

beloved “Bolshevik” Asja Lacis. Typically, Benjamin frames his activity within the town’s brutal melancholy, which “with great force can seize whoever has walked across the Roman streets.” Here, he continues, he toils day and night, attending to the “infinite brittleness in the details,” which makes him “think of Chinese porcelain that has to be packed carefully for shipment to Germany” (*Briefe*, 3:93). What remains of Benjamin’s earlier meditations on linguistic philosophy is an intense awareness of the fragility of language. His formulation recalls, for example, the well-known image from his essay “The Task of the Translator,” which recognizes both the translation and the original “as fragments of a greater language, just as fragments are part of a vessel” (*Selected Writings*, 1:260). The metaphor of fragile porcelain also points to the image of the mosaic, whose “majesty in fragmentation” serves as an illustration of philosophical contemplation in Benjamin’s study of baroque drama, where “truth-content is only to be grasped through immersion in the most minute details of subject-matter” (*Origin of German Drama*, 28). The modification that working on Proust brings is that now this intensive reflection on the fragmentary quality of language coincides with a preoccupation with strolling through the city—walking “across the Roman streets.” Accordingly, while living in Paris with the Hessels, Benjamin writes to a friend about his daily regimen: he begins working on Proust immediately upon getting out of bed, before washing, dressing, or breakfast, then spends the afternoons sauntering through the city (*Briefe*, 3:420–421).

In a sentence that Benjamin and Hessel never touched, Proust writes, “The function and the task of a writer are those of a translator” (*Le temps retrouvé*, 3:926). Along similar lines, the perambulatory gaze of the *flâneur* transforms the city into a foreign text awaiting translation. The disorientation is but an index of the reader’s inexhaustible curiosity, passively fighting against the rapidity of modern transportation. It is literally a method—a “way” or “path”—whose critical force is perfectly analogous to the “retarding elements” that Leo Spitzer recognized in Proust’s style. In his own essay “Zum Bilde Prousts” (1929; “The Image of Proust”), Benjamin refers to the inversion of Penelope’s apotropaic project of infinite delay, unraveling by day what has been woven at night, disdaining the teleology of memory in favor of the detailed arabesques of aimless amnesia. Here, Benjamin’s elaboration of Proustian recollection, which is “much closer to forgetting than what is usually called memory” (*Selected Writings*, 2:238), corresponds to what he once characterized in a letter to Scholem as the near illegibility of his translation (*Correspondence*, 289).

Committed as it is to the literalness espoused in the essay on translation, Benjamin’s rendering of the twists and turns of Proust’s syntax mimic the experience of losing one’s way. The principal difference, then, between the *Recherche* and the *Arcades Project* is a simple matter of focus, but this distinction is also the critical line that keeps the two thinkers apart. The inwardly spiraling recollection from Proust’s cork-lined room translates into the flashes of “profane illumination” before the marketplace. The claustrophile finds his precise echo in the agoraphile.

Despite growing financial difficulties, Julius Salter published Benjamin and Hessel's *Im Schatten der jungen Mädchen* in the early spring of 1927. Given the scandal associated with the Schottlaender translation, the critical attention to the new volume was significant and, on the whole, quite positive. Regardless, Die Schmiede was irrevocably on its way to bankruptcy and within a year it sold the Proust rights to the Munich publisher Reinhard Piper. Piper was eager to retain Benjamin and Hessel to produce a complete edition of the *Recherche*, but both authors had already begun to move to other projects. As early as September 1926, only a year after Benjamin had demonstrated great fervor for the project, he confided to Scholem his need to move on. "Unproductive involvement with a writer who so splendidly pursues goals that are similar to my own, at least former, goals occasionally induces something like symptoms of intestinal poisoning in me" (*Correspondence*, 305). The ecstasy of inspiration was sliding into fear of contamination. As for Piper, caught in the turmoil of high inflation, plans for the translation started to fall apart. Tedious negotiations led to general disinterest, until the project died slowly and quietly. *Die Herzogin von Guermantes*—a title that Benjamin and Hessel would not approve—did appear in 1930, but the German reading public was already moving in other, less open directions. The manuscript of *Sodom und Gomorrah*, portions of which Benjamin had enthusiastically recited to Laci as she directed her illegal communist theater in Riga, has to this day never been discovered.

