the ephemeral beauty of the sensory impression, rather than for the underlying truth.<sup>22</sup> This attitude is reminiscent of Baudelaire's complaint in 'The Modern Public and Photography' (1859) that 'the exclusive taste for the True [...] oppresses the taste for the Beautiful'.<sup>23</sup> The notion of truth has been replaced by that of authenticity. Appearance can engender the same perception of authenticity while at the same time pleasing the beholder, whereas the perception of an untransfigured reality is, according to the aesthetic viewpoint, not more authentic but simply more reminiscent of the sadness of life. The subject of appearance and reality has thus been freed from its moral connotations.

However, it is clear from the second part of the novel that in *Die Nacht* Hermann goes far beyond the description of the aesthetic appearance of city scenes. Hermann has many times spoken out against a merely superficial aestheticizing understanding of art.<sup>24</sup> One instance is particularly interesting here, as it occurs in the context of a review of Lesser Ury's paintings. Hermann often expressed his admiration for the painter's work,<sup>25</sup> but in a review of an Ury exhibition written in 1905,<sup>26</sup> he critically dissociates himself from what he sees as the painter's superficial dazzling. Hermann's judgement is harsh: 'Heute ist er nur noch ein Blender.' He accuses Ury of substituting garishness for depth and criticises the lack of true feeling and life in the painter's recent works: 'Seine frühen Arbeiten sind ganz anders durchstudiert, haben das Zwingende eines Erlebnisses, während Ury heute im besten Falle bis zum Blendenden einer Operndekoration kommt.'

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<sup>21</sup> For a discussion of the aesthetics of modernity in the context of Baudelaire's writing, see Michele Hannoosh, 'Painters of Modern Life: Baudelaire and the Impressionists', in William Sharpe and Leonard Wallock (eds.), *Visions of the Modern City: Essays in History, Art, and Literature* (New York, 1983), pp. 164-84.

<sup>22</sup> See for instance the narrator's comment: 'Er liebte das bunte Scheingewand des Daseins' (p. 233).

<sup>23</sup> Here quoted from Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air. The Experience of Modernity* (New York, 1982), p. 140.

<sup>24</sup> See for instance Hermann, 'Vom gesicherten und ungesicherten Leben', p. 39.

<sup>25</sup> See chapter 7 of this dissertation.

<sup>26</sup> Georg Hermann, 'Lesser Ury', *Berliner Zeitung*, 10 January 1905.



It is clear here that an aesthetic facade, which does not at the same time aim to represent the depth of life experience, does not satisfy Hermann's demands of art. I shall therefore show in the next part of this chapter that the interpretation of the novel as the expression of an aesthete's view of the metropolis of Berlin would be too superficial. Hermann's approach to the depiction of the metropolis has to be found through his depiction of the archetypal metropolitan person, Doktor Herzfeld.

## 9.2 The Fragmented Identity of the Urban Personality

### 9.2.1 Belonging and Alienation

The fact that Doktor Herzfeld perceives the city as home is significant, especially when seen in the context of the contemporary anti-urban cultural pessimism. The very beginning of Doktor Herzfeld's conversation with Gutzeit immediately establishes Doktor Herzfeld's attachment to Berlin. Even though clearly capable of seeing the negative aspects of city life, Doktor Herzfeld declares himself as a 'Städter' through and through (p. 17). It is clear from this conversation also that it is not only the cultural abundance of the city that attracts the art-loving Doktor Herzfeld, but also his rootedness in the city of Berlin as a 'Heimat' (p. 17). Far from decrying the metropolis as a social conglomeration that, in its fragmentation, negates the notion of belonging (a topos to be encountered in many contemporary novels as well as in sociological literature), Doktor Herzfeld, who in this respect clearly voices Hermann's own attitude,<sup>27</sup> sees himself as part of the history of the city, as a 'Mitspieler' (p. 20).

His view of the city is thus not entirely that of the detached aesthete. In his conversation with Gutzeit, Doktor Herzfeld reveals the main reason for his enjoyment of the Kurfürstendamm area: 'Am liebsten aber, alter Freund, gehe ich diese Straße *deshalb* entlang, weil ich die Bäume hier noch kannte, als sie nicht stärker als mein Arm waren [...]. Und jetzt, wenn ich hier entlang gehe, dann habe ich das Gefühl, als hätte ich das alles mitgeschaffen.' (p. 25) He is part of the city. His personal history is linked to its history and therefore, he is attached to it beyond aesthetic considerations: 'Und ob schön oder unschön - es *ist* etwas; ich freue mich damit.' (pp. 25/26)

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<sup>27</sup> See the description of Doktor Herzfeld's past life in Berlin which equals Hermann's own, pp. 20/21. See also Doktor Herzfeld's memories of his youth (*Schnee*, p. 142) which are - at least in parts - Hermann's own, as recounted in his essay 'Bismarck und Menzel'.



Kohn has interpreted this perception of the city as home as indicating Doktor Herzfeld's absolute alienation and rootlessness: 'Er ist so entwurzelt, daß ihm die Negation aller Heimat, die Großstadt, zur Heimat wird.'<sup>28</sup> However, Hermann's characterisation of Doktor Herzfeld's relationship to the city does not support this view of Doktor Herzfeld as the archetype of the rootless individual. Eloesser, in his review of *Die Nacht*, shows a deeper understanding of Doktor Herzfeld's attitude towards Berlin, which is essentially the author's own. Eloesser recognises that Hermann/Doktor Herzfeld cannot rely on the ready-made existence of a 'Heimat' but must create it for himself. Eloesser, however, sees this attempt rightly as based on an intimate knowledge of the history and atmosphere of Berlin and on a feeling of belonging at least to an older incarnation of the city: 'Georg Hermann ist im Herzen von Berlin aufgewachsen, als Berlin eben noch ein Herz hatte.'<sup>29</sup> He explains: 'Der Dichter hat den *horror vacui*, er muß sich von neuem Heimat schaffen, die vergrößerten Dimensionen menschlich besiedeln.'<sup>30</sup>

Hermann achieves this sense of 'Heimat' despite highlighting the disparity and fragmentation of the exploding city of Berlin. It is this dichotomy which captures the essence of the metropolitan experience. Eloesser recognises this achievement in Hermann's novel when he acknowledges 'daß [Hermann] die richtige Atmosphäre der Weltstadt, die sich bildet zu kosten gibt' whereas in most other Berlin novels, Berlin appears 'als vergrößertes Kyritz [...] oder als eine schlechte Kopie von Paris'.<sup>31</sup>

Comparisons with contemporary sociological writings show that Hermann's perception of this dichotomy between the fragmentation of urban life and the feeling of belonging in the fragmented city, is a common perception in the discourse on the emerging metropolis. In 1915, Robert Park described the same dichotomy that Hermann presents here and demonstrated that, to a certain extent, the possibility of attachment to the metropolis is actually based on its fragmentation:

The attraction of the metropolis is due in part, however, to the fact that in the long run every individual finds somewhere among the varied manifestations of city life the sort of environment in which he expands and feels at ease; finds, in short, the

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<sup>28</sup> Kohn, p. 33.

<sup>29</sup> Eloesser, 'Die Nacht', col. 1047.

<sup>30</sup> Eloesser, 'Die Nacht', col. 1048.

<sup>31</sup> Eloesser, 'Die Nacht', col. 1047.



moral climate in which his peculiar nature obtains the stimulations that bring his innate qualities to full and free expression.<sup>32</sup>

Hermann, while stressing Doktor Herzfeld's belonging to the cultural centre of Berlin, shows his alienation from other parts of the city and its society just as clearly. The tension between these two poles of belonging and alienation is present throughout the novel. I shall proceed in the following paragraphs, to analyse the causes of these contradictory emotions felt by Doktor Herzfeld.

Kohn and Eloesser link the feeling of alienation to Doktor Herzfeld's Jewishness. Certainly, this must be seen as one aspect, as Hermann confirmed much later in an article entitled 'Der deutsche Jude und das Großstadtproblem' where he states: 'Ich liebe und schätze den Typ des wurzellosen, intellektuellen Großstadtjuden, da ich selbst ein gutes Stück davon in mir trage, und ich habe versucht, in Doktor Herzfeld diesen Typ zu zeichnen.'<sup>33</sup> However, in *Die Nacht*, there is hardly any emphasis on Doktor Herzfeld's Jewishness.<sup>34</sup> What Hermann does stress, however, is his protagonist's typically metropolitan character. Doktor Herzfeld is more representative of the metropolitan dweller than Kohn's and Eloesser's interpretations would suggest by their stressing the typically Jewish aspect. Hermann has repeatedly maintained that before the First World War, Jewishness within German society was not an issue he was particularly concerned with.<sup>35</sup> In the essay *Weltabschied*, written in 1935, for instance, he states: 'Bis 1914 wußte man eigentlich kaum, daß man Jude war, oder erst in dritter Linie.'<sup>36</sup> He always defined his own Jewishness, which he saw as 'Weltanschauung und

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<sup>32</sup> Park, p. 608.

<sup>33</sup> Hermann, 'Der deutsche Jude und das Großstadtproblem', typescript, 9 pages, Georg Hermann Collection, section V, p. 4. A reference in the article indicates that it must have been published in *Central-Verein-Zeitung. Blätter für Deutschtum und Judentum* in the 1930s.

<sup>34</sup> This becomes very clear in comparison to other novels of the time in which the subject takes far more prominence, such as Fritz Mauthner's *Der neue Ahasver* (1882).

<sup>35</sup> See for instance Hermann's evaluation of the position of the Jews in pre-First World War Germany in an untitled and undated article (typescript), Georg Hermann Collection, section V: ' "Ich fürchte, sagte der Assessor, da wird es ein Hindernis geben, Excellenz ... ich bin Jude." "Ließe sich das nicht beseitigen?" "Nein Excellenz." "Dann danke ich Ihnen." Es ist noch kein Vierteljahrhundert her, daß dieses Gespräch zwischen dem damaligen preußischen Justizminister und einem heute sehr bekannten jüdischen Anwalt geführt wurde. Aber man kann trotzdem nicht sagen, daß man als Jude in der Vorkriegszeit derartige Dinge sehr tragisch nahm [...] weil [dem Vorkriegsjuden in Deutschland] alle andern Gebiete [außer dem Beamtentum] gehörten, ohne daß ihm irgendwelche Schwierigkeiten in den Weg gelegt wurden. [...] Und jeder, der etwas leistete, jeder der durchdrang, konnte der allgemeinen Anerkennung sicher sein.'

<sup>36</sup> Hermann, *Weltabschied*, p. 237.



keine Religion',<sup>37</sup> as inextricably intertwined with German - and particularly Berlin - culture.<sup>38</sup>

Both Kohn and Eloesser have assumed that Hermann presents in his portrayal of Doktor Herzfeld and Gutzeit the contrasting portraits of the Jew and the German. However, it is clear from *Schnee*, that this is not the case, as Hermann describes Gutzeit's son Kurt as 'Mischblut - die Mutter war Christin'.<sup>39</sup> Doktor Herzfeld's alienation from society on the basis of ethnicity or religion should therefore not be overstated. On the contrary, there is no doubt that Hermann also saw the attraction of the particular way of life that Berlin had to offer for what he called 'den seelischen Typ des Juden'<sup>40</sup> whom he saw as driven by a striving for individuality and culture. In 'Der deutsche Jude und das Großstadtproblem', Hermann shows the metropolis not merely as isolating and alienating the Jews from the rest of society<sup>41</sup> but also, at the same time, as being the most congenial environment to the Jewish mentality, as it offers the opportunity 'sich nicht an den seienden Dingen begnügen zu lassen [sic], sondern über die seienden Dinge hinaus zu-schaffende-Möglichkeiten zu sehen.'<sup>42</sup> Doktor Herzfeld's alienation is thus to be seen as that of the modern metropolitan *per se*, of the cultured bourgeois individual who is not so much alienated from his Christian neighbours as from modern mass society and, even more importantly, from his own self. I shall look at these two concepts in turn.

