CHARLES UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

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Programme: Modern History

Erich Heller and Bohemian Jewish Exiles in Anglo-American Academia

Dissertation

2024 **Martina Frommer Kerlová**

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Dissertation Thesis

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Abstract

My project examines the life and work of Erich Heller, a literary critic and scholar of Austrian and German literature and philosophy. Erich Heller described the situation of the German (and European) society of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as one where the spiritual guidance by God was lost, and he depicted the epoch that stretched from Goethe to Nietzsche to Rilke and Thomas Mann as one defined by an irreversible tendency toward destruction. For the critical period of two decades of post–World War II recovery, when the world demanded an explanation about what happened to Austria, Germany, and Europe, Heller offered answers that resonated on both sides of the Atlantic. Born into a German-Jewish family in the borderlands of Habsburg Bohemia, Heller graduated from Prague's German University, only to be forced to flee the Nazi invasion. He found refuge in Britain before moving ultimately to the United States, where he taught for two decades at Northwestern University. My dissertation scrutinizes Heller's intellectual development through his voluntary and forced migrations and traces his intellectual sources, for example, in a greater extent, the life and work of a German language philosopher from Bohemia, Paul Roubiczek, who taught extramurally at Cambridge and published several books inspired by Jan Hus and Immanuel Kant, most notably, *Thinking in Opposites*. Heller's life and thought are examined in two main contexts: that of his generation of Bohemian-born émigrés who ultimately became influential in exile, and of the postwar American atmosphere in higher education, as well as the role of German-speaking scholars within it. This study is primarily also a contribution to the study of the lives and work of German-speaking anti-fascist exiles from Czechoslovakia.

Abstrakt

Erich Heller a čeští židovští akademici v anglo-americkém exilu

Můj projekt zkoumá život a dílo Ericha Hellera, germanisty a teoretika německé literatury a filozofie, a jeho krajana z habsburské a československé Prahy meziválečného období, filozofa Paula Roubiczka. Ve své seminální studii *The Disinherited Mind* (Vyděděný duch) Heller popsal situaci německé (a evropské) společnosti 19. a počátku 20. století. Stav této společnosti je charakterizován ztrátou duševních hodnot v souvislosti se ztrátou duchovního vedení Bohem. Epochu, která se zahrnuje dobu od Goethe a Nietzsche až k Rilkovi a Thomasi Mannovi, vykreslil jako epochu definovanou nezvratným sklonem k destrukci. Pro kritické období dvou desetiletí obnovy po Druhé světové válce, kdy svět požadoval vysvětlení příčin této katastrofy, Heller poskytl odpovědi, které našly silnou odezvu na obou stranách Atlantiku. Ve své práci se věnuji Hellerově myšlenkovému vývoji v závislosti na exilové zkušenosti, i v dětství a v mládí zakotvených hodnotách, Hellerově přehodnocení německých literárních hodnot, a přijetí jeho interpretace jak akademickou tak laickou veřejností jak v Německu, tak v anglo-americkém prostředí. Práce se věnuje rovněž vztahu s bratrem Paulem Hellerem, s přítelem a kolegou, německy píšícím filozofem Paulem Roubiczkem, který externě vyučoval na Cambridgské univerzitě a vydal několik knih inspirovaných Janem Husem a Immanuelem Kantem (*Thinking in Opposites)*. Vedle těchto hlavních zdrojů inspirace se práce věnuje i širšímu intelektuálnímu okruhu, který Hellera formoval. Předložená studie je především příspěvkem do studia životů a tvorby německy mluvícího antifašistického exilu z Československa. Do jisté míry přispívá také k situaci poválečného vývoje Germanistiky jako akademické disciplíny mimo Německo, zejména ve Spojených státech amerických.

Keywords

German literature, WWII exile/émigrés, Bohemia, Sudeten German, Jewish, Northwestern University, Erich Heller, Paul Roubiczek

Klíčová slova

Německá literatura, česká exilová tvorba psaná německy, německá menšina v Československu, židovská menšina v Československu, Erich Heller, Paul Roubiczek

Length of the work

473 789 characters (without abstracts and bibliography).

Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis in progress is not being used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague Martina F. Kerlová

July 9, 2024

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INTRODUCTION

The status and understanding of one's homeland, identity, and belonging is undoubtedly challenged in times of open societal conflicts—war, revolutions, and nation building, for example. Sometimes they crystalize new loyalties that were not present before. And sometimes from them completely new concepts for understanding oneself and one's identity emerge. The experience of being a refugee can drive one's disorientation to the dimension of the absurd. Often, personal writing or another form of creative nonverbal art seems to have the capacity to be entrusted with documenting such dramatic human encounters—ones that would otherwise be lost. And then, when a good amount of time has passed, from a distance we ask the question, we pose the demand stemming from the practicality of our lives in times of peace: What does it mean to us to read literature conceived in times so very different from ours, and what can literature do to help us comprehend or even prevent the recurrence of what the writing in front us conveys? This is one of the special roles of literary critics: to help interpret the writing and look for answers. Where the writers could simply add another twist to the story or to the transcript of what conscience dictated, critics cannot. They stand behind answers, not questions, no matter how deep and inspiring. Literary critics and scholars condense the experience of those who lived through and recorded their struggle into a more easily graspable and practical understanding of a period that might not have been captured otherwise in factual historical records. Critics and literary scholars translate the history of human emotions. When literary critics themselves experience exile and then critique works of authors who were uprooted in various ways, the result may present the very essence of modern life removed from its origins.

Exile as a state of being is dialectic. It exists between the stable and safe feeling of belonging and familiarity, set against the unstable, transient, extraterritorial, and

daunting. One defines the other, and it is this tense mutual relation, this space between, the isolation and separation from what once seemed to be the permanent anchor when life began, that either destroys the uprooted life or provides it with intense creative power attached to the reestablished life. It redefines everything—the past, present, and future.

I present a study of German-speaking critics and intellectuals originating from Bohemia, especially Erich Heller and Paul Roubiczek. Both, in different ways, were very familiar with the conditional mood of life, especially life lived in Central Europe of the twentieth century. This essay is not simply a biography of one individual, but rather an examination of possible ways of coping with uprooting and seeking reestablishment. It is also a study of a crisis, of subjects withing it who realize it, and those who do not recognize the crisis. Facing moral dilemmas is inherent to any crisis, and so it was for both Heller brothers, Paul Roubiczek, and Thomas Mann who shared the experience of uprooting and recorded his struggle with finding his place amidst moral challenges. I hope that my work will contribute to the studies of the continuity of the Bohemian multifaceted cultural life after 1939 and its impact abroad. Heller and Roubiczek were inspirations for each other, and my last chapter is devoted to the work of Paul Roubiczek and his influence on Heller's intellectual development. The work I present falls within several academic contexts:

- Literature written in the German language in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in both Germany and the Habsburg lands;
- Literary studies of German writers, most prominently Thomas Mann, Friedrich Nietzsche, Franz Kafka, Rainer Maria Rilke, Karl Kraus, and Franz Werfel;
- The context of exiled German-speaking intellectuals from both Germany and Central Europe;
- The cultural and/or political loyalties of German-speaking intellectuals originating in Bohemia;

- German Studies abroad and the role of German critics exiled from the Habsburg lands;
- The experience of Bohemian Jews in exile; and
- The cultural transmittance between Europe and the anglophone world during and after World War II (hereafter WWII).

My study of Erich Heller, his sources and circles while in Czechoslovakia and later abroad, will likely be useful for scholars interested in the fields outlined above. Not only has a thorough study of Heller, a native of Chomutov, (or Roubiczek, a native of Prague), not been done, the post-WWII work and achievements of German or multilingual thinkers exiled from Bohemia need attention in general. My study of German and multilingual thinkers exiled from Bohemia who left written records in Western host countries complements those of thinkers already more prominently known, such as Peter Demetz, H. G. Adler, and Vilém Flusser, and fills another gap in the mosaic made up of those who fled or were forcibly transferred elsewhere after Hitler's seizure of power in Germany; during Hitler's occupation of Czechoslovakia; during the post-WWII expulsion of Germans from Czechoslovakia; after the Stalinist 1950s; and after the Soviet invasion in 1968. If they lived long enough, many of these people faced multiple transfers and/or exile based on their Jewishness, Germanness, or both (e.g., Kurt Krolop, E. E. Kisch, Lenka Reinerová, and Eduard Goldstücker, to name a few of the most prominent of these individuals).

Three overreaching premises guided my research. First, how was the experience of German-speaking Bohemian émigrés from Hitler's Europe reflected in their work. I discuss the path to success of literary critic Erich Heller, his brother, Paul Heller, who became a clinical professor of Medicine at University of Illinois in Chicago, and Paul Roubiczek, a publisher, philosopher, and literary critic from Prague. Several other émigrés from their circles who crossed paths with them have space in the narrative as

well, including the prominent German writer and anti-Nazi activist abroad, Thomas Mann. Both Heller brothers eventually secured highly successful careers in the American Midwest. Philosopher Paul Roubiczek admirably built and maintained his academic livelihood and teaching career, even without a terminal academic degree, in England at the University of Cambridge. The second theme fits the life stories and histories of both Erich Heller and Paul Roubiczek in the mosaic of the specific context of Czech German-Jewish literature and literary criticism that originated in Bohemia or Austria-Hungary and continued in their exile. The third theme probes how the chronicles of Erich Heller carried on in the context of postwar academic life in the United States, conditioned by the post-Holocaust reformation and restructuring of German Studies and the escalation of the East-West conflict in the 1950s and 1960s. The postwar conditions also determined the second half of life, and the literary second life in exile, of Thomas Mann, Heller's foremost and most prominent subject of academic interest. In my study I compare both men's intellectual development and coming to terms with their heritage.

Within these three themes I investigate Erich Heller's rise to fame. Fame is all that Heller could evoke during his post-emigration life. Yet this fame started fading in the 1970s, and one of my original research questions when I discovered his legacy was, "Why?" What conditions and new findings brought the relevance of Heller's interpretations of the writings of Thomas Mann, Franz Kafka, Rainer Maria Rilke, or Karl Kraus to an end? The life stories and successes of some of Heller's contemporaries invested in German letters and thought (J. P. Stern, Vilém Flusser, René Wellek)—contemporaries who in part shared the experience of exile, forced or voluntary—serve as comparisons. While Vilém Flusser's and H. G. Adler's legacies have undergone immense revival in recent years, Heller's work has not.

When attempting to answer the question about what role the cultural and intellectual heritage of Bohemia played in the path to success for Heller, a slight variation of the question emerged: Was the success Heller, and to an extent also Roubiczek, lived through conditioned precisely by the fact that they spoke German as opposed to Czech? This query regarding language also returns my questioning to politics: How were exiles and especially German-speaking exiles in the United States affected by the swings in the American politics, and what role did Heller's own political experience and identification play? How did the major academic arguments Heller developed fit into his own political convictions, and even into his writing about seemingly nonpolitical literary questions? In the end, what resonated more with his audience and employers—his own (non)political charismatic public persona, or his writings? To borrow Thomas Mann's focus in his early deliberations, how political is the unpolitical?

Along with the (un)political, both Heller and Roubiczek grappled with reconciling the religious ideologies of Christianity and Judaism with the events of the twentieth century. How did their struggle affect their personal values and intellectual thought? How important for them was faith in exile? Although both Heller and Roubiczek were German speakers, Roubiczek's inspirational sources (especially Jan Hus) were far more Bohemian than those of Heller, who adhered firmly to German literature and thought, and Austrian literature written in German. This feature corresponds with the fact that Roubiczek grew up in Prague and Heller in the borderlands. How significant for future life in exile could have been one's original identification with the culture of the majority in comparison to having also been attached, to some degree, to the cultural values of a minority? The intellectual development of Vilém Flusser serves as a comparative.

Jewish parents living in larger cities in Bohemia and Moravia or in the borderlands at the beginning of the twentieth century continued sending their children to German schools and so created the last generation of German-speaking Jewish intellectuals, who either perished during the Nazi occupation or survived in exile. The coexistence of Germans, Czechs, and Jews in the Habsburg crown lands, and later in Czechoslovakia, has been studied extensively, as has the period of Nazi occupation, WWII, and the Holocaust, as well as the immediate period after WWII. The latter included the expulsion of Germans, retribution against the Nazi Germans and Czech collaborators, and the consolidation of Communist power in Czechoslovakia.

Through my study, following the lives of a limited number of individuals who were forced to leave their physical homes, I aim to contribute to the body of scholarly work on the demise of the multicultural environment of Prague and Bohemia/Moravia that helped define or, more accurately, redefine modern German and European writing. The names of most of those who survived and went into exile are included in the anthology edited by Werner Röder and Herbert A. Strauss: *Biographisches Handbuch der deutschsprachigen Emigration nach 1933–1945*, published in Munich in 1999.

With respect to German literature and the academic field of German Studies abroad, specifically after WWII, my study of Erich Heller contributes to the history of education, especially in the American Midwest, where German Studies have a relatively long history that often closely reflects the political environment and development in both Germany and the United States.[1] My study of Heller's sources also sheds new light on his actual critical engagement with German literature, especially with writings of Thomas Mann.

[1] Ceclia Applegate and Frank Trommler, "The Project of German Studies: Disciplinary Strategies and Intellectual Practices," *German Studies Review* 39, no. 3 (2016): 471–92.

The broadest context in which a study of Heller should be considered is that of exile—exile from Hitler, German and Central European émigrés, or exile as a sociological or psychological concept in general. A few themes live on in literature; one of them is the motif of the lost home. As a concept, a "homeland" is where humans typically feel self-determining and confident of themselves, where they can form valid opinions and be sure of them and of themselves. One's homeland gives a person, naturally, the confidence to act. Although Heller's life story perfectly fits this concept, his writing appears to affirm the opposite, and Heller himself claimed that he did not experience the perception of sudden loss of home and/or disorientation, even though he left the country of his childhood and young adulthood at the age of 28.

As an author and as an individual, Heller found confidence in being an outsider and observer. He claimed to possess a comparative, not emotionally biased, view from his youth onward, and he built admirable confidence without the security of rootedness. In this regard he came very close again to his compatriot from Prague, Vilém Flusser. Flusser, however, arrived at such a realization and gained confidence in "homelandlessness" only after his nearly perfect world of multicultural, prewar-Prague intellectual circles collapsed. Flusser offers an interesting parallel experience, which is also reflected in his writing, and I plan to pursue studying it in the future.

Heller found a home in the literature written in his native language. Paul Roubiczek, a German-writing philosopher from Prague who fought in World War I (hereafter WWI) and subsequently became a pacifist, spent the rest of his life, especially his academic life, trying to come to terms with his aversion to any kind of violence, as well as to his need to resist and fight Hitler's regime and the imperial war in the name of German National Socialism. He found his new home in a self-reformation by following the life of Jesus.

The body of this dissertation is divided into five chapters. The first chapter introduces Heller's life and gives an overview of his career. The second chapter puts Heller's work in the context of German literary criticism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, outlines his views on psychoanalysis, and lays out my thesis that Heller's central theory concerning literary history and history of ideas paralleled the theory of *Sonderweg,* developed by historians. Chapter three explores Heller's subjectivity, written inspirational sources, and contemporary living circles of friends and the cohort that crossed Heller's path in one way or another. It includes connections from his leftist youth and from his deeply conservative later period. Chapter four is dedicated to Erich's relationship with his only brother, Paul Heller, who survived six years in Nazi concentration camps and went on to be a successful hematologist in Chicago, the New World city that became the postwar home to both siblings. Finally, chapter five is dedicated to Erich Heller's oldest contemporary inspirational foundation embodied in his friend and mentor from Prague, Paul Roubiczek, a philosopher in his own right, who witnessed and supported Heller's first steps in British exile and whom Heller continued to visit till Roubiczek's last days of life in Bavarian Gmund am Tegernsee.

STATE OF ART

In the immediate aftermath of WWII, the studies of exile were somewhat naturally in the hands of contemporary historians. Academic literary criticism began at the end of the late 1960s and was initiated by critics of German literature living abroad (e.g., J. Hermand, W. Koepke, and G. Stern). Literary scholars embraced the literature written in exile, and some, ignoring anything written on German soil during National Socialism, even went so far as to declare it the official continuation of the tradition of German literature. By now, the study of exile has become interdisciplinary (it includes the academic fields of psychology, gender studies, culturology, anthropology, etc.), and the new areas of attention reveal connections and interrelations that illuminate parallels to the world we live in today, where more and more people are displaced and uprooted. The experience of émigrés and exile became an extraordinarily stimulating one not only in the general questions of (German) literature but also in nearly all related disciplines within the humanities and social sciences (including generational studies, mental health, etc.).

Exile studies in the first couple of decades after the war had primarily focused on famous nationals and the aspects of exile (trauma, alienation, isolation, difficulties of acculturation, etc.). They had been guided largely by authors' own statements, letters, and autobiographies. The national or diasporic approach lasted almost until the 1990s, when the first scholars started to apply a transnational approach[2] and focused on various sociopolitical formations. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Wulf Koepke and Michael Winkler laid the grounds for studies of the politicization of literature in exile.[3]

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[2] Akhil Gupta, "The Song of the Nonaligned World: Transnational Identities and the Reinscription of Space in Late Capitalism," in *Cultural Anthropology* 7, no. 1: *Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference* (New York: Wiley, 1992), 63–79.
[3] Wulf Koepke and Michael Winkler, *Exilliteratur 1935–1945* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1989).

The 1990s marked the end of the era of exclusively national perspectives in theoretical approach to studying Exile, proclaiming a dissolution of national differences. In the following three decades scholarship explored new approaches and methods rationalizing that exile and migration are concepts that have been part of humanity ever since the earliest civilizations. In the last decade, transnational studies have also been replaced in part by a more fitting approach, namely, a transcultural one, because transnationality is linked to the existence of the nation-state and therefore has clear political contours. Precisely for this reason, in my study of Erich Heller and Paul Roubiczek, exiles from Hitler, I consider the transnational research perspective useful, because it was exactly their national belonging, next to the religious, linguistic and ethnic backgrounds that determined their fate during imperialistic German nationalism.

From several perspectives, I bring the connection between literature and transnationality into focus. Besides exile, other examples where concepts and rhetoric of the transnational approach still find expression are postcolonial studies, or memory.[4] The transnational approach remains a key category of literary studies in the field of tensions between political, economic and aesthetic dimensions.

The newest approaches utilize a wide range of methods and concepts applicable to the transnational and literary problems. The construction of the national and the mechanisms of the formation of the "collective body" are theorized, and still new fields and concepts are being developed: for example, translational humanities,[5] transcultural

[4] Doerte Bischoff and Susanne Komfort-Hein, *Handbuch Literatur & Transnationalität* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019).
[5] Doris Bachmann-Medick, "Introduction: The Translational Turn," *Translation Studies* 2, no. 1 (2009): 2–16.

studies, multilingualism in literature,[6] institutional research or transregional and transareal literary studies.[7]

In this study, I use transcultural approach (critically viewing Heller's Eurocentric narratives), and in part institutional approach when setting Heller's career in America into the narrower context of his employing academic institution and the interplay of political undercurrents.

Scholars interested in works written by German-speaking exiles from Hitler's Europe will find a vast body of secondary literature exploring the commonalities of the intellectual elite that was almost in its entirety forced into exile. Hardly any writers of worldwide reputation were left. This body of work gives a clear picture of the enormous volume of literature considered "German literature in Exile." The German Exile Archive (in Frankfurt and Leipzig) holds reference collections with indices and further bibliographic information to the studies of the currents in German literature abroad. It includes authors who were émigrés to all destinations because they wrote principally about Germany. It also includes all representative groups with distinct backgrounds: liberals, Jews, Socialists, Communists, and mavericks.

In the successive waves of professionals leaving Germany and occupied Central Europe in the 1930s and 1940s, heading to the coasts of England and the United States were those who included America in their dreams and those for whom having to leave the old continent equaled an apocalypse. In exile some thrived artistically, and their careers took off—for example, Mies van der Rohe. Others became depressed and silent. Many returned to Europe after the war, including Thomas Mann and Bertolt Brecht. And many took root at universities around the United States. As a group, the intellectuals,

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[6] Esther Kilchmann. "Mehrsprachigkeit und deutsche Literatur," *Zeitschrift für interkulturelle Germanistik* 3, no. 2 (2012): 11–18.
[7] Ottmar Ette, *TransArea: A Literary History of Globalization* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016).

often in their midlife years, were the least adaptable one. Many sought out communities of the like and tried to recreate their German circles abroad. A number of recent scholars have examined such circles, especially around Lion Feuchtwanger, Bertolt Brecht, and Thomas Mann.[8]

Most intellectuals who were forced to flee Hitler and ended up in the United States never envisioned their lives as taking place on the North American continent. This lack resulted in some difficulties for integrating into their new society and coming to terms with their limited ability to comment on the situation in both their home countries and new host countries. If not immersed in their own psychological or existential difficulties, many émigrés engaged in very intensive network development and communication with other intellectuals in a similar situation. They did not feel as though they could fit in the cultural sphere of their new home or into the heritage groups that still treasured their second identity. The most prominent German writers, such as Thomas Mann, Lion Feuchtwanger, and Franz Werfel, were fortunate enough to settle together and form a community either on the West Coast (California) or the East Coast (New York, Vermont, and Washington state).

This focus on the ways of integration overlaps largely with the geographical categorization of exile. Different countries enabled different networking connections and possibilities. Several scholarly studies (e.g., that of Stephan O'Dochartaigh) have concentrated on such émigré communities and their interactions with the culture of the host country, in addition to studying the ways in which they formed coalitions and collaborated. These networks aided them in integrating more successfully into the host

[8] See, e.g., Pól O'Dochartaigh and Alexander Stephan, *Refuge and Reality: Feuchtwanger and the European Émigrés in California* (Amsterdam: Brill, 2005).
Helga Schreckenberger, *Networks of Refugees from Nazi Germany: Continuities, Reorientations, and Collaborations in Exile (*Boston: BRILL, 2016).

country's environment. Yet the networks also isolated these communities. The research that focuses on networking connects the National Socialist exile to other forms of displacement in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as well.

German-American studies scrutinized the history of German-American communities, the lifestyle and history of school, and churches.[9] The histories of the new émigrés from Hitler's Europe—about three-quarters of a million of them—would have to wait to become part of German-American studies over time. Yet groups not easily fitting into the German mainstream, mainly Jews but also German-speaking Central Europeans (from the Habsburg lands, as was Erich Heller), deepened the questions about immigration studies. Scholars interested in ethnologically, religiously, professionally, and individually distinctive persons or groups found homes in interdisciplinary studies.[10]

Refugees/émigrés kept looking back at their home countries and the number of entries in their diaries, and later also in correspondence when communication was reestablished, and these sources offer considerable material to be explored. Historians have described the problems of migration and remigration—the problems of German-Jewish and German-American identity in Germany and the United States. Max Paul Friedman argued that German and German-Jewish émigrés acted as transmitters of American protest culture and that they were prominent in the German 1960s through the writings of émigré authors such as Max Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse.[11] The American New Left, with its cosmopolitanism, acted as a model for German student activists in 1968.

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[9] Philip Vilas Bohlman and Otto Holzapfel, *Land Without Nightingales: Music in the Making of German-America* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002).
[10] Mark K. Bauman, "On German American and American Jewish History," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 29, no. 1 (2009): 67–71.
[11] Max Paul Friedman, "Émigrés as Transmitters of American Protest Culture," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 13, no. 1 (2014): 87–98.

Many well-known intellectuals forced into American exile successfully continued their careers by writing in their native language and using translating services. New research pays attention to the linguistic reeducation[12] of those who strove to master English-language publishing as a stepping stone to securing a position in the growing sphere of American academia. The rise of English to its current position of global prominence as the language of intellectual discourse was already well underway.

Scholars interested in women writing in exile aim to correct the masculine image of a (Jewish/German) European intellectual émigré.[13] Their writing highlights the experiences and roles of female émigrés with or without their own careers to reconfigure the traditional dominant image of a masculine intellectual or economic émigré. They explore the supportive roles of female home keepers, earners, and, ultimately, the major forces in the integration and acculturation processes. The studies of more prominent female writers combine traditional and new approaches, for example, new scholarship about Else Lasker-Schüler, Nelly Sachs, and Anna Seghers.[14]

Erich Heller's roots in the Habsburg lands point also to the position of Austrian literature as one written in the German language. It has been treated by some scholars inclusively as part of German literature, while others have fought persistently to establish its own place in exile studies. From a political perspective, the case for a

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[12] Spencer Hawkins, "The English of Exile," *Chronotopos: A Journal of Translation History* 2, nos. 1–2 (2020): n.p.

[13] Svetlana Averkina, Angelika Kalinina, and Tatiana Suchareva, "The German Literature in American Exile—Great Writers and Their Wives: Perspectives from Russian Scholars," *SHS Web of Conferences* 55 (2018): 4018.

[14] Ursula Töller, "Nelly Sachs: Eine literarhistorische Verortung," *Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik* 28, no. 112 (1998): 134–40.
Hajo Jahn, ed., *Das Lied der Emigrantin: 12. Almanach aus Anlass des XII. Else Lasker-Schüler-Forums vom 12.15. Oktober 2017 in Ascona, der "Republik der Heimatlosen" im Schatten des Monte Verità, mit einer Dokumentation über die "Schülerakte Paul Walden."* (Wuppertal: Peter Hammer Verlag, 2018).
Birgit Maier-Katkin, *Silence and Acts of Memory: A Postwar Discourse on Literature, History, Anna Seghers, and Women in the Third Reich* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2007).
Jennifer Miller Hoyer, *"The Space of Words": Exile and Diaspora in the Works of Nelly Sachs* (Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2014).

national Austrian exile literature was strongest in the 1980s and involved a struggle with the definition of "Austrian literature" (*Österreichische Exilbibliothek im Literaturhaus*). Helmut Pfanner argued that a large percentage of the German-language writers (about one-third) who fled Hitler were Austrians by virtue of their birth or acquired citizenship. But how much they felt distinctly Austrian, Czech, or Hungarian is reflected only in their writing.[15] It certainly brought advantages, however, if they referred to themselves as *das Österreichische Exil*, thus separating themselves politically from the tainted Germans. Heller experienced this phenomenon firsthand and did not hesitate to take advantage of it.

From the cohort of Bohemian intellectuals who were forced to exile, there were several who achieved influential positions in German Studies in anglophone academia. Among them were Germanist and literary critic J. P. Stern; philosopher Paul Roubiczek; writer, sociologist, and philosopher H. G. Adler; historian Peter Demetz; and literary critic and journalist H. C. Weisskopf. In a special way, the contributions and influence of the groundbreaking work of René Wellek, a product of Central European philological tradition and a true founder of the field of comparative literature, cannot be overlooked, even though he arrived abroad by invitation, not by force, and coincidentally also when WWII broke out.

Another, comparative cohort presents Bohemian intellectuals who dispersed during their exile from Hitler's Europe to various geographic destinations, but not to the anglophone world; these individuals include, for example, Vilém Flusser, who went to Brazil; E. E. Kisch who went to Palestine, as did Louis Fürnberg; and Lenka Reinerová, who traveled to France, Morocco, and Mexico. Some of these left-leaning intellectuals returned to their home country after 1945, only to be forced into another exile (inner or

[15] Helmut F. Pfanner, *Exile in New York: German and Austrian Writers after 1933* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983).

geographical) after February 1948. To this group belong, among others: writer, journalist, and translator Lenka Reinerová; literary critic Kurt Krolop; journalist Franz Carl Weisskopf; writer, poet, and journalist Louis Fürnberg; and Germanist Eduard Goldstücker. Egon Erwin Kisch died in 1948 while drafting his work about the new Czechoslovakia. The Holocaust survivor H. G. Adler fled Czechoslovakia in 1947 for London and escaped the Communist takeover. There he authored twenty-six books on history, sociology, philosophy, and poetry—among them his foundational work on Holocaust studies, published in 1955 in German and translated in 2017 into English.[16] Veronika Tuckerová has written about Eduard Goldstücker,[17] Peter Filkins has translated Adler's major works and wrote a successful monograph about Adler.[18] Ulrike Robeck's recently published book about Kisch shows an interest in rediscovering the journalist, who currently has been receiving less attention in the literary world.[19] On the other hand, Vilém Flusser's writing has been experiencing an immense explosion of interest, mainly in French and German academia, and Flusser's own work is being newly edited and republished.[20] Kurt Krolop has also found a well-deserved place in history, as honored through the establishment of the Kurt Krolop Forschungsstelle für deutschböhmische Literatur (established in 2015), and also seen interest in his writing.[21] Research conducted and published by other literary scholars and writers has often

[16] H. G. Adler, *Theresienstadt 1941–1945: Das Antlitz einer Zwangsgemeinschaft* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1955) [*Theresienstadt 1941–1945: The Face of an Enforced Community*, edited by Amy Loewenhaar-Blauweiss, translated by Belinda Cooper (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017)].
[17] Veronika Tuckerová, "Reading Kafka, Writing Vita: The Trials of the Kafka Scholar Eduard Goldstücker," New German Critique 42, no. 1 (2015): 129–61. https://doi.org/10.1215/0094033X-2824249.
[18] Peter Filkins, *H. G. Adler: A Life in Many Worlds* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).
[19] Ulrike Robeck, *Egon Erwin Kisch auf der* "*Vaterland*"*: Ein Versuch zum Verständnis der Heizer-reportage* (Oberhausen: ATHENA-Verlag, 2011).
[20] Vilém Flusser and Rodrigo Maltez Novaes, *Communicology: Mutations in Human Relations?* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2022).
[21] Kurt Krolop and Klaas-Hinrich Ehlers, *Brücken Nach Prag: Deutschsprachige Literatur im kulturellen Kontext der Donaumonarchie und der Tschechoslowakei—Festschrift Für Kurt Krolop Zum 70. Geburtstag* (Frankfurt: P. Lang, 2000).

focused on the reception of literature written before exile, that is, in the period of multilingual cultural output, and the reception (or the absence) of it in Czechoslovakia during the Communist era (Kubíček, Denemarková, Turek, Petrbok, Šámal). Marek Nekula explored the multilingual roots in Kafka's life and work.[22]

The Institute of Czech Literature of the Czech Academy of Sciences founded its Germano-Bohemist section in 2017 as part of the Department of 19th-Century Literature, and its scholars build on the foundations of research on German-language literature from the Czech lands developed during the 1960s at the Institute of Languages and Literatures, Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, and research on Czech literature. Other scholarly institutions also engage in scholarship about exile from Hitler's Protectorate, including the Institute for the Study of Literature; the above-mentioned Kurt Krolop Center for German Literature in Bohemia (Prague, Charles University); the Centre for German Moravian Literature (Faculty of Arts, Palacký University of Olomouc); the Adalbert Stifter Association in Munich; Collegium Carolinum Munich; and Bohemicum Regensburg-Passau.

Beyond geographical or functional societal communities, thematic categorization allows for a narrower focus. What dominantly defined a thematic approach for a long time was the imaginary measure of success and the émigrés' contribution to American thought, either as a measurable or imagined impact they made in their host country or worldwide. Among German-speaking refugees seeking shelter in the United States were already accomplished intellectuals and others who soon would be so. Many of those who succeeded eventually transformed American architecture, art, science, technology, and political thought, especially in exact scientific disciplines and especially in the case of German-Jewish émigrés, thus proving that Germany and Austria dramatically boosted

[22] Lena Dorn, Marek Nekula, and Václav Smyčka, *Zwischen Nationalen und Transnationalen Erinnerungsnarrativen in Zentaleuropa* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020).

America's scientific powers; most prominent of these individuals was Albert Einstein.[23] The list of German-heritage scientists is very long. But even in the humanities the great contributions to American political thought after WWII, namely, by Hannah Arendt and Leo Strauss, have been abundantly studied. In literature, the power of influence and/or genius is less evident, but a few made their names known to the wide public nevertheless: Thomas Mann, Lion Feuchtwanger, Bertolt Brecht, and to a lesser extent also Franz Werfel are among them. Franz Kafka became iconic as a post-WWII subject of literary research.

Historians have done much research on the beginnings of the cultural multilingual coexistence and traced the demise of this environment, including the situation of Bohemian Jewry and anti-Semitism. My research connects to the proven work of Kateřina Čapková, Hillel Kieval, and Michal Frankl among others who studied the multiethnic struggles at the turn of the century and the period between the wars. Čapková studied Bohemian Jewry and the ways this group's national identity was established in Bohemia, primarily between WWI and WWII.[24] Ota Konrád and Rudolf Kučera analyzed the inevitability of a conflict, considering the population of the hinterland as an active subject that decisively shaped the outcomes of the war.[25] Kieval went even deeper and studied the history of Jews in Bohemia and Moravia from the Enlightenment to the beginning of the first Czechoslovak republic and their struggle when linguistic nationalism took root in Bohemia.[26] Michal Frankl researched the movement of refugees and governmental policies in the years preceding the beginning of

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[23] Petra Moser, Alessandra Voena, and Fabian Waldinger, "German Jewish Émigrés and US Invention," *American Economic Review* 104, no. 10 (2014): 3222–55.
[24] Kateřina Čapková, *Czechs, Germans, Jews?: National Identity and the Jews of Bohemia* (New York: Berghahn, 2012).
[25] Ota Konrád, and Rudolf Kučera, *Paths out of the Apocalypse: Physical Violence in the Fall and Renewal of Central Europe, 1914–1922* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).
[26] Hillel J. Kieval, *Languages of Community: The Jewish Experience in the Czech Lands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

the war, as well as Czech anti-Semitism since the late nineteenth century.[27] The Holocaust and post-WWII retribution has been researched by Czech, American, German, and Austrian scholars, for example Benjamin Frommer, Wolf Gruner, Livia Rothkirchen.[28] Benjamin Frommer has also studied the fates of numerous mixed marriages in multiethnic and multilingual Bohemia and Moravia in a way that compares them with those in other multicultural regions.[29] And the life stories of forty-six Czech Jewish scholars who were murdered during the Holocaust are included in the biographical dictionary published by the Czech Institute for Contemporary History.[30]

The set of literary works written in German—but not in Germany and not necessarily *about* Germany—especially by writers who lived in Prague and frequented the Arco or Jung-Prague literary and political gatherings, influenced by both Czech and Habsburg history, experimented with the approach to language and explored identity in new ways, but they also translated many texts written in Czech into a "larger" language—German—thus clearing the way to a wider readership. These literary texts written in German, created by writers and journalists who lived in Prague in the second half of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, received relatively great academic

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[27] Michal Frankl, *Občané Země Nikoho: Uprchlíci a Pohyblivé Hranice Středovýchodní Evropy 1938–1939* (Prague: Lidové noviny, 2023); also Michal Frankl, *East Central Europe as a Place of Refuge in the Twentieth Century State and Patterns of Historical Research* (Marburg: Herder-Institut, 2022).
[28] Benjamin Frommer, *National Cleansing: Retribution against Nazi Collaborators in Postwar Czechoslovakia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Wolf Gruner, *The Holocaust in Bohemia and Moravia: Czech Initiatives, German Policies, Jewish Responses* (New York: Berghahn, 2019); Livia Rothkirchen, *The Jews of Bohemia and Moravia: Facing the Holocaust* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005).
[29] Adrienne Edgar and Benjamin Frommer, eds., *Intermarriage from Central Europe to Central Asia: Mixed Families in the Age of Extremes* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2020).
[30] Michal Šimůnek and Antonín Kostlán, eds., *Disappeared Science: Biographical Dictionary of Jewish Scholars from Bohemia and Moravia—Victims of Nazism, 1939–1945* (Prague: Pavel Mervart, 2013).

interest. These studies include works by historians and Germanists—for example, Lucie Merhautová,[31] Ines Koeltzsch,[32] Štěpán Zbytovský, and Manfred Weinberg.[33]

The most evident traditional contexts in which Heller and his compatriot émigrés from Bohemia should be studied are the political and cultural realities in the host country, the state of their academic disciplines in the host country, the relationship to their homelands, and the context of their homeland and its political relationship to the world. On the largest scale, this context includes the Cold War era.

An overview of all stages of the writing history of the Cold War was offered recently by Ladislav Beneš.[34] In his article Beneš evaluates existing scholarship and tendencies within the discipline and directs scholars to the following historiographical works, which each represent a different approach: traditional, revisionist, and post-revisionist.[35]

The German coming to terms with the past in post-WWII history, wrapped around the theme of fear, was analyzed by Frank Biesse, who explored the question how historical changes in the post-WWII history of the Federal Republic of Germany shaped the German emotional perception of their burden of the past, and vice versa.[36] The

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[31] Lucie Merhautová, *České křižovatky evropských dějin. [1], 1918: Model komplexního transformačního procesu?* (n.p., 2010); also Lucie Merhautová, *Mezi Prahou a Vídní: česká a vídeňská literární moderna na konci 19. Století*, Vydání první (Prague: Academia, 2011).
[32] Ines Koeltzsch, *Übersetzer zwischen den Kulturen: Der prager Pubizist Paul Eisner/Pavel Eisner* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2011); also Ines Koeltzsch, *Geteilte Kulturen: Eine Geschichte der tschechisch-jüdisch-deutschen Beziehungen in Prag (1918–1938)* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2012).
[33] Václav Petrbok, Alice Stašková, and Štěpán Zbytovský, eds., *Otokar Fischer (1883–1938): Ein Prager Intellektueller zwischen Dichtung und Wissenschaft* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2020); also Manfred Weinberg, Irina Wutsdorff, and Štěpán Zbytovsky, eds., *Prager Moderne(n): Interkulturelle Perspektiven auf Raum, Identität und Literatur* (Bielefeld: Transcript-Verlag, 2018).
[34] Ladislav Beneš, "Nové pojetí dějin studené války v anglosaské historiografii. Analýza základních tendencí a přístupů tzv. *New Cold War History*," *Český časopis historický* 120, no. 1 (2022): 177–94.
[35] Arthur Schlesinger, "Origins of the Cold War," *Foreign Affairs* 46, no. 1 (1967): 22–52; Moses Yakubu, "A New Historiography of the Origins of the Cold War," *Soshum Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 9 (2019): 100–111; David Gold, "Remapping Revisionist Historiography," *College Composition and Communication* 64 (2012): 15–34; Federico Romero, "Cold War Historiography at the Crossroads," *Cold War History* 14 (2014): 685–703.
[36] Frank Biess and Astrid M. Eckert, "Introduction: Why Do We Need New Narratives for the History of the Federal Republic?" *Central European History* 52, no. 1 (2019): 1–18; and Frank Biess, *German Angst: Fear and Democracy in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

German academic reconciliation with its own history—the role the academic institutions and individuals played in fascist Germany—has entered many discussions.[37] The German reassessment of the relation to its own past set against the background of other far-reaching events happening in the rest of the world at that time is presented in Carole Fink's *The World Transformed*.[38] Close examination of individual cases spurred new waves of academic interest and public debate—for example, the Schneider-Schwerte life story.[39]

The historical and intellectual development of German Studies (also on non-German grounds, including the United States) has a solid basis in the works of Hermand Jost, Wulf Köpke, and Michael Trommler.[40] In the lean 1970s, many universities in the United States integrated German Studies within new departments of comparative literatures or of world literatures. At Northwestern University (NU), where the German department still exists as an independent discipline, several scholars from Germany and Central Europe contributed to determining the future direction of German Studies at NU—most prominently, Géza von Molnár, Meno Spann, Erich Heller, and Hans Egon Holthusen.

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[37] Ingo Haar, "*Rosenbergs Elite und ihr Nachleben. Akademiker im Dritten Reich und nach 1945*, by Ekkehard Henschke. Vienna and Cologne: Böhlau, 2020. Pp. 378. €32.99 (HB). ISBN 978-3-412-51923-0." *Central European History* 55, no. 1 (2022): 168–70; Oliver Schmolke, *Revision nach 1968: Vom Wandel der Geschichtsbilder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, neue Ausg. (Saarbrücken: Südwestdeutscher Verlag für Hochschulschriften, 2012).

[38] Carole Fink, Philipp Gassert, Detlef Junker, and German Historical Institute (Washington, DC), *1968, The World Transformed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[39] Bernd-A. Rusinek and Historische Kommission zur Untersuchung des Falles Schneider-Schwerte und Seiner Zeitgeschichtlichen Umstände, *Zwischenbilanz der Historischen Kommission zur Untersuchung des Falles Schneider—Schwerte und seiner Zeitgeschichtlichen Umstände* (Düsseldorf: Nordrhein-Westfälisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, 1996); Joachim Lerchenmueller and Gerd Simon, *Masken-Wechsel: Wie der SS-Hauptsturmführer Schneider zum BRD-Hochschulrektor Schwerte wurde und andere Geschichten über die Wendigkeit deutscher Wissenschaft im 20. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen: Gesellschaft für interdisziplinäre Forschung, 1999).

[40] Jost Hermand, *Geschichte der Germanistik: Originalausgabe* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1994); Wulf Koepke and Michael Winkler, *Deutschsprachige Exilliteratur: Studien zu ihrer Bestimmung im Kontext der Epoche 1930 bis 1960* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1984); Frank Trommler, *Germanistik in den USA: Neue Entwicklungen und Methoden*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1989.

W. G. Sebald offered insight into the expatriate experience of a German writer and the possible way of constructing literary identity in exile.[41] Although Sebald (born in 1944) was at least a generation junior to the cohort of German exiles from Hitler's Europe who are treated in my work, he experienced the reevaluating of belonging to the *Täter* (perpetrators) firsthand because his father served in the Wehrmacht, and the modes of coping with this version of German modernity became a central theme in his today widely recognized work.

[41] Gerhard Fischer, *W. G. Sebald: Schreiben ex patria / Expatriate Writing* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009).

METHODOLOGY

This essay is a result of my work with primary sources in three archives and their physical collections:

- the Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach, in Germany;
- the McCormick Special Collections of the Northwestern University Archives, in Evanston, Illinois, United States—specifically, the Erich Heller Papers, Paul Heller Papers, Hans Egon Holthusen Papers, Géza von Molnár Papers, and Henry Rand Hatfield Papers; and
- the Special Collections of the Brotherton Library of the University of Leeds, in England—specifically, the Paul Roubiczek Papers.

Both Charles University and Northwestern University provided me with access to a number of secondary electronic or printed and audio sources, either from their own depositories or via interlibrary loans from a variety of partner institutions, including the Library of Congress; the statistical records of Charles University (and the German University of Prague); or digitized collections of the University of Vienna, as well as the Austrian Exile Library in Vienna, the Literature Archive of the Austrian National Library in Vienna, and the German Exile Archive. Many of the sources housed in the institutions mentioned are now available with Open Access, for which I thank them. Where I included the original version of a direct quote in German or Czech, the translation into English is mine.

The exclusively male authors treated here, who were generally attentive to understanding human beings, their history, including literary history, and philosophical thought, referred commonly to “Man” and otherwise used male attributes. Occasionally, where possible, I have replaced exclusively masculine nouns and possessive pronouns, and other attributes with a non-gendered expression. But it turned out to be impossible

throughout the text because of the disruption to the contextuality and language of my writing. I wish to acknowledge this phenomenon.

Instead of the word “homosexual” that appeared at that time, or “gay” (there is evidence that Heller was vehemently opposed to this expression), I have used “queer” as it is today the more widely accepted form of denomination, even though it would have sounded awkward to Thomas Mann or Erich Heller, or the society around them.

In my work with primary and secondary sources, I pursued mainly a prosopographical, transnational, and transcultural approach. Although I did, on occasion, engage-with Heller in my own literary analyses of selected works, mainly spurred by comparative segments which included various interpretations of other critics, these occurrences are rather exceptional, as for example in the case of Kafka’s *Castle*. Besides working with primary archival sources and setting them into larger literary, political, and historical contexts, I use works of contemporary literary criticism (Heller’s own and that of his fellow academics who engaged in dialogue with him, directly or indirectly) as additional primary readings, as ego-documents, to understand better the identity and positions of their author, or other author’s influences on his development. This task was a much easier one to solve in the case of Paul Roubiczek whose communication style was straightforward, and each page of his writing defined by clarity. Roubicek’s voluminous, mostly private correspondence offered a much better (psychological) reading of the man himself but deepened the question about the intellectual relationship that both men of letters maintained for so long. Textual analysis of their writing, including their published works and private correspondence allowed me to identify their ethics of responsibility on one end and their rules of morality on the other.

PRIMARY SOURCES

In my research I have worked with physical primary sources, not available online, from three archives: (1) McCormick Special Collections, Northwestern University Archives, United States; (2) Special Collections, Brotherton Library, University of Leeds, England; and (3) Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach, Germany. Both McCormick and Literaturarchiv had more than one collection relevant to my research, and, of course, the Literaturarchiv in Marbach is an excellent, well-known research center with on-site access to both primary and secondary sources regarding German Literature.

I began my investigation at the McCormick Special Collection, where I identified many pointers to other sources, for instance, the Paul Roubiczek Papers. To my knowledge, most of the materials I worked with had not been thoroughly researched, and therefore the work I present here brings new archival findings and new perspectives. One might consider as an exception to this assertion a book by Caroline Heller, Erich Heller's niece,[42] who wrote a self-discovering, semifictional memoir of her family journey, based in part on the documents collected in the Erich Heller and Paul Heller Papers. As the daughter of Paul Heller, Caroline Heller not only worked with both collections but is also their source. She collected many documents from her uncle's heritage and donated them to the NU Archives.

In terms of relevance, the NU Archives hold several collections connected to the German department at Northwestern and its role at the university, including the speeches that Thomas Mann and Erika Mann gave at Northwestern in the 1940s. Several other voluminous collections offer materials about the history of the German department, from the very beginning (the Hatfield Papers) throughout WWI. I studied them out of

[42] Caroline E. Heller, *Reading Claudius: A Memoir in Two Parts* (New York: Dial, 2015).

curiosity but decided to stay focused on the Bohemian connection and pursued Heller's personal and intellectual sources instead (Holthusen, T. S. Eliot, Roubiczek, and Flusser). The Paul Heller papers reveal the personality of both brothers and allow insight into how their respective experiences of life, which differed dramatically, could have shaped both their personal and professional focus and growth. And not least, they are a testament to the sweeping consequences of the shattered world conditions the Heller brothers were born into.

Overview of Archival Collections

McCormick Special Collections, Northwestern University Archives

Collection: Erich Heller (1911–1990) Papers, 11/3/15/3

Abstract

The major portion consists of correspondence, most of which is comprised of letters to Heller, and much is in German. The other major section, publications, contains primarily drafts and reprints of articles, as well as book reviews by Heller and reviews of books authored by Heller. There are also teaching files and materials relating to papers Heller presented at professional organizations.

Arrangement

The papers of Erich Heller are organized into the following categories: biographical materials; financial records; correspondence (a chronological sequence of general correspondence, followed by alphabetically arranged folders for individual correspondents and organizations); teaching files (in alphabetical order); papers presented at professional meetings (in alphabetical order); publications – books (in alphabetical

order); publications – articles (in alphabetical order, plus book reviews); reviews of books by Heller (in alphabetical order by keyword; plus reprints in chronological order).

Extent

19 Boxes

Collection: Paul Heller (1914–2001) Papers, 55/55

Abstract

Paul Heller was born in Komotau, Bohemia, Austro-Hungary (now the city of Chomutov in the Czech Republic), on August 8, 1914. The Paul Heller collection fills eight boxes and spans the years 1934 to 2014. The collection contains his Holocaust diary and other personal papers, professional papers documenting his career as a physician, and books and multimedia items.

Arrangement

The Paul Heller collection is divided into four sections: personal papers, professional papers, books, and multimedia.

Extent

8 Boxes

Collection: Hans Egon Holthusen (1913–1997) Papers, 11/3/15/6

Abstract

German poet and literary critic Hans Egon Holthusen taught German language and literature at Northwestern University from 1968–81. His papers contain offprints, manuscripts, publications, and correspondence (copies) Holthusen received from distinguished European authors, poets, and philosophers. A more complete collection of Holthusen's papers may be found at Bibliothek der Universität Hildesheim (Hildesheim University Library), Germany.

Arrangement

The Hans Egon Holthusen papers are organized into three sections: biographical correspondence (arranged by surname of correspondent); manuscripts (arranged by title); and offprints and short publications. The correspondence files include copies of letters from distinguished European authors, poets, and philosophers and date from 1939 to 1982 (Folder 2-39).

Extent

1 Box

Collection: Meno Spann (1903–1991) Papers, 11/3/15/4

8 Boxes

Collection: Géza von Molnar (1932–2001) Papers, 11/3/15/5

18 Boxes

Special Collections, Brotherton Library, University of Leeds

Collection: Paul Roubiczek Correspondence and Papers, Archive Collection MS 1736

Description

Manuscripts, typescript and printed material, and correspondence

Extent

14 Boxes

Deutches Literaturarchiv Marbach

Abstract

The collections are open to anyone who conducts source research. With currently around 1,600 estates and collections of writers and scholars, including those from philosophy

and intellectual history, 49 archives of literary publishers, and more than 450,000 pictorial and representational pieces, the archive is one of the leading of its kind. The library houses the largest special collection of modern German literature and includes more than 1.5 million media units (including books, magazines, sound and image recordings, other materials), as well as more than 160 author and collector libraries. Since its founding in 1955, the DLA has also been intended as an exile archive, offering a place for the holdings of refugee authors in the past as well as today.