See also 1910, 1929 (Autumn), 1936 (February)

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On the cusp of his fiftieth birthday, Hermann Hesse publishes *Der Steppenwolf*

The Lesson of the Magic Theater

Relegated to the fringes of the German literary canon in his lifetime, the writings of Hermann Hesse (1877–1962) achieved widespread recognition only after his death, and then primarily outside the German-language sphere. Colin Wilson's analysis *The Outsider* (1956) led the Beat Generation to take up Hesse as if he were one of their own. Hesse's greatest promulgator, however, was the Harvard psychologist Timothy Leary, who regarded his writings as an example of Buddhist-style interiority and the value of psychedelic experience. Staging performances based on the Magic Theater episode in Hesse's novel *Der Steppenwolf* (1927; *Steppenwolf*) during 1965 and 1966 in New York and at his summer camp in Millbrook, Leary encouraged his audience to take a trip

with the novel's protagonist, Harry Haller, metaphorically entering his bloodstream and participating with him in his strange experiences. By initiating a North American Hesse boom, Leary enabled young Americans of the 1960s to identify with an alienated character who could serve as a model for anti-establishment rebellion. Later, opponents of the Vietnam War found that Hesse's critique of militarism, as figured in one of the lessons Harry Haller learns in the Magic Theater, resonated with their own views. From America, this image of Hesse spread to the German student revolution of 1968. Asian readers, who had long been impressed by Hesse's push beyond Western culture and his incorporation of Eastern metaphysics and utopianism into his writings, became devoted fans of his novels *Demian* (1919) and *Siddhartha* (1922). Despite a relative lull in critical reception of Hesse's works in the later decades of the 20th century, a revival of interest now seems likely. The first fully annotated edition of Hesse's collected works, including his correspondence and political writings, is currently in preparation. Exhibitions and conferences in Berlin, London, and Hesse's hometown of Calw in Baden-Württemberg celebrated the 125th anniversary of the author's birth in 2002; and in the same year a new Hermann Hesse museum opened in Seoul, South Korea, with more than twenty-five hundred artifacts.

Although younger readers tend to be especially drawn to *Der Steppenwolf*, the work was in fact a product of the author's maturity. In arranging for the novel to appear in time for his fiftieth birthday, Hesse was not indulging in a mere conceit. Centered on a character who too was soon to turn fifty—and who was initially planning to commit suicide at this point—the novel in many ways takes stock of Hesse's own life. One contemporary reviewer deemed it “an exhausting confession at which all criticism can only fall silent” (Hsia, 263). Other critics compared the novel unfavorably to *Der Zauberberg* (1924; *The Magic Mountain*), which Thomas Mann had published in time for his own fiftieth birthday celebrations. It is perhaps unfair to compare Hesse's *Steppenwolf* to the philosophically ambitious *Zauberberg*; still, both novels attempt to present a critical portrait of contemporary society and to reconceive the role of the writer in the modern world.

Der Steppenwolf was first and foremost an indictment of modern bourgeois life. Its deep ambiguities are a product of the crisis of modernity during the Weimar Republic. The novel's protagonist, an aestheticized outsider, attempts to break out of the rigid strictures of a lifestyle he finds oppressive and to cut through unreflecting obeisance to cultural traditions he himself understands in more sophisticated terms. Torn between desire to belong to the domestic sphere and distaste for the forms it has taken, the protagonist sees himself divided between a human and a wolflike self. The excesses with which he experiments as he tries to resolve his inner dichotomy and the sexual explicitness of their portrayal left contemporary readers embarrassed and bewildered. They were also disturbed by the novel's critique of modern industrialism, a source of national pride for many Germans of the time.

During the First World War, Hesse had already gained a reputation as a

critic of modern militarism. Until 1917, when he was officially asked to desist, he was a prolific contributor of antiwar essays to newspapers and journals. In the postwar period, he continued to come under attack for his pacifist stance. Later, the Nazi regime declared his writings "unerwünschte Literatur" (undesirable literature) and, although he had now become a Swiss citizen, prohibited him from reprinting old works or publishing new ones during the period 1939–1945. In this respect, the regime bore out Hesse's suspicion of the Prussian Academy of the Arts when he resigned from his position as a foreign member of the creative writing section in 1931, declaring that in the event of another war, he believed its members would "deceive the people by order of the government about every vital issue." Hesse's receipt of the first Nobel Prize for literature awarded after the Second World War in 1946 marked a turning point in his career. In the same year, he also received the Frankfurt Goethe Prize. The two awards spoke to Hesse's lifelong antimilitarism and his emphasis on a "world-citizenry" modeled on that advocated by Goethe. Pilloried throughout much of his life, Hesse now became the best-selling 20th-century German author worldwide.