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<sup>37</sup> See note in Georg Hermann Collection, section XII.

<sup>38</sup> See Hermann's reply to a survey on the importance of Jewishness in the character and work of Jewish artists (cutting, Georg Hermann Collection, section V; no record of provenance): 'Das Judentum, das mir die Grundfärbung gibt, ist ein norddeutsches, mehr noch berlinisches liberales Weltjudentum, das vom Religiösen sich ziemlich weit abgelöst hat, ohne ihm unfreundlich gegenüberzustehen. Ein Judentum, das im Äußeren, auch in der Denk- und Redeweise stark verpreußt, ja verberlinert ist, das aber dagegen rassemässig, gerade bei mir als einem rein erhaltenen Mittelmeertyp, völlig unassimiliert ist. Meine Einstellung ist jedoch rein deutsch, dem Sprachgut nach. Und im weiteren Sinne westeuropäisch, der Kultur nach.' Similarly, in *Weltabschied*, p. 237: 'Das Judentum ist mir [...] die Weste unter dem Rock des anständigen Europäers gewesen.'

<sup>39</sup> Hermann, *Schnee*, p. 55.

<sup>40</sup> Georg Hermann, letter to his daughter Hilde Villum-Hansen, 25 May 1939, in Nussbaum (ed.), *Unvorhanden*, pp. 175-80 (p.177).

<sup>41</sup> See Hermann, 'Der deutsche Jude', pp. 7/8: 'Für den Armen bringt die Großstadt leichter das traurige Schicksal der Verproletarisierung, und für den Reichen bedeutet die Großstadt ein Leben nur in *einer* Gesellschaftsschicht, und dadurch zwangsläufig eine Loslösung von der Allgemeinheit und zum Schluß ein bewußtes oder gar halb bewußtes Einsamkeitsgefühl innerhalb des Volksganzen.'

<sup>42</sup> Hermann, 'Der deutsche Jude', p. 9. This ambivalent, but overridingly positive attitude to Berlin can be found in many contemporary Jewish artists' work. M. Berman attributes these inner contradictions, which he exemplifies in Lubitsch's and Benjamin's works, to the same cultural background as Hermann's, namely that of the Berlin Jewish bourgeoisie (see M. Berman, *All That Is Solid*, p. 146).



As in *Kubinke*, the concern over the loss of individuality in modern mass society is also expressed in *Die Nacht*. Here the image of the incessant stream of people coming out of underground and 'Stadtbahn' stations conveys this concern: 'Das Bild schien immer das gleiche zu sein, - und doch traten von Minute zu Minute die alten Spieler ab, und neue rückten an ihre Stelle, um wieder abgelöst zu werden. Aber keiner fehlte, keiner wurde vermißt.' (p. 47) Then, with his mistrust of the reader that we have come to recognise as typical of Hermann, he adds a rather unnecessary explanation of his image: 'Doktor Herzfeld war es, als sollte ihm damit die Überflüssigkeit des einzelnen praktisch veranschaulicht werden.'

Doktor Herzfeld's alienation from the modern world of industry and commerce is evident in his walk through the Friedrichstraße area. He feels utterly estranged from the people he encounters, whose occupations he cannot recognise and whose rough tone and impatience he dislikes, and he suffers from the monotony of the physical surroundings. In short, he deplures what Simmel calls 'die Atrophie der individuellen durch die Hypertrophie der objektiven Kultur'<sup>43</sup> and expresses his alienation from a modern world which has changed so radically as to be unidentifiable as the world of his youth (see p. 279).

This alienation from the modern is a theme that also runs through many of Hermann's other works. It is most clearly expressed in the opposition between the old and the new society, exemplified by the Gebert and the Jacoby families respectively in *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte* (see p. 100 of this dissertation). In the earlier 'Doppelroman', however, Hermann has, in spite of his melancholy and nostalgic criticism, also shown individual ways of positive accommodation to the new world. This is the case in *Die Nacht*, too. Doktor Herzfeld's alienation is counteracted by his feeling of belonging to the old West of the city, the Kurfürstendamm area, as well as to the people who inhabit it such as Gutzeit and the rest of his ageing literary friends, the 'Dito-Passablen'.

The concept of alienation can have different forms, however. Whereas most sociological literature stresses the nonrecognition of the self in an anonymized identity,<sup>44</sup> the psychologist Peter Berger and colleagues point out another possible form of alienation.

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<sup>43</sup> Simmel, 'Großstädte', p. 241.

<sup>44</sup> See Durkheim; Tönnies; and Max Weber, 'Die protestantische Ethik und der "Geist" des Kapitalismus', *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, vols. XX (1904/05), 1-54 and XXI (1905), 1-110.



They describe the 'componential self' as typical of the modern experience of identity.<sup>45</sup> As each 'portion of identity' relates to different roles, it becomes possible to 'engineer' one's self. This is what Doktor Herzfeld does. In order not to have to face himself and his (possibly imaginary) guilt, he settles in the role of the detached intellectual. Alienation, according to Berger, can now occur 'from precisely those components of his self that are not anonymized [...]. The individual may seek anonymity because he finds the non-anonymous relations of private life intolerable.'<sup>46</sup> This form of alienation is in Doktor Herzfeld's case the more important one. In his conversation with Gutzeit at the beginning of the novel, Doktor Herzfeld states that one reason why the metropolis is his preferred living environment is the fact that it offers narcotization (p. 19), it allows the individual to escape from himself (p. 21).

Berger et al. point out the difficulties and potential crises of the emotional management of 'psychological engineering'. Firstly, they refer to the 'fragile and conflict-prone relation' between the 'first' and the 'second nature' of the individual.<sup>47</sup> If identity can be engineered, they point out, the individual's biography becomes a 'designed project'.<sup>48</sup> As a result, the life plan becomes a primary source of identity. What Hermann portrays in Doktor Herzfeld's crisis is the clash between the otherwise suppressed 'first nature' with the engineered 'second nature'. As his emotional, guilt-laden, sensitive, first nature asserts itself, frustration at the failure of the life plan sets in and is expressed as a crisis of identity.

However, as becomes clear in the end, the 'second nature' is the one that protects him. It is this that gives him his feeling of self-worth, which makes him give up his plan of suicide and murder. Ultimately, Doktor Herzfeld reasserts his identity with his self-constructed 'second nature' back in control. In the following paragraphs, I aim to show that this interpretation of Doktor Herzfeld's ambivalent experience of the metropolis as a treatment of the conflict of the modern psyche leads to an understanding of *Die Nacht* as a model for the adjustment of the individual to modernity.

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<sup>45</sup> Peter L. Berger, Brigitte Berger and Hansfried Kellner, *The Homeless Mind. Modernization and Consciousness* (Harmondsworth, 1974), p. 37.

<sup>46</sup> Berger et al., p. 38.

<sup>47</sup> Berger et al., p. 39.

<sup>48</sup> Berger et al., p. 71.



## 9.2.2 The Divided Self: Crisis and Accommodation

### 9.2.2.1 An Ambivalent View of Anonymity: Independence and Loneliness

Doktor Herzfeld seeks the anonymity which life in the metropolis grants. No one really knows anything about him (p. 6). He lives by himself, an intellectual and art connoisseur. His distance from others is stressed by the fact that Hermann never drops his protagonist's title of 'Doktor', even when writing about the most private of thoughts. Doktor Herzfeld has chosen this distance as his way of life:

Doktor Herzfeld gehört nicht zu den Menschen, die so ohne weiteres des Abends bei fremden Leuten an die Tür klopfen. Dazu ist er viel zu sehr Einsiedler. [...] Er würde vielleicht auch hineingerufen werden, müßte warten, Rede und Antwort stehen, mit Menschen sprechen, die ihm nicht genehm sind; - und dafür ist er durchaus nicht zu haben. (p. 5)

The fact that he keeps himself distanced allows him the personal freedom he needs. Gutzeit remarks enviously on entering Doktor Herzfeld's flat: 'Sie haben es hübsch frei hier.' (p. 183) Doktor Herzfeld reserves for himself the right to choose with whom to keep company. For this reason, he rejects the family ties forced upon the individual: 'Die Familie [...] wittert es gleichsam, wenn man sterben will. Und plötzlich ist sie da, wie der Aasgeier, wenn ein Tier fällt. Wir leben unser Lebtage mit *anderen* Menschen; sie ist uns fremder als fremd. Aber wir *sterben* mit der Familie.' (p. 77)

Relationships with his acquaintances are defined by common intellectual and literary interests and are based on the non-violation of one another's private sphere (p. 8). This distance in his relationship with Gutzeit, for instance, is explicitly described as 'Rücksicht'. It is clear that Doktor Herzfeld is not looking for a friend as a soulmate, but for company and intellectual exchange only; for a diversion from his innermost thoughts: 'Wo aber kann ich hinfliehen, ohne mich selbst zu treffen?' (pp. 21/22).

His association with the other literary-minded regulars in the café is based on the same principle of personal distance: 'ein richtiger Schwarm ähnlicher Vögel, die sich Abend für Abend da im Café trafen, die von allen Seiten her zusammengeschwirrt kamen, und die einander doch so nah und so fern standen, wie sich Menschen gemeinlich zu



stehen pflegen' (p. 9). In an association of thoughts typical for Hermann,<sup>49</sup> he calls these café habitués 'die Dito-Passablen' after a term used by butterfly collectors for slightly damaged specimens. The place and importance of the 'Dito-Passablen' in the novel and in Doktor Herzfeld's psyche are made explicit here. Although at the fringes of 'life' themselves, they provide Doktor Herzfeld with a spiritual home. In terms of Simmel's sociology, Doktor Herzfeld's attachment to this group who do not make any claims on his involvement as an intimate friend, is a typical form of association for the metropolitan dweller. Simmel recognises the dualistic drive of the modern individual both towards individuation and towards oneness with others. In the chapter on 'Die Erweiterung der Gruppe und die Ausbildung der Individualität' of his *Soziologie*, he defines a club such as the 'Stammtisch' of the 'Dito-Passablen' as 'ein Mittleres [...], das dem vorhandenen dualistischen Triebquantum in einer gewissen Verschmolzenheit genügt'<sup>50</sup> and thus as a typical and adequate form of association for the metropolitan dweller.

To the detached intellectual Doktor Herzfeld, the city of Berlin is the natural home ground, not only because of the personal history which links him to the city, but also because it accords him the feeling of belonging without constriction and provides the cultural environment in which he feels most at home. 'Gehen Sie mal durch einen Wald', he says to Gutzeit, 'für all das was Sie angeht, hat der nur die weitgehendste Interesselosigkeit. Meinen Sie, die Sezession imponiert ihm? Er hat nie etwas davon gehört!' (p. 18).

Connected to this enjoyment of intellectual stimulation gained from the metropolitan environment is Doktor Herzfeld's aestheticising view of the city, which I described earlier in this chapter. He appears to be the flâneur as Benjamin describes him, the detached and observant stroller through the streets whose enjoyment of the modern reality of the metropolis relies on an aestheticising distance as much as on local roots. The resemblance to Jason is apparent, but Doktor Herzfeld is a more uprooted modern metropolitan version of Jettchen Gebert's intellectual uncle. In the epilogue to the 1997 edition of the Herzfeld novels, Thomas Medicus indeed claims that Hermann's

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<sup>49</sup> See for instance the references to butterflies in *Jettchen Gebert* or Hermann's accounts of his hobby in autobiographical essays such as 'Der junge Hauptmann und seine Modelle'.

