

Berlin 1927: Intersections with Albert Friedlander

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Intersections are not Parallels

Growing up in a safe, clean, rebuilt, orderly, post World-War and shiny new economic-miracle West Germany, I had no first-hand experience of the Germany Albert Friedlander and his family inhabited during the pre-war Nazi years. That Germany, largely *totgeschwiegen*¹ during my school years, had to be sought out explicitly, initially through reading (one of the first books I read on the subject was Friedlander's collection *Out of the Whirlwind*²), much later through the research for *Lovable Crooks*, my own book on crime and antisemitism in Germany and Austria.³ That book netted me an invitation to a celebration of the life of Albert Friedlander in May 2019, bringing me back into contact with my old schooltime hero, the editor of *Out of the Whirlwind*. It also brought me face to face again with that unknown Germany, with the whirlwind that he had to weather and I didn't.

My links with Friedlander and the Germany of his youth are tenuous—less than connection, more than coincidence. The many intersections between his life and mine were shaped by the difference between the Germany of his youth and the one of mine, and that difference is also the reason why I would consider these links 'intersections' rather than 'parallels.' He left Germany for the USA under duress and in danger of his life, I voluntarily and with my head in the clouds. These events, remarkable only in the sense that they set the course for each of our lives, are commonplace in the sense that they are shared by millions. Other intersections between Rabbi Friedlander's life and mine occurred on roads less travelled. We were both accepted at the University of Chicago,⁴ exactly forty years apart. He was at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, on the same street as the University of Cincinnati, where I held my first teaching assignment forty-five years later. He taught at a synagogue in Wilkes-Barre, a Pennsylvania town that my husband and I drive through every summer because it is only a few towns over from the one where my husband grew up and

where my in-laws still live. And he died in London two days before I arrived there to take up my new post at UCL. Not having known him in person, I can't honestly say that I miss him, but intersecting with him in so many places but never in time has made me feel that I've always just missed him, sometimes by decades and sometimes by days.

It is these kinds of intersections in time and place, these strange encounters in the nebulous realm between connections and coincidences, that I'd like to explore below, based on two case studies taken from *Lovable Crooks*. The time in this case is 1927, the place Berlin.

Three momentous events occurred independently of each other in Berlin in 1927:

1. Albert Friedlander is born. He will later escape Nazi persecution by emigration.
2. The Sass brothers, Germany's most gifted, daring, ingenious, persistent and beloved thieves, revolutionise the art of the bank break-in. They will later try to escape Nazi persecution but fail.
3. Walter Serner, one of the German-speaking world's most riveting and innovative crime writers, falls silent forever. He will later try to escape Nazi persecution but fail.

Intersection I: The Sass Brothers are the talk of the town

Franz and Erich Sass,⁵ murdered by the Nazis in 1940, were not Jews, but they intersect with Friedlander because they, more than anyone else, typify the time and place of his birth. Part of the reason why Berliners in 1927 identified with the Sass brothers to such a degree was that their family background and childhood story, both defined by wretched poverty, was hardly unusual. In Berlin's poor quarters, tiny two-room apartments such as the one the Sass family occupied were normally home to eight or ten people. **Insert Fig. 1 and caption here** Fathers waited outside the front door until the children were asleep;

people who had a balcony slept on it during the summers—anything for a bit of breathing space.⁶ The Great Depression was already in the air and Berlin was swamped with an army of jobless workers. Discontent was in the air too. Some went so far as to suggest that the era's true criminals were not bank robbers like the Sass brothers but those who kept the distribution of wealth uneven,⁷ and some of this sentiment can be linked directly with popular support for the brothers' escapades. Everyone knows Bertolt Brecht's famous accusation of society's real crooks in *The Threepenny-Opera* (first performed the year after Friedlander's birth): as Mac the Knife muses on the relative scale of criminal behaviour, 'how does robbing a bank even compare to founding a bank?'⁸ Few remember, though, that this line was directly inspired by the daring feats of Franz and Erich Sass.

