Wesleyan University The Honors College

As Nature Never Intended
by Hilde Domin

Translated by

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Translator's Note

A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step, and the first and most crucial step in doing a translation thesis is choosing the book. As a biology major, I first considered finding a book about biology. It didn't seem as if it would be difficult, as there are plenty of German and German-speaking biologists of note. As I began to research, however, I realized that even if I found a biological text, it would likely be rather dry, and I would be risking an ugly burnout if I lost interest. Beyond that, the most important texts were already in English. Even if I couldn't do a biology text, I was still hoping for a non-fiction work. The idea to do a biography came to me because my favorite book is Primo Levi's *The Periodic Table*, also a biography. The results were twofold: first, I started looking for biographies in particular, and second, influenced by the quality of Levi's book, I set my standards extremely high.

At the time I was in Germany, stopping at every used bookstore I could find and buying up books that seemed interesting, because I didn't know when I would see them again. I spent an hour crouched on the floor of a foul-smelling bookshop in Switzerland, only to leave with a book I soon discovered had already been translated. Asking German students about their favorite books only turned up books that had already been translated, or books that had been translated *into* German. I was constantly on the lookout for that elusive hint that would send me down the rabbit hole. Though I didn't know it yet, the moment came when I wrote down the name "Hilde Domin" in my travel journal as I toured "Heimat im Exil" at the Jewish Museum in Berlin.

Upon returning to Regensburg, I checked out all of Domin's books from the library. And lo and behold, she had written an autobiography. A biography in vignettes, tableaux—just like *The Periodic Table*, in fact. But it was something else that reeled me in completely: when I saw that there was a chapter called "On the difficulties of being a professional woman," and that it was an honest-to-God bulleted list on the topic, I was on board.

Von der Natur nicht vorgesehen is a collection of Hilde Domin's short works written between 1964 and 1974 for anthologies and periodicals, which, presumably, she felt amounted to something of a memoir. There are eighteen "chapters," plus a theoretical piece on exile in the appendix.

I chose the book because it was feminist, because it was sprinkled with poetry, because the writing was childlike as well as severe, and because it was a different story of being a German Jew. Instead of concentration camps, deportation, and "broken glass," the story Domin presents here is an almost enviable (as she herself concedes) journey through the stunning landscapes of Rome, the Andalusian coast, and the Dominican Republic. One might argue that it could be categorized as one of the few tales of happy endings that came out of this period of German history. Domin read the writing on the wall and left Germany in 1932. Hers is not the story of death in the camps, but of life in the world. The thing that gripped me most forcefully is this: she came back.

Her father, a lawyer, was shunned and her whole family forced out. They were pursued across the globe and met with suspicion wherever they landed. Domin's whole "German-Jewish milieu" (as she called it) was destroyed. And then she learned

about the concentration camps. But she came back. The idea both fascinates me and brings me to tears, because although it seems unimaginable that anyone in her position would want to go back, I understand it on some level. She was homesick, but not just in the classical sense. She wanted a home that she would never have to leave if she didn't want to. Where she could have a mailbox and a garden and to which she could come home at the end of the day or the journey. There is also the suggestion that her homecoming is at least partially due to the perception that the "true" Germany was most faithfully represented by those whom Hitler had chased out. Thus, as Domin herself says in the appendix, the theme of 'returning' is more prevalent than that of exile. A significant admission from a poet who identifies herself as an exile poet.

Mine was a loaded decision to translate prose written by a poet. A multilingual poet without formal training. Though it's hard to say which idiosyncrasies are due to the author's being a poet and which to her being Hilde Domin. Anyone who has translated from German to English will tell you that the long sentences and the liberal use of the extended modifier (non-existent in English) can make difficult the act of translating between these seemingly similar languages. To this mix, Domin adds plenty of parenthetical asides and long dashes. There were moments while I was translating paragraph-long sentences when I felt as if I were swimming through molasses.

Also problematic, if endearing, were Domin's tangents. Perhaps this feature is part of what makes her writing seem childlike at times; there are several instances in her chapter on "her homes" (and elsewhere) when the author gets carried away by the

details of one element of the story she is intending to tell. A few pages later she will stop abruptly and scold herself, restating the original topic at hand (though not always returning to it immediately!). With a lot of ambiguous pronouns, one could become lost between the two stories. But then again, sometimes there was absolutely no transition, and although the objects of the pronouns were clear, I found myself confused.

In addition, it was easy to get lost in the author's plentiful metaphors. Over and over, I found myself taking metaphors at face value or doing the opposite, interpreting descriptive elements as elaborate symbols. Specifically, trying to turn the death of a flesh-and-blood snake on a bookshelf into the symbolic slaughter of censorship. One of the risks of reading a poet writing in the second person in Santo Domingo.

Without a doubt the most challenging aspect of the book was Domin's inclination to sometimes forego fully expressing an idea. That is, leaving too much information out of a sentence. In light of her own assertion that she needs to train herself to "do more with less," it's unfortunate that at some points she does less with less. In her minimalist poetry, she succeeds in evoking an image in the reader's mind that fills in the blanks she leaves. A memorable example is the last line of the heftiest chapter in the book; a line the reader might expect to be of particular interest. In these situations, the five or ten minutes it took the thesis-writer and her advisor to figure out what the author meant was the easy part: if translating were as easy as comprehending, a project of this nature would hardly qualify as thesis-level work.

One of my favorite parts of translating this book was discovering the rule-breaking sentences. The book is full of incomplete sentences used for emphasis. For instance, as a Jew, Domin's mother wasn't allowed to perform in the opera: "Only one time did she sneak out and appear as Mignon when her family still lived in Frankfurt. Then never again." *Then never again*. No reader could ignore that.

Hilde Domin has a remarkable ability to see her own experiences objectively. At one point she describes being unable to judge her own poems, "at least not in the beginning," but she had clearly gotten over that problem by the time she wrote the pieces in *Von der Natur nicht vorgesehen* (i.e., between 1964 and 1974). In describing her run-in with Hitler's brother-in-law, she writes that "Chaplin himself couldn't have staged it more effectively." Even in what must have been an overwhelming experience, she is able to see what any onlooker might have. After her return to Heidelberg, where she had met her husband at the university almost twenty-five years earlier, she can see the cosmic element about the whole situation: it's as if the intervening years were just cut out.

Part of that ability to see objectively is an ability to call things as she sees them. This of course includes her going to a Nazi party meeting, realizing where things were headed, and deciding to flee the country. But it also includes the amused, awed acknowledgement of some far-off island where "Not one cat . . . has a tail." And what one might call a literal metaphor. While visiting a hospital, she comes upon the amputated leg of a black Dominican and sees that it is red on the inside, "Just as all legs, including yours, are red inside." She sees how people are literally all the

same on the inside, and works it into a reflection on the kinship and equality of all people.

I see Hilde Domin as an optimist (despite her assertion that she is a realist). After fleeing Hitler across two continents, she tells us that it wasn't so bad because she was with her husband. After her return, she took the optimistic position that the West Germany of the day was the most good-natured and liberal state that had ever existed on German soil. She doesn't believe that pure pessimism is possible. It's heartening that she calls herself a realist, because that means she sees what is really the best in everything.

Some book titles are not so easy to translate, but the task must nonetheless be met head-on. I didn't think "Not Intended By Nature" had any appeal at all, and I went back to the text. Slightly better was "As Nature Didn't Intend," but in the end I felt that using "never" was more evocative and more in the spirit of the passage.

Now, as Hilde would say, I can cut the cord and set my work free. This book evokes strong emotions in me. Certain passages never fail to bring me to tears. I often find myself quoting sections to my friends and asking them to read a chapter or two. As I release this piece, I would like to thank very sincerely my advisor Krishna Winston, without whom I would not have figured this whole thing out. Many thanks for picking up the slack as fast as I created it.

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My Father, as I recall him

When I think about it, my father was probably a high-ranking official. Not the highest, because he wasn't inclined toward pomp and had no gift for it, though very correct. He was loyal to his conscience. And to the Weimar Republic, which he considered to be an ideal state. He never told me stories about the Kaiser under whom he lived as a young man, only about democracy. Nor did he ever speak about the war, although he had served in it, and somewhere in a drawer lay an Iron Cross.

In reality, he was self-employed—he was a lawyer. I've heard it said that he was valued by judges because of his detailed briefs, which made trials move more smoothly, and because he never took a case that he didn't believe was "good," that is, worth representing. "Shady things" didn't suit him.

When I was already in my final year of school, my father took on a partner. I still remember how he came home and, disgusted, told us that his younger colleague had let his trials be postponed until they came before a favorably disposed judge. That would never have occurred to my father; not in his wildest dreams did it occur to him that trials could be manipulated. (Yet he came from a long line of lawyers, and a cousin of his with whom he'd been in law school was the star defender of the twenties.)

My father was not the same one my brother knew, while my mother seemed to an astonishing degree to be both of ours. My brother remembers being her favorite child. I, too, am quite sure that I was her favorite.

My mother had very simply managed to have two favorite children, although I kept it to myself, not wanting to hurt my brother's feelings. He is my younger brother, we're just the two of us. When I saw him again in 1954 after twenty-three or twenty-four years—the word is hardly appropriate—one can almost erase the "again." After such a long time there he stood at the Munich train station as I arrived from overseas. Before that we'd last seen each other in Cologne, in our parents' house, in 1931. There I discovered suddenly that we were both favorite children, but knowing two different fathers.

Because of that, I am very aware that my father was definitely not the man he may have been, but rather the one I remember. What I know for sure is that he was a man who came far too early to the train platform with us as we set off on our journeys. And that we had to eat very quickly, because his lunch break was so short. Even today we eat faster than every one else, my brother and I. The food would be served as soon as he rang. He walked home from his office, along the Hansaring, at that time a wide street, an *avenida*, with maple trees. On the left ran streetcar 16, which my mother rode for months alongside me as I first rode my bicycle to school. From the streetcar she would keep an eye on my expedition and assess the risks. You can already tell from this what kind of childhood I had. It seems almost adventurous, like preparation for a life like mine. I was allowed to do what I wanted, and someone held a hand over or under me and protected me. So my father walked from there, mother went with him and acted as nomenclator. From the other direction came the judges of the district superior court, which was in our neighborhood, and father usually didn't recognize them, or recognized them too late. "Here comes the district

court judge so-and-so, you have to greet him," my mother would say. I've inherited my father's terrible memory for faces, which is why I remember it so well. So my mother and I walked with my father, or I with him alone; my school was at first and then again later near my father's office. My brother never came along, his school was downtown. On the way, my father told me about his cases and we discussed the legal aspects. Or we talked about plays we had seen. Or about my essays for school. I had probably numbered all the problems that I wanted to ask him about from 1 to 20. My father was both honored and intimidated because I asked numerous, complex questions as a child, and wanted to know everything from him. I suspect that he prepared for our conversations by reading up on likely topics. On Sundays my father went to museums with me, like the Wallraf-Richartz Museum or the Art League. He taught me that Wouwerman painted white horses and who made the equestrian statues on the Cologne Bridge. At that time I was very curious about facts, and he taught me many. In those days I retained everything. Before school he went swimming with me. At first I wore a float on my back, then a cork belt around my stomach. Back then, people went to a small, wooden whitewashed pool on the Rhein. Ours was called "Noldes," it occurs to me. All of this was naturally after the war, in this case after the first one. He had been in the war and had sent us splendid, colorful postcards from Belgium, which we stuck in large albums. I still remember the poplar-lined avenues.

At one point—I was still very small—I became afraid that I was adopted, but decided to my great relief that I looked like both of my parents. I still do. Yet they

looked completely different from one another. When my father died, I looked at myself and saw my father. When my mother died, I saw her in the mirror.

I didn’t have an ‘oppressed’ childhood, quite the opposite. My father didn’t cast a dark shadow.

I was allowed to read as much as I wanted to. I was given, after a few battles, the pets that I wanted. I had rabbits and a dove in my room, briefly, however; the animals got rid of themselves, they stank so badly. (It was only the stray dogs I had befriended that I wasn’t allowed to bring home. That was one of the non-negotiable rules, I remember.) But I was allowed to milk cows and herd goats in the Eifel region. My father didn’t force me to do anything. I didn’t have to go for walks with my father, I was allowed to. I was allowed to go swimming, I was allowed to go to court with him. I was allowed to go to the theater with him. I was allowed to go away to Heidelberg to the university, and I was allowed to study what I wanted. Law, like my father, of course. And then I was allowed to give up law and study economics and sociology, disciplines that could “change the world.” I was allowed to have a working group with students and workers in my parents’ living room; they didn’t understand, but they went out and left the apartment to me, because I’d had an accident and couldn’t go out myself. I was allowed to go (emigrate) to the university in Rome with my later husband when we were still afraid of the institution of marriage, and we didn’t have to lie about it. I never had to be afraid to tell the truth.