<sup>50</sup> Simmel, 'Die Erweiterung der Gruppe und die Ausbildung der Individualität', in Simmel, *Soziologie*, pp. 791-863 (p. 800).



protagonist embodies the type of the aesthete.<sup>51</sup> He describes Doktor Herzfeld as a 'Bummler' and 'Flaneur' and claims that he stands for 'der moderne impressionistische Mensch schlechthin.'<sup>52</sup>

While I agree with this view to a large extent, I would lay greater stress on Doktor Herzfeld's suffering. He has chosen his distance and he does, as Medicus rightly observes, put up with it for the sake of his solitary, individualist lifestyle, but the loneliness of this way of life affords him a great amount of suffering, too. Already in the first introduction to Doktor Herzfeld's character, the narrator mentions 'die Einsamkeit', '[die] bei ihm oft zehn Stunden des Tages und viele Stunden der Nacht [...] zu Gast ist' (pp. 6/7). From then on, the theme of loneliness is developed throughout the novel. Doktor Herzfeld's loneliness not only stems from his solitary existence, but also, like Emil Kubinke's, from the feeling of insignificance in a mass society (see p. 47). In the combination of freedom and loneliness that characterises his urban situation, Doktor Herzfeld is shown as the archetypal metropolitan dweller about whom Simmel knowingly observes:

Es ist offenbar nur der Revers [der] Freiheit, wenn man sich unter Umständen nirgends so einsam und verlassen fühlt, als eben in dem großstädtischen Gewühl; denn hier wie sonst ist es keineswegs notwendig, daß die Freiheit des Menschen sich in seinem Gefühlsleben als Wohlbefinden spiegele.<sup>53</sup>

Indeed, Doktor Herzfeld's loneliness is heightened at times to almost misanthropical bitterness, which is expressed for instance in his view of the relationship of the Gutzeit couple.<sup>54</sup> Doktor Herzfeld longs for human intimacy at the same time as he treasures his individuality and separateness. That these two impulses are not a contrast, but rather go together as part of the same striving towards individuation, was recognised by Simmel who writes:

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<sup>51</sup> Medicus, p. 585.

<sup>52</sup> Medicus, p. 586.

<sup>53</sup> Simmel, 'Großstädte', p. 237.

<sup>54</sup> See Doktor Herzfeld's comments on Gutzeit's return to his wife, p. 223: 'Und da quält nun dieser arme Hund sich sein Lebtag; von morgens bis abends. Sein bißchen Hirn zermartert er, um die paar Groschen daraus zu prägen, die er von Woche zu Woche braucht, um das Dasein kümmerlich weiter zu fristen. Immer wieder von neuem spannt er seine Knochen vor den alten, morschen, grobrädrigen Karren - und das ist der Dank! - Ach Gott, und er will es ja gar nicht anders haben. Er ist ja froh, wenn er das hat. Und er macht gleich beide Augen zu, wenn ihm nur solch eine weiche Hand ein bißchen den alten Kopf kraut.'



Während [...] die Hingabe an einen engeren Kreis im allgemeinen dem Bestande der Individualität als solcher weniger günstig ist als ihre Existenz in einer möglichst großen Allgemeinheit, ist psychologisch doch zu bemerken, daß innerhalb einer sehr großen Kulturgemeinschaft die Zugehörigkeit zu einer Familie die Individualisierung befördert. Der Einzelne vermag sich gegen die Gesamtheit nicht zu retten, nur indem er einen Teil seines absoluten Ich an ein paar andre aufgibt, sich mit ihnen zusammenschließt, kann er noch das Gefühl der Individualität und zwar ohne übertriebenes Abschließen, ohne Bitterkeit und Absonderlichkeit wahren.<sup>55</sup>

Doktor Herzfeld lacks and yearns for the protective circle that the intimate companionship of the family provides. The ambivalence of his independent individualism is thus stressed again and again. It prepares for the crisis in which he is plunged as a result of the encounter with Lene Held. His facade of the detached observer crumbles to reveal depths of self-torment and guilt and shows him as a person torn by inner conflict. The loss of the facade threatens to become the loss of Doktor Herzfeld's identity.

#### 9.2.2.2 'Second Nature' as a Means of Preserving Identity

Hermann not only describes this personal crisis directly, in terms of Doktor Herzfeld's thoughts, but also reflects it in Doktor Herzfeld's relationship to his metropolitan environment. This is logical, as it is the metropolitan anonymity that enables him to create his role of intellectual aesthete in the first place. Doktor Herzfeld's struggle for his identity, a struggle to come to terms with a suppressed past, is represented as a confused wandering through parts of the metropolis that appear unfamiliar, and yet are part of his past life.<sup>56</sup> Drawn further and further into the maelstrom of metropolitan life, lost in districts he does not recognise, he is no longer in control of his actions, but is in the hands of a rage of fury and revenge which plays with him as a cat does with a mouse.<sup>57</sup> Finally, awakening from the unconsciousness into which he has fallen, Doktor Herzfeld is able only with difficulty to piece together his identity: 'Ja - wie heißt er doch gleich?!' (p. 291), 'Ist *er* denn das, der all das durchlebt hat?' (p. 293).

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<sup>55</sup> Simmel, 'Erweiterung', p. 802.

<sup>56</sup> See p. 280: 'Das war ja eigentlich seine Welt von früher.'

<sup>57</sup> See p. 269: 'Aber die schwarze Katze ließ ihn nicht frei: sie warf ihn hin und her wie ein Wollknäuel. Nicht *du* bestimmst hier mehr, sondern *ich!*'.



Hermann's insight into the modern consciousness is revealed by his evident awareness of the multiplicitous nature of identity. Doktor Herzfeld is shown explicitly as recognising his role as the detached aesthete who prefers art to life as just that: a role. In his conversation with Gutzeit, he admits that his aestheticism is 'nur ein Surrogat für die feinsten lebendigen Beziehungen von Mensch zu Mensch' (p. 195). The renunciation of life for art and the detachment which ensures personal freedom while forbidding emotional closeness, are revealed as deficient. This is where the characterisation of Doktor Herzfeld as aesthete shows itself to be insufficient. Liere recognised this discontinuity in Doktor Herzfeld's character when he claimed that Doktor Herzfeld was certainly no aesthete in the vein of Hofmannsthal's protagonists. Rather than being above the troubles of the world, he has come to his position through suffering. 'Doktor Herzfeld', Liere writes, is 'innerlich zu sehr auf die Welt eingestellt, als daß [er] nur der Kunst oder der Beschaulichkeit leben [könnte].'<sup>58</sup>

The bitterness, however, which sounds in the recognition that his love for art is a surrogate, is turned into a melancholy acceptance which is best expressed by the passage from a letter by van Gogh quoted by Doktor Herzfeld:

Mir wird es mehr und mehr klar, daß die Menschen die Wurzel alles Lebens sind ... und wenn es auch ein melancholisches Gefühl bleibt, nicht im richtigen Leben zu stehen' - und jetzt kommt eine entzückende Klammer [...] 'insofern, als es richtiger wäre, in lebendigem Fleische, als in Farbe und Ton zu arbeiten, insofern als man lieber Kinder machen als Kunst oder Kunsthandel treiben sollte' ... Hier schließt die Klammer. Und nun der sanft schmerzliche, versöhnliche Ausklang: - 'so empfindet man doch wenigstens, daß man lebt, wenn man bedenkt, daß man Freunde unter solchen hat, die auch nicht im wirklichen Leben stehen.' (p. 197)

Hermann does not leave it there. From a melancholy acceptance of his surrogate role as a detached aesthete, an outsider from a life of human closeness, Doktor Herzfeld is shown ultimately to positively embrace the role. Having overcome his identity crisis, Doktor Herzfeld can consciously re-adopt the role of the flâneur and aesthete. The positive relationship with a detached, independent life is re-established.

Hermann represents in Doktor Herzfeld the modern man who does not see himself simply as the object of change but as an active subject who is able to make use of the opportunities of the metropolitan life and who accepts the metropolis as his home.

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<sup>58</sup> Liere, p. 170.



Hermann achieves this without in any way reducing the disorienting impact of the growing metropolis or the complication of the modern understanding of identity, and thus stands high above comfortable, trivialising fiction such as Julius Stinde's *Buchholz* novels<sup>59</sup> or Erdmann Graeser's seven volumes of *Lemke's selige Witwe* (1907 f.). By contrast with these, Hermann centres his novel on the process of an individual's coming to terms with his position in the modern metropolis; on a metropolitan dweller who, in spite of - or even with the help of - the multiplicity of modern man's identity, finds a way to preserve his individuality in this new world. The ambivalence between alienation and emancipation of the individual in the metropolitan context is at the centre of his novel and Hermann is careful not to give a facile answer to the problem.

Hermann accepts the incoherence of the self as a condition of modern life. This concept has been mentioned earlier in connection to Berger's notion of identity as a construct. It is a view that has been described as resulting from the division of labour and particularly the experience of life in the metropolis where the individual assumes a variety of different functions in a multiplicity of relationships. It has also been underpinned by studies such as Ernst Mach's *Analyse der Empfindungen* which define the self as a conglomeration of experiences.<sup>60</sup>

Jürgen Habermas, too, builds his theory of socialisation on the modern individual's capacity to come to terms with the fragmentation of identity. He has integrated many of the theories of the modern identity and comes to the conclusion that successful behaviour and communication in modern society relies on the individual's capacity to operate in a controlled manner within a system of roles: 'Nur der Begriff einer Ich-Identität, die zugleich Freiheit und Individuierung des einzelnen in komplexen Rollensystemen sichert, kann heute eine zustimmungsfähige Orientierung für Bildungsprozesse angeben.'<sup>61</sup>

In his study on the *Loss of the Self*, Wylie Sypher points out the implication of this complex understanding of identity for the representation of the self in literature:

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<sup>59</sup> *Die Familie Buchholz. Aus dem Leben der Hauptstadt* (1884); *Der Familie Buchholz zweiter Teil* (1885); *Frau Wilhelmine Buchholz* (1886).

<sup>60</sup> See Ernst Mach, *Analyse der Empfindungen und das Verhältnis des Physischen zum Psychischen* (Wien, 1886).

<sup>61</sup> Jürgen Habermas, 'Können komplexe Gesellschaften eine vernünftige Identität ausbilden?', in Habermas and Dieter Henrich, *Zwei Reden aus Anlaß des Hegel-Preises* (Frankfurt a.M., 1974), pp. 23-75 (p. 31).



The romantic quest for sincerity - for emotional authenticity - thus changes into an existential quest for a different kind of authenticity, a kind of confidence in the self while the self feels an earthquake underneath, while one has 'nothing to hold on to' after fear and trembling have shaken the foundations of reason.<sup>62</sup>

It is this quest for confidence in the self that Hermann represents in *Die Nacht*. Referring to the writings of Henri Bergson and Ortega y Gasset, Sypher points out that the accommodation with the divided self can only be achieved beyond the bounds of logic and reason.<sup>63</sup> Hermann valued the works of these two philosophers highly,<sup>64</sup> and shows his adherence to this idea in his characterisations of Doktor Herzfeld and Gutzeit. Gutzeit, who clings to the framework of reason, remains a rather one-dimensional character. Not able to accept the multi-faceted nature of the modern self and the disorientation that comes with it, he continues to deceive himself. Doktor Herzfeld, by contrast, who rejects the straitjacket of reason and intellect and repeatedly describes himself as predominantly sensual,<sup>65</sup> is able to know the depths of his self. He is successful in his quest because he accepts his adopted 'second nature' (Berger's term), namely that of the detached aesthete, as the role that allows him to preserve his individuality.