The Sass brothers were the Dream Team of crime: little Franz, 5'5", blond and blue-eyed with the gift of gab; tall, dark and handsome Erich, 6'1", the genius surveyor of the thickness of walls, the weakness of locks and the safest path to the safe.⁹ **Insert Fig. 2 and caption here** In the Berlin of Friedlander's birthyear, they were the stuff of legend, the epitome of the local boys who had made good. They were underworld superstars, raising to an entirely new level the aspects of the job that made safe crackers the royalty of crime—planning, expertise, non-violence, training, and skill.¹⁰ Their robbery of the Deutsche Bank in Alt-Moabit on Monday, 28 March 1927, was the first time in recorded crime history that a welding torch had been used to open a safe. For the next thirteen years the Sass brothers would go on to baffle the police, astound criminologists and entertain the populace with virtuoso break-ins, becoming more daring, innovative and brilliant with each crime, making off with millions which, to this day, have never been found, and successfully evading the law for as long as there was a rule of law in Germany. In 1940, their luck ran out. Although they had fled to Denmark to escape summary execution as 'habitual criminals' by the Nazis, the

Danish authorities, eager to cooperate with the Nazi state, extradited them back to Germany, where they were promptly shot at the concentration camp Sachsenhausen under the personal supervision of Rudolf Höß, who would go on to become the commander of Auschwitz.

The story of the sassy brothers tells us something about Friedlander's Berlin, a Berlin that was forced to lose its terrific sense of humour—not unlike that with which, by all accounts, Friedlander himself was endowed—, a Berlin that was slowly and painfully undergoing Nazi synchronisation, but not without a struggle. The Sass brothers became a symbol of that struggle. Jokes about them attest to their continued popularity even in the early Nazi years. In February 1933, when the SA (*Sturmabteilung*), the Nazi party's original paramilitary wing, and the SS jointly burned down the Reichstag-building, a crime for which they guillotined a hap- and blameless Communist, the following joke made the rounds: 'Who burned down the Reichstag? — Of course: the Brothers SA-SS.'¹¹ It was an apt comment on a regime that specialized in blaming others for their own crimes. Even more daringly, as the regime entrenched itself: "'How do you spell Germany's most famous criminal gang?"—Answer: "SA-SS".'¹² We can certainly read these witticisms as expressions of nostalgia. In the age of mass men, as Hannah Arendt has described it,¹³ the Sass brothers stood out. In a regime that reigned with unprecedented brutality, the Sass brothers, who had never carried a weapon or harmed a fly in their entire lives of crime, were throw-backs to a less violent age.¹⁴ In a regime that systematically obliterated individual rights and flouted the rule of law, the Sass brothers' ability to wriggle out of every indictment was a last reminder of a constitutional State long gone. In a land ruled by criminals, they were rogues, or, to use a term coined by Max Fabich, the detective who pursued them for 13 years, 'good scoundrels.'¹⁵ And rogues, as Peter Bamm has so aptly remarked, are

‘moralists, and this is why they are so rare. The main aspect of real roguery is that society is taught a moral lesson through an immoral act... This is why true rogues enjoy the approbation of all well-meaning people... How happy is the nation that still manages to produce a true rogue from time to time!’¹⁶ Ekkehard Schwerk, to whose research we owe so much of our knowledge of the Brothers Sass, comments in tones of despair:

How unhappy we are! For how long have we well-meaning people been forsaken by the ‘true’ rogues! They no longer exist. They are, the Devil knows why, extinct, like the may bugs. They were, certainly, pests, but also a pleasure. And how a society responds to rogues, how it deals with them, mirrors its disposition.