Hesse's appeal stems from his protagonists' quests for an identity that rejects the reified modern industrial (and now postmodern, postindustrial) age of late capitalism. His heroes wish to escape what Max Weber once termed the "iron cage"—the instrumentalization of the world and of the self. Hesse's most famous outsider figure, Harry Haller, a writer and self-styled "wolf of the steppes," chooses not to become part of the "never-ceasing machinery" that controls people's lives. He is appalled by the jingoistic professor who invites him to dinner, as well as by his landlady's narrow-minded businessman-nephew, who writes a preface for the confessional text that Haller leaves behind when he departs the town unannounced (*Steppenwolf*, 4; 78). By rejecting these aspects of the modern world, Haller adopts an aesthetic code of inwardness. His hero worship of Goethe and Mozart is symbolic of his obsession with *Kultur*—the high culture of literature, classical music and poetry, including his own. His elevation of these creative modes is as intense as his neo-Romantic, Nietzschean rejection of modern *Zivilisation*—a philistine, commodity-oriented attitude. Popularized by the cultural pessimism of Oswald Spengler's *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (1918–1922; *The Decline of the West*), the dichotomy of *Kultur* versus *Zivilisation* challenged long-held ideals deriving from the Enlightenment. Originally, the German goal of self-cultivation (*Bildung*) followed a path of humanistic integration, embracing culture and civilization, self and world. But Germany's belated industrialization at the end of the 19th century made it difficult for individuals to take this course. Haller's self-obsession is not entirely of his own making; it stems from the sociological conditions of modernity. Yet his rejection of Weimar Germany's technological and commercial progressivism, particularly its more militaristic applications, leaves him with few alternatives.

In the course of the story, Haller discovers a new path to self-development. In the surroundings of the modern city, beneficial experiences of diversity, de-

viance, and otherness can be found for the introverted individual. In developing this idea, Hesse turned to Freud, whose works he later admitted made a stronger impact on him than those of Jung, despite his own former experience as a patient of a Jungian psychoanalyst (Richards, 113). By maintaining exposure to the world, Freud suggests, we can encounter an alterity that also lies potentially within us. Haller overcomes his death wish during his nightly forays into the old quarter of the city (a fictional amalgam of Basel and Zurich). These excursions spark in him a seemingly uncharacteristic curiosity about modern mass culture's spectacular commodity consumption. The Magic Theater's vulgar flashing electric sign that first beckons Haller is a correlative of this new interest. He is then initiated into contemporary dancing, uninhibited sex, jazz music, and drug-induced visions by Hermine, her friend Maria, and the musician Pablo.

The uncannily recurring invitations to enter the mysterious Magic Theater—emanating from the city's bestial unconscious, so to speak—summon Haller to emerge from his frozen immobility as narcissist. The "Treatise on the Steppenwolf," an inset text that analyzes Haller from an external perspective, helps him to see that he has become untouchable and disconnected. After decades of striving for independence and a life free from bourgeois morals, he is now "incapable of relationship" (47). The treatise, however, has made him a reader of his own self, able to recognize his weaknesses. Haller now admits that his advocacy of pacifism conveniently kept him from the fate of others in the trenches of the Great War; he understands that his private investment income makes him a member of the bourgeoisie; and he feels ill at ease with such radically alternative lifestyles as Hermine and Pablo lead.

Most dangerous for Haller's chances of ever "healing" himself—a word Hesse himself later applied to the protagonist's trajectory in a foreword to a 1961 edition of the novel—is the fact that the urban domain with which he is to connect is itself so damaged. While his earlier turn away from the material world had led him to espouse the ideals of aesthetic modernism, it also left a void that needed to be filled. It is at the Magic Theater that Haller is able to act out his narcissistic identity on an imaginary level and to gain a symbolic glimpse into aspects of the world with which he was previously unwilling to become engaged.