It is important to note here that Hermann does not represent the construction of identity by role adoption as negative or mendacious, but frees it from moral judgement and regards it in psychological terms as a way of coming to terms with modern society and preserving one's identity amid the mass. This approach to role adoption may be attributed at least partly to the great influence that Simmel had on Hermann.<sup>66</sup> In respect of *Die Nacht*, Simmel's writings provide a key to Hermann's representation of the metropolitan personality Doktor Herzfeld.<sup>67</sup> It is specifically in this context of the

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<sup>62</sup> Wylie Sypher, *Loss of the Self: In Modern Literature and Art* (New York, 1962), p. 66.

<sup>63</sup> Sypher, p. 66.

<sup>64</sup> See Hermann, 'Weltabschied', p. 254: 'Ich habe [...] die Lektüre intuitiver, unsystematischer Denker, von Plato [...] bis Simmel, Bergson und Ortega y Gasset aller anderer Lektüre vorgezogen.'

<sup>65</sup> See Hermann, *Die Nacht*, pp. 192 and 232.

<sup>66</sup> Hermann attended the sociologist's lectures at the Berlin Humboldt University and claimed a great debt to him as '[diesem] Mann, der uns alle zu dem geformt hat, was wir geworden sind' (Georg Hermann, 'Erinnerungen an Simmel' [1918], in Kurt Gassen and Michael Landmann (eds.), *Buch des Dankes an Georg Simmel* (Berlin, 1958), pp. 162-66 (p.165).

<sup>67</sup> Interestingly, Doktor Herzfeld's art collection in *Die Nacht* is modelled very closely on the collection which Hermann saw in Simmel's house (see Hermann, 'Erinnerungen an Simmel', p. 164: 'Der Schrank mit dem farbigen Chinaporzellan, von dem Doktor Herzfeld in meinem Roman "Die Nacht des Doktor Herzfeld" Abschied nimmt, und um dessen Besitz man mich viel beneidet hat, steht leider nicht bei mir, sondern ich habe ihn bei Simmel gesehen, mit der ganzen Farbenskala der tiefblauen, oxsenblutfarbigen,



struggle to maintain and express individuality in the modern metropolis, that Simmel takes up the issue of the divided self. He sees the ability to operate in a role as a positive strategy for life in the metropolis. Simmel stresses the importance of the 'second nature' or 'role' in two respects: firstly as a protective mechanism against 'die Strömungen und Diskrepanzen des äußeren Milieus', against the rape of the self by the metropolis. Adopting a blasé attitude enables the metropolitan person to choose among the external stimuli provided. Secondly, Simmel highlights the function of the 'role' as heightened consciousness and a controlled way of expressing one's individuality.<sup>68</sup> The larger the social conglomeration, the greater is, according to Simmel, the opportunity to develop this conscious awareness and expression of individuality. He maintains:

Daß das Leben in einem weiteren Kreise und die Wechselwirkung mit ihm an und für sich mehr Persönlichkeitsbewußtsein entwickelt, als es in einem engeren Kreise wächst, liegt vor allem daran, daß die Persönlichkeit sich gerade durch den *Wechsel* der einzelnen Gefühle, Gedanken, Betätigungen dokumentiert.<sup>69</sup>

This positive evaluation of the opportunities for individualism in the city stand in contrast to the views of more traditional commentators such as Tönnies, who deplore the loss of identity suffered in the metropolitan environment. Underlying this anti-urban stance is the perception of the individual as a victim of circumstances, a view which also becomes apparent in Max Weber's concept of modern society as an iron cage.<sup>70</sup> If the individual is, however, seen as active rather than passive, as Simmel clearly does, a more dialectical attitude can be taken.<sup>71</sup>

### 9.2.3 Comparisons with the Treatment of the Preservation of Identity in Contemporary Novels

It is worth looking at other contemporary German novels where the preservation of identity and the quest for individuation in the metropolis were central. In Rilke's *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*, the protagonist Malte clearly appears as a

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auberginefarbenen, apfelgrünen und mondscheinfarbenen Stücke, die zu betrachten und zu besprechen er mit den feinsten und gewähltesten Worten nicht müde wurde.')

<sup>68</sup> See Simmel, 'Großstädte', particularly pp. 239/40.

<sup>69</sup> Simmel, 'Erweiterung', p. 847.

<sup>70</sup> See Weber, 'Protestantische Ethik'.

<sup>71</sup> For a discussion of the positive and negative evaluations of the impact of modernity on the individual, see M. Berman, *All That Is Solid*, pp. 27-36.



victim of the forces of the modern metropolitan environment. Not only is he incapable of protecting himself from the onslaught of stimuli - as I described earlier in the context of the description of the erring individual in an alien cityscape - but he is also unable to stay in control in the face of the overwhelming metropolis: 'Die Straße war zu leer, ihre Leere langweilte sich und zog mir den Schritt unter den Füßen weg und klappte mit ihm herum, drüben und da, wie mit einem Holzschuh.'<sup>72</sup> His fragmented self, which consists of nothing but sensations, has lost its core. Malte's will and goal orientation are effaced as his identity is crushed: 'Was hätte es für einen Sinn gehabt, noch irgendwohin zu gehen, ich war leer. Wie ein leeres Papier trieb ich den Häusern entlang, den Boulevard wieder hinauf.'<sup>73</sup>

Unlike Hermann's Doktor Herzfeld, Malte is incapable of taking advantage of the opportunity for individuation through the adoption of a role. He remains a victim and fails to establish a sustainable relationship with the city environment, because, to use Simmel's vein of argument, he lacks the protective reserve. In his novel, Rilke addresses the central problem of the individual in the modern metropolis, but, as he is unable to accept the concept of a divided self, he cannot show a solution to his protagonist's predicament.

Another contemporary writer, Johannes Schlaf, shows in his Berlin novel *Der Kleine* (1904) the possibility of self-assertion in the metropolitan environment, even if only in the form of a crisis which is presented as a transitional stage to a life in mystical harmony. Schlaf's protagonist Siegmund Löhr goes on excursions through unfamiliar parts of the city in order to sample the sensations of metropolitan life. He drives himself into hallucinatory states of consciousness which, in their intensity and their threatening impact on his identity, are comparable to those that Rilke's Malte experiences. But in contrast to Malte, Schlaf's protagonist conducts these excursions as controlled scientific experiments and thus remains in firm control of his identity: 'Er "fixt" sich das gleichsam durch Autosuggestion und hält es und ist dennoch [...] davon frei und vermag den Bann zu brechen, wenn er will.'<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Rilke, p. 12.

<sup>73</sup> Rilke, p. 61.

<sup>74</sup> Johannes Schlaf, *Der Kleine* [1904] 0(Berlin, Stuttgart, Leipzig, 1905), p. 206.



Schlaf's Siegmund Löhr shows some striking affinities to Doktor Herzfeld. Both are meditative, solitary and emotionally slightly damaged characters, sensitive to their city environment to the point of nervous overexcitability. Schlaf describes Löhr's experience in the following terms:

Ja, er kannte wohl Stimmungen - wenn man einen Blick in seine Heimlichkeiten tun wollte - welche direkte Selbstmordstimmungen waren, bis zu einem Grade, daß es eigentlich durchaus logisch und notwendig war, daß er sich den Revolver an die Schläfe setzte - er hatte das ganz genau untersucht - : aber dann war da ein Punkt und ein seelisches Vermögen, wo diese Stimmung gewissermaßen automatisch überkippte und in seine gewöhnliche normale, man möchte sagen, in seine individuelle Grundstimmung überschlug. - Er brauchte es einfach, durch welche Hölle auch hindurch, nur abzuwarten.<sup>75</sup>

This can almost be read as a summary of Doktor Herzfeld's experience at the end of *Die Nacht*. Both Doktor Herzfeld and Löhr experience the heightening of nervous tension in the unfamiliar all-engulfing city environment as an almost schizophrenic frenzy. In aimless wanderings through the busy city streets, their nervous excitement is aroused to the extent that it seizes them like an external force, overrides their rational detachment and governs their feeling and thinking. In Schlaf's novel, this force is compared to the figure of the Horla from Maupassant's story of the same name, whereas Hermann uses the image of a cat playing with a mouse to express the fit-like, obsessive power of Doktor Herzfeld's temptation to suicide.

In *Die Nacht*, I have shown earlier that the threat of the loss of self is always near. In Schlaf's *Der Kleine*, schizophrenia is also expressed as a crisis, but one that is consciously sought and is seen as a necessary transitional stage on the way to a higher plane of consciousness which will ultimately lead to a new mankind.

The direct dependence on the city environment is made clear in both cases: explicitly in *Der Kleine* ('Also die verwunderlichsten Sensationen gewährte ihm dieser Schnapsrausch, zu denen ihm Gegend, Lokalität, Tageszeit und was sonst für äußere Umstände mannigfache Veranlassung gaben'<sup>76</sup>), implicitly in *Die Nacht*, where the intensification of Doktor Herzfeld's disturbed state corresponds to the growth of unfamiliarity with the city environment.

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<sup>75</sup> Schlaf, *Der Kleine*, p. 205.

<sup>76</sup> Schlaf, *Der Kleine*, p. 206.



Already in the novel *Das dritte Reich*, published in 1900, Schlaf had dealt with the fragmentation of the self in the context of the individual's experience of the metropolis. His mystical evolutionary theory of mankind was expressed very clearly in that earlier novel. In one episode, the protagonist Dr. Liesegang's experience of the city is heightened into a visionary ecstasy. He derives a 'Wonne einer Rauschfülle'<sup>77</sup> from the notion of Berlin as 'Weltstadt', as a city comprising an agglomeration of the height of all global cultural, biological and technological achievement. He derives from it an intense feeling of the power of mankind, but at the same time is reminded of the tower of Babel and feels uncomfortable in the face of what seems like human hubris. Liesegang expresses the longing for a power above mankind to give purpose to human life. This purpose is finally seen in a striving for unity of all mankind, not in the framework of socialism, but as a unity of perfected individuals ('Höchstes Glück aber war das Streben nach eigenster, persönlichster Selbstgestaltung und Selbstvollendung'<sup>78</sup>) coming together in a new 'Heiligtum' as a 'Gemeinschaft all dieser einsamen, neuen, dieser Höhenmenschen und Freien'.<sup>79</sup>

Schlaf describes this and similar crises, in terms that resemble a sociological or psychological treatise rather than literary representation, as 'eine Sphäre überreizter Nervosität, einer äußersten Blasirtheit, ein intellektueller Gâtézustand'.<sup>80</sup> This state can be overcome with a mysterious innate vitality, leading on to a 'ganz neuen und eigenartigen Seelenzustand' defined as 'vielfältigste, differenzierteste Unrast und Gegensätzlichkeit des Denkens und Fühlens, die sich selbst zu ertragen beginnt in einer Anzahl erlesener Individuen, die zur Gewohnheit, zu innerer Einheit, zu einer Art neuen Temperamentes geworden.' A schizophrenic experience of the world thus clearly emerges as part of an 'Entwicklungskrise eines werdenden Neumenschentums des Helden', as Dieter Kafitz formulates in his study of Schlaf's ideology.<sup>81</sup> The acceptance

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<sup>77</sup> Johannes Schlaf, *Das dritte Reich. Ein Berliner Roman* (Berlin, 1900), p. 89

<sup>78</sup> Schlaf, *Das dritte Reich*, p. 150.