The last truly genuine rogues existed in Berlin, in the so-called Golden Twenties, in the form of the Brothers Sass. Since then, nothing comparable has been on offer.¹⁷

Perhaps this is why their popularity endures to this day, why they were the subject of a novel and three films,¹⁸ and why every online blog on the Sass brothers is filled with comments from people named Sass claiming to be their descendants.

Intersection II: Walter Serner falls silent

Walter Serner,¹⁹ born as Walter Eduard Seligmann, was Austrian by birth, but is a true Berliner in the sense that his stories captured Berlin’s underworld like none before or since. If he is not a Berliner by birth or residence, that is also true of every other place. Serner spent most of his life on trains. He travelled through Berlin, Carlsbad, Greifswald, Zurich, Geneva, Paris, Naples, Barcelona, Berne, Vienna, and Prague, among others—and on these trains he wrote one crime novel, one crime drama, and exactly 100 crime stories between 1918 and 1926. In 1927, fifteen years before his death, he fell silent, never writing another word—no books, no stories, not even letters to his rare friends.

Serner's crime stories are among the most eccentric written even in a literary epoch that had no shortage of peculiar crime fiction.²⁰ The heroes of his tales are, without exception, on the wrong side of the law, bearing names that sound outlandish in any language: Flou and Pepino; Kaudor, Sasso and Lusi; Moo, Gibsi and Lapu; Öchsli and Jukundus; Wutschka, Schicketan and Fidikuk. All stories are dominated by totally decontextualized dialogue into which the reader is flung without any information about who is speaking, how these people know each other, where they are, what prompted the conversation, what preceded it or what happens afterwards. All stories are set in major cities— Berlin, Vienna, New York, London, Lisbon, Barcelona, Nice, Paris, Munich, Lyon—but unless Serner is kind enough to drop us the name of a café or a bar, we can only deduce the story's setting from dialogue snippets written in English, French, Italian, Spanish, Yiddish or Berlin, Bavarian, Austrian, or Swiss dialects.

A 'typical' Serner story, if there is such a thing, has no beginning, no ending, no context, no development, usually not even a plot. The story 'Bucket Fever' ('Lampenfieber') parachutes us into the middle of a conversation between three weirdly named criminals, Spinach-Emil ('Spinat-Emil'), Nun-Japoll ('Nonnen-Japoll') and Arable Käthe ('Acker-Käthe') who are planning an unspecified crime. Their plan is not shared with the reader, but delights Arable Käthe to such a degree that she swings Spinach-Emil around the room screaming 'Kitz-kitz-kitz-kitz-kitz-kitz!.' She then proceeds to nearly suffocate him by pressing him tenderly to her bosom. Nun-Japoll saves Emil's life by smacking Käthe on the head so lustily that her glass eye jumps out and rolls under the wardrobe, from where Käthe retrieves it, licks it clean, and re-inserts it. And that, aside from a brief sex scene between Emil and Käthe and repeated references to Emil's fear of the police (the title's 'bucket fever') is all he wrote.²¹

Serner was a weird but riveting writer and certainly one of the most accomplished stylists of his time. After the Nazis banned and burned his books in 1933, none of his titles appeared in any publisher's catalogue for the next thirty years. In part this may be due to his contemporaries' inability to make sense not only of his literature but also of his life—a life of which we know very little, even today. We merely know enough of both to say that neither conformed in the slightest to the traditional formula of what a crime story, or a writer's life, should look like. Serner had a high school diploma (passed on the second attempt in 1909) and a law degree (passed on the second attempt in 1913). Immediately after obtaining his hard-fought-for high school diploma, he converted from Judaism to Catholicism and changed his name from the recognizably Jewish Seligmann to Serner.²² Immediately after obtaining his hard-fought-for law degree, he announced his intention never to use it but instead to spend the rest of his life touring Europe by train. Until the Nazi advance made travel through Europe difficult for Jews, that is what he did, and nobody ever had the slightest idea what Serner actually lived on.