(A fateful thing; despite my efforts, I never learned to lie properly. That is my parents’ fault, without question particularly my father’s. Had he been different, at

least my mother would have taught me to lie. She had it in her. But it simply didn't happen.)

I remember that one day I said to my mother—taking a page from Freud's analysis—that I could never get married, because my father was already married to her. That must've been around the time when my father was defending an innocent man to the brink of destroying his career, a case in which I took a passionate interest. (My father was actually a civil attorney, he seldom took on criminal cases.)

I ended up choosing a husband who was the opposite of my father in almost every way. I still remember the moment when that became suddenly clear to me. For reasons I have forgotten, as a student, I took a hat home with me—the hat of a male classmate. It hung in our hallway all through the Easter holidays. It was a round, squat hat, dark blue, a Borsalino. Not at all the type that would suit my father. One could scarcely imagine a hat less suited to him. Or even to my brother. Completely unrelated, alien to the family *par excellence*. The hat was like a large, foreign bird, enormously exotic. Every day, with a mixture of unease and curiosity, I looked at this hat that could hold its own with my father's.

I remember how my father had a clash with the district attorney during a trial. (In those days, there was no news magazine like *Der Spiegel*, but if *Der Spiegel* had existed, my father would not have been the man to exploit it, although the conduct of the case offered many opportunities.) Incensed, my father left the courtroom, banging the door closed behind him. The billowing black robe made his exit even more

dramatic. Before the judge could suspend the hearing, I jumped up (I had been sitting in the front row) and rushed out into the corridor after my father. It was completely improper, naturally. Of course, it was also unusual for a child of twelve to be in court rather than in school.

I ended my school career in my father's robe. It was the celebration after the final exams. Although it was the robe of a defender, I read an indictment. (I had totally forgotten this incident until I ran into an old friend recently who reminded me of it.) The indictment was in rhyme; it was the paraphrase of a Tucholsky poem and concluded with the alternating refrain "there is no time" and "that's what time is for." Today one would call it a critique of the curriculum. There was plenty of laughter, too much. After this display in my father's robe, there was talk about withholding my diploma. I was, in complete contrast to my father, an *enfant terrible*.

My mother had an explosive temperament. She was also capable of being unfair. Not my father. Sometimes, rarely, I will meet a person as inflexible, as sincere, as incapable of evil—even the supposition of evil—as my father. There is great dignity in people who are so upright that opportunism never crosses their mind. And also a great—and admirable—helplessness.

I speak much more frequently of my mother than of my father. That was true even when they were both still alive. I always felt it was unfair.

Today I could analyze to what extent he was typical of his generation or particular circumstances and why people behave so differently now. But why should I dissect him, here and now? I think of him today as I remember him. It's important that he was almost fifty when I was ten. At that time many people married late. The women were much younger.

My father was predictable so long as my life was. There was a set routine that he determined. Yet it was a routine he so quietly and unobtrusively dictated that one never gave it another thought. Perhaps my mother also established this routine; it seemed plausible at times; but in the end it really was my father who made it possible and sanctioned it. My father admired my mother, and said so frequently. It was part of our way of life that my father backed my mother up and supported her in everything. We felt a bit closer to her; we were her charges after all. Maybe that's why I never really understood my father, though we were constantly talking. That changed when the predictability stopped. When my parents fled and my father committed the first and only illegal act in his life: On their silver wedding anniversary my parents took an excursion to the Belgian border on the streetcar. Then a short stroll and they were out of Germany. That was shortly after Jewish attorneys were ignominiously driven in trucks through Cologne, a fate my father was spared—someone had warned him. And shortly after Germany left the League of Nations, in which my father believed. In any case, though, it was a time when I wrote to my parents daily, saying "I can't sleep as long as you are in Germany."

That was when my father began a life without his career, in a rented room with my mother. A daily test in being useless on which he could hardly give himself a passing grade. At first it made his life both easier and harder that this illegal existence, this secret emigration, took on the aspect of a tragedy, a rejection of his whole life. For a long time he was on the verge of suicide. In that state he barely noticed his ruined career. But at that point I wasn't living with my parents, and only experienced their hardships only by mail.

When I saw my father again in 1939 in England, he was as reliable and correct as ever. But he felt lost, in a permanent state of self-indictment. It was barely perceptible, however, because he was very composed and very helpful and didn't complain; instead he endeavored to learn perfect English. He never got over it that the words had so many meanings. Even in good weather he went out with an umbrella as required (there was a sort of self-imposed order among the émigrés, who intended to facilitate their assimilation with German thoroughness). He spoke only English on the street, as was likewise expected of émigrés, and always walked to the next fare zone for the bus. Instead of phoning, he always wrote his acquaintances postcards—a postcard cost less than a phone call and he had no source of income. Despite that, he had immediately rented us a large, bright room when we had to get out of Italy, and gave us money daily so that we could go to museums and eat at a Lyon's. My parents sent us out for our own good, and so that we got used to looking at Italian paintings, something for which the National Gallery was ideal, while they, while all of us, lived in total deprivation.

As he had paid for our second—involuntary—emigration, because we had nothing, he paid (he was then almost 70) for our third, and thereby literally shared with us his last money, as little as there was, so that we didn't have to disembark penniless. Impoverishment was one aspect of the "permanent state of emigration," the intercontinental flight from Hitler.

All of this fit into the image I had of my father, and didn't particularly surprise me. I would have been surprised if he *hadn't* done it. At the same time, it's not quite right to say, "My father helped us." I could just as well say, "My mother helped us." They were inseparable. With her temperament and her imagination, her almost militant willingness to sacrifice, she was the one from whom the impulse came. What surprised and concerned me—and has remained through the years my most upsetting memory of my father: On the day that the war broke out, or the day after (we were in a little town on the Bristol Channel, where we each had, they and we, a room in a tiny boarding house), I was alone with my father for a moment by chance. It was in my parents' room. Suddenly he put his arms around me, and sobbing, pulled me to himself, and we lay on his bed: I felt his body, shaken by weeping. Never before had my father so much as hugged me. And never before—so it seemed then and so it seems still—had I seen him cry. He was crying for me. Because he couldn't protect me.

"I don't know him at all," I thought, as I lay in his arms. "He is a completely different person." For a moment, it upset me more than the war, or at the least just as much. (Only now, as I write this, does it strike me that he was the same man who protested so vehemently when he thought he had witnessed a violation of the law.

A year later he was dead. On the day of our departure for South America he was detained, as a German. As fear of the '5th Column' escalated, the designation "Refugee from Nazi Oppression" all at once became worthless. He was sent to a camp, and had to sleep out in the open on benches, an elderly man. At least it was summer. He was set free when his visa arrived. He had been on a waiting list and was given permission to go to New York with my mother. I never saw him again. One day an acquaintance approached me and said in an uneasy voice, "Have you heard from your father?" At that moment, I had a letter from him on my desk—the mail took a week. He was already dead. In the letter was bibliographic information that he had copied down at the New York Public Library for my husband's work. It was later recounted to me that he had tried up to the last minute to speak perfect English with the nurse. Despite his intelligence, he had no gift for languages.

He has no grave. About that, I cannot speak.

It is easier to reminisce about a father who was persecuted and whose life was destroyed than about one who was a persecutor. Or who watched, or even looked away, as others were persecuted. The victim of persecution has, with all that suffering, this one advantage: He is absolved of accountability. *His* defenselessness is absolute.

I Write, Because I Write

Why a person does what she does

Why I write? It wasn't supposed to happen. It didn't need to happen. You don't live every life that you might. It happened. Nothing can be undone. It is my second life. Everyone smiles when I say that, as if it were a figure of speech. When they see the photos, they become instantly serious. Because I *am* two people. The one before and the one since.

I hadn't planned it, it just happened. Like being run over. Or like falling in love. You can't do anything, it just happens.

"I wrote a poem," I said to him. In the morning, perhaps. Probably in the morning.

"You don't write poetry," he said disapprovingly.

"Until yesterday," I said, cautiously.

"As if the cat suddenly started talking," he answered. "So it's that easy?" he said, indignantly, when, after much resistance, he looked at the poem.

"Why?" I said, "What's so easy?"

"Writing poetry," he said.

"You've never done it before! It's a poem!" With that, he slammed the door shut behind him. When I heard the door slam, I knew it was a poem.

I had typed the poem up as soon as I got out of bed. That same day I translated it into Spanish. Just like that. Without any other reason, just to try it out and see if the text held up. As you would evaluate a fabric by examining the wrong side. Suddenly it was there; I wanted to see what was what. My trade was translating the texts of others into (and out of) diverse languages. Yet a poem was almost an afterthought. I wasn't proud of it, I just made a note of it. The poem didn't separate itself from me at that point. I don't know if I ever caught sight of it. (Normally poems pull away, make themselves independent, ever faster. "Words don't turn their head/ they stand up/ immediately/ and go,"[1] like the objectification that I have just described, this astonishing task.) I wrote more poems. I was a dying woman who wrote poems to outrun death. As long as I was writing, I was alive. The skill I'd had for a long time. I had never needed it. I needed it now.

It is a self-duplication. The inside becomes the outside, and the other way around. An objectification process, a fluke of creative work (as Marx defines it). The egregious foreign feeling is conquered, unless a person dies or takes her own life.

Lorca says that the quicksilver on the back of mirrors should tear. I thought that, too. The poem should have altered a reality that was unlivable. It altered itself. About that, I cannot say anything, nor should I. I am supposed to speak about myself, that is the topic. I write, because I write, ever since I began to write. Every other explanation is after the fact. It is language. Since I've had this kind of association with language, since she has become my partner, I can't get away. I have a passion for giving her these little nudges and feeling the impact. Time comes to a complete stop, like when making love. It is a schizophrenic activity, at once active and passive.

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[1] *Ich will dich,* p. 7.

A form of wizardry, an act of liberation through language. The words mean things. Things become changed or rearranged depending on the combinations of words. They reorder themselves. In a totally different sphere, where you are simultaneously inside but even more outside and for that very reason free from that which is now captured in words and visibly, audibly detached from the "I."

My first poem, that was already my life. That which I call my second life. That was almost twenty years ago. As long as my first life, actually, not counting childhood. I recently published a selection of my earliest poems, written in 1951-1952. It's just a small volume. Heinz Mack drafted about fifty illustrations for it, of which I was allowed to choose three. And one for the cover. That was in 1968.[2] They were still very new. And maybe they were younger than I am now. As young as Mack is today. They are love and bed poems, so they *do* something that affects the reality of love. Just as Lorca insisted on. (Strangely enough it occurs that my poems intervene in the lives of strangers. Purely by coincidence one learns sometimes that they've done something for one person or another.)

But it's not for that reason that I write, though it makes me happy. Likewise that the lawyer Fritz Bauer could use my poem "Whoever it Affects" in his lectures about "blind obedience" made me happy when I heard it from him much later. That's what poems are for: so they can be used for the archetypal situation. In this case, the active abstention from injustice. That's what poems are for. But one writes them because one writes them. Because one must. After that they have consequences, that's only natural, in that they were born of compelling reasons and have served as models, stripped of the chance properties of the singular experience that provoked them.

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[2] *Höhlenbilder, Gedichte 1951/1952.* Limited edition with graphics by Heinz Mack.

Sometimes I've had the opportunity myself to put my poems to use. I'd like to describe such an instance.