<sup>79</sup> Schlaf, *Das dritte Reich*, p. 152.

<sup>80</sup> This and the following quotation: Schlaf, *Das dritte Reich*, p. 80.

<sup>81</sup> Dieter Kafitz, *Johannes Schlaf - Weltanschauliche Totalität und Wirklichkeitsblindheit. Ein Beitrag zur Neubestimmung des Naturalismus-Begriffs und zur Herleitung totalitärer Denkformen* (Tübingen, 1992), p. 130.



of the fragmented nature of the self is a step on the way towards this new mystic community, 'das dritte Reich' of the title.<sup>82</sup>

This mystical belief in the evolutionary function of the crisis of the self is alien to Hermann's thinking. It smacks too much of Nietzsche's striving for the 'Übermensch'.<sup>83</sup> Hermann is more concerned with an accommodation with the given facts. As I have shown in his treatment of the Doktor Herzfeld character, this does not mean a passive resignation, but rather a positive and conscious accommodation. This attitude to life, which his daughter Ursula identified as fundamental to Hermann's character,<sup>84</sup> is again strikingly close to Simmel's philosophy. Characterised by Werner Jung as a continuation and conjunction of Nietzsche's and Schopenhauer's philosophies, Simmel's position can be described as a 'Versuch, das Leben grundsätzlich zu bejahen, einen Platz im Leben zu finden und zu behaupten, ohne auf die skeptischen Einsichten, die die *Philosophie des Geldes* wie die *Soziologie* über die moderne Welt äußern, zu verzichten'.<sup>85</sup>

On this basis of a positive accommodation to life, Hermann is concerned, far more pragmatically than Schlaf, with Doktor Herzfeld's re-adjustment to the role that he has created for himself. Doktor Herzfeld's love for the city of Berlin is not kindled by intimations of power and his detached sobriety contrasts with the ecstatic reactions of Schlaf's protagonists. His attachment to Berlin is a positive attitude that sets him apart from the overwhelming majority of protagonists of contemporary urban novels. It is not based on Schlaf's brand of neo-Romantic mysticism, but on understanding of the metropolitan environment, at-homeness, receptiveness to beauty, cultural engagement and a coming to terms with city life's demands on the individual. Whereas Schlaf's protagonists cannot accept the metropolis as their living environment and ultimately escape it - either by suicide or by withdrawal into provincial life, Hermann is

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<sup>82</sup> For a further discussion of Schlaf's evolutionary theory, see Gaston Scheidweiler, *Gestaltung und Überwindung der Dekadenz bei Johannes Schlaf: eine Interpretation seines Romanwerks* (Frankfurt a.M., Bern, New York, Paris, 1990).

<sup>83</sup> Hermann's criticism of Nietzsche's philosophy is expressed in many places, for instance in *Schnee*, p. 56; in *Vom gesicherten und ungesicherten Leben*, p. 39; and, most extensively, in the satirical play *Zarathustra. Eine lustige Frechheit in zwei Acten* (1907), published in a censored version under the title *Der Wüstling oder die Reise nach Breslau* (Berlin, 1911).

<sup>84</sup> Comment by Ursula Borchardt, made at Georg-Hermann Colloquium, November 1996, Literaturhaus Berlin. See also Hermann, 'Weltabschied', p. 224: 'Ich bin nicht immer weltbejahend, aber immer lebensbejahend [...] gewesen.'

<sup>85</sup> Werner Jung, 'Nachwort', in: Georg Simmel, *Schopenhauer und Nietzsche. Tendenzen im deutschen Leben und Denken seit 1870* [1902], edited by Werner Jung (Hamburg, 1990), pp. 339-54 (p. 351).



advocating the accommodation to the metropolis and, as shown in the incident with the two horses, a more sympathetic way of life. The metropolis of Berlin is not a stage on the way to a new humanity, but an environment to which modern man can assimilate himself in a balance of criticism and enjoyment.

Hermann's exploration of the problem of the modern self, which is represented as a clash of roles or 'first' and 'second' natures, is perceived as real crisis without the consolation of a projected harmonious future that Schlaf has. On the other hand, Hermann shows that the crisis does not have to end in self-destruction and loss of identity, as in the case of Rilke's *Malte*, but that there is a way out of the crisis, namely self-definition on the basis of a chosen role. The fragile character of this fragmented identity is never denied: in the moments of Doktor Herzfeld's hope and happiness with which the novel closes, it is easy to recognise a note of self-deception.<sup>86</sup>

In the second Herzfeld novel, *Schnee*, Hermann shows the world of art and culture on which Doktor Herzfeld has built his aesthete role, collapse before the brutality and stupidity of nationalism and war. This time, Doktor Herzfeld's relationship with the world and his accommodation with his own self are not reparable: the loss of his world means the loss of hope and of an identity that is built on this world. Having given himself up, he dies in the snow. It becomes very clear in *Schnee* that Berlin stands for culture and a background of personal history. What is threatening individuality and identity is not the metropolis, but war.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> See p. 223 of this dissertation.

<sup>87</sup> The theme of identity in the metropolis is taken up once more in the unfinished novella *Bist du es, oder bist du's nicht?*, which Hermann described as 'eine "Nacht des Doktor Herzfeld", aber ins Phantastische gedreht' (Georg Hermann, letter to his daughter Hilde, 2 July 1937, in Nussbaum (ed.), *Unvorhanden*, p.136). The same ambivalence as in *Die Nacht* towards personal distance and loneliness is described. The confrontation with the self has become even more painful, the loneliness even more desperate, but again, the peace and constancy that can be found in art console the aging writer who is the protagonist of this novella. And again, the love-hatred of the Berliner to his city which emerged in *Die Nacht* is expressed in no uncertain terms: 'Berlin ist doch unausstehlich. Ich habe nie begriffen, wie jemand da wohnen kann, ebenso wie ich niemals verstanden habe, daß man woanders, als in der Weltstadt Berlin ... aber damals war es noch eine bescheidene Großstadt ... zur Welt gekommen sein kann. Das braucht man schon wegen der weiteren Horizonte.' (Hermann, *Bist du es oder bist du's nicht?*, p. 4.)



## 10 Conclusion

I shall conclude by briefly reconsidering Hermann's pre-First World War novels in the terms set out in the introduction. I concentrate first on those qualities of Hermann's writing that have emerged as common to all four novels considered here. Other commentators have also observed some of these, principally: the eidetic quality of Hermann's writing (and its affinity to painting) and his upholding of tradition. I shall then provide my own, rather different conclusions to the two main strands of investigation in this thesis, namely the assessment of Hermann's art as a novelist and his representation of the changing city of Berlin.

Concerning Hermann's power of visual evocation, the following conclusion can be drawn. Hermann's writing is indeed dominated by his interest in capturing the experience of the particular environment that he depicts and in rendering the mood and atmosphere of this environment in his construction of his fictional world. This study has shown that, in this respect, he goes beyond the factual interest of Realism. For the sensory quality of his writing, which shows an underlying affinity to the aesthetic principles of Impressionism, is essential to his atmospheric descriptions. An interest in the Impressionist evocation of the atmosphere of the city is already tangible, especially in some night scenes, in *Spielkinder*. It is further developed in the elegiac tone of the descriptions in *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte* and comes to maturity in the city depictions of *Kubinke*. Finally, in *Die Nacht*, it is mixed with a deep psychological understanding, obvious especially in the detailed portrait of the protagonist Doktor Herzfeld's mental turmoil. Looking back on his literary career in 1940, Hermann himself reported: 'So gelangte ich zu einem seelisch durchbluteten Impressionismus.' He labels his own style as 'ich-betonten Spätimpressionismus'.<sup>1</sup>

My analyses of Hermann's pre-First World War novels partly confirm but also modify the view of Hermann as a writer who upholds tradition, who may even be described as an epigone. I shall return to this argument in my discussion of Hermann's works in the wider aesthetic context of the turn of the century. But a brief consideration of the themes and attitudes, which are said to be typical of his writing, shows its diversity, its changing emphases and styles, as clearly as its continuity.

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<sup>1</sup> Georg Hermann, letter to his daughter Hilde Villum-Hansen, 24 November 1940, in Nussbaum (ed.), *Unvorhanden*, pp. 202-07 (p. 203).



It has been said that Hermann concentrates on the victims of society, the outsiders, whom he portrays with sympathy and warmth, but also with a fatalistic attitude. Indeed Liere stresses Hermann's fatalistic attitude to his characters' lives as a defining trait of his art. Whether it is explicitly stated in a leitmotif sentence (*Jettchen Geberts Geschichte*), highlighted by the passage of the seasons in parallel to the protagonist's story (*Jettchen Geberts Geschichte* and *Kubinke*), or stressed by the emphasis on particularly fateful days (*Spielkinder*, *Kubinke* and *Die Nacht*), the author's belief that 'es kam wie es kommen mußte', rings through his work. In the face of the power of destiny, his protagonists remain weak and passive. Rarely do they even have the strength to adjust positively to their situation. Their autonomy is severely limited and with it their capacity for change.

I have stressed, however, the fact that this does not preclude a critical stance or the development of form. Typically, Hermann voices his criticism in the form of gentle irony, towards social and cultural realities such as the constraints of the Biedermeier society or the excesses of the Wilhelmine architecture in Berlin's new western centre. The theme of the alienation of the cultured or naively serious person from a society governed by commercialism shines through in the stories of Georg, Jason Gebert and Kößling, Kubinke and, most clearly, Doktor Herzfeld. Yet, Hermann gives this theme a very different form in each of his narratives. In this respect and in others, my analyses confirm Liere's view that the formal development of Hermann's writing from *Spielkinder* to *Die Nacht* is marked by a gradual reduction of plot and growing structural cohesion.

However, the conclusions I draw from my investigations go well beyond those of Liere and others. In the following pages, I will trace the new findings which combine to show that there is much to Hermann's pre-First World War novels that has been missed by previous analyses and that prompts a new evaluation of the craft of this author.

In respect of structure, the evolution of Hermann's writing from *Spielkinder* to *Die Nacht* demonstrates his increasing willingness to open out from the form of the nineteenth century Realist novel. Apart from the experimental form of the first part of *Spielkinder*, Hermann's early writings as a novelist are firmly rooted in the tradition of the Realist novel. This is especially clear in the historical novel *Jettchen Geberts*



*Geschichte*, which is constructed as a retrospective 'Gesellschaftsroman' in the tradition of Fontane. Like this 'Doppelroman', both the second part of *Spielkinder* and *Kubinke* follow the traditional pattern of the linear 'einsinnig erzählte Lebensgeschichte' as defined by Lämmert.<sup>2</sup> In *Kubinke*, however, a second structure is simultaneously developed, underlying the more obvious and clearly signposted plot-based construction. This second structure is based on a series of sketches of city life and is developed further in the conversations and feuilletons of *Die Nacht*. That novel is controlled by a structure reflecting the spatial and mental progress of the protagonist. It does not indicate a development in terms of a finite narration with a beginning and an end, but instead demonstrates, with its figure-of-eight form, a breakdown in Hermann's reliance on the goal- and plot-oriented narration so prevalent in nineteenth-century Realist literature.