Collection: Heller, Erich (1911–1990) – Teilnachlass, Handschriftensammlung [A: Heller, Erich], BF00012182X

Content

Prose essays, lectures, and speeches (mostly in English with German translation): "Democracy and Education," "The Hazard of Modern Poetry," "Realism in Literature," and "Eine Rede zum Thema Kultur und Gegenkultur" u.a.; works about Hannah Arendt, T. S. Eliot, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Franz Kafka, Karl Kraus, Thomas Mann, Friedrich Nietzsche, Rainer Maria Rilke, Arthur Schopenhauer u.a.; essays from before his emigration such as "Escape from the Twentieth Century" and reviews, Autobiographical records: "Pädagogischer Gast in Amerika."

Extent

6 Boxes

Related Collections - Exile: Helen und Kurt Wolff-Archiv

Content

Materials by and related to H. G. Adler, Alfred Döblin, Hilde Domin, Walter Hasenclever, Siegfried Kracauer, Werner Kraft, Karl Lieblich, Konrad Merz, Karl Otten, Kurt Pinthus, Hans Sahl, Kurt Tucholsky, and many others.

Related Collections - Scholars, Philosophers, and Germanists Archive

Among the prominent and most-used authors' libraries in the Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach are the book collections of Gottfried Benn, Hans Blumenberg, Paul Celan, Ernst Jünger, Reinhart Koselleck, Siegfried Kracauer, Martin Heidegger, Hermann Hesse, and W. G. Sebald.

***Library of Congress*, Washington, DC**

***Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation, 1999**

National Portrait Gallery
https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw217640/Erich-Heller

I am including in this section also books published by Heller as not all of them are cited in the footnotes. They are listed in order of their publication, from first to last published.

Books by Erich Heller

Flucht aus dem zwanzigsten Jahrhundert: Eine kulturkritische Skizze. Vienna: Saturn-Verlag, 1938.

The Disinherited Mind: Essays in Modern German Literature and Thought. Cambridge: Bowes & Bowes, 1952.

The Hazard of Modern Poetry. Cambridge: Bowes & Bowes, 1953.

Studien zur modernen Literatur. Berlin: Suhrkampf, 1963.

The Artist's Journey into the Interior, and Other Essays. New York: Random House, 1965.

Kafka. London: Fontana, 1974.

Nirgends wird Welt sein als innen: Versuche über Rilke. Berlin: Suhrkamp, 1975.

Die Wiederkehr der Unschuld und andere Essays. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1977.

The Ironic German. South Bend, IN: Regnery/Gateway, 1979.

In the Age of Prose: Literary and Philosophical Essays. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

The Importance of Nietzsche. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.

Die Bedeutung Friedrich Nietzsches: Zehn Essays. Göttingen: Wallstein, 1992.

CHAPTER 1

ERICH HELLER'S LIFE AND CAREER

1.1. Komotau, Prague, and Exile

Born in 1911 in Komotau (today's Chomutov), Bohemia, Heller was first a citizen of Austria-Hungary and then Czechoslovakia once that country was established in 1918. Chomutov was founded at a crossroads, connecting Prague with Leipzig. By the time Heller moved to Prague in 1929, the local Jewish community he left behind numbered only 1.3 percent of the total population and was highly integrated into it.[43] Nearly 90 percent of the city's inhabitants spoke German. In May 1938 the vast majority of the ethnic Germans in this region voted for the Sudeten German Party (Sudetendeutsche Partei), the main pro-Nazi force in Czechoslovakia. After the Munich Agreement of September 1938, which ceded the Sudetenland to Hitler's Germany, most of the region's ethnic Czechs, anti-Nazi Germans, and Jews fled to the interior of the country. After WWII Czechoslovakia expelled nearly all of Komotau's German speakers and, thus, truly transformed it into Chomutov.

By then Heller had long departed Central Europe. After March 1939, when the German army marched into Prague to finish the occupation of Bohemia and Moravia, Prague could no longer provide a safe haven. Heller fled on foot across the Polish border, where he boarded the last ship to leave for England in late August 1939. He was the only one from his family to escape in time. His younger brother, Paul, had made plans to

[43] Hugo Gold, *Die Juden und Judengemeinden Boehmens in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart, I: Ein Sammelwerk* (Bruenn-Prag: Juedischer Buch- und Kunstverlarg, 1934), 299–304. Jewish Virtual Library, a project of AICE: https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/chomutov (accessed August 26, 2021).

follow in the next days, but the beginning of the war sealed the borders. Instead, Paul Heller suffered imprisonment in the Dachau and Buchenwald concentration camps, transfer to Auschwitz, and a death march back to Buchenwald, where he was finally liberated. He eventually settled with his family in the Chicago area, where he worked as a physician and clinical professor at University of Illinois–Chicago. Erich Heller explained that the presence of his brother in Chicago was the primary reason that led him to negotiate an academic position at Northwestern University in nearby Evanston.[44]

A decade before his flight abroad, Erich Heller moved to Prague to study law at the German University of Prague, where he (at least metaphorically) experienced his first exile. While Komotau was a German-speaking town with a small minority of Czech speakers, Prague was not. According to the 1930 census, at most 4.5 percent of Prague's residents spoke German as their mother tongue. There, liberal German circles had already been struggling for cultural survival for the previous fifty years, with little success, while the German-speaking working class integrated into the Czech majority.[45] Although it was customary that many Czechs, especially small-business owners, could converse in both languages with their customers, the large cultural and everyday sphere of Prague likely remained foreign to Heller, as there is no evidence that he was conversant in Czech.

As a result of the power struggle between local Czech and German speakers, in 1882 the city's ancient university was divided by language into two separate institutions. In 1920 the Czech one designated itself Charles University, and the German one officially became the German University in Prague (Deutsche Universität Prag). Although Heller, a student of the German University, lived within the limited cultural

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[44] Erich Heller (1911–1990) Papers, 1932–1990 (hereafter Heller Papers), Box 6, Folder 1, Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections and University Archives, Northwestern University.
[45] Gary B. Cohen, *The Politics of Ethnic Survival: Germans in Prague, 1861–1914* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2006).

sphere of German Praguers, he nonetheless believed that his time in the city gave him a special understanding of his fellow German-speaking Jewish Bohemian, Franz Kafka. Decades later Heller introduced his study of Kafka with the claim: "My contribution originates in the long familiarity with his works and, if this does not sound too presumptuous, with the mind behind the work, an acquaintance made perhaps a little more intimate by the facts of cultural geography. It is my hope that this, if nothing else, gives some legitimacy to this book."[46] Kafka, however, had been born in Prague, worked in a bilingual office, and had an admirable knowledge of Czech, even if his active use of the language remained in the shadow of his native German.[47] Kafka himself engaged actively in editing Milena Jesensk's translations of his work into Czech, and in one of the early letters between them he assured her that he knew her native language and asked her to write back in Czech.[48]

Despite this significant variance, both Heller and Kafka graduated from the German University with a law degree and shared a sense of professional frustration. In a 1937 letter to a friend named Hans, Heller confided: "My occupation is becoming less and less tolerable for me and I am spying very persistently for a change."[49] And even more poignantly, in an earlier letter to the same friend he wrote: "I have discovered yet again and now possibly definitely, causing myself in part much pain, that writing is my actual life. Everything else is an insubstantial, flavorless surrogate of bad style. In my little journal are the words: 'My writing—*horror vacui*.'"[50]

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[46] Erich Heller, *Kafka* (London: Fontana, 1974).
[47] For more about Kafka's languages, see Marek Nekula, *Franz Kafkas Sprachen: "In Einem Stockwerk des innern babylonischen Turmes"* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2003).
[48] Franz Kafka and Philip Boehm, *Letters to Milena* (New York: Schocken Books, 1990), 8.
[49] Erich Heller, "Der Beruf wird mir immer unleidlicher und ich spähe sehr hartnäckig nach einer Veränderung aus," Heller Papers, Box 1, Folder 18.
[50] Ibid.: "Ich habe, was zum Teil sehr schmerzlich ist, wieder und jetzt wohl endgültig entdeckt, dass das Schreiben mein eigentliches Leben ist. Alles sonst ist substanzloses und geschmackloses und stilloses Surrogat. In meinem kleinen Tagebuch steht das Wort: 'Mein Schreiben—horror vacui.'"

When Heller arrived in England as a political refugee, he already had a law degree and an established professional connection to Karl Kraus under his belt.[51] But he spoke no English. Barely ten years later he was a professor of German literature, held a chair at the University College of Swansea in Wales, and had made a name for himself as an author writing in English. By the late 1950s he was able to negotiate—from overseas—a tenured academic position in the German department at Northwestern University, a singular college of his choice. In Evanston, Illinois, his successful career continued, and Heller eventually became the first holder of the prestigious Avalon Chair in the Humanities at Northwestern—clear evidence of the respect he had earned in his adopted country as a leading representative of German-language culture.

Despite Heller's physical journey as a refugee, he was not part of the cohort of exiled writers who went more or less directly to the United States hoping that America could offer a more humane democratic political system as an alternative to German National Socialism. Among that cohort were, for example, already renowned Thomas Mann and the Viennese writer Hermann Broch. Another fellow Bohemian, J. P. Stern, later a fellow literary critic, arrived in England and there found his second home. But all three intellectuals were politically engaged and actively pursuing democratic peace. According to the 1940 "The City of Man" declaration, which both Mann and Broch supported, they searched openly for a "third way" in opposition to both National Socialism and Bolshevism.[52] Their pathways demonstrate alternative approaches to political engagement in exile.

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[51] Heller first published about K. Kraus in *Flucht aus dem zwanzigsten Jahrhundert: Eine kulturkritische Skizze* (Vienna: Saturn-Verlag, 1938).]

[52] Herbert Agar, *The City of Man: A Declaration on World Democracy* (New York: Viking, 1941). Available from: Weltdemokratie.de: https://weltdemokratie.de/pdf/thecity-of-man.pdf (accessed June 7, 2021).

For Thomas Mann, a central subject of Heller's academic interest, such engagement was a natural continuation of his theoretical exploration of the relationship between contemplation and action. Already during WWI, Mann had critically scrutinized his own German origin and his place in the disintegrating society he recognized[53]. His traditional conservatism underwent many revisions, and the political extremes in Germany eventually moved him to active political involvement. For his earlier belief that the German spirit was a nonpolitical one he was heavily criticized, for example by Hannah Arendt, who saw him as a German traditionalist who distrusted civilization and the German democratic society.[54]

Hermann Broch, who before WWII lived the tradition Mann portrayed in his novel *Buddenbrooks*, broke with it and sold the family's textile mill to enroll in the University of Vienna to study mathematics, philosophy, and psychology. Having witnessed radically violent societal changes in the 1930s, together with his relatively brief imprisonment by the Nazis, which he survived thanks to international efforts, Broch parted with literature and started writing on mass psychology. In such dire times Broch considered the existence of literature paradoxical. In exile he turned to political theory and devoted himself fully to political writing and aiding European refugees. Heller later criticized this "growing aversion to literature" in a review of Broch's *Death of Virgil* and *The Spell*.[55] After the war, Broch carefully rethought his own return to Austria or

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[53] in *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* [*Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man*; also *The Meditations of a Nonpolitical Man*], published in 1918)

[54] Gordon Alexander Craig, *The Politics of the Unpolitical: German Writers and the Problem of Power, 1770–1871* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

[55] Erich Heller, "Hitler in a Very Small Town: Review," *New York Times*, January 25, 1987, late edition (East Coast). "The trouble was that despite his frustrated determination to devote the rest of his life to philosophical and psychological studies, he did have the gifts of the literary artist. Even in the present work, jettisoned by him, these are unmistakable in the evocations of landscape, skies, flowers and farmsteads, or in the characterization of Mother Gisson or the narrator's dog and the villagers' children and animals. Yet the novelist is, again and again, betrayed by the theorist, and the theorist, in his turn, led astray by the imagination. This is the very predicament that pervades Hermann Broch's exceptional and exceptionally creative life, and it reflects the character of the age."

Germany for political reasons, not wanting to expose Germans to guilt by his emergence as a surviving Jew. Broch was skeptical of society's susceptibility to totalitarian dictatorship and did not share his much younger correspondent Volkmar Zühldorf 's enthusiasm for rebuilding German democracy. In a letter to Zühldorf, Broch wrote:

> In my opinion, we Jews cannot and must not return for the time being; no guilty conscience should grow at the sight of victims; Germany needs repentance, because only out of remorse consciousness could be built up: especially the non-Nazi needs repentance, he needs it for his Nazi brother, who is never capable of it himself.[56]

Joseph Peter Maria Stern, born in 1920 into a bilingual Jewish family in Prague, was educated at secondary schools (*Gymnasien*) in Prague and Vienna. In 1939, after his mother died by suicide, he and his father fled to Poland on foot and in August took the last ship to England. Aboard he met Erich Heller and befriended him for life. In England Stern studied for one semester before joining the Czechoslovak Squadron of the Royal Air Force in 1941. His plane was shot down over the Atlantic, but he was rescued after long hours in the water. After his return to Cambridge he, too, finished his studies of German literature and earned a doctorate in 1949. Stern specialized in German Realism, but he also wrote on Nietzsche, Rilke, Jünger, Mann, and Wittgenstein. He studied Russian and taught German and Czech before he became a teaching fellow in the German department in St. John's College of the University of Cambridge. With Heller, Stern immersed himself in enthusiastic correspondence (and also many conversations at his own house) about the tendencies of German literature and culture of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries. Heller was an inspiration for Stern's academic work. They were both skeptics, Stern being perhaps a bit more passionate in his attempts to broaden the implications of the text into the larger human domain.[57] In

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[56] Hermann Broch, *Briefe über Deutschland: 1945–1949: Die Korrespondenz mit Volkmar von Zühlsdorff*, edited by Paul Michael Lützeler (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986), 21.
[57] J. P. Stern, *Idylls and Realities* (London: Methuen, 1971).

his obituary for Stern, Martin Swales wrote: "He never forgot that in the 1930s it was Anglo-Saxon culture (particularly English) culture that stood for decency and humanity. Throughout his career he was concerned to explain German and Central European literacy, cultural and historical matters to an English audience."[58]

By the time twenty-eight-year-old Heller left his homeland and entered exile, he had already completed mandatory military training and service for the Czechoslovak Army. Unlike Stern and many of his compatriots, however, Heller did not join the Allied forces abroad. He did not publicly engage in political or physical efforts to maintain peace, help fight Nazi Germany, or rebuild democracy in postwar Germany, Austria, or Czechoslovakia. Nonetheless, he very much became part of that process, consciously or not, by his mode of writing, which spoke to an international audience, in the end reflecting positively on the achievements of German-language writers.

1.2. Heller and Mann

Heller entered the University of Cambridge in the fall of 1939 as a research student and candidate for a Ph.D. in the German department. He had sent his application to the graduate program less than two months after his feet had touched Czechoslovak ground for the last time. He proposed a research subject, "The Development of Anti-humanistic Tendencies in German Literature of the Nineteenth Century," and outlined the starting point: "The essential feature in the ideology of present-day Germany seems to be the opposition to Humanism, against the optimistic belief in the value and the continuously progressive evolution of human life, against Christian ethics and the creed of Western civilization and progress."[59] Later, after he was accepted, Heller changed his

[58] Martin Swales, "J. P. Stern, 1920–1991," *German Life and Letters* 45, no. 2 (1992): 190-193, esp. 191.
[59] Heller Papers, Box 1, Folder 21.

topic to: “Thomas Mann—A Study of His Work in Relation to the Main Currents of Thought in Nineteenth Century Germany.” He received his Ph.D. on March 13, 1948.

Heller reworked his dissertation and published it in 1958 as *The Ironic German*. The book presents Heller’s study of most of Mann’s works in the context of major European intellectuals. The title resonates intensely in two of his chapters. In the fourth chapter, “The Conservative Imagination” (a study of *The Meditations of a Nonpolitical Man*), Heller engaged with Mann’s history of political sympathies and the intellectual foundations of Mann’s work. This chapter also includes a relatively brief description of Mann’s polemic with Kant and Mann’s interpretation and criticism of Kant as a “philosopher of Life,” a philosopher “who sacrificed Mind for the sake of Life.”[60] From this polemic Mann emerges with confidence that only a man involved in practical life (politics) can be sure of reality. Yet, Heller comments, politically involved man lacks broader perspective and sacrifices imagination to authenticity. Heller considers Mann a more profound thinker in his conservative, nonpolitical period.

Then, in the sixth chapter, “The Theology of Irony,” Heller explores the different modes of irony and parody that Mann used to distance himself from the world of his characters, thereby allowing him to unveil a society that exhausted its creative capacity and is trapped between chaos and despair. *The Ironic German* on the whole shows Heller’s interest in Mann’s perception of the fragmenting German society and in Mann’s awareness of his presence in such a world. It also demonstrates Heller’s continued fascination with Mann’s reasoning that private dilemmas and split loyalties (in pluralistic modern life) disrupted the traditional German moral and aesthetic integrity and German interest in universal values. Only by applying irony, submerging his characters in ignorance, was Mann able to identify and grasp the most serious societal problems. *The*

[60] Erich Heller, *The Ironic German* (South Bend, IN: Regnery/Gateway, 1979), 126.

Ironic German was frequently reviewed (positively, but also negatively), and the last edition appeared as late as 2010.[61]

The spirit of Thomas Mann was to accompany Heller on his academic path. Mann's novel *Buddenbrooks* (1901), subtitled *The Decline of a Family*, is not only about one German family but also symbolically about the decline of ideals in the changing German society and all Western civilization. When the family inheritance is up for grabs in the provincial Baltic city of Lübeck, the people who take it over represent a new kind of society, one very different from that of the worthy, respectable burgher merchants, the Buddenbrooks. In an interview from the 1970s Heller summed up what he believed to be the essence of Mann's *Buddenbrooks* and what became his own lifelong search:

> The story of the *Buddenbrooks* is dominated by the dualism between "Geist" and life, with "Geist," by a process of differentiation and refinement, gradually emerging from life itself, undermining and finally destroying it. What then is this "Geist" that displays such disruptive energies, and what kind of life that crumbles away under the impact of such elusive force?[62]

Heller kept reworking the idea of a spirit, "Geist," and defining the negative forces that according to him eventually undermine an established, integrated life. He himself was very familiar with the meaning of a disintegrated life, both first- and secondhand. Yet, until Hitler rose to power in Germany, Heller had lived a comfortable, provincial childhood as a son of a successful family physician. His brother, Paul, who testified to the USC Shoah Foundation in 1995, recalled their peaceful, conflict-free childhood:

> Our father was the busiest physician in the area. . . . Our town was beautifully located at the foot of mountains, with lots of villages in the area. . . . We owned a home with two apartments, one was ours and one we rented out. . . . We lived there in peace, in a very comfortable way.[63]

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[61] Erich Heller, *Thomas Mann: The Ironic German* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
[62] Heller Papers, Box 9, Folder 13. The word *Geist* that Heller decided to use "instead of an English equivalent he characterizes as being closer to 'imaginative questioning and possibly creative intelligence.' Its connotations being closer to those of 'spirit' than of 'mind' or 'intellect.'"
[63] Paul Heller, Interview 2904, led by Jack Graller, Tape 1, Segments 1–11, *Visual History Archive*, USC Shoah Foundation, 1999.

After Erich Heller moved from Chomutov to Prague in 1929 to study law, enjoy city life, and lay the foundation for his own future, the world around him started falling apart together with his own life. Subsequently, he lived to see many variations of a catastrophe. Yet he did not find any value in searching for integrative forces. Instead, Heller advised to wait and then re-form the fragments that disintegration left behind instead of trying to keep together what was falling apart. He saw value in building consciousness and the ability to endure this condition, in "having the strength, the intellectual composure to live with it, rather than to rush to historical attempts to find a solution. It may be that the strength to live through the catastrophes will at the same time supply the strength or the genius to reintegrate what has disintegrated."[64] In real life, he was prepared to deal with the disappearance of his world, as the professional path he took from 1939 to 1948 and beyond demonstrates.

Heller, however, became best known for his tragic vision of modernity, for his perception that human catastrophes are inevitable. He maintained that the romantic, satisfied art of living leads to a withdrawal from real life and that this illusion eventually fully replaces the perception of the real world. This change happens often unnoticed by the subject. In the arts this gap may occur at the level of content and form, soul and form, or ethics and aesthetics. Parallel dualisms were, of course, examined by a number of philosophers, including Friedrich Hegel, Karl Marx, and György Lukács. In his lengthy essay "The Artist's Journey into the Interior," Heller did not call this phenomenon "alienation."[65] He spoke instead about the presence or absence of politics, as an analogue to the "real" life. In adherence to this real life, which includes politics, he saw especially Mann's writings as generally healthy: "Literature versus poetry, literature, which for

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[64] Reece Hirsch, "Fleeing Hitler's Europe," *The Daily Northwestern*, April 17, 1980, Heller Papers, Box 1, Folder 6.
[65] Erich Heller, *The Artist's Journey into the Interior and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976).

Thomas Mann formed a unity with politics, against poetry that is subject to a different law than life, or even politics. This was and still is a very German subject."[66]

In his essay "Die verantwortungslose Literatur" [Literature without responsibility], Heller expressed his deep criticism of the distinction between the life of the mind and life in the world (politics). For "to think" is to be in the world, as the thinking appears in the particular time and place that influences the thinker. To Heller, Hegel was the binding authority. To dispute Plato's famed statement about Art's lack of truth, Heller argued that without spiritual consciousness, literature would become trivial, and it would not make sense to go to great efforts to ban it. And to his defense Heller also called on Nietzsche by using his articulation that a pure form equals a pure nothing and thus the peculiarity of the obsession with form is perverse.[67] In other words, Heller was a passionate critic of what became accepted as formalism. He used the verse of his friend W. H. Auden (Thomas Mann's son-in-law) to illustrate his argument:

> God may reduce you
> On Judgement Day
> To tears of shame,
> Reciting by heart
> The poems you would
> Have written, had
> Your life been good.[68]

1.3. The Disinherited Mind

After obtaining his Ph.D., Heller moved to the University College of Swansea in Wales as an independent lecturer and head of the German department. In 1950 he was promoted to professor and remained at University College through the fall of 1959. In

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[66] Erich Heller, "Die verantwortungslose Literatur," *Merkur* 22, no. 9 (1968): 803-812, esp. 804. "Literatur versus Dichtung, die Literatur, die für Thomas Mann eins war mit der Politik, gegen die Dichtung, die einem andern Gesetzt untersteht als das 'Leben' oder gar die Politik: dies war und ist noch immer ein sehr deutscher Gegenstand."
[67] Ibid., 808–9.
[68] Ibid., 809.

1960, when Heller arrived in the United States, he was welcomed with champagne at an ostentatious party friends threw for him in New York. The suitcases that the dock porters carried for him also contained his personal correspondence with many public intellectuals of the time, including Conrad Aiken, Hannah Arendt, T. S. Eliot, and Theodor Adorno, as well as with Henry Kissinger and Werner Heisenberg. Heller recalled this arrival in terms that melded the Old World with the New and emphasized his intimate knowledge of both: "Relatives and acquaintances had gathered in a welcome crowd, and there it was, New York, so interwoven with Prague and Vienna that if you looked, but not specifically out the window, you lost New York completely out of sight and certainly out of hearing."[69]

Heller never lost the belief that his prewar roots in Habsburg Central Europe gave him a special ability to understand the men he studied and the world they inhabited. Toward the end of Heller's academic career, a student newspaper posed a question to him: "You have written about the idea of disinheritance in literature. Is there a relationship between your personal experience as a refugee and your writing about disinheritance?" Heller responded:

> I was well prepared for my personal experience, because I was convinced that some catastrophic event was in the making. The rise of Hitler took quite a number of years and I watched it with a kind of pessimistic certainty. But my personal experience as a refugee is more or less contingent. The theme of disinheritance has occupied my thoughts for a long time.[70]

Heller further explained that the term and idea of inheritance he borrowed from Kafka, who spoke of himself as a disinherited son, by which he meant his inability to follow in

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[69] Erich Heller, "Pädagogischer Gast in Amerika," in *Jemand, der schreibt: 57 Aussagen*, edited by Rudolf de le Roi (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1972), 231. "Verwandte und Bekannte hatten sich zu einer Begrüßungsgesellschaft versammelt, und da war New York, so sehr mir Prag und Wien durchwirkt, da. man, schaute man, schaute man nicht gerade aus dem Fenster, New York ganz aus den Augen und gewiss aus den Ohren verlor."

[70] Hirsch, "Fleeing Hitler's Europe."

the footsteps of the old Orthodox Jewish traditions of Central Europe. Heller also borrowed from Rilke's *Seventh Duino Elegy*: "Each vague turn of the world has such disinherited ones, to whom the former does not, and the next does not yet, belong."[71] As an agnostic himself, Heller felt right at home in such an epicenter of modernity.

Heller's fame came mostly from this first publication, *The Disinherited Mind*, in which he coined the conception of cultural and spiritual "disinheritance." Its title and the essays included in the book (on Goethe, Nietzsche, Spengler, Rilke, Kafka, and Karl Kraus) capture the experience of the loss of fundamental values in the process of secularization. Heller turns it into a critical key term for determining the state of consciousness of the epoch. Throughout the text he makes frequent references to the sense of "disinheritance" as he looks for references to this awareness in works of German literature.

But it was Heller's compatriot from Prague, Paul Roubiczek, who offered a clearer and crisper narrative of the problem. A generation older than Heller, Roubiczek was born in 1898 into the family of a Prague Jewish manufacturer. He experienced WWI as an officer in the Austro-Hungarian army, studied in Berlin, but then, after his father's early death, had to interrupt his studies to take care of his father's business. In 1933 Roubiczek emigrated to Paris, where he established Der europäische Merkur, an anti-Nazi publishing house. After 1939 he fled the Continent and worked as an extramural lecturer in philosophy at the University of Cambridge and as a supervisor of German at various colleges in England. In 1956 the University of Cambridge awarded Roubiczek the honorary degree of master of arts.[72]

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[71] Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duineser Elegien* (Leipzig: Insel-Verlag, 1923), 28. "Jede dumpfe Umkehr der Welt hat solche Enterbte, denen das Frühere nicht und noch nicht das Nächste gehört."
[72] Gregory Needham, "Paul Roubiczek: Some Aspects of His Thinking," *Theology* 76, no. 635 (1973): 256–63. https://zh.booksc.eu/book/54809911/1ce66c.

In *The Misinterpretation of Man* (published in 1934 in German and 1947 in English), Roubiczek emphasized that it was ten years before the French Revolution when Immanuel Kant published his *Critique of Pure Reason*, restricting the scope of metaphysics, introducing the laws of thinking, and making room for intrinsic freedom and the "experiencing" of the sensual inner mind. This inner mind is an essential part of our experience of reality, our existence in the world and our awareness of it. This recognition, Roubiczek argued, paved the way to "setting the man free from the old feudal laws." For the inner mind, the power of sense, forms concepts of our knowledge and "guarantees the sovereignty and freedom of man, by excluding absolute knowledge and establishing the role which we ourselves have to play in the world."[73] Aware of this inner mind, a man would not need a dogma to guide him through his life. The moral laws are represented as part of human nature. Roubiczek articulated his belief that hardly any important thoughts of the nineteenth century would have been possible without Kant's preparatory work because he had opened the way to Romanticism and the modern form of individualism that inspired Nietzsche. He argued there that the achievements of Kant and Goethe helped liberate the personality. This sensual individual is inspired by nature and mysticism and becomes the moral lawmaker for his own acts.[74]

Heller was no stranger to Roubiczek's ideas and work. He lived in the Roubiczeks' apartment during the war years, and during the decade after WWII he continued to exchange letters with Roubiczek, read his work, and recommended it to publishers. Heller also dedicated his book *The Ironic German* to Paul and Hjördis Roubiczek (as well as Francis Bennet and Graham Storey): "For affectionate memories

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[73] Paul Roubiczek, *The Misinterpretation of Man* (New York: Scribner's, 1947), 14, 17.
[74] Roubiczek later developed the dualism of external and internal realities in full in *Thinking in Opposites: An Investigation of the Nature of Man as Revealed by the Nature of Thinking* (Boston: Beacon, 1952), and *Thinking Towards Religion* (Sagwan Press, 2018). The newest edition: Paul Roubiczek *THINKING IN OPPOSITES an Investigation of the Nature of Man as Revealed by the Nature of Thinking* (ROUTLEDGE, 2024. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003463177).

of those days in Cambridge when the idea of this book was first conceived." In Heller's own published studies of the "disinherited world," however, he mostly skipped over the work of Kant and Johann Gottlieb Fichte and instead analyzed the guiding principles of Goethe, the mastermind Nietzsche, the conservative critic of liberalism Oswald Spengler, and the Central European writers Rilke, Kraus, and Kafka.

Among those, the author that seems to be a strange misfit to remain in the postwar canon is Spengler. Yet Heller's admiration of Spengler led him not only to include an analysis of *The Decline of the West* but also to state that the works of Aldous Huxley, George Orwell, and H. G. Wells are "invariably an elaboration of themes from *The Decline of the West*." Heller acknowledged that Spengler was by general consent utterly out of date but nonetheless made the effort to resuscitate interest in Spengler's writing. Heller seems to be in an agreement with Spengler's vision of "history as destiny," a cycle of life and death, at a societal level. Heller approvingly quoted Spengler to describe the death of cultured human society: "Then, with its (given culture's) spiritual substance exhausted, outward expansion is the only gesture of life that is left." In terms of government and foreign policy Heller further quotes Spengler: "The totalitarian state becomes the instrument of inevitable imperialistic wars." Yet Heller was also critical of Spengler, whom he termed a "false prophet." Heller used the adjective "false," not in relation to the correctness of the prediction, but instead based on the sincerity of his concern for the things threatened by human "sin and anger." After all, Spengler appeared to Heller to be "merely concerned with lending Destiny a hand in the business of destruction."[75]

The Disinherited Mind earned mostly positive reviews over a span of decades. In 1953, in one of the first published reviews, Bonamy Dobrée kept a satirical distance from

[75] Erich Heller, *The Disinherited Mind: Essays in Modern German Literature and Thought* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 182, 183, 194.

what Heller described. Firmly earthbound, Dobrée stated that "the Teutonic soul seems to live in a difficult chaos and for a German poet the affirmation to life has to emerge from this dark chaos."[76] When *The Disinherited Mind* came out in a Pelican edition in 1961 (and could thus more easily reach a wider audience), Leslie Bodi reviewed the book and argued that Heller's work presented a synthesis of Central European and English thought. According to Bodi, Heller himself served as a mediator between "Oxbridge and Kakanien": he translated the "intellectual small-talk of old-time Prague and Vienna into excellent English . . . and adapt[ed] it most skillfully into Anglo-Saxon attitudes and ideas."[77] In 1981 German literary scholar Hans Egon Holthusen, a close friend of Heller since the early 1950s, summarized *The Disinherited Mind* in his public congratulatory letter for Heller's seventieth birthday:

> What is described is the disintegration of a great culture, the exodus of the guiding spirits from the Occidental aeon, as an inevitable fate. Heller's πάτος [pathos, spelled in Greek in the original] is the question of meaning, it is the great calamity caused by the fact that the recognizability of truth is desperately uncertain, even hopeless. It is what Thomas Mann calls "hollow silence" in the *Magic Mountain* [Zauberberg], where The Time persistently silences all of our questions about the unconditional meaning of our efforts. . . . His [Heller's] models have German names. What was achieved in Heller's books was in fact the critical mediation of a German literature of the twentieth century under cosmopolitan auspices. And this in a historical moment, in which an Empire as a political way of life for Germans has become in the eyes of the world forever impossible.[78]

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[76] Bonamy Dobrée, review of "*The Disinherited Mind*, by Erich Heller," *The Spectator* 190, no. 6502 (1953): 159.

[77] Leslie Bodi, review of "*The Disinherited Mind*," *Journal of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association* 18, no. 1 (1962): 280.

[78] Hans Egon Holthusen, "Geburtstagsgruß an Erich Heller zum 27. März 1981," *Merkur* 35, no. 3 (1981): 340-42, esp. 340. "Was beschrieben wird, ist die Desintegration einer großen Kultur, der Exodus der maßgeblichen Geister aus dem abendländischen Äon, als ein Unabwendbares Verhängnis, Hellers Pathos ist die Sinnfrage, es ist die große Kalamität, die darin liegt, dass es mit der Erkennbarkeit von Wahrheit eine so verzweifelt, ungewisse, ja, hoffnungslose Bewandtnis hat, es ist was Thomas Mann im Zauberberg das Hohle Schweigen nennt, mit dem die Zeit all unser Fragen nach einem unbedingten Sinn unserer Bemühungen beharrlich überschweigt. Seine Modelle tragen deutsche Namen. Was in Hellers Büchern geleistet wurde, war in der Tat die kritische Vermittlung einer deutschen Literatur des 20. Jahrhunderts unter kosmopolitischen Auspizien, und dies in einem geschichtlichen Augenblick, dass das Reich als die politische Lebensform der Deutschen in den Augen der Welt für immer unmöglich geworden war."

Was a thesis such as this one a radical understanding of German literature? It certainly hurt the nostalgic yearning for continuity, yet also—and all the more so—in it Heller identified with the loss of the "inheritance" and approved of the loss. For him, the loss itself is The Authority, the setting of new norms. To those without first-hand experience of the loss emotionally and personally, or who remained unaware of the loss, Heller's thesis indeed might have seemed a rather radical pointer to their spiritual future.

1.4. Heller and H. E. Holthusen

In the postwar period Hans Egon Holthusen assumed an important role as an intermediary in the cultural exchange between the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany. In his essays and books he repeatedly dealt with current literary trends. The "Holthusen Papers" in Northwestern University's McCormick Special Collections archive holds some of his correspondence with distinguished European authors, poets, and philosophers, correspondence dating from 1939 to 1982.[79] The list of more than forty correspondents in the inventory starts alphabetically with the following names: T. Adorno, A. Andersch, H. Arendt, W. H. Auden, I. Bachmann, M. Brod, G. Grass, and M. Heidegger. The sense one gets from reading the voluminous private correspondence between Heller and Holthusen is that their friendship rested on both personal and literary matters, despite the seemingly opposite natures of their personalities. Heller[80] admitted to pessimism as his mode of being. Holthusen's letters show, by contrast, a limitless, optimistic curiosity about life, even about tabloid news. The friendship developed despite Heller's initial criticism of Holthusen's writing and lasted many years.

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[79] Hans Egon Holthusen (1913–1997) Papers, 1939–1982, Box 1, Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections and University Archives, Northwestern University.
[80] Heller Papers, Box 5, Folder 24.

Holthusen was born into a Protestant family in Rendsburg, in northern Germany. In 1933, at the age of 20, he voluntarily enlisted in the SS. Four years later, for unclear reasons, he left the SS and became a member of the Nazi Party.[81] He spent five years as a Wehrmacht soldier in Poland, France, and Russia and lost his younger brother, Walter, in 1942 on the Eastern Front. Despite Holthusen's checkered history, by the 1950s Joachim Kaiser remarked in *Die Süddeutsche Zeitung* that Holthusen "ruled" German literature.[82] By the early 1960s he worked in major German cultural affairs, from 1961 to 1964 as director of the Goethe Institut in New York, and as a visiting professor at several American universities. In 1968 he joined Heller as a tenured professor at Northwestern University until returning to Germany in 1981 to continue his career as the elected president of the Bavarian Academy of Fine Arts (Bayrische Akademie der schönen Künste) and an elected member of the Academy of Arts in Berlin (Akademie der schönen Künste in Berlin) till 1983, as well as a member of the Wissenschaftskolleg in Berlin. When Holthusen celebrated his sixtieth birthday in 1973, Heller wrote a public congratulatory letter to mark the occasion. In this laudation Heller characterized his friend and colleague as an eternal optimist:

> Aliveness—that's it! Someone who has been ordered to live. To quote our, your Rilke incorrectly, since there is often a lack of "glory" when one is not only orphic, but also critically active nowadays. Yes, most vividly alive, that is you, and as if one were also a little more in your presence, than what one would be without you, and thank you for that![83]

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[81] Mechthild Raabe, *Hans Egon Holthusen: Bibliographie 1931–1997* (Hildesheim: Universitätsbibliothek, 2000).

[82] Joachim Kaiser, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, April 15, 1973; Stiftung Universität Hildesheim: https://www.uni-hildesheim.de/en/bibliothek/forschen-publizieren/literaturarchiv/hans-egon-holthusen/zur-person-he-holthusen/ (accessed August 31, 2021). "In den 50-er Jahren beherrschte er die deutsche Literatur, soweit ein kritisierender sie beherrschen kann."

[83] Erich Heller, "Geburtstagsbrief an Hans Egon Holthusen," *Merkur* 27, no. 300 (April 1973): 500-502. "Lebendigkeit—das ist's! Ein zum Leben Bestellter, um unsern, Deinen Rilke falsch zu zitieren, da es am 'Rühmen' ja doch oft hapert, wenn man heutzutage sich nicht nur orphisch, sondern auch kritisch betätigt. Ja, aufs lebhafteste lebendig, das bist Du, und als ist's man in Deiner Gegenwart selber ein bisschen mehr, als man es ohne Dich wäre, und danke Dir dafür!" (on the occasion of Holthusen's sixtieth birthday). Draft in Heller Papers, Box 8, Folder 27.

In a private reply to Heller, Holthusen labeled the letter as one that mattered most to him.[84]

In winter 1960 the Library of Congress invited two representative scholars of French and two of German literary studies to deliver lectures about their respective literatures. The two scholars who were invited to present the development and most important works of German literature were Erich Heller and Hans Egon Holthusen. While Heller chose to speak about the lasting impact of Nietzsche ("The Modern German Mind: The Legacy of Nietzsche"), Holthusen lectured about the German apocalypse ("Crossing the Zero Point: German Literature since World War II")[85]. The audience was surely taken by surprise when Holthusen started: "Our point of departure, and at the same time the very focus of our whole enquiry, must needs be [original wording] the German catastrophe of 1945." He went on to depict German suffering immediately after WWII vividly and then presented four German writers, all of whom were born in the nineteenth century: Gottfried Benn (1886), Bertolt Brecht (1898), Thomas Mann (1875), and Ernst Jünger (1895). Holthusen explained that given the apocalyptic conditions in Germany after 1945, no one could expect an appearance of another German genius writer like Rilke or Kafka.[86]

Despite his myopic focus on German suffering, Holthusen was one of the few German writers who dared to respond to Wolfgang Weyrauch's 1966 article, "War ich ein Nazi?" The article challenged writers to reflect on their own uncomfortable pasts. Holthusen did, in the lengthiest response of only nine published contributions. His answer, however, just like his lecture at the Library of Congress six years earlier, was no critical introspection, and not orphic in any sense. He depicted an

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[84] Personal note to Heller, Heller Papers, Box 5, Folder 24.
[85] Pierre Emmanuel, ed., *French and German Letters Today: Four Lectures* (Washington, DC: Reference Department, Library of Congress, 1960).
[86] Ibid., 39, 40.

environment, the 1930s in Germany, where nothing made sense and no decision would have made a difference. The largest part of his essay described over and over again the circumstances of the year 1933. He enlightened readers that he joined the SS simply out of conceitedness and for possibilities of advancement, not as a true follower of fascist ideology: "The black uniformed organization with the skull emblem of the Schill officers was considered elite, it was considered chic, it was considered elegant, and so it was preferred by many exclusively appointed younglings, because they were too delicate to walk around in the shit brown gown of the SA."[87] Holthusen hid behind Arendt's systemic theory and did not shy away from pointing the finger at others—for example, at Adorno for his admiration of music composed for Hitler. At the very beginning of the essay Holthusen mentioned his participation in the resistance movement against National Socialism in Bavaria, in the very last days of WWII.[88] The members of that resistance group, the Freedom Action Bavaria (FAB), came mainly from the conservative, Bavarian patriots and educated middle class. Nonetheless, for Holthusen his resistance activity was apparently of such little importance that he devoted only one sentence to it in his almost fifty-page-long contribution. In the self-centered letter there was little to no space left for the name of any of the peoples that fell victim to the Holocaust. In a review of the anthology for *Die Zeit*, Horst Krüger expressed his perplexity: "The inability of the North German pastor's son of critical introspection is dismaying."[89]

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[87] Hans Egon Holthusen, "Porträt eines jungen Mannes, der freiwillig zur SS ging," in *War ich ein Nazi? Politik-Anfechtung des Gewissens*, edited by Joachim Günther and Ludwig Marcuse (Munich: Rütten and Loenig, 1968), 61. "Die schwarzuniformierte Organisation mit dem Totenkopfemblem der Schillschen Offiziere galt als eine Auslese, sie galt als schic, sie galt als elegant, und darum wurde sie von vielen exklusiv eingestellten Jünglingen bevorzugt, weil sie sich zu fein waren, in der kackbraunen Kluft der SA herumzulaufen."

[88] Holthusen, "Porträt eines jungen Mannes," 41.

[89] Horst Krüger, "Waren sie Nazis?" *Die Zeit* 27 (1968). https://www.zeit.de/1968/27/waren-sie-nazis/komplettansicht (accessed June 7, 2021). "Die Unfähigkeit des norddeutschen Pastorensohnes zur kritischen Introspektion ist bestürzend."

Perhaps Heller's friendship with Holthusen was proof of a belief in coping, not saving, in everyday practice. If Holthusen's life story sounds similar to that of one of the more eminent thinkers, then it might be worth mentioning that Heller did grow critical of Martin Heidegger's philosophy because Heidegger supported Hitler and National Socialism for philosophical reasons. Of course, Heidegger's *Black Notebooks* had not yet been published when Heller was reassessing his intellectual relationship with Heidegger's thought.[90]

1.5. German Studies in the Midwest before Heller's Arrival

When Heller accepted his position at Northwestern University, German Studies as an academic field in the United States was still young. The discipline had been part of the legacy of German immigration to the United States. Between 1850 and 1890 almost 2 million German speakers immigrated to the United States and settled predominantly in the Midwest. German was used in schools and churches, and German newspapers were widely printed. The knowledge of German classics was considered a stepping stone to education. Until WWI, the image of German literature was favorable and so powerful that it took some effort to rally the American public to anti-German WWI propaganda. The war hysteria specifically targeted public universities, especially those in regions with a strong German-immigrant population. Professors at the universities of Illinois, Michigan, Nebraska, and Wisconsin were censured and dismissed because of their attitudes toward the war. At the University of Michigan, the administration almost completely dismantled its German department in the years 1917 to 1918 and permanently discharged six professors for suspected disloyalty.[91] This loss of status hit

[90] Martin Heidegger, *Ponderings VII–XI: Black Notebooks*, 1938–1939, translated by Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017).
[91] Clifford Wilcox, "World War I and the Attack on Professors of German at the University of Michigan," *History of Education Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (1993): 59–84.

many German patriots more than the fact that the world had entered a war. The old positive and the new aggressive image of Germans mixed and produced a deeper interest in Germany as a societal phenomenon rather than one in German literature.[92]

Only when the situation in the Weimar Republic seemed more stable in the 1920s did the situation of German Studies start changing. German classics and Romanticism slowly became permissible again—excluding, however, anything on "the Left" or with more than a singular German background, for example, works by Jewish Germans. In this period, German academia in the Midwest promoted authors from the national conservative (pre-fascist) circles—Hans Carossa, for example. Then refugees from Nazism from Germany and Central Europe brought liberal ideas into the sensitive environment where the anti-German hysteria of 1917 was followed by anti-Communist hysteria. Jost Hermand argued that interest in authors such as Hermann Broch, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Franz Kafka, and Franz Werfel did not disturb the established classic canon and did not voice too loudly the criticism coming from the Left. It merely shifted interest to the intrinsic values: "form-content, rhythm."[93]

By focusing on intrinsic literary values rather than the interpretative approach, the authors and their critics were better protected from any suspicion of political (leftist) engagement. Avoidance of political or ideological engagement offered the possibility of continuing to talk about literature. Heller fulfilled this condition instinctively, thanks to his standing interest in the newly discovered, mostly Central European writers. He did so despite his stated aversion to formalism, despite having contributed strongly to the existential literary criticism by his depiction of the symptom of the era: spiritual barrenness and despair (*The Disinherited Mind*). By the 1960s, when Heller arrived in

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[92] Hermand Jost, "Zur Situation der Germanistik in den USA: Eine historische Bilanz," *Zeitschrift für Germanistik* 11, no. 3 (2001): 578–89.
[93] Ibid., 580, 581.

the United States, his political loyalties were already conservative, almost mainstream. In January 1968 Hannah Arendt (an avid reader of Heller's writings) sent him a letter about a review of his essay on Kafka in the German newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung:* "I took a very close look at the supplement from FAZ. Indeed, you should not do anything about Mr. Wagenbach's rabid remarks about your introduction. It is of course also an attack on your general position by the 'Left.'"[94]

However, Heller was part of a cohort of primarily German Jewish writers who published in German and (mostly) had leftist pasts, at least in their youth in Europe between the wars. In an interview Heller explained: "I was quite well known in student and political circles in Prague, I had been in liberal student movements, socially [sic, socialist] movements, even, and I was politically very much compromised."[95] Heller reflected on his leftist past in several other conversations, if not with shame, then with definite contempt: "I'm much more conservative now than I ever could have imagined at the age of twenty. I have learned not to be particularly proud of that part of my past."[96] In another interview, Heller stated that his transformation had to do with his "gradual disillusionment with any Utopia. . . . One of the most decisive wounds perhaps, to my progressive socialist ideology, was the total impotence of the liberal opponents to Hitler."[97]

Heller's statement about "the impotence of liberal opponents to Hitler" likely referred in part to the Munich Agreement of September 1938, when France and Great Britain treacherously forced Czechoslovakia to surrender its border regions and defenses

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[94] Wagenbach was a German publisher and scholar who wrote a major critical biography of Kafka: Klaus Wagenbach, *Franz Kafka in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* (Leipzig: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1964). See also Heller Papers, Box 4, Folder 9. *Ich habe mir die Beilage aus der FAZ sehr genau angesehen. Gegen die pöbelhaften Bemerkungen von Herrn Wagenbach gegen Ihre Einleitung sollten Sie in der Tat nichts tun. Es ist natürlich auch ein Angriff der "Linken" auf Ihre Gesamtposition*.
[95] Stephen Bates, "Interview with Erich Heller," Heller Papers, Box 1, Folder 6.
[96] Hirsch, "Fleeing Hitler's Europe."
[97] Paul Herron, "An Interview with Erich Heller," Heller Papers, Box 1, Folder 6.

to Nazi Germany in exchange for Hitler's useless pledge of peace. Heller, in other words, suffered from what the Czechs call a "Munich complex." Heller carried this lesson within and applied it as late as the 1980s, when he concluded: "the 'peace movement' is naively and unconsciously one of the most destructive movements ever invented. . . . The only means of preserving [the] political independence of the West is atomic blackmail."[98]

In the post-Nazi era, Heller as a critic of German literature and philosophy enjoyed a double advantage that may explain his success as a public intellectual. Not only did he not bear any personal stain of Nazism, but he also hailed from the Habsburg lands that did not shoulder the moral burden of Germany itself. Heller, as noted above, chose to emphasize his cultural connection to German-language writers from his native Bohemia. In an interview with Stephen Bates, the dean of faculty in Northwestern's College of Arts and Sciences, he also proudly maintained that many of the most important writers in German did not come from Germany.[99] The Austrian publishers (post-WWII) with whom Heller collaborated—for example, the journal *FORVM* in 1956—expressed the same affinity to one's own: "contribution by Erich Heller, a Professor of German Literature, originating from Austria."[100]

Ironically, if Heller was aware of the shift in the American reception of literary works and simply played his Central European cards, then it removed him from his own thesis spelled out in *The Ironic German*, namely, that literature is truthful and politically conscious. Or perhaps he could consider his own turn to political conservatism in exile as a turn closer to current local political life. Heller also eventually distanced himself from his initial admiration of Thomas Mann. Although Heller's

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[98] Herron, "Interview with Erich Heller."
[99] Bates, "Interview with Erich Heller."
[100] "Zum 20. Todestag von Karl Kraus," *FORVM* 111, no. 30 (1956): 217.

socialist connections had once allowed him to meet many intellectuals, including Mann, Heller dismissed him in1980 as a "mere bureaucrat, nothing more": "Mann looked like a higher state official and conducted himself in the same way."[101]

In their political lives, Thomas Mann and Erich Heller moved in opposite directions. While Heller moved from a leftist past closer and closer to a conservative approach in his adult life in England and the United States, Thomas Mann transformed from a conservative anti-republican Romantic to a supporter of the Weimar Republic. When confronted with the "radical Right" challenges to Weimar, Mann shifted to increasingly strong support of the Social Democratic Party. Some critics—for example, Geörgy Lukács—saw Mann's writing very differently from Heller, namely, as a rebirth of society along Marxist lines, especially in *Buddenbrooks*, *Magic Mountain*, and *Doctor Faustus*. Although neither Heller nor Mann was religious, Heller continued to believe that the Enlightenment was the cornerstone leading to a catastrophe, but Mann eventually fully accepted it.[102]

1.6. Heller's Golden Cage in the Midwest

The nonpolitical interpretative literary methods applied in the United States in the immediate aftermath of WWII gradually lost their novelty as the fear of being read as leftist and moving too close to the danger of falling onto the radar of the House Un-American Activities Committee slowly eased. German Studies began to change by the time Erich Heller arrived in the United States and accepted the position at Northwestern University. In the 1960s American universities and, with them, German departments began to expand and grow. New liberal minds, many arriving directly from Germany,

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[101] Hirsch, "Fleeing Hitler's Europe."
[102] Hans Rudolf Vaget, "Thomas Mann: Enlightenment and Social Democracy," *Publications of the English Goethe Society* 86, no. 3 (2017): 193-204, esp.196–97.

filled opening teaching positions. This new generation of academics, operating in the new political atmosphere, eventually cleared the "Muff" of the stagnating American *Germanistik*, just like they would in Germany itself.[103]

The new emphasis stressed ethical leadership and voicing political ideas once again. The connection between academia and life outside was slowly reestablished. The change became visible not only in theoretical research focus but also in practical teaching. While in the 1950s the focus was on language training and, for academic advancement, the development of language materials might have been enough, such was no longer the case by the late 1960s. Not only younger German academics (who came because of better prospects for advancement in academia compared to the situation at home) but also the Vietnam War brought calls for the political relevance of literature in the wider world. The ability to speak to a wider audience, which in turn brought in more students and possibly raised the profile of both the department and the university, marked the return of a connection to politics.