I was traveling back to Seefeld, our vacation residence, from Ulm, where I had done a reading as a guest of Inge Aicher-Scholl. It was already very late; besides me there was only one other person in the second class car. I believe I was reading proofs. At the Austrian border came the customs check. That familiar ritual. "Do you have . . . ?" "No I don't have . . . " A formality these days. The official moved along. Suddenly it was no longer a formality. The woman in the rear of the car had to open her small suitcase and let the contents be pawed over, and was sternly interrogated. I had become more attentive at this unequal treatment. She looked shabby. Are poorly dressed people especially suspect of carrying contraband? "And no gifts?" I heard him ask. "Who would I be bringing anything to!" That had a bleakly persuasive ring, and the customs officer backed off. I stood up and sat down on the wooden bench across from her. "You're a refugee?" I said. "Leave me alone," she replied. "I was a refugee, too, I understand." "Leave me alone, I don't want to talk." "There were two of us, you know. And very, very young. That was a bit better. But we had to keep going, on and on. We were fleeing from Hitler. That was worse. Are you all alone?" "I have no one." She had been a seamstress at home, had found work as a milkmaid, felt very lost. A woman in her late thirties, maybe, a face you would not remember. Pale and sullen from sheer desolation.

"I want to read you something," I said, "I wrote about it, what it's like. I am what they used to call a poet."

"I'm only a seamstress," she said, "and now a milkmaid. I don't read books."

"It's really simple," I said, "and if you want to hear it, I will read it several times. You'll understand it then."

I read it three times. I usually read something twice. Poems, naturally, not prose. I read her the first poem in my first volume.

> A person must be able to go away
> and still be like a tree
> as if roots remained in the ground
> as if the landscape moved and we stayed in place . . .[3]

And then I read her a selection from *The Second Paradise*. And although it was prose, I read it three times, one after another, because she wanted to hear it multiple times, just like my audience in Ulm. This is what I read her:

She herself still remembered clearly the empathy she had felt when she learned in school about the displaced and persecuted people of earlier centuries, about inhuman events from the days when there were still diseases like plague and leprosy. They were separated from all that by a deep trench, as from beasts of prey in a zoo . . . she as well as the other children in the class. They were safe, little girls with curls or pigtails, and they learned all these things that dated so far back that they could hardly be true. They didn't think they were safe. They were safe. That one or two of them were already destined to be thrown to the carnivorous beasts, that it was already decided which of them would have to run for her life and who could stay an observer, and that in truth, there was no question of a protective trench—all that would never have occurred to them. Not once, for instance, later when, already a

[3] *Nur eine Rose als Stütze*, p. 9.

student, she saw a young Russian cry with homesickness at the sight of blooming lilacs, did she have anything but compassion for a stranger's fate, glimpsed in passing. Not something one could be personally threatened by. "Strange," she had thought, "just like those luckless victims of persecution that moved me as a child. And now I'm looking at one." She still recalled exactly the school desk, her place, the second one on the right next to the window, the dark brown wood of the desk, and what she had felt as she heard about persecution for the first time in her life. People were burnt alive, in barns and other buildings where they had been gathered. A few fled, leaving everything behind, learning much later, somewhere, by chance, of the deaths of their loved ones. She made timid attempts to comfort the young Russian, but he shook his head and changed the subject, and she understood that there could be no solace for him.

She had an almost reverent dread of this incurable misfortune. Since he had cried over the lilacs she always felt as if she were walking next to a blind person to whom one doesn't dare offer an arm, lest one remind him of his blindness. But still one walks beside him, in case he should need support. Yet nobody expects to go blind. One can fear it like a remote possibility. One who has never been cast out doesn't fear being cast out. One who has never been persecuted does not fear persecution. Today maybe that is different, today there is a great fraternalism among people. Everyone knows that it can befall him too. Does everyone know that? It has been shown by so many examples, this Trial of Everyman.

"When someone shaves your neighbor, lather your own chin," say the Spaniards, who have looked misfortune in the eye. "Something that has happened to

you and could happen to you again," our people say, maybe still, and feel untouchable. As she herself had felt untouchable until the time came when she belonged to the always-growing brotherhood of the persecuted. Are they not—today—the majority?[4]

"I'm in there too," said the woman. She was no longer the same woman, sullen from homesickness and loneliness, a dead face, without the marks of age but without youth. She beamed. "I'm in there too!" The train stopped. She didn't say anything else, maybe she didn't even say 'thanks,' maybe she just nodded, beaming with delight. Then she headed into the darkness in one direction, I in the other.

They used to call that the "consolation of art." Today the "consolation" has fallen into disrepute almost as much as "beauty"; we are allergic to the dressing-up of reality. This woman was no patron of beauteous literature. Nor was it aesthetic pleasure that had cheered her up. Rather, she had recognized herself in the paradigm of that experience; she had been redeemed from her isolation, integrated into a societal and political pattern. In other words, she saw her situation from the outside and understood it. What we call objectification. Was this woman now capable of "altering" her situation, unlike before, when she just dully suffered? Anyone who is honest knows that she couldn't change, either before the fact or after, what politicians have been ruining for decades. I see her going to the ballot box as a woman who understands the situation and votes more intelligently than in the dull pain of someone who merely suffers, who falls for every slogan. But even that is not the most important thing. The most important thing was that she could feel integrated into the

[4] *Das zweite Paradies,* p. 100 ff.

great scheme of which we are all just a part. A model that we, perhaps, through rational efforts, can improve.

That made my reading in the empty second-class compartment into something meaningful. And because of that, I got more pleasure from it than from an evening reading to a large audience that understands literature.

After the fact, something that a person wrote because he had to write it to objectify his own experiences acquires a sort of societal function and condenses it into something exemplary. Writing is without a “point.” That which is written finds its “point”: on its way from the author to the reader.

What Can Happen With Poems

I

In the spring of ’62, I received a letter from Bochum, where I had read at the college for adult education. Two teachers, a married couple, informed me: “We’re building the house . . . a little house/ with a white wall/ for the evening sun.”[5] And they told me that they were émigrés from Thuringia.

Many times my book was read by refugees from the East, because it dealt with leaving in general. People who didn’t know any better thought I was one of them. Anyway, it doesn’t matter from what the author is fleeing, so long as only the experience is a universal one. Those details in the house were more concrete. “The white wall for the evening sun will be hard to achieve here,” I wrote back. “I wrote that in Spain.” To be more precise, I wrote it in the “Verdad” on the Rio de la Miel in 1957, where the “Andalusian Cat”[6] lived with us. This landscape between Fuengirola and Torremolinos, . . . which is more elusive today than Hölderlin’s Heidelberg. I also recall this landscape in one of the “dreams.”[7] I was thinking of an Andalusian farmhouse, something truly solid, with thick, whitewashed walls, much more farmlike than the house in which the “cat” lived with us.

“The many pointy hillocks along the coast,” that is the landscape of my desire; once a week, I want to drive back to that coast, buried under the masses of concrete of a Chicago-style shoreline. Only recently debated, but not reversible. Andalusian exile

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[5] *Nur eine Rose als Stütze*, p. 22.
[6] Cf. bottom of p. 68.
[7] *Das zweite Paradies*, p. 148 f.

poets also have a lifelong homesickness for this landscape. “A miracle such as happens only rarely in life,” Luis Cernuda wrote to me about his time there.

“Still,” replied the Thuringians from Bochum, “we’re building that exact house.” The year after that they got me an invitation from the literary society there, one of the most active in those days. I was picked up at the train station, as for most readings. They were waiting for me and waved a bouquet and my book in the air to identify themselves. For my benefit—they knew me. I had pictured them differently, because a person signs a lot of books, and I had been thinking of a lean, unremarkable teacher who was also there. They weren’t like that; they were young and lively and more on the chubby side. And immediately I was driven to my house.

Let us go inland . . .
and build me a house.

A small house
with a white wall
for the evening light . . .
A house
next to an apple tree
or an olive tree,
past which the wind
blows
like a hunter, whose hunt
is not concerned
with us.

I had worried before my arrival about my ineptitude at lying. But there it was on the outskirts of Bochum: an Andalusian house. Well, almost. The couple had never been there. The house is whitewashed inside and out like the houses in Andalusia,

simply and generously. A study. Flat roof, thick walls. I couldn't believe my eyes. As if I'd sent a blueprint. Inside, one of the walls is painted slate-color under the window and serves as a guestbook. A piece of chalk was already lying next to the coffee cup. Every guest—famous names were already included—had written a simple inscription on the wall under the window.

The next day I bought a thick felt tip pen and looked for an inconspicuous spot. Up top, they said, above the cross beam is where the motto is supposed to go. I thought of the 'magic words'[8] that are inscribed on the carrying beam of a friend's entry hall. "Not a chance," I said, "I'd rather put it in the bathroom. As private as possible." But then I found what I was looking for. And I wrote in cursive, in my everyday hand, at a right angle to the floor, a kind of protective charm: "A house, past which the wind blows like a hunter, whose hunt is not concerned with us." When I got to "us" I had exactly reached the floor; I had begun under the ceiling. I wrote it on a likewise whitewashed beam that formed a line between the bricks, white on white. When I was done, I saw that it was a supporting beam. The inscription is there and not there, as a magical formula should be. You recognize it only when you tilt your head. Otherwise it's nothing more than a wavy line, a sort of ornamentation. "Every morning when I wake up, I go to that beam and tilt my head," wrote the teacher's wife after my departure. But that makes sense only to those who know the anxiety of not being allowed to stay.

II

[8] *Urworte*—Trans.

Not less curious was the collision between poetry and reality that I experienced in 1964 at a reading in the Cantatesaal in Frankfurt, only the other way around: reality in this case preceded the poem—the author discovered belatedly what the poem had known all along.

Before the reading S. Fischer Verlag gave me a letter from an old woman, a resident of a Jewish nursing home, who regretted that her poor health prevented her from coming. She had "one" of those spoons I spoke about in my poem:[9]

> . . . You
> don't smell like staying
>
> One spoon is better than two.
> Hang it around your neck,
> you may have one,
> because with your hand
> the hot food is too difficult to scoop.

And she had worn it around her neck on a string in the concentration camp. That was new to me, though it fit well. Because I had come to write these lines in horror at the cemetery desecrations in the Rhineland and in my hometown of Cologne in the winter of '60-61. The first desecrations of Jewish cemeteries since the Nazi era. We had just decided to return permanently to Heidelberg. At the time I had moved into a tiny furnished apartment in Madrid. The shock made me physically incapable of buying even the smallest necessary item.

> Don't acclimate.
> You must not acclimate.
> A rose is a rose,

[9] *Rückkehr der Schiffe,* p. 49.

But a home
is not a home.
Say no to the enticing trinket
that is wagging its tail at you

from the shop window.
You don't need a lap dog. You
don't smell like staying.

The spoon seemed to me the minimum possession of the perpetually persecuted, I took it for a fear metaphor, but still a metaphor. It suddenly came out that in my extreme dismay, I had fished out and named a concrete object from the inventory of abhorrent reality. The poem doesn't create anything, it just calls it by name.

If I think of it, by the way, what agitation those cemetery desecrations in 1960 and 1961 aroused. I remember that Günter Eich and Ilse Aichinger wrote to me about it and how we discussed whether the young writers, and everyone who felt as they did, should wear yellow stars in protest. And that's only thirteen years ago.

How thick our skins, how strong our stomachs have gotten again since then: We swallow almost everything. Not just in this country.

III

In that same year, I read at a gathering of young booksellers in Düsseldorf. After the reading a girl came up to me and requested that I write a specific line in the book she had brought with her.

Two or three weeks later I received a letter from a young bookseller in Stuttgart: "Gudrun was at the young bookseller's convention in Düsseldorf. And there

you wrote in her book with your own hand the line with which I won her heart. Just as I had dreamt. Your poem helped me break through to her," that or something similar is what he wrote.

I remember that at the time I was almost angry. That poem had never "helped" me. Poems sometimes "do" something, so why not for the author? (Since then I have forgotten which line was so able and also what it was supposed to have "done" for me.)

But as I look through my correspondence with the Eichs once more, because of the yellow stars, I stumbled across the letter from the bookseller, because his name happened to begin with D. And there I find the line again. "Actually it was a few lines from 'There Will Be No One After Us,'" he wrote, and quoted this:

> It is unimportant
> what we write or say
> except for you or for me . . .
> We are just made for this one day,
> just for these, for ours . . .
> Nothing overlooked.
> Every time is the last
> or could be.[10]

"Nothing overlooked" is apparently what I wrote for Gudrun in my book that day. And I recall very vaguely the circumstances under which the poem came to me. Today I read the poem very differently. The last time I read it to a German audience was in the "International Bookstore" in Mexico in 1971. I had, after a few weeks' delay, just received a batch of German newspapers. Bundled like that, they had a

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[10] *Nur eine Rose als Stütze,* p. 76 ff.

terrifying effect on me: The malice, the contempt for others, the whole wannabe pretentiousness of an inhumane future. Perhaps I am particularly sensitive to such things. As I read:

> Our shadows fall
> into the void . . .
> The way we go
> few have gone . . .