It was this mystery, coupled with the minuteness with which he described the world of crime and Serner's own claim that he was intimately familiar with criminals and their milieu, that led to the persistent myth that Serner himself was a professional criminal. The author of these rumours was Serner's own publisher, Paul Steegemann, who sent a fictitious Serner-bio to the Jewish writer Theodor Lessing. Lessing did not hesitate to spice his 1925 review of Serner's crime stories with these 'biographical' details and adorn them with a Serner-mugshot that, in stark contrast to the anaemic doe-eyed insurance-salesman type that peers out uncertainly from other Serner portrait photos, presents him as a hardened criminal glaring at the observer with an unmistakable air of menace. *Insert Figs. 3-4 and caption here* 'You won't find his address in literary calendars,' Lessing wrote, 'but you will

find it in the files of the criminal investigative police. He is an international conman of the highest order. His books contain nothing that he hasn't experienced. You're welcome to say all this out loud. Herr Serner doesn't give a damn. Currently he is travelling through the orient, the owner of several grand brothels in Argentina.²³ This bio led Alfred Rosenberg, one of the Nazis' most prominent antisemitic propagandists, to denounce both Lessing and Serner as Jewish peddlers of female flesh and 'brothel natures' whose work showed 'the blood-curdling abyss that separates Jews from human beings.'²⁴ Serner's response to all three—Steegemann, Lessing, and Rosenberg—denied that he was a criminal but gave them nothing else:

Herr Steegemann has claimed that there was nothing in my books that I haven't lived through. That is correct. Every line I write is based on things I saw, heard or physically experienced. [Rumour has it that] someone who knows criminals and police work as well as I must be [...] a criminal himself [...] The fact that I don't have a criminal record and that there is no concrete evidence against me is thus merely seen as proof of my criminal mastery. That is flattering but untrue.

What is, however, true is that I've never been a pimp, never an international conman, never a white slave trader. It would be easy for me to prove what I've lived on until today. And it is practically a tragicomic joke that the few irregularities in my biography were actually caused by the duress that the police has seen fit to subject me to.²⁵

Much like Serner's literature, this sparse biography is dominated by negatives: all we know is what he *wasn't*—not a criminal mastermind, not a pimp, not a white slave trader. But what, then, was he? Even those who knew him best had no idea. The painter Christian Schad, whom Serner once called in a letter 'my only and best friend,' was so uncertain about the provenance of Serner's exquisite knowledge of crime milieus and argot that he finally broke down and asked:

I remember that once I asked him the confidential question without further ado. I received a smile and an extensive explanation that culminated in the sharply formulated sentences: 'Must someone who seeks out the most awful environments and has contact with the lowest of men necessarily be part of that milieu and participate in those acts? Must someone who encounters in that milieu [...] the most hideous honesty necessarily feel scandalized by it? Must someone who is disgusted by the hypocrisy and the innate lies everywhere else not feel better there? Must even someone who feels like that necessarily feel good there?'²⁶

In the absence of answers, we are left with questions. Serner's texts are so oddly spellbinding because they really offer nothing else. And so, in sheer self-defence, we spin our own stories—about his texts or his life. Serner the criminal mastermind is certainly the one that had the most traction. Even Christian Schad, who knew him best, was occasionally seduced by it, for myth flourishes in the absence of facts. In 1927, Serner published his *Collected Works*-edition and then wrote no more. 1927 is also the date of his final brief letter to Schad. 44 years after they lost contact, in 1971, Schad became aware that his personal memory was the sum total of historical memory of Walter Serner, who had by then been completely forgotten, and fearing its loss with his own death, he began to write his Serner-memoirs. Much like Serner's own statements on his life, Schad's account amounts to anecdotes and the near-total absence of even the most basic biographical data. Until 1980, when Thomas Milch, the scholar responsible for a very brief Serner-revival in the 1980s, dug up the records and told him, Schad had no idea that Serner had perished in a makeshift gas chamber somewhere near Minsk in 1942. In Schad's memoirs, originally published in 1971 and re-edited in 1980, the author muses idly where Serner might have ended up after the war: perhaps he emigrated to the USA, or maybe he wound up in South America?²⁷ As Schad's widow Bettina states in her afterword, he left the passage unchanged even after Milch told him the awful truth; he did not want Serner's terrible death polluting the memories of his friend. Thus Serner was allowed to live on in Schad's memoirs, even after