This progressive structural opening out is paralleled in Hermann's use of narratorial perspective and guidance. With the exception of the more open beginning in *Spielkinder*, Hermann keeps a tight control over the reception process throughout his works. However, the methods, by which this control is effected, change. Hermann's use of the narratorial voice is gradually reduced.<sup>3</sup> The interfering and openly directing omniscient narrator of the first three novels is abandoned in *Die Nacht*. Hermann relinquishes both extremes of the multi-perspective presentation and of the authorial narrator. He uses instead the figural narrative perspective, at times even going to its logical extreme, the stream of consciousness technique. Furthermore, the use of leitmotifs to direct the reading process, very prominent in the first three novels, is reduced in *Die Nacht*. No overriding leitmotif determines the reading process of that novel. Instead, Hermann retains his firm grip on the reader's imagination and understanding of the novel by means of a strong evocation of an all-pervading atmosphere of melancholy. Tone and atmosphere, always essential to Hermann's craft as a novelist, are here, more than in any of the earlier works, relied upon to fulfil a guiding function.

In thematic terms, a development of Hermann's interest can be traced from an early personal confessional expression in *Spielkinder*, via two novels in which the central interest is in keeping a record of cultural history (the retrospective view of Biedermeier Berlin and the panoramic picture of the city's manifestation as a developing metropolis

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<sup>2</sup> See chapter 2 of this dissertation.

<sup>3</sup> This has been pointed out by Liere (Liere, p. 137).



in the early years of the twentieth century), to a psychological analysis of a metropolitan intellectual. The social interest that is tangible in the first two novels lessens in *Kubinke* and *Die Nacht*; instead, Hermann's concern with the relationship between the individual and the city environment comes more to the fore.

It has thus far become clear that Hermann built up a growing formal assurance as a writer with a personal voice. My analysis furthermore shows the special place his work occupies in relation to the contemporary German literary and wider cultural scene. The subjects Hermann chose in his four first novels can each be seen as new departures in terms of genre. He adeptly matched tone, attitude and the formal aspects of his writing to the chosen genre, experimenting with the aesthetic principles of the major artistic movements of turn-of-the-century German literature.

*Spielkinder* is largely constructed in the genre of the autobiographical novel. The autobiographical intent is, however, closely linked with a more general, at times very bitter, criticism of the social injustices and cultural vacuity of late nineteenth century Berlin society. Thus mixing subjective and objective concerns, in order to unveil and report a reality that is perceived as harsh and unjust, Hermann uses many of the formal techniques preferred by the Naturalist writers, whose ideological concerns he shares. The structure of the novel is broken in two, essentially encompassing two different, though interlinking, plots. The objective and multi-perspective representation of the account of Georg's childhood uses many of the techniques of the 'konsequente Naturalismus' of, for example, Holz and Schlaf in *Papa Hamlet*. It is followed by a linear, heavily author-guided and, at times, rather self-righteous and sentimental exploration of his affair with the proletarian girl Lies, which, in its ideological content, is reminiscent of Hauptmann's *Vor Sonnenaufgang*.

The second of Hermann's ventures as a novelist, *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte*, differs greatly from *Spielkinder*, not only because of its retrospective setting in Biedermeier Berlin, but also in its intention, tone and formal construction. *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte* is a historical novel in the Realist tradition of Fontane's 'Gesellschaftsromane'. Hermann presents the story of his Biedermeier heroine in the form of a chronicle, concerned in the construction of his fictional world not only with authenticity, but also with 'Verklärung' of the historical reality he depicts. While presenting a nostalgic, sympathetic picture of Biedermeier family life in the Jewish



middle class, Hermann does not relinquish his critical intent in the depiction of social conflicts. Although the urgent bitterness of *Spielkinder* is replaced by an atmosphere of resignation, Hermann introduces contemporary turn-of-the-century experience in aesthetic and thematic terms into the novel in order to highlight the social dimension. *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte* can thus be described as a work in which the Realist tradition meets the consciousness of the turn-of-the-century writer.

In spite of the success of this historical novel, Hermann did not, in his next work, return to the Biedermeier context.<sup>4</sup> Instead, in *Kubinke*, he depicted the contemporary Berlin of the early twentieth century. In *Kubinke*, the city of Berlin is turned into the main protagonist of the novel. The eponymous hero Emil Kubinke is portrayed first and foremost as the touchstone on which the manifestations of metropolitan life are tested. Hermann experiments here with the genre of the city novel, mixing it with the traditional pattern of the 'Bildungsroman'. Though concentrating on the milieu of Berlin servant girls, Hermann does not present a Naturalist account in the manner of Viebig's *Das tägliche Brot*. Rather than eliciting pity for the girls' social situation, his concerns are to describe the fleeting impressions created by the city, to capture the atmosphere of the new metropolitan environment and to demonstrate the behavioural structures of metropolitan people, for whom the servant girls serve as typical representatives. In keeping with these aims, he uses the detached and aestheticising voice and style of Impressionism, as I have shown in a comparison with the painter Liebermann's art. The emphasis on a light-hearted depiction of the 'Quadrille der Liebe' largely replaces the social concern of Hermann's earlier novels.

With *Die Nacht*, Hermann returns to a confessional, if not autobiographical, style of writing. However, the execution of this last of his pre-First World War novels differs considerably from that of his first efforts as a novelist in *Spielkinder*. Reducing the action to a bare minimum, Hermann focuses on the struggle for identity of modern metropolitan man. As his handling of plot, structure and characterisation indicate, *Die Nacht* must be read as an experiment with the aesthetics of the Modernist novel as exemplified, for instance, in Thomas Mann's *Der Tod in Venedig*.

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<sup>4</sup> That he remained fascinated with this period, however, is clear from his Biedermeier anthology, which he published in 1913, as well as from the fact that in 1915 he wrote another novel set in the Biedermeier period, entitled *Heinrich Schön jun.*



Thus the results I have obtained from analysis of Georg Hermann's pre-First World War novels, both in their own terms and within the cultural landscape of turn-of-the century Germany, yield the following conclusions. The assessment of Hermann as an epigone (Mattenklott), as a keeper of the Realist tradition and a successor to Fontane, which has dominated judgements of Hermann so far, can be confirmed. However, my findings suggest that, additionally, at least equal importance should be accorded to Hermann's openness to new contemporary aesthetic currents and developments. While adhering to the underlying structure of the Realist novel, Hermann largely constructs his first three novels within different aesthetic parameters, namely those of Naturalism, Realism and Impressionism. Finally, in *Die Nacht*, he ventures into the realm of the Modernist novel form. That he was aware, and indeed proud, of this diversity is clear from the following remark in the autobiographical essay entitled 'Meine Geschwister': 'Man wird kaum annehmen, daß der Verfasser "Jettchens" der von "Kubinke" und der des "Herzfelds" ist [...]. Ich habe immer wieder von Neuem den Einsatz gewagt und immer wieder einen andern Blumentopf gewonnen.'<sup>5</sup> Yet, it is clear from his comments on literature in his essays and in *Der kleine Gast*, for instance, that Hermann was not concerned with literary innovation for its own sake. The aesthetic differences between his novels, rather than being self-conscious experiments in form, are an expression of a very sensitive awareness of the adequacy of a certain style and technique to a certain topic and genre of the novel. It is as a result of his search for aesthetics appropriate to the representation of the new reality he saw developing around him, that Hermann emerges as a representative literary figure of the period from the late 1880s to the outbreak of the First World War, making use of the breadth and variety of the contemporary aesthetic movements.

The second strand of inquiry in this dissertation was concerned with an assessment of Hermann's fictional portraits of the city of Berlin. In all four novels considered here, Hermann provides representations of Berlin that go beyond the mere sketching of a background. The relationship between protagonist and city reflects and, at least in the case of *Kubinke*, even determines, the protagonists' characters and destinies. In all four cases, Hermann shows the individual grappling with his or her situation in the environment of the big city of Berlin. In the first two novels, this antagonism has a

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<sup>5</sup> Georg Hermann, 'Meine Geschwister. Ein Vorbild jüdischen Familiensinns', typescript, 12 pages, incomplete, Georg Hermann Collection, section II, pp. 9/10.



social emphasis and Berlin is used as a location for the conflict between individual and society. Georg and his family are the victims of economic circumstances of the 'Gründerjahre', exemplified in the depiction of different strata of society in Berlin. Jettchen Gebert is broken in her confrontation with the social expectations and limitations specific to her situation as a member of the established Jewish middle class in Berlin. But the emphasis is different in *Kubinke* and *Die Nacht*. In these two novels, the individual's attempts to come to terms with the specific way of life of the modern metropolis that Berlin has become, stands in the foreground. Emil Kubinke, the newcomer from the provinces, tries to integrate into the new and strange world of metropolitan Berlin, but fails to understand and live by the rules that govern this world. Doktor Herzfeld, by contrast, has deliberately extracted himself from the metropolitan society. Yet he is a metropolitan dweller through and through, guarding his personal and intellectual freedom, while at the same time suffering from the isolation that this way of life brings with it. His coming to terms with the alienation and the fragmented personality of the city dweller is one of the central concerns of *Die Nacht*. While *Kubinke* thus concentrates on the encounter between individual and city, Hermann shows in *Die Nacht* a detailed psychological portrait of the city person.

Corresponding to the thematic and aesthetic orientations of the individual novels, the representation of Berlin also reveals a distinct new departure in each of Hermann's pre-First World War novels. In *Spielkinder*, Hermann mixes the typical representation of social problems in the city that corresponds to the Naturalist intention of the book, with a depiction that evokes a strong sense of the specific Berlin location. He unites the soberness and representational nature of Baluschek's paintings with Zille's criticism, suffused with fondness for and closeness to his native city.

This interest is developed in *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte*, in which Hermann represents the city, both nostalgically and critically, as a Biedermeier idyll. The image of Berlin presented here is based on a wish to keep the memory of Berlin's history alive, without being anti-Modernist. Modern city experience is integrated as a positive experience in the retrospective novel. While the picture presented here is largely static and resembles the nostalgic retrospective Berlin representation of Biedermeier revivalists such as the painter Fischer-Cörlin, it does not succumb to the anti-Modern idealisation of the past inherent in most of the Biedermeier revivalists' works. Hermann also refers to the transient, modern city experience as presented in paintings by Lesser Ury. In *Jettchen*



*Geberts Geschichte* maybe more than in any other of his works, Hermann shows his strong sense of belonging to the cultural tradition of the city of Berlin and his desire to link the present with the past.

In his next novel, *Kubinke*, the importance of the city representation takes over. The author provides a detailed and atmospheric view of the physical aspects of Berlin city life, and an analytical description of the codes of behaviour of the modern metropolis. The concept of the beauty of the metropolis that emerges from the novel is close to that propagated by the Impressionist city aesthetic *Die Schönheit der großen Stadt* by August Endell. The incisiveness of Hermann's sociological observations is underlined, particularly in this and the following novel, by the similarity of his descriptions of characters and their behaviour to those given by contemporary city sociologists and psychologists. Not only is Hermann's awareness of modern developments obvious here, so also is his acceptance of the modern metropolis as characterised by fragmentation and a rationalist way of life.

Finally, in *Die Nacht*, Hermann's depiction focuses on an atmospheric portrayal of the city by night and on the psychological portrait of the typical city dweller, Doktor Herzfeld. Hermann's initial social interest in the city has made way almost entirely for an aesthetic and a psychological interest. On the one hand, Hermann portrays the sensual attraction of the city by night, as Lesser Ury did in his paintings. On the other hand, he explores the tension between the Berliner's simultaneous alienation from and attachment to his changing and growing city. The fragmentation of the modern city is once again recognised and made responsible for a sense of alienation within the metropolitan dweller, but ultimately Hermann's alter ego, the solitary intellectual Doktor Herzfeld, recognises Berlin as the only possible environment for him and so reaches an accommodation with this typically modern city. This progression and the ultimate acceptance of the new metropolitan reality sets the novel apart from other contemporary explorations of the individual in the metropolis as presented, among others, in Rilke's *Malte Laurids Brigge* and in the two novels *Das dritte Reich* and *Der Kleine* by Johannes Schlaf.