I couldn't read any farther. I explained to the shocked audience, among them the German ambassador, that the German newspapers that I had seen again for the first time after weeks were plainly inhumane, and instead I read a piece of prose, probably something about the 'one-eared tomcat.'

Yes, I recall that the poem was originally a love poem. Now it has become acutely political. Because poems change, transform themselves according to the current reality. For that reason, poems stay alive and can always be read anew and differently, for decades and sometimes even for centuries, depending on the time and place.

By the way, I completely agree with Jean Paul: "The poet must have made himself cold enough that he can make others warm." "Warmth of the mouth," he said is questionable: "Just as a warm nose on a dog means it's ill."[11] (Incidentally, the other way around, a clown isn't allowed to laugh.)

The author is always on the tipping point between proximity and distance. I don't think it's anything personal, but rather a characteristic of poetry, something

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[11] *Vorschule der Ästhetik,* 3, II.

paradoxical that is inherent. I myself prefer to read from inside the poem, as if I reside in it. But like something totally ordinary.

Only once something happened to me that was as embarrassing as that moment in the bookstore in Mexico: That was in Hamburg. My voice failed me. The listeners in the first row stood up and ran to me, evidently meaning to comfort me. Behind me was the wall, I had no way to escape. I would've liked to have run away from their comfort. The author should give only his voice to the poems when he reads. As a person he should forget himself. At least that is how it seems to me. Although I don't know if it seems like that for my listeners. Perhaps it does. In the beginning, between one poem and the next, I would timidly ask, "Should I stop there?" I think it was in Stuttgart—I remember the very special audience—there was someone, perhaps Goes, who had the good sense to say: "Don't do that, it bothers us." From then on it was clear to me once and for all that it doesn't matter to the public if a person is self-conscious or not. And that he, to the extent he can manage, has only to be the interpreter of the poems, yet he is completely present. And his listeners are also individually present with him while he reads, regardless of how many people are sitting there.

I, at least, differentiate exactly and read often for someone or other, one or many, friends or strangers, who emerge from the public like lights going on. (The late Peter Szondi and the elderly Eppelsheimer could empty a hall with the intensity of their listening. Szondi resembled a suction device, he almost pulled the speaker off the podium, as if one were being devoured headfirst.)

As the result of a reading, even this is self-evident, mutual trust can develop that penetrates the most intimate sphere. Poems are one of the shortest paths from person to person, instantly replacing years of acquaintance. The traveling poet, whom nobody in town knows, is almost like a confessor, or a professional recipient of intimate problems. It is his job not to shy away from his experiences, that is, from reality, but rather to formulate them. In other words, his job is truthfulness, which in turn automatically makes him an uncomfortable contemporary. According to the time in which he lives. So surely today as well.

The collisions reported here between poetry and reality came to my attention purely by coincidence—a reality that is embodied in the text and merely 'emerges,' when turned on, as everyone finds self-evident with electronic devices, just not with a poem—were almost always associated with readings, thus the author, simply becomes witness to his poem.

The letters could naturally have come without a reading and often did. My first letters from readers, also purely by coincidence, came from my hometown, from Cologne. The first excited reception in a stranger's house, that was in Cologne. The first students who wrote to me wrote to me, from a German literature seminar in Cologne. And of course I also read a few times in Cologne and met the letter writers. It is normal. That readers who write to someone also meet that person some day. For example, a schoolgirl who received a dumb grade in German class for a clever text interpretation. (In such cases I even intervene.)

The poem itself does not depend on a personal encounter that includes the author (and the reader); it can get by without him. The most important difference is that a story may come to light that the author wouldn't ordinarily come to know.

IV

Almost the strangest encounter was the Sunday morning in the church in Harlem. Janheinz Jahn had brought us there, twelve PEN members. There we perched, eleven white chickens, quite far to the front in the enormous sanctuary. All around us the blacks were in their Sunday best, as is traditional among WASPS: with handbags and gloves and straw hats, even the children, as in small-town America or in old photos. As if the bourgeois outfits guaranteed more civil rights. A revival service. First the lay preachers, everyone who felt called. Mostly women, with high, wailing voices. Very verbose and emotional. Then came the minister, even in the worldly sense the lord of the church, which was built with the funds collected after his sermons: cathedral-sized and neo-Gothic, naturally.

He had been informed of our attendance, he knew that we were Germans and writers. And he had seized the opportunity to make us demonstration objects, as will become clear.

In moving words, because he was a splendid orator, which the scale of his church reflected, he exhorted the congregation to a righteous life, pleasing to God and man. Then equality and salvation from their oppressors would be theirs on earth. Just as the Lord had saved the Jewish people from the German Master Race and overthrown the men of racial hatred. As he had given the Jews the promised

homeland, a new Jerusalem, while still on earth, so too would he keep his promise to them, those present, and grant them a free and worthy existence. In their time on earth and for eternity. If only they would work and not get drunk and not beat their wives and children. Will you do that? (*Oh yes, we will, we will, Our Lord.* They promised, sobbing.) So that God will save you, and you will, like the Jews, receive a new Zion.

It was appalling how everyone believed in the concrete reward for virtue, at least for the half hour or the hour that the sermon lasted. As if it depended solely on their good behavior whether everything would be different. Maybe they'd even turn white. (It was 1966, so before "Black is Beautiful.") I remembered the anxiety and the hope with which mulattos in the Antilles examine their newborns: How the child came out of the womb, *cómo salió*. Had it turned out a shade lighter or darker? And how would the hair be, smooth or kinky? (The Mendelian laws, a dreadful lottery for those in question.) I began to cry, too, one of the PEN women cried, while the men felt slightly uncomfortable for a moment. At the same time, the minister restrained himself because of our presence and didn't bring the congregation to the usual visions, convulsions, and swooning, as Jahn told us afterwards. After the sermon, as many people went to the front to speak with the minister and formed a line, I jotted down a few lines that had occurred to me from the poem "Someday."

> How the tears are the same on every face
> every skin color
> across the continents, the centuries . . . [12]

I wrote it on a slip of paper, in German and in English, and gave the paper to a woman in the row in front of us. But she said I should bring it to him myself. And

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[12] *Hier,* p. 59.

before I could think it over, I was pushed out of the row into the aisle and inched toward the front with the others. To all those present it must have been astonishing, only to me was it immediately quite natural, because I'd lived in the Antilles for twelve years. And what was definitely no miracle was to him a sign of a particular kind. The unexpected.

I might have ruined everything if I had told him that I myself was only one of the saved. I came to him as a German PEN author, maybe deep-down a racist, and brought him this message of fraternity. A sign.

Incidentally, I wasn't in the mood for explanations. And what could I have said beyond these lines that conveys that zoological distinctions are inhumane and that weeping is human. That went for me as well as him. Because I had these lines, I also approached him of course in the name of all of us who had been the object of the sermon. And because such lines have to be delivered, when the recipient emerges so obviously. When they are 'a useful intervention,' as people call it in discussions today. The PEN colleagues, who were waiting for me in front of the church, were of an entirely different mind, nervous, as indeed the whole morning had made them. It was clear that they took me for an eccentric. With one exception. I've already said that two of us had cried, the woman sitting next to me and I. We cried for the opposite reason of the believers around us: We cried as realists.

And as I write this sentence, "We cried as realists," it occurs to me suddenly, for the first time, that Joy Weisenborn (the name is significant now), was the wife of one of the 'saved,' a member of the resistance, who had seen Moabit from the inside

under the Nazis. “He who turns on the lamp, knows/ his hand will be cold/ as the latch/ before the next person turns the lamp off . . . ” “Moabit, 1942.”

V

At some point after a death, the family called me up and asked me to read one more poem after the minister had spoken; the deceased had loved my poetry. If he could still hear, the last voice should be mine, for him. I had known him in passing; I had been in his house a few times. I was dismayed by the request, but I couldn’t refuse. So I sat in the church next to the family, among those most affected. And the minister, who had been notified, waited a moment, so that nobody would get up and I would have the chance to approach the casket before it was engulfed (the dead man was cremated). Around that time I had written a very short poem. That’s what I recited: “The Summons” is the title and it is in *Return of the Ships* (1962). So it must have been in the first year after my return to Heidelberg.

“The Summons”

The gardener calls me.

In the ground his flowers
are blue.

Deep in the ground
his flowers
are blue.

Reading for the dead, or at least for his wife and children, as the last voice that they will remember forever when they think of the funeral, that has no resemblance at all to a reading in a hall or a train car or anywhere else. I cannot speak about it, and even a minister would not understand, because to him it's routine, sadly. — The next day the widow sent me the dead man's favorite drinking glass with lilies of the valley in it. It is a very delicate glass from the 18th century. *Beaucoup vous connoitre/ C'est beaucoup vous aimer* it says on it in somewhat old-fashioned French. I use it sometimes for flowers.

Among Acrobats and Birds

Almost a curriculum vitae

I, H. D., am astoundingly young. I finally came into the world in 1951. Crying, like everyone coming into the world. It was not in Germany, although German is my mother tongue. Spanish was being spoken and the front yard was full of coconut palms. There were eleven palms, to be exact. All male trees and thus without fruit. My parents were dead when I came into the world. My mother had died only a few weeks earlier.

But of course I had already always been there. 'Always' reaches back until just before the so-called First War. Naturally my parents were alive then, naturally German was being spoken, the nanny I don't remember was definitely not a mulatto, and in front of the house on the Ringstrasse grew perfectly ordinary trees, maples, I think. In front of the house itself stood, and still stands, a small Japanese almond tree. The maple trees were cut down. Despite the trees, when I was a child the street was much wider than today. At least twice as wide.

When I, Hilde Domin, opened my eyes, crying, in that house on the edge of the world, where the pepper grows, and sugarcane and almond trees, but roses only with difficulty, and apples, wheat, and birches not at all, I, orphaned and displaced, got up and went home to the word. "I set up a room in the air/ Among the acrobats and birds."[13] A room from which I cannot be expelled. The words, however, were

[13] *Nur eine Rose als Stütze*, p. 55.

German words. Because of that I traveled back over the sea, to where that language lives. It was three years after my birth. I had been gone for twenty-two years.

I passed on a train in the city where the almond tree stands. My parents were sitting on the platform. I walked by them, we didn't speak to one another. They weren't buried in Germany either. We took a taxi, my husband and I.

At the house of my childhood
in February
the almond tree was
in bloom.

I had dreamt
it would be in bloom.[14]

When I think about the child who opened the wrought iron gate by the almond tree every day, I see clearly that I can start with this child. In fact, I was that child. (In retrospect, it seems as though everything was always pointing in that direction, and thus my childhood at me.)

My first day of school, for example. I followed the teacher down the hall, grabbed her by the skirt as she vanished into the teachers' room and said: "Fräulein, I dreamt about you." I can't see her face anymore, but surely it was embarrassed. Only the pale grey painted door of the teachers' room and also the skirt that I clutched in my little hand. I was a delicate, pampered child and was sent to school late. If, at the time, she had slapped me or at least sternly showed me the difference between behavior in public and at home, then I'd have grasped what convention is. She must have explained it to me poorly. All who know me know that I still have a tendency to

[14] *Rückkehr der Schiffe*, p. 12.

grab people by the arm (I am grown up now) and say things that people simply don't say.

My last day of school was in its own way equally idiosyncratic. In history, I gave a presentation on the International Pan-European Union. I was totally in favor. The school inspector was totally against it. Nobody had told me that school inspectors—nowadays this wouldn't be true—were dead set against Pan-Europe, though I surely would've chosen the topic despite that fact. He gave me a bad grade and thus I passed my final exams with a B instead of an A. On that unfortunate day I wore a soft dark blue silk dress with a white lace collar. It was a dusky blue that carried the name of Patou, the Dior of the day. The silk was very thick and had little hairs, like a fur. I never had a dress like that again. I say this only because I ripped the dress apart in anger and distress as soon as I got home. That's how outraged I was with the school inspector. My mother didn't reprimand me about the dress as other mothers might have done. She was too upset. All who know me won't doubt that this story is absolutely true. From my school days I still remember that on the one hand I was outgoing and got along well with the others, for example, I was elected the speaker for the class as soon as the office was created. On the other hand there were times when life in the group was so oppressive that I shut myself in the bathroom during breaks and would've liked to forego graduating—although learning came easily to me—just to get away from the class. Even today I often take flight abruptly from the most joyous company to the strictest solitude and need an indecent amount of breathing room. The teacher told my mother that there were no other children in

the school who could be as joyful and as sad as I was. My mother was disturbed to hear that I was inclined to such extremes.