Schad knew better. The Walter Serner who defended himself against the myth of Serner the criminal mastermind might have been horrified. The Walter Serner who judiciously withheld from the world even the most basic biographical facts might have approved.

And, indeed, why not? Who wouldn't choose the intriguing witticism of a half-sentence casually flung our way by a criminal in a Serner story over a boring explanation of the same criminal's motives? Who wouldn't prefer Serner's biographical denials, his declaration of what his life *wasn't*, to a tedious year-by-year chronology of where he lived and what he lived on? And who wouldn't treasure the fantasy of Walter Serner living his scandalous life of terrible honesty, perhaps in South America, over the sordid horror of Serner gassed in a modified Volkswagen van?

Intersections are Stories

So where, beyond the coincidences of time and place, is the intersection between the heroes of my book, the sassy Sass brothers and the mysterious Walter Serner, and the hero of my school years, Rabbi Albert Friedlander? They intersect at the point where their stories become prayers, or poetry, in precisely the way described by Friedlander in his introduction to *The Six Days of Destruction*: 'Indifference leads to silence. There must be words for those who care. Ignorance leads to silence. There must be records of past and present cruelties done in the world, so that each generation can remember—not only the evil of the past, but also the glowing goodness, the courage and the decency, which existed in the darkest days.'²⁸

This is the deeper meaning of our stories about the Sass brothers, Berlin's beloved rogues, and our fantasy lives of Walter Serner, the breezy clever crook who could survive even the Holocaust. Our celebration of lovable crooks, our fantasies that they will in the end

elude their killers, are words for those who care. In telling their stories accurately, we keep the record of cruelty that Friedlander called for. By celebrating the rogue's wit and humanity, we evoke a decency that existed even in the darkest days. And by rewriting the rogues' stories, we dream that that glowing goodness might glow more brightly next time.

'Poetry becomes prayer, and fiction becomes fact,' wrote Rabbi Friedlander.²⁹ Let us tell stories, and make it so.

¹ Trust the German language to find the most perfect-yet-intranslatable term for the most appalling circumstances. Imperfect renditions of *totgeschwiegen* (literally: ‘silenced to death’) might include ‘to pretend it never happened’, ‘to keep as quiet as the grave’, or perhaps ‘to keep under wraps’, with all allusions to funeral garb firmly in place.

² Albert H. Friedlander (ed), *Out of the Whirlwind: A Reader of Holocaust Literature* (New York: Schocken, 1976 [orig. ed. 1968]).

³ Susanne Kord, *Lovable Crooks and Loathsome Jews: Antisemitism in German and Austrian Crime Writing Before the World Wars* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2018).

⁴ Basic information about Albert Friedlander’s life is available at the Wikipedia site (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albert_Friedlander), the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust Official Site (<https://www.hmd.org.uk/resource/albert-friedlander/>) and on Encyclopedia.com (<https://www.encyclopedia.com/arts/educational-magazines/friedlander-albert-hoschander-1927-2004>).

⁵ The most extensive account of the Brothers Sass and their exploits is offered by Ekkehard Schwerk, *Die Meisterdiebe von Berlin: Die ‘goldenen Zwanziger’ der Gebrüder Sass* (Berlin: Nishen, 1984); see also Kord, ‘A Tale of Two Thieves: The Case of Franz and Erich Sass (Berlin, 1920s)’, in *Lovable Crooks*, 107-28, on which my remarks in this section are based.