There are clearly different emphases in Hermann's various depictions of Berlin. These are dependent not only on the overall intention of the particular novel, but also on the changing reality and the changing possibilities open to the writer for representing city



reality. In *Spielkinder*, the city is still treated as describable and is shown as a social environment in a way which highlights particular problems. The observer, whether on the level of the author/narrator or the protagonist, is still able to classify and describe without being overwhelmed by the multitudinous influences and manifestations of metropolitan reality.<sup>6</sup> In *Kubinke* and *Die Nacht*, however, written in the second decade of the twentieth century, the new, fragmented reality can no longer be ignored by the novelist, who now has to adapt his depiction to this complexity. In *Kubinke*, Hermann tackles the problem by concentrating on individual areas and institutions and depicting them in factual and atmospheric detail, thus presenting a kaleidoscopic view of Berlin. The city is treated as a system, with its own rules, which determines the lives of its inhabitants. The individual is then characterised either as player or as uncomprehending victim. Systematic representation of the fragmented city is abandoned altogether in *Die Nacht*. In Doktor Herzfeld's second walk, Hermann represents city reality by analogy with the protagonist's mental process. Objective description is abandoned for an evocation of Doktor Herzfeld's subjective experience of his environment. Hermann concentrates on a very narrowly confined geographical area, which alone can be experienced by the protagonist as 'home', while the rest of the city must remain alien and is perceived by Doktor Herzfeld as a threat to his identity. The individual city dweller has now lost his self-assured detachment from the alien environment and instead the city environment is experienced as a confused and confusing mental process.

The development that emerges in Hermann's representations of the city of Berlin parallels the aesthetic development of Hermann's art as a novelist: from nineteenth century Realism to a partial Modernism.

Hermann is confirmed as a writer who is very open to new developments. He reacts sensitively, both in capturing changes in the city itself and in adapting his own style of representation to the changing reality. He thus emerges as a writer who bases his art on the traditions of the nineteenth century novelists, but does not hang on to them when reality has overtaken the established patterns of representation. Instead, without losing his own characteristic voice, he presents himself as Naturalist, Realist, Impressionist and Modernist in turn. He does not compromise his art by pandering to the need of a

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<sup>6</sup> In the retrospective depiction of Biedermeier Berlin, such a representation of the city is, of course, even easier. An omniscient narrator presents, from hindsight, a nostalgically tinged static picture, of which the main protagonist, Jettchen, is an integral part.



disoriented early twentieth century readership for an image of Berlin that is characterised by a consoling stability. This is what distinguishes him from the many popular 'local colour' writers such as Erdmann Graeser, Felix Philippi or Heinrich Seidel. His writing has popular appeal too, but it does not shy away from the depiction of the specifically modern traits of the city and it works with the innovative opportunities provided by turn-of-the-century aesthetics. Thus, Hermann does not conform to Gerhard Hermann's 1931 classification of writers of Berlin novels as authors, 'die meinen, der neuen Wirklichkeit mit alten Darstellungsschablonen beikommen zu können'.<sup>7</sup>

Hermann's emotional closeness to Berlin is obvious in all his novels. His positive attitude towards the city shines through his representations and distinguishes him from most other contemporary city novelists who decry the modern developments of the early twentieth century metropolis. Yet he always maintains a certain critical distance from Berlin, which pervades not only his pre-First World War novels, but also his later works and journalistic writings. In short, he displays the critical attachment to his city which is the characteristically ambivalent attitude of the modern Berliner.

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<sup>7</sup> Gerhard Hermann, *Der Großstadtroman* (Stettin, 1931), p. 35.



## 11 Appendices

### Appendix 1:

#### **Georg Hermann - Biographical Survey and Selected Bibliography of His Works<sup>1</sup>**

- 7 October 1871      Born as Georg Borchardt in Berlin-Friedenau (Heilige-Geist-Straße); spends early childhood in Blumeshof (Tiergarten).
- about 1876          Following their financial ruin due to a failed speculation of Hermann's father, the Borchardt family moves to Bülowstraße (Tiergarten).
- 1890                  Hermann receives his 'Einjährige Diplom' from the Friedrich-Werdersche Gymnasium.
- 1890-1895          Apprenticeship as a commercial clerk in a tie factory; then military service.
- 1896                  First literary sketches published in *Jugend* and *Simplicissimus*.
- 1896-1899          Studies of the History of Art, German Literature and Philosophy at the Berlin Humboldt Universität.  
Start of Hermann's work as an art critic in various journals.
- 1897                  Publication by the Fontane publishing house of Hermann's first novel, *Spielkinder*.  
Publication of *Modelle* (also Fontane), a collection of literary sketches  
Adoption of the name Georg Hermann in memory of his father Hermann Borchardt.
- 1897-1898          Work as 'diätarischer Hilfsarbeiter im Statistischen Amt der Stadt Berlin.'<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Information based on Hermann's autobiographical writings and on Liere's monograph on Hermann.

<sup>2</sup> Hermann, 'Im Spiegel', p. 209.



- 1898 *Die Zukunftsfrohen*, a second collection of literary sketches, is published by Fontane, including the satirical sketch 'Die Zukunftsfrohen', based on Hermann's experience as an assistant statistician.
- 1900 The collection of literary sketches *Aus dem letzten Hause* is published by Fontane, including the eponymous novella *Aus dem letzten Hause*. Engagement to Martha Heynemann.
- 1901 The monograph *Die deutsche Karikatur im 19. Jahrhundert* is published by Velhagen und Klasing. Marriage to Martha Heynemann.
- 1902 Birth and death of their first daughter.
- 1903, 1904 and 1906 Births of three further daughters: Eva-Maria, Hilde and Elise.
- 1906 *Jettchen Gebert* is published by Fleischel.
- 1908 *Henriette Jacoby* is published as the second volume of the 'Doppelroman' *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte* (Fleischel).
- 1909 onwards Work as an art correspondent for the Ullstein publishing house.
- 1910 Publication of *Kubinke* (Fleischel).
- 1911 First performance of Hermann's play *Der Wüstling oder Die Reise nach Breslau* (Fleischel), together with Carl Sternheim's *Die Cassette*, in Berlin.
- 1912 Publication of *Die Nacht des Doktor Herzfeld* (Fleischel).
- 1913 First performance of the dramatisation of *Jettchen Gebert* (Fleischel),



in Frankfurt/Main.

The anthology *Das Biedermeier im Spiegel seiner Zeit* is published by Bong.

- 1915 Hermann and family move to Neckargemünd.  
First performance of the dramatisation of *Henriette Jacoby* (Fleischel), in Berlin.  
The Biedermeier novel *Heinrich Schön jun.* and the essay collection *Vom gesicherten und ungesicherten Leben* are published by Fleischel.
- 1916 *Der Guckkasten*, a collection of essays and literary sketches, is published by Fleischel.
- 1917 The play *Mein Nachbar Ameise* (Fleischel), set in the period of Friedrich II in Potsdam, is premièred in Berlin.  
*Einen Sommer lang*, the first of a series of five autobiographical novels ('Die Kette') centring on the life of Hermann's alter ego Fritz Eisner, is published by Ullstein. It focusses on the period of Hermann's engagement to Martha Heynemann.
- 1918 Divorce and marriage to Lotte Samter, editor at the Ullstein publishing house.
- 1919 Birth of their daughter Ursula.  
*Kleine Erlebnisse*, a volume of short fiction, and *Randbemerkungen*, a collection of aphorisms and observations, both published by Fleischel.
- 1921 *Schnee*, the second novel centring on the character Doktor Herzfeld, published by DVA (Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, Stuttgart); republished in 1922 as the second volume of *Doktor Herzfeld*.
- 1923 *Frau Antonie*, dramatisation of *Heinrich Schön jun.* (DVA), premièred in Frankfurt.
- 1925 *Der kleine Gast*, the second part of the autobiographical series 'Die



- Kette', is published by DVA. This novel concentrates on the period of the death of Hermann's first child and the writing of *Jettchen Gebert*.
- 1926 *Spaziergang in Potsdam*, a guide through the present and past of the city and its environs, is published by Rembrandtverlag.  
*Der doppelte Spiegel*, an essay concerned with the rise of antisemitism, is published by Alweiss.  
Death of Hermann's second wife, Lotte.
- 1927 The novel *Tränen um Modesta Zamboni*, focussing on the involvement of a German art historian with an Italian woman, is published by DVA.
- 1928 The essay collection *Die Zeitlupe* and the novel *Träume der Ellen Stein*, focussing on the imaginary relationships of the female protagonist to three men who died in the First World War, are published by DVA.
- 1930 *November Achtzehn*, the third part of 'Die Kette' (DVA). Hermann's friendship with his second wife is recounted against the background of the 1918 revolution in Berlin.  
*Grenadier Wordelmann*, a historical novel from the period of Friedrich II, is published by Ullstein.
- 1931-1933 Hermann moves back to Berlin to live with his daughters Hilde and Ursula.
- 1933 Goes into exile in the Netherlands; first in Laren, then, in 1934, Hilversum.
- 1934 Two further volumes of the series 'Die Kette' appear: *Ruths schwere Stunde*, which depicts the events around the birth of Hermann's daughter Ursula (published by Allert de Lange, Amsterdam); and *Eine Zeit stirbt* (Jüdische Buch-Vereinigung, Berlin), which concentrates on the death of his second wife.



- 1935                    The novel *Rosenmil*, set in the Berlin 'Ganovenmilieu' of the early years of the twentieth century, is published by Allert de Lange (Amsterdam).  
Hertzberger (Amsterdam) publish *B.M., der unbekannte Fußgänger*, a novel concerned with a journey into exile.
- 1936                    Hermann's last novel, *Der etruskische Spiegel*, which mirrors the fascist Rome of the 1930s in the doomed etruscan society, is published by Hertzberger.  
Hermann continues work on a sequel to *Rosenmil* and on a new tetralogy of novels which was to be entitled *Die daheim blieben*.
- 1940                    German invasion of the Netherlands.
- 16 November 1943    Deportation to Auschwitz. Hermann dies there soon after his arrival.



## **Appendix 2:**

### **Georg Hermann Collection, Leo Baeck Institute, New York**

The Georg Hermann Collection at the Leo Baeck Institute, New York, is the first port of call for any Hermann scholar. The information I gathered there has proven essential for this dissertation.<sup>1</sup> Mainly due to the fact that Hermann was a conscientious collector of his personal notes, manuscripts, typescripts, newspaper cuttings of his own articles and scripts of published and unpublished works, the collection presents a wealth of material which allows important insights into Hermann's thinking and his way of working.

The collection consists of three parts: the largest contains Hermann's literary estate, and two smaller parts hold letters to Hermann and autographs collected by him. The following list, reproduced from information supplied by the Leo Baeck Institute, provides an overview of the collection's contents.

#### **A. Hermann's literary estate - filed under AR- C. 3025 7074**

- I Manuscripts and typescripts of novels (3 feet, 1.5 inches of shelf space)
- II Manuscripts and typescripts of shorter fiction (1 foot, 8 inches)
- III Manuscripts and typescripts of non-fiction essays (general) (5 inches)
- IV Manuscripts, typescripts and clippings about literature and art (5 inches)
- V Manuscripts, typescripts and clippings about Judaism (2.5 inches)
- VI Manuscripts, typescripts and clippings about nature (2.5 inches)
- VII Manuscripts, typescripts and clippings about Berlin (2.5 inches)
- VIII Manuscripts, typescripts and clippings about Hermann's travels (5 inches)
- IX Clippings - general (15 inches)
- X Correspondence (5 inches)
- XI Miscellaneous; including folders on 50th and 60th birthdays (5 inches)
- XII Miscellaneous typescripts (10 inches)
- XIII Varia; including notebooks and address book (5 inches).