I then studied law, out of admiration for my father. Mainly due to a trial in which my father had to defend against arson charges a harmless fellow who lived under a less harmless landlord. The trial spanned a large portion of my childhood. I skipped school to attend court sessions and encouraged my father to defend through all the courts this client, long since unable to pay. I can still see my father, lying in bed in the evening after a hearing, a nervous wreck because he received threatening letters, and my mother was all for giving it up—but he simply couldn't let me down, even if it had cost us everything. This man, pardoned by Hindenburg in response to my father's petition after five years of back and forth, was one of the first who, in 1933, stopped greeting my father, a Jewish attorney, on the street.

From law, I switched to economics and sociology, experienced the great era of Heidelberg, was able to hear lectures by Jaspers and Karl Mannheim, gained and lost political conviction, and lived a first life, which also fit with this childhood and which led me through Rome and England to Santo Domingo. I taught publicly and privately, I juggled texts from many languages into many others. And through all this misfortune, I have always had just enough good luck to be able to talk about the bad.

At the time when I became Hilde Domin and all these years of wandering from country to country, from language to language suddenly proved to be my preparation, my apprenticeship, I was a docent for German at the University of Santo Domingo. My first poem closed with the words:

A great blossom rose
luminous, pale
from my heart.

Since then writing is like breathing for me: One dies if one gives it up.

The first 150 or 200 poems I wrote very rapidly, one after another between the autumn of ’51 and the autumn of ’53, in Santo Domingo, in Haiti, and then in the United States, in New York, and on the island of Vinalhaven, way up near the Canadian border. This first period came to a close with the long poem “Whoever it Affects,” which is still very important to me, even if I express myself more simply now. It is about someone who is ‘affected’ and how he managed to survive,

. . . as if he had fallen
from the tenth or twentieth floor
—the difference is not much
for a fatal somersault
without a net—
on his feet
in the middle of Times Square
and narrowly dodged
the snouts of the automobiles
before the red light changed.
Still a certain buoyancy
stayed with him
like a bird.[15]

After that I couldn’t write another line for a year and a half. We traveled to Germany: my life consisted of travel and typing.

[15] *Nur eine Rose als Stütze*, p. 46 ff.

At first I didn't think about publishing, it just came to me as writing had come to me. I didn't do anything to bring it about. It happened in Munich. Dr. Schöningh asked me if I had tagged along: "And what do you do?" At his request I sent him a poem, only one. It was three years old, the third poem that I had written. Schöningh printed it in the next edition of *Hochland*. I was quite embarrassed to be praised for a poem. At the beginning—but maybe it's that way for everyone—the poems remained a part of me for a long time. Today that is different, today they cut the cord immediately and become autonomous. One becomes increasingly conscious of one's own style of artistic intentions. Maybe 'artistic intentions' are knowing what you don't want; for me it is training myself to 'omit': "doing more with less."

Actually, I began publishing after my second return to Germany, in 1957. *Die Neue Rundschau* had already accepted poems that I, an unknown, had sent from Madrid. From an exchange of letters about a line of poetry, my relationship with S. Fischer Verlag developed entirely on its own. At Christmastime in 1957 I was presented simultaneously by the *Neue Rundschau* and *Akzente*. After that, all anthologies and all arms were open to me. It was a euphoric homecoming.

Not in the 9th year, as Horace prescribed—*nono imprimatur in anno*—but instead in the 8th year I published my first book, *Only a Rose for Support* (1959), which Walter Jens, who didn't know anything about me, greeted in his review with the words: "Here a poet who could wait introduces herself." I incorporated eight poems that I wrote while I was overseas into this volume, which formed an anthology drawn from four creative periods, while my second book of poems, *Return of the Ships* (1962), formed a unified entity, which connected to the last part of the first

book or originated alongside it. The “Songs of Encouragement,” now the addendum, could’ve been my third volume: a homecoming book. (Which *Ships*, despite the title, definitely was not!)

With my third—I dare say ‘definitive’—return to Germany in January 1961, I received in Heidelberg, my old university town, all of the astonishing things that people usually have and which I have never really had since my childhood: a bed, a table, the mailbox and the other things that go with a home. I, who was always adrift, who had unlearned ‘having,’ “as if I no longer had the hands to have.”

The “Songs of Encouragement” were the reversal of my theme of loss: the ‘gift’ that lacks hands to hold it. I don’t know with what one would receive it. Only that it is an extreme, a delicate happiness, the most fragile thing imaginable. Something like “and out of the brook gleams the buried gold.”

I didn’t write this book of receiving. The play is not always performed on the waiting set. Such luck never comes without a price, I don’t know to which gods I failed to make sacrifices.

When the world . . .
sends a unicorn
saddled
to your door
. . .
when everything beckons to you
that is the hour
when everything abandons you.

Perhaps it lay in the circumstances of my birth. I recounted my parthenogenesis in 1951. A non-humanist could think about it this way: It's like a firework. A trail of light is already near the end of its arc, it should sink. Then with a bang it flares anew. If only, when I became my own son, I had finished the job and changed my sex. As a boy I would have had it easier.

As it is, my husband is in his second marriage with me. With me, a person who still cooks the same recipes as before and whose soufflés have not suffered, who still always likes to stay in bed until nine. But otherwise, simply everything has changed. I used to be chubby and roly-poly, now I am delicate. I used to plan, but now every day is just today, in the morning the evening is unimaginably far off. I, once so useful, have become useless. And the worst thing is, I'm a son who does everything backward. Who requires a lot of patience and whom one might like to throw out sometimes. Every breath I take is that of an *enfant terrible*. That's not because of me, it's because I came into the world with that bang.

In 1951, when I began to write, everything that had gone before became prehistory, as happens to everyone beginning such a project. (Like surrealism, which I became aware of abroad, earlier than within our borders.) Which is why I belong with the youngest German poets, approximately the generation of Peter Rühmkorf.[16]

If I am one of our youngest authors, I, who already dye my hair—a bit lighter than before—am also flouting all the rules such that I, who grew up with the *Diwan* and Heine over my bed, trained by Mannheim, Weber and Jaspers, must consider myself a native student of the Spanish, among whom, more than among the Italians, I

[16] Written in 1962.

spent a large part of my conscious life. What Krolow finds in Alberti, what Enzensberger finds in Neruda, that flows in my veins, it is part of me from birth. The challenge, too, of deciding between legitimate emotion and sentiment, and the resulting trepidation never arises, as with all romance peoples.

Thus, it is perhaps no accident that my poems, to which the formula of "traditional yet still modern," coined for the new Spanish lyric poets, is applicable, just as to the poems of the Spanish or of Ungaretti, can be read on many levels. A more simple refugee from the East can recognize himself in them exactly like a 'high brow.'[17]

In other ways, too, I am a special case: if everyone nowadays agrees with Kafka, who says his dove came home and had found "nothing green," my poems see with wide-open eyes how grazed-over all the meadows are, how empty the branches. How totally hollow everything is. And in fear they fly so far and so high that somewhere they catch a patch of blue or green, already transparent. As, in truth, we all do, over and over, because otherwise we couldn't live. Pure pessimism is a pretension.

Thus it is a fact that my poems are among those which get read. In other words, they get 'used.' Yet, I believe, a poem is not a basic commodity like others, it doesn't get used up. It belongs rather to those magical objects which, like the bodies of lovers, only blossom with use. Frequently I feel that my poems are stronger than I, that I—in a way more than any plant or animal in a botanical or zoological lab—have been crossed and crossed again. Beyond every law of nature. As nature never

[17] In English in the original—Trans.

intended. Perhaps I shouldn’t be allowed to exist. Perhaps I don’t exist. But that my poems exist seems beyond a doubt.

On the Difficulties of Being a Professional Woman

1. We are all hermaphrodites.

2. The fatal division of labor goes back to our expulsion from Paradise at the very latest, and manifests itself in every social order.

3. A little while ago, a Russian joke made the rounds: “Where is your father, child?” “Father is orbiting the moon.” “And your mother?” “Mother is standing in line for groceries.” Yet the Russians already have a female astronaut and also the female space dog, Laica.

4. “Women can’t think logically.”
That logical thinking can be accomplished only by means of a penis seems to be an ineradicable axiom of pop medicine.

That the penis is appropriate for pissing out fires, as women “can’t control the stream” (Freud’s explanation for the primacy of men) is verifiable, yet pretty unimportant in the age of the second industrial revolution.

Nor can women “piss roses into the Guadalquivir,” as Lorca suggests, and in pissing duels such as Breton engaged in, they cannot give satisfaction.

5. The intelligence of the woman can be forgiven, where she is willing to work as a ghostwriter. “Behind many a clever mind hides one at least as clever.”

6. Women are the appropriate ground crew for the launch of gifted men: a combination equally recommendable in the erotic sphere for the woman with an uncomfortably high IQ.

7. Female politicians frequently suggest advocating for an initiative through or together with a man (applicable in PEN, for example). On the job, nothing can be delegated. Everyone must be as good as he or she can possibly be.

8. An Italian woman author wrote to me a few years ago: "How does it happen that at first there was so much buzz about you, and now suddenly it's so quiet. Usually it's the other way around, you get more and more well-known. What happened to you? *Basci non dati?* Not enough kisses?" "*C'ha ragione*," I wrote back. (A man wouldn't ask a person that, because such things don't happen to men.)

9. I received a letter from a famous colleague in reference to my latest poetry volume (*Ich will dich*, 1970), saying that I was "a man among poets." His compliment *ne plus ultra.* Was I supposed to be happy that I, actually a second-class being, was being promoted to a person of the highest order? (I can already see the writer's infuriated face when he reads this, I can already hear him protesting, no, he never considered women inferior, he actually hates the division into superior and inferior, into *übermenschen, untermenschen* and the like, and he'd proved as much during the Nazi era. He had, too.) He had quite simply been searching for a superlative. So as people

say, “What a terrific person!” cats say to cats, “You’re a terrific cat!” It doesn’t get any better than: you are just like me. Because of that I was gratified by the praise, despite everything: because it was so direct and came from the heart. Had he written something like that publicly (“I actually wanted to do that,” he wrote to me), it would have constituted a sort of diplomatic passport, a safe conduct, the ability to move freely, to escape from the wall at one’s back against which the condemned must stand. (Women are virtual defendants, they always have the burden of proof.) In this respect such a pardon in the drawer is frustrating; we stare at it like a hungry child at a cake in a bakery window, a cake from which it will never get a piece.

10. In 1844 wrote Droste to Schücking: “Give me your word of honor, as you would give it and keep it to a man, that you will never intentionally change a syllable of my poetry.”

11. In 1942, shortly before her death, Virginia Woolfe wrote to an American women’s organization: “Women are like Jews under the Nazis.” In 1968 or 1969 Sartre wrote: “Women are Jewish Negroes.” So have things gotten better in the last quarter century?

12. Celebrated female authors (you hear about other cases only by coincidence) who have taken their lives in the last three decades because they just couldn’t go on: Tsvetaeva, after her return from exile in Paris; Sylvia Plath, the American wife of the British poet Ted Hughes; Virginia Woolfe; the Swedish Karin Boye. A high

percentage of the female poets. (Men like Mayakovski, who, as a political dissident found himself in a similar defensive situation, and Paul Celan, a Jew, make up a much smaller percentage.)

13. A self-critical and practicing Marxist who is having marital problems said to me: "I realize that I simply cannot apply my progressive beliefs when it comes to myself. I just can't!" (In reality he retreats in the face of Ibsen's *Doll's House*.)

14. The so-called "emancipation" has freed us from household help. Do it yourself; every professional woman—the family servant. Temporary relief is offered professional women when the so-called 'no-fault divorce' allows the fifty-something (or even forty-something) divorcee to be made into the ideal cook-clean-type secretary, just as she used to be for her husband. (I say temporary relief because the mid-twenty-somethings will hold on tight to their jobs, regardless of what becomes of their families.)