In his interviews Heller was rather careful with regard to the current political situation in any of his homelands. He remained devoted to literature, and when he commented on life in Germany or Austria, it was through the literary lens and mostly pointing to the past. Aside from taking a strong position with respect to the Cold War, Heller did not articulate a vision for a societal organization in these countries going forward, as the independence of the West was for him the dearest value. That distinction became clearer in a response Heller wrote to a critical review of *The Ironic German*. In the 1959 review, Goronwy Rees interpreted Heller's praising of Mann as a novelist as insufficient criticism of Mann's writing (only) in the face of Hitler. Rees doubted that

[103] The "Muff Action" was a student protest against the double morality of German professors with a "brown past" and their exclusive control over academic decision making at German universities. At the celebration of the change of rector in the Hamburg Audimax on November 9, 1967, the protesters rolled out their slogan: "Unter den Talaren Muff von 1000 Jahren [Muff under the gowns of 1000 years]."

Mann had done enough in his opposition to Hitler, and he even doubted the honesty of Mann's opposition.[104] Within three months Heller responded, explaining that his published retort was "entirely for Thomas Mann's sake."[105] Heller vehemently rejected both Rees's suggestion that the German catastrophe meant little to Mann and Rees's jest that Mann's "answer to Buchenwald was a smile."[106] Heller reminded readers of "the many pamphlets and speeches in which Mann sought first to rouse resistance to Hitler inside Germany, then awaken the world to the immensity of the German danger, and finally to undermine, through broadcasts from London, the moral defenses of Hitler's 'fortress Europe.'"[107] Heller found Mann's dealings with Hitler "utterly un-problematical," but he had much greater difficulty understanding Mann's postwar contacts with the German Democratic Republic and "his benevolent shaking of hands with its literary lackeys." In this response, shortly after the publication of *The Ironic German*, Heller spelled out the greatest irony of Thomas Mann anew:

> Is it not ironical that in a world of liberal letters, applauding with "non-political" abandon and almost masochistic delight the politically corrupted genius of Bertolt Brecht, frowning doubts should be voiced in 1958 concerning the depth of Thomas Mann's humanistic indignation at the tyrannical infamies of—Hitler?[108]

Setting aside any potential personal reasons, Heller's firm stand on the East-West conflict, his distrust in liberal democracies, and fear of proletarian tyranny were all possibly at the root of Heller's continuing drift away from Mann.

During his own life Thomas Mann stepped out of the *Unpolitische* (nonpolitical) and became himself *Der tätige Geist* (the acting inner self) that he originally rejected. This conscious spirit drove his political engagement during the 1930s

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[104] Goronwy Rees, "*Thomas Mann, the Ironic German*, by Erich Heller," *Encounter* 1, no. 1 (1959): 81–83.
[105] Erich Heller, "Thomas Mann and the 'Domestic Perversity,'" *Encounter* 12, no. 3 (1959): 54–55.
[106] Rees, "*Thomas Mann*, *the Ironic German*," 81–83.
[107] Heller, "Thomas Mann and the 'Domestic Perversity,'" 55.
[108] Ibid., 56.

and early 1940s. He was among the exiled authors who expressed their affinity to and support of American political values. Mann, however, returned to Europe in 1952, after he was forced to quit his position as a consultant in Germanic literature at the Library of Congress as a suspected communist (following his testimony to the House for Un-American Activities Committee), and after he had been challenged by German intellectuals (as early as 1945 in an open letter from Walter von Molo) to consider returning.[109] Mann refused to live in Germany and settled for the last two years of his life in Switzerland (where he had often visited before WWI and then lived in exile from 1933 to 1938).

For Heller there was no urgent political or personal need to return "home"—or any familiar physical space to which he could return or would wish to preserve. When Czechoslovakia reemerged into existence after liberation in 1945, it had a different size and demography. The ethnic Germans had been expelled, their homes looted, and their land resettled. Larger estates and factories were seized by the state. Czech and Slovak became the country's only official languages, Social Realism and the communist doctrine the only permitted way of living. The country he knew from his youth no longer existed. The communist coup in 1948 sealed this situation for the next four decades. But Heller did have an opportunity to visit Prague in the 1960s as a scholar. A fellow countryman from northern Bohemia—literary critic, Germanist, Slavicist, and Anglicist Kurt Krolop[110] (born in 1930), whose family had been expelled after WWII to East Germany—repeatedly invited Heller to make a return visit to his homeland. Krolop

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[109] David Kettler, and Detlef Garz, "I Do Not Lift a Stone," chapter 3 of *First Letters after Exile*, by Thomas Mann, Hannah Arendt, Ernst Bloch, and Others (London: Anthem, 2021), 53.
[110] Kurt Krolop, and Klaas-Hinrich Ehlers, *Brücken nach Prag: Deutschsprachige Literatur im kulturellen Kontext der Donaumonarchie und der Tschechoslowakei—Festschrift für Kurt Krolop Zum 70. Geburtstag* (Frankfurt: P. Lang, 2000); Kurt Krolop, Peter Becher, Steffen Höhne, and Marek Nekula, *Kafka und Prag: Literatur-, Kultur-, Sozial- und Sprachhistorische Kontexte* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2012); Kurt Krolop, *Reflexionen der Fackel: Neue Studien über Karl Kraus* (Vienna: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1994).

taught at Martin-Luther University in Halle and from 1957 onward at Charles University in Prague, where in 1968 he had become the first chair of the Forschungsstelle für Prager deutsche Literatur (Research Center for Prague German Literature) until the institute was dissolved in 1969. Krolop participated in the famous 1963 Kafka conference in Liblice,[111] near Prague, and he delivered one of the keynote speeches at the follow-up conference in 1965.

His efforts to engage in research about Prague German and Moravian German literature, organize conferences that confronted the problem (for the Communist Party) of the German presence in Bohemia, and lead the institute were politically daring undertakings. Krolop made at least two attempts to bring Heller to Prague, one in 1969 and one in 1969, to give a talk. They shared an interest not only in Kafka and the Prague writers but also an intense one in Karl Kraus.[112] He tried to coordinate with Heller's existing travel itineraries in Germany and proposed "a side trip [*Abstecher*] to Prague."[113] Heller never accepted the invitation.

The first homeland for which Heller could have longed was for him irretrievably lost. He commented on this fact frequently in the interviews he frequently gave. But he did seriously consider an offer from his second homeland. In March 1971 the provost of University College London, Noel Annan, invited Heller once again to become the head of its German department (which for Heller could have meant closing the circle—not dissimilar to returning home). It took Heller six months to respond, and he made the

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[111] Franz Kafka, Eduard Goldstücker, and Otto Guth, *[Franz Kafka. Liblická Konference 1963.] Franz Kafka Aus Prager Sicht. (Redaktion: Eduard Goldstüker [and others].) [The Proceedings of the Conference Held at Liblice in 1963*, translated by Otto Guth and others, with plates, including portraits and facsimiles] (1965); Vědecká konference věnovaná dílu Franze Kafky, Liblice, 1963, Czechoslovakia: *Franz Kafka*. [1. vyd.] (Prague: Nakl. Československé akademie věd, 1963); *Kafka und der Prager Frühling: Die Konferenz in Liblice 1963 und Ihre Folgen* (Potsdam: Leibniz-Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung Potsdam, 2018). https://doi.org/10.14765/zzf.dok-2573.
[112] Dietrich Simon, and Kurt Krolop, *Karl Kraus, Stimme gegen die Zeit: Dichtung und Satire bei Karl Kraus / Kurt Krolop* (Berlin: Volk und Welt, 1971).
[113] Heller Papers, Box 6, Folder 6.

provost greatly impatient. Perhaps he acted in a Kafkaesque manner, consciously or not, by first creating a hostile environment through procrastination, then being left with no other option but to reject the offer. Heller eventually wrote to the provost in October that he "would very much enjoy this, if only it had not been for the Germanic leadership," and explained how much he disliked administrative work. And then Heller continued in a very pragmatic fashion:

> My Northwestern professorial freedom allows me to teach almost whatever I happen to like teaching, and from time to time not to teach at all; the difference in salary (even after taking into account the lower cost of living)—I would have to take a cut of 50 percent and the considerable reduction of my retirement income.[114]

He also inquired whether it would be possible for London to contribute to his pension insurance in America, thereby revealing the ultimate reason for his decision.

1.7. The Inheritance

For the formulation of the title of his seminal work, *The Disinherited Mind*, and the ideas within it, Heller was attacked by some readers for whom the idea of one's making, completely detached from the tradition, was unimaginable, even sinful. Yet for Heller, an agnostic who lived a parallel of a similar disintegration of societal network in 1918, such idea was very close to home, and he could have easily been writing about his own life. It may be that Heller's successful career was enabled by the fact that he originated from Bohemia and was so naturally a part of the circles where Central European authors were more prominently discussed. Heller remained faithful (mostly) to the same group of writers that had enchanted him in his youth and whose writing was so firmly connected to his "romantic" way of living in the literary cafés in Prague in

[114] Heller Papers, Box 4, Folder 8.

interwar Czechoslovakia, now so pragmatically and firmly rejected as naive. The only German writer that Heller so assertively spurned in his later career, Thomas Mann, was the one who did not share his Habsburg cultural heritage.

However, they both still shared the cultural heritage of Nietzsche. For Mann, this fact presented a painful awareness. *Buddenbrooks* (1901) is to some extent a result of Mann's fascination with Nietzsche and the urge to respond to his philosophy in his own creative way. In his *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* (1918) Mann spoke about the eternally connected spirits of the triumvirate Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Wagner, and the inspiration they provided for him and most of the German, educated middle class in the first half of the twentieth century. Nicolas Martin argues that Friedrich Nietzsche emerged also as a key figure in Thomas Mann's continued efforts in the mid-1940s to account for National Socialism and to contextualize Germany's "Faustian bargain." Mann examined Nietzsche's intellectual and emotional authority and attempted to distance himself from Nietzsche but ended in renewed admiration of him. Martin cited from a letter Mann wrote to Bavarian lawyer and lyricist Maximillian Brantl in 1947: "I can't be angry with Nietzsche because he 'spoiled my Germans.' If they were so stupid as to fall for his diabolism, that is their business, and if they cannot take their great men, so they should no longer produce any."[115] In this wording, Mann's quotation gets familiarly close to Nietzsche's own statement: "One even ought not to know more of a thing than what one can create. Furthermore, the only way to know a thing truly is the attempt to make it."[116]

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[115] Nicholas Martin, "Ewig verbundene Geister: Thomas Mann's Re-engagement with Nietzsche, 1943–1947," *Oxford German Studies* 34, no. 2 (2005): 197-203, esp. 203. "Ich kann Nietzschen nicht böse sein, weil er mir 'meine Deutschen verdorben hat'. Wenn sie so dumm waren, auf seinen Diabolism hineinzufallen, so ist das ihre Sache, und wenn sie ihre großen Männer nicht vertragen können, so sollen sie keine mehr hervorbringen."

[116] Daniel W. Conway and Peter S. Groff, *Nietzsche: Critical Assessments* (London: Routledge, 1998), 106.

Heller would have to agree that German thinkers found the diagnosis (namely, loss of spiritual guidance by God), but no cure. The wound remained open, and the German attempt to close it forcefully (by replacing it with a human leader full of "Will to Power" failed terribly, as it led to the horrors of the Holocaust. Perhaps that vision was on Heller's mind when he advised against any forceful attempts to reintegrate what had disintegrated. However, the return of a spiritual life that includes faith, the return of God, is not part of Heller's prophesy for Western democracies. Reinventing a new spiritual foundation for the disinherited modern Western society is unlikely. The birthright is lost, and we must have the composure to come to terms with it.

How relevant would Heller's teaching be today, and for whom? He himself may have found the answer in a letter to a friend from the German department of the University of Wales in Swansea: "I don't believe in German departments. How can one get a picture of the world by reading Thomas Mann, but not Anna Karenina? I believe in World literature."[117] That declaration represents a clear shift away from the still complex and complicated but narrow (national) understanding of the world—Austrian, Bohemian, or German. The physical space Heller inhabited, of course, had become much larger for him after he had come from the Bohemian borderlands to Prague and experienced two physical exiles, one involuntary, one chosen. In his countless interviews Heller wrapped his message more carefully:

> What seems to me particularly disturbing, at times, is that English speaking students should devote themselves to the study of even not very important German writers whom they have to read with great effort (at the same time learning the subtleties of the language), while they remain ignorant of the great literary works in their own language.[118]

Historically, Heller derived his view also from the German eighteenth-century

[117] Hirsch, "Fleeing Hitler's Europe."
[118] Ibid.

search for the roots (*Ursprünge*) that so many small nations in Europe followed. He viewed the burrowing for national roots as a resurrection of "primitivity", capable of destroying the delicate fabric of civilization. For Heller, the imaginative immersion into "primitivity" to find new intellectual goals reveals the greatest (German) irony.[119] Thus Heller's resolution was to call for "World or European literature" to lead students to the best sources and skip "unimportant" authors often included in national canons. Instead, he proposed an analogue to the national awakening movements, not to recover the past but to recover the interior past, a movement to retrieve one's historical consciousness—which in turn explains Heller's inclination to accept a description of his own work as a "historian of consciousness" while objecting to the label "psychoanalyst." For Heller, consciousness was a changing entity. And "psychoanalysis is the disease of which it pretends to be the cure."[120]

Heller called this introspective journey a "voyage into the interior." Yet in a paraphrase of Hegel, Heller still highlighted the importance of a connection to reality: "no imagination can equal the excitements of the real world."[121] What remained with all these doubts is only the questioning of the value of truth. This conclusion not only reflects Heller's belief that "Nietzsche is the mastermind of modern Germany and few can think in Germany without thinking of Nietzsche," but also his handling of the truth in his own life.[122] Heller's own voyage resulted in a dislike, if not fear, of universal truths.

When the 1938 German invasion tore apart the familiar atmosphere of

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[119] Bates, "Interview with Erich Heller."
[120] Heller quotes Karl Kraus, originally used in his own essay, "The Modern German Mind: The Legacy of Nietzsche," in *French and German Letters Today*, edited by Pierre Emmanuel (Washington, DC: Reference Department, Library of Congress, 1960), 31.
[121] Bates, "Interview with Erich Heller."
[122] Heller, "Modern German Mind," 38.

democratic Prague, Heller may not have undergone as radical and sudden a transformation as other writers and thinkers from Prague who spoke Czech in addition to their native German and felt more rooted and sheltered in the city. They found it more difficult to accept the reality of their world's disappearing. His sense of belonging had already been limited, at least during his studies in Prague. He could not comfortably socialize with most of the city's residents who spoke Czech, fully partake in their cultural life, or engage in arguments with them—about politics or literature. Heller himself emphasized that his idea of inheritance was conceived long before his physical flight. Holthusen's memory confirmed Heller's awareness of being an outsider when he recalled how they both sat in a house over the Swansea Bay and drank a lot of Drambuie, while Heller recounted witty tales from the "Czech provincial prison" (*tschechisches Provinz-gefängnis*).[123]

1.8. The Ironic Erich Heller

In 1958, Northwestern University created a new program to "provide qualified students of literature with a perspective broader than that offered in any single department."[124] The Avalon Professorship at NU was established in 1966 by the Avalon Foundation, along with the university's "First Plan for the Seventies." Heller persuaded the university that his perspective on life would fit the vision, and he was appointed to direct NU's general and comparative literature program. Two years later, Heller, the first Avalon Professor, was awarded the 1968 Gold Medal by the Goethe Institute of Germany for his activities as a teacher and writer. He received the prize in Munich and delivered his acceptance speech, titled "On the Margins of World Literature."[125] In 1971

[123] Holthusen, "Geburtstagsgruß an Erich Heller."
[124] Northwestern University, "The University's First Plan for the Seventies," Heller Papers, Box 1, Folder 1.
[125] Heller Papers, Box 1, Folder 8.

he was then elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences at its annual meeting in Boston. And in 1978 Heller received the Great Cross of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Heller's early life in a province electorally and geographically, if not intellectually, detached from German political strife redefined his attachment to cultural Germanness and empowered him with the skills to recognize and navigate the transforming world. In his youth at home, his native German represented for the first time the political interests of a minority. This extrication and refinement of the understanding of the cultural heritage possibly allowed Heller to engage so passionately in the post-WWII revival of German and Austrian culture. For Heller, it was represented in the achievements of thinkers who used the German tongue since the age of Goethe and a select few, mostly writers who lived on non-German soil, who did so after Nietzsche.

In point of fact, Heller did ultimately cross the political threshold, but he did so to criticize the younger generation in the 1960s and 1970s and, ironically, their own break with the tradition. As a keynote guest speaker for the annual public meeting of the Bavarian Academy of Fine Arts (Bayrische Akademie der schönen Künste) in the summer of 1971, and invited by the academy's president—Heller's friend and colleague Holthusen—Heller sealed his position in the eyes of most of the German audience (and readers of German) as a deeply dated conservative man estranged from late modernity. In his celebratory lecture, "Culture and Counter-Culture" (*Kultur und Gegenkultur*), Heller condemned American youth culture (and, among others, the Beatles) as a symptomatic product of bad education. He colorfully labeled John Lennon a music comedian (*Musik-Komödiant*).[126] Heller continued with his attack by speaking about the

[126] Erich Heller, "Kultur und Gegenkultur," Heller Papers, Box 8, Folder 29.

hideousness of what he termed "modern terrorist irrationalism" and mocking the younger generation's "journey into the interior" as "pubertal mysticism and soul tourism" (*pubertäre Mystik und Seelentourismus*). The German press (and, according to reports, also a substantial part of the audience) responded with sharp criticism. In response to Heller's statement that Sigmund Freud provided the theoretical foundation for generational conflict, the *Munich Merkur* commented: "The quintessence of Heller's lecture consisted in the sharp rejection of a mentality that sees in the father-son conflict an inevitable necessity and in the destruction a creative principle."[127] In *Die Süddeutsche Zeitung* Joachim Kaiser summarized Heller's condemnation of modern education: "Anyone who praises the old grammar education system conservatively because it produced great men behaves roughly as logically as someone who criticizes education because it did not prevent Auschwitz."[128] And the *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, in reaction to Heller's defense of preservation against renewal, called desperately for a "counter-academy."[129] Yet, given Heller's negative assessment of the European secularization process, such celebration of the closed social and educational systems from the pre-secular era might appear logical.

Perhaps Heller's fascination with the drama of German and Austrian intellectual history of the nineteenth century absorbed him so completely that not only did he search for tranquility in the departed values, but he also never publicly tested the outcomes of this struggle against the drama of post-Nazi German and Austrian politics (and

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[127] *Munich Merkur*, "Jahressitzung der Akademie der Schönen Künste: Vom Schönheitssinn der Steinkeule" [Annual meeting of the Academy of Fine Arts: from the Stone Club's sense of beauty], clippings from *Merkur*, July 1971, Heller Papers, Box 8, Folder 29. *Die Quintessenz von Hellers Vortrag bestand in der schroffen Ablehnung einer Mentalität, die in dem Vater-Sohn-Konflikt eine unabänderliche Notwendigkeit und in der Zerstörung ein schöpferisches Prinzip erblickt*.

[128] Joachim Kaiser, "Die Donnerkeile des Plauderers" [The chatterer's thunderbolts], clippings from *Die Süddeutsche Zeitung*, July 9, 1971, Heller Papers, Box 8, Folder 29. *Wer das alte Grammatik Bildungssystem konservativ lobt, weil es große Männer hervorgebracht habe, verhält sich etwa so logisch wie jemand, der die Bildung tadelt, weil sie Ausschwitz nicht verhinderte*.

[129] *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, "Unbildung und Gegenkultur?" [Illiterateness and counter culture], clippings from *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, July 12, 1971, Heller Papers, Box 8, Folder 29.

literature) of the twentieth century. As a literary critic, he described the experience of irretrievability and ways of coping with it. In his own historical reality, WWII propelled many into a realm beyond recovery, and the merciless consequences of the war presented survivors with bewildering acts and the need for a graspable and accountable theoretical framework. The shared awareness of the postwar void was more intense and painful than the perception of the immediate reality. That was a situation Heller was fully prepared to confront. For the critical period of two decades of post-WWII recovery, when the world demanded an explanation about what happened to Austria, Germany, and Europe, Heller offered answers that resonated on both sides of the Atlantic.

CHAPTER 2

HELLER'S PLACE WITHIN LITERARY CRITICISM

2.1. Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century German Literary Criticism

In the twentieth century, the literary texts became subjected to closer formal linguistic, aesthetic, and contextual examination and subordinated to stricter judgment about to what extent the work recapitulates the experience of society and its sense of life. Critics were assessing the work's congruence of language, history, and culture, yet, psychological investigations along with formal studies of literature introduced the reading of literature as the reading of ideas. The historical dependency of the literary work on the classical philological approach was no longer the only possible approach. With relaxing the normative measures of classical criticism, a theoretical study of literature became more popular, even beyond the gates of high-brow academia. In the second half of the century, in the aftermath of WWII, the social structures of both the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic dictated the relationship of literary criticism to literature and its readers. Thus the teleological conceptions of literary criticism no longer determined the discipline's development.[130]

Looking back, the nineteenth and especially the twentieth centuries brought wider access to education. Everyone who could read, write, and afford taking time to tend to literature could speak up and comment on the quality of the written work in question. Nonacademic criticism bloomed in both Germany and Bohemia, as the literacy rate was high in both regions. Literature attracted great public interest, especially in the

[130] Peter Uwe Hohendahl and Klaus L. Berghahn, *A History of German Literary Criticism, 1730–1980* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988).

critical years of the interwar period, when print media were developing rapidly. In major cities, such as Prague, some of them were appearing two or three times a day. This wider readership was not interested in the Platonic ideal and/or formal aspects of philology. Readers wanted to understand and assess their society through the critique of the literary works the society produced. Both scholarly and nonacademic critics examined the language's capacity to capture the essence of life in the given period—and ideally to predict the turns the society might take in the future. The effectiveness of literary works in establishing a connection between the work and the reader became an important measure. The attention to the history of ideas as opposed to the nature of language, aesthetic theories, and methodological dispositions marked a renewed search for meaning and assessment of the current human condition, as foreshadowed by the Russian existential writers, principally Fyodor Dostoyevsky.

The Swiss scholar Emil Staiger[131] formulated some fundamental theoretical guidelines along the lines of classical aesthetic and Wolfgang Kayser[132] paid attention to Russian formalism,[133] but ultimately and most powerfully, the general tendency of German thinkers toward spiritualization was challenged by the empirical criticism defined by a Czech-Austrian émigré to the United States—René Wellek, a former member of the Linguistic Circle in Prague and professor of Slavic and comparative literature at Yale University. Wellek and his American colleague and friend Austin Warren, professor of English at the University of Michigan, called for an "organon of empiric methods" in their 1949 *Theory of Literature*.[134] They reminded readers, critics,

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[131] Emil Staiger, *Die Kunst der Interpretation: Studien zur deutschen Literaturgeschichte, von Emil Staiger* (2 vols.; Zürich: Atlantis, 1957).
[132] Wolfgang Kayser, *Das Sprachliche Kunstwerk: Eine Einfuhrung in die Literaturwissenschaft / Wolfgang Kayser* (Bern: A. Francke, 1948).
[133] Richard E. Amacher and Victor Lange, *New Perspectives in German Literary Criticism: A Collection of Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 9.
[134] René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature* (New York: Harcourt & Brace, 1949). https://archive.org/details/theoryofliteratu0000well_x5t7.

and scholars of methodological problems of literary interpretation; their work would become known as the "New Criticism."[135] German scholars countered Wellek and Austin's proposal by defending the need for a basis in historical framework.[136]

When in 1970 Wellek published another of his periodical overviews of the state of European criticism,[137] he found German criticism clearly distinguished from the French and English traditions, as well as from the situation in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. With respect to German criticism, Wellek described a strong aversion to literary historicism. He found that existentialism was still present and mostly influenced by Heidegger. (Heller himself wondered how much he was attracted to Heidegger's thought.) But mostly, in opposition to historicism he found various expressions of leaning against the German classical and romantic traditions. German literary criticism, according to Wellek, was in the hands of the "Left Hegelians" (Benjamin and Adorno). He preferred this expression as opposed to "New Marxists" to set them apart from Eastern Marxism (Lukács). In comparison to the leftist group, he assessed the criticism of the Right as weak and highlighted only one such critic, based in the traditional conservative and religious values: Hans Egon Holthusen.[138] Wellek valued his work as eminently ethical. However, Wellek was also critical of Holthusen's enthusiastic approval of T. S. Eliot's acceptance of dogma and commitment to elitist, Eurocentric cultural conservatism, which included a certain degree of anti-Semitism and a call for unity of religious background.

Heller's interest in literary criticism developed during the time he spent in Prague, between two currents: First, the currents of the German *Geistesgeschichte*

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[135] René Wellek and Austin Warren. *Theory of Literature* (2nd ed.; Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1956); first edition published in 1946 and first translation into German in 1959.
[136] Amacher and Lange, *New Perspectives.*
[137] René Wellek, *Grenzziehungen: Beiträge zur Literaturkritik* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1972), 155–65.
[138] Hans Egon Holthusen, *Der unbehauste Mensch: Motive und Probleme der modernen Literatur* (3rd ed.; Munich: R. Piper, 1955).

(intellectual history), based on Hegel, popular at that time in the circles around the German department at the German University of Prague, based on Cysarz's[139] work. A little earlier, August Sauer[140] and his student Josef Nadler[141] emphasized the continued focus on German intellectual history and the study of *Volkskunde* (folklore) as an academic discipline. The second intellectual current was cultivated in the Prague Cafés with the interwar Prague Linguistic Circle.[142] Between these two intellectual forces, the roots of many Prague writers can be identified. The circles around the German department of the German University of Prague[143] and the "street culture" of the multilingual Prague Cafés. Although Heller remembers most vividly the energies of the city and its Café culture, Heller's writing points to his inspiration as being more aligned with the German academic line, at least in part: Hegelian and close to Heidegger. On the other hand, Heller grew very critical of elevating the study of folklore beyond everyday culture.

While taking different paths, Czech, German, and multilingual speakers inspired one another and experimented with creative forms of defining (or blurring) the territoriality of one's life, language, and ethnicity in the face of the encroaching nemesis of merciless nationalism. Scott Spector defined their searches as "radicalized rootlessness."[144] Franz Kafka was one of the frequent *Stammgäste* (regulars) in bilingual

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[139] Herbert Cysarz, *Erfahrung und Idee: Probleme und Lebensformen in der deutschen Literatur von Hamann Bis Hegel* (Vienna: W. Braumüller, 1921).
[140] August Sauer, *Literaturgeschichte und Volkskunde: Rektoratsrede, Gehalten in der Aula der K. K. Deutschen Karl-Ferdinands-Universität in Prag, Am 18. November 1907* (London: Forgotten Books, 2022).
[141] Steffen Höhne, *August Sauer (1855–1926): Ein Intellektueller in Prag zwischen Kultur- und Wissenschaftspolitik* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2011). https://doi.org/10.7788/boehlau.9783412213442.
[142] Jindřich Toman, *The Magic of a Common Language: Jakobson, Mathesius, Trubetzkoy, and the Prague Linguistic Circle* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995).
Giorgio Graffi, *The Prague Linguistic Circle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019). https://doi.org/10.1093/OBO/9780199772810-0247.
[143] Ota Konrád, *Geisteswissenschaften im Umbruch: Die Faecher Geschichte, Germanistik und Slawistik an der Deutschen Universität in Prag 1918–1945* (New York: P. Lang, 2020). http://public.eblib.com/choice/PublicFullRecord.aspx?p=6208977.
[144] Scott Spector, *Prague Territories: National Conflict and Cultural Innovation in Franz Kafka's Fin de Siècle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

Cafés of Prague, and so were M. Brod and E. E. Kisch. Even though there is no direct evidence about which Cafés Heller frequented, it is unimaginable that he would avoid bilingual Cafés in his leftist youth and pass on the all-day chatting and critical philosophizing opportunity. Given his literary inclinations, as described in his early notes to friends and by his younger brother, the vivid multilingual expression of modernity likely attracted and shaped him. The Prague Cafés offered a public sphere for members of the middle class like Heller to discuss and form opinions and express them in art. It was Karl Kraus who mocked the Prague literati debates, especially those from Café Arco, whose participants he named "Acronauts." Heller's youth likely soaked in something from both currents, the more traditional German University atmosphere and the progressive, cosmopolitan, Prague avant-guard. Heller recalled in his interviews the intellectual environment of that Prague as incomparable to any other he had witnessed.

The members of the Circle were driven by a common desire to form a new basis for understanding the sources and functioning of language. They were made up of a heterogeneous group of Czech, Russian, Ukrainian, and German scholars who found themselves living in Prague in the mid-1920s and flourished in its social and cultural environment. The Circle's theories were strongly connected to Prague's literary and artistic avant-garde and characteristic of the age in search for the collective and the syncretic. Its members included Vilém Mathesius, Russian phonologist N. S. Trubetzkoy, and Roman Jakobson. The Circle promoted in the 1920s and 1930s structural literary analysis informed by semiotic studies. The debates of the Prague Linguistic Circle also significantly formed the future interests of René Wellek.

Later in Cambridge, when Heller started writing his dissertation and built on the literary debates he lived through in Prague, he turned for inspiration to Spengler's naturalistic approach, and Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's *Dialektik der*

Aufklärung (Dialectic of the Enlightenment).[145] Horkheimer and Adorno argued in this work that the path to the dissolution of the ties of traditional society originated already in the Enlightenment, when literary criticism became part of public discourse for the first time in history. Whether this critical involvement started during the Enlightenment (Adorno and Horkheimer) or later during capitalism as its criticism (as in Jürgen Habermas's thesis). In both approaches, the importance of the bourgeoisie and its interest in social organization appeared as the key element. Thomas Mann was the descendant of this enlightened and educated bourgeoisie. The battle over the role of literary criticism happened to be between inclusion of historical dependence (Wellek's New Criticism) and the aesthetics of modernity (as outlined also in Adorno's aesthetic theory).[146] With the merge of traditional literary criticism as an academic discipline and of journalism, the popularization of culture, and the emergence of pop-culture, the purely aesthetic principles could no longer secure applicability to all writing, where the principles of aesthetic autonomy are irrelevant. Since the Enlightenment, literary criticism can be understood as an institution within the public sphere, and its contents should be explicable also within it. While in the 1960s, the aesthetics of modernity were still tied to the history of criticism, the 1970s brought the recognition that politics and aesthetic innovation go hand in hand.[147] The path to postmodern configurations was paved. Yet Heller never took this step—he operated within the frames of traditional culture. With respect to the post-WWII situation, Bernhard Zimmermann added another historical aspect of the development and argued that the German experience of WWII

[145] Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, and Rolf Tiedemann (ed.), *Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1981).
[146] Richard E. Amacher, and Victor Lange, *New Perspectives in German Literary Criticism: A Collection of Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979).
[147] Peter Uwe Hohendahl and Klaus L. Berghahn, *A History of German Literary Criticism, 1730–1980* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 1-11.

led to the "predominance of a critical self-image that considered itself apolitical, but still paid tribute to the Cold War," and:

> What was held true for the economics and the law was reflected in the cultural life as well: in the wake of militant anti-communism and of rearmament, those persons who have financed Hitler's plans and had given legal formulation to his racial laws, but also those misguided spirits in the realm of literature who have erred to the bitter became socially acceptable again.[148]

Zimmerman sees the "political indifference" of German post-WWII literary criticism as a logical reaction to the unconquered past. Yet the development in French and Anglo-American areas developed along the same lines. Criticism was based on sociocultural systems of norms determined by interests grounded in particular social and historical formations. Still, as Heller proved, incorporating a historical reconstruction of connections between the present and the past served as a valuable tool, one accepted by a wide readership at that time.

Undeniably a follower of Hegel (in Heller's own words: "If there is a muse of dialectics and a constellation of opposites, they were there when Hegel came into the world"[149]), Heller displayed in his essays in *The Disinherited Mind*, written in the late 1940s and published in the early 1950s, a proximity in some respects to the Frankfurter school and Adorno. Although Heller's approach could be considered existentialist in nature, his definition of the state of, and mainly the tasks of, modern poetry finds a unison undertone with the Frankfurter School. Members of the Frankfurter School and Heller both viewed the society as disjointed, disoriented, lost—disinherited. And they both saw the critical function of art as the only medium capable of restoring the world, thanks to art's creative powers and its serving as a mirror of society. In Adorno's words:

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[148] Hohendahl and Berghahn, *History of German Literary Criticism*, 392.
[149] Erich Heller, "Die Reise der Kunst ins Innere," in *Nirgends wird die Welt sein als innen: Versuche über Rilke* (Fankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1975), 9. Original: *Gibt es eine Muse der Dialektik und ein Sternbild des Gegensatzes, so waren sie zur Stelle, als Hegel in die Welt kam.*

"It is the power of art, to make the present state of negativity palpable and thus to create 'a mirror image of its very opposite.'"[150] Only in this reversed function can art have redemptive power. With his "negative dialectic" (mirroring and showing the negative side of reality to foster positive actions), Adorno coined the post-WWII German Critical Theory. Both Horkheimer and Adorno highlighted the sociological dimension of Karl Kraus's language criticism. Adorno wrote that Kraus's aesthetic criticism of language "presented more essential revelations about society than most empirical sociological findings."[151] Horkheimer posited a similarly enthusiastic review:

> It was he [Kraus] who gave impetus to the concept of a sociology of language in which the starting point is the language itself rather than the social sciences. . . . The tools of official sociology seem blunt and ineffective compared to his [Kraus's] analysis of language. There is an inexhaustive list of things the sociology of language can learn from Kraus; nor can psychology or psychoanalysis ignore his ideas.[152]

Though both Adorno and Heller were interested in Kraus's writing, in contrast to Adorno, Heller distanced himself from anything remotely touching on Marxism. It is possible that the connection was a parallel one, especially regarding Heller's understanding of the redemptive capacity of art. The roots of Critical Theory were connected with Marxism early on, but the Frankfurter School took its own course after the Moscow trials in the 1930s. The late Frankfurt School came eventually to the realization that the misfortunes of humankind are rather a result of something inherent in human beings. But Heller remained in his own conservative individualist position by not aligning with any of the new, reassessing currents of literary criticism, or taking part in the theoretical discussions. Heller's initial inspiration was also guided by Martin Heidegger's concept of the inseparability of the object and subject, the *Dasein* (being

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[150] Zoltán Tar, *The Frankfurt School: The Critical Theories of Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno* (New York: Wiley, 1977), 146.
[151] Theodor Adorno, *Prisms* (London: Neville Spearman, 1967), 7.
[152] Tar, *Frankfurt School*, 92).

there),[153] and Heidegger's depreciation of technology, contextually also tied to Marxism. After the war, Heller distanced himself from Heidegger's thinking.

When René Wellek commented in the 1970s on the state of literary history, he borrowed George Watson's formulation from the late 1960s proclaiming "the sharp descent of literary history from the status of a great intellectual discipline to that of a convenient act of popularization."[154] Heller could be named as an example of the latter. This is not to say that there is no merit to such a vocation; the phrase is just a very accurate description of Heller's admirable achievement in post-WWII German literary criticism and teaching of German literature. Heller may not have achieved the lasting fame of the profound, iconic, multilingual Bohemian literary scholar, René Wellek, but he did raise awareness of the German reality at times when it was most needed to achieve redemption of the post-WWII "German soul." What is more, Heller's own writing propelled him to what he criticized about the German educated middle and higher class: a good, established (academic) life. In the American post-WWII reality, it did not even matter that Heller missed or ignored the fact that critical Marxism was the most influential current in interpreting literary history as a reflection of human productive and creative forces.

2.2. Heller's Criticism of Psychoanalysis

With his *The Disinherited Mind*, Erich Heller led the way in post-WWII German literary criticism when he proposed the idea that the German path to National Socialism was long in the making. He emphasized the "anti-humanistic tendencies in German Literature of the nineteenth century" and linked the recent German and European history

[153] Martin Heidegger and Dennis J. Schmidt, *Being and Time*, translated by Joan Stambaugh (Albany/Bristol: State University of New York Press/Excelsior, 2010).
[154] Richard E. Amacher and Victor Lange, *New Perspectives in German Literary Criticism: A Collection of Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), 418.

to the "disintegration of the German values" in the course Germany took in the post-Enlightenment era. He painted the appearance of Nietzsche's thinking and its further influence as unescapable. These elements of his thesis sounded convincing and very logical in the first decades immediately following the end of the war. Heller's belief that German intellectuals groomed the path to the horrors of German National Socialism, a form of special intellectual determinism, based on what could be identified in today's language as an imbalance between political liberty and individual freedom. Heller's own pessimism was based on Spengler's historical determinism,[155] his own strong opposition to Freudian psychoanalysis, and, more generally, suspicion of scientific experiments and discoveries. Heller accused "science" of pushing art and literature from the central stage and voiced his disbelief in the capacity of science to recognize "truth."

For Heller, psychoanalysis is simply a symptom of what he identified as loss of and yearning for the old ethical values given within the dogmatic frame of Judeo-Christianity. In his article "Observations on Psychoanalysis and Modern Literature," he spelled out this idea very clearly: "There was a time, long ago, when the Prophet struck fear and terror into the minds of the Pharisees[156] by putting the goodness of the hidden soul or the rebirth of the whole man ethically above the righteous observance of the law by the publicly displayed good will. This was the essence of the moral revolution in Christianity."[157] Heller did not elaborate any further about this link to Christian

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[155] Oswald Spengler, *Deutschland und die Weltgeschichtliche Entwicklung: Von Oswald Spengler* (Munich: Beck, 1933); Oswald Spengler, Sebastian Maaß, and Martin Falck, *Zyklen und cäsaren Mosaiksteine einer Philosophie des Schicksals: Reden und Schriften Oswald Spenglers* (Kiel: Regin, 2013).

[156] The Pharisees were meticulous adherents to their interpretation of the Torah in the Eastern Mediterranean region during the time before the fall of the Second Temple. They resisted Hellenization—the adoption of ancient Greek culture by non-Greeks. Their beliefs became the foundation of Rabbinic Judaism.

[157] Erich Heller, "Observations on Psychoanalysis and Modern Literature," *Salmagundi* no. 31/32 (1975): 17–28, esp. 20.

morality, but he pitched psychoanalysis against this publicly displayed form of "Good" that is to be followed:

> A psychoanalysis manifests itself in the vast superiority of presumed diagnostic insight over therapeutic possibilities . . . All pleasures and all oppressions of the soul, all sins and virtues, . . . the constancy of love, the fear of evil, as well as the faith in God—. . . degenerate into signs of psychic imbalance . . . . It is the accomplished hypochondria of Unbelief. . . . it follows the scientific intention to disregard any hierarchy that religion or metaphysics or ethics or tradition has set up concerning the activities of consciousness.[158]

Heller indulged even in criticism of Freud's intellect: "Freud himself was securely at home in that rationalistic Enlightenment faith . . . ," and further, "Freud certainly did not have the philosophical genius" to meet the question his theory raised. "With astonishing naiveté he examined the 'how' of psychic conditions, as if such answers could yield clear answers to the 'what.'"[159] Interestingly, in his fuming criticism Heller concluded his article by using the same measure for Nietzsche and Freud and condemning their interest in "psychological radicalism intolerant of any gods that were not more than the illusory comforters of sick souls . . . . Never again psychology!"[160] If Freud were alive and cared, he would have an easy answer for Heller: If one starts asking about the meaning of life, it is a sign that that person is in need of therapy.

This attack was not Heller's only one on psychoanalysis. In 1978 he published another article: "The Dismantling of Kleist's Marionette Theater; Or, Psychology and the Misinterpretation of Literature,"[161] which generated several critical responses, including the one from the author of the text that Heller chose to use as an example for his attack: Margret Shaefer, a lecturer in the Department of Psychiatry at Northwestern University Medical School.

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[158] Ibid., 21–22.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Ibid, 28.
[161] Erich Heller, "The Dismantling of a Marionette Theater: Or, Psychology and the Misinterpretation of Literature," *Critical Inquiry* 4, no. 3 (1978): 417–32.

The article is about Kleist's text *Über das Marionettentheater*[162] (On the Marionette Theatre) and his (Kleist's), according to Heller, problematic penis. Heller suggested in his article that "Kleist suffered from sexual impotence, wounding his self-confidence, crying for expression."[163] The dispute resulted in a long series of published responses to Heller in *Critical Inquiry* in the late 1970s, prominently by Shaefer herself, and Heinz Kohut,[164] an established psychologist in Chicago and a cult author of a modern psychoanalytic theory of self-psychology.

Kohut was developing a psychoanalytic treatment in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s based on understanding the subjective experience of the human psyche. He posited that empathy in psychology should be acknowledged as a powerful therapeutic tool. Kohut was born in Vienna, homeschooled until he was 11, then studied medicine at the university of Vienna but was forced to flee the Nazis in 1939 because his father was Jewish. Like Heller, he traveled to England and then to the United States, where he worked in Chicago hospitals and transitioned to psychoanalysis. Kohut took up a fervent argument with Heller, one attempting to convince Heller of the place of science in today's world by laying out the essential pillars of psychology. But Heller had no ear for any rebutting pledges.

While only a few felt outraged and sorely misunderstood by Heller's *The Disinherited Mind* and *The Ironic German* (most prominently and persistently, translator and literary scholar Michael Hamburger), Heller's view of psychoanalysis and attacks on Freud did earn him public criticism to a degree that, if he believed in psychology at

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[162] Heinrich von Kleist, *Über das Marionettentheater* (Copenhagen: Lindhardt og Ringhof, 2021). https://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?id=none&isbn=9788728015339 (accessed April 28, 2024).
[163] Heller Papers, Box 16, Folder 14.
[164] Heinz Kohut and Geoffrey Cocks, *The Curve of Life: Correspondence of Heinz Kohut, 1923–1981* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Heinz Kohut, Arnold Goldberg, and Paul E. Stepansky, *How Does Analysis Cure?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

all, he could have taken as a sign of a decline in the relevance of what he, as an established man, had to say to the real world. Critical not only in print, Heller also delivered several lectures condemning psychoanalysis—all this at the time when his brother, a physician, was contemplating in his autobiography the possible medical causes of their father's severe depression, considering the potential of new possible treatments that were not known at the time of their father's struggle, and ways that would have possibly prevented his suffering and early death.

In the published retort "Psychoanalysis and Literature," Kohut delivered a fifteen-page response to Heller's lectures on psychoanalysis where Heller claims, in short, no purpose to it. He starts mildly: "Like the good old-fashioned hellfire-and-brimstone preacher, you delivered a sermon meant to stir up guilt and contrition in the congregation. . . . My immediate response is simple. The inquiring human mind, I say, will not be stifled by prohibitions." After he received Heller's stubborn response, standing behind his attack and claiming there was no reason to change anything, Kohut laid out many reasons why he could not consider Heller's view as valid:

> My paramount concern about your essay—and the same holds true for a number of others which you have written—is with your enmity toward science, or, [to] put it more accurately, I am concerned about the manner in which you depict man's choice as either his espousal of science or of the humanities, of his either, in the first instance, leading life devoid of values but filled with facts, or, in the second, of his retaining or regaining a life filled with valued beauty and meaning.[165]

Kohut eloquently dismantled Heller's main argument as based on an irrational, either-or attitude. He recognized that Heller's firm stand against psychoanalysis is anchored in a much more general disrespect of science as it was evident to him from many other writings Heller produced prior to his critique of Kleist. That Heller's dismissive stand of

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[165] Heinz Kohut, "Psychoanalysis and the Interpretation of Literature: Correspondence with Erich Heller, Psychoanalysis and Literature," letter from December 1976 (published 1977), 440, Heller Papers, Box 16, Folder 14.

science originated indeed much earlier, is documented, for example, in Heller's speech for a German radio station in 1964:

> The great revolutions of history do not change the face of the earth. They change the face of people, the image in which they recognize themselves and the world around them. The earth only follows closely, the pitiful superficiality of empiricism lies in the fact that it presents as a safe harbor what is in reality the open sea, the storms, the waves and the shipwrecks, namely man's experience of himself and the "objective" World. The history of the human species is a seabed full of submerged objective truths, a museum of irrefutable facts—refuted not by empirical discoveries, but by those mysterious choices of people from time to time to experience themselves and the world in different ways.[166]

Heller's deep mistrust for science's capacity to debug myths and ignorance went hand in hand with his longing for the simplicity of medieval explanations of the meaning and origin of life. According to Heller, "Our lives lack communal symbols to house our deepest feelings."[167] Even earlier, in Heller's very first publication from 1938 with the Viennese Saturn-Verlag, he expresses his awe about the fact that Thomas Mann, the famous man of letters, was invited by Sigmund Freud, the man of science, to speak at the occasion of Freud's eightieth birthday. Heller needed several pages to get over this fact that he considers paradoxical. Mann's tribute to Freud was titled *Freud und die Zukunft* (Freud and the future); in it Mann expressed his genuine admiration of Freud's work. And in this very first youthful publication, Heller already labeled Nietzsche as the "first great psychologist." Heller found it fitting to place the two psychologists,

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[166] Erich Heller's speech in Westdeutscher Rundfunk, broadcast Thursday, June 4, 1964, from 4:30–5:00 p.m., in Heller Papers, Box 9, Folder 2. Original: *Die großen Revolutionen der Geschichte verändern nicht das Antlitz der Erde. Sie verändern das Antlitz des Menschen, das Bild, in welchem er sich selbst und die Welt um sich erkennt. Die Erde folgt nur auf dem Fuß, die klägliche Oberflächlichkeit des Empirismus liegt darin, dass er als sicheren Hafen ausgibt, was in Wahrheit die offene See ist, die Stürme, die Wellen und die Schiffbrüche, nämlich des Menschen Erfahrung seiner selbst und der „objektiven" Welt. Die Geschichte der menschlichen Gattung ist ein Meeresgrund voll von versenkten objektiven Wahrheiten, ein Museum von unwiderlegbaren Tatsachen—widerlegt nicht durch empirische Entdeckungen, sondern durch jene geheimnisvollen Entscheidungen der Menschen, von Zeit zu Zeit sich selbst und die Welt auf andere Weise zu erfahren.*

[167] Ibid. Original: *Fehlt es unserem Leben an gemeinschaftlichen Symbolen zur Behausung unserer tiefsten Gefühle.*

Nietzsche and Freud, visibly at the end of human culture[168] and proclaimed in 1938 that in the last hours of human civilization man does not need a psychologist but instead an ethicist and a satirist—both of whom were, for him, incorporated in the persona of Karl Kraus.

When Graham Hugh introduced Heller's freshly published *The Disinherited Mind* in 1952 to the audience in England—a country responsible for the making of the working class and known for its black humor, satire, and divorce of the intelligentsia from practical politics—he did not display any concern about the position of a man in an inhuman and mechanical universe, or about science making full religious belief impossible. Intellectuals had not been popular in Britain, and their presence was barely tolerated. Hugh fulfilled his role when he spoke to the audience in a slightly mocking tone that he believed befitting the author he introduced:

> It is a book about the mind deprived of all nourishment, stability and strength given by a power and an order outside man and the material universe. Man has now to provide all this for himself—because God is dead. And because God was so powerful, efficient and secretive a landlord that to look after his estate all by ourselves involves us in great difficulties . . . . Much that we had been powerfully persuaded to accept as true, dissolves into sheer illusion . . . . We have lived in splendor, but the splendor was merely loaned. Payment was due at the death of God, and the unknown creditor lost little time in claiming it.[169]

In his *The Disinherited Mind*, Heller assigned the task of restoring "the glory" to poetry and literature, but Hugh wondered: "What for? We've been dull before and never afraid of it."[170] He made it clear that those who made these discoveries should pay the bill, not the English:

> A tremendous effort has to be executed to restore the glory. . . . Nietzsche and Rilke have devoted themselves to just this task, to restore the glory

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[168] Erich Heller, *Flucht aus dem zwanzigsten Jahrhundert: Eine kulturkritische Skizze* (Vienna: Saturn-Verlag, 1938), 20. Heller Papers, Box 10, Folder 16: *Es wäre aber noch die Frage zu stellen, ob denn nicht noch wesentlichere Zusammenhänge den Psychologen, den Tiefenpsychologen zumal, so sichtbar an das Ende unserer Kultur zu stellen*.
[169] Heller Papers, Box 9, Folder 10.
[170] Ibid.