⁶ Conditions described by Gabi Schlag in ‘Ehrenwerte Gauner: Die Meisterdiebe Franz und Erich Sass und die Zwanziger Jahre in Berlin’, *SWR 2: Feature am Sonntag*. Aired August 22, 2010. Screenplay available at <http://www.swr.de/swr2/programm/sendungen/feature/-/id=6632706/property=download/nid=659934/1i0g5mx/swr2-feature-am-sonntag-20100822.pdf> .

⁷ As Klaus Schönberger put it, ‘every bank robbery reminds us that societal conditions are historical and hence alterable, for bank robberies challenge the seemingly natural distribution of societal wealth’ (cited in Schlag’s broadcast).

⁸ Bertolt Brecht, ‘Was ist ein Einbruch in eine Bank gegen die Gründung einer Bank?’ *Die Dreigroschenoper, Ausgewählte Werke in sechs Bänden. Erster Band: Stücke 1* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1997), 267.

⁹ A physical description of the Brothers is offered in Schwerk, *Meisterdiebe*, 22, and *Berliner Volks-Zeitung*, 19 February 1929, 2.

¹⁰ For a good account of the crime scene in the Weimar Republic and the early Nazi-years, see Patrick Wagner, *Volksgemeinschaft ohne Verbrecher: Konzeptionen und Praxis der Kriminalpolizei in der Zeit der Weimarer Republik und des Nationalsozialismus* (Hamburg: Christians, 1996).

¹¹ ‘Noch einmal flackerte der Berliner Witz, bezogen auf unsere Meisterdiebe, auf. Wer hat denn den Reichstag angezündet? Natürlich die Brüder SA-SS’ (Schwerk, *Meisterdiebe*, 78).

¹² “‘Wie buchstabiert man Deutschlands bekannteste Verbrecher?’ — Antwort: ‘S-A-S-S’.” Lars Koch, ‘Die Volksgemeinschaft als arischer Tresor: Biopolitischer Terror in Rainer Wolffhardts Fernsehfilm Auf Befehl erschossen—Die Brüder Sass, einst Berlins große Ganoven (1972).’ *Schicht um Schicht behutsam freilegen: Die Regiearbeiten von Rainer Wolffhardt*, ed. Günter Helmes (Hamburg: Igel, 2012), 153-74, the joke quoted on 162.

¹³ In *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Oxford: Benediction Classics, 2009).

¹⁴ This is a suspicion indirectly voiced by Schwerk: in the exceptionally violent NS-regime ‘waren die Gebrüder Sass mit ihren Gaunerstücken, mit ihren Fingerübungen an den Tresoren aufs Ganze gesehen Ausnahmen wie Juwelen unter viel Thalmi’ (*Meisterdiebe*, 45).

¹⁵ Max Fabich published several accounts of his hunt for the Sass brothers in criminalistic journals of the time; see, among others: ‘Geldschränkebrecher’, *Kriminalistik: Monatshefte für die gesamte kriminalistische Wissenschaft und Praxis* 17 (1943): 61-3; ‘Die Straftaten der Gebrüder Saß’, *Kriminalistik* 14 (1940): 85-89; and 15 (1941): 14-17, 64-67,

123-6, and ‘Das Vorleben der Brüder Franz und Erich Sass’, *Kriminalistik* 14 (1940): 37-9.

¹⁶ ‘...Moralisten, deshalb sind sie so selten. Das Merkmal einer echten Gaunerei ist, daß der Gesellschaft auf eine unmoralische Weise eine moralische Lehre erteilt wird... So genießen die echten Gauner ... seit je den Beifall aller Gutgesinnten... Wie glücklich muß man ein Volk schätzen, von Zeit zu Zeit noch einen echten Gauner hervorzubringen...’ Peter Bamm, cited in Schwert, *Meisterdiebe*, 8, italicization original.