15. When both members of a married couple are intellectuals, they really should marry a third person. A wife: one who will be waiting at the door to hear about the other's day, who doesn't come flying out of the room eager to describe her own: a collision which can be counteracted only with complicated turn signals.

Apparently the stay-at-home person has a vital role in the household. Does it have to be the woman? But what woman would want it to be her husband?

16. Is the youth beyond all that? Because boys look like girls and girls look like boys?

The following bold verse appeared in a “progressive” high school literary magazine (*Spiegel*, 1969): “Legs open wide/ Arms tied taut/ Fucking is an afterthought.” *Kursbuch* Nr. 11, heartbreaking to recall, dedicated entirely to the problems of the leftist female students and written almost completely by them, gave this advice: “If he accuses you of being reactionary, tell him he’s an idiot!” (verbatim).

Liberation or degradation of the woman to an object, with sex becoming another form of pressure? (Compare studies like *Introduction to Partnership* by Mandel/Stader/Zimmer, Munich 1971.)

17. A woman today is given access to almost anything: until she isn’t. She must always walk on eggshells, she needs to be twice as “lucky.” Like every social underdog who makes it anyway. When she one day comes under suspicion (of being a woman?) she loses her friends, the dispensation is rescinded. Because it was only a “dispensation.” Tolerance cannot be equated with birthright.

18. Do women have more moral courage? Maybe. Like everyone who belongs to a societal minority. But this courage pertains only to men. By means of demonstrations, “Aryan” woman, Berliners, rescued their non-Aryan husbands from concentration camps during the Nazi era. No equivalent action on the part of men for their non-Aryan wives has been reported, as far as I know.

But when it's a question of women, women seldom have that courage. Because they're afraid that they'll be pulled down into the abyss themselves. On the contrary, women find it convenient to take sides with men against other women, as if they themselves were outside the danger zone. The mechanism functions like life-threatening situations in authoritarian states.

19. Besides the societal and occupational war, we also fight the erotic one. They are two wars with contrary rules of engagement. The one battlefield makes reporting on the other into a farce.

20. We are all hermaphrodites. We are all afraid of solitude. Death? or Madame Death? *La muerta, la morte, Madame le Mort.* Our bones will be almost the same. Our dust no longer differentiable.

First Meeting with My Publisher[18]

A publisher is something in between a typewriter and a spouse. Everyone knows what a typewriter is: it makes the text legible, it makes it—if the text even lends itself to that—into something objective and distinct from the writer, it duplicates the text. The publishing house is something like the ultimate typewriter. As for the spouse, Ortega defined marriage—no, probably love—as "a union for reciprocal admiration," and that applies, in the ideal situation, to the relationship between author and publisher. There is nothing further to say about the typewriter, it is an obedient instrument. As for marriage, any extra word would be one too many. The publishing house is in between, larger than life.

A person arrives at such abstractions only after many years. In the beginning, publishers are the most exciting thing there is. They are neither typewriters nor spouses (a disillusionment one does best to swallow later). They are what people think they are: the head of the world, a partner, the reader *par excellence*.

My first visit to S. Fischer Verlag, in the "beehive." On the shelves stood the books, many of which I had owned as a student. I still have quite a few of them, others are lost. Bernard Shaw, for example, in old gold linen: I was proud of that edition, proud to lend it to a famous man; I'm sure he doesn't have it anymore either. The Knoll furniture was familiar to me from America. I found the rooms bright, neutral, appropriate, they left me completely indifferent. That was precisely the

[18] Dr. Rudolph Hirsch, S. Fischer Verlag.

‘neutral’ part. One could easily be more nervous about all the things there are to be nervous about than about when one walks into a publishing house for the first time.

What made me the most nervous was that an hour or two was spent discussing just one of my poems—I was still wholly unpublished, the poem was to be in the *Neue Rundschau*—while a quite illustrious and in any case much more published visitor sat in the waiting room. I died of timidity and also of reverence for my own poem. I was shown poems that were already virtually in the wastebasket, poems by famous people. I became even more shy, although I also found these poems sub par. Whether my own poem was any good, I could in no way judge at the time, even though it was already four years old. You don’t know your poetry objectively before it’s printed, at least not in the beginning. With great elan, the poems were picked up by the *Neue Rundschau*. (They had in reality already been accepted before I entered the building; I had sent them from Madrid.) That I had thus acquired a publisher was not something I thought about at all, because I was so excited that the poems were going to be in the *Neue Rundschau*, which at that time, in 1957, had barely published any contemporary lyric poetry except Celan, and was, as the editor emphatically told me, “top tier.”

The *Rundschau* came out in December, featuring poems by Saint-John Perse, “The Horse” by Tibor Déry, an essay about bees by Frisch, a story by Ionesco and “Whoever it Affects” and other poems by me. In my erratic life it was a close approximation of a middle-class wedding dress: something truly festive. Shortly afterward I was invited to Fischer again and asked if I had poems for a whole volume. “You must be patient, Frau Dr. Palm,” they said to me at the door, “But right now

we’re expecting Frau Domin.”[19] Or the other way around, I have forgotten. Only days later an editor from another large publishing house wrote to me.

[19] Hilde Domin’s married name was Hilde Palm; in 1957 she assumed the name Domin in tribute to the city of Santo Domingo.

Bibliographic "Whims"

The "bibliographic whims" I owe to Th. W. Adorno

It's fun to read that books are 'cats.' Not dogs, of course, which come running, tails wagging when you whistle. They hold back as only cats do, they are insistent like cats, they cling to you when you have other plans. (They climb the walls, are the enemy of any decor, scratch the furniture to shreds. And they spread out where we don't actually want to let them, and with friendly exasperation we let them have their way.) We have them in our houses, but they are not really pets. With the exception of those who are pets in the most exclusive sense: goat and cow herds with swelling udders. I mean the dictionaries. But they won't let themselves be milked by just anyone, even though their udders are full to bursting. But rather only by someone they know intimately. Because what would a person do with a dictionary if he didn't already know what was inside? Dictionaries are only for those who no longer actually need them. The ones who can milk them are the ones they fatten. The best are dictionaries that talk to themselves: those from one foreign language to another. You see the words expand and contract, and although they are the same words, they are very different words: larger or smaller, circles that overlap, are seldom concentric. As long as one doesn't immediately grasp what kind of person would take a word in his mouth in what kind of situation and with what kind of emphasis, dictionaries will have no taste.

‘Thin books, thick books’: In Latin America they distinguish between two types of books: “Un libro que se para,” a book that “stands upright when you put it down”—and the other ones. “Un libro que se para” is of a certain thickness and moreover hardbound, for its author more exciting than any medal. On the topic of ‘well-traveled’ books: one shouldn’t neglect to mention the stigmata from the nails. Where does one find a mover who doesn’t hammer nails into at least two books? Especially if the crates are banded for shipping overseas? Then the packers have every excuse. With every new journey, new casualties.

Always more books, always more poorly bound, I have to say. In South America, we got into paperbacks, before we had paperbacks. The Argentinean ‘Easter eggs,’ as we called them. Colorful and inexpensive. When one couldn’t have leather with gilt edging. Even if you had money, who would want to have books with so much gold: arrows, embossing and the name, all gilded, *horror vacui*. As the expensive clothes in Latin America are stitched with sequins so that nobody would buy them, even if one could afford to.

Then the books behind which snakes are hiding: one pushes a book onto the shelf, and encounters resistance. Ssss, a snake rears up. With a machete, a cambered blade, half a meter long, the snake and book are done in: one watches in horror as the houseboy swings the knife. The horror with which one sees the blade cutting through snake and book, it is two different kinds of horror, though it is only one blow. Basically, the snake could have been allowed to live, it wasn’t deadly, except to the

book. Big, thick snakes behind books are nonetheless repulsive. For a long time afterwards one has no real desire to put a book on a shelf.

And the tropical wasps, mason wasps or whatever they are called. They maintain a *ménage à trois* and build sticky nests in the spines of the old books. The octavo and duodecimal volumes are ideal. Aldines[20] or other Renaissance texts of the sort that Adorno likes also attract wasps. They almost never move into new, replaceable books. Only the *rara*. A complete nest is a rounded mud wall, hollow in the middle: a kind of canal for the maggots. You scrape it off, let it dry, and scrape it off once more. Then you can open the book again. It stays discolored.

The question of termites is totally different. I read in some recent German poem that they have 'pincers.' Nothing could be farther from the truth. Termites are miserable, spongy animals without any protection: without an exoskeleton, without a weapon, and they even march in file; without the freedom to flee. Nothing is more easily destroyed than the termite. It's just that there are so many of them. You kill them, and the ants, the tiniest ants, carry off the dead, small elliptical worms, and eat them. Termites and ants impose order. If you lie on the floor once a week and check under the bookcases, and even paint their feet with what the French call 'Schweinfurt green' and the Germans call 'Parisian green'—as syphilis is called the 'English' or 'Gallic' disease, depending—then they'll only eat the bed sheets, because you hadn't been taking care of them. It's well known that they burrow winding tunnels as they

[20] Books printed by the Manutius family in Venice beginning in the 15th century, named for Aldus the elder. "Aldines" Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin. http://altedrucke.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/en/sammlungen/aldinen.html, accessed 11 April 2008.

eat. With a book, one sometimes finds oneself in doubt: Was it a crookedly driven nail, or is it termites? “Just a nail,” you say, relieved. And never think that you’re not in much better shape yourself.

Then there are the cyclones. Apart from the roof, whether it’s corrugated zinc or cement, cyclones are a test of character. Do you pack 5000 books into boxes, for example, when a cyclone is predicted, because the whole roof could blow away with the first gust of wind? If only you’d never moved into a house with a galvanized zinc roof. In the first year you start packing at the sound of the cyclone alarm, just as the windows and doors get boarded up. You can hear nothing but hammering, as, stark naked, you pack your books in the oppressive heat. Cyclones come when it is hottest. (“August: come it must. September: remember. October: all over.”[21]) By the time they are packed and nailed, the cyclone has swept past, a few kilometers to the north, a few kilometers to the south, where the people don’t have books, or let them float away. You can unpack them now. More nails than usual found their way into the books in the excitement. I say, yes, it’s a test of character, whether you do it two or three or four times. I don’t know anyone who would pack up their books in their fifth year. The question of what to do with the boxes is a moot point. On the ground floor they’d be standing in water. The top floor will collapse if the roof goes. The cyclone could take it along on its retreat. It is well known, I think, that cyclones administer a slap to the left, a slap to the right, passing first to and then fro. The stillness in the middle is supposed to be as still as it ever gets.

[21] In English in the original—Trans.

Not recommended against moisture and insects is pepper. Books treated with pepper age by centuries in a matter of weeks: mildew. Even new books. That was before DDT. You put cotton in your nostrils and sprinkle book after book on the inside with DDT, shaking out the old DDT. Once a year. Like cyclones, a test of character.

Before we left Santo Domingo—with only small suitcases, the books salted with DDT stayed there for ten years—we did something horrible: We sacrificed Marx so that the other stored books would never be put in danger by his presence, at the hands of Trujillo or whomever else. Marx put up a fight. He was well bound in half-linen and it was like a very slow death, where the victim just keeps on breathing. The perpetrators became nauseated. We had always had him with us; these were reference works for me. We sat on the floor and painstakingly tore the pages into tiny pieces. It was a crime, a sacrilege, and it took a long time. *Das Kapital* proved to be the only borrowed book that we had. I had long ago forgotten that it wasn't mine. We had just barely returned to Europe when it was asked for by someone in London, an old man, who had lent it to me, a first-year university student. Even before Hitler. He demanded it as if it were yesterday, and as if it made sense that Marx had accompanied us on our flight from country to country, which he actually had, until in 1952, when, after the danger had passed, we had voluntarily done him in.

At the end of all of this the moment arrives: receiving the books, a truckload, when one suddenly has an apartment in Heidelberg, for instance. The 'cats' have

become beasts of prey, a person cannot live in the same cage with them. The stench of decay. You have gotten along without them in the decade of living like a nomad as a subletter. You don't want to be your own heir. Reluctance toward property, even if it didn't smell like rot. Why all of this, when life went on without it? No more books, no more things. How lovely, when all the rooms were bare. Virginia Woolfe tells of looking cheerfully at her bombed-out house, and thinking of the books. "Exhilaration in loosing [sic] possessions." It's no fun to have them back. It's worse than getting married after an affair. What good will they do us? We're never going to read them. We are tired of the old Italians of which we have complete editions. The tattered things, why put them on the shelves? And before you know it, you already have Petrarch in your hand;—he still stinks. And start comparing d'Annunzio with Valle Inclán, and the futurists with the Spanish. So much comes back to you. How did you ever manage without them?