Haller's entry into the Magic Theater finally occurs at a masked ball to which Hermine has invited him. The novel's famous culminating scene is marked by a series of narcissistic doublings that lead to a surreal orgy. Hermine starts off the doubling effect when she appears at the ball dressed as a handsome youth, the image of Haller's childhood friend Hermann. Her name is, of course, already the female version of Hermann (not coincidentally also the first name of Hesse himself); and now Hermine assumes the role of her masculine other. As in their previous encounters, she functions primarily as Harry Haller's *anima*, in the Jungian sense. From his own Jungian analysis, Hesse was familiar with this concept, expressed in Jung's writings by such formulations as "a meeting with oneself is, at first, the meeting with one's own shadow" (*Ar-*

chetypes, 20–21). During Haller's initial meeting with Hermine, the young woman advises him that her role would be "a kind of looking glass" for him; and he, in turn, confirmed that her face was a "magic mirror" (108). As Jung put it, "Whoever goes to himself risks a confrontation with himself. The mirror does not flatter, it faithfully shows whatever looks into it" (*Archetypes*, 20). Hermine's ability to alternate sexual identities as she pleases (not only does she attract Haller's desire, but she also gives him her lover, Maria) facilitates her role in opening up repressed areas of Haller's sexual identity: in desiring her, he can engage both his heterosexual and homosexual longings.

Pablo leads them both from the dance floor into the Magic Theater, where he gives them hallucinogens. Taking over from Hermine as Haller's double, Pablo plays several initiator roles for the protagonist: he teaches Haller "to play chess with the little figures" (217), and substitutes for him in the field of sexual conquest, making love with Hermine in his stead. The Magic Theater leads Haller beyond the dualistic "wolf" posture that the treatise had already criticized. In the theater, Harry Haller is in effect cured of his "mirror stage," as Lacan might have put it, precisely by the use of mirrors. Holding up a pocket mirror, Pablo makes Harry not only double in number, but legion. Only when Pablo throws the little mirror away does the Steppenwolf image fade, allowing the "multitudinous Harrys" to appear in a gigantic wall mirror. Harry Haller finally understands that countless possibilities lie within him, all and any of which can be discovered by means of the Magic Theater.

Every doorway that Harry enters in the Magic Theater's virtual reality can lead him either to blissful composition or violent decomposition of the self. Calling this process a *Figurenspiel* (game of figures), Pablo asks to play with "a few dozen" pieces of Harry's "personality broken up." This division of the self into pieces reaches a crisis when Haller enters into a world at war with its own machines and enthusiastically involves himself in a mass shooting of people driving by in automobiles. In this savage parody of what happens when humankind assumes the machine-perspective as an absolute, Haller and a friend shoot passing cars over the cliff, justifying their actions by citing a pacifist wish to rid the world of machines and capitalists in one fell swoop. As one of their dying victims points out, however, they themselves are using guns to achieve this aim. The atrocity of this scene articulates Hesse's own fears about the technologized modernity that exploded into being during the First World War, when human beings were used as pawns in a drawn-out, machine-driven conflict.

Another destructive scene involves the alternation of aggression and self-disgust, metaphorically encapsulated in the image of the Steppenwolf. While in the Magic Theater, Harry observes a reversal of roles in which a wolf becomes a trainer who teaches a human being to eat live animals. This scene holds up a mirror to Harry's own former desire to tear human society apart and live without regard for conventional morals. In the Magic Theater, woman is also portrayed as a commodity that can be destroyed at will: when a jealous Harry discovers the lovers Pablo and Hermine as they lie asleep and naked, he

stabs her to death. Fortunately, this turns out to occur only on the level of the theater's imagined reality. In the final episodes of the novel, Pablo revives Hermine as a diminutive sex object and puts her in his pocket as a "toy figure" (217). Hermine's "death" and her shrinking into a doll are a part of a stage set, the purpose of which is to reveal to Harry Haller the advantages of mutable identity. The culmination of the scenes in the Magic Theater is reached with Haller's final insight that "all the hundred thousand pieces of life's game were in my pocket" (217). Haller now recognizes Pablo as a "clever architect" (193) who can reset the pieces of the soul to play different personality games and create an individual's world afresh in new settings. At the close of the novel, Haller comes to understand that this is what he must now learn to do for himself.