> that was lost to the world on the death of God. They remain unfamiliar and rather hostile figures to us—because England never saw the task in that light. The great worry in England was how to find a secure basis for morals and conduct once the direct compulsions of Christianity were gone. A very much easier job.[171]

Hugh was convinced that things have not worked out so badly for England, where they "also knew for a while that God is dead, but the enlightened self-interest did not take them far astray."[172] According to his assessment, the secular and agnostic moralists of England behaved in very much the same way as their religious counterparts in all ordinary human and social relations. Effectively, he had introduced more doubts about Heller's theory even before Heller got to the podium. A similarly sarcastic mode spread in the early reviews published in England, one of them, by Bonamy Dobrée, already mentioned in the previous chapter.

2.3. Heller's *Sonderweg*

On a more general level, Marxism also expressed the idea of historical determinism. For Marxism, the human consciousness encompasses everything: the creative forces (material production and art), the belief, progress, and freedom. But Marxism did not shun science and production, just the form of their applications and organization, and of course the consequences for the existing conditions. Comically, Marx called the obsessive German pursuit of the causal connections between material production and human consciousness *die deutsche Misere*.[173] If Marx believed that the German intellectuals studied this connection more obsessively than did other cultures, then Heller walked in his footsteps with his claim that German literature and critical

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[171] Ibid.
[172] Ibid.
[173] Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy, Being a Translation of the Misère de la Philosophie (a Reply to "La Philosophie de la Misère" of M. Proudhon)*, with a preface by Friedrich Engels, translated by H. Quelch (Chicago: C. H. Kerr, 1910).

thought were unique and conditioned by the historical developments in Germany. In this sense, Heller also walked an analogous path in literary criticism to what historians have described in the postwar period (and onward) as *Sonderweg*[174]—a "special German path," or "German exceptionalism."

Heller himself was neither obsessed with the connection of material production, political organization, and the culture of an organized society nor ever commenting on Marx's thoughts about historical materialism, except superficially and with disdain. And he likely was not much interested in this connection in his own life, for he left no written evidence examining his awareness of the correlation and mutuality between someone's material occupation and his own intellectual one. He followed, however, the idea that Germany went its own way during the age of industrialization and state making. He saw the domination of the German cultural sphere by the German aristocracy well into the turn of the century. He also saw that Thomas Mann's life and family experience aligned with this pattern (in some measure due to Mann's own writing), and that moment was when Heller realized that writing about Thomas Mann may result in describing an experience larger than Mann himself.

Heller, in his daily life, was not a supporter of aristocracy, and he criticized the German hubris with great satisfaction. Even a mere, outdated symbol of nobility irritated him; his colleagues from the German department at Northwestern University remembered his gagging over other German-heritage colleagues' names with the noble "von" attached, perhaps reminding him of his own provincial origin he so disliked—

[174] Bettina Hitzer, and Thomas Welskopp, eds., *Die Bielefelder Sozialgeschichte: Klassische Texte zu einem Geschichtswissenschaftlichen Programm und Seinen Kontroversen* (Bielefeld: Transcript-Verlag, 2015). https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839415214; Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *"Deutscher Sonderweg" oder Allgemeine Probleme des Westlichen Kapitalismus?: Zur Kritik an Einigen "Mythen Deutscher Geschichtsschreibung"* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1981).

picturesque Komotau, set at the foothills of Erzgebirge, locking Komotau in on the Habsburg and Bohemian side.

The thesis of the special historical development termed "Sonderweg" had intellectual ancestors in Germany and abroad. Jürgen Kocka argued that American voices played a crucial role in the formulation of the thesis: "It was against the background of their experiences in the United States that scholars who had fled from or been driven out of Germany in the 1930s (i.e., 'émigré scholars' of the first and second generations) decisively shaped the *Sonderweg* approach to German history, which corresponded, after all, to fundamental experiences in their lives."[175] Kocka argued that especially exiles who escaped persecution in Germany and found a new home in the United States saw this special path more as a "German divergence from the West," and it was the American experience that shaped their approaches to the German past. The "Sonderweg debate" was the German-Anglo-American debate, even though it had its own predecessors in Germany itself: Friedrich Engels, Max Weber, and Thomas Mann.[176]

According to the thesis, both long- and short-term factors contributed to the collapse of the Weimar Republic and the rise of Hitler. Among these factors were the weakness of the German middle class and strong feudal traditions, as well as the absence of a revolution transitioning to a parliamentary system. Accordingly, Germany followed a direct path from monarchy to democracy. Other nations in Europe followed a different path, one that included more stages.[177]

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[175] Jürgen Kocka, "Looking Back on the *Sonderweg*," *Central European History* 51, no. 1 (2018): 137–42, esp. 137. doi:10.1017/S0008938918000183; Jürgen Kocka, *German History before Hitler: The Debate about the German* Sonderweg (London: Sage, 1988).
[176] Kocka, "Looking Back," 138.
[177] The Bielefeld School, especially Jürgen Kocka and Hans-Ulrich Wehler.

The *Sonderweg* theory links the roots of German National Socialism with the early and mid-nineteenth century development, and some *Sonderweg* theorists (or their critics) go even further into the past by arguing for a connection with Martin Luther's Protestant movement, which according to the theory glorified the state (*Bund*) at the expense of individual freedom.[178] And of course another argument points to German opposition to the French Revolution. Most controversially, in 1961 the German historian Fritz Fischer opened a can of worms with his proposition that imperial Germany was solely responsible for WWI and its consequences. According to Fischer, Germany was led by its ambition for political and economic domination in Europe and beyond. Fischer's thesis heated many debates over the years, especially after *Der Spiegel* reviewed his book in 1964. Back then, it propelled Fischer to inclusion among the "historiographic celebrities," especially internationally.

In historical studies, the *Sonderweg* theory has since lost its prominent position, especially comparatively. According to Jürgen Kocka, after decades of more research, the later years were more decisive for the rise of Hitler than the pre-republican societal organization.

The major question the *Sonderweg* theory tried to answer ("Why and how did it happen?") was the same question Heller and other writers and critics pursued in the 1950s and 1960s. Thomas Mann famously transformed himself directly from a monarchist into a social democrat and a supporter of the Weimar Republic within a few years. Although he did take a very long step to become a republican, he never returned to his initial conservatism. Mann did not continue supporting the National Socialist Democratic (i.e., Nazi) Party, even though he flirted with it briefly and was a supporter

[178] Fritz Fischer, *War of Illusions: German Policies from 1911 to 1914* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1975).

of WWI.[179] Early on, during WWI, Mann was hoping that a German victory would demonstrate again the superiority of German culture and unify Germany on such grounds. Mann was also skeptical before WWI about the idea of creating a European federative union, a counterpart to the United States; he commented on the ever-increasing fragmentation of Europe and described the emancipating nations and their visions of the new states as *künstliche Gebilde ohne Dauerhaftigkeit* (artificial structures without durability),[180] presumably including Czechoslovakia, where he later found refuge from Hitler, applied for Czechoslovak citizenship, and accepted it. Peter Lange quotes Mann's article from the December 1920 issue of the journal *Heimgarten* (published in Graz) under the title "Heim, ins Reich". In it Mann states that the *Anschluss* (annexation) of Austria to Germany is only a question of time and makes perfect sense: "I don't see any means of power that the hostile governments of the Western peoples had at their disposal to practically prevent coexistence and cooperation."[181] It is unclear whether he saw Austria as including or excluding Bohemia. Mann later became a member of the Paneuropean Union, founded by Coudenhove-Kalergi (with its own visionary problems, such as the inclusion of colonies), and attended the congresses in the interwar period. So did Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud.

Mann's brother Heinrich on the other hand, welcomed already in 1916 in an introduction to Emil Zola's lecture in Prague, the possibility of Bohemian Crown lands

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[179] Kristin Buser, *Kriegsbefürwortung in politischen Schriften. Ein Vergleich von Georg Simmels "Deutschlands Innere Wandlung" und Thomas Manns "Gedanken Im Kriege,"* (München: GRIN Verlag, 2020). https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:101:1-20200618035409313827O3; Thomas Mann, *Gedanken Zum Kriege,* (Frankfurt am Main: FISCHER E-Books, 2009. https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:101:1-202205251015024024581S.

[180] Peter Lange and Jindřich Mann, *Prag empfing uns als Verwandte: Die Familie Mann und die Tschechen*, Deutsche Originalausgabe (Mitterfels: Vitalis, 2021), 15.

[181] Ibid., 18. Original: *Ich sehe kein Machtmittel, über das die feindlichen Regierungen der Westvölker verfügten, um das Zusammenleben, Zusammenarbeiten, praktisch zu verhindern.*

to become a sovereign political subject.[182] Heinrich Mann's books were burned by the Nazis and he was among the authors whose works Roubiczek's exiled publishing house Der europäische Merkur published in Paris—*Der Sinn dieser Emigration* (The meaning of this emigration) in 1934, for example.

Thomas Mann did not part completely with his past, however; he argued for a special place for aristocracy, even in a democratic system, well into the 1940s. He highlighted this belief also in a lecture he gave at Northwestern University on March 3, 1938, when he asserted:

> We must realize that democracy and aristocracy are not opposites. . . . The real leaders in democracies have always been aristocrats, in the intellectual sense, while fascism calls for plebian dictators. . . . Real democracy cannot lack aristocracy in the spiritual meaning. It must honor and be guided by intellectual life. A higher level of intelligence must be standard. Without aristocracy, democracy sinks to a low ebb, as in Germany.[183]

In this respect, interestingly, Mann's ideas align with the controversial vision of Coudenhove-Kalergi. For Mann, aristocracy and intelligence formed an equation. It is more a statement about Mann's self-perception than a progressive comment about the organization of modern societies. In the same speech, Mann also commented: "National Socialism is economically Bolshevism, but in all its other aspects, it is a lie. Nationalism is an outworn creed,"[184] and he emphasized that democracy cannot win over fascism by concessions.

On the other hand, in time Mann recognized that Germans as a nation, just like any other nation, have no special mission, and he accepted the idea of Germany's building herself into a unique, independent power by situating the nation between the

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[182] *Die Aktion: Wochenzeitschrift für Politik, Literatur, und Kunst*, July 8, 1916.
[183] *The Daily Northwestern*, March 3, 1938 (Northwestern University Archives, on display in the Deering Library, Room 108, during the Thomas Mann exhibition "Democracy Will Win!" in February 2023).
[184] Ibid.

West and the East as pointless. His intuition was ahead of his time, his language and emotions still part of the time he lived in. Like Heller, Mann and his literary heroes experienced the feeling of being an outsider, of not belonging. Ignace Feuerlicht studied Mann's ego as it is reflected in his writing, and he identified different expressions in it. To distinguish between the individual ego and the mainstream or general assumptions held by society, Mann uses terms such as *Allseele*, "The Great Soul," *Seele des Abendlandes*, *deutsche Seele*, *Zeitwille*, and most clearly *Geist der Geschichte*, even *Weltgeist*, and such effort to find distinction indicated, according to Feuerlicht, that Mann was not an individualist and did hold broader concerns for humanity. This broader interest was recognizable more easily by Mann's actions, so the linguistic analysis of Mann's writing simply confirms that image. Feuerlicht concludes that Mann's longing for wholeness goes beyond closing this gap between the unique individual and the commonality, it addresses the need for playing doubles in politics, time and place, and his bisexuality. In this wish for a form of transcendence, Mann speaks more of a *Rettung und Rechtfertigung* (salvation and justification) (*Meine Zeit*[185]) than a merge with the cosmos.[186] And this explanation might be the closest we can get in trying to understand Mann's sense of religiosity.

Upon reading Thomas Mann, about Thomas Mann, and having developed a fascination by Thomas Mann, Heller developed a thesis that mirrored the historian's *Sonderweg* theory, though he could not have had any familiarity with it at the time he drafted his dissertation. As a believer in determinism, Heller searched for the roots of German National Socialism deep in the bygone centuries, in German romantic spiritualism and supernaturalism, and he argued that German romantic literature

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[185] Thomas Mann, *Meine Zeit; Vortrag gehalten in der Universität Chicago, Mai 1950* (Amsterdam: S. Fischer, 1950).
[186] Ignaz Feuerlicht, *Thomas Mann und die Grenzen des Ich* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1966).

undertook a secularization of Western religious systems and thought, in fact denying the supranational character of Romanticism. From there onward, the path to the apocalypse, according to Heller, was irreversibly set. Heller saw Goethe as everything but the Platonic sense of being. Goethe turned the 1587 manuscript about Dr. Faustus (Heller highlighted that it was during the time when Martin Luther "dominated"[187] the country) into one of the greatest German contributions to literature, and it is this vision from the first German *Faustbook* that Heller never let go of.

2.4. The Importance of Style

According to Heller's brother, Paul, and written evidence left behind, Erich Heller made only a few attempts, in his youth, at lyrical writing, and he never attempted a full fictional narrative (a novel or a novella) of his own. What suited him best was the essay, a genre that allowed for a more open approach and creative writing. *The Disinherited Mind* is a collection of essays connected by the theme of the loss of values. Some reviewers even called Heller's essays "translations" or "mediations," as they mediated (translated) Central European and German thoughts to (for) the English-speaking world.

J. P. Stern[188] observed that Heller's success in addressing the public lies in the fact that Heller "resolutely avoided all technicalities and methodological acridities" and so appealed to his readers directly.[189] Stern pitched Heller's approach in parallel with Erich Auerbach's and in contrast with that of György Lukács. He praised Heller's "expository skills" and also described the path of *The Disinherited Mind* into being:

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[187] Erich Heller, "Faust's Damnation: The Morality of Knowledge," *Chicago Review* (Summer, 1962): 1-26. http://turing.library.northwestern.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/magazines/fausts-damnation-morality-knowledge/docview/1301395228/se-2.
[188] See chapter 1 for a brief biography.
[189] Heller Papers, Box 16, Folder 5; J. P. Stern, *The Enlarging and Enlivening Study of Literature* (Heidelberg: L. Stiehm, 1976), 350.

Heller gave his first lectures in the course "German Literature from 1914 to 1933" in Cambridge in 1946. The course earned approval, and some of the lectures were published in the monthly *Cambridge Journal* ("Karl Kraus: The Last Days of Mankind" in 1948 and "Oswald Spengler and the Predicament of Historical Imagination" in 1952). Later that year the book *The Disinherited Mind* was published by Bowes & Bowes, the Cambridge publisher of the journal.[190]

Edwin Muir, a British poet and Kafka's translator (who with his wife, Willa, translated *The Castle* within six years of Kafka's death), endorsed it almost instantly and praised the inner coherence of the book despite the fact that Heller's reading of Kafka greatly challenged his own. Heller's reading, however, differed from everyone else's, not just Muir's, including that of Max Brod. Heller's own interpretation communicates that "The conviction of damnation is all that remains of Faith" (*Die Überzeugung der Verdamnis ist alles, was vom Glauben übriggeblieben ist*) and that "Kafka's soul is almost always occupied with the power of evil . . . . The living thing itself is the incarnation of evil"[191] (*Kafkas Seele ist fast stets mit der Macht des Bösen beschäftigt . . . . Das Lebendige selbst ist die Inkarnation des Bösen*). Yet in Kafka's writing, faith is one of the most prominent refrains, and his protagonists are attracted to it as an enduring power even if they may be ignorant of it. Kafka's faith is also very moldable, flexible, and individual—in a similar way that Paul Roubiczek came to understand it, namely, as coming from within. Paul North analyzed Kafka's relationship to faith and presents this understanding: "Kafka agrees (with Felix Weltsch) that faith is necessary for life in the world, but he disagrees on the value of the faithful life."[192] Where Weltsch quoted

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[190] Heller Papers, Box 16, Folder 5; J. P. Stern, *The Enlarging and Enlivening Study of Literature* (Heidelberg: L. Stiehm, 1976), 350.
[191] Erich Heller, *The Disinherited Mind: Essays in Modern German Literature and Thought* (Cambridge: Bowes & Bowes, 1952), 166–67.
[192] Paul North, *The Yield: Kafka's Atheological Reformation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015), 93.

Tolstoy—"without faith man cannot live"—Kafka modified: "without enduring trust in the indestructible in himself and an enduring concealment of this from himself, man cannot live."[193]

Setting the stage for his analysis of Kafka's writing, Heller shares no information about the life and work of Kafka, as he did with Karl Kraus. He starts with Plato, a passage from his *Republic*. Immediately on the second page of his Kafka essay in *The Disinherited Mind*, Heller starts dismantling existing "misconceptions" of other scholars, then offers again his overview of the process of the European loss of faith by walking the reader through the Middle Ages, Christian theological thought, and the upsetting disruption of it by the Reformation:

> During that period an intellectual tension, inherent in Christian dogma, developed into a conflagration of vast historical consequences. It produced an articulate climax—which was, however, a mere symptom of a mere inarticulate, yet more comprehensive process—at a particularly exposed point of dogmatic faction: the sacramental dispute between Luther and Zwingli. . . . From then onwards, the world 'merely' has been attaching itself ever more firmly to the word 'symbol', soon gaining sufficient strength to bring about a complete alienation between the two spheres.[194]

The generalization continues in rapid fashion (in a direct continuation of the previous quotation):

> Finally a new order of things emerged. Within it, the transcendental realm is allotted the highest honors of the spirit, but, at the same time, skillfully deprived of a considerable measure of reality; the mundane, on the other hand, is compensated for its lowering in spiritual stature by the chance of absorbing all available reality and becoming more 'really' real than before.[195]

Subsequently, three more pages explicate what happened in the seventeenth century (an attack on the emergence of science and positivism) and the eighteenth century ("propelling the artist in an exile from reality," an event that Heller declared "one of the

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[193] Ibid.
[194] Heller, *Disinherited Mind*, 166.
[195] Ibid.

most authentic themes of German literature"),[196] calling Kleist, Hölderlin, and Nietzsche victims of a "hopeless collision between the minority demand for a realization of the spirit and a spiritualization of reality on the one hand, and, on the other, the inexorable resistance of a safely established spirit-proof view of life."[197] Then, the historical consciousness of his reader was established or checked.

In the same essay, as well as in *Die abenteuerliche Geschichte der modernen Poesie* (The adventurous story of modern poetry), Heller laid open what according to him is the most important phenomenon of modern times: the sacramental dispute between Luther and Zwingli over the Last Supper. "For Luther the sacrament of the Last Supper *is* Christ (the bread and the wine are what they represent), while Zwingli reduces it to the status of an allegory (as merely representing what it is not)"[198]. Heller explained that this reduction of the symbol to the "symbol only" stripped the reality of the symbolic clothing and thus made it meaningless. And because reality was robbed of its symbolism after the Luther-Zwingli dispute, we have no more poetry. Heller summed up that poetry can possibly reemerge only when meaning and significance are intact again. With respect to music, Heller contradicted himself, once declaring (in his private correspondence with his brother[199]) that music degenerated, and elsewhere that "music is the only form of art in modern times that outperformed the achievements of the previous periods."[200]

Interestingly, in his early writing about creative literary work, "Die Theorie des Romans," which excited not only Thomas Mann but also Max Weber, Adorno, and Walter Benjamin, György Lukács postulated a very similar assumption to Heller's

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[196] Ibid., 167–68.
[197] Ibid.
[198] Ibid.
[199] Paul Heller Papers, Box 2, Folder 17.
[200] Heller Papers, Box 9, Folder 2, Radioansprachen.

definition of the relation between modernity and the development of symbolic thought. That assumption originated from Lukács's pre-Marxist period. Lukács provided a historically philosophical definition of literary genres: lyric, drama, and epic; then he compared epic from Homer to Dante with novels and found that "the Greeks had only answers, no questions, only solutions but no puzzles, only forms but no chaos."[201] The Greeks knew only the totality of being, and Homer's epics corresponded with it. But a novel is an expression of "transcendental homelessness"[202]—and so is the fact that a novel develops, historically constituted. A novel is something unfinished, indefinite. A conclusion of the world of the novel would mean resignation. Lukács considered a novel a form of a "matured humanity." And according to Lukács "the hero emerges from the totality of the objective world of chaos. The world of created forms has been destroyed, and the ultimate basis of artistic creation has become homeless. . . . The novel form is, like no other, an expression of this transcendental homelessness."[203] For Lukács the world of the Greeks still a symbol, the world of the Romantics, then, only the reality. But as opposed to Heller, Lukács explained the transition differently. For him, "it is Dante's *Divine Comedy* that represents the step from an epopee toward a novel."[204]

The essay on Kafka included in *The Disinherited Mind* ("The World of Franz Kafka") is one mainly on Kafka's *The Castle*. The only thing Heller did not dismantle and may have agreed on with other critics is the understanding that K. (main character) believes in absolute freedom, but he lives in a world where he is not free, so he can have no idea what the freedom he seeks means. Therefore, he believes not in grace and redemption but in his right.[205]

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[201] György Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1982), 31–32.
[202] Ibid., 40–41.
[203] Ibid.
[204] Ibid., 52.
[205] Heller, *Disinherited Mind*, 173.

In the first third of the essay, Heller resolutely rejects several ideas, dismissing the work of others to date—for example, the idea that *The Castle* could be a religious symbol. Still, according to Heller, the novel is a symbolic one. Max Brod drew the same distinction between allegory and symbolism, also declaring the novel symbolic.[206] Heller further dismisses any possible importance of psychological events in Kafka's life, for instance, Kafka's relationship with his family, including his father. Yet Heller still maintains that "only someone from Prague can really understand Kafka,"[207] counting himself as one of them despite having spent his childhood and adolescence in the predominantly German-speaking Sudetenland before he had a chance to move to Prague and experience the city filled with the "precious essence of mystery."[208]

In his essay, Heller offers evidence that his ideas about the split between the external and inner worlds are applicable to Kafka's work, presenting Kafka himself (not his work) as trapped between external and inner reality. Given the broad applicability of general statements, this observation rings true for most of us, not just Kafka. But Heller escalates in a metaphoric manner: "Kafka is Nietzsche's victim!" What he means is a metaphoric counterpart to Nietzsche's "Superman."[209]

The strong rhetoric continues when Heller eventually proceeds to the actual description of Kafka's work, calling "K." a "hero":

> Undoubtedly, the land surveyor K., the hero of *The Castle*, is religiously fascinated by its inscrutably horrid bureaucracy; but again, it is a word from Nietzsche, and not from the Gospels, that sums up the situation: 'Wretched man, your god lies in the dust, broken to fragments, and serpents dwell around him. And now you love even the serpents for his sake.'[210]

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[206] Max Brod, *Streitbares Leben: Autobiographie*, Kindler Taschenbucher 20/21 (unabridged; Munich: Kindler, 1960), 286.
[207] Reece Hirsch, "Fleeing Hitler's Europe," *The Daily Northwestern*, April 17, 1980, Heller Papers, Box 1, Folder 6.]
[208] Ibid.
[209] Heller, *Disinherited Mind*, 163.
[210] Ibid., 164.

The author of the essay is sure of himself: "The Castle of Kafka's novel is, as it were, the heavily fortified garrison of Gnostic demons, successfully holding an advanced position against the maneuvers of an impatient soul."[211] Or a little later: "The correspondence between the spiritual structure of the Castle and the view of the world systematized into Gnostic and Manichean dogma is indeed striking."[212] According to Heller, Kafka's heroes struggle "in vain for spiritual survival"—which for Heller is the proof that "Kafka's "creations" are symbolic, for "they are infused with (and not merely allegorical of) negative transcendence…. In Kafka's work the symbolic substance, forced back by every attempt to attack from above, invades reality from down below, carrying with it the stuff from hell." [213] With several decades having passed, some of the passages that spoke to so many readers in the 1950s and 1960s, including Hannah Arendt, sound almost comical today. No sign of humble and close reading, no vow to Kafka's *schlichte Worte und schlichte Wahrheit* (simple words and simple truth) along with "something unspeakable."[214]

The Northwestern University Archives also hold correspondence between Max Brod and H. E. Holthusen. In one of the letters from Tel Aviv, dated January 1959, Brod shows admiration for Holthusen's understanding of Kafka as well as appreciation for Holthusen's approval of Brod's editing of Kafka. Brod thanks Holthusen for not twisting his (Brod's) writing about Kafka as the published reviews (for instance in *Der Spiegel*) did, reviews that Brod called an "attack on him and his editing work":

> You must have read the attack on my *Trial* edition in *Der Spiegel*, which was based on nothing, nothing at all. . . . The word from Kafka's *Trial*: "They hounded me" always came to mind during these days of struggle. Conclude from it how your kindest words in your letter about my Kafka biography must have pleased me doubly. I am very happy that you are one of the few who (in addition to the many despairing ones) also see the

[211] Ibid., 175.
[212] Ibid., 177.
[213] Ibid., 168.
[214] Brod, *Streitbares Leben*, 285.

> precious hope and the cautious construction in Kafka's work. This truth will prevail. For the time being, however, "Der Spiegel" slanders me: according to them, I had created a mood for the "Chaotic" in Kafka. Anyone who knows my work knows how walloping a lie this is.[215]

Although today Kafka scholarship remains critical of many of Brod's edits to Kafka's manuscripts, Brod's overall understanding of Kafka's fragmentary novels and his rejection of spiritual despair in Kafka's work still present a challenge to Heller's assessment.

It is not surprising that Heller concluded his essay about "Kafka's world" with a quote from Nietzsche: "Whosoever has built a new heaven has found the strength for it only in his own hell."[216] Heller's essay on Kafka does not lack elegance or wit, but Heller did not pay close attention to every word and did not aspire to understand Kafka's "truth in every word." Heller speaks to his readers from a position of an appointed prophet—one coming from Prague and enriched with Heller's own inexhaustible imagination.

2.5. The Unity, the Whole, the Loss

The "historical consciousness" (relationship of people to the past—and themselves) was also the key term in the Marxist historical critique. Together with Engels, Marx formulated the most complex critique of the post-Enlightenment bourgeois humanism. He and especially Engels criticized the "positioning of nature instead of the

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[215] Hans Egon Holthusen Papers, Box 1, Folder 9, Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections and University Archives, Northwestern University. *Sie haben wohl im Spiegel den auf nichts, gar nichts gebauten Angriff auf meine Prozeß-Edition gelesen. . . . Das Wort aus Kafka's Prozeß: „Sie hetzten mich" kam mir in diesen Kampftagen stets in den Sinn. Ermessen Sie daraus, dass Ihre so freundlichsten Briefworte über meine Kafka-biographie mir doppelt wohltun mussten. Ich bin sehr glücklich darüber, dass Sie zu den wenigen gehören, die (neben der vielen Verzweifelten), auch das kostbar Hoffnungsvolle, das vorsichtig Bauende im Werk Kafkas sehen. Diese Wahrheit wird siegen. Vorläufig allerdings verleumdet mich „der Spiegel": ich hätte für das „Chaotische" in Kafka Stimmung gemacht. Wer auch mein Wirken kennt, weiß, wie faustdick diese Lüge ist.*

[216] Heller, *Disinherited Mind*, 181.

Christian God as the Absolute." And the man who arose from bourgeois humanism Marx described as "Abstract, isolated Man" without material-social relations," not without relations to nature.[217] Marx clearly rejected the post-Enlightenment bourgeois humanism as insufficient and hypocritical, especially in connection with colonialism. Such a critique would also include Thomas Mann's humanism.

Back then still an orthodox Marxist critic, György Lukács counted Thomas Mann's *Betrachtunegn eines Unpolitischen* (1918) as subject to the same tendency, that is, it offered an incomplete critique of capitalism "leaving room for sympathy for German wretchedness of its surviving features."[218] Lukács saw Romanticism as a preliminary socialist critique that then in Germany transformed into a form of apology for the political and social backwardness of Hohenzollerns' Germany.

Yet Mann and Lukács shared the transformative experience of WWI. Lukács wrote his *Theory of the Novel* in summer 1914, and the immediate motif for the writing was, according to him, the outbreak of WWI and the effect its acclamation had on the European Left. Lukács's personal attitude was based in his "rejection of the war and especially in rejection of the enthusiasm for the war."[219] Lukács had no objections to the possible defeat of Hohenzollerns' Germany, the Habsburgs, or the czarist Russia, but he could not imagine who then would save "us" from Western civilizations.[220]

Presciently, Lukács offered a critique of Heller almost forty years before the latter formulated this thought when stating:

> Any resuscitation of the Greek world is a more or less conscious hypostasy of aesthetics into metaphysics—a violence done to the essence of everything that lies outside the sphere of art, and a desire to destroy it, an attempt to forget that art is only one sphere among many, and that the very disintegration and inadequacy of the world is the precondition for

[217] John Bellamy Foster, "Marx's Critique of Enlightenment Humanism: A Revolutionary Ecological Perspective," *Monthly Review* 74, no. 8 (2023): 1–15.
[218] Ibid., 20.
[219] Lukács, *Theory of the Novel*, 11.
[220] Ibid.

> the existence of art and its becoming conscious. The exaggeration of the substantiality of art is bound to weigh too heavily upon its forms; they have to produce out of themselves all that was once simply accepted as given; in other words, before their own a priori effectiveness can begin to manifest itself, they must create by their own power alone the pre-conditions for such effectiveness—an object and its environment. A totality that can be simply accepted is no longer given to the forms of art: therefore they must either narrow down and volatilize whatever has to be given form to the point where they can encompass it, or else they must show polemically the impossibility of achieving their necessary object and the inner nullity of their own means. And in this case they carry the fragmentary nature of the world's structure into the world of forms.[221]

To simplify, Lukács was convinced that after the unity disintegrated (the same unity Heller identified), "there could be no more spontaneous unity of being."[222] Heller also recognized the disintegration, but he used the shoulder of poetry (art) and charged it with the colossal task of restoring the whole. Heller saw the religious and political split so hopelessly aligned with the end of humanity and culture that he could not imagine anything so radically different, something that would transcend the given and familiar.

Heller, however, came very close to Kafka's thought about yielding and not rushing into solutions—and not trying to repair what was disintegrated. North, in his book *Yield*, analyzed Kafka's views about the historical continuity between religious and secular thought. North studied Kafka's notes in *Zürau Aphorisms* (*Die Zürauer Aphorismen)* and characterized them as "atheological-political treatise."[223] According to North, Kafka, the writer but also a legal theorist, pursued the connection of the secular and the religious, "covering almost every significant theologoumenon in the history of European thought." The prefix a- in "atheology" modifies both—not only "theos" but also "logos." According to North, Kafka formulated the thought that everything secular is ultimately religious, and "the only interesting thing about secular modernity was that

[221] Ibid., 38–39.
[222] Ibid.
[223] North, *The Yield*, 1-30.

its logic was a-logical in a variety of ways that could be explored, and exploited, and shown to correspond to theology, rightly understood."[224]

Kafka is aware that neither theism nor atheism is the option for the afterlife in the post mono-god Europe. Neither one can be negated or affirmed. Nietzschean objectives are still part of the theological realm, but Kafka developed a system of non-knowledge, a cosmos not allowing for self-contradictory arguments, a cosmos that could be a foundation for action. For, as North explains, Kafka found the logos of theology flawed. Theology, the main source of our conceptional commitment, was not logical. Since neither theology nor secularity, which stems from the theological, is logical, no opposition between them could be asserted. If they are both born from nothing, then the only force is faith—a groundless scenario. North quotes Kafka's friend Felix Weltsch: "Faith overcomes itself, by creating."[225] That something *is* because it is believed becomes, instead, something is *believed* because it is. North comments that the objective thus arises from the subjective. This creative force of faith is the most meaningful modern moment.[226] The moment of faith, in this creative capacity, is what Weltsch associates with incorrigible human freedom. Paul Roubiczek discovered the same connection between faith, personal freedom, and religion. He saw mutuality and lived it to transform the world around him.

Kafka engaged with theological themes using Jewish and non-Jewish, Christian, pagan, and animistic themes. His notebook includes entries separated in time by only a few weeks: "The messiah will come as soon as the most unrestrained individualism of

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[224] Ibid., 4–5.
[225] Ibid., 7–8.
[226] Ibid., 8. Here North paraphrases Jean-Luc Nancy's *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

belief is possible" (opening the possibility of an infinite diversity of belief), then later, "The messiah will only come when he is no longer needed."[227]

Similar explorations of the dialectic between theism and atheism that attempt to articulate post-religious philosophical faith started emerging more confidently after WWII, with and after Derrida. But North is among the first to point out Kafka's interest in the diversity of individual beliefs from a theoretical and philosophico-legal point of view. Kafka wrote his *Zürau Aphorisms* in winter 1917–18 and gave up on finishing *The Castle* in 1922. Implicitly, in *The Castle* there was already room for more than the demons from the Christian concept of hell that Heller drew attention to.

Heller decried not only the Roman and Greek deities but also and principally the death of the kind of Christianity that informed our cultural value system and perception of reality in the past. The idea that religion and secularism need not oppose each other would have been strange to him. The late twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries have seen religion sneaking back into our lives more victoriously and efficiently than ever in the past, and it is secularism that is losing what seemed a decided battle. The legitimacy of the new religious or spiritual forms, empowered by the age of instant informational technologies, does not depend on rational grounds, it draws its strength from new aesthetics of social form.

New religious doctrines and art do not oppose each other; especially in Vilém Flusser's vision of post-historical, post-industrial, and techno-reality, they can coexist symbiotically: religion uses art as its tool, and art, if we want to credit Heller, fulfilled the colossal task in its own creative way—it absorbed spirituality and created a new whole, the irony of disinherited art. And more, the post-secular age is the age where

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[227] Ibid.

science and art merge to describe what was indescribable by language alone, thus fulfilling Flusser's vision of a "telematic utopia."

In our world of the twenty-first century, the traditional dialectic of art and religious dogma has been overcome by the dialectic of reciprocation and response. The inflexible part of the dogma separated and continues on its own path to fundamental beliefs. In the (so far partly imaginary) post-secular world, literature and its tendencies to challenge hierarchy continue to pose a threat to any totalitarian or fundamental society. In the attempts to create religious pluralism, art became one of the leading forces. Spirituality in a globalized world shows once again the natural tendency toward diversity and entropy, but it does not point to its own disappearance. However, Heller did not fear the loss of spirituality as is, he lamented the loss of universal faith, a set of objective values to which the literary text stood indeed in opposition. Yet along with the need for objective values, Heller also advocated for the existence of individual truths. The spiritual pluralism of the twenty-first century may very well be able to bring these two opposites together. To use Kafka's words: then, "the messiah will come."

At the heart of Heller's criticism was the inseparability of one's writing and the reality that writer lives in, a reality conditioning one's historical imagination. But rarely did Heller comment more specifically on the Central European cultural crisis (as opposed to the "West") of which he possessed a direct and a more intimate historical consciousness. He came close to doing so in his lecture "Political Doom and Cultural Creativity." In it he attacked again Sigmund Freud and psychoanalysis as a product of the Habsburg monarchy:

> The Oedipus Complex is not a general disposition of the young male psyche. It is one of the gifts of the Habsburgs, among other decrepit authorities, to generations of sons who had, with the vanishing of any

> higher commands, unknowingly appointed their fathers to the position of the "ultimate authority."[228]

Heller blames the Habsburgs not only for the state of young males' mental health, the emergence of Sigmund Freud, and Freud's "invention" of the Oedipus complex, he also sees Kafka's writing as undeniably Austrian:

> The author of "*The Judgment*," or "*The Trial*," or "*The Castle*," unwittingly revealed the destiny that awaited him: to become the representative writer of Austro-Hungary, or, rather, of a world where nobody truly possessed the authority to authorize that State to exist. Its Family doctor was Sigmund Freud . . . . *The Judgment* is an Austrian story, the story of the perversely displaced ultimative authority.[229]

When Kafka stated in his *Letter to the Father* that he knew no higher authority than his father, no god or emperor, did he lead a revolt against the Habsburgs? Or did he walk in the footsteps of the tradition? The multinational Central European Habsburg Empire, and later one of the new succession multinational states, Czechoslovakia, and even Komotau could indeed not rely very strongly on a unifying political faith and the natural centripetal powers of a "Center." The House of Habsburg had been losing grip since Johann Gottfried Herder's sociolinguistic explorations and the era of technical advancement, with new modes of infrastructure and communication. Moreover, it faced directly one of the new rising powers, Germany. The accumulating potential for distraction discharged by the rebelling peripheries prepared the unruliness that Hitler exploited. And all this pandemonium in and due to a mad search for unity to close the gap between one's own perception of the self in the world and the perception of the objective world. Heller gravitated naturally to scrutinizing the German path to modernity more than to the particularities of the Austrian one, a task that he comfortably threw on Sigmund Freud's divan. His skeptical approach to the historic-political conditions of Austria demonstrates Heller's preferred attachment to German culture, everyday or high,

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[228] "Political Doom and Cultural Creativity," 8–10, Heller Papers, Box 9, Folder 1.
[229] Ibid.

but not to the everyday culture of the small communities his hometown belonged to and what Central Europe is made up of. That lack might explain why he— unlike his brother, who could very well collaborate with the Czechoslovak government and offices and spoke conversational Czech—felt so trapped in the environment of the new Czechoslovakia.

To achieve his stellar success, Erich Heller unconsciously moved between two seemingly contradictory lines: the generality of his writing, which on the one hand suggests or emphasizes patterns that were or are most likely to be replicated, and its singularity, which on the other hand offers something unique, something that sets his reasoning apart from other criticism, thereby highlighting the exceptionalism of German literary development and drawing attention to it precisely because it is special. This relation of two seemingly different approaches has helped establish Heller's success.

At the end of the year 1957, when his *The Ironic German* appeared in English and soon after also in an American edition, three prominent public intellectuals put it on their "three books of the year" list: Isaiah Berlin, Philip Toynbee, and T. S. Eliot. Heller commented in a letter to his brother that he always knew that a book about Thomas Mann, maybe even a different book from the one he ended up writing, would lead to success after the war. Herein Heller admits that composing a true criticism of which the subject is literature, and nothing else, was not his sole motivation. At the heart of Heller's writing was the struggle for the success of his own creativity.

The 1980s saw another change in the field of literary criticism, one that left deterministic thinking behind. This development, however, changed nothing about the fact that Heller was a critical figure in the 1950s and 1960s. When presented with the original edition of his *Enterbter Geist* for his seventieth birthday in 1981, Heller commented that it held up well and that if he were to write it today, he would change a

few things, but not the spirit of the book.[230] He also said: "The book has, to my surprise, proved quite enduring, strangely with greater persistence in England and America than in Germany, where it appeared in my own translation in 1954."[231] It must have been a surprise indeed, because in his much earlier (1958) correspondence with his brother, still from Swansea, he proclaimed his distrust in the "lazy Germanistik in England and especially America."[232]

Heller was lucky to see another reprint, likely the last one, of his *The Disinherited Mind* (1975). His refusal to adapt and engage with new historical developments and research explains the fact that he remained the man of his time. The strong moral concepts he used—such as "freedom," "truth," "humanity," "imagination," "body," and "souls"—gradually exhausted their power, as they were too narrow to absorb new ideas from the world of the late twentieth century. They became containers conserving "the Conservative," the belief that the past was better than the present. They could not hold the ever-emancipatory that literature represents.

[230] Paul Heller Papers, Box 1, Folder 17, correspondence.
[231] Heller Papers, Addition, Vorwort zur neuen Ausgabe, Box 9, Folder 11. Original: *Das Buch hat sich, zu meiner Überraschung als recht dauerhaft erwiesen, in England und Amerika sonderbarerweise mit größerer Beharrlichkeit als in Deutschland, wo es in meiner eigenen Übertragung 1954 erschien.*
[232] Paul Heller Papers, Box 1, Folder 17, correspondence.

CHAPTER 3

CLOSE CONNECTIONS:
T. S. ELIOT, T. MANN, K. KRAUS, W. HEISENBERG, V. FLUSSER

3.1. Firmly Grounded

Heller maintained that all poetry rests on religious grounds. With the religious grounds collapsing, art emancipated itself from reality, and so did man (that is 'human beings', to use non-gendered language). In his view, private loyalties could not maintain the universal understanding of a universal *Symbol*. The correspondence of *Word* and *Symbol* was dissolved, and private allegories took its place. In his *Disinherited Mind* the meaningful *Dasein* in the meaningful *World* gave way to *Wahnsinn* (insanity) and incomprehensibility. What Heller bemoans is the loss of the universal system of values. In that vein, he stands against diversity, entropy, to which nature naturally gravitates, and what is more, emancipation. For a queer man, this is a surprising standpoint.

In the classical Latin and Greek worlds he idealized instead, many of his concerns (as a person from the middle class and a self-determined outsider) would not have been heard at all. For classical rhetoric and literature followed an actual, strict social and moral hierarchy. While the demigods and aristocratic heroes performed extraordinary acts, represented in poetry through a correspondingly noble language, the slaves performed ridiculous, trivial, or no actions. These (non-)actions were harmoniously captured in a comical, simple, and fragmented language. In other words, the style of representation befitted the character and was considered a natural form. The daily struggle for survival and the lewdness of reproduction were not part of the epos or tragedy. Poetry was the true mirror image of the existing societal hierarchy, by far not as

flexible or permeable as in modern times. Heller imagined the aesthetic ideal of the classical world as applicable to modern society, of which he himself was a part.

Christian literature, imitating a variety of styles from the Bible, exposed much more about human private life—including its cycle of labor and reproduction. In contrast to that in the ancient cultures, Christian literature represented and valued the realm of work and family. It diminished the value of myth and mythological figures and ideals, and by introducing the theologically moral guidelines for common people, the value of heroic suffering was also lessened. Instead, everyday suffering for religious truths was expected and redemption promised.

The age of critiquing dogma was opened by Immanuel Kant, who challenged the worth of following and suffering for these common given or religious values. For Kant, adult humanity was defined by humans' critical capacity. The direct link to the metaphysical being outside particular time and space was lost. Thus Kant and the responders to his teaching changed the literary traditions beyond Germany. There is no metaphysical sequence in our knowledge; each individual must start from his/her own exposure in time and space and use his/her particular sensible intuition, combined with intellect, to form a unique knowledge. The status of the "truth" is constantly challenged and justified by critical consciousness. "*Being* is temporalized and spatialized, but the transcendent reality that includes *God* is not. The critical questioning slowly desacralized the world."[233] Critical questioning also, however, allowed for a more creative, imaginary picture of the world, as recorded in new developments of literature.

Literature filled the emptied spiritual world, devoid of divinity. The nineteenth century fictional writing then naturally continued to diminish further the value of

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[233] Andrew Hass, David Jasper, and Elisabeth Jay, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of English Literature and Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 131–35.

suffering dictated by religion. The century's fictional heroes still suffer, but their suffering is not a virtue and it does not promise or lead to redemption as it did in the medieval, mythological concepts. The new heroes suffer for love, ideals, and self-realization. They can be liberated from suffering only by self-fulfillment or death.[234] It is somewhat intriguing that Heller, who spent his career trying to answer the Kantian question of how we can fill the spiritual emptiness, never devoted a deeper reflection to Kant's thought.

The shock of the encounter with critique and the destruction of biblical theology led many to wonder about the path ahead. Was there no return, or was a new clarity concerning the truth on the way? Heller, as an enduring exponent of the former, believed that breaking the traditional acceptance of universal values leads to nothing but nihilism. There is no evidence that Heller read Fichte's ideas about transcendental idealism, which declared that the human empirical consciousness is still positioned within a transcendental structure because absolute knowing comes to nothing—it is full of images that represent nothing.[235] Nor is there evidence that Heller was deeply engaged with Friedrich Schlegel, who thought that the creative aspect of Kant's philosophy revealed art (aesthetics) as capable of presenting the absolute, and thus superseded theology. But he did engage with at least one of the radical responders (Nietzsche), for whom Ludwig Feuerbach paved the way by proclaiming that the religious consciousness of the absolute is not what it appeared to be, so self-consciousness is alienated from itself. Feuerbach's "Dream of the Human Mind"[236] was followed by Marx's "Dream

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[234] Ibid.
[235] Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *The Science of Knowledge*, translated by A. E. Kroeger (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1968).
[236] Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2008).

about the Whole Man,"[237] Nietzsche's "Superman," and Freud's psychic man. Heller developed disdain for Marx and Freud but admired and accepted Nietzsche's thought.

3.2. Subjective and Imaginative

Essay as a literary genre in the German literary world was preceded by the eighteenth-century concepts of *Versuche*, *Gesinnungen*, and *Abhandlungen*. All these forms, known in German letters, refer to something that does not aspire to completion, perfection, or rightness. The essay may be associative, critical, or entertaining, and for that purpose even some aspects of fantasy and personal elements are permissible. When an *Abhandlung* became popular in Germany in the nineteenth century, a version of Michel de Montaigne's *essayer* (to try), and subsequently via the English version of "essai" or "essay" writing during the era of the Enlightenment, it spread easily, for its autobiographical elements and strong subjectivism were already present in the German versions of the genre.

Heller embraced just that in his writing. His essays intertwined his own preexisting thoughts with another author's ideas to create rhetorically impactful and even provocative statements. Heller's *Versuche* (essays) are not are not so much exhaustive as they are abstract. For example, in his essay on Kafka and his work, "The World of Franz Kafka," Heller rejects many existing scholarly readings and offers his own variations of meaning, his personal interpretation of historical circumstances, and leaves the actual questions about the meaning of Kafka's work rather open. Heller perhaps mediated new angles of looking at Kafka's writing, but he did not analyze the structure of Kafka's language very closely, even though he did explain for English

[237] Ernst Fischer, Franz Marek, and John Bellamy Foster, *How to Read Karl Marx* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1996).

readers the German meaning of names and possible associations with them. But he explained no more than what any German reader typically would notice.

Heller used the freedom provided by the genre of literary essay. He was inspired, not afraid to expand existing enigmas or insert new ones. Shielded by the fact that he once lived in the same city as Kafka ("Only people who lived in Prague can understand Kafka"[238]), this reorganization and denial of the obvious (*The Castle* = an allegory; K = the messiah or prophet) meets success with a general audience—and initially also in academia. If Heller's friend, compatriot, and colleague J. P. Stern (see chapter 1), himself a literary critic, calls Heller's writing "expository, direct, and effective,"[239] then it might be so. But if someone else wanted to call it "superficial, unfounded," then it could it be that, too.

For many readers it was fascinating to read Heller's rhetorical intellectual exercise, and, feasibly, there was enough room left in which to place their own last, satisfying words. Herein lies the secret of Heller's success: he worked with the predictable imaginative capacity of his readers, which he either supported or denied but always acknowledged and even helped establish, by means of very broad introductory pages and quotations from the ancient Greeks, the enlightened thinkers, and German idealists and romantics, should the grounds be lacking. Heller's most enthusiastic readers (at least those who wrote letters to him) were mostly aspiring poets and writers themselves. He engaged their own will to probe the literary piece, sometimes more than the piece itself could have done.

The long preludes probe and engage the reader directly: "What was the meaning of the word that appears empty today?" And a thorough elucidation of either a biblical

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[238] Reece Hirsch, "Fleeing Hitler's Europe," *The Daily Northwestern*, April 17, 1980, Heller Papers, Box 1, Folder 6.
[239] Heller Papers, Box 16, Folder 5; J. P. Stern, *The Enlarging and Enlivening Study of Literature* (Heidelberg: L. Stiehm, 1976), 353.

or a philosophical term follows by tracing the etymology of its use to the ancient Greeks. Heller offered such adventuresome, personal journeys to those who were willing to embark on one. In this sense, indeed, Heller's essays in *The Disinherited Mind* are truly less critical and more mediating. In a letter that T. S. Eliot sent to Heller in 1958 to thank him for a birthday present, a copy of *The Ironic German*, Eliot wrote:

> Critical studies of novelists are usually boring to those who know the novelists' work and meaningless to those who do not. Yours is the reverse. It obviously throws a great deal of light on the books of Thomas Mann for those who have read them. As I have never read any work of his, I can speak for those who have not read Thomas Mann and say that it is absorbingly interesting. On the one hand you are faithful to your task and at the same time manage to make Thomas Mann the occasion for your general ideas. Indeed I now feel, not being much of a novel reader, that *The Ironic German* will serve me so well that I shall have no need to read the novels.[240]

Heller's favorite genre, the literary essay, experienced in Germany one of its highpoints in the conscious vacuum of the immediate decades after WWII, conceivably the more appropriate device to address such vacuum. Thomas Mann's favorite tool, irony, no longer proved a suitable literary tool in the post-WWII era. After what the world had been exposed to during the war, even literary/prosaic irony could not assist in uncovering the truth about the society. An essayistic contemplation, filled with pathos, on the other hand, could openly search for and offer a new direction for German post-WWII literature, and attempt to explain what happened to the "cultured" German and European societies.

In this respect an essay is related to lyricism, which also treats its subject with more subjectivity—sometimes to the point of making the subject unimportant. But of course, it is impossible to write an essay entirely without a subject. The genre of lyricism not only offers enough of a distance from the real events and actions that are its

[240] Heller Papers, Box 5, Folder 18.

subject, it also allows the author to present a more positive view of them as it may describe dreams, wishes, and illusions. Here is where H. E. Holthusen found his home: both genres, lyric poetry and literary essay, were his strongest domains. Holthusen was used to the more scholarly, aesthetic approach, for he hoped, like Heller, to restore the glory of the past. In his own conservative way, he measured contemporary works against the ideal of the classics and was rarely satisfied. He expressed his disappointment not only in his speech at the Library of Congress but also in the individual reviews he wrote. With Heller, Holthusen shared pessimism regarding the German literary future. Sticking to the classical bygone ideals rather than addressing the present sociopolitical or historical circumstances protected Holthusen, as well as Heller, from political commitments. Conservatism, a-politicism, and pessimism formed the trinity Heller and Holthusen shared.