(The only works that were adopted again without hesitation, indeed with excitement: the 'pets,' the dictionaries. With tenderness and pomp they are led into their new enclosure, these patient animals.)

The books are shaken out, laid out in the sun, they smell more acceptable every day, or else we become accustomed to the smell. We become accustomed to their appearance. They are bleached from the tropical sun, battered in every sense. We again have all our 'cats' around us, our 'non-pets.' More feral than ever in this country where all cats are groomed and looked after. But they are purring again.

And we start to bicker, because we sold books to pay for our passage: back then, when we rode back across the Atlantic.

The Andalusian Cat

On the first night, after we moved in, she came. Immediately there was a silent understanding between us. She seemed to say: “I will serve you as a cat. I’m more alive than an armchair or a table. But I want to be around you as constantly as the furniture. When you have a cat, it’s almost like being at home.” We answered: “You are a cat without a master. A scrawny, black cat without a master. You are not beautiful, but you are more alive than the furniture. We are transients. Here—and not just here. Don’t rely on us. We are not permanent. But as long as you have us, it will be almost like having a home and a master.”

The cat stayed with us. She wasn’t a beautiful cat, she wasn’t especially lively or clever, but she was a humble and unobtrusive cat who never forgot that she was just a guest, even though she was playing the housecat. She sat by the table and never begged. In the mornings she came onto the terrace off the bedroom. But she kept quiet and never raised her voice to demand to be let in until we woke up and opened the door. When we read or wrote, she sat with us. If we went walking, she accompanied us to the road, just as our own cats did. And when we returned, she was already sitting at the gate. We felt very at home, and not only because of the cat.

The house was situated on the edge of the sea like a ship, with terraces instead of decks. It was totally surrounded by geraniums and bougainvilleas. When we opened our eyes in the morning we saw the sea, glowing, smooth and blue. The sunrise was brought to us in bed like breakfast, at a reasonable hour, shortly before nine.

We had our books sent and stayed in the house that we had rented for two weeks. We stayed for quite a long time. But still only for a certain length of time. The cat didn't seem to understand that. As the days went by without our leaving, she began to think that we had come to stay. The many books over the fireplace—we put them there because it was a fireplace that smoked, a fireplace whose black history could be read outside on the roof tiles, in short, a fireplace that one was better off not using—the many books, then, above the cold fireplace reassured the cat completely as to our reliable intentions. The first time that I went to Malaga, she ran desperately after the bus and was almost run over by a car. Now she began to regard the bus with friendly eyes. Always punctual, she was sitting on the wall to receive me when I returned with my shopping bags. The fish in Malaga are first-rate. The fish the Spanish call "Saint Peter's Fish," with the thumbprint of Saint Peter on its belly, was her favorite because it has such a large head and there is plenty of meat on the fins and tail.

In January—luna de enero, luna de amor, month of love—the cat received visits from several admirers. The tomcats that courted our cat didn't have far to go. They had no need to come from one of the villages up in the hills, because they were hanging around the property anyway. Right from the start, when they saw how successfully the cat had gotten herself adopted, they introduced themselves and asked to be taken in. There was a red and white speckled cat with an unfriendly, impertinent look but a thoroughly dignified demeanor, with plenty of meat on his bones, a testament to his survival skills. And an annoyingly slimy black one, ravenous and

shy, who obviously seldom met with approval. We didn't like either one and sent them away. They lived off occasional handouts when the other houses were occupied.

Besides them there was an emaciated yellow greyhound which sometimes appeared down on the beach, a long-legged skeleton, who, yellow against the yellow sand, sniffed around the mussels left behind from the fishermen's meals with a sad half-heartedness. — The boat with the three fishermen belonged to the expanse of sea in front of our house. In the morning light it was already out on the water, black like the gulls before the sun rises. Then it became white. But although they spent the whole day fishing, the three fishermen never had anything to offer for sale but a squid now and then. Maybe they simply lacked the equipment for a proper catch. But it didn't seem to bother them that there was no money coming in from this life of working all day without really working. At noon they pulled the boat up on the shore and cooked their mussels. Then they slept in the narrow shadow that the boat cast on the sand and then pushed off until the shadows of the mountains of Africa sank below the horizon at sunset.

But in speaking of the fishermen, I've totally forgotten the two cats, the admirers. Yet in January they made their presence felt. They stormed our house and tore through the rooms. They clawed their way up the drapes and preferred to choose a post up on the curtain rod rather than clear the area. When you chased them out one door, they would come back in another. Finally, they disappeared. The cat was pregnant. With a little effort we convinced her that the pile of manuscripts accumulating in the desk drawer wasn't yet thick enough to be a birthing nest. "Maybe next time," she promised herself, and made do with a ratty red blanket in the

corner by the window. There were four kittens. Pretty they were not. But with those parents one didn't expect otherwise. Two kittens were black, two were tricolored. The black kittens had white paws and a white collar, like raccoons. We named them "Snow White" and "Snow Paw" to make the cat happy. In Spanish, of course, because otherwise she wouldn't have understood. 'Blancanieve' and 'Blancamano.' In any case, the owner of the property was named Doña Dulce Nieves, 'Madame Sweet Snow.' She was a bad-tempered blonde who, after decorating the houses with great taste, stopped caring for them, because she really didn't want to finally find out all the things that needed repair. As a result, she never got around to discovering the related names.—To the other two cats we gave names from the society pages in the Madrid newspaper. Beautiful, special names, such as they have only in Spanish newspapers.

When the mimosas bloomed like little plumed suns, the kittens opened their eyes. Blue eyes, like all young cats. Four more lady cats: what would become of them after our departure?

I inquired with the kind gardener. Although the name gardener barely applied; the garden was the only thing that thrived wonderfully and without any work. The flowers flourished all by themselves. The wind swept away the fallen leaves. The moist ocean air watered the plants. But the gardener was there for everything that needed doing or might have needed doing on the estate, a kind of Ariel in this little colony of five houses that was called 'The Truth.' You would ring a ship's bell that hung outside. Then he put down the work that he had just begun in one of the houses and came and promised to fix the faucet or the stove or whatever else had made that

treacherous leap from defective to useless. Because the gardener was so nice and promised everything with a smile, brown, and gangly, with blue eyes and winning Andalusian grace, one accepted his promises likewise with a smile, although we soon learned that they were meant only as a consolation. When someone had rung the bell often enough, the gardener actually came to their house, and before the ship's bell rang again, gave the offending object a quick shove. Either it started to work again for a while or it was completely done for. Now and then, very seldom, after a long wait, when we had had the right mix of patience and impatience, a professional came, a proper electrician or carpenter, and patched the most urgent thing, and as he left, he would say to the thing he had repaired, according to the custom of the area: "Be nice and keep working until I've been paid."

We saw these workmen come and go. As for Ariel, we left the door open for him. (People never locked anything up, the keys didn't work anyway or had already been replaced with hooks, and Ariel was honest. Only while shopping did he sometimes cheat.) He appeared and disappeared like a ghost or a bird and deposited the canisters with the bad, yellow-brown kerosene in the kitchen or unscrewed a light bulb he considered expendable, to do a favor for the guest in the next house over. We called him the seagull's son.

When the seagull's son was once again at our house to hammer in a nail where a screw was missing—I believe it was the hinge of the meat safe—I asked him about the future fate of all the plump kittens. He landed such a neat hammer blow that a little piece of green plaster leapt off the wall, leaving a hand-sized white spot (by no means the first), and informed me pleasantly that he would drown them. "You don't

seem like a murderer," I protested. "Oh no?" he said, smiling, "I have it in me." Then the ship's bell rang and he laid the hammer on the tray with the teacups, left the saw askew in the kitchen door, and disappeared with his standard "I'll be back." The meat safe door remained unrepaired, which in view of the many holes in the screen was not that important.

But although for the kittens the prospect remained that he would drown them too hastily and thus only halfway, I still felt responsible for them. But it proved difficult to give them away. Those to whom I offered them always had a few kittens too many already. I resolved, in the worst case, to take the four little kittens with me to Malaga and offer them up for sale like a peddler. There had to be some takers in a large city like that. Before I did that, I asked the cleaning girl to inquire up in town and promised her a premium for each kitten home. She nodded almost imperceptibly. She was a delicate, timid, and emotionless creature, as so many girls in the country along the Andalusian coast are, a girl for whom smiling required an emotional strain, with whom you never knew if she had heard what you said, so little did understanding register in her eyes.

The cleaning girl found homes for all the kittens, one after another, in the village of Rio de la Miele. The cat stayed behind alone. Already as the number of offspring dwindled, she had begun to give us her tender attention again. She purred again, too. Despite that, she wasn't the same cat anymore. Not only because she had become much uglier. She had been losing her fur for a long time. We were afraid that she would go completely bald on the ears and shoulder blades. She was also visibly more brown. Despite everything, she couldn't actually be seriously ill, because her

milk had kept the kittens well nourished. She had teats like the Capitoline wolf, large, sallow grey teats in the thinning dark fur. But it wasn't because of her beauty that we had agreed to play housecat with her. The worst was that with her fur she also lost her polite humility. Since she had ceased in earnest to be a stray cat who is thankful for every handout, since she had forgotten her beggar's existence and the accompanying lessons, she had begun to demand what a true housecat is entitled to. Her opinions on the matter, what was appropriate for such a cat, were all the more exaggerated because she had never been a house cat and thus never knew that only in special cases is the cat the boss and allowed to spend the night in the bed of the lady of the house. Now she came at sunrise—the sun rose much earlier too—and demanded her breakfast in an assertive voice. "Bring me a fresh bowl of milk," she said, "Someone else can eat the leftovers from yesterday." When we pretended not to hear, she returned half an hour later to repeat her order. In other respects, too, she became presumptuous and claimed the right to inspect the sink and inside the kitchen cupboard.

Despite that, I was quite prepared to allow the cat's demands during the last few weeks of our stay. But she made it hard. To be sure, she did lie purring on the chair next to me as I wrote on the typewriter. If I had asked, she would certainly have laid her paw on the page so that the wind wouldn't blow it away. But she didn't stay quiet for long, but rather appealed to me at intervals with a questioning voice. Soon it became clear that she was asking for medical help. In such situations, cats usually take care of themselves by eating grass. But either the grasses on this coast were not sufficiently therapeutic or the cat was eating the wrong sort. We had the gull's son

bring us an anti-diarrheal from the apothecary in the next village. They were greenish tablets. They smelled like cinnamon. Animals under one kilo were supposed to get half a pill every five hours. Whatever it is that affects the taste must have been calculated for animals over one kilo. The only way the cat would eat the pills was if I wrapped a crushed tablet in a bit of food soaked with anchovy paste. And she would only eat them in the morning when she was still really hungry. This rather haphazard Andalusian treatment had a highly imperfect effect. After a few days, we talked over with the gull's son whether he should take her to the next village and release her. After all, she would soon be without an owner again anyway. When we then found her with a suspicious collar, a wire hoop with an opening on one side, we refrained from calling on the help of the gull's son.

I resolved to get rid of the cat on my next trip to Malaga. I would let her out near the market, where she would immediately be introduced to the local hiding places and eating times by the numerous resident stray cats. In comparison to the uncertain fate of a beggar cat in the "Truth" colony, it would actually mean an improvement for her.

The next morning, as I stood on the road and hailed the bus from Algeciras, the cat came along. At the fish market, I bought her a half pound of sardines. But since far and wide there were no cats to be seen—they come only in the afternoon, when the market is closed, and clean up—and because I didn't want to cause the cat any difficulties, I left her on a side street, in a doorway. I laid the packet of sardines on the ground in front of her. The cat looked at me in a gently questioning way as she climbed out of the basket. Then she dove into the sardines. I had a guilty conscience,

but I had made my decision, turned, and walked away. My plan was to walk through the fish market where my tracks would be lost in the irresistible fishy haze. But the cat was faster. Before I had reached the market, I heard her small, reproachful voice next to me. It was impossible that she had eaten all of the sardines. We went back to the sardines. It seemed as though the flower sellers at the big carnation stalls were already laughing at me. I stayed next to the cat, petting her and encouraging her to eat some more. The cat took a fish in her mouth with visible distrust, while never letting me out of her sight. Then along came a taxi. It was a rare bit of luck. I had never seen a taxi in the narrow alleyways by the market. I pretended to be deaf and blind, climbed in and rode to my dentist's, who lived very close by. It made so much noise that the whining of the cat was immediately drowned out. In any case, she hadn't been hit by the taxi, and it couldn't fail that in a neighborhood with so many exciting smells, she would soon forget me.