¹⁷ ‘Wie unglücklich sind wir! Wie alleingelassen sind wir Gutgesinnten von “echten” Gaunern seit langem. Es gibt sie nicht mehr. Sie sind, weiß der Teufel warum, ausgestorben wie die Maikäfer; Plagegeister ganz gewiß, aber eben auch Pläsier. Und wie eine Gesellschaft auf solche Gauner reagiert, mit ihnen umgeht, spiegelt eben ihre Gesinnung. / Die letzten wirklich echten Gauner kamen in den sogenannten goldenen zwanziger Jahren in Berlin als Gebrüder Sass daher. Seitdem wurde uns Vergleichbares nicht mehr geboten’ (Schwert, *Meisterdiebe*, 8).

¹⁸ To date: Paul Gurk, *Tresoreinbruch. Roman* (Darmstadt: Agora, 1981 [orig. 1935]); films: *Banktresor 713*, TV-film, dir. Werner Klingler, 1957; *Auf Befehl erschossen—Die Brüder Sass, einst Berlins grosse Ganoven*, TV-film, dir. Rainer Wolffhardt, 1972; *Sass*, feature film, dir. Carlo Rota, 2001.

¹⁹ My remarks in this section are based on my ‘Farcical Criminals or Tragic Victims (1926-1939)’, *Lovable Crooks*, 191-230, particularly 197-205. Serner was re-discovered in the 1980s, after the re-edition of his 1927 *Collected Works*-edition in 1984. On Serner’s post-

war reception, see Thomas Milch, 'Eine kuriose Karriere. Zur Rezeption Walter Serners nach 1945', *Der Pfiff aufs Ganze: Studien zu Walter Serner*, ed. Andreas Puff-Trojan and Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler (Vienna: Sonderzahl, 1998), 98-108. Serner has attracted most scholarly attention as a Dada-theorist: see the works by Alfons Backes-Haase ('Über topographische Anatomie, psychischen Luftwechsel und Verwandtes.' *Walter Serner—Autor der 'Letzten Lockerung'*, Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 1989), Jörg Drews ('Alles in strahlender—Unordnung. Anlässlich der Mitteilung einiger Briefe und Dokumente zum Leben Walter Serners', *Protokolle* vol. 1 [1980]: 154-60; "Hinter jedem Satz hat man ein wildes Gelächter unmißverständlich anzudeuten." Zur geistigen Existenz Walter Serners', *manuskripte* 89/90 [25. Jg., 1985]: 149-53; "Der Schluck um die Axe: Der Pfiff aufs Ganze". Fragmente eines Kommentars zu Walter Serners *Letzte Lockerung manifest dada'*, in Puff-Trojan and Schmidt-Dengler (eds), *Der Pfiff aufs Ganze*, 10-20); Andreas Puff-Trojan (*Wien/Berlin/Dada: Reisen mit Dr. Serner*, Vienna: Sonderzahl, 1993); Jonas Peters ('Dem Kosmos einen Tritt!' *Die Entwicklung des Werks von Walter Serner und die Konzeption seiner dadaistischen Kulturkritik*, Frankfurt/M.: Peter Lang, 1995), and the essays assembled by Andreas Puff-Trojan and Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler in *Der Pfiff aufs Ganze*. Serner's 'autobiographical' documents and the posthumous tribute to Serner by Christian Schad (*Relative Realitäten: Erinnerungen um Walter Serner*, Augsburg: Maroverlag, 1999) are highly illuminating with regard to Serner's creative attitudes, but say little about his biography.

²⁰ On Serner's crime stories, see the works by Ulrich Hackenbruch (*Sachliche Intensitäten: Walter Serners 'erotische Kriminalgeschichten' in ihrer Epoche*, Frankfurt/M.: Peter Lang, 1996), André Bucher (*Repräsentation als Performanz: Studien zur Darstellungspraxis der literarischen Moderne [Walter Serner, Robert Müller, Hermann Ungar, Joseph Roth und Ernst Weiss]*, Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2004, 88-124), and Puff-Trojan, *Wien/Berlin/Dada*, 244-65.