3.3. T. S. Eliot

Heller's intellectual relationship with T. S. Eliot rests likewise in similarities of mind, not aesthetics. T. S. Eliot believed that Christianity is the cradle, foundation, and future of Western civilizations, and any divergence from this course of living the traditions would mean the end of Western civilization. In the past few decades Eliot's conservatism and sympathies with fascism have become the subject of new scholarship. Eliot's belief was illustrated most notoriously in his proclamation from 1933: "The population should be homogeneous; where two or more cultures exist in the same place they are likely either to be fiercely self-conscious or both to become adulterate . . . and reasons of race and religion combine to make any large number of free-thinking Jews undesirable."[241] Belief in the status quo and diligent work with quotations were

[241] Roz Kaveney, "TS Eliot and the Politics of Culture," *The Guardian*, April 28, 2014.

connecting Heller and Eliot, not, of course, the latter's subtle sympathies with fascism. Eliot's inclination to fascism has been scrutinized by a number of scholars, who have produced publications ranging from the analysis of Eliot's own conservatism and anti-Semitism[242] and the expression of his beliefs as reflected in his poetry, to more abstract thoughts about connections between literary modernism and right-wing ideology. These publications have urged readers to become more aware of the connection between aesthetics and politics and to see their cultural practices as political.[243]

Heller presented a paper for a lecture series organized by the Bayrische Akademie der Schönen Künste in 1966: "Avantgarde: Geschichte und Krise einer Idee" (Avant-garde: history and crisis of an idea), which he devoted to the work of Thomas Stearns Eliot. Heller reviewed the saga about the fisherman and the lost fertility of the land that could be recovered only by a life of innocence and a believing spirit. Heller stated: "This legend itself became a legend of modern poetry in Eliot's hands."[244] In his closing statement, before he read another poem by Eliot—"The Journey of the Three Kings," written in 1927, the year Eliot returned to the church—Heller paraphrased "what Eliot said in 1933" (without giving the exact source) about an "imagination of the hearing," or a "poetic hearing". He paraphrased it as:

> Imagination of the feeling for syllables and rhythms that penetrate deep below the level of conscious thinking and feeling and that give each word its own power, reaching into the primitive and forgotten, returning to the origins and bringing something with them from there, always searching for the beginning and the end.[245]

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[242] For example: R. B. Kitaj and Anthony Julius, "Reflections on *T. S. Eliot, Anti-Semitism, and Literary Form*," *ANQ* 11, no. 4 (1998): 43–59 (https://doi.org/10.1080/08957699809601268), or, Jonathan Morse, "T. S. Eliot Says 'Jew,'" *American Literary History* 10, no. 3 (1998): 497–507. http://www.jstor.org/stable/490108 (accessed May 30, 2023).

[243] Katrin Fisch, *The F Word* (Berlin: Logos, 2019).

[244] Heller Papers, Box 10, Folder 2, "Die Tradition und das Moderne," Erich Heller on T. S. Eliot. Also Erich Heller, "T. S. Eliot: Die Tradition und das Moderne," in *Bayerische Akademie der Schönen Künste Jahrbuch*, Gestalt und Gedanke 11 (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1966), 109–10. Original: *diese Sage unter Eliot's Händen selbst zur Legende der modernen Dichtung wurde*.

[245] Ibid., 134–35. Original: *Imagination von dem Gefühl für Silben und Rhytmen, die tief unter das Niveau des bewußten Denkens und Fühlens dringend und jedem Wort die ihm eigene Kraft verleihen, ins*

Eliot's own published words about the importance of tradition show more clearly what could have connected the two men to each other intellectually:

> Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it, you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense . . . and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.[246]

Since the 1990s, Eliot's critics have accused him of anti-Semitism, most notably Anthony Julius in 1996.[247] In the twenty-first century, young scholars such as Katrin Fisch have challenged Eliot's poetry for his Right, conservative, and racist leanings. Fischer finds in her broader analysis of Eliot's poetry a "a certain general misanthropic pessimism in all of Eliot's earlier poetic work, only the 'other' are equated with a strong (almost physical) feeling of revulsion. Making the 'other' disgusting implicitly legitimizes and naturalizes rejecting them."[248]

3.4. Thomas Mann

Heller introduced Thomas Mann to his readers through Mann's 1901 novel *The Buddenbrooks* and observed that when the long novel came out and became a bestseller, "nobody would have guessed that it was written by a young man."[249] Heller stated that the book appeared in the time when a young writer was expected to join the avant-garde and when revolutionary literary manifestos poured forth from the pages of the

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Primitive und Vergessene reichen, zu den Ursprüngen zurück kehren und von dorther etwas mitbringen, immer auf der Suche nach dem Anfang, und dem Ende.

[246] T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent." *Perspecta* 19 (1982): 36–42. https://doi.org/10.2307/1567048.

[247] Anthony Robert Julius, *T. S. Eliot and the Jews: A Study in Anti-Semitism and Literary Form* (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1993).

[248] Fisch, *The F Word*, 156.

[249] Erich Heller, *Thomas Mann, the Ironic German* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), 20.

fashionable journals. In this time full of passion for literary experimentation with style and form, "Thomas Mann simply knotted more tightly the old net of the storyteller . . . from the period before the machines of the industrial revolution in literature."[250] Heller's assessment was that *Buddenbrooks* already foreshadowed the daring literary device of Thomas Mann's later works: "He calculated and artistically mastered incongruity between the meaning of the story told and the manner of telling it."[251] In other words, Mann set out, ironically, to depict the experience of societal decline with the most traditional form, for it was the only form that did not feel alien to him. It was a risky undertaking.

Tobias Boes, the author of a recent comprehensive study of Thomas Mann in English and published in 2019, gives in the opening pages of the book the same reason for Mann's success in America:

> He became famous in America not because of his criticism of Hitler, nor even because he found powerful words to attack governmental injustice, as his nineteenth century predecessors Heinrich Heine or Emile Zola had done. His fame instead rested on the quietly dignified aura of culture and tradition with which he surrounded himself and that seemed to emanate from every page that he wrote.[252]

Buddenbrooks is a story without surprises: the characters are in possession of their fate, as opposed to the dispossessed characters deprived of faith and searching for unattainable reality in modern writing (as in the works of Kafka, Joyce, and Proust).

Mann's initial, deeper interest in aesthetics rather than politics, an interest conditioned by the influence of Prussian authoritarianism during his childhood and adolescence, culminated in *The Meditations of a Nonpolitical Man*, in which he argued for the superiority of German culture. World War I was followed in 1918 by the

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[250] Ibid., 21.
[251] Ibid., 23.
[252] Tobias Boes, *Thomas Mann's War: Literature, Politics, and the World Republic of Letters* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019).

November revolution in Germany, the proclamation of the Weimar Republic, and, in April/May, the founding of the short-lived Munich Council Republic. In those years Mann struggled with conflicting political sentiments. In the preface to *Meditations*, he declared: "It is not a work of art, but the work of an artist whose existence was shaken to its foundations, whose self-respect was brought into question, and whose troubled condition was such that he was completely unable to produce anything else."[253] Heller calls Mann's political engagement in his later years a result of an "awkward debt" that Mann tried to pay off for the rest of his life. This debt originated in having attempted to answer in *Meditations*, toward the end of WWI, questions about individual ethics, traditional loyalties, intellectual radicalism, and political commitment as though Mann himself had participated in the war. Given the six-hundred-page length of his book, the trauma appears to have been real, not deserving of Heller's ironical and almost cynical commentary:

> All of the forward looking (with the exception of his denunciation of Hitler's Germany, inspired by genuine hatred) political exhortations of his later years have, embarrassingly, an ingredient of deliberate well-meaningness and studied simple-mindedness: from the Berlin oration of 1922 (*Von deutscher Republik*) in which he surprised the German social democrats and trade unionists with a literary bouquet made up of Novalis and Walt Whitman, and with all but the offer of the inheritance of the Romantic movement, to the Chicago Address of 1950 (*Meine Zeit*), which, on the margin of what is otherwise a moving piece of autobiographical reflection, counseled the two "good natured colossi in East and West" to be as good to each other as their soldiering Vanyas and Sams in occupied Germany, united as these were by "a certain kinship in temperament," and a certain "gay primitivity of drinking and love-making."[254]

This quotation also illustrates Heller's skillful navigation between German and English, using German syntax (purposefully, for his knowledge of English was already proficient), and his pushing this element of his writing (for an English reader) to the

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[253] Thomas Mann, *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man*. Translated by Walter D. Morris (New York: F. Ungar, 1983). Preface.
[254] Heller, *Ironic German*, 118–19.

permissible, thus, of course, making his point even more dramatic. Except for Mann's resistance to Hitler, which Heller acknowledged as genuine, Heller attributed all the political actions of Mann solely to his alleged "guilty conscience" and labeled them "playing the part of a Lübeck senator"—as though WWI was not believably horrible enough to spur political change, as though the emergence of Hitler and the consequential WWII were not enough to cement this attitude for anything after it. Only under such assumptions can one make accusations of this scale. And then the ultimate verdict of the literary critic follows:

> The irritating truth is that he [Mann] was an incomparably profounder political thinker when he was a non-political man, a political "obscurantist" and "reactionary," than ever as the advocate of democracy, progress and, more recently, "co-existence" (that tiresome word which seems to claim for a harsh political necessity some sort of ideological and sentimental value).[255]

Heller did not say a "better writer," he said a "profounder political thinker" (as a nonpolitical man). In the historical context, and especially with hindsight—for we now have the ability to assess events in retrospect—it sounds a little out of place to criticize someone's political engagement on behalf of democracy in the most turbulent time of German history. Such a context was already available to Heller when he wrote those lines, around the time his own brother had just emerged from Hitler's concentration camps. It does not seem inherently logical.

Thomas Mann's turn to democracy was inspired primarily by two events. One was the assassination of German-Jewish Foreign Minister Walther Rathenau by right-wing radicals in June 1922. The other was his reading of the American poet Walt Whitman, through whose writings Mann was introduced to the idea that commitment to a common democratic constitution can create a sense of identity. Mann's political

[255] Ibid., 127–28.

engagement reached its apex shortly after the Reichstag election in 1930 when he delivered his address "An Appeal to Reason" in Berlin's Beethoven Hall. The speech was interrupted by SS stormtroopers and resulted in a harsh campaign by the right-wing press. Mann rejected National Socialist Germany categorically and most resolutely in 1936, from his Swiss exile. He emigrated to America in 1938. By then, his political course had been irreversibly set.

In his five, enormously successful lecture tours in the United States between 1938 and 1943, Mann explained to the American public what was happening in Germany and advocated military action against Hitler. And for Mann this urging was very close to his heart, for his sons Klaus and Golo served in the US Army and his daughter Erika was a war correspondent for the BBC. Upon invitation by the BBC, Mann also famously recorded fifty-eight radio speeches, which were broadcast monthly from London to Germany and the occupied territories between October 1940 and May 1945 under the title *Deutsche Hörer* (Listen, Germany!; also, German Listeners!); the first forty-two of these speeches had been published already in 1942.[256] The recordings made on the West Coast were pressed on LP records in New York, then sent to BBC headquarters in London, which finally broadcast them to Germany via long wave radio. Thus Mann's speeches became part of the Allies' demoralization tactics. The number of regular listeners in Germany is estimated to have been relatively low, because, there, listening to foreign stations was severely punished.[257] Nevertheless, Hitler reacted to the attacks and frequently brought up Mann's name in his speeches. As for Mann, his five-to-eight-minute broadcasts delivered sharp criticism of Nazi Germany. At first he saw Germans as victims of the dictatorship, but as the world headed toward victory over the

[256] Thomas Mann, *Deutsche Hörer: 25 Radiosendungen nach Deutschland* (Stockholm: Bermann-Fisher, 1942).
[257] Thomas Mann, "Thomas Mann Deutsche Hörer BBC Radioansprachen." Internet Archive: https://archive.org/details/Thomas-Mann-Deutsche-Hoerer (accessed May 18, 2023).

Nazi madness, Mann accepted the theory of collective guilt and responsibility. In his most famous, last broadcast from January 14, 1945, he detailed war crimes and called for repentance:

> German listeners—if only this war were over! If only what had to happen and will happen one day had already happened! If only the horrible people who brought Germany here were eliminated and one could begin to think of a new beginning of life, of clearing away the rubble, internal and external, of gradual reconstruction, of an understanding reconciliation with other peoples and a worthy coexistence with them to think! Is that what you desire? Am I expressing your longing? I think so. You are fed up with death, destruction, chaos. You want order and life, a new way of life, no matter how gloomy and difficult it may be for years to come. That's brave.[258]
> . . .
> What is done by your sons' hands, by your hands, is unbelievable, but it is true. Do you, who can hear me now, know about Majdanek near Lublin in Poland, Hitler's extermination camp? It wasn't a concentration camp, but a gigantic murder facility. There is a large stone building with a factory chimney, the largest crematorium in the world. Your people would have liked to destroy it quickly when the Russians came, but for the most part it's there, a monument, the monument to the Third Reich. More than half a million European people, men, women and children, were poisoned there in gas chambers with chlorine and then burned, 1400 a day. The death factory worked day and night, its chimneys always smoking. An extension had already begun . . . .

Tobias Boes saw in Thomas Mann a predecessor of modern dissidence based on the way Mann, a literary figure, was able to use his internationally recognized name and

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[258] Thomas Mann. "DOK. 193: Thomas Mann benennt in einer Radiosendung vom 14. Januar 1945 die deutschen Verbrechen und fordert zur Reue auf." In *Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden durch das nationalsozialistische Deutschland, 1933–1945*, edited by Götz Aly, Wolf Gruner, Susanne Heim, Ulrich Herbert, Hans-Dieter Kreikamp, Horst Möller, Dieter Pohl et al. (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2008), 526–27. „*Deutsche Hörer—wäre nur dieser Krieg zu Ende! Wäre nur schon geschehen, was geschehen muß und einmal geschehen wird! Wären die grauenhaften Menschen erst beseitigt, die Deutschland hierhin gebracht haben, und könnte man anfangen, an einen Neubeginn des Lebens, an das Forträumen der Trümmer, der inneren und äußeren, an den allmählichen Wiederaufbau, an eine verständige Aussöhnung mit den anderen Völkern und ein würdiges Zusammenleben mit ihnen zu denken!Ist es das, was ihr wünscht? Spreche ich damit eure Sehnsucht aus? Ich glaube es. Ihr seid des Todes, der Zerstörung, des Chaos übersatt. Ihr wollt Ordnung und Leben, eine neue Lebensordnung, wie düster und schwer sie sich für Jahre auch anlassen wird. Das ist mutig. Was durch eurer Söhne Hände, durch eure Hände getan ist, ist unglaubwürdig, aber es ist wahr. Weißt du, der mich jetzt hört, von Majdanek bei Lublin in Polen, Hitlers Vernichtungslager? Es war kein Konzentrationslager, sondern eine riesenhafte Mordanlage. Da steht ein großes Gebäude aus Stein mit einem Fabrikschlot, das größte Krematorium der Welt. Eure Leute hätten es gern rasch noch vernichtet, als die Russen kamen, aber größtenteils steht es, ein Denkmal, das Denkmal des Dritten Reiches. Mehr als eine halbe Million europäischer Menschen, Männer, Frauen und Kinder, sind dort in Gaskammern mit Chlor vergiftet und dann verbrannt worden, 1400 täglich. Tag und Nacht war die Todesfabrik in Betrieb, ihre Kamine rauchten immer. Schon war ein Erweiterungsbau begonnen . . . .*"

connections, especially in the West, to fight against a criminal totalitarian regime established at that time in his own country. With his political engagement Mann became an important figure in the resistance against Hitler. He was fully capable of exploiting the potential of his international fame as a representative of the kind of Germany the West supported. Mann's actions were simply of importance when he, assisted by his daughter, Erika Mann, boosted American support of the war against Hitler; together they filled rooms and public spaces with thousands of listeners, who applauded in the vision of Germany of the 1940s Thomas Mann and that Germany's future role in international politics. Mann was also received by President Roosevelt in the White House.

Boes characterized the difference in the perception of culture on both continents and what culture means to Americans and Europeans in writing:

> The United States in the nineteenth century was a country rich in republican customs, but as yet without any hegemonic cultural traditions that could have played a dominant role in reinforcing national identity. American identity was then (and it continues to be to this day) far more likely to be defined by social values like the ones codified in the Bill of Rights or the Gettysburg Address than by poems, folk songs and popular plays.[259]

This observation is not new; the fact that members of new nation states, for example in Europe, rely much more heavily on their national poetry and the historical roots promoted by their founding fathers than on an existing social organization and shared values is notorious. But Boes continues and ties this difference to cultural criticism:

> In contrast to the German-speaking world, English critics (and Americans who modeled their views on the English) viewed culture primarily as an expression of class identity, rather than of nationality. To be "cultured" meant to be able to display wit, beauty and refinement and to thereby testify to the intellectual and spiritual suppleness that were thought to be prerequisites for elevated social positions. …This fusion of aesthetic refinement with moral responsibility also gave rise to a specifically American conception of the representative writer. [260]

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[259] Boes, *Thomas Mann's War*.
[260] Ibid., 49–50.

It is the task of an American writer to guide and criticize the democratic society. Thomas Mann was able to do just that. In 1949, he was invited to give lectures both in Frankfurt am Main in the West and Weimar in the East to commemorate the two-hundredth anniversary of Goethe's birth. He decided to honor both invitations: "I know no zones. My visit is to Germany itself, Germany as a whole."[261] This decision, nevertheless, together with his admiration for Roosevelt and the policies of the New Deal made him suspect as a potential communist. Mann eventually withdrew from politics and emigrated to Switzerland in 1952, where he died in 1955.

Although Heller would not be able to agree with Mann and his late 1940s cosmopolitan politics of reconciliation, many of Mann's intellectual ideas from his prior conservative stage became a core part of Heller's own study and further contemplations—not only the idea of a spirit and a *Geist*, but also and mainly Mann's conviction that the fundamentals of the German Nazi mindset originated in the German Reformation, which for Mann represented both the best and the worst of the German people. Boes traced the lectures Mann gave in the war years, and according to Boes, over the years Mann arrived at the conviction that Luther was both the greatest man—the man who saved Christianity by reforming the church—and the man who brutally stood up against the Peasants' Revolt. In one sentence Mann stated his belief that "The horrors of the Nazi dictatorship and the Holocaust lie inherently within Germany itself."[262] This realization disallowed Mann to envision two post-WWII Germanys—a good one and a bad one; for Mann, all his countrymen should examine their consciences. This belief not only irritated another famous émigré in American exile—Bertolt Brecht—but likely also did not sit quite well with Erich Heller, from the opposite

[261] Ibid., 207–12.
[262] Ibid.

political spectrum, who had once already condemned Thomas Mann for shaking hands with the Eastern German literary lackeys (see chapter 1).

Mann, who became the symbol of democratic Germany as well as a living representative of it in the flesh—Mann who declared that Germany was always with him, no matter where he was ("I am Germany"), in an interview with the *New York Times* right after he stepped off the boat in America (often misinterpreted as a too-egoistic manner)—at the same time comprehended that if Germany, German culture, or he himself were able to survive only under the auspices of the Allies, then that same culture was no longer exclusively German. And he arrived at the realization that the world's unification must be the goal for humanity of the future. Thus he spoke of himself as a representative of "cosmopolitan Germanness."

Mann became a member of Coudenhove-Kalergi's Paneuropean Union based on Coudenhove-Kalergi's vision of aristocratic intellectual leadership, a mixed-race Europe, and a path to pacifism.[263] Mann's dream of a pan-European community of any kind and leadership model was not realized in the immediate postwar years, and Mann did not live to see Germany united again. Furthermore, he himself became the target of radical political developments on both ends of the spectrum. As nationalism bolstered its position, and as the West and East drifted further and further away from each other, Mann fully comprehended his own defeat and withdrew from politics completely. It is perhaps the last irony that in Mann's downfall, Heller's pessimistic vision of life was fulfilled. For at that time, he who took no action and accepted no responsibility emerged more victorious than a political leader who lost his followers. In 1952, Mann recalls the words of Toynbee (at that time Heller's passionate reader and author of enthusiastic reviews of *The Disinherited Mind*):

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[263] Richard Nicolaus Coudenhove-Kalergi, *Praktischer Idealismus* (Vienna: Paneuropa-Verlag, 1925).

> In an article in *The Observer* called "The Isolated World Citizen," Philip Toynbee, an English critic, called the political stance that I've taken for the past 30 years "too good to be true." Young Toynbee is right: my stance has become quietly questionable, especially those things about it that relate to optimism, democracy, faith in humanity—and yes, even to my "world citizenship." My books are hopelessly German.[264]

In search of his religious attitude and ethical orientation, Mann moved toward and united with the Christian front against the Nazis, but he also married a Jewish woman, was an agnostic, and a queer man. Even the religious figures in his novels do not feel comfortable in their skin (as in *Joseph and his Brothers*) and do not reveal reliably where they draw their values from. For example, the introductory chapter "Höllenfahrt" brings nothing infernal (as noticed by many critics, including Peter Heller and Mark van Doren, with various interpretations).[265]

From today's perspective, it may seem paradoxical that Mann worked with religious material in the 1920s and 1930s, the decades when he was fascinated with the ideas of Sigmund Freud, who considered religion an illusion, and after he had scrutinized the radical societal changes that forced him to reconsider his political action. Henry Hatfield, professor of German at Harvard and Northwestern universities, argued that "above all Mann wished to break a lance for the Jews, the people who primarily represented *Geist* to him, in a time seething with anti-intellectualism and racial hatred."[266] He also pointed out that the initial, illusionary rise of Joseph (in *Joseph and His Brothers*) suggested the possibility of upward social movement. However, the rise is

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[264] Boes, *Thomas Mann's War*, 239.
[265] Peter Heller, *Dialectics and Nihilism: Essays on Lessing, Nietzsche, Mann, and Kafka (*Amherst, Mass.1966), 157.
[266] Henry Hatfield, "Myth and Secularism," in: Blume, Bernhard, Hunter G Hannum, Edgar Lohner, and Egon Schwarz. *Festschrift für Bernhard Blume. Aufsätze zur deutschen und europäischen Literatur.* Göttingen: Vandenhoeck u. Ruprecht, 1967, 271-279.

followed by a fall and could be read as a transition from theism to secularism and as Joseph's being forced to face his human limitations.

In the early pages[267] of *Joseph and His Brothers* Mann retells the myth of the fall of the soul: *die Seele* (the soul), a feminine noun in German, was of unformed matter, so God created forms for the world that she could mingle with and form living men. But *die Seele* forgot her divine origin, so God created *der Geist* (the spirit), a masculine noun in German, to put things right and destroy the forms (his forms) to call *die Seele* back to heaven. *Die Seele*, however, took a liking to the physical world, and even in a way took a liking to resemblance even resemblance in a way, and *der Geist*, instead of bringing her back, fell in love with her. They both went astray from God, their creator, and incorporated both the sensual and the divine. They were alienated from God and from their divine origin. This rise and fall, or better, fall and rise, may very well be symbolic also for Mann himself—his own political and religious development.

Mann's conceptual writing is based on a paradoxical, constant rotation of the top and the bottom, which become interchangeable, and this rotation diminishes the mythical value originally present in this work. The aspect of the man's gradual self-realization in Mann's Joseph novels is inseparably connected with the fall of human beings. Mann presents a seemingly ironic vision: there is more faith without God than there is in blind following. This vision is the same one that led the religious Reformers to act, and it is the same realization that led Roubiczek through his post-traumatic life, when he was forced to confront his own pacifism.

Another writer who was preoccupied with the role of faith in our lives and the space it creates or restricts for us human beings was Franz Kafka. Mann read Kafka for

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[267] Thomas Mann, *Joseph and His Brothers: The Stories of Jacob, Young Joseph, Joseph in Egypt, Joseph the Provider*, translated by John E. Woods (New York: Everyman's Library, 2005), 39–49. http://site.ebrary.com/id/10078782.

the first time in August 1921 and found him "quite boring," but by a month later he had already reconsidered that assessment and was "very interested." Kafka was admiring Mann's writing already in 1915, but the two never had the occasion to discuss with each other their work or political views.[268]

Hatfield argued that "Mann's Joseph is about a God of the future, but he may well have envisioned a future without God,"[269] for the God depicted by Mann is a projection of the best in man. Societal values are derived from the projections of a given society. They are flexible, and there is nothing divine about them. An analogy to Kafka's *The Castle* and *The Trial*, is noticeable, every step K. takes is instantly reciprocated by the Castle, and in the direction K. had determined – himself unaware of this relation. Unlike Kafka (or perhaps in a similar way), Mann developed an ultimate faith in human beings and their power to surpass the object of their faith. Kafka's K. is operating in an environment free of traditions, where every person has the power to shape the world, yet they are unable to perceive this power and must perish exactly because of their inability to recognize the nature of the truth.

Fascinated by Mann's work with mythical symbols and values, with the dualism of *die Seele* and *der Geist*, Heller set out to understand this destructive spirit, God's messenger, meant to bring *die Seele* back to the divinity. But Mann's idea focused on the inseparable dualism of soul and spirit. Heller, caught in the myth, had to make the

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[268] Peter Lange and Jindřich Mann, *Prag empfing uns als Verwandte: Die Familie Mann und die Tschechen*, Deutsche Originalausgabe (Mitterfels: Vitalis, 2021), 20. Entry from August 1, 1921: *Zum Thee L. Hardt, der mir Prosa eines Pragers, Kafka, vorlas, merkwürdig genug. Sonst ziemlich langweilig*; and from a bit later, September 22, 1921: *Sehr interessiert war ich von den Schriften Franz Kafkas, die der Recitator mir empfahl.* (Ludwig Hardt, apparently known for his *Vortragskunst*, served often as Mann's personal audiobook.) Franz Kafka mentions Mann's 1904 novela *Ein Glück* to Max Brod, and he also finds similarities between *Tonio Kröger* and Brod's *Ausflüge ins Dunkellrote*. And in October 1917 Kafka writes to Brod about Mann's work again: "Mann gehört zu denen, nach deren Geschriebenem ich hungere."

[269] Henry Hatfield, "Myth and Secularism," in *Festschrift für Bernhard Blume: Aufsätze zur deutschen und europäischen Literatur*, edited by Egon Schwarz, Hunter G. Hannum, and Edgar Lohner (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1967), 271-279, esp. 277.

myth. His fascination with the mythical and with symbol prevented him from seeing beyond the confines of the mythical and pursuing the inquiry to its end.

Mann's belief in Joseph is similar to Goethe's belief in Faust. The description of a projective society—mirroring itself—is the unifying element that ties the three pieces together: Mann's Joseph, Kafka's K, and Goethe's Faust. Conversely, that element could also be the theme of disinheritance, as Heller saw it, or rather, the inability to relive tradition as is. Both Mann and Kafka explored what may happen if society does not relive the tradition or loses interest in reliving it. It is possible that Mann's novels (especially *Joseph and His Brothers*) are secular, as such recognizing the reciprocal nature of human god(s), human critical minds, and creative lives.

In his *The Ironic German*, Heller also noted with regard to Joseph:

> The "Prelude" in the end retracts the words of the Joseph blessing by adding a skeptical recantation which is strangely reminiscent of the final question Thomas Mann asked in *Meditations of a Non-Political Man* about the inner truth of his Germanically conservative beliefs. "Could it be," he asked then, "that what I am does not correspond exactly to what I think and believe, and that I am destined to further precisely that which in these pages I have called 'Progress' through the very act of conservatively opposing it—opposing it by means of literature?"[270]

Heller sees this question in parallel with the story of "Romance of the Soul." *Der Geist* betrayed his mission. Did the spirit mean to behave this way? For he will always carry the purpose for which he was sent, namely, to bring the material world to an end by taking the soul out of it and delivering it back to heaven. And in Mann's own words:

> He cannot but remain what in truth he is: the voice of conscience, the principle of critique and opposition, the messenger of the pilgrimage whose call, in a world benumbed by pleasure and conformity, brings disquiet and sublime unrest to the single heart, urges the wanderer on his journey, drives the herdsman from the familiar pastures into the adventures of the distance, and makes him like unto a stone which, by detaching itself from its mountain, is destined to set up an ever-increasing motion of which nobody can say where it will end.[271]

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[270] Heller, *Ironic German*, 229.
[271] Mann and Woods, *Joseph and His Brothers*, 29–30.

While the Enlightenment was without a doubt the major force in creation of modern democratic values, it is not easy to prove or disprove that the intellectual movement had any meaningful impact on the development of the political organization and culture of the twentieth century, especially in Germany (Heller's *Sonderweg*). For Thomas Mann, this mental revolution presented an enormous challenge. So it was, at least in consequential thinking for most of the German philosophers of the twentieth century—for example, Adorno, Horkheimer, and Cassierer. Some sided with Heller (or Heller with them), but some challenged the serious charge that the ideas of the Enlightenment led to the horrors of the twentieth century, and consequently to the Holocaust.

Most eminently was this idea of a correlation between the Enlightenment and the history of political thought leading to the catastrophe of German National Socialism challenged by Peter Gay in the 1960s.[272] Gay argued that the core values of the Enlightenment were the critical mind and moral realism. Scholars of the Enlightenment era were searching for an alternative to the era of Christianity. The alternative world would be based on the old values of the ancient classical world. Anti-mythical thinking, together with a life of action, would make up a world based on knowledge. By rejecting myths and fables, the Enlightenment created the modern world and social ethics that today should, on the same basis of using the human capacity for critical thinking, reject conspiracy theories and untruths based on falsified evidence. Just as education cannot be blamed for having failed to prevent Auschwitz, so the philosophical Enlightenment cannot be blamed for having failed to prevent it.

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[272] Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment, an Interpretation: The Rise of Modern Paganism* (New York: Knopf, 1966).

3.5. Werner Heisenberg

Despite Heller's little use for evidence, textual, structural, or historical, his rhetorical exercise triggered only a few negative responses by some of his contemporary scholars in the humanities. Much more often, he received very enthusiastic and admiring responses. One of the negative reviews came from Michael Hamburger, a British translator and literary scholar. In his 1957 review of *The Disinherited Mind* he responded with frustration: "It is very hard to overcome one's intuitive resistance to so fanatical non-commitment,"[273] a comment reacting directly to Heller's statement in the postscript to the last chapter of *The Hazard of Modern Poetry*, where Heller claims he is "unaware of having advocated anything. My sole concern is to understand the situation."[274] In 1958, Hamburger tried to open a dialogue by initiating a personal correspondence with Heller. He strongly objected to Heller's reduction of reading Thomas Mann mostly from a philosophical angle: "To reduce Mann's works to thin ideas is to leave very little that's worth talking about; the whole Leben-Geist antimony is nauseating in its crudity."[275] Heller retorted promptly: "Your remark that you are 'nauseated' by 'Thomas Mann's Leben-Geist antimony in its crudity' reveals the whole Malheur of the 'purely aesthetic approach.' It may be 'crude' and 'nauseating' when it is reflected in crude and nauseating minds."[276] Heller then goes on by ridiculing and twisting Hamburger's retorts; for instance, Hamburger did not put the possessive genitive "Thomas Mann's" in front of "Leben-Geist," but *Heller's* doing so allows him to accuse Hamburger of not understanding more complicated philosophical questions:

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[273] Heller Papers, Box 5, Folder 20, clippings from *The Times Literary Supplement*, 78.
[274] Erich Heller, *The Hazard of Modern Poetry* (Cambridge: Bowes & Bowes, 1953).
[275] Heller Papers, Box 5, Folder 20, correspondence between Michael Hamburger and Erich Heller.
[276] Ibid.

"It is of some importance to me that you should understand at which point of the debate I 'come in': it is at a point considerably above 'the literal approach' business."[277]

This isolated criticism of his otherwise brilliant success was evidently of not so insignificant importance to Heller, for barely a week later he reported about this rare occurrence to his brother, in a private letter from October 10, 1958: "I returned on the day of the publication of my book and was greeted by an excellent write-up by Philip Toynbee in *The Observer* which was followed by an almost breathlessly enthusiastic review in *The Daily Telegraph* and a middle page of a respectful and even admiring bitchiness (by an anonymous enemy—it's Michael Hamburger, as I happen to know) in *The Times Literary Supplement*."[278]

It is not surprising that most scientists were either too busy or too indifferent to pay attention to Heller's writing. But at first glance it might also surprise one to know that Heller maintained contact, if not friendship, with one of the most prominent scientists of the time, Werner Heisenberg, who won the Nobel Prize for physics in 1932, at the age of 31, for his formulation of quantum mechanics in terms of matrices and thus contributing to the atomic theory. Heisenberg also created his principle of uncertainty, which guided him not only through his work in physics but also his interest in philosophy. The principle states that a particle's position and its momentum cannot both be known exactly.[279] From this principle he also drew a philosophical conclusion, stating that "absolute causal determinism was impossible, since it required exact knowledge of both positions and momentum as initial conditions."[280] Heisenberg studied

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[277] Ibid.
[278] Paul Heller Papers, Box 2, Folder 15.
[279] Richard Beyler, "Werner Heisenberg," *Encyclopedia Britannica*. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Werner-Heisenberg (last updated April 23, 2024) (accessed May 22, 2023).
[280] Ibid.

ancient Greek philology and modern Greek literature, and his father was a professor at the university of Munich in both disciplines.

Richard Beyler wrote that although Heisenberg was labeled as a "White Jew" or the "Ossietzky in Physics" for his minor interventions in defending his colleagues who were being removed from their professional positions for what was considered "Jewish influence in physics—abstract mathematical approaches," for feelings of national loyalty he never considered leaving Germany. Instead, he relied on his family's connections to Heinrich Himmler to secure a future in German academia.[281] Heisenberg and Heller exchanged letters in the 1950s and 1960s concerning literature and their personal lives, letters in which Heisenberg approved of Heller's study of Thomas Mann, though he could not agree with its overall pessimistic tone. In a letter to Heller written in 1959 in Munich, where Heisenberg was employed at the Max-Planck-Institute für Physik und Astrophysik, Heisenberg expressed his repentance and hopes for a better future role of science in human societies. He wrote that he had a feeling "that newer and better forces are emerging again, and that we, for example in natural science, which is otherwise guilty of so much misfortune, acquire a very direct feeling for the ordering powers of this world."[282]

As soon as Heller himself became a little comfortable and established at Northwestern University, in 1961 he invited Heisenberg to come there as a guest professor and promised him the opportunity to engage with both fields in an interdisciplinary way that merged his interest in physics and philosophy. Heisenberg expressed his regrets, for he would have liked to spend an academic quarter with Heller again (their having known each other from postwar days in England, where Heisenberg

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[281] Ibid.
[282] Erich Heller Papers, Box 5, Folder 22. *Dass sich schon wieder neuere und bessere Kräfte regen, und dass wir, z.B. in der sonst an so viel Unglück schuldigen Naturwissenschaft ein sehr unmittelbares Gefühl für die ordnenden Mächte dieser Welt erwerben*.

was interned), but his work responsibilities in Munich and mainly his research concerning the conditions of resonance in elementary particles did not allow for doing so.[283] Heller's friendship with Heisenberg appears to have been an isolated close relationship with a scientist, one likely stemming from the years they both spent in Cambridge shortly after the war. Heisenberg was also a very close friend of Paul Roubiczek, who likely mediated the relationship.

Heller's overuse of sacral and biblical concepts, interpretation of modern European history as based on the Christian myth of human beings' fall from paradise, and his linguistic acrobatics secured him the position of a respected critic, and often even the label "philosopher." Heller's success is proof that he understood clearly the historical (sub-)consciousness, the historical imagination of his era. Part of this imagination was the nostalgic yearning for common guiding values, and for many also the wish to escape the burden of having individually failed when falling for Hitler's rhetoric and thus being co-responsible for the horrors of WWII. Heller delivered the sermon that he knew was lost on his hearers, but the longing it expressed was still very present. He presented a gospel compiled of quotations of his favorite writers. Heller's claim (or rather vision) that poetry is now responsible for restoring the grandeur of life that has been lost in the secular world is no different from the claim that science could or should be responsible for such an illusionary task.

Heisenberg's pessimism, which he later partly overcame, is easier to trace than Heller's. Heisenberg devoted a chapter in his book *Der Teil und das Ganze* (The part and the whole) to the burden or responsibility of a scientist—moreover, a scientist involved in abstract particle physics—that after Hiroshima he could not escape. Heisenberg had a few reasons to rethink his role, not only because of his position in

[283] Ibid.

actual research and contributions to the atomic theory but also because in April 1942 he accepted leadership of the Kaiser-Wilhelm-Institut in Berlin, which he led till the end of the war, and thus became a leading figure in the nuclear research of Nazi Germany. Heisenberg collaborated with the German authorities to be able to travel and deliver lectures in occupied countries during the war (Denmark and the Netherlands). Contemplating his life and work, he came to a similar conclusion as Heller's in his intellectual contemplations: humankind's decision to follow reason and pursue scientific experiments to deepen human knowledge and improve humans' lives had been made long ago: "This development (namely modern natural science) is a life process that humanity, or at least European humanity, decided on centuries ago." But he was more rational in his understanding of the consequences of human progress: "We know from experience that this process can lead to both good and bad. . . . Before [Otto] Hahn's discovery, neither Hahn nor any of us could have seriously considered the possibility of atomic bombs, since the physics of the time did not make it possible to foresee it."[284] Although this quotation says nothing about the existence or absence of the will to get to that point, Heisenberg made himself clearer in the following years as he also mentally processed his life's actions and stated that what is of importance is the difference between a discovery and an invention: "As a rule, the discoverer cannot know anything about the possible applications before the discovery, and even afterwards the path to practical use can still be so long that practical predictions are impossible. . . . but things are usually different for inventors. The inventor has a specific practical goal in mind. He

[284] Elisabeth Heisenberg, *Das politische Leben eines Unpolitischen: Erinnerungen an Werner Heisenberg* (Munich: Piper, 1980), 105. Original: *Diese Entwicklung (nämlich die moderne Naturwissenschaft) ist ein Lebensprozess, zu dem sich die Menschheit, oder wenigstens die europäische Menschheit, schon vor Jahrhunderten entschlossen hat . . . . Wir wissen aus Erfahrung, dass dieser Prozess zum Guten und Schlechten führen kann. . . . An die Möglichkeit von Atombomben hat vor der Hahnschen Entdeckung weder Hahn noch irgendein anderer von uns ernstlich denken können, da die damalige Physik keinen Weg dahin sichtbar machte.*

must be convinced that achieving this goal represents value and he will rightly be burdened with the responsibility."[285]

Given the fact that Heisenberg stood accused of having brought up discussions of the nuclear bomb during his visits to Copenhagen in 1941, accusations that were never cleared up,[286] this elaborate distinction allowed him to excuse himself from responsibility, at least partly, in public. He reassumed the directorship of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institut in 1946 after he was released from internment in England, and the institute was renamed the Max-Planck Institute for Physics (Max-Planck-Institute für Physik und Astrophysik). Heisenberg then, however, followed his words with action, and in 1952 he was instrumental in the creation of the European Council for Nuclear Research (CERN). He also returned to research and proposed the unified field theory in 1958.

Heller did not have to deal with such a broad and heavy burden of his own, for he contributed to nothing in reality; the only thing resting heavy on his conscience could have been the absence of an act. The idea of the Enlightenment's being a cornerstone for both science and the humanities sat well with Heisenberg's life story. But especially the life story and description of political development of Thomas Mann served as a mirror that might have helped Heisenberg develop the sense of responsibility and the will to act. Heisenberg realized that simply tending to one's expertise is not enough, especially if the area of expertise carries enormous potential for either progress or destruction. His wife wrote in her memoir about him: "Heisenberg was of the opinion that Germany

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[285] Ibid, 168. Original: *Der Entdecker kann in der Regel vor der Entdeckung nichts über die Anwendungsmöglichkeiten wissen, und auch nachher kann der Weg bis zur praktischen Ausnutzung noch so weit sein, dass praktische Vorraussaussagen unmöglich sind . . . aber bei den Erfindern ist es in der Regel anders. Der Erfinder hat ja ein bestimmtes praktisches Ziel vor Augen. Er muss überzeugt sein, dass die Erreichung dieses Zieles einen Wert darstellt, und man wird ihn mit Recht mit der Verantwortung belasten.*

[286] Beyler, "Werner Heisenberg."

should now completely abandon any policy to achieve a position of power—be it economic or military—in Europe or even in the world."[287] So it came as a shock for him when the Bundeswehr was equipped with American nuclear weapons. Together with Hahn, Weizsäcker, and Gerlach, he challenged Adenauer's politics during the Cold War by drafting a Manifesto that was signed by eighteen leading physicists. In a Faustian mode, he continued reassessing his ethics,:

> In today's world, people's lives largely rely on this development of science. If one were to quickly turn away from the constant expansion of knowledge, the number of people on earth would have to be radically reduced in a short time. But that could only happen through catastrophes that would be comparable to those caused by the atomic bomb or even worse.[288]

According to Friedrich von Weizsäcker, Heisenberg became the "Homo Politicus" only in the last instance, out of a feeling of duty.[289] In this context, Heisenberg's reading of Heller's *The Ironic German* comes to light as either transformative or affirming.

3.6. Karl Kraus

Karl Kraus's personal development, the first of Heller's early subjects of interest, mirrors that of Mann, at least in its first part: an aristocratic conservative evolved into a democratic republican during the years of WWI. In the time of the war, he was working daily on his satirical play *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit* (*The Last Days of Mankind*), which criticizes the high officials of the clergy, military, media, and business for their cynical, greedy lust for war. From the early 1920s Kraus supported the Social

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[287] Heisenberg, *Das politische Leben*, 169. Original: *Heisenberg war der Meinung, dass Deutschland jetzt ganz und gar jede Politik zur Erlangung einer Machtstellung—sei sie wirtschaftlich oder militärisch—in Europa oder gar in der Welt aufgeben sollte.*
[288] Ibid., 177. Original: *In der heutigen Welt beruht das Leben der Menschen weitgehend auf dieser Entwicklung der Wissenschaft. Würde man sich schnell vor der ständigen Erweiterung der Kenntnisse abwenden, so müsste die Zahl der Menschen auf der Erde in kurzer Zeit radikal reduziert werden. Das aber könnte wohl nur durch Katastrophen geschehen, die denen der Atombombe durchaus vergleichbar oder noch schlimmer wären.*
[289] Ibid., 9-15.

Democratic Party of Austria, but he eventually exhausted himself, and his public criticism of Hitler eased into silence as he was overcome by despair. The last issue of his critical journal *Die Fackel* (The Torch) appeared in 1936. *Die Fackel* had served as a platform for his criticism since 1899, when Kraus, born into a Jewish family in the Bohemian town Jičín in 1874, converted to Catholicism. This decision resulted from his opposition to Zionism, and especially the thought of Martin Buber. In *Die Fackel*, Kraus increasingly published his own texts, not only anti-war and anti-violence but also attacking psychoanalysis and nationalism, both of which subjects spoke so strongly to Heller. The admiration of Karl Kraus led Heller to publish his first article about Kraus, which then ensured his acceptance to the doctoral program in Cambridge. In his reworked essay about Kraus, included in *The Disinherited Mind*, Heller commented on Kraus's precise use of language and his work with language ambiguity. Heller wrote:

> Textbooks would call Karl Kraus a master of language; but he is its master by being its slave. He has no "command of words," he is at their command, avenging their honor upon all who violate them. Thus this implacable enemy of all phrase-ridden traditionalism and nationalism is more deeply steeped in a national tradition than any other German writer of this time.[290]

Heller was most fascinated by Kraus's observation about corrupted morals and its reflection in the corruption of language, Kraus's pointing out the hypocrisy and of the political elites and journalists who abused the meaning of words to mask their interest in finance and power while ostentatiously calling for morality and punishing women who practiced prostitution. Heller also commented approvingly on Kraus's understanding of the integrity of tradition, culture, and historical sense: "An age without any sense of religious, ethical and aesthetic order has no culture."[291] Kraus's own explanation of his

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[290] Erich Heller, *The Disinherited Mind: Essays in Modern German Literature and Thought* (Cambridge: Bowes & Bowes, 1952), 189.
[291] Ibid., 193.

passion for and use of satire is included: "I mean what I say; yet what I say means the opposite of what you understand it to mean. Therefore, I mean what I say *and* its opposite."[292] Kraus perfected the use of the typical tools of satire—irony and sarcasm to expose societal flaws, often with humor—and set a prominent example of the way a satirist may work most effectively with the collective awareness or knowledge to confront public discourse. His style is very close to that of Hašek, Čapek, and Hrabal in drawing inspiration from anecdotes that indirectly reveal the truth, while the narrative of the story itself is of lesser importance.

The essay on Karl Kraus that constitutes the concluding part in *The Disinherited Mind* is the most down-to-earth in the collection; it clearly defines the argument, with few tangential thoughts of Heller's own and with no violence to subordinate the subject to the theme of disinheritance. Yet it is also in this essay that Heller falls for the common presumption of the exclusivity of one's own language (and consequently, thought). Heller writes that Kraus's work is possible only in German—no other language could offer the means and flexibility that German does. Heller claims that Kraus's writing is untranslatable because of his (Kraus's) special treatment and use of language.[293]

Heller published his first short essayistic contributions in the early 1930s in *Die Weltbühne* (The world stage), when its editorial office was in Prague—"Der Marxismus auf dem Scheiterhaufen," in the issue of May 18, 1933—in addition to his separately printed article about Karl Kraus published in Vienna by Saturn-Verlag.[294] *Die Weltbühne* was an independent, radical, democratic left booklet, pink in color, with a small circulation. It appeared for the last time in 1939, edited from Paris, and was

[292] Ibid., 189.
[293] Ibid., 191.
[294] Erich Heller, *Flucht aus dem zwanzigsten Jahrhundert: Eine kulturkritische Skizze* (Vienna: Saturn-Verlag, 1938).

refounded after the war in 1946—ironically for Heller, as a communist platform in East Berlin.

The idea Heller had about German determinism that he translated into his literary criticism may have originated in his first Prague-Vienna conversations with Karl Kraus in the 1930s and Kraus's criticism of the German press, German culture, Austrian politics, and Sigmund Freud.[295] Even more poignantly, Heller's idea may have originated from Kraus's vision that modern language is hollowed out, divorced from traditional religious and ethical values. To both Kraus and Heller, this carelessness regarding language reflects a disintegrating society without culture. And likely, Heller was not even the first one to depict the long German intellectual journey to apocalypse as logical and predictable, but he wrapped it skillfully in literary, rhetorical language that spoke to a wider readership, and he did it at the right time.

Heller's own written word was elevated and ornate, raising the question whether such expressive language can indeed capture the essence of things and had not, too, been hollowed out:

> Naturalists and expressionists alike appeared as advocates of the demons of the depth, and as rebels against the anemic refinements of aestheticism. But with a few exceptions, theirs was merely a rebellion of resentment and bad manners. Inarticulateness became the apogee of "self-expression," intellectual asthma, uttering embryonic sentences, counted as a sure sign of intellectual passion, and crippled souls freed themselves of their inhibitions by noisily throwing about their crutches. In the case of Karl Kraus, in him and through him, the spontaneous strength of a tradition and culture comes to life once more, and, finding itself in an environment of betrayal and decay, gains a highly differentiated consciousness of itself, without for a moment suffering the embarrassment of self-consciousness.[296]

[295] Erich Heller, *Studien zur modernen Literatur* (Berlin: Suhrkampf, 1963).
[296] Heller, *Disinherited Mind*, 187.

A diametrically opposite style if compared to Kafka's belief in *schlichte Worte und schlichte Wahrheit*, "simple words, simple truth."[297] In the realm of the inexplicable, when everyone was searching for an answer, Heller had one: German special intellectual development was ordained to fail, and reason is to blame. Heller's *The Disinherited Mind* appealed to a much wider audience than his more academic *The Ironic German*, which was based on his doctoral thesis. Consequently, Heller did more for the rehabilitation of German literature with his *The Disinherited Mind* after WWII than with his analysis of Thomas Mann's writing. Mann was already a well-known and popular public figure and was already known as an open antifascist, who filled large lecture halls on his tour through American cities during his exile in the early 1940s. But Mann's work was complicated, the story line intertwined with political themes and autobiographical moments. And he spoke only broken English.

Compared to the works of Thomas Mann, Heller's *The Disinherited Mind* was a relatively slender publication comprising eight essays, each of them summarizing what the world should understand under "German thinking" that preceded Hitler's rise to power. And it did not matter much if its readers had not read all the literary works discussed by Heller. Heller offered both the synthesis and elucidation of meaning.