How might this conclusion be evaluated? Certainly, the Magic Theater functions to open up the closed circuits of Harry Haller's mind—though, to be sure, only under the influence of drugs. Yet the reader is not given any sense of how the protagonist will negotiate his new understanding of engagement with the world. Perhaps one important motif is that of outwardly oriented play. Another is the idea of meeting external change with inner flexibility. Haller's recognition that the self can best become engaged with the world by marshaling its protean possibilities is perhaps the ultimate lesson of the Magic Theater.

See also 1791, 1882, 1899, 1906, 1918, 1937

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Janet Ward



1928, August 31

Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht's *Die Dreigroschenoper* premieres at the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm in Berlin

The Urform of Opera

"I'm not exactly asking for an opera here," says Macheath, the antihero of the Weimar Republic's theatrical smash-hit *Die Dreigroschenoper* (*The Threepenny Opera*). The occasion for the comment is a wedding reception, held in an illegally occupied stable. The wedding (by no means his first) is that of Macheath himself, a dashing, notorious criminal known as Mack the Knife. Given his dangerous lifestyle, several widows will presumably survive him, among them Polly, whom he has just married, and Lucy, daughter of his old

friend Tiger Brown, London's chief of police. Along with his excessive fondness for the bourgeois institution of marriage, Macheath displays nouveau riche pretensions to taste. When his men supply stolen furnishings, he claims to know the difference between Chippendale and Louis Quatorze. Later, under arrest and awaiting execution, though ultimately pardoned, he requests his favorite food: asparagus. Why does he receive a pardon? "So at least in opera," concludes his father-in-law and arch-rival Peachum, "you can see for once how mercy comes before justice." Neither Macheath nor his creators ask for an opera, but a connection to high culture is part of his, and the piece's, style.

If *Die Dreigroschenoper* is an opera, it is an opera with significant material and institutional differences. The premiere took place on August 31, 1928, in a small theater (Berlin's Theater am Schiffbauerdamm), not at an opera house. Playing to a broader audience than traditional opera, the first production also drew on a wide spectrum of performers from various theatrical backgrounds. No one in the cast was a professional opera singer. The instrumentalists, drawn from the world of dance bands, remained in full view on the stage as visual property—opera turned inside out, as it were. Yet thanks to these differences, Kurt Weill (1900–1950) and Bertolt Brecht (1898–1956), each in his way, managed to say something about the genre. "It presented us with the opportunity," as Weill remarked at the time, "to make 'opera' the subject matter for an evening in the theater." *Die Dreigroschenoper* is art about art.

The work begins, like many an 18th-century piece for the operatic stage, with an overture. While the musical idiom is recognizably related to baroque music, it is defamiliarized by linear counterpoint, bold modern harmonies, and an unusual instrumental line-up. Both texture and timbre impart a 1920s flavor, with two saxophones, two trumpets, a trombone, a banjo, timpani, and a harmonium. Underscoring the generic ambiguity, the playbill described *Die Dreigroschenoper* as a "play with music"; but it also informed the audience that they had come to watch an adaptation of an early 18th-century piece, *The Beggar's Opera*, presented "in a prologue and eight scenes after the English of John Gay." Brecht received credit not as author but as adaptor; his assistant Elisabeth Hauptmann provided the translation.

The idea of updating a theatrical classic informed the work from the beginning. Alerted to the huge success of Sir Nigel Playfair's revival of Gay's *Beggar's Opera* at the Lyric Theatre in Hammersmith, London—a production that opened on June 5, 1920, and ran for a record-breaking 1,463 performances over a three-year period—Brecht had Elisabeth Hauptmann prepare a working translation of the piece in the winter of 1927–28. The project soon took off when Brecht met the young impresario Ernst Josef Aufrecht, who was in search of a play for his new company at Schiffbauerdamm.

Between its inception in early 1928 and its first performance on August 31, eight or so months later, the hybrid opera-cum-play with music underwent numerous and substantial reworkings, especially during the chaotic final month of rehearsal under the direction of Erich Engel. Apart from Gay's text, Brecht also used "interpolated ballads" by François Villon and Rudyard