²¹ Walter Serner, 'Lampenfieber', in *Erotische Kriminalgeschichten*, online version available at <https://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/erotische-kriminalgeschichten-6880/9>.

²² For Serner's biography, see Peters, *'Dem Kosmos einen Tritt!'*, 31-2, Puff-Trojan, *Wien/Berlin/Dada*, 12-4, and Christian Schad, *Relative Realitäten*.

²³ 'Seine Adresse werden Sie nicht in Literaturkalendern, wohl aber bei der Kriminalpolizei erfahren können. Er ist internationaler Hochstapler im allergrößten Stil. In seinen Büchern steht nichts, was nicht gelebt wurde. Sie können dies alles ruhig sagen. Herr Serner pfeift darauf. Er bereist gegenwärtig den Orient als Besitzer großer, öffentlicher Häuser in Argentinien' (Theodor Lessing, 'Der Maupassant der Kriminalistik', *Prager Tagblatt* No. 109 [May 10, 1925]). On Lessing's article, see, among others, Puff-Trojan, *Wien/Berlin/Dada*, 265.

²⁴ 'Bordellnaturen'; 'den grauenerregenden Abgrund zwischen dem Menschen und dem Juden' (Alfred Rosenberg, 'Der internationale Mädchenhandel', *Völkischer Beobachter* No. 84 [July 8, 1925]).

²⁵ 'Herr Steegemann hat behauptet, in meinen Büchern stünde nichts, das nicht erlebt wäre. Das ist richtig. Hinter jeder Zeile von mir steht Gesehenes oder Gehörtes und gar oft am eigenen Leibe Erfahrenes. [...] wer den Verbrecher und die Arbeit der Polizei so gründlich kennt wie ich, der müßte entweder Verbrecher sein oder ein feindlicher Geheimpolizist. [...] Der Umstand, daß ich gänzlich unvorbestraft bin und nichts Handgreifliches gegen mich vorliegt, wäre demnach lediglich der Beweis meiner Verbrecher-Überlegenheit. Das ist schmeichelhaft, aber nicht wahr. / Wahr ist vielmehr, daß ich niemals Zuhälter war, niemals internationaler Hochstapler, niemals Mädchenhändler. Es wäre mir ein Leichtes, nachzuweisen, wovon ich bis auf den heutigen Tag gelebt habe. Und es ist geradezu ein tragikomischer Witz, daß die wenigen Irregularitäten meines Lebenslaufes der Zwang

verursacht hat, den die Polizei über mich zu verhängen für gut befand.' Serner, 'Theodor Lessing und der Mädchenhändler', *Karlsbader Tagblatt* No. 149 (July 4, 1926), 98-9.

²⁶ 'Ich erinnere mich, ihm einmal ohne alle Umschweife die Vertrauensfrage gestellt zu haben. Lächelnd bekam ich eine ausführliche Erklärung, die in den scharf resultierenden Sätzen gipfelte: "Muß, wer die furchtbarsten Milieus aufsucht und mit den niedrigsten Menschen Umgang hat, dazugehören und mittun? Muß, wer dort das 'offene Tier' findet und die gräßlichste Aufrichtigkeit, darüber empört sein? Muß, wen anderswo die Heuchelei anwidert und die angewachsene Verlogenheit, sich dort nicht wohler fühlen? Muß, wer so ist, sich deshalb dort wohl fühlen?"' Christian Schad, *Relative Realitäten*, 7-8.

²⁷ Christian Schad, *Relative Realitäten*, 108-9.

²⁸ Albert H. Friedlander, 'Introduction', in Elie Wiesel and Albert H. Friedlander, *The Six Days of Destruction: Meditations Towards Hope* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1988), xx-xxi.

²⁹ Friedlander, 'Introduction' to *The Six Days of Destruction*, xxi.