With admiration, Heller stated in his invited broadcast about Karl Kraus: "He examined the language his contemporaries spoke and wrote and found that they lived according to false ideas."[298] And in his 1947 article published in *Hamburger Akademischer Rundschau*[299] Heller commented that although the themes Kraus dealt

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[297] Max Brod, *Streitbares Leben: Autobiographie*, Kindler Taschenbucher 20/21 (unabridged; Munich: Kindler, 1960), 286.
[298] Heller's essay about Kraus in Heller, *Studien zur modernen Literatur*. Also in Radioansprachen, Heller Papers, Box 9, Folder 2. *„Er prüfte die Sprache, die seine Zeitgenossen sprachen, und schrieben, und fand, dass sie nach falschen Ideen lebten."*
[299] Erich Heller, "Karl Kraus: Satiriker, Dichter, Erzieher seiner Zeit," *Hamburger Akademische Rundschau* 2 (1947/48): 244–50.

with around 1899, when he founded his *Die Fackel*, were "small"—for instance, "the corruption of the language through media, the corruption of justice by the influential, of art by the profiteers"—Kraus's polemics "aimed at the principle of evil itself, which manifested itself in all the small things and which he knew from the start was going to cause major events, even preparing for the ultimate crime of annihilation."[300] Heller believed that Kraus "sensed the devil gripping the German world by the collar."[301] Using such strong Christian rhetoric (devil, evil) Heller gained the ear of his audience. But what is evil (*das Böse*)? What/who in the real world creates the *Prinzip des Bösen*, the "principle of evil"? Conversely, Heller had an answer:

> The devil is in the flattening and trivialization of bourgeois life, in the stale aestheticization and artificialization of art, in the mechanization and commercialization of all human creative power, both manual and intellectual, in the rigidification of language into phrases and clichés, in the hollowing out and degradation of the imagination by the press, in the hypocrisy of a religionless morality which, instead of elevating humanity to a higher, living order, lets it evaporate into semblance and empty convention, a great devil beneath the smooth and ever smoother surface of the orderly civil world, humiliation and baseness behind the rises of scientific industrial progress and national expansion.[302]

The only sphere of the organized society we live in that was spared the decadence includes those who did not and do not participate in building it—for example, the poets. Or, the illiterate poor. Heller's interest in Kraus came at the absolute beginning of Heller's career, and Heller never distanced himself from him. When in 1963 Suhrkamp

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[300] Ibid., 246. *Aber der starke Atem seiner Polemik gilt schon damals dem Prinzip des Bösen selbst, das sich in all dem Kleinen manifestiert und von dem er von Anfang an weiß, dass es sich zu größeren taten, ja, zur letzten Untat der Vernichtung anschickt.*

[301] Ibid. *Karl Kraus „spürte den Teufel, der die deutsche Welt am Kragen packt."*

[302] Ibid., 246–47. *Der Teufel steckt in der Verflachung und Verniedlichung des bürgerlichen Lebens, in der schalen Ästhetisierung und Verkünstelung der Kunst, in der Technisierung und Kommerzialisierung aller menschlichen Schöpferkraft, der handwerklichen sowohl wie der geistigen, in der Erstarrung der Sprache zur Phrase und zum Cliche, in der Aushohlung und Degradierung der Phantasie durch die Presse, in der Heuchelei einer religionslosen Moral, die das Menschentum, anstatt es zu einer höheren, lebendigen Ordnung zu steigern, sich in Schein und leere Konvention verflüchtigen lässt, ein großer Teufel unter der glatten und immer glatteren Oberfläche der geordneten Bürgerwelt; Erniedrigung und Niedertracht hinter den Aufschwüngen des wissenschaftlich industriellen Fortschritts und der nationalen Expansion*.

republished his article on Kraus (from *Studien zur modernen deutschen Literatur*, an updated and edited version of Heller's initial writing on Kraus), Heller made substantial changes to the opening of the essay. He exchanged the bibliographical information that opened the essay in his *The Disinherited Mind* and substituted it with a quotation from Confucius. This quote is indeed very telling and provides a captivating start of the essay:

> Confucius was once asked what he would do if he had a country to manage. "I would improve the use of language," replied the Master. His listeners were amazed. "That has nothing to do with our question," they said, "what's the point of improving the use of language?" The Master replied: "If the language is not correct, what is said is not what is meant; if what is said is not what is meant, the works do not come into being; the works do not come to fruition; morality and art do not thrive in this way; morality and art do not thrive, justice does not act, and the nation does not know where hands and feet are going. So don't tolerate arbitrariness in your words. That's what it all comes down to."[303]

Karl Kraus analyzed the language used, for instance, at a diplomatic conference and deduced from it how much the speakers had to twist it from the plain description of the actual political situation. He rewrote his observation in such a way that this phenomenon became more obvious even to his readers:

> Scene 8 from *The Last Days of Mankind*, written in 1915:
> Excerpt from scene 8: officers in the suburbs, carrying a ladder, strip of paper and paste.
>
> *Officer 1:* But what do we have here? Look at that! Café Westminster! That's surely English, isn't it?
> *Officer 2:* Yes, but we better check with them first. It's a coffeehouse. The owner might be some celebrity and we'd be in trouble. Let's get him out here. Wait a minute. (He goes in and returns at once with the proprietor, who is visibly alarmed)—you see the point, don't you?—a patriotic sacrifice.

[303] Heller, *Studien zur modernen Literatur*, 55. *Man fragte Konfutse einmal, womit er beginnen würde, wenn er ein Land zu verwalten hätte. „Ich würde den Sprachgebrauch verbessern", antwortete der Meister. Seine Zuhörer waren erstaunt. „Das hat doch nichts mit unserer Frage zu tun", sagten sie, „was soll die Verbesserung des Sprachgebrauchs". Der Meister antwortete: „Wenn die Sprache nicht stimmt, so ist das, was gesagt wird, nicht das, was gemeint ist; ist das, was gesagt wird, nicht das, was gemeint ist, so kommen die Werke nicht zustande; kommen die Werke nicht zustande; so gedeihen Moral und Kunst nicht; gedeihen Moral und Kunst nicht, so trifft die Justiz nicht, so weiß die Nation nicht, wohin Hand und Fuß setzen. Also dulde man keine Willkürlichkeit in den Worten. Das ist es, worauf alles ankommt".*

Proprietor: What an imbroglio, but if you gentlemen are from the Voluntary Committee—

Officer 3: Look, why did you call your coffeehouse that in the first place? That was shortsighted.

Proprietor: But Gentleman, how could I have known? I feel bad about it myself now. Look, the reason I called it that is because we are right beside the Westminster Station, and that's where the English milords arrive during the season—so they should feel at home straightaway—

Officer 1: but look, none of them can come now anyway.

Proprietor: Thank God for that!—Gott strafe England!—But look, people have got used to the name, and after the war, when, God willing, the English customers come back—look, give me a break!

Officer 2: Sorry, mister, the voice of the people can't make allowances for things like that, and the voice of the people, as you will know only too well—

Proprietor: Of course, we entrepreneurs are aware—aren't we more or less a people's Café?—but—what am I going to call it then?

Officer 3: Don't worry about that, we won't hurt you—it'll only take a second—and quite painless. (he scratches out the "i"). There, now you get a painter to put in the "ü"

Proprietor: A ü? Café Westmünster?

Officer 2: It's German now! Kosher! Not a soul will notice any change, but everyone will be aware, so it's something quite different.[304]

This natural dialog, written in colloquial language, is based on Kraus's use of newspaper articles from Viennese mainstream papers and language used on officially distributed flyers—and on witnessing them himself on the streets of Vienna. The many seemingly surreal dialogues are a true reportage from the Austrian political world, with no visible formal innovation of form.

The work of Jaroslav Hašek springs to mind as a comparison. Hašek wrote his bestseller in a similar style, though he used language not as carefully copied from other sources but instead drawn from his own experience and imagination, and he ended his

[304] Karl Kraus, *The Last Days of Mankind: The Complete Text*, translated by Fred Bridgham and Edward Timms (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 69–71; Marjorie Perloff, "Avant-Garde in a Different Key: Karl Kraus's *The Last Days of Mankind*" *Critical Inquiry* 40, no. 2 (2014): 311–38. https://doi.org/10.1086/674117 (accessed May 25, 2023).

novel *The Adventures of the Good Soldier Schweik* famously with a belief in the future, sure of a new beginning even after the collapse. When Schweik is parting with his companion from WWI, they make plans for sharing another beer together:

> *"When the war is over, let's see each other,"* said Švejk. *"You will find me every day after six o'clock in the 'U Kalicha'"* (Prague pub).
>
> *"Then, see you after the war, at six o'clock in the evening,"* Vodička said.
>
> *"Better come at six-thirty to be safe if I'm late,"* Švejk replied.[305]

Unlike Hašek, Kraus was the true skeptic, not only foreseeing the end of monarchy but also prophesying the end of the ethical world as the peoples of the monarchy knew it. Heller was fascinated by both Kraus's use of the language and his apocalyptic vision that his generation was going to see the end of an era, if not the end of humankind. In this world, phrases are marketed in the same way as events. Kraus set out to change it and rescue language from the grip of the media (or from capitalism).

Walter Benjamin took an interest in Kraus when searching for a way to place language within Jewish identity. Benjamin also studied Kraus for his use of language as a convert to Christianity with traces of "self-hate, for his Jewishness." Benjamin tried to define Judaism by language, especially by using quotations. In doing research for his essay on Kraus, Benjamin discovered that Kraus wrote an article in which not a single sentence was written originally by Kraus himself. Benjamin also laid out an argument that language and justice are mutually connected, and journalism is the expression of the changed function of language in the world of high capitalism.[306] Unknowingly, he might

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[305] Jaroslav Hašek, *The Good Soldier Švejk and his Fortunes in the World War*, translated by Cecil Parrot, with original illustrations by Josef Lada (Carlstadt, NJ: ZBK Books, 1973), 395.
[306] Benjamin E. Sax, "Walter Benjamin's Karl Kraus: Negation, Quotation, and Jewish Identity," *Shofar* 32, no. 3 (2014): 1–29, esp. 4–5. https://doi.org/10.1353/sho.2014.0022.

also have identified what drew Heller so strongly to Kraus's use of language: Heller himself was a non-practicing Jew with a love for quotations.

Benjamin and Kraus were connected through their fears of the misuse of technology, especially its connection to the "Phrase," which takes hold of life and destroys the essence of origin. In a time of unprecedented journalistic boom and the spread of printed media, Kraus described the media as a factory, a machine that needs to feed the world with words at given times a day, and in larger cities several times during the day, and so it contributes to the circulation of empty phrases and the depreciation of language. In his essay about Karl Kraus, Benjamin selected a quote from Kraus's writing: "It should be explained that technology, while it cannot form a new phrase, leaves the minds of humanity in a state that is unable to do without the old one. In this duality of a changed life and a life form that has been dragged along, the evil of the world lives and grows."[307] Benjamin comments critically: "In these words, Kraus ties the known in which the Phrase and technology are connected."[308] Nonetheless, Benjamin also uncovers in Karl Kraus the backward-looking radical, for whom, not what should become, but what was, becomes a utopia.[309] Benjamin sees the depreciated language and imperfect media as tools of their master, expressions of the character of power. And therefore, asking for perfect tools that are mere reflections of a degraded power with a degraded purpose is leading Kraus off course.

There is no evidence that Heller read Benjamin, or at least that he read his work intensively enough to become interested in it. Heller's admiration of Kraus never

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[307] Walter Benjamin, *Über Literatur* (Berlin: Suhrkampf, 1970), 106. *Es sollte Aufschluss über die Technik geben, dass sie zwar keine neue Phrase bilden kann, aber den Geist der Menschheit in dem Zustand belässt, die alte nicht entbehren zu können. In diesem Zweierlei eines veränderten Lebens und einer mitgeschleppten Lebensform lebt und wächst das Weltübel.*
[308] Ibid. *Mit einem Ruck schürzt Kraus in diesen Worten den Knoten, zu dem Technik und Phrase sich verbunden haben*.
[309] Ibid., 114–15.

became more critical or shifted toward a more Marxist view to which such ostentatious criticism of capitalism could naturally lead. Heller never saw the depreciation of language, the use of media in capitalist societies, from the Marxist point of view. He remained faithful to his concept that symptomatic of a godless society is the absence of humility and disregard for the truth.

Another Bohemian émigré from Hitler's Europe—one from Prague—scholar of communication Vilém Flusser showed no distress over such a phenomenon. Flusser's interest in the symbiosis between technology and human expression and creativity, the masses and art, discovered a new reality, a new realm of realities that he claimed would eventually transform all channels of human communication and even their imaginative capacity. In contrast, Heller cherished the Platonic ideal of the oneness of word and thing, in which every word denotes a universal concept, a known concept. The words partake in the nature of the one reality known at the time.

Significantly, Heller felt most at home in the ever-secularized West and never looked for inspiration to the East, where he could yet have encountered his ideal: the mentality of believers still capable of absolute surrender to God, of renouncing individual recognition and personal knowledge. Heller's papers in the McCormick archive, his personal notes and published pieces, do not suggest that he would have been a reader of Solzhenitsyn, Pasternak, Sinyavsky-Terz, or similarly oriented authors. He did read Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky. Heller's own writing was firmly bound in the formal traditions of Athens and Rome that did not survive in Russia, but he could not help but reproach the West for the lack of essence. In the East, on the other hand, he would have found an abundance of it, formless, or in a form of simplicity—*der schlichten Wahrheit*.

3.7. The Left

Where Heller stopped, having aligned art with the ideal of the period, Marx continued. Marx explained the importance of art in connection with not only the ideal of the period but also and mainly with the mode of living and the way man's creativity is released. Ernst Fischer, Heller's compatriot from Komotau, defined in his own terms Marx's thought about the connection between culture, quality of life, and freedom—the idea of the "Whole Man." If we read Marx through Fischer's lens, then we will find similarities not only to Heller's theoretical contemplation but even to the "four freedoms" outlined by President Roosevelt, for they both emphasized the creative role of all persons in their pursuit of freedom. According to Fischer's reading of Marx, the "realization of the inner potential of human beings," which for Marx was the same as the development of human freedom, "required the liberation of humanity from the pursuit of narrow economic ends and the opening up of wider realms of creativity."[310]

Each individual would become "whole" when allowed to pursue happiness through the realization of the creative powers within. Roosevelt's four freedoms, formulated in January 1941 not only for cultural elites but also for society at large, became the theoretical foundation of life for many Americans—and also the incentive to support the war against Hitler's Germany and his allies. When the United States entered the war in December 1941, Americans enlisted not only to defeat the dictators but also to preserve global democracy and the fundamental freedoms laid out by President Roosevelt. The "Freedom from Want" should assure that no citizen must fear the consequences of poverty and that all have the right to an adequate standard of living and the pursuit of individual happiness. In this way Heller's, Marx's, and Roosevelt's view of art/culture/creative powers is inseparably connected to living conditions and reality.

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[310] Fischer, Marek, and Foster, *How to Read Karl Marx*, 37.

And for each of them—Heller, Marx, and Roosevelt—art possesses no value/meaning of its own; it possesses value/meaning only in connection with its own time, reality, and society. Culture, itself not measurable, is simply the mirror on the wall that has the capacity to point to the truth and recognize political instability.

When Heller mediated to his audience the idea that the European tragedy (WWII and the Holocaust) was linked to the stagnating cultural production of the preceding decades (the cultural vacuum), the decades following the Enlightenment in Europe, it sounded logical. And even Holthusen's remarks in his speech at the Library of Congress in 1960 about the state of German affairs post-WWII might have sounded logical (if he had identified the year of the German catastrophe differently).

Heller's fellow Germanist and literary critic Joseph Peter Stern—a fellow Bohemian from a well-to-do Catholic Jewish family from Prague who entered English exile with Erich Heller on the same boat from Poland and became a friend—explained the rise of Hitler slightly differently in his book *Hitler: The Führer and the People*,[311] a book that brought him the widest attention. In it he argued that part of Hitler's ability to seduce the German people derived from the fact that his propaganda appealed to ingrained cultural notions of spiritual and existential strenuousness, of sacrifice, and of the supreme value of "everything that is hard won precisely because it is hard won." In the obituary for Stern published in *The Independent* on November 23, 1991, Martin Swales rephrased Stern's argument that "this cast of mind which he described as the doctrine of the 'dear purchase,' was productive as both political evil and a literary and artistic culture of great significance."[312] Stern showed how German literature and philosophy after 1918 became an "instrument drawing value from defeat like poison

[311] J. P. Stern, *Hitler: The Führer and the People* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975).
[312] Paul Heller Papers, Box 2, Folder 19, clippings from newspapers, Peter Stern obituaries, *The Independent*, November 23, 1991.

from a corpse."[313] He did not see Hitler as a phenomenon on his own, and he argued that Hitler spoke to his Germans in the way they understood. He analyzed Hitler's speeches and demonstrated Hitler's use of average contemporary rhetoric.

Stern spoke Czech, German and English, but in writing he expressed himself best in English, and as a Germanist, he wrote almost exclusively about German writers. The writers who interested him most were all isolated, introverted figures: Rilke, Kafka, Spengler, Musil, Benn, Jünger, Wittgenstein and especially Nietzsche, about whom he published three books. In the last book, completed shortly before his death, *The Dear Purchase*[314] Stern identified an ideal of strenuousness and sacrifice as characteristic of Germany after Nietzsche, and embraced in metaphorical form the entire complex of moral and epistemological perspectives as defining modernity. For him, the conscious abandonment of The Absolute, the 'dear purchase', re-emerges in the meta-history of Spengler, and the novels of Thomas Mann. The value of the 'dear purchase' is not absurd, but uncertain. Stern demonstrated how humanity and decency could be sacrificed in the pursuit of the uncertain and nebulous 'reality.'

Stern's father fought in WWI in the Czechoslovak legion and raised his children speaking Czech. He emigrated first, hoping his family would follow. But Stern's mother could not face the exile and died by suicide before departing. Her daughter, Joseph Peter's stepsister, was sent to a concentration camp, and she, unlike her husband, survived. Determined to understand the fate of his family and his own, Stern took up the journey with German literature and philosophy and became a Germanist. His intellectual roots were in post-war Cambridge. He believed that "'close reading' was the essential tool of criticism, for the difference between brutality and compassion lies in a turn of a

[313] Paul Heller Papers, Box 2, Folder 19, clippings from newspapers, *The Times*, November 21, 1991.
[314] J. P. Stern, *The Dear Purchase: A Theme in German Modernism*. (Cambridge [England], 1995).

phrase."[315] Stern, who was born in Prague and spoke no German until he was eleven, established himself in exile in Cambridge as a well-respected Germanist. There he collaborated with Michael Oakeshott on the *Cambridge Journal*, the very journal in which Heller published his first writing in England.

The conservative influence of Heller (whom Stern considered a mentor) on Stern's intellectual development was balanced by Stern's admiration of the American literary critic Lionel Trilling, especially his *The Liberal Imagination*. Since 1951, Stern and Trilling had been close friends. Trilling was a member of the anti-Stalinist Left and maintained a deep interest in Sigmund Freud and psychoanalysis; he did not belong to any school of thought. At Trilling's heart was educating the enlightened middle classes.

Heller, on the other hand, was in the 1950s still clinging to Spengler's theory, with a shift toward determinism in literature. Perhaps Heller was not asking any questions because he had already found the answer when he started tracing the anti-humanist tendencies backwards, as his original thesis proposal stated, by comparing Germany to the West—which for Germany meant comparison mostly with France and England, following Thomas Mann's early belief in the incompatibility of the French republican model with Germany. Nevertheless, what is the road not taken? Have we wasted time reading Kant and following reason? If it was the Enlightenment that had taken Germany down the anti-humanistic road, what road would have been cleared without the dismissal of dogma?

In the article "Aesthetic Analysis and *The Disinherited Mind*," published in 1970, author Peter Heller[316] (born in Vienna and not related to Erich Heller) reviewed a collection of essays about German literature (the *urür Bernhard Blume*), summarized the

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[315] Stern, *The Dear Purchase.* Forword by Nicholas Boyle.
[316] Peter Heller, "Aesthetic Analysis and *The Disinherited Mind," In: The Festschrift für Bernhard Blume*, *German Life and Letters* 23, no. 2 (1970): 169-177.

state of the profession (German Studies) in the late 1960s, and reflected on the resurgence of criticism calling for and judging sociopolitical engagement:

> We—the collective mind of the profession—are concerned with, believe in, and seek to demonstrate the integration, the aesthetic unity . . . of the texts which we examine. However, we are equally concerned with, and believe in, and seek to demonstrate the progressive disintegration, loss of unity, emancipation from dogmatic certainties or assumptions, or the lack of unifying faith implicit in the evolution of modern German literature.[317]

Then he continued to explain why formalism and political relevance are not enough for German literary critics:

> We follow the lead of Spitzer, the example of Staiger, the precepts of Warren and Wellek. However, as literary historians, we also subscribe to Nietzsche's diagnosis of a progressive nihilism in order to trace the devaluation of sustaining values. Following in the wake of Erich Heller—perhaps the first to grasp and to articulate this perspective in all its significance for an analysis and critique of modern German literature—we retell and confirm again and again the story of the "disinherited mind."[318]

Peter Heller made the point that most literary critics of German literature follow one or the other path, and he lists only a few exceptions who tried to beat their own path but remained insignificant. He named only one such critic as an example, the East German Marxist Hans Meyer, but stated that his work was of limited impact.

J. P. Stern quoted Walter Benjamin's formulation of the task of a literary historian in search of an answer to a similar but more general situation: ". . . their purpose "[of a literary historian or critic]" is not to present works of literature in the context of their time, but to present our age—the age that recognizes them—'die Zeit, die sie erkennt'—within the context of the age in which they came into being." Stern is vastly critical of this position, because for him it presents a "radical denial of the

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[317] Ibid.
[318] Ibid.

possibility of other minds, for the otherness in minds of time is not necessarily different from the otherness of minds in space."[319]

Stern feels "imprisoned" by ideology in such a statement, but I would like to use Stern's critical argument with respect to Erich Heller's correspondence and Paul Heller's diary entries side by side (chapter 4), as suggested by Caroline Heller. They bear evidence, if singular, that, due to the situational circumstances of these two brothers, who lived in the same decade and came from the same household, their views of the world could not have been further apart. In his safe, academic and literary calling in exile, Erich Heller felt closer to the world of the subject of his studies, namely, writers removed from him by a century or more, than to the life of his own brother in the concentration camps, a life Erich Heller could not even have imagined. On the other hand, through historical sources we can very well imagine a life from the past century. Through studies of history, literature, and language, an approximation and comprehension of such are not impossible.

Stern, however, offers his own contention: "The idea of alienation is inadequately understood. . . . All knowledge, Hegel saw, involves an alienation from the habitual self and a journey into the unknown."[320] Determination by time, status, language, or geography is not unescapable or unsurpassable.

Erich Heller's own transcendence into a new culture and language happened exceptionally smoothly. Writing about Germany, he found just as many or more followers of his academic work among English-speaking audiences and readership as he did among his home countrymen. He achieved this success through education, studying thoroughly the English language as well as German literature, partly in English. Through

[319] Stern, *Enlarging and Enlivening Study*, 19.
[320] Ibid.

exile he also gained the necessary distance that allows seeing what one cannot identify from within.

3.8. Vilém Flusser

A few attempted to remove completely the frames of the familiar and "imprisonment" by one's own reality. One such attempt was examples by Vilém Flusser, who experienced the removal of all cultural grounds in a way that differed from that of Paul Heller in the concentration camp—but their starting point was the same: the disappearance of the sheltering reality that provided each of them with confidence, prospects of a future, and stability. Flusser's situation allowed for more creative freedom and provided space in exile for optimism. A different attempt can be seen in Franz Kafka, who experienced or, better, achieved close to absolute intellectual and religious isolation through his pursuit of the essence even without a physical flight. Both Kafka and Flusser found followers, and both men shared some of Heller's ideas.

Born in 1920 into a Czech Jewish family in Prague, Vilém Flusser attended Czech and German elementary schools, in which he alternated grades, as was customary in some bilingual households, instead of undergoing a parallel bilingual education. He completed his higher education in German but enrolled in the Charles University using instruction in Czech to study law in 1938. A year later he escaped via London to Brazil, where he eventually resumed writing, teaching, and publishing. Flusser's entire family was murdered during the Holocaust. In his Brazilian exile, he joined the intellectual community and became a professor of philosophy of science at the Escola Politechnica of the University of São Paulo and a professor of philosophy of communication at the Escola Dramática and the Escola Superior de Cinema. In 1981, after the military regime

took over, Flusser left Brazil and moved to France, where he lived and remained intellectually active. He died in Czechoslovakia during an academic visit in 1991.

Reflecting on his youth in Prague, Flusser realized how deeply rooted he lived in the haven of the familiar. Unlike Heller, Flusser remembered with no contempt, rather, with ceaseless astonishment at his own "ignorance":

> One believed oneself to be open to the world, but in hindsight the Pragean limitation becomes obvious. The entire French and Anglo-Saxon worlds passed by merely as shadows, and the real information was limited to German and Russian cultures. Prague narrowness was concealed by its profoundness. This is the symptom of being rooted: to think that one is the epicenter of the world. Clearly: one knew that this epicenter was in danger. That Prague was an anachronism. However, existentially, one was not aware of this. Prague was one's reality and how could this reality disappear? Prague was eternal: if it disappeared, everything would disappear. . . . Then the Germans came, which was unbelievable, but anticipated. One had imagined that their presence would represent, in itself, the end of reality. Now one could comprehend that this belief was the result of a lack of imaginative capacity.[321]

For Flusser, human rootedness, the sense of belonging, and security (or establishment) formed limits to knowledge, even denial of reality, and he dedicated his further studies to the possibility of closing the gap between his own home and the world. He maintained that the established order of the lived, experienced world prevents us from seeing and believing historical changes that will inevitably happen. Although Heller was more focused on the nineteenth century and the traditions of the bourgeois life, his view was parallel to Flusser's, though more confined to literature. In *The Ironic German* Heller argued that living within a tradition means to "enjoy the privilege of innocence, narrow the domain of the questionable and grant the mind a firm foundation of answers."[322] Emancipation from such life in tradition must be costly. Flusser's depiction of blindness in the familiarity of the stone walls of Prague's cathedrals reveals another dimension of

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[321] Vilém Flusser, *Groundless*, translated by Rodrigo Maltez Novaes (Metaflux, 2017), 37. For an unabridged original in German, see Vilém Flusser, *Bodenlos: Eine philosophische Autobiographie* (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1999).
[322] Erich Heller, *Thomas Mann, the Ironic German*: *A Study* (Mamaroneck, NY: P. P. Appel, 1973), 14.

Heller's argument: In German literature, knowledge as an enemy of life is a very particular and earthly paradigm, vastly distinct from the Faustian one.

Flusser reworked his experience of rootlessness and groundlessness into an exploration of freedom: without the constraints of belonging, a person is free of conscious and unconscious societal habits and relations. What most humans naturally seek, namely, attaining a good life, such a life, if attained, presents intellectual, cognitive, and physical constraints. Heller experienced such intellectual limitations later in his American career when he became well established and failed to see historical changes around him.

Flusser went even further. He envisioned communities on a global scale, no longer defined by "the other" and challenging our current understanding of political sovereignty and identity. A visionary foreseeing the power of social media, Flusser learned his lessons in Prague, and he stretched his imagination to redesign the concept of freedom. Flusser became interested in images as opposed to texts, for he identified image as a tool that possesses a better capacity of reflecting reality, free of ideology, because in an image the historical context is not present.

A couple of decades before image-based social media became reality, Flusser declared that text is dead. In his work, he described new dimensions of knowledge based on an image or even artificial reality rather than a simple text. In his *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* he used the Marxists' rationalization to illustrate his own thesis, in which he posited that the photographic universe has programmed us to think in "post-historic" fashion. Flusser elucidates his thinking:

> In the eighteenth century, human beings invented machines, and their own bodies served as a model for this invention—until the relationship was reversed and the machines started to serve as models of human beings, of the world and of society. In the eighteenth century, a philosophy of the machine would simultaneously have been a criticism

> of the whole of Anthropology, science, politics, and Art, i.e. of mechanization. It is no different in the case of photography.[323]

Flusser goes on to explain that the basic structures of our existence will be transformed by photography. The way visual reproduction of our world will develop and take over our perception of the real world will become a question of freedom in a new context, one that goes beyond the problem of alienation. Flusser foresaw a world where every person will be able to produce and share instantly perfect images of their environment, that is, create virtual reality, and our understanding of human freedom will be changed. That moment is when Flusser saw the need for a philosophy of photography.[324] He published this vision of future social networking, the possibility of instantly sharing images of the world, in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The first version of *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*[325] was published in German in 1983 (in the same year, also in Portuguese and English). It was the basis for his vision of a global society, which is emerging today, if limited to the wealthier part of the world.

Flusser's preferred format was also essay, and he wrote prolifically in Portuguese, German, and French but lectured also in English and Czech. Over his career, Flusser moved from a linguistic theory of reality to communication and media theory and continued to the phenomenological theory of gestures. He shifted between disciplines such as migration studies, digital humanities, transcultural studies, and so forth.

The fact that Flusser attempted to remove historicism to crystalize new meanings by the recombination of available information and to get closer to absolute reality is also targeted by his critics. Flusser argued that by using a text as opposed to images and aligning the texts historically, historical consciousness appeared. In Flusser's view,

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[323] Vilém Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography* (London: Reaktion, 2000), 79.
[324] Ibid., 77–82.
[325] Vilém Flusser, *Für eine Philosophie der Fotografie* (Göttingen: European Photography, 1983).

historical consciousness plays many roles in forming knowledge, but it removes us from the actual reality that is consequential. In his *Does Writing Have a Future*,[326] written in the 1980s, Flusser also envisioned a society communicating via images rather than texts, one free of chronology and linearity, which would lead to a "post-historic consciousness." For Flusser, with instant image generation and sharing possibilities, mode of being begins (to paraphrase Heidegger's *Dasein*). He called such true images "techno-images," free of the imperfection of images produced by human agents, which he calls "only symbolic."

Such perfect techno-images are stripped of illusion and mainly—Flusser's prime concern—their ties to ideology, which would always be part of human, imperfect, manual reproduction. For the traditional, manual visual reproduction requires some imaginative or interpretative capacity on the part of the recipient of the communication via image. Techno-images do not. They exist in their own virtual reality, and the meaning is assigned by studying the perspective of the image and placing it in the whole. Flusser articulated it as "offering ideological gestures." Illusions and ideologies are for Flusser based on the same concept.

The "historical consciousness" is, according to Flusser, inherent to text: it is the awareness of readers and writers, and the dialectic is reflected in cultural life. So Flusser explains the dramatic changes of the nineteenth century (the same changes in the spiritual realm that Heller assigned to the Enlightenment) to a more grounded and graspable development of print and the accessibility of education. Still, conceptually they are very close:

> The lower, less or uneducated class lived in a scenic world (magical, mystical, ritual), and the upper class in a processual world (dramatic, discursive, progressive). The invention of letterpress printing and the introduction of compulsory education have overcome this dialectic: at

[326] Vilém Flusser and Mark Poster, *Does Writing Have a Future?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011). http://site.ebrary.com/id/10455042.

> least western humanity as a whole has "advanced to historical consciousness."[327]

Flusser also commented that a humankind using techno-images must develop a new skill so as not to be disoriented in the new world. It must develop a "'post-historical consciousness' if it wants to resist losing consciousness, as such, in the face of the constant stream of ideological techno-images to which it is exposed."[328] Flusser declared in this sense not only the end of text but also the end of history.

Flusser's theories-turned-reality today (at least to an extent) are in a parallel manner also detectable in the later decades of the post-WWII literary criticism that turned its back to the importance of historicism. Younger critics (such as Louis Althusser, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jürgen Habermas, Jacques Lacan, and Jean-François Lyotard) introduced new, post-modern concepts and diminished the role of Heller's criticism, which declared historical imagination and awareness one of the key elements in understanding Germany's literature and political downfall.

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[327] Vilém Flusser, "Towards a Theory of Techno-Imagination," *Philosophy of Photography* 2, no. 2 (2012): 195–201. Written in 1980, "Für eine Theorie der Techno-Imagination" was first published in *Standpunkte: Texte zur Fotografie*, Edition Flusser VIII, edited by Andreas Müller-Pohle (Göttingen: European Photography, 1998).
[328] Ibid., 200.

CHAPTER 4

BROTHERHOOD

4.1. Paul Heller

Paul Heller—a professor of medicine and hematologist affiliated with the University of Illinois College (UIC) of Medicine and Presbyterian-St. Luke's Hospital in Chicago with a record of seventy-two authored or coauthored medical articles—initially took up his interest in hematology when his mother was found to have chronic lymphocytic leukemia and Paul had to arrange for her care. His father, a general practitioner in Komotau, suffered severe depression and died when Paul was 16. Having to care for his mother led Paul to contacts with hematologically oriented scientists Paul Kaznelson and Otto Naegeli and later, after graduating from the Medical Faculty of the German University of Prague, to biochemical research on hemoglobin and red blood cells. After surviving a long, unpredicted, forced time as a prisoner in German concentration camps, he continued his medical career in the United States post-1946. He first served in Montefiore Hospital and then at Beth Israel in New York, and after a four-year-long group practice in Washington, DC, he worked in Chicago and at the Veterans Administration (VA) Hospital in Omaha, Nebraska. In 1954 he finally moved to the VA West Side Hospital in Chicago, where he remained until his retirement. He was appointed professor of medicine at the University of Illinois College of Medicine in 1963 and there became head of the Hematology and Oncology Department of Medicine from 1975 to 1978.[329] Paul Heller's research dealt mainly with abnormal hemoglobins.

[329] Paul Heller Papers, Box 3, Folder 1 (CV) and Folder 2.

In October 1996, a symposium was held at UIC College of Medicine to honor Paul Heller. Both of his children gave a tribute to their father that day. Caroline Heller recalled an evening that she spent alone with her father at a very young age: "I remember planting myself in a chair across from Bau [Paul Heller] in the living room absolutely intent on having an important conversation with him about—anything—but silenced when coming face to face with a quality he and I shared . . . —shyness."[330] Caroline's brother, Thomas Heller, remembered: "The war loomed as the defining event of our lives ever since I can remember. . . . It was darkness I could not penetrate that separated me from my peers."[331] Caroline also recollected what the childhood experience was like for her: "When we were children, as Tom told you, we knew almost nothing about the landscape of horror and loss and dislocation that shaped our parents' lives. My father's quest and his awe-inspiring success to reclaim his humanity, his mind, and the fullness of his possibility as a human being after the Holocaust is surely the greatest tribute to and the truest explanation of his life as a scientist. It was the same urgent quest on the part of both of our parents to find hope and belonging in the suburbs of Chicago after hope and belonging were stolen from them that is also probably the truest explanation of our early life as a family."[332] Paul Heller survived his brother, Erich Heller, by eleven years and passed away in September 2001 in Evanston, Illinois.

In the eulogy[333] written and spoken in November 1990 for Erich, his older brother, Paul recollected Erich's formative years and the childhood of both brothers in Komotau. He remembered that the town hardly changed after the creation of Czechoslovakia. The city of about thirty thousand people was predominantly German

[330] Paul Heller Papers, Box 3, Folder 15.
[331] Ibid., newspaper clipping from UIC Medicine.
[332] Ibid., Caroline Heller's eulogy for her father.
[333] Paul Heller Papers, Box 2, Folder 15.

speaking and prosperous, with a small theater and even a symphony orchestra. Paul Heller read:

> Erich participated intensely in the activities of various political youth organizations and enjoyed being listened to and had the reputation of being irresistible in all conversations and discussions. . . . He became strongly conscious of his literary talent and frequently gave vent to his feeling of being stifled by the small-town atmosphere. Relief came in 1930 when he moved to Prague. His dislike of his hometown, despite the intellectual enjoyment of some of its funny features, was so strong that in subsequent years he only occasionally visited there and rarely for longer than a day or two.[334]

Paul further recalled that Prague was an enormous success and that there Erich's essayistic skills began to mature, especially after Hitler took power in Germany in 1933 and "Prague became the haven of the German anti-Nazi intelligentsia, a boon for Erich's further development."[335] Paul Heller also expressed his perplexity about why Erich did not leave Czechoslovakia earlier. Paul concluded with a hint of persisting bitterness:

> "When the Nazis overran Czechoslovakia in 1939, he [Erich] luckily escaped to England and I went to Buchenwald and Auschwitz. . . . After Erich followed one of the many calls to this country (the United States), the narrowing of the distance created by all these circumstances remained a difficult task, but whenever it was accomplished, may it just be said, we both were touched in many ways by these much too infrequent occasions."[336]

Paul Heller's unpublished autobiography, which he wrote as an already accomplished physician, clinical professor at UIC, and hematology researcher with two grown children, reveals that he still felt downgraded by the shine of Erich Heller, who according to Paul did not care for his presence in the house:

> "As I remember the years after 1918, we quarreled often, he teased me, made fun of me, found fault with my appearance and rarely played with me during those early childhood years. Very often the nanny had to intervene in our fights in order to protect me. I don't remember that my

[334] Ibid.
[335] Ibid.
[336] Ibid.

> mother ever took a side on my behalf and I always was left with the feeling that she was siding with my brother."[337]

What is more, when their parents fell sick, Paul remembers, Erich would not help, even though by then he worked for an established lawyer in Prague. Reminiscing further, Paul continues describing their postwar reunion after he had been liberated from the Buchenwald concentration camp, having survived six years in various concentration camps including Auschwitz. He arrived in England after another long journey, being smuggled from Germany to France, and remembered the tears of joy and awkward moments of the reunion with his older, now established brother at the pier upon getting out of the boat. He then spent a few months with his brother in the apartment of Paul and Hjördis Roubiczek, and the old feelings of order returned: "For Erich, I was soon again the little brother who had to be educated about his new environment and needed supervision. Often, he chided me for my restlessness, which he somehow took as a sign of lack of gratitude.[338] When Paul departed England, Erich accompanied him to the port in Liverpool and "the farewell was not as tearful as the welcome on arrival in England."[339]

In the introductory remarks to the published fragments from Paul Heller's concentration-camp diary depicting the death march from Auschwitz back to Buchenwald, Paul wrote:

> The following notes were never intended for publication. Why am I willing to spend a few hours in translation now, more than 30 years later? The first motif is the realization that the memory of this experience could not be extinguished, no matter how great my satisfaction with the normalcy of my private, professional and social life and with the apparently successful creation of a new existence as physician and adaptation to a "better world." . . . Persistently and with increasing

[337] Heller Papers, Box 2, Folder 20, "Autobiography," 6.
[338] Paul Heller Papers, Box 2, Folder 20, "Autobiography," 39.
[339] Paul Heller Papers, Box 2, Folder 20, "Autobiography," 41.

> intensity it was overflowed into nightmarish dreams in which I relived camp experiences. Thus, I yielded to the urge of talking about it all as a purgative of the unconsciousness.[340]

The second reason Paul gave consisted in his awareness of the "dwindling interest of the new generation of the significance of the events in Nazi Germany,"[341] and the third reason, he admitted, was the fact that he was never able to communicate anything but the experience of liberation to his children. The written word was his attempt to expand that communication.

Paul Heller was arrested after the occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Nazis in March 1939 for being a member of the social democratic student organization of the German University in Prague. He was released and ordered to emigrate on September 2. But September 1, 1939, marked the beginning of WWII, and that night he was arrested, together with thousands of other people. After four years of hard labor and starvation in Buchenwald, the Gestapo of Prague ordered his transfer to Auschwitz for reasons that never became known. Paul wrote that "my life was later saved by Himmler's order, in 1944, that all prisoners, 'even Jews,' should be used for work for which they were best qualified. This edict removed me for a few months from the mines in Eastern Silesia into the infirmary of a small branch camp of Auschwitz."[342] He described the evacuation of the camp in January 1945 as the "crowning torture in the lives of the prisoners."[343] Paul's notes document the sixteen-day-long westward march from the concentration camp Jaworzno in Eastern Silesia to another camp, Groß-Rosen, near Breslau (Wroclaw). The prisoners were then transported by freight train to Buchenwald, where other prisoners from eastern and western camps arrived due to the evacuation of their

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[340] Paul Heller Papers, Box 1, Folder 7, "Holocaust testimonies" (April 1980), 29.
[341] Ibid.
[342] Ibid.
[343] Ibid., 30.

camps in the face of the advancing allies. Paul closed his introduction as follows: "When the SS fled on April 11th, 1945, many of the 21,000 survivors were incapable of rising from their mattresses to celebrate the occasion."[344]

Paul Heller decided to translate and edit his notes from his concentration-camp diary in the late 1970s, and he wrote his autobiography in 1994. He stated that the autobiography was meant for only his family members and that it was his children, Tom and Caroline, who urged him to write one. It is now accessible in the McCormick archives at Northwestern University (and subtitled "Autobiographic Sketches: The first forty years").[345] According to Paul's memories recorded in the autobiography, he originally did not seek to emigrate, because even when the German University in Prague announced its impending closure, students in their final stages were permitted to take their final exams prior to graduation. Paul received his medical degree on December 17, 1938, with the great relief and renewed hopes for his medical career. His emigration plans were restricted to countries that would allow foreign graduate students to practice medicine.[346] According to Paul's memory, Erich left Czechoslovakia in May 1939 (a slight discrepancy with what Erich remembered about his departure), but Paul waited and hoped for a temporary visa to England. On March 15, when Hitler occupied the truncated Czechoslovak state, Paul was in Prague on the streets and "admired the Czech sense of the humor of the gallows."[347]

The German University in Prague was subordinated to the Berlin Ministry of Education on September 1, 1939, and declared a Reich University just several weeks later, on October 4.[348] The Reichsprotektor von Neurath ordered the closure of all Czech

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[344] Ibid.
[345] Paul Heller Papers, Box 2, Folder 20.
[346] Paul Heller Papers, Box 2, Folder 20, "Autobiography," 22.
[347] Ibid., 23.
[348] Alena Míšková, *Německá (Karlova) Univerzita od Mnichova k 9. květnu 1945: (Vedení univerzity a obměna profesorského sboru)* (Prague: Karolinum, 2002); Ota Konrád, *Geisteswissenschaften im*

universities, in part as a reaction to students' anti-Nazi protests, which resulted in the mass deportation of Czech students to concentration camps and to several deaths; but the plan was already in existence before the protests. The Czech universities remained closed until Nazi Germany was defeated, and the German medical faculty took over most of the institutes and clinics of the Czech medical faculty. The thoroughly Aryanized faculty called in several new teachers, mainly teachers from the Reich, and in 1940 established an institute for hereditary and racial hygiene. At the beginning of the war, the number of its students increased, because the institute also provided preclinical teaching for the military medical academy. However, toward the end of the war the number of medics decreased rapidly, as total war required more and more conscripts. Legally, the German Medical Faculty was abolished by presidential decree on October 18, 1945, with retroactive effect to November 17, 1939.[349]

When Paul Heller himself fell into the Gestapo's hands at 3:00 a.m. on August 31, 1939 (already having a reservation for a flight to England in early September), he was taken to Pankrác Prison, where he learned that Germany had invaded Poland that morning. Eight days later he was collected from his cell for transport to Dachau. At the railroad yard, together with about two thousand other prisoners, were also the former mayor of Prague Petr Zenkl, the novelist Joseph Capek, Ferdinand Peroutka, and some of Paul's former professors.[350] It was the beginning of a six-year-long ordeal. Although his determination to wait for his medical degree in part prevented him from leaving the

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Umbruch: Die Fächer Geschichte, Germanistik und Slawistik an der Deutschen Universität in Prag 1918–1945 (New York: P. Lang, 2020). http://public.eblib.com/choice/PublicFullRecord.aspx?p=6208977.

[349] Ludmila Hlaváčková, "Německá lékařská fakulta v Praze (1883–1945): Problémy studia jejích dějin," *Vesmír* 73, 684, 1994/12; Michal Šimůnek, "'Youth Ahead' and the Faculty of Medicine at Charles University in Prague, 1938–39," *Acta Universitatis Carolinae, Historia Universitatis Carolinae Pragensis, Univerzita Karlova* 42, no. 1–2 (2002): 105–22; Michal Šimůnek and Antonín Kostlán, eds., *Biografický slovník obětí nacistické perzekuce z řad vědecké obce v českých zemích 1939–1945* (Prague: Nakladatelství Karolinum, Univerzita Karlova, 2019).

[350] Hlaváčková, "Německá lékařská fakulta," 24.

country earlier, it did possibly save him from the hardest labor and death from exhaustion in the later years he spent in the concentration camps.

During the memorial services for the life of Paul Heller, who died in September 2001 at the age of 87, his daughter, Caroline, read her tribute to her father in the Third Unitarian Church of Chicago and quoted from the letter Paul wrote to his family after he recovered from a bout with the flu:

> "In my heart, I am a small towner from Komotau who enjoyed walking around the 'Bummel' [promenade] and gossiping with Bobby Komisch about the newest stories of the vice and virtues of our co-citizens. It is a fact that I feel very much part of the lonely crowd in Chicago, whose main attachment to Chicago, too often, is going to and from work. I still feel sometimes like a visitor."[351]

Paul's attachment to his hometown is spelled out repeatedly in his autobiography. He described his father as "highly assimilated." In the correspondence that both brothers received, and that their families preserved in the Northwestern University Archives archives, no letters or postcards sending good wishes for Jewish holidays are upheld, but numerous cards for Christmas and Easter are. In Paul's case this phenomenon is natural, because his family became members of a Christian church, but in Erich's case it might be a bit surprising. Paul defended the small Habsburg and later Czechoslovak town against the disdain Erich voiced and displayed. Unlike Erich, Paul originally saw his career in Czechoslovakia, planned to open a private practice there, and aimed to become more proficient in the Czech language. According to Caroline Heller, even his library in Chicago included some works by Czech writers, most prominently Milan Kundera, who in his work not only probed similar themes as Erich but also, given his published personal views, might have very well become Erich's friend—if their paths had crossed. Similar themes included an interest in the disappearance of culture and its effects on

[351] Paul Heller Papers, Box 2, Folder 22.

society as reflected in literature, the dualism of body and soul, interest in Nietzsche, and misogynic views. But Kundera's experience of exile was closer to that of Thomas Mann; Kundera became a representative of a nation, accepted the citizenship of the host country, and became consumed with the role of literature in political life, its possibilities, and its limits.

It was Erich Heller, however, who a few times returned privately to Czechoslovakia and even revisited the familiar countryside and other places. In March 1947 he sent a postcard from Lysá Hora to the Hellers living still in New York City back then "from a few days skiing holiday" in Moravian-Silesian Beskids, a place apparently known to his brother—"Everything is still here—the firn, the deer, the sunshine"[352]—and another one in summer 1968 from Prague—"it is still very beautiful here and crowded with ghosts. On almost every step you all with me . . . . It feels good to remember."[353]

Almost the entire, rather voluminous correspondence between the Heller brothers was written in English, certainly at least since Paul had moved to the United States. According to the interview Erich gave to NU's student newspaper in 1980, he visited Prague under the communist regime also in 1974 and "found the situation 'lamentable.'" He said that it was "dull as any other iron curtain country."[354] It might very well have appeared so to someone accustomed to the rapidly rebuilt West, where most summer and professional trips led him. Erich's summer itinerary rotated between the same places, where he visited his friends, and he usually added a new destination, thus making him a world traveler, according to twenty-first century standards, already in the 1970s and 1980s; he typically stayed with literary critic, editor, and close friend Joachim Beug in

[352] Paul Heller Papers, Box 2, Folder 17.
[353] Ibid.
[354] Heller Papers, Additions, Box 16, Folder 16, *The Daily Northwestern*, April 17, 1980.

Ireland, J. P. Stern in Cambridge, and Florian Adler in Switzerland. In summer 1986 he travelled also to Heidelberg, Munich, and Bolzano, as he had done during the previous summers (e.g., 1984): he stayed with Beug and Stern in Ireland and England, respectively, and then went on to Heidelberg, Munich, Bolzano, and a couple of places in the Dolomites.[355] Erich also travelled to Scandinavia, Israel, Greece, Austria, and throughout Western Europe. His love for the pleasures and aesthetics of the old continent—and the sense of guilt, presumably, that was telling him to honor his brother's invitations and pleas to join them in America—tormented him continuously. After long hesitating to follow Paul, Erich accepted the position at Northwestern, a perfect location for being closer to his family and a more-than-decent match for Erich Heller's fame. Yet already in his letter to Paul in July 1959, he disclosed his wish to not overstay his time there:

> Shall I tell Northwestern now that I may not stay longer than two terms? Or shall I tell them only when I get there? At present, it all feels rather unreal; no, not you, but Northwestern. What has changed since I accepted? Simply my idea about my future: it should be devoted to writing rather than teaching, to peace and contemplation, rather than the hurly-burly of the States, to continuity rather than the strains of new adjustments.[356]

But come to and stay at Northwestern he eventually did, though his heart likely remained in the rocking chair at the Gower coast near Swansea watching the sunset, undisturbed. There he could be with friends he had known since his studies in Cambridge and several even from Czechoslovakia.

In her memoir, Caroline Heller—Paul's daughter and Erich's niece—remembers her own distance from her uncle. The "family memoire"[357] is partly autobiographical, written from her own perspective growing up in Omaha and Chicago, as a child in an

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[355] Paul Heller Papers, Box 1, Folder 20.
[356] Paul Heller Papers, Box1, Folder 17.
[357] Caroline E. Heller, *Reading Claudius: A Memoir in Two Parts* (New York: Dial, 2015).

immigrant family and the daughter of a Holocaust survivor, and partly fictional, yet always inspired by the life journey of her father and her own life. When Uncle Erich visited, she writes, the house changed, and a certain atmosphere of tension and nervousness filled the house. Her mother would start tending to chores more intensely and cooking traditional Czech food; she drove to bakeries in the insular Cicero neighborhood,[358] traditionally Czech since the mid-nineteenth century, to buy Czech pastries, and everyone wore the best clothes.[359] With Uncle Erich, the "old" Prague walked into the house, and it was as though "all of Europe were talking."[360]

For Caroline, child and then teenager, Erich's presence was overpowering and intimidating, especially due to her uncle's height and the "cascade of names and quotations that poured from him."[361] Occasionally, she recalls, "he came with Hannah Arendt, who spoke in a very different voice than her mother." But what Caroline seems to remember most vividly is the impression that she was unable to earn her uncle's approval, and it seemed to her that her uncle was looking at her (or rather over her) differently from the way he looked at her older brother, Tom, and he teased her about her appearance.[362]

This impression is well supported by a sympathy letter sent to Paul Heller after Erich's death by a family friend and a writer for *The Boston Globe*, Tony Tommasini:

> I remember many times when you and Alice (Paul's wife) and Erich and I would get talking about books, or in particular, music, when Erich could be utterly charming, brilliant and all that, even though he had some crackpot ideas about music . . . that music had died in about 1890, that the fact that there were no women composers of renown in music's past

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[358] Jojo Galvan Mora, "From Czech Fortress to Latinx Youth Rock Scene, Klas Was More Than Just a Restaurant," *Cicero Independiente*, September 26, 2022. https://www.ciceroindependiente.com/english/cicero-news-klas-restuarant-czech-mex-punk-rock-scene-youth-historical-building-demolition (accessed April 2024).
[359] Heller, *Reading Claudius*, 217.
[360] Ibid., 218.
[361] Ibid.
[362] Ibid., 220.