The material is arranged in boxes within the different sections. My references in this study are to the exact location (section) of any particular cited text.

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<sup>1</sup> I spent a month studying the collection, split over two visits in September 1995 and September 1996.



**B. Letters to Georg Hermann - filed under AR - B. 342 3109**

This part of the collection contains 142 letters and cards written between 1901 and 1939. They are from 77 senders.

**C. Autographs collected by Hermann - filed under AR - B. 343 3110**

Among these are autographs from Peter Altenberg, Theodor Fontane and Detlev von Liliencron.



## 12 Bibliography

The bibliography is divided into seven sections.

12.1 Texts by Georg Hermann

12.2 Adaptations of Hermann's Work

12.3 Secondary Literature on Georg Hermann

12.4 Letters to Georg Hermann

12.5 Fictional Works by Other Writers

12.6 Texts Concerning Aesthetic Movements of the Turn of the Century, Literature and the Visual Arts

12.7 Texts Concerning the City, History, Sociology and Psychology

These sections list the texts and editions which are cited or referred to in the dissertation, together with some further works which have exerted noteworthy influence on the study. For all items, the year of publication of the specific edition used is given in parentheses ( ). Where editions other than the first are used, the date of the first edition is given in square brackets [ ] after the title. Texts held in the Georg Hermann Collection of the Leo Baeck Institute, New York are referred to by the section in which they have been catalogued there. See appendix 2.

### 12.1 Texts by Georg Hermann<sup>1</sup>

#### 12.1.1 Published Sources

##### A. Collected Works Edition

*Gesammelte Werke*, 5 vols. (Stuttgart, Berlin, Leipzig, 1922-1932)

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<sup>1</sup> For comprehensive surveys of Hermann's writings, see Cornelis Geeraard van Liere, *Georg Hermann. Materialien zur Kenntnis seines Lebens und seines Werkes*, diss. University of Leiden (Amsterdam, 1974), pp. 61-105 (for published texts); and the inventory of the Georg Hermann Collection (for material held in the Leo Baeck Institute, New York).



B. Other Publications (in Chronological Order)

*Spielkinder* [1897], in Hermann, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. II (1922), pp. 1-259

*Aus dem letzten Hause* [1900], in Hermann, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. V (1932), pp. 3-141

*Die deutsche Karikatur im 19. Jahrhundert* (Bielefeld, Leipzig, 1901)

'Moderne deutsche Karikaturisten', *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, 17 March 1901

'Max Liebermann,' in Martin Buber (ed.), *Jüdische Künstler* (Berlin, 1903), pp. 105-35

'Neues über Böcklin', *Vossische Zeitung*, 12 June 1903

'Lesser Ury', *Berliner Zeitung*, 10 January 1905

*Jettchen Gebert* [1906] (Reinbek, 1989)

*Zarathustra. Eine lustige Frechheit in zwei Acten* (1907), published in a censored version under the title *Der Wüstling oder die Reise nach Breslau* (Berlin, 1911)

*Jettchen Geberts Geschichte* (1908), 2 vols.: vol. I: *Jettchen Gebert*; vol. II: *Henriette Jacoby*

*Henriette Jacoby* [1908; published as vol. II of *Jettchen Geberts Geschichte*] (Reinbek, 1990)

'Hans Baluschek', *Nord und Süd*, 33 (January 1909), 171-77

'Die Großstadteinsamkeit' [1909], in Hermann, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. V (1932), pp. 660-63

'Die Ausstellung der Secession', *Die Gegenwart*, 36 (1909), 293-95

*Kubinke* [1910] (Berlin, 1951)

*Die Nacht des Doktor Herzfeld* (Berlin, 1912)

'Um Berlin', *Pan*, 2 (22 August 1912), 1101-06

*Das Biedermeier im Spiegel seiner Zeit* (Berlin, 1913)

'Heinrich Zille', in Zille, *Mein Milljöh. Bilder aus dem Berliner Leben* [1913] (Berlin, 1925), pp. 3-6



'Vorwort', in Hermann, *Kubinke* (Berlin, 1913), pp. 7-10

*Heinrich Schön jun.* (Berlin, 1915)

*Vom gesicherten und ungesicherten Leben. Ernste Plaudereien* (Berlin, 1915). This collection of essays includes the following items referred to in the text of this thesis:

'Vom gesicherten und ungesicherten Leben', pp. 1-51

'Der tote Naturalismus', in Hermann, pp. 52-66

'Bücher und Autor', pp. 190-205

'Im Spiegel (Pfeilerspiegel, ganze Figur)', pp. 206-16

*Die Reise nach Massow* [1916], in Hermann, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. V (1932), pp. 228-40

*Einen Sommer lang* (Berlin, 1917)

'Erinnerungen an Simmel' [1918], in Kurt Gassen and Michael Landmann (eds.), *Buch des Dankes an Georg Simmel* (Berlin, 1958), pp. 162-66

*Schnee* [1921] (Berlin, 1922)

'Rückblick zum Fünfzigsten' [1921], in Hermann, *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. V (1932), pp. 423-54

*Der kleine Gast* (Stuttgart, Berlin, Leipzig, 1925)

*Spaziergang in Potsdam* (Berlin, 1926)

'Ernst Heilborn, "Zwischen zwei Revolutionen. Der Geist der Schinkelzeit"', *Die Literatur*, 29 (1927), 385-87

*Die Zeitlupe und andere Betrachtungen über Menschen und Dinge* (Stuttgart, Berlin, Leipzig, 1928). This collection of essays includes the following items referred to in the text of this thesis:

'Bismarck und Menzel', pp. 5-13

'Raabe', pp. 13-19

'Bang. Reger', pp. 19-27

'Der junge Hauptmann und seine Modelle', pp. 54-62



'Was von Büchern übrigbleibt', pp. 149-58

'Meine Eltern', pp. 194-199

*Pro Berlin* (Berlin, 1931)

'Mal wieder in Berlin', *Vossische Zeitung*, 1 March 1931

'Hundertundein Kilometer', *Vossische Zeitung*, 2 April 1933

Various letters from exile to Hermann's daughter Hilde Villum-Hansen [1933-1941], in Nussbaum (ed.), *Unvorhanden und stumm, doch zu Menschen noch reden. Georg Hermann* (Mannheim, 1991), pp. 19-218

*Rosenmil* [1935] (Berlin, 1988)

'Weltabschied' [1935], in Laureen Nussbaum (ed.), *Unvorhanden und stumm, doch zu Menschen noch reden. Georg Hermann* (Mannheim, 1991), pp. 221-61

## 12.1.2 Material Held in the Georg Hermann Collection, Leo Baeck Institute, New York

### 12.1.2.1 Newspaper Cuttings of Uncertain Provenance

'Ein neues Buch über Berlin', cutting, Georg Hermann Collection, section VII, provenance unknown

'Eine Lanze für Berlin W.', (1906), cutting, Georg Hermann Collection, section VII, provenance unknown

Various cuttings of Hermann's Berlin columns in different daily papers, Georg Hermann Collection, section VII

### 12.1.2.2 Unpublished Sources

'Anna', manuscript, 6 pages, in a notebook under the title *Skizzen 1889-1890*, Georg Hermann Collection, section XIII

Letter to Dr. Alfred Kerr, 18 October 1910, Georg Hermann Collection, section X

*Bist du es oder bist du's nicht?*, typescript, 83 pages, undated, incomplete, Georg Hermann Collection, section II



'Clara Viebig', typescript, 7 pages, undated, Georg Hermann Collection, section IV

'Das große Haus und der neue Laden', typescript, 4 pages, undated, Georg Hermann Collection, section II

'Der deutsche Jude und das Großstadtproblem', typescript, 9 pages, undated, Georg Hermann Collection, section V

'Mein Geburtshaus', typescript, 3 pages, undated, Georg Hermann Collection, section III

'Meine Geschwister. Ein Vorbild jüdischen Familiensinns', typescript, 12 pages, undated, incomplete, Georg Hermann Collection, section II

'Wie ich Berlin wiederfand', typescript, 6 pages, undated, Georg Hermann Collection, section VII

Untitled typescript, 3 pages, undated, autobiographical survey, Georg Hermann Collection, section III

Untitled typescript, 5 pages, undated, on the position of the Jews in pre-First World War Germany, Georg Hermann Collection, section V

## 12.2 Adaptations of Hermann's Work

Roland, Ralf, 'Filmsynopsis: "Jettchen Gebert"', typescript, 20 pages, dated 1935, Georg Hermann Collection, section XII

Stauder, Josef, television adaptation of *Kubinke*, Deutscher Fernsehfunk, GDR, 21 June 1962

## 12.3 Secondary Literature on Georg Hermann

anon., 'Georg Hermann zum 50. Geburtstag', *Heidelberger Tageblatt*, 7 October 1921

A., Dr. E., 'Georg Hermann: "Kubinke"', *Die Gegenwart*, 44 (1910), 875-76

Berman, Russell A., 'Culture Industry and Reification: Georg Hermann', in R. A. Berman, *The Rise of the Modern German Novel. Crisis and Charisma* (Cambridge/Mass., London, 1986), pp. 161-78



- Borchardt, Hilde, 'Georg Hermann', in Laureen Nussbaum (ed.), *Unvorhanden und stumm, doch zu Menschen noch reden. Georg Hermann* (Mannheim, 1991), pp. 7-16
- Coler, Christfried, '“Es kam alles, wie es kommen mußte”. Erinnerungen an Georg Hermann', *Aufbau*, 3,2 (1947), 182-83
- Coler, Christfried, 'Vorwort', in Georg Hermann, *Kubinke* (Berlin, 1951), pp. 7-15
- Eloesser, Arthur, '“Die Nacht des Doktor Herzfeld”', *Das literarische Echo*, 14 (1911/12), 1044-48
- Eloesser, Arthur, 'Georg Hermann zum 60. Geburtstag', *Vossische Zeitung*, 6 October 1931
- Escher, Karl, 'Georg Hermann zum Sechzigsten', 6 October 1931, cutting, Georg Hermann Collection, section XI, provenance unknown
- Fürst, Ludwig, 'Georg Hermann zum 50. Geburtstag', *Berliner Börsen-Courier*, 7 October 1921
- Galliner, Arthur, 'Ein Besuch bei Georg Hermann', *Israelitisches Familienblatt*, 8 October 1931
- Goetz, Wolfgang, 'Der Vater des Jettchen Gebert. Erinnerungen an Georg Hermann', *Die Neue Zeitung*, 7 October 1951
- Härtling, Peter, 'Georg Hermann, “Doktor Herzfeld”', *Die Welt der Literatur* (supplement to *Die Welt*), 30 September 1965, p. 479
- Härtling, Peter, 'Nachwort', in Georg Hermann, *Kubinke* (Frankfurt a.M., 1974), pp. 289-94
- Härtling, Peter, 'Ein verlassener Held. Über Georg Hermanns *Kubinke*', in Härtling, *Zwischen Untergang und Aufbruch. Aufsätze, Reden, Gespräche*, ed. by Günther Drommer (Berlin, Weimar, 1990), pp. 131-35
- Heine, Anselma, 'Georg Hermann', *Literarisches Echo*, 17 (1914/15), columns 326-32
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