> proves that they are temperamentally unsuited to the manly task of composition.[363]

Erich shared what would today be called a misogynistic temperament with one of his best friends in Chicago, Joseph Epstein, an American writer, and for more than two decades (1975–97) the editor of *The American Scholar*, who also taught in the English department at Northwestern University from 1975–2002. Epstein published several homophobic and misogynistic statements, especially in his 1970 article in *Harper's Magazine* attacking homosexuality and another one in 2020 in *The Wall Street Journal* attacking Jill Biden, dismissing her career and education. He sat at Erich Heller's deathbed, visiting him often, and in his obituary for Heller in *The New Criterion* inserted an unnecessary, telling adjective when referring to Hannah Arendt's reaction to American politics as a woman: "Even a woman supposedly as politically sophisticated as Hannah Arendt was . . . ."[364] By now, Northwestern has removed Epstein's name from its websites and condemned his opinions.[365]

Caroline Heller's memory also recalls the moments when conversation in the kitchen during her uncle's visits turned to the war, and she heard terrible arguments: "Where were you during the war?"[366] This direct quote might or might not be part of the actual biographical moments, but it reflects the overall atmosphere of distance that she felt her uncle Erich stirred up at their house on Sundays. Maybe to pay him back, Caroline pokes fun at Uncle Erich's heavy accent in English, which overdid the round vowels and voiced too much the digraph in the word "the." She recalls the moment

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[363] Paul Heller Papers, Box 2, Folder 17.
[364] *The New Criterion* 41, no. 9 (February 1991).
[365] Northwestern University, "University Statement on Joseph Epstein," December 12, 2020. https://news.northwestern.edu/stories/2020/12/joseph-epstein-statement/?fj=1 (accessed April 2024).
[366] Heller, *Reading Claudius*, 220.

Erich talked to her parents about her: "Zis girl is costing you so much money!" in reference to her sessions with a psychologist.[367]

And even more painfully, Caroline Heller arranges in the memoir her father's diary entries from his imprisonment in Buchenwald and Auschwitz (from September 1, 1939, to April 11, 1945) in rotation with Erich Heller's passionate letters from the same war months and years to his lover, a student from a wealthy family in Cambridge, Graham Storey:[368]

> *Cambridge, August 13, 1940—My dear Graham, Cambridge is lovely and quiet. And I am excessively in love with my writing desk. . . . Yet there are lots of interviews, appointments, and other annoyances. The results are some vague but rather "promising" promises for next term. So let's hope and see . . . Erich*
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> *November 9, 1939—A bomb explodes at Nazi headquarters in Munich. Five-day fast for Jewish prisoners is ordered. We're assigned to workgroups. I report to stone carriers. I'm ordered to run with stones in wheelbarrows. I wear wooden shoes and paper socks. Worse than the cold is the mud. Prisoners around me collapse. They're carried to the infirmary and I never see them again. I work 7am to 6pm without purpose. Prisoners commit suicide by running into the electric fence.*
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> *Cambridge, September 26, 1940—My dear Graham, there is a fine light in the fireplace, and the autumn's flowers on the table look pensive, deep, knowing, and resigned. One of these still and miraculous hours when the brain is on leave from its diplomatic duties and excessively receptive to the insinuations of the heart . . . music comes . . . What a great light from within. I had given up all hope that there could be again a summer and autumn like this.*
>
> *Late November—The central square of the camp is converted to a tent camp. Thousands of Jewish prisoners from Poland arrive. Most of them die of starvation and freezing temperatures. Tents are removed. Mass murder.*
>
> *Cambridge, November 1941—I am unspeakably happy tonight. What an evening it was! . . . Goethe and Claudius and Schubert. The music room in St. John's, a very beautiful, intimate architecture, some hundred people in it . . . and you feel in your fingertips that they obey you, they cannot help following you, you could do with them what you like, and you feel like doing exactly what you are doing: to kidnap their souls for an hour or so and to lead them astray from the path they are forced and willing to go*

[367] Ibid., 223.
[368] Ibid., 156–69.

> *everyday, and to lead them somewhere where the unaltered heart of humanity beats as if it were its first hour of life, its first and its last and its everlasting hour.*
>
> *October 1940—SS are jubilant with German victories. The Kapo selects me for a beating for not breaking stones fast enough. I can hardly move.*
>
> *Cambridge, 1941—my dear Graham, alone with the world, with the sun, the moon, the stars, the cosmic night.*[369]

What Paul saw as his brother's superficiality, narcissism, and egoism, Herbert Marcuse put differently when he visited Northwestern: "Heller, how can you be so intelligent and so cheerful?"[370] For Erich Heller, nonetheless, cheerfulness and distance had been the winning cards in life and the keys to success. He was familiar with the personal need for distance from the existential problems of many in order to enjoy life, and together those tools formed the one he identified in Mann's writing and then devoted his own work to: literary irony. Regarding his friend H. E. Holthusen, just so as well: Heller admired most his will to live. For Erich there was no point in scowling at the world and trying to repair it. His credo sounded simple: life.

For his younger brother, Paul, accepting life with enthusiasm was more difficult. With the assistance of the renowned BBC journalist Edward Murrow,[371] a legendary moderator and media scholar who went to Buchenwald to give his first-hand report in the very first days after the camp had been liberated, Paul was able to reunite with Erich in England and with Murrow's help was also able eventually to move to the United States. Murrow was the first American to enter the concentration camp of Buchenwald to report to the world. In 1984 Paul wrote a letter to Mr. Friendly, director of Columbia

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[369] Ibid., 157–60.
[370] Paul Heller Papers, Box 2, Folder 18, sympathy correspondence (Irwin Weil's tribute speech on December 5, 1990).
[371] The Edward R. Murrow Memorial Library at Tufts University (the Edward R. Murrow Center for the Digital World) includes personal correspondence, papers, scripts, tapes, films, and memorabilia documenting a crucial era of broadcasting and public information. Heller's correspondence with Murrow is part of it.

University's Graduate School in Journalism, to defend Murrow's creative way of reporting:

> Let me tell you of another episode of the Buchenwald-Murrow story, which reflects on his sensitivity and character: A few days after his report on Buchenwald he returned to the camp bringing numerous letters which were sent to Columbia in London and New York by friends and relatives of the people whom he mentioned in his broadcast. In my case, they were letters from my brother in Cambridge, England and from many friends in the US (among them a former girlfriend who is now my wife), who learned from Murrow's report that I was still alive.[372]

In this letter, written so many years after his liberation, Paul was referring to the report that was written by Murrow and broadcast to the world on April 15, 1945. Murrow reported:

> If you are at lunch, or if you have no appetite to hear what Germans have done, now is a good time to switch off the radio, for I propose to tell you about Buchenwald. It is on a small hill about four miles outside Weimar, and it was one of the largest concentration camps in Germany, and it was built to last. . . . We drove on, reached the main gate. . . . There surged around me an evil-smelling horde. Men and boys reached out to me, they were in rags. Death had already marked many of them, but they were smiling with their eyes. . . . I asked to see one of the barracks. It happened to be occupied by Czechoslovakians. When I entered, men crowded around, tried to lift me on their shoulders. They were too weak. Many of them could not get out of bed. . . . The stink was beyond all description. When I reached the center of the barrack, a man came up and said, "You remember me. I'm Peter Zenkl, one-time mayor of Prague." I remembered him, but did not recognize him. He asked about Beneš and Jan Masaryk. I asked how many men had died in that building during the last month. They called the doctor. We inspected the records. There were only names in the little black book, nothing more—nothing of who these men were, what they had done, or hoped. I counted them. They totaled 242. Two hundred and forty-two out of twelve hundred in one month. As I walked down to the end of the barracks, there was applause from the men too weak to get out of bed. It sounded like the hand clapping of babies. The doctor's name was Paul Heller. He had been there since 1938.[373]

[372] Paul Heller Papers (1934–2014), Box 2, Folder 3.
[373] Ibid., Box 2, Folder 3, correspondence regarding Ed Murrow.

On April 24, 1988, in the speech Paul gave at the Northfield synagogue (Northfield, Illinois) remembering Nazi Germany, he still recalled when[374] "Dr. Murrow visited Buchenwald a few days after the liberation and several ex-prisoners, including myself, guided him through the camp. A French journalist who had been in Buchenwald for several years, asked Murrow: 'you will write something about this, perhaps?' and added 'To write about this you must have been here at least two years, and after that—you don't want to write anymore.'" Paul agreed with the French prisoner's truthful simplicity and commented on the delayed occurrence of literary accounts of the trauma, mentioning Primo Levi, who was in Auschwitz for "only" about a year and "fortunate to have been assigned light work." Levi's first book on Auschwitz appeared in 1958 and his last in 1987. Paul was certain that Levi's suicide was a direct consequence of the trauma he carried for more than forty years. Yet he went on to draw a cruel conclusion: "The cycle of experience, silence and expression is understandable; however, it should not tempt us to understand and forgive silence. . . . Silence means forgetting and forgetting is reprehensible and sinful refusal to learn from history."[375] Although Paul refers here likely to public awareness and consciousness, the implication is that without the personal accounts of the witnesses and victims, no public awareness would be possible, and therefore his urging included a certain imperative toward survivors to account for and document their trauma.

Paul Heller himself followed what his consciousness dictated by the very speech he was giving and by writing his autobiography. When Ed Murrow started working for the Columbia Broadcasting System in New York City, Paul expressed his gratitude for the fact that he could be comforted by Murrow's weekly appearance on the television and the ability to hear Murrow's voice on a regular basis. In a letter from December 12,

[374] Paul Heller Papers, Box 2, Folder 1.
[375] Ibid.

1954, already from Chicago, he also noted to Murrow that temporal distance from the concentration camps does not heal the memories from them: "The more distant the liberation is removed in time the more intensely I find myself pondering about its significance for my little soul—and more pretentiously—for the world."[376]

Paul grew more and more worried that history would be forgotten again and that the lesson of Hitler's Germany and the deaths paid by millions would vanish. In his 1988 speech at the Northfield synagogue he went on to appeal to his audience by expressing his dissatisfaction with and despair over public education:

> Among my technically excellently trained and knowledgeable medical students, born in the fifties and sixties, it has not been unusual to find some who don't know who Hitler was and what were the origins and consequences of WWII. To these people history is nothing but a television program for entertainment. Unfortunately, this trend toward an education to ignorance and forgetfulness, especially in the teaching of history, is not effectively counteracted by the highest authorities in our government.[377]

Paul Heller is believed to be the first liberated prisoner to become an American citizen—he took his oath of citizenship and was naturalized on December 7, 1948, in Washington, DC, at age 34. Significantly, it took place on the anniversary of the day on which Japanese bombers launched an aerial attack on the US Navy base in Pearl Harbor, causing the United States' entry into WWII. Ed Murrow continued supporting Paul Heller and his family in the following years, when illness did not allow Paul Heller to work full time. In 1955, Murrow also provided the transcript of his BBC broadcast from 1945,[378] The explicit mention of Paul's liberation helped Heller submit his claim to the German state and apply for compensation. To be eligible, he needed to prove officially that his health suffered from his years in the camps and thus his earning capacity was

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[376] Ibid.
[377] Ibid., Folder 14.
[378] Available in Paul Heller Papers, Box 2, Folder 3.

adversely affected. His brother, Erich, also informed Paul in private correspondence that he himself had been granted compensation.

Even earlier, in the response to the call of the First Unitarian Church in Omaha (of which the Heller family were members before they moved to Chicago) to answer the question "What does freedom mean to me?" Paul Heller sent his reply in early 1953. In it, he concluded that, based on his life experience: "Culture is the most valuable and most cherished gift of freedom," and "the removal of freedom from the world means the end of culture for centuries to come." [379]

Paul illustrated his conviction by the example seen in the consequences that the German annihilation camps and the Soviet labor camps brought on their nations—how the two countries robbed themselves of the cultural achievements they had been building for centuries. Through his own experience as a victim, he illustrates the loss of orientation, the inability to recognize truth from lie and lie from truth once the cultural ground had been removed. "If my own imprisonment in Buchenwald had lasted a little longer than the six years it did last, I probably could have believed that the Führer was God's son and I could have admitted the most elaborate details of, let's say, a plan to assassinate the Führer if the Gestapo had expressed an interest in my saying so."[380]

In Paul Heller's view, civilization cannot continue when the mind has been alienated from the roots from which it developed and grew. And he offers words full of praise and admiration for the country that became his new home: "The historic tradition of this great country which I should have chosen to be my country many years earlier, remains the hope of survival of "the" Western civilization. The root of this tradition was freedom and the fight for more and more freedom is its perpetual conscience."[381]

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[379] Paul Heller Papers, Box 2, Folder 13.
[380] Ibid.
[381] Ibid.

Paul's children, however, remember slightly differently the difference between the American civic society values one picks up in school and the church, including the pursuit of individual freedom, and those of their family. Their parents treasured art and literature per se as part of the German/Central European tradition, their heritage, and that set of values set the children apart in their everyday lives:

> We were different from our neighbors in suburban Chicago. That difference made me feel both insecure and proud. We were European. We had Art in our house. There were pictures of Prague and Frankfurt on our walls. My parents listened to classical music. My father taught doctors to be doctors and did research to make the world a better place; he wasn't out to make big bucks. I felt we held to some higher standard; our family was noble in my eyes; we held to ideals. In a very materialist community, we were thinkers. In a Republican town we were Democrats. What I did not fully understand was that in a very gentile community, we were Jews.[382]

Even when Paul Heller's admiration was paid openly to the social values of his new home country, in his heart he could not part with the ideal of his cultural heritage as expressed in classical music, literature, and the fine arts, for these values represented for him the very idea of "home."

That home was both similar to and different from the home his brother, Erich, cultivated. For Erich Heller, the small town of Komotau was not worldly and intellectual enough, and he considered his new (third) country of residence and employment, the United States, also rather a desert intellectually compared to the old European continent. On this end he exchanged ideas with a number of friends and family, and he also received assentient postcards from Hannah Arendt, who, vacationing in the Lake Geneva region in the summer of 1973, commended to him her displeasure about having to return "*zwar nicht in die Hölle, aber doch in etwas Nicht-paradiesisches*.[383] ("not to hell directly, but still to something very unlike paradise,") indicating the same mood about the "cultural" circumstances in the United States. Arendt was also especially

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[382] Paul Heller Papers, Box 3, Folder 15, "Life with Father," October 18, 1996.
[383] Heller Papers, Box 4, Folder 9.

critical of the modern American educational system, a concern, if not disdain, she shared with Erich. In a letter to H. E. Holthusen, who invited her to participate in an academic debate apparently related to a topic of applying theater elements in education, she replied in March 1974:

> Thanks for inviting me but unfortunately I can't accept. I've simply not the time to prepare anything, and certainly not in German. I'm also quite doubtful about the whole "play" theories. . . . I'm old-fashioned enough to believe that there is [a] distinction between playing and learning. The American notion that you can play while you learn or learn while you play [has] had rather disastrous effects on education.[384]

At that time, most of the German intellectual elite that found refuge or settled in the United States after having fled Hitler, and was already coauthoring these circumstances. This note from Arendt mirrors the ideas Erich Heller presented in his disastrously unsuccessful lecture "Culture and Counter-Culture" in 1971 in Bayern, a lecture in which he condemned American education (see chapter 1).

In their understanding of culture, brothers Erich and Paul Heller came close to each other after all. Erich, too, had been pondering heavily the role of culture in his writing, and he offered a different, more theoretical model: The nature and quality of civilized life itself is directly tied to the relationship between art and life, the aesthetic and moral, culture and politics. The role of culture is the consistently recurring theme in *The Disinherited Mind*.

[384] Hans Egon Holthusen (1913–1997) Papers, 1939–1982, Box 1, Folder 4, (Arendt Hannah).

CHAPTER 5

THE MOST IMPORTANT CONNECTION: PAUL ROUBICZEK

5.1. Paul Roubiczek

This chapter explores the role of the cultural heritage Erich Heller and Paul Roubiczek shared or chose, as well as their intellectual and human relationship. It links their inherited values to the new values they adopted in exile. The persona of Paul Roubiczek, a German-speaking publisher and philosopher from Prague, emerged from my research about Heller as his primary and oldest living source of support and inspiration (at his time). This chapter follows that link and offers a more comparative understanding of their work. Departing from the foundational principles and methods of important nineteenth-century thinkers, Roubiczek and Heller took very different paths in their practical lives, but they remained connected via the principal questions they investigated and often came to similar conclusions.

Hundreds of booksellers and publishers who were no longer allowed to practice their profession in the tumultuous 1930s and during the war in Germany and the occupied regions were forced to flee. Among them were publishers connected with literature from Prague: the publisher and promoter of Kafka and Werfel, Kurt Wolff (who went to New York via Paris and London), Ernst Pollack (who fled to Italy), and Hugo Steiner-Prag (who escaped to Finland, Japan, and then New Haven, Connecticut, in the US).[385] The large group of intermediaries of culture, many of them Jewish, bears

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[385] Fischer, Ernst. *Verleger, Buchhändler und Antiquare aus Deutschland und Österreich in der Emigration nach 1933. Ein biographisches Handbuch.* Verband Deutscher Antiquare, 2011.

witness to the level of development of the book industry and book culture in the first third of the twentieth century in Germany, the Austrian monarchy, and Czechoslovakia. In many cases, somewhat naturally, the booksellers took on a special function as secret bases for the resistance. Yet, for many, resistance became only a dream in the face of systematic persecution of Jewish business owners even before the outbreak of the war. From the Jewish Boykott Day in April 1933, the book burnings, and the pogroms, including the Reichspogrommnacht in November 1938, and in the light of the political consequences in Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia, they needed to refocus on the difficult task of bare survival. Paul Roubiczek's flight was successful, but he had to navigate Hitler's seizure of power in Germany; the Munich Pact; the political and refugee crisis in Czechoslovakia; the establishment of a one-party conservative nationalistic state in Austria (the Bundesstaat Österreich); armed conflicts within the Austrian state; the Anschluss (annexation) of Austria in March 1938 to Hitler's Germany; the occupation of Bohemia and Moravia; the outbreak of the war; and the Nazi-occupation of Europe.

Roubiczek was born in 1898 into the family of a Prague Jewish manufacturer. His father was the owner of a steam horsehair-spinning mill and felt factory, Roubiczek & Fischer.[386] Paul Roubiczek served in the Kaiserliche und Königliche Armee (Imperial army) during WWI and after 1918 studied at the German Technical University in Prague to gain the skills to take over the family's factory one day. He also completed an apprenticeship in his father's company, after which he matriculated to a program of studying philosophy in Berlin but did not finish it because he had to return to Prague to

[386] Ibid., 272. Roubiczek & Fischer, Dampf-Rosshaarspinnerei Prag-Holeschowitz's company, was based in Prague Holešovice, founded in 1893. The company processed felt for saddlery and upholstery purposes. In 1936, the chemical-pharmaceutical company SANOMEDIA acquired the building of the factory, and in 1940 the factory was adapted for the furniture company B. Pisch and co. After the war, the development of the Furniture Industry cooperative took over the manufacturing. See the pages of the district of Prague 7: http://www.lepsipraha7.cz/wiki/Hole%C5%A1ovice.

take care of his ailing father and help run the business in the years 1924 to 1926. He returned to Berlin 1927 in the hope of completing his doctorate in philosophy. In the meantime, he worked as an advertising manager of the *Universitas Verlag* and as a lecturer.

Roubiczek started writing, and his manuscript *Der missbrauchte Mensch* (*The Misinterpretation of Man*) was initially accepted for publication by Insel Verlag. Its acceptance was, however, annulled after the Machtergreifung in 1933 (seizure of power by Hitler in Germany). Soon after, for racial reasons, Roubiczek lost his position at the Universitas Verlag, married actress Hermine Apel, and emigrated to Paris, where, using funds from his father's business, he founded anti-Nazi publishing house *Der Europäische Merkur/Les Éditions du Mercure de L'Europe* together with Peter de Mendelssohn.[387]

In 1936, de Mendelssohn, son of a goldsmith who left Germany also in 1933, wrote a memorandum on the establishment of a German academy in New York (together with Richard A. Bermann). His memorandum and personal efforts of persuasion won Thomas Mann over to the idea of establishing the "German Academy of Arts and Sciences in Exile." De Mendelssohn received British citizenship and worked in the British civil service during WWII and after the war was press chief at the British Control Commission in Düsseldorf. He reported on the Nuremberg Trials and played a key role in establishing a democratic-press system in the British occupied zone. He was involved in founding newspapers such as *Der Tagesspiegel* and *Die Welt*. Further, he published numerous novels, stories and essays on historical and political topics in both English and German, worked as a translator from English and French, and published the complete works of Thomas Mann. He also published Mann's diaries and wrote Mann's

[387] Ibid., 273.

biography.[388] In 1978 de Mendelssohn received the Grand Cross of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany.[389]

After its founders had to declare bankruptcy for *Der Europäische Merkur/Les Éditions du Mercure de L'Europe* publishing house in Paris, in 1936 de Mendelssohn went directly to England, but Roubiczek attempted to continue his publishing efforts in Vienna. After the Anschluss (annexation) of Austria, however, he fled back to Prague with his wife. They managed to get visas and left for England via the Netherlands. Initially in England they stayed in Peter de Mendelssohn's apartment and Roubiczek worked for the War Agricultural Executive Committee as a farm worker until, with the assistance of the Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars, he secured a position as a supervisor of German.[390] Roubiczek eventually became an extramural lecturer in philosophy at the University of Cambridge, which in 1956 awarded him an honorary master of arts, a degree that allowed him a more permanent position in the years 1961 to 1965. Roubiczek's seminal work, *Thinking in Opposites*, as with all his other books, was the result of having reworked and refined the ideas that stemmed from his WWI military experience, captured already in his diary he completed in exile: *Across the Abyss.*

In the postwar years Erich Heller became a public intellectual and collected a considerable circle of admirers. Roubiczek, on the other hand, was a far more private person, dedicated to teaching and searching for values that would guide him through his

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[388] Peter de Mendelssohn, *Der Zauberer: Das Leben des deutschen Schriftstellers Thomas Mann* (Frankfurt: S. Fischer, 1975).

[389] Fischer, Ernst. *Verleger, Buchhändler und Antiquare aus Deutschland und Österreich in der Emigration nach 1933. Ein biographisches Handbuch.* Verband Deutscher Antiquare, 2011. 216–17.

[390] *The New York Library Archives and Manuscripts*, Emergency Committee in Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars records 1927–1949 (bulk 1933–1945), Series I, Grant files 1927–1949, I.B., Non-Grantees, Box 109, Folder 13; Paul Roubiczek (1898–1972) Papers (hereafter Roubiczek Papers), Special Collections of the Brotherton Library, University of Leeds, Box 4, Roubiczek's correspondence with the Emergency Committee.

own life. His open, public pursuit of this ethical quest attracted large numbers of people to his lectures, which, however, offered students no credit toward their regular coursework because Roubiczek, without a terminal degree, lectured extramurally. Nonetheless, this continued engagement with academic affairs through his teaching and discussions with audiences allowed him to develop his thought further. The resulting works are expansions of the original ideas captured in *Across the Abyss.* All his works, including his seminal *Thinking in Opposites*, present the pacifist's (Roubiczek's) response to the challenge of conscience. They show Roubiczek's struggle to grasp and philosophically ground the necessity of resistance in the face of Hitler. The failing of empirical and philosophical systems that he witnessed during WWI led Roubiczek to look inward for a definition of the self. Under the influence of Kant, Roubiczek was convinced that the inner mind and innate moral law superseded any system of dogma.

Both Roubiczek and Erich Heller became teachers, and, from their examples, teaching, just like writing, appears to have been an act of self-reestablishment. Their former self may have experienced a national or cultural allegiance that resurfaced as an object in need of reevaluation in exile. A few interesting, tangential points centered on the theme of loyalty or allegiance resulted from my research:

- The context of German-writing Bohemians' allegiance to the House of Habsburg during WWI and the role of bilingualism;
- The context of the Sudeten German and urban German-speaking population's loyalty to the young, multilingual state of Czechoslovakia;
- In more abstract terms, the role of rootedness in one's homeland, the loss of it in further intellectual development in exile, and new paths to reestablishment and/or confidence; and
- The context of Bohemian Jewish exile from Hitler's Europe.

5.2. World War I: Prologue in Hell

About 1.5 million[391] men from the Bohemian Crown Lands (Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia) were drafted to serve in the twenty-four K.u.K.[392] infantry regiments of the Habsburg army in WWI (out of the seven to eight million soldiers). Although the military units were typically built as linguistically and ethnically homogenous, sometimes speakers of different languages made up units together.[393] Paul Roubiczek was one of these men. He was drafted to serve in WWI as an officer in the Austro-Hungarian Army right after he passed his Matura (secondary-school exit exam) in 1916. He spoke German and, by chance of the war, ended up taking command of his regiment when the lieutenant in charge, not much older than Roubiczek himself, went mad. Barely an adult, in May 1917 eighteen-year-old Roubiczek led his company of 236 men into his first battle, one of the bloodiest fought during WWI—the Tenth Battle of the Isonzo. The casualties were tremendous, and when his regiment retreated, "of the 236 men thirty-six were left, including the cooks and the sick who had remained at the kitchens and not been forwarded at all."[394] Then, Roubiczek writes, the numbers were brought up to count again, sent back to the battle field, returned diminished to less than a quarter a few days later again, and waited to be replenished again.[395]

The conviction that he should have been killed, and that death was imminent, changed Roubiczek's mind forever. His new self was characterized by a strong urge to

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[391] Jiří Hutečka, *Men Under Fire: Motivation, Morale, and Masculinity Among Czech Soldiers in the Great War, 1914–1918* (New York: Berghahn, 2019), 1-28.
[392] Kaiser und König, Imperial and Royal. For more: L. W. Seidel, *Dislokation und Einteilung des k.u.k Heeres, der k.u.k. Kriegsmarine, der k.k. Landwehr und der k.u. Landwehr* [Location and organization of the Imperial and Royal Army, Imperial and Royal Navy, Imperial-Royal Landwehr and Royal Hungarian Honved], Seidel's kleines Armee-schema (Vienna: Seidel & Sohn, 1914).
[393] Ivan Šedivý, *Češi, české země a Velká válka, 1914–1918* (Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2014); Richard Lein, *Pflichterfüllung oder Hochverrat?: Die tschechischen Soldaten Österreich-Ungarns im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Vienna: Lit Verlag, 2011); Tamara Scheer, *Die Sprachenvielfalt in der Österreichisch-Ungarischen Armee (1867–1918)* (Vienna: Heeresgeschichtliches Museum, 2022).
[394] Paul Roubiczek, *Across the Abyss: Diary Entries for the Year 1939–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 238.
[395] Ibid.

resolve the incomprehensible and find a new pointer to his future life based on two question: why did he survive, and what was the meaning of his survival? Roubiczek embarked on the long, scholarly journey of a man who detested war and every form of violence, yet he was unable to be a pacifist in the war Hitler unleashed. From this contradiction his philosophical views developed. Furthermore, Roubiczek's philosophy rested in his sincere conviction that any guiding principles must be translatable to practical life.

Conversations with Paul Roubiczek and his wife, German actress Hjördis Roubiczek, were the first intellectual exchanges Erich Heller had in exile, and they presented the deepest inspirations for him. Although Heller did not adopt Roubiczek's thought in its entirety and also had different sources of his own, he was particularly influenced by Roubiczek's deep contemplations about the meaning of the loss of one's spiritual guidance in life, especially in times of violent conflict and war.

5.3. First Excurse on Loyalty: The Monarchy

The Czechs emerged from WWI with a new national statehood and independence, and this outcome contributed to the notorious image of disloyal Czechs. The first Czechoslovak Republic was born from the military defeat of Austria-Hungary, the strong lobbying of Tomáš Garigue Masaryk and other exiles on the international scene, especially in the United States, and the 90,000[396] men in the Czechoslovak Legion, comprised of former Austrian prisoners of war, expatriated Czechs, and Slovaks.

In his recent study of the atmosphere in military circles at and behind the war front of WWI, Jiří Hutečka traces the feelings of distrust as mutual and displayed on the

[396] Hutečka, *Men Under Fire*, 3.

part of the Austrian authorities as well as on the part of the minorities.[397] He argued that a mutual atmosphere of suspicion dominated the last years of the monarchy. Yet beyond this logical observation Hutečka identified the failure of the Austro-Hungarian Army to motivate its minorities and spark their enthusiasm about the cause of the war. The traditional approach of avoiding selecting higher officers from the minority groups, plus the traditional use of violence and corporal punishment to establish military discipline, all pointed to the increasingly present national awareness. Disillusionment with the long war, combat ineffectiveness, the more-often-than-not urban background of the minority Czechs in contrast to other minorities from Austria-Hungary, and thus very importantly also a weaker reliance on religion of the former (but stronger belief in socialism), all contributed to the disappearing morale of the Army, but its Czech part especially.[398]

Another Praguer, bilingual journalist Egon Erwin Kisch, writing in German, also fought in the war in its last year. The entries in his diary confirmed as well what today is widely understood, namely, that loss of excitement for war without an apparent cause is often merely a result of human reaction to stress. When Kisch was returning to Prague from the front, his imagination and a trace of sudden paranoia did not allow him to believe that he would ever reach his home city: "I got on the train and the journey was closer to home. . . . Suddenly it occurs to me: The train is going to derail! Of course, that's the joke of fate!"[399] But the train kept going, and when it stopped in the first suburbs of Prague, the passengers, including Kisch, heard the news:

> The gentleman [a random traveler on the platform] turns around and calls out to us: "Przemysl fell today!" There was great excitement among everyone on the trip. So Austria's best fortress is in Russian hands! "This is the end of the war."—"The Russians will be in Vienna in 14 days. Don't you think so?" I realize the question is directed at me. "It's

[397] Ibid.
[398] Ibid.
[399] Egon Erwin Kisch, *Schreib das auf Kisch! Das Kriegstagebuch* (Berlin: E. Reiss, 1930), 292–93. Original: *Ich stieg in den Zug, und die Fahrt ging näher zur Heimat. . . . Plötzlich fällt mir ein: Der Zug wird entgleisen! Natürlich, das ist der Witz des Schicksals*.

> terrible," I reply. It is terrible. But not for me, what bothers me Przemysl! Down there, under my train, a thousand lights flicker that I didn't think I could see anymore; you can see streets through which people walk, and through which I too will walk, without being hit by shells, without being shot at from behind in ambush. I'll eat from plates, . . . my mother will sit with me, I won't be a dirty corporal anymore.[400]

Kisch's diary confirms that decreasing loyalty, and especially enthusiasm for engagement in the trenches, was the most natural and human reaction to the long war, regardless of the ethnicities of its participants. It is mostly the Czech-speaking Bohemians, however, who stand accused of disloyalty to the emperor for the outcome of the war, which marked also the victory for the Czech national goals.

The German-speaking Bohemians, especially those from the borderlands, as opposed to the urban German-language speaking islands had, however, very similar incentives for not rushing to defend the House of Habsburg when the danger of the monarchy's dissolution became real. A generation-younger Erich Heller from Komotau in the northern Sudetenland, too young to have participated in WWI, made it clear through his writing that his own cultural heritage, and his understanding of self, came not from the monarchy but from the West, as embodied in the writings of Goethe and Nietzsche. He also left no evidence about a literary, political, or social engagement with his Czech-speaking Bohemian compatriots. For what it is worth, Heller's analysis of Thomas Mann's writing is far more scholarly adept than is his analysis of Franz Kafka, despite Heller's personally perceived intimacy with Kafka's work.

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[400] Kisch, *Schreib das auf Kisch!*, 293–94. *Der Herr dreht sich um und ruft uns zu: „Przemysl ist heute gefallen!" Große Aufregung bei allen Fahrtgenossen. Also Österreichs beste Festung ist in russischen Händen! „Das ist das Ende des Krieges."— „In 14 Tagen sind die Russen in Wien. Glauben Sie nicht?" Ich erkenne, dass die Frage an mich gerichtet ist. „Es ist schrecklich," erwidere ich. Es ist auch schrecklich. Aber nicht für mich, was stört mich Przemysl! Dort unten, unter meinem Eisenbahnzug flimmern Tausend Lichter, die ich nicht mehr zu sehen geglaubt hatte, man sieht Straßen, durch die Menschen gehen, und durch die auch ich gehen werde, ohne von Granaten getroffen, ohne aus dem Hinterhalt beschossen zu werden, ich werde von Tellern essen, . . . meine Mutter wird bei mir sitzen, kein schmutziger Korporal werde ich mehr sein*.

Roubiczek's main sources of inspiration were situated elsewhere. In his *Warrior of God* (1947) he declared the dates of the life and death of Jan Hus more important for modernity than the predatory expeditions of the Spanish conquistadores.[401] Roubiczek and his coauthor Kalmer proclaimed that the economic progress from the end of the fourteenth century inspired a demand for economic, political, and spiritual freedom—a desire to be free from feudal lords. As the feudal powers did not prove invincible against the mercenary armies that the middle class set up to protect themselves, the emancipatory movement took root. The growing demand for economic freedom found expression in the only possible realm of that time, the religious one, postulated by the complex Catholic foundations of medieval thought.

Roubiczek wrote that clerics such as John Wycliffe and Jan Hus were the protagonists of the fight for freedom of thought, a revolutionary striving. Roubiczek calls Hus's action "the force of conscience,"[402] because Hus demanded to be taught and convinced by arguments and thus brought new empiric principles to life that stood in stark opposition to medieval dogma: "Hus did not refuse to submit either to the Pope or to the Council of Constance, but he opposed to the authority of the church a new principle, that of the personal intellect and personal conviction of the Christian, supported by his conscience."[403]

For Roubiczek, the burning of Jan Hus at the stake in 1415 was the signal for a chain of emancipatory revolutions that are still ongoing. That the serfs followed Hus's teaching in the name of Christ, according to Roubiczek, marks modernity. Hus's emphasis on practical life appealed to Roubiczek immensely, for he sought a conscience that would lead man through a life such as his own, one faced with situations he does not

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[401] Paul Roubiczek and Joseph Kalmer, *Warrior of God: The Life and Death of John Hus* (London: Nicholson and Watson, 1947), 4.
[402] Ibid., 1-6.
[403] Ibid.

understand. Roubiczek admired Hus's perseverance, and especially the fact that the certainty of death did not divert Hus from his belief resonated with Roubiczek. He quotes Hus's letter to Gallus, Hus's successor at Prague's Bethlehem Chapel:

> We must not follow custom, but the example of Christ and his Truth. . . . Beloved, prepare yourself for suffering, drop all fear. . . . I believe that in Bohemia there will set in a great persecution of those who serve God truly if God does not intervene through the temporal lords who are more enlightened in His laws than the clergy.[404]

And then again from the letters Hus wrote to home from Constance, where he was held and interrogated by the council prior to his death, Roubiczek quotes:

> It is a strange truth that if someone suffers here below he will really prevail against badness and in particular against the wickedness of the clergy, which cannot otherwise be touched. . . . Now I already rejoice that they had to read my books in which their wickedness is laid bare: I know that they have read them more diligently than they have done the Holy Scriptures because they wanted to find false doctrines.[405]

Roubiczek argued against the conventional church's picture of Hus as a fanatical nationalist. He saw a message in his teaching that inspired his own course in life and that he still considered relevant for his age, namely, the value of preserving purity. In the conclusion of this book Roubiczek spelled out his belief that

> Freedom has not proved its worth. Almost more seductive to us appears obedience, however unworthy it may be, if it can safeguard order and internal peace. But the certainty of Hus . . . shows us the only way to overcome false obedience and give freedom its true fulfillment. We must not reject freedom. . . . For freedom must not be misunderstood as liberation from Christianity; today, as then, the world would sink into chaos if freedom were robbed of its mainstay of religion.[406]

The above is also the central idea of Heller's *The Disinherited Mind* (1952), which propelled him to his steep ascent of success in the following decade.

Beyond empiricism, Roubiczek identified Hus's linguistic awareness as the beginning of modernity. Himself from a linguistic frontier—Bohemia—Hus advocated

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[404] Ibid., 233.
[405] Ibid., 236.
[406] Ibid., 264.

supranational justice and order. Within it, linguistic groups have the right to establish churches and universities in their own language. Roubiczek attributed Hus with moral determination and religious sincerity, qualities that stood as towers of strength in the search for his own philosophical formulation of ethical values.

In his draft for an article about Roubiczek, Gregory Needham, a student in Roubiczek's lecture series in Cambridge, emphasized how the connection of philosophy to the practical life was of utmost importance for Roubiczek. Needham quotes Roubiczek's statement from one of his lectures: "Philosophical analysis is like sharpening your tools, but when you have sharpened them, you need something to use them on!"[407] He also highlights Roubiczek's individual approach to the formation of valid ethical principles and his endless seeking of "room for the variety of human experience."[408]

Roubiczek's second inspirational source appeared some three hundred years later, also on a linguistic frontier—Immanuel Kant. Roubiczek was fascinated by Kant's masterpiece *The Critiqie of Pure Reason* in which Kant declared that instead of asking our knowledge to conform to objects, we must start with the preposition that objects conform to our knowledge. All our knowledge begins with experience, even though it does not arise from it. The major concept we derive from experience is that of "change". Kant maintained that every change has a cause, and that law is universal. If a priori judgments (knowledge independent of all experience) are possible, then metaphysics is possible, too. The only possible understanding of metaphysics begins with comprehension of the nature and the limits of its power, the "critique of pure reason". That means understanding how the constitution of the sensory organs determine the

[407] Gregory Needham, "Paul Roubiczek: Some Aspects of His Thinking," *Theology* 76, no. 635 (1973): 256–63. https://doi.org/10.1177/0040571X7307600506.
[408] Roubiczek Papers, Box 2.

content of experience (transcendental aesthetic). Isolating the sensibility, one arrives at the foundation of a priori knowledge – space (metaphysical exposition) and time (transcendental exposition). These phenomena cannot exist by themselves but only in us, the nature of things in themselves is not known to us. Space is the form of outer sense and time is the form of inner sense. The self-conscious discoveries which one can make about one's experience are at the same time awareness of experience and belonging to a single consciousness. This concluding though to Kant's critical analysis of the possibility of metaphysics, combined with his thoughts on morality and arguments about God's existence influenced Roubiczek's own way to defining his belief in God and his own moral principles. He followed Kant's starting point that the only thing which is good without qualifications is a good will. Good willing is good, and character, talents, self-control, fortune can be used to halt or promote it. Finally, reason should be used to produce the good will, not happiness, which could also be corrupting.[409] In his *Thinking in Opposites* Roubiczek declared the external reality as value free. Only in the (internal) area of feeling can values be formed.

Roubiczek earned both positive and negative critique for his work. For example, his book about existentialism was fairly heavily criticized by M. P. Rickman[410] for what could be summed up as a lack of knowledge about existentialism in modern theology, or even contemporary French philosophy. The reason for this perhaps sometimes justified critique lies in Roubiczek's motivation—his incentive to study philosophy was part of his own search for values that could guide him through his own life. Established academics reviewing published books have, of course, little interest in each author's

[409] Kenny, Anthony. *The Oxford Illustrated History of Western Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001: "Descartes to Kant", 107-193.
[410] M. P. Rickman, review of "*Existentialism: For and Against*, by Paul Roubiczek," *Philosophy* 40, no. 154 (1965): 363–64.

psychology, and the harsh academic assessment of his work may also be the result of Roubiczek's lack of a terminal academic degree or any established position.

In a certain way, one could say that both Erich Heller and Paul Roubiczek lacked a rigorous academic foundation. Roubiczek was unable to finish his degree in philosophy, and Heller was a lawyer by primary academic training. The British system allowed Heller to enter doctoral studies directly, with no qualifying exams in broader literary studies or a deeper survey study of German literary development. Heller's particular interest alone formed the path he took as a scholar. This "thin" academic foundation in German literature in philosophy was easier to uncover in the case of Roubiczek than in that of Heller, who, as an already internationally accomplished writer, broke through with his first book without anyone's suspecting his lack of qualifications as an academician. Only a thorough examination reveals a certain fragility in his arguments—a fragility covered up by his brilliant stylistic acrobatics.

5.4. Second Excurse on Loyalty: Hašek's Schweik

When Karl Kraus promoted Jaroslav Hašek's satirical anti-war, anti-establishment, anti-religion novel *The Good Soldier Schweik*[411] and helped publish it in 1922 (without Kraus's support the publication might never have happened), it guaranteed that public opinion about the Czech ambivalent patriotism would reach well beyond the Lands of the Bohemian Crown. Hašek's satire, written originally in Czech, was swiftly translated into German and instantaneously became a bestseller in both languages. Already translated into more than fifty languages, it remains the most-often translated Czech book to date. Hašek himself participated in WWI in the 91st infantry of

[411] Jaroslav Hašek and Josef Lada, *Osudy dobrého vojáka Švejka za Světové války, Díl 1.* [The Fateful Adventures of the Good soldier Švejk During the World War, Vol.1], (Prague, A. Sauer and Hašek, 1920).

the Austro-Hungarian Army and created his anti-hero out of the absurdity of the situations he himself witnessed and cocreated.

Recorded in his diary, Roubiczek's devastating memory of the burden of having been put in charge of military action at the age of 18, just a few days into his service and with no experience, did not resemble a joke—he described it with no trace of irony nor with any comical elements. The lieutenant originally in charge went mad from what he had been through and, in the middle of an exchange of fire, handed leadership over to Roubiczek, who was "quite unable to carry the burden."[412] Those who reported to him did not all share the same language, and Roubiczek had no map of the region, thus easily getting lost and under the fire of his own army. In Hašek's narrative, such events transform into hilarious anecdotes spiced up by multilingual, rough, army vernacular, likely also an accurate mirror of the mode of communication in the Austrian army.

The opening scene of the book takes place in a local pub, and Hašek's style of amusing, pub-atmosphere narration about the adventures of a Bohemian soldier during WWI seem to point willfully at the fragmentation of the narrative itself, against an already established doctrine of aesthetic organicism in literature. Many readers and critics alike (from Czechoslovakia and internationally) believed the main protagonist to be a mirror of the Czech self, dominated by timidity, obedience, and obsequiousness. Hašek's use of the vernacular and his disjointed syntax, especially the ironic and sarcastic elements of the cyclical pedestrian plot, created a hero who eventually became completely interchangeable, or obsolete for the meaning of the narrative. As the cause of the war was lost, or unknown, the self-perpetuating violence, too, lost its meaning.

The main characters in Hašek's *The Good Soldier Schweik* are of stereotypical parochial minds, either executors or subjects of Austrian military discipline or the

[412] Roubiczek, *Across the Abyss*, 233.

corrupted Catholic Church: the indispensable local pub owner, the military chaplain who drinks and visits prostitutes more often than his company; the company commander; secret policeman who hunts for those with anti-monarchist views; the German-speaking caricature of a typical senior officer in the Austrian army; the insane general with aristocratic roots; the always hungry one-year volunteer; a private with extreme hatred for Hungarians. Together they piece together a puzzling mosaic of characters trapped in the cyclical, never-ending storytelling. The moment in which the death of the narrative becomes obvious reveals the true meaning of the tale. As this ironic prose or prosaic irony frustrates its own plot, Schweik, within the narrative, frustrates the Austro-Hungarian military bureaucracy.

Hašek wrote the first collection of stories about the "good soldier Schweik" already in 1912. [413] The main character was portrayed as a formalistic, phrase-mongering apprentice who causes confusion and damage through overzealous fulfillment of duty and narrow-minded loyalty. Hašek himself was a soldier in the First World War, he had to enlist at the beginning of 1915, by was taken prisoner by the Russians (or defected) in the same year and changed fronts. He enlisted in the Czech Legion, which fought against Austria. During his imprisonment in 1917 in Russia he wrote a continuation of the stories about "Schweik in captivity"[414] which the journal *Čechoslovák* published in the same year. The outlines of the future Schweik appeared in this work. When the Russian Revolution broke out in 1917, Hašek turned a Bolshevik and became Commissar of the Bolsheviks. He joined the Communist Party and in the same year became head of a Czech Red Army agitation and organization group. In 1920

[413] Jaroslav Hašek, *Dobrý voják Švejk: A jiné podivné historky* [The good soldier Schweik and other peculiar stories] (Prague: Hejda & Tuček, 1912).
[414]Jaroslav Hašek, "Dobrý voják Švejk v zajetí", (Praha: Mladá fronta, 2018).

he returned to Prague and published *The Adventures of the Good Soldier Schweik in WWI*.[415] This work appeared in German translation in 1926.[416]

Bertolt Brecht wrote an adaptation of *The Good Soldier Schweik* during his Californian exile; he set the little man and his struggle for survival in Nazi-occupied Prague and on the Russian front during WWII (*Schweik in the Second World War*), but like Hašek, he, too, never finished the play.[417] Max Brod commented in his autobiography, "Hašek has achieved what hundreds of writers have spent their lives fruitlessly trying to achieve: he has created a figure who is both an individual and a human type."[418] Brod wrote about Hašek's achievement with admiration:

> An artist couldn't want anything more: a figure that emerged from the darkest depths of the people's spirit and was almost immediately recognized by the people as real, passing into their consciousness—it can almost be assumed that such a structure suggests something unspeakable, and not just for their own people, but also has something to do with the most secret basis of existence of everything human.[419]

From a different perspective Walter Benjamin also found admiration for Hašek and connected Hašek's method to that of Franz Kafka in the use of gestures—in other words, in having created a character that consisted merely of his gestures, a hollow character in the sense that the reader never gets to know him.[420] The reader can only observe his

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[415] Jaroslav Hašek and Josef Lada, *Osudy dobrého vojáka Švejka za Světové války, Díl 1.* [The Fateful Adventures of the Good soldier Švejk During the World War, Vol.1], (Prague, A. Sauer and Hašek, 1920).
[416] Jaroslav Hašek, *Die Abenteuer des braven Soldaten Schwejk während des Weltkrieges,* translated by Grete Reiner (Prag: A. Synek, 1926).
[417] Bertolt Brecht, "Schweik in the Second World War," translated by William Rowlinson, in Brecht Collected Plays: Seven, edited by John Willett (London: Bloomsbury, 1994), 66–140. Drama Online: http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781408161401.00000020 (accessed April 27, 2023).
[418] Max Brod, *Streitbares Leben: Autobiographie*, Kindler Taschenbucher 20/21 (unabridged; Munich: Kindler, 1960), 411. Original: *Hašek hat erreicht, worum sich Hunderte von Literaten ihr Leben lang fruchtlos bemühen, er hat eine Figur geschaffen, die gleichzeitig Einzelmensch und Menchentypus ist.*
[419] Ibid., 412. Original: *Mehr kann ein Künstler nicht wollen: Eine Gestalt, aus den dunkelsten Tiefen des Volksgeistes hervorgestiegen und fast unmittelbar vom Volk als echt erkannt, in sein Bewusstsein übergehend—es ist fast als sicher anzunehmen, dass ein solches Gebilde nicht nur für das eigene Volk unaussprechliches andeutet, sondern nebstdem irgendetwas mit den geheimsten Existenzgrundlagen alles Menschlichen zu tun hat.*
[420] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, edited by Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968).

gestures in their impulsive spontaneity, or seeming spontaneity. This character without a character stands out in his ignorance of the cohesive powers in the delicate social network, and his acts become disruptive to the system. In real life, Roubiczek strived with all his power for the exact opposite of any version of a "man without qualities."

To amuse themselves, Hašek's readers must be familiar with the social milieu and understand the twist away from reality that Hašek put on his storytelling, as is the case with all irony. Without poking fun, Heller, too, used this reader-narrative-history-society maze of conscious interconnections to critique societal behavior, and he called it "historical consciousness," which is no more and no less than human beings' education and self-awareness. To those who possess such awareness about the larger societal sphere, the character of Schweik appears estranged or grotesque. Herein lies the similarity of Hašek's Schweik and Kafka's K: they carry the same traits of either ignorance or defiance of the system of values and relations that surround them. In a sense, they are free in the system, independent of it, and that is exactly why they are victorious (in the case of Schweik) or why they must be punished (in the case of K).

Disrupting the game—that is also the central idea of dissidence: ignoring the required act, not giving the required gesture (or giving the opposite one), destroying the panorama (the world of appearance, as Havel would call it) in the totalitarian system of reversed values. It may even mean spelling out the truth. For what it is worth, Walter Benjamin also believed that Kafka in his texts transgressed (or in his words "sacrificed"[421]) the religious laws, the Christian ones and the Halakha.

When one keeps in mind this parallel of Roubiczek's experience and Hašek's novel, with all his character holders, one more ironic element of the historical consciousness cannot escape it: the name "Roubiczek" is one of the most stereotypical

[421] Ibid.

Czech Jewish names, dominating together with Kohn the rich pool of Jewish jokes. It is an "immortal" name that stands for Jewish culture in Bohemia. Have you heard this one?

> Kohn and Roubíček are sitting over beer together and Roubíček says: "Tonight, I had a beautiful dream." Kohn wants to know: "Tell me!"—"I dreamt that a boat full of oranges arrived in Prague with my name on it, a boat full of oranges, all mine!"—Kohn swallows and says: "Listen, Roubíček, if you had a boat full of oranges, how many would you give me?"—"None," says Roubíček. Kohn gets nervous—"Listen, Roubíček, I'm your friend, am I not? I'm sure you'd give me a kilo, no?"—"No"—Kohn hits the table with his fist: "But why not?" Now Roubíček gets up from the bench: "I've had enough of you Kohn, can't you imagine your own boat full of oranges?"

Any holder of such a notoriously stereotypical name as Roubíček is, in the Central European consciousness of the twentieth century, inseparably connected with Hašek's Schweik. None of Roubiczek's close friends called him by his first name, and the authors of the letters preserved in the archive use a wide variety of salutations: Robi, Robbi, Roubi, Robby, Roubitschek, Roubiczech, Roubitcjek, Roubiček, Roubyczek, Roubicek, and more.[422] Some may have been attempts to anglicize his name, as letters written in English got processed faster during WWII. Even native German- or Czech-speaking friends were exchanging letters with him in English in the late 1930s and the 1940s. But some simply present the certainty of the letters' authors that their rendering was the way the name would be spelled, because, phonetically, the sound of it was so familiar to them that they simply "followed their ear."

Roubiczek and E. E. Kisch are both examples of Bohemian (German-speaking) loyalty to the Habsburg Kaiser. Bilingual Kisch published his war memoir in 1922 under the title *Soldat im Prager Korps* (Soldier in the Prague corps). Later editions also appeared, with the title *Schreib das auf, Kisch!* (Write that down, Kisch!). Roubiczek

[422] Roubiczek Papers, Box 7.

published his contemplations and memories from the front only partially, as a flashback, as part of his diary about the years 1939 to 1940. It was written in exile, when Hitler was sweeping Europe and Roubiczek was contemplating the terrifying dilemma: should he join the military resistance now that he could see a cause, or follow his decision never to fight again? It was this decision that led him to emigrate to Paris and set up one of the first anti-Nazi publishing houses in Paris, Der europäische Merkur, together with Peter de Mendelssohn. They published works by Heinrich Mann (a republican and anti-Nazi many years before his more famous brother, Thomas, started supporting the republic), Lion Feuchtwanger, Grete Fischer, Ernst Glaeser, Albert Grimm, Andre Maurios, Walter Mehring, Alfred Neumann, Rudolf Olden, Arnold Zweig, and Roubiczek's and de Mendelssohn's own work before declaring bankruptcy in 1935.[423] The books were printed partly in Czechoslovakia; then Roubiczek relocated to Vienna to work for *Zeitbild-Verlag*. After Austria's annexation he fled back to Prague, and after the annexation of the Sudetenland and the creation of the Nazi Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, in July 1939 he fled again to Cambridge in England, where he stayed and worked until 1965. After Hitler came to power, Roubiczek's first book, *Der missbrauchte Mensch* (The abused man, published in English under the title *The Misinterpretation of Man*), became the target of the Nazi censorship. His diary, which he travelled with from Czechoslovakia to Cambridge, came out originally in German under the title *Über den Abgrund* (1978),[424] and then in English translation in 1982 as *Across the Abyss*.[425]

[423] Ernst Fischer, *Verleger, Buchhändler und Antiquare aus Deutschland und Österreich in der Emigration nach 1933* (Stuttgart: Verband Deutscher Antiquare, 2011); Hermann Kesten, and Franz Schoenberner, *Briefwechsel im Exil 1933–1945* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2008). These books and bibliographies are available at the Center for Jewish History: https://www.cjh.org/about/about-the-center.
[424] Paul Roubiczek and Jörg-Ulrich Fechner, *Über den Abgrund: Aufzeichnungen 1939/40* (Vienna: Molden, 1978).
[425] Roubiczek, *Across the Abyss*.

If German literature and thought were born from the spirit of dialectic, then Roubiczek fits in most prominently. For Roubiczek could not recognize any law that would explain the causal correlation of coincidences, any law that could teach him to understand and obey to save himself in the future. His inability to identify the causes of his survival could not deny their existence, but it denied them as a law that was useful for his life.

For Roubiczek's age, the unusually long sixteen months he spent on the front line, where 80 to 90 percent of the regiment were repeatedly lost, shaped the man that philosopher Roubiczek became: "I could not feel my saving fate to be a special singling out, but only resent it on account of the dead—at the same time, the fact of my still being alive was a reproach to fate."[426] Roubiczek did not succeed in reconciling the two thoughts he saw as possible explanations, but it led him to a powerful feeling that "I must show myself worthy of the fate that had, for inexplicable reasons, befallen me, and make it my fate—not fritter away my energies in irrelevant things—in practical result, but do what I consider essential, live in the essential!" In this sense, Roubiczek's diary is a depressing prologue to what the Holocaust survivors a few decades later had to contemplate.

In his search for the essential, Roubiczek decided to study and teach philosophy, which led him, an assimilated Jew from Prague, to recognize and accept Christian values in the wider realm of his philosophical searching for meaning: "A way to freedom and spaciousness, a way to vital life suddenly opened to me and other, more genuine values appeared . . . another, deeper compulsion was taking possession of me, in which gradually I recognized the voice of the Absolute."[427] "The Absolute," according Roubiczek, must be individual, internal, provided from within, Kantian. Roubiczek

[426] Ibid., 243.
[427] Ibid., 245.

recognized that any struggle for the absolute, unified knowledge is hopeless. His inspiration, his attitude, and to an extent also his vocabulary are explicitly and unmistakably Kantian. He never mentioned Hegel in his diary, but in his concluding thoughts he came close to Hegel's writing: "The Absolute" and existence are one. What often reads as childish questions about our existence in the world, about the "I," Roubiczek uses as an entry point for further, deeper investigations. His external and internal realities are reflections of Kant's *Pure* and *Practical Reason*. The practical synthesis of these contradictory concepts became Roubiczek's search, occupation, and life. The right opposition to each of the spheres, or even oscillating between the two realms, with a firm acceptance of the limits of such a middle sphere allowed Roubiczek to find his internal absolute, embodied in the life of Jesus.

Roubiczek concluded that it is not possible to relativize ethical value, and he committed his own life to everyday cooperativeness and readiness to provide help if needed. Erich Heller was one of those who benefitted from Roubiczek's broad-mindedness in both a material and a spiritual way. Heller lived with Paul Roubiczek and his wife, Hjördis, during the war years in Cambridge and took a deep interest in Paul's thinking. It inspired him to apply some of the aspects into his own academic work about the lost spirit of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Without that material support and intellectual friendship, Heller's own intellectual and academic development may have taken a different path.

In the special collections of the Paul Roubiczek Papers in Brotherton Library at the University of Leeds, there is an entire oversized box[428] filled with six thick folders full of numerous students' letters. These letters bear evidence of how much influence Roubiczek had on young people's lives and how much they appreciated his teaching and

[428] Roubiczek Papers, Box 7.

mentorship, how well he could listen, and what a great psychologist he was. Students sought advice about their life decisions, family problems, career decisions, and simply updated Roubiczek regularly about their lives. It is an impressive, beautiful collection of heart-to-heart correspondence.

For Roubiczek, the question about the meaning of war is inherently connected with the question about the essence of Christianity, the foundation of European culture and the denotation of personal ethics. In *Across the Abyss* Roubiczek identified several reasons why England was not ready to defend Austria and Czechoslovakia. The independence and political stability of Czechoslovakia and Central Europe, his homeland, played an important role in his initial examination of the political situation that opened his diary. The lack of a political and mainly ethical motif on the part of the European Western powers Heller would later call a "lost spirit." Roubiczek decided to fight the totalitarian danger of growing nationalism with the recreation of the belief in life and its meaning. He was optimistic when he said that "man by nature is anything but nihilist. But this man searches for fulfilling content in life and is driven to despair because he can no longer attain what he demands."[429]

In Cambridge, in the Roubiczeks' rented apartment where Erich Heller lived from September 1939 throughout the war, Heller also reunited with his brother, Paul Heller, who survived several concentration camps and was freed during the liberation of Buchenwald. Six months later, on October 9, 1945, Paul arrived in England via Paris. After the war, both Heller brothers left for United States, although Paul did so much sooner, and Erich only reluctantly. Erich, nonetheless, kept returning to England most, if not all, summers to visit the Roubiczeks. And he continued to travel across half a world to see Roubiczek even when the latter, a generation older, had already retired in

[429] Paul Roubiczek, "Rezension: Walter Hof, Pessimistisch-nihilistische Strömungen in der deutschen Literatur vom Sturm und Drang bis zum Jungen Deutschland," *German Life and Letters* 26 (1972/73): 76.

Bavarian Gmund. Erich Heller recalls the last conversation he had with Roubiczek on his deathbed in Bavaria, a conversation about "anonymity and the unknown predecessors, thinkers, artists, builders of our civilization such as the masons who constructed the medieval cathedrals."[430] In the Paul Roubiczek Papers, only one photograph of Roubiczek himself is preserved. It is not an original; rather, it is a cutting from a printed source, a review of his *Across the Abyss*.[431]

Some of Roubiczek's private correspondence during his last years may serve as a self-reflection on his life. One of his former students—Edmund, who had recently entered academia but was overcome by doubts about the meaning of such a profession and torn between it and the urge to do his own creative work/writing—sought advice from his mentor. Roubiczek replied in 1970 from his home in Gmund am Tegernsee:

> I'm sorry that you find teaching such a strain and disappointment. I don't think that the urge to creative writing is immature, nor in your case unjustified. . . . I wonder whether an artificial, deliberate breaking away from everything, in order to gain experience, can ever have the desired effect . . . it will more probably become destructive. . . . You also speak about the "loss of faith," but there seems to be, particularly at this moment, a task which could be better done by the non-believer, than by the believer.[432]

Roubiczek responded to most points raised in the frustrated student's letter that related to the actual life of the now-grown Edmund and continued to respond to the theoretical point his student was concerned with:

> Marx, I fear, you interpret too much in the light of Buber, prejudiced by the despair about our society. . . . I don't think that alienation should be equated with exploitation. I don't think Marx serves the human in the right way, except perhaps in his early writing—but these are not yet Marxism. It is often referred to young Marx in order to save Marxism. . . . I fully understand your doubts and respect you fully for them. But teaching, despite many disadvantages, does not, for me, diminish the worth of a university. It is still the one place where one can hope to find time for writing, sooner or later.[433]

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[430] Heller, *Across the Abyss*, vii.
[431] Roubiczek Papers, Box 4.
[432] Ibid., Box 7, correspondence.
[433] Ibid., Box 8, correspondence.

Letters such as this one speak to Roubiczek's stature as a mentor and acceptance of this role; and, not least, it speaks to a certain sense of satisfaction with the decisions he made for his own life in exile.

Roubiczek's demand that ethical values be accepted first, as an unconditional obligation, is anchored in his personal experience of violence and, intellectually, by the teaching of the Bohemian reformer Jan Hus. The right and duty of each individual to develop his/her own ethical standards as part of education and maturation stands in a sharp contrast to any kind of absolutism and totalitarianism, especially National Socialism and Soviet communism, and to any large-scale attempt to explain ethics or human behavior in connection with history, sociology, or psychoanalysis. According to Roubiczek, individuals owe their highest allegiance to their own values, unjudged by any universal moral knowledge. This personal standard alone may demand the highest sacrifices, including the sacrifice of one's life. Such requirement to follow, unconditionally, one's own conscience usness is closely related not only to Hus but also to the Christian faith and to Nietzsche's thought.

In his critique of Kant's categorical imperative, Roubiczek highlights the importance of experience, the adjustability of one's own values in accordance with reality and over time. When Edward LeRoy Jr. reviewed Roubiczek's *Ethical Values in the Age of Science* in 1971,[434] he found it difficult to assess its significance, as it did not fit mainstream thinking about ethics at that time. LeRoy found Roubiczek's philosophical existentialism rather incompatible with the logical analysis that dominated academic philosophy in the 1970s. He also found it too abstract and theoretical for the theological world. Ultimately, LeRoy came to an interesting conclusion: he found

[434] Edward LeRoy Long, "Philosophy, Science, and Ethics," *Journal of Religion* 51, no. 4 (1971): 282–86. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1201839 (accessed August 22, 2023).

Roubiczek's approach and his position incompatible. Nonetheless, he found the book worth further analysis for its sobriety and sustained argument, which returned the reader's attention to the basic issues. This assessment stands in contrast to the flair and brilliance of Heller's writing, which impressed so many academic and nonacademic readers regardless of the sustainability of his argument.

Christian Ferber, who reviewed Roubiczek's *Across the Abyss* in *Die Welt*, commented on the quality of the ideas in it and, further, found that Roubiczek's writing differs from that of many other thinkers because of his extremely readable German: *Roubiczek unterscheidet sich von vielen anderen Denkern auch durch außerordentlich lesbares Deutsch* (Roubiczek also differs from many other thinkers because of his extremely readable German).[435] Describing Roubiczek's diary, Ferber called it a *fesselndes Denkdokument des Jahrhunderts* (captivating thought document of the century). Roubiczek wrote this document while France was falling and Hitler's landing in England seemed imminent. It led him to ponder his own German cultural heritage and his own relationship and role in the catastrophe. Here Roubiczek also significantly differs from Erich Heller, who in his writing assiduously avoided any inclusion of his personal self and any practical conclusion in general.

5.5 Third Excurse on Loyalty: The Self

Roubiczek consumed the daily news obsessively; he commented on the position of the Scandinavian countries, Poland, the Baltics, the Balkans, and the German-speaking minorities, the carriers of the German culture within. And he did so with deep self-reflection on his own debt to the German University in Prague and the German-speaking minority in Prague. Roubiczek's diary entry from October 12, 1939, reads:

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[435] Roubiczek Papers, Box 14, clippings from *Die Welt*, 14.10.1978, Christian Ferber.

> We must not let ourselves be moved by the misery of the people who have been expelled and robbed, nor must we grieve after German culture. In the old Austria these scattered German minorities were still upholders of the German culture. They had their good theatres, their concerts, lectures, schools, universities. They seemed a wonderful means of imparting to the Slav world that German culture had to give. How great my own gratitude—and I am not alone—to German institutions in Prague, and what a fruitful reciprocal effect these energetic splinters had upon German culture! But in Austria minorities were being already abused as a means of domination, and to the Nazis they were merely another means of destruction. By their aid the way was paved for the demoralizing of the states to be subdued. And having let themselves be misused for this purpose, and having themselves brought the greatest misfortune upon people, upon all Germans who were not Nazis and upon the Jews who felt themselves part of German culture, these minorities have forfeited the right to be pitied or regarded as upholders of culture. The wonderful legacy of the German past, German culture, is being destroyed: can anyone mourn the other legacy of the past, the German minorities! They might still have been the special means of peacefully propagating a peace-bringing culture, but as they have simply been a means of domination it is good for them to disappear.[436]

One of the reasons behind such a drastic and painful vision that became true in a more violent way after the war is Roubiczek's close examination of German mythology and the role of the hero within it. Roubiczek found the German willingness to bet everything on one of two alternatives—world domination or destruction—believable because of the German mythological "inclination to insanity."

As an example, he analyzed the Germanic national epic, the *Song of the Nibelungs*. In it, Roubiczek traces the glorification of power at all costs, power gained through betrayal, deception, and murder. He describes the essence of the *Song of the Nibelungs*, which inspired Hebbel and Wagner, as a self-destructive power and the uncritical worship of it. Roubiczek identified Hagen as the true hero of the epic, not Siegfried, and describes how this displacement transforms the heroic qualities from the traditional perception of a strong, confident, courageous, and daring hero (Siegfried) to a conscious hero who strives to be one despite his inadequacies, and the ideal of becoming

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[436] Roubiczek, *Across the Abyss*, 87 (originally published in German as *Über den Abgrund: Aufzeichnungen 1939/40* [Vienna: Molden, 1978]).

a hero justifies everything, including murder. And to complete the heroic ideal, Roubiczek explains that because "the curse of his act is still a burden upon him, . . . it serves only to bring about what the heroic ideal cannot dispense with, heroic death."[437] Hagen decides not to save his brothers and consciously and deliberately brings on a disaster. For he knows that only by death can the treachery and ignominy be erased and a heroic death will confirm him as the greatest hero. Then Roubiczek finishes his thought:

> Loyalty and honour, sullied again and again, stand firm in the face of death, and for the first time no traitor is found. Only now, when all are aware that what awaits them is not the victory they proclaimed and pretend to desire, and when they at last know the destruction they glorify to be certain annihilation, does the sham ideal hold good that ought to have shaped life and yet was too weak. Only now they come to be really worthy to be heroes of an epic. Only now, having chosen the way of madness and annihilation.[438]

He concludes that "only now *The Song of the Nibelungs* is more than ever the German national epic" and that "the German nation is pursuing an ideal whose value is proved only in death, seeking death."[439] To finish his diary entry from October 12, 1939, Roubiczek poses a question: "Is this sinister epic, which from any human viewpoint remains totally incomprehensible, simply a prophesy? Is annihilation all that is left?"[440]

If one compares Roubiczek's diary from 1939 with the diary of a much more prominent writer, Thomas Mann, from 1933, then it becomes surprisingly apparent that Roubiczek's comprehension of the situation was much deeper than that of Thomas Mann. Although Mann's style might be more refined, Roubiczek's assessment turned out to be much closer to reality than Mann's assessment, even though they came from similar economic circumstances, with Roubiczek being a generation younger and an

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[437] Ibid., 89.
[438] Ibid., 90.
[439] Ibid., 90.
[440] Ibid., 90.

Austrian and Czechoslovak citizen. Roubiczek, of course, had seen more by the time he composed his diary. Mann in the 1930s, after all, considered it only natural that German minorities or German-speaking areas, including all Habsburg Austrians, should join together in one powerful state.

Both Mann and Roubiczek cultivated a reasonable distance from the church as an institution but kept being attracted to explorations of religion. For Thomas Mann the search resulted in a fascination with a mythos, but for Roubiczek in a never-ending valuation of the life of Jesus, stemming irrefutably from the teaching of Jan Hus, to whom Roubiczek dedicated several of his works. Roubiczek articulated his conviction that the Reformers, who defended the truth and saved Christianity. When Thomas Mann applied the same idea to the German situation, he found that Luther's Reformation brought out both the best and the worst in the German people.

In Roubiczek, a further investigation about the reformation of the church sparked an entire path to self-reformation. This reformation of the self opened life in a free world, and this kind of life was the one Roubiczek pursued in England after the war and later in Germany (Bavaria); it was characterized by a certain tendency to humility and a compliant will to stay in the background. His diary opens with an intensive self-interrogation about the permissibility of conscious refusal of military service. Does he have the moral right to evade an accidental death on the war front? And more: Did that liberal British society, which offered nothing but weak defense and offers of compromise to Hitler, even have the right to fight a war that produced countless deaths?

If, at the beginning of his diary (September 3, 1939), Roubiczek barely concedes the possibility of a just war, he then changes his view as the war goes on and Hitler clears victories all over the Continent. In his reaction to the German invasion of the low countries and France in June 1940, and also the uncertain developments in America,

Roubiczek lost all remaining illusions and anticipated the genocide to come, which steered his mind to a single task in the war: defeat of Hitler. He abandoned all philosophical and theological abstractions and attempted to formulate the most practical tactics to end the brutal conflict. Ulrich Simon described Roubiczek's decisive change as a "pilgrimage through 'Resist not Evil' to 'I came not to send peace but a sword,' studded with hesitations, bewilderment, fear and final confidence."[441]

Although Roubiczek's thinking as preserved in his diary likely reflects the overall atmosphere in Europe and beyond, including the call for the return of Christ, and may not have brought any unique perspective, it nonetheless reminds us of the struggle of the German-speaking émigrés from Bohemia. Roubiczek himself serves as a representative for a group that possessed the Jewish perspective and Catholic conviction. In the monarchy, not an insignificant number of progressive, German-speaking Jews converted to Christianity (for example, Karl Kraus, Ludwig, Wittgenstein, and Franz Werfel).

What makes Roubiczek stand out among those who emerged from the WWI front as pacifists is the very fact that he did not remain in the secular domain. For someone born into Judaism, Christian dogma did not make up the realm of "the Good." Roubiczek examines the realm where God cannot be grasped in the language of the church, and he identifies the path across the abyss as one filled with overcoming. He never stopped being critical of his own educated, upper-middle-class world, as it was this part of society that failed to prevent the rise of Hitler. He attempted to comprehend and recognize whether the existence of a form of socialism that would not lead to unfreedom is possible, but he resolutely rejected Soviet communism, especially upon remembering the alliance between Stalin and Hitler.

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[441] Simon Ulrich, "What is to be done?" *Religion* (October 1978), Roubiczek Papers, Box 2, newspaper clippings.

5.5. Lost Home—Return to Home

Roubiczek's first book, *The Misinterpretation of Man* (first published in German as *Der Missbrauchte Mensch* in 1934; first published in English in 1947; newly republished in English in 2015), presented a similar idea as Heller did almost two decades later. In fact, they had the same idea. And this phenomenon was no coincidence, because during and after WWII, many were asking the question, "What are the deeper roots of the ideas that found their most disastrous expression in German National Socialism?" Roubiczek, however, had been pursuing this question since the early 1930s, when Erich Heller was still a teenager. The truth is that both men, as German-speaking exiles from Bohemia and friends and roommates in Cambridge, grappled with their own experiences, consciousness, and motivations. Heller did it better, as measured by the public eye and representatives of academia, or at least he was able to "wrap" it better. But they both ended up tracing the roots of what they considered the decline if not the collapse of Western civilization.

Roubiczek, like Heller a few years later, also argued that Western thought "took the wrong turn in the nineteenth century"—the one-sentence judgment that Heller often repeated in his numerous interviews. Roubiczek had used the same wording as Heller did in his *The Disinherited Mind* (1952). They both wrote about the attempt of European man to renounce Christ and live without God, and they both wrote about the romantic intellectual flight from reality that worshiped heroes and national sacrifice. They both criticized the scientific progress and totalitarian systems that led to the catastrophe. While Roubiczek started with Kant, and then followed through with Goethe, Hegel, Nietzsche, and Marx, Heller picked up with Goethe, Nietzsche, and Spengler. Roubiczek followed his written word in his personal life; he became a follower of Kierkegaard,

studied and practiced Christian existentialism, and believed in the natural human desire to seek God in his effort to grasp his own existence, which had endless possibilities but no certainty. Heller, however, remained agnostic, yet culturally much closer to Christian traditions than the Jewish ones—he did not observe the Jewish high holidays but did join the festivities of Christmas and Easter.

Roubiczek faced criticism concerning his concluding ideas but earned positive evaluations for the way he developed arguments and pursued them methodologically. For example, Harold Parker pointed out in his review the strength of the book's historical sections, as opposed to Roubiczek's conclusions, which Parker would not support.[442] Heller did not risk such judgements. He brought up very similar arguments, even more radically driven, but he formulated no conclusions and took no philosophical or political stand—he remained behind the label of mere "critic." Heller was an essayist with a strong tendency for tangents, heavily anchored in idealized classical antiquity, and a fondness for pathos. Although Heller, inspired by Karl Kraus, strongly criticized hollowed-out language, his own style was ornate and metaphoric, with many moral accounts. Roubiczek's syntax was simpler, his style perhaps less eloquent, but always focused on the idea he was developing and grounded in everyday reality. Roubiczek's tendency to humility percolates through his writing (sometimes even weakening his argument), just like Heller's cleverness dominates his.

The original German version of Roubiczek's diary, *Über den Abgrund* (in Roubiczek's earlier notes, also *Über dem Abgrund*[443]), was introduced by Werner Heisenberg, the prominent German scientist. In his 1974 letter to Hjördis Roubiczek, Heisenberg wrote:

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[442] Harold T. Parker, "The Misinterpretation of Man: Studies in European Thought of the Nineteenth Century by Paul Roubiczek," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 47, no. 4 (1948): 607–10; Roubiczek Papers, Box 1, clippings.
[443] Roubiczek and Fechner, *Über den Abgrund*.

> Your husband's diary made a strong impression on me. . . . I would be happy to write a short foreword as best I can. In recent years I have often been asked to write such forewords—even by very good authors—and I have always answered that for fundamental reasons I could not, because there were too many such requests and I could not do it in one case no, in the other case say yes. But I can probably "excuse myself" here by explicitly mentioning the long, friendly relationship with your husband.[444]

The German edition appeared indeed with Heisenberg's introduction, in which he wrote:

> The diary often provides in many ways the key to understanding the author's later philosophical path. At the heart of it is the belief that ethics cannot be relativized. . . . But his thoughts never remain theory for him, they are the basis for daily actions, and anyone who knew Roubiczek knows that he also expressed this ethic in his willingness to help others, in his desire to repair the broken threads after the war among victims socializing, practiced.[445]

Erich Heller wrote the introduction to the English edition of *Across the Abyss*, which appeared four years later, with much more flair and a much more intimate academic knowledge of Roubiczek's philosophical work. Heller, too, stated that Roubiczek's most important philosophical work, *Thinking in Opposites* (1952), was rehearsed already in *Across the Abyss*, and Roubiczek's other books are intimately related to it without being simply preludes or afterthoughts.[446] Heller commented on the stages in Roubiczek's life and the time he spent studying in Berlin. He wrote that even though Roubiczek was formed by these years as a scholar and thinker, he was "certainly very much less

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[444] Roubiczek Papers, Box 8, Folder "Heisenberg." Original: *Das Tagebuch Ihres Mannes hat mir einen großen Eindruck gemacht. . . . Ich bin gern bereit, dazu ein kurzes Vorwort zu schreiben, so gut ich es eben kann. In den letzten Jahren bin ich oft gebeten worden, solche Vorworte zu schreiben—auch von sehr guten Autoren—und ich habe immer geantwortet, dass ich das aus grundsätzlichen Erwägungen nicht könnte, denn es gäbe zu viele solche Wünsche und ich könnte nicht in einem Fall nein, im anderen Fall ja sagen. Hier kann ich mich aber wohl „entschuldigen" dadurch", dass ich ausdrücklich die lange freundschaftliche Beziehung zu Ihrem Mann erwähne.*

[445] Roubiczek Papers, Box 8, Folder "Heisenberg," Heisenberg's draft of the introduction. Also in print: Roubiczek and Fechner, *Über den Abgrund*. Original: *Das Tagebuch gibt vielfach den Schlüssel zum Verständnis des späteren philosophischen Weges eines Autors. Im Zentrum steht die Überzeugung, dass man die Ethik nicht relativieren kann. . . . Seine Überlegungen bleiben für ihn aber nie Theorie, sie sind die Grundlage für das tägliche Handeln, und wer Roubiczek kannte, weiß, dass er diese Ethik auch in der Hilfsbereitschaft für andere, in dem Wunsch, nach dem Krieg die abgerissenen Fäden unter Opfern wieder zu knüpfen, praktiziert hat*.

[446] Roubiczek, *Across the Abyss*, ix.

impressed by the illusory expectation of limitless cultural progress in the uneasy republican freedom that Germany acquired with her military defeat."[447] Heller's description of the city at that time reads:

> After two years in the family business in Prague, he spent thirteen years, unlucky number, in Berlin. It was the time when that extraordinary city, once the proud capital of the German empire, had become the symbol of the precariously divided continent, passing through turbulent years of political and economic disorder, intellectual agitation and the kind of cultural liveliness and nervous creative energy which some people took to be the promise of a new civilization.[448]

Regardless of the years Roubiczek spent in Berlin and of the emotional memories of WWI that he described in his diary, Heller states that three cities formed the three main stages in Roubiczek's life: Prague, Cambridge, and Gmund am Tegernsee. Gmund, where Roubiczek retired, is a beautiful Bavarian spa town, today with a desirable real-estate market for German elites, Russian oligarchs, and international celebrities.

Besides his diary, *Across the Abyss* and *Thinking in Opposites*, Roubiczek published: *Der missbrauchte Mensch* (published in German in 1934; in English in 1947 as *The Misinterpretation of Man*)—a collection of essays about intellectuals who influenced his thinking; *Warrior of God: The Life and Death of John Hus* (1947); *Thinking Towards Religion* (1957); *Existentialism, For and Against* (1964); and *Ethical Values in the Age of Science* (1969). His work typically appeared in English and German, and some of it was translated into French, Spanish, Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, and Hindi. These books are also the result of Roubiczek's preparation and lectures he gave in Cambridge to various religious and non-religious societies (Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and secular academic) and as part of his popular extramural teaching series as a fellow of Clare College (University of Cambridge), a series that included lectures on Dostoyevsky, Buber, the French existentialists, and German philosophers.

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[447] Ibid., vii (introduction by Heller).
[448] Ibid., viii.

As an admirer and critic of Immanuel Kant, Roubiczek advocated for the integration of emotions and reason and promoted acceptance of the perpetual dynamic between opposites. Inspired by Hus, Roubiczek naturally did not reject science as strongly as did Heller, yet he, too, identified the rise of modern science as a reason for the decline in the leading role of philosophy, and he attempted to bring questions about human experience into the purview of both approaches. The philosophical realm, for Roubiczek, is the only one capable of providing explanations for personal and the most intimate questions. And over time, such philosophical answers transform into religion.

Born in Prague as a German-speaking Jew, educated in Prague and Berlin, in 1933 Roubiczek was about to establish himself in the German culture he loved. Entirely formed by the German intellectual tradition, he still rejected it and fervently opposed Hitler's regime from the very onset, even if it meant sacrificing his own inheritance in the name of an ethics that could guide humanity forward. His work is a historical contribution to clarifying further the thinking of uprooted, German-speaking, WWII emigrants from outside Germany and, in fact, uprooted people from all over the world who were turned both physically and spiritually into nomads by the violence they witnessed and escaped from. The new home Roubiczek found for himself came from the abysmal investigation of his own self, as well as of other lives crushed by uncontrollable circumstances. Roubiczek's home became the cultivated ability to overcome fate.

CONCLUSION

Heller and Roubiczek both left rich material for us to study, to understand the demise of Prague's multi-cultural heritage, and the ways in which it remained operative in various parts of the world post-WWII. German-speaking Bohemians Heller, Roubiczek, and Flusser became, together with other refugees from the former Habsburg Monarchy, truly disinherited because, unlike German exiles, they had nowhere to return. For them, the dialectic of exile was broken. This awareness is evident in the life stories and work of the subjects of my study. What connected them to their heritage was their interest in German language or in languages, literature, and culture in general. In some cases, for example Kurt Krolop, or E.E. Kisch, there was also the interest in their original homelands, others, like Heller, erased the concept of a homeland from their memory. Based on my study of selected authors one of the most interesting comparative aspects are the individual changes in their political persuasion, conditioned by the experience of exile. Most of them were influenced by the leftist Prague before WWII, but they went different ways in their host countries and new environments. Heller became politically conservative, Roubiczek religiously conservative but celebrating individual freedom, while Flusser embraced the loss of familiarity, even emotional, to discover new intellectual realms. They also assessed the role of their uprooting differently. Interestingly, all my research subjects, who experienced uprooting and became successful in their new homes, were able to turn the experience of uprooting into something positive, though in different ways. But they also had an advantage over their fellow exiles from Hitler who did not speak German. The choice of the genre of their expression, the political circumstances on both continents, their own political

conviction, character, and human connections prepared the ground for their subsequent steps.

Ironically, the knowledge and mastery of German, the language of the enemy, became an asset in exile from Hitler's Germany. The need for training military and intelligence specialists in German was high, especially in England. Both Erich Heller and Paul Roubiczek (as well as J. P. Stern) were able to get their foot in the door of English academia because of their natural skill, as language teachers, translators, exam supervisors.

Roubiczek had experience in the publishing business, and Heller had already published one article about Karl Kraus before coming to England. While interpreters from German were needed, and training of soldiers and military intelligence in the German language was a valuable skill during the war, no Czech speaker could have hoped to set foot in England and start working as an interpreter of Czech (Ukrainian, Polish, Slovak, etc.). This opportunity to enter academia, even if at a rudimentary level, presented still an important steppingstone that enabled the German-speaking intellectuals considered in my study to become professionally established and to continue working in academia as faculty members by interpreting and mediating German language, literature, culture, philosophy, and history. The war itself and the scope of the horror, and subsequently the public interest in understanding it, together with a strong desire to prevent it, ensured that German Studies post-WWII and post-Holocaust would remain an academic subject at most major universities and colleges worldwide.

Erich Heller wrapped his study about Thomas Mann and his literary oeuvre with foresight of what the world would demand after Hitler's defeat. Heller declared an essential feature in the development of modern German ideology: a long-standing

opposition to humanism, distrust in the value and the continuously progressive evolution of human life, against Christian ethics, and the creed of Western civilization and progress, with an irreversible tendency to destruction. He formulated this thought even before he started writing his dissertation and remained faithful to his thesis till his very last academic engagements. He published his thoughts soon after the war, when other would-be writers in Germany were just finding the ground under their feet. Heller's word was widely heard and appreciated.

Even before Heller prepared his dissertation for publication (which he defended in 1948 and published as *The Ironic German* in 1958), he published a collection of essays about several German-language writers: Karl Kraus, Rainer Maria Rilke, Friedrich Nietzsche, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and Franz Kafka. The essays are joined by the theme of lost values (*The Disinherited Mind* [1952]). *The Disinherited Mind* met with grand success, and Heller's dream was fulfilled: he became a well-known and well-respected authority on German literature.

I have traced the similarities of Heller's pursuit of this thesis, drafted to explain the road to German National Socialism in Germany, with the historical thesis developed by historians also soon after WWII, the theory of the *Sonderweg*, or "special path." For Heller's argument carried similar characteristics: the contention of German incompatibility with modernity, described as a direct path from the aristocratic organization of society to democracy—a unique phenomenon compared to the development of other countries in Europe; detection of the very long road to crisis; and the inevitability of the outcome. Heller's thesis and that of the *Sonderweg* also share a short-lived span of acceptance by a wider scholarship.

Thanks to his success, Heller found himself in a position to answer his brother Paul's call to join him in the United States, where Paul, a survivor of six long years in

several concentration camps, worked as a physician in the American Midwest. Erich made compromises that, in part, he never stopped regretting. He joined his brother and Northwestern's University German department in fall 1959. In America he joined the many European intellectuals who had difficulty coming to terms with American culture's being sound and happy even without a physical connection to the ruins and monuments of the ancient Greeks and Romans. The Greek tyranny that many Germans thinkers submitted themselves to was closer to Heller's heart than accepting the sober results of progress. He did not settle in any of the communities created by prominent German émigré writers. In the Midwest Heller had to find his own, new network of friends and contacts. He developed an intense correspondence with mostly conservative émigré intellectuals and some academic and publishing circles in Germany.

Paul Roubiczek, who lived and worked in Cambridge, became conservative in a different way. He found stability and flexibility in a very individual approach to faith and developed his own moral principles. Roubiczek repeatedly emphasized the variable of time and human experience in individual searches for moral principles. What led Erich Heller to believe that spiritual emptiness could not be resolved provided Roubiczek with the will and capacity to fill his glass with spiritual potentials.

Post-WWII West German politics, the only one Heller accepted (as opposed to East German politics), was based on the Christian image of humankind, the social market economy, parliamentary democracy, and foreign policy ties to the West. Post-WWII German letters were also marked with religious revival, restoring belief in Christian values. The superiority of Christian artists, who could fall back on the faith's complex set of values and the established "truth," was evident, despite the efforts of the younger generation to assign the leading role in the reconstructing society to the arts. The inter-wars debates about the connection between modern art and the Enlightenment

returned, but the avant-garde supporters of a more radical engagement with art as the foundation of individual freedom in society could not defend their vision against the establishment.

My research shows that Heller's theological lens brought nothing new to the debate. But unlike the conservative circles in Germany, often tinted by their sympathies with National Socialism, Heller did not condemn modern art as a symptom of godlessness. He embraced it as a mirror of the state of the human condition. This version became popular with lay and academic audiences as it skillfully navigated the connections between past and present and clearly separated itself from the National Socialists' assault on the modern arts. The fact that Heller originated from non-German soil made it easier. The idea of language as a mirror was coined by Karl Kraus, Heller's original inspiration, and it clearly sets even Heller's first muse also beyond the German border.

Heller's gravitation toward morality is likely the reason why he never befriended René Wellek, a compatriot from the Bohemian Crown Lands of Austria-Hungary and a leading, prolific figure in literary studies in both American and European academia. Wellek articulated and held himself to high standards for literary criticism; he refused any one-sided approach and required a more theoretical methodological foundation. But thanks to his initial success with *The Disinherited Mind* Heller did not owe a methodological explanation to anyone. During Heller's tenure in the humanities at Northwestern University, no one could hope to be promoted without his approval. But the man who for two decades ruled the humanities at one of the most prestigious liberal arts institutions of higher education in the United States and who derived his respect from his two seminal works, *The Disinherited Mind* and *The Ironic German*, could

surprisingly hardly enter any of the postmodern theoretical debates about the literature of the 1960s and 1970s and its exploration of the meaning in the human life.

During my research, the question I was pursuing gradually changed from "Why did Heller disappear" to "How did Heller achieve his fame?" I believe the answer to the latter question is a sum or a combination of Heller's writing style, the timing of his publications, his diligent correspondence with influential German and American men of letters (most importantly Thomas Mann) and also with American, English, and German publishers, as well as the political conditions on both continents, including their reflection of it in American academia.

The conservative turn in immediate, postwar German politics (the Christian Democratic Union of Germany), as well as political and intellectual development in the United States (the Red Scare), helped propel Heller and his thesis to fame. The American humanities were more conforming to the mainstream and leaning toward promoting apolitical, intrinsic values in literature to prevent possible cuts or even their elimination, in the case of public schools. Heller's moralistic writing and his natural expertise in the writing of formally innovative Central European authors such as Kafka and Rilke fit the needs.

The tensions between the conservative criticism of progress, technology, and consumerism at the time when science developed with tremendous speed mirrored the tensions and paradoxes of the Cold War. Western societies, especially in America, expanded at an unprecedented tempo and so participated in the triumph of the West during the Cold War. In West Germany, the critique of consumerism gave rise to the leftist movement of the 1960s. Heller was able to maintain his conservative position. He did not advocate any change in the ways we use the products of our economies, he simply advocated restricting their development. That position is also the key to

understanding his conflict with the youth movements in both the United States and in Germany.

Not least, Heller also owed his success to German literary critic Hans Egon Holthusen, who reached out to Heller in Cambridge and offered to promote his book *The Disinherited Mind*. Despite Holthusen's political stains from the 1930s, when he voluntarily joined the SA units and the NSDAP, and despite Heller's initial criticism of Holthusen's own work, Heller accepted the offer. It might have been one of the most important steps that propelled Heller to his steep academic rise. Whether Holthusen was simply looking for another *Aushängeschield* or truly believed in Heller's genius is irrelevant today.

Heller's success drew from his own plurality of experiences: at first the German-Austrian duality, then to a lesser extent the Bohemian-German duality, and eventually the Anglo-American–German duality. Leaving aside any possible, additional personal distances with respect to societal norms, this plurality allowed him to gain the space needed for a critical perspective, including his view about German incompatibility with modernity.

Willfully looking to the past, Heller, with his unique background and his unique use of English, became the credible voice that international audiences were willing to listen to. Although he had escaped the Holocaust and any military experience on the war front and sat in the lecture halls of the University of Cambridge during the war, he knew how to use the credits his origin and heritage offered him, and he worked tirelessly to influence his audience by building the image he wanted to possess. Even in his writing Heller typically first carefully set the stage. By the time he brought his argument to the table, the reader did not even notice it but simply considered it a continuation of the narrative that passionately painted the broadest picture of European Judeo-Christian

cultural heritage, which is, indeed, impressive on its own. In other words, Heller painted a certain panorama, giving the reader an illusion of understanding European development over the centuries and the place of German culture within it. His readers could identify with the writing by simply understanding the narrative. The narrative ended by prophesying the death of European culture, for it followed in the footsteps of the death of God. The end of Heller's narrative was its most impactful part, for "death" as a concept serves well as a metaphor. Heller sounded the alarm that scientific objectivity could destroy the religious foundation of European civilization by leaving humanity devoid of spiritual security.

In times of crisis and radical societal change, intellectuals repeatedly evoke, exactly, arts and literature, or even appeal to history lessons, for humanity cannot go on without imagination. Imagination and plurality are inherent parts of art, and that feature is what makes them the enemies of stasis. By calling for a closed system of values, Heller promoted stasis over progress. Yet he also called on poetry and literature to return the world to its foundation. By merging with technology, art has already acquired the capacity to change our reality. Art is not flight from reality, it is reality's substance. Nevertheless, it did not revive the past.

Thomas Mann's idol, Walt Whitman, with whom Mann's adult life overlapped by about fifteen years and by whom Mann was inspired to act, stands in a strong contrast to Heller's pessimistically deconstructive, critical existential approach, which was linguistically blooming, and to his search for the beginning and the end. For Whitman did not acknowledge the end of anything. Whitman's poems already displayed the transcendental capacity Heller assigned to poetry of championing the common individual, by then for Mann the symbol of democracy. Mann, Heller's early model, noticed it. So did Kafka, Whitman's admirer.

Leaves of Grass

I have heard what the talkers were talking, the talk of the beginning and the end,
But I do not talk of the beginning or the end.

There was never any more inception than there is now,
Nor any more youth or age than there is now,
And will never be any more perfection than there is now,
Nor any more heaven or hell than there is now.
. . .

Has anyone supposed it lucky to be born?
I hasten to inform him or her it is just as lucky to die, and I
know it.[449]

Heller's place in postwar German Studies is assured, not least because of his experience of exile and his origins, as similarly with Mann's development. Thanks to the view from a distance, Heller refined his ability to sort out what is unique. The twentieth century allowed public journalism to merge with literary criticism, and the fact that Heller originated from the Bohemian Crown Lands of Austria-Hungary, where apocalyptic visions of the end of an era, or the end in itself, preceded similar moods throughout Europe—in Heller's case moods multiplied by his own experience of exile—allowed Heller to formulate an idea that we could see today as parallel to what historians called the *Sonderweg*.

In reality, Heller remained the nonpolitical man he applauded at the very moment Thomas Mann started parting with him. Focused on German exceptionalism, the traveled individual, intellectually and physically, who saw the differences of the human condition in various places, did not ask the question, "How can we support the collective life not only in one country like Germany, or a multinational country like the former Habsburg monarchy and then Czechoslovakia, but also multiethnic Europe and the multicultural world?" Heller did call openly for world literature—so did Thomas

[449]Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass.* (Champaign, Ill.: Project Gutenberg, 1998). http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/1322.

Mann, and so did many others after WWII—but he simply avoided the responsibility of a thinker, the same responsibility he placed on the shoulders of anonymous poets. For the union of ethics and politics cannot be achieved in the same way that it seems remotely possible to be within the domain of ethics and religion. Understanding the struggles of the *Buddenbrooks* who lost their social position in the nineteenth century, in Lübeck, reveals that they lost orientation, not solely because God was lost but also because no new working and acceptable social structure was created. Where new organizational structure is absent or flexible, conspiracy alternatives and new constructs of ideology are the fastest to fill the vacuum: anti-Semitism, anti-vaxxers, xenophobia, anti-evolutionists, Lysol-drinkers. This is the vacuum we must fear, not a vacuum created by the absence of cultural production or production of "lesser value."

Heller's writing did not find a lasting place in the history of literary criticism, because it could not offer any valid patterns for the future. There is no shame in it, because very few can. But it is the answer to the question that stood at the beginning of my research. Having conducted this research in several archives carrying materials pertaining to Heller's work, I now believe that Heller's "disappearance" from the sources that matter today regarding German literary criticism and its history was justified and logical. For Heller's existentialist approach could not spur a change. In other words, Heller's criticism could not serve as a model to be followed. Though Heller was a moralist writer, he sided with the existing (or lost) status quo, advocating surrender to dogma. He did not critically examine writing that attempted to break away from it—quite the opposite, he subdued even the most innovative and experimental writers, for example Kafka, to his existing, unshakable vision of the tragic consequences of the loss of faith without looking for and testing a positive, viable alternative, the quest of modern literature.

The findings in my study show that the experience of Heller, Roubiczek, Flusser, and Stern of having come of age in the Bohemian lands, Czechoslovakia, Prague, and Sudetenland, as well as the German language and their cultural ties to both, resulted in their writings' strongly reflecting German and Austrian history and culture. Heller was the only one of this group who originated in the borderlands, not from the multilingual environment of Prague. His stronger attachment to the traditional German cultural heritage is evident in his writing.

In his own quest for "the essential," Paul Roubiczek, an émigré from Prague, found his system of thinking in Christian values that pointed to freedom of thought. A follower of Hus and Kant, Roubiczek defined his personal "Absolute" as "individual, internal, provided from within." The private correspondence accessible in the Paul Roubiczek Papers attests to this individuality, as people of any religion, ethnic background, or even sexual orientation felt comfortable choosing Roubiczek as a mentor. Already forming in the earlier parts of Roubiczek's life was his hatred of violence, especially violence forced on him by the state. Roubiczek found sources of inspiration in the teaching of Jan Hus, especially his fight for freedom of thought and for empiric principles over unthinking adherence to religious dogma. Roubiczek declared Hus's teaching revolutionary and his actions the marker of modernity's arrival. In a way, what Roubiczek celebrated, Heller eventually rejected. By developing a deep concern for the social (political) consequences of every human act, Roubiczek moved much closer to the world of politics. The profound, deeply personal meditations of Paul Roubiczek based on his life experience strongly influenced Erich Heller and also resonate in Heller's own writing. Roubiczek, Heller's oldest living inspiration, followed his word by act, by converting to Christianity and living a pious life. Heller himself never adopted any organized religion; he remained an agnostic until his last days.

None of the men considered in my study denied Prague as their intellectual origin, no matter whether they were born there or came there for periods sufficiently extensive to have influenced them for life. The works of Prague's mostly Jewish writers and poets, who transcended the memory of a life in a ghetto and accelerated the development of German poetic and literary expression, stand out among German literatures. If the post-Holocaust German Studies, abroad or in Germany and Austria, had to reach out to Kafka to help bridge the difficult period of void, it is no coincidence. And this work would not be a work touching on German-Jewish Prague if it did not mention Kafka in the conclusion. I am including him as the supreme representative of plurality, an author who did not write in words but in metaphors. The metaphorical meaning of each of the events he described points indubitably to more than one world.

SUMMARY

Erich Heller shaped postwar German Studies as a discipline in a particular way. Through literary analysis of modern German-language writing of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, produced in both Austria and Germany, he helped awaken an awareness of modern literature written in the German language in the English-speaking world. Each of Heller's seminal works, *The Disinherited Mind* (1952) and *The Ironic German* (1958), was published in more than a dozen editions and translated into German, French, Italian, and Japanese. In public, Heller passionately depicted the epoch that stretched from Goethe to Nietzsche to Rilke and Mann as one defined by an irreversible tendency toward destruction.

Soon after the defeat of Hitler's Germany, Heller made discussions about German-speaking intellectuals and their work not only socially acceptable but also desired—a remarkable achievement for a German-speaking Jewish émigré born in Habsburg Bohemia. At Northwestern University, Heller stood at the birth of a new academic discipline: the academic field of World Literature, or slightly differently phrased and focused, comparative literature.

Although Heller was mentally and intellectually well prepared to deal with the challenges of living in exile, he never considered his new host country his home. Heller's closest intellectual home included the figure and work of Karl Kraus and the question of the relationship between art and truth. The theme of spiritual disinheritance filled the space originally vacated when he left his homeland.

The relevance of Heller's writing, however, proved unable to surpass two of the most comprehension-hungry post-WWII decades. In my work, I have identified the reasons for Heller's becoming an influential critic in the 1950s and 1960s and studied his family connections, as well as his connection to the intellectual and political currents

on both continents and in American academia, to ascertain reasons for Heller's eventual disappearance from the historical consciousness of German literary criticism.

Paul Roubiczek, Heller's oldest inspirational source, took a different direction. Roubiczek was not only repeatedly uprooted but was also severely traumatized by his participation in WWI on the Italian front (on the Habsburg side) at the age of 18. He devoted his life to addressing the inner conflict of a man who detested war and every form of violence, yet was unable to be a pacifist in the war that Hitler unleashed. This conflict occupied his mind and led to his struggle of conscience and his conversion to Christianity, his new home. Roubiczek's thinking is captured in his diary, *Across the Abyss: Diary Entries for the Year 1939–1940* (published in English in 1982 and originally in German in 1978 as *Über den Abgrund*), and his seminal works *Thinking in Opposites* (1952) and *Thinking Towards Religion* (1957). He developed not only a philosophical system of thought but also an approach to his own life, here and now, that allowed him to find a new home and feel rooted again. The new home, a spiritual one, as described in the teaching of Jan Hus, in true belief in one's moral conscience was for Roubiczek ideally exemplified in the life of Jesus.

These two paths, those of Erich Heller and of Paul Roubiczek, demonstrate different ways of coping with the loss of familiar grounds. My work documents the post-emigration life and work of mainly two exiled, German-speaking Jewish Bohemians and presents how their oeuvre and experiences serve as contributions to understanding the uprooted life and self-perception of identity of German ethnic groups living beyond Germany in the first half of the twentieth century.

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