The dentist wasn't there yet. He usually came only after eleven when the electricity was back on. But, like every morning, the waiting room had already begun to fill by nine. He was an excellent dentist, and without question the fastest who ever had his hand in my mouth. It was like a film being played too fast. Because the power was turned off again at two. It must have been exhausting for him. Despite it all, he maintained that calming smile without which a patient would under no circumstances entrust himself to a dentist. But you could see clearly how thinly it sat on his weary face. He worked like a conjurer in the middle of a risky performance.

When I left the dentist's, I went immediately to do my shopping, because there was only an hour until the bus left. Soon I was standing in the grocery store,

when I heard—it couldn't be—the cat calling to me. And then a black cat came in the door. I must have been suffering from a persecution complex. There are plenty of black cats in Malaga, I told myself. But before I could comfort myself with that thought, the cat had recognized me and leapt toward me with a hoarse cry in which the joy of being reunited was mixed with accusation. She clamped onto my leg and scrambled up me as if I were a tree. Appalled, the shopkeeper ran around the counter, because it was mortifying to have a customer attacked in his store by a wild cat. "Oh no," I said, "Don't worry. It's my own cat." Then I was given the address of a veterinarian. Naturally it was a veterinarian only for animals weighing over one kilo. He gave me a new prescription that the cat was to take every four hours in a bit of warm milk. Ideally, day and night. Then we rode home. In a taxi. I had missed the bus.

Now we are dedicating the last days of our visit entirely to caring for the cat, so that she will at least be healthy when we leave. Because then she will have to take up the begging life again, and in her condition she would make herself so unpopular in houses that the gull's son might actually kill her in a fit of energy. Of late we have set two jellyfish up in our sink, a light blue one with a large, red-bordered sail and a charming golden umbrella jellyfish. The basin is just large enough for them to let their tentacles dangle. They were lying on the beach, limp, but they have recovered nicely. I am supplying them with algae. The water is brackish anyway, because the well from which it is pumped is located right on the beach. But when it's bad enough to ruin the tea, the jellies are in their element. Only when I wash up do they have to make do with a soup bowl. In addition, I always leave the light above the sink on at

night so that they won’t miss the moonlight. It also has the advantage that I don’t sleep very soundly, and that makes it easier for me to wake up regularly to warm the milk for the cat’s medicine. The treatment seems to be successful. But I’m almost looking forward to leaving.

My Homes—*"Mis moradas"*

I

"My homes," "mis moradas" (literally: my residences, my waystations): for me they are somehow paradigmatic. Besides 'going,' perhaps nothing is discussed as much, at least in my first volumes, as living or being allowed to live. Allowed to stay. Most of the homes in my life were homes on the run, or refuges, or were transformed suddenly from seemingly normal dwellings. That stays in one's bones for life.

I am not attached to the objects, or I think I am not hung up on things. I furnish my places minimally, with the exception of books. When I think of homes, I think about the walls, and how I want to dig my claws into them. In case of emergency. But when the emergency came, the walls were always too smooth. Hands are not claws, man is not a monkey, he sits on the floor in a corner and cries. Then he obediently goes down the stairs and out a door and turns around, or doesn't turn around, and doesn't come back.

> You, whom
> every wall forsakes,
> and who often crave the portable den
> of the circus child . . .

I wrote that in 1956, in "Appletree and Olive," the first poem that I wrote after my return to Germany. Earlier, that was naturally not the case. Earlier, I lived with my parents in a house on Riehlerstrasse, around the corner from where Böll lives now. We lived on the third floor, and my brother and I were carried to the ground floor or the raised terrace when the air raid sirens sounded during the First World War. On the

fourth floor lived people who dangled their sons out the window as a punishment, over the courtyard: as a deterrent. I don't know if the boys were as outraged as the other tenants. I don't know if my parents got involved. Otherwise it was a very bourgeois house. The dining room, paneled in dark oak, had stained-glass windows so that you couldn't see the rear courtyard or the fire wall, which you could see from the bedroom. It had a heating system in addition to the central heating, in the form of a fireplace with logs, which in reality were gas tubes on which flames flickered decoratively. In front of that was a dark bronze grate with Jugendstil coils, which corresponded to the period of the house. I mention that because the fireplace was still there when I rang at that door with a stranger's name but the same doorbell, pressed the fancy old latch, and climbed the same marble steps to the third floor, past that familiar letterbox: when I came back to Cologne for the first time after twenty-two years. Because I did come back. After twenty-two years.

The apartment had been split in half. In the front rooms, the former living rooms, a seamstress was living. Our bedrooms and the long hallway where we walked on stilts and played with toy cars in bad weather or roller-skated, like the children above us and the children below us—it must have made quite a racket—and gymnastics equipment was there too: I couldn't see this part of the apartment because the occupants weren't home. From the split hallway I entered the former dining room, which now had normal window panes through which you could immediately see the courtyard and the big, gray wall, and the backs of the houses on Lupusstrasse. If the parquet was still there or if it had been replaced with easy-care PVC flooring, I don't really know anymore. Only that I sat down on the floor, in front of the fireplace with

the fake logs, my only reference point. “Excuse me,” I hope I said politely after this act, unexpected for me as well as the woman. I had already explained at the door that this was my parents’ home and my childhood home; she was on her way out but had a few minutes for me. As I sat on the floor, as I had as a child, and stared into the fireplace, and she was probably thinking, these émigrés really aren’t like us anymore, I suddenly said to her: “For Christmas we got guinea pigs. A black and white one and a red and white one. They ran into the fireplace and didn’t reappear for days. We sat here and waited.” “Yesterday my son’s gold hamster disappeared into that hole, and the boy hardly wanted to go to school,” she said. “It will come back,” I said. “The guinea pigs also came back.” Everything was suddenly as it had always been. The only difference was that children now get hamsters instead of guinea pigs. In my day a pomeranian lived downstairs that ripped pieces out of my underwear when I got on my bicycle. Nowadays, it would be a poodle. It wouldn’t do something like that. The underwear wouldn’t be the right kind, either.

The room in the front, on Riehlerstrasse, which used to be connected to the dining room with a sliding door almost the width of the wall and which now apparently served as a sewing room, was certainly the most important to me all through my time in school: there stood the high glass-fronted bookcase, also made of dark oak, and on top a bronze bust, a head of Donatello. On the right was a narrow cabinet in which my father kept his liqueurs and cigarettes, on the left, my mother’s cabinet, in which she kept the sewing things and the key basket, and I don’t know what else. (She never sewed, by the way, or at least I can’t remember it. She embroidered our clothes before we were in school.) But the key basket she definitely

had, and when I was still small enough, I saw from underneath, from the baby's perspective, that she had stuck the keys in her skirt. Perhaps the keys to the linen closet. In those days there were linen closets several meters wide. And maybe there are still a few today, in which bedsheets are bundled with colorful ribbons. Probably, even. ("You have only what you need," a cleaning lady said to me reproachfully not long ago.) Now that I think of it, people in those days, in the time before washing machines, needed more things. Laundry was done every four weeks, and then for a week: when the tenant had use of the laundry room with the large kettle and the washboard. Even we children later sent our laundry home once a month.

Maybe the keys were also the keys to the silver cupboard. In the dining room stood giant dark cupboards, copied from the German Museum in Nuremberg, and inside, in red felt, lay the flatware, and the serving utensils, and the things that one got as wedding presents in those days, and also things one inherited from one's parents and in-laws. And the Rosenthal porcelain with gold edges (or was it Meissen?), which must have been extraordinarily modern, because I still picture it as chic today. It was used only two or three times a year, for formal occasions. Also kept in these cabinets were the cookie tins, reason enough to hide the keys. We received some of the silver and the expensive porcelain, as well some of the Persian rugs, as our own wedding presents, for our move to the Via Monte Tarpeo. And that was a blessing, because with them we could pay for the transport of our book crates and a few pieces of furniture during our second emigration, from Italy to England. We took the carpets with us and didn't part with them until the next leg. I don't know what happened to my parents' furniture, only that it somehow wandered away in Holland,

where it had been stored. And that was barely noticed in the midst of all that was going on.

The great bookcase and my parents' library I never saw again, they disappeared with the rest, whole shelves of Meyer's Classics, among them irreplaceable editions, like Elster's Heine. I read my way along the shelves, twelve or fifteen meters of them (with the exception of Schlosser's World History, way up on top. Freytag's *Ancestors*, for example, I read in its entirety) and became a formidable child at school, because I had always read everything already and more than required. In those days I retained everything, with shocking accuracy. On the lowest shelf lay, in stacks, no longer in rows, the latest literature. Less complete, I assume. There was Herman Hesse, both the Manns, both the Hauptmanns, Colette, and also a strictly forbidden small book by the sociologist Leopold von Wiese, Benno's father, which created much commotion, in which a naked woman's body was shoved into a narrow well, which is why I was not allowed to read it. A prohibition imposed mostly as a formality. No one removed the key to the bookcase, at most the ones to the narrow side cabinets. And these were not of any interest to me.

One side of the room served as a ballroom for my brother and me. We rolled up the carpet between the dining room and the 'study,' as it was called, and danced for a while every day. In the dining room, we pulled out the leaves of the big table, then it was good for ping pong. When I was even younger, I repeatedly banged into my parents' large desk with a wagon or a toy animal on wheels, which was so much fun for me that I still remember it. At the time I'm sure I wasn't even as high as a door handle. When I think back on it, we were evidently allowed to play in every

room, at least so long as my father was at the office. Which he was practically all day, with the exception of lunchtime.

On top of that, we also had the playroom, which belonged to us alone, where we had aquariums and terrariums with highly mortal populations and where we staged horse races on our rocking horses, which themselves only rocked, but on which one could move forward by rocking. I had inherited the dapple-gray Wotan from my cousin. Wotan had real hair and was big and slow. My brother's little wooden horse, a kind of rocking chair with a horse head, was more mobile but less of a horse. The playroom, like all playrooms, had a cabinet full of toys, and next to it the two side cabinets, in line with the popular scheme. In one of them were our coats. And an ill-tempered nanny shut me in that narrow cabinet when our parents were away, and locked the door, so that I almost suffocated. She was supposedly a remarkably beautiful woman of gentle beauty, Meta by name. In the other, I, or both of us, had schoolbooks and workbooks.

In the playroom I spent a lot of time at the window, especially in winter, so as not to miss the fat coal horses, which were maneuvered into the right position with much groaning, so that the wagons could be tipped and the coal shoveled into the cellar. From above, I tried with screaming and crying to protect the poor animals, who during the procedure often fell and were horribly beaten, which supposedly helped them right themselves on the slippery ground. I was glad when they were replaced by the first coal trucks.

Of the room in the middle between the 'study' and the playroom, the so-called 'salon,' where my mother's grand piano stood, we used only the corner balconies and

really only the one on the right side, facing the Deutscher Ring, probably because it got more sun.

But as I write about the ‘so-called salon’ and the ‘so-called study,’ it occurs to me that I came into the world in a home belonging to ‘temps perdus,’ decorated like Proust’s, completely in the French fashion. The windows were even called ‘French windows,’ in contrast to the wide double-hung windows in the ‘study,’ which were very unwieldy and were ‘English windows,’ but only in the middle; right and left were ‘French’ and—as is still normal today—easy to open. The ‘study’ that I am calling ‘so-called’ was planned as a smoking room, and before the First World War women didn’t smoke, but instead probably retired after dinner, as in Proust, to the ‘salon,’ something that no longer happened at our house, at least once I was big enough to stay up late—in the kitchen—when company came. The smoking table was there, but the lounge chairs and the many ashtrays had disappeared, and the guests, too, went in evening clothes into the ‘salon,’ to hear mother and other singers or pianists perform.

These three rooms on the street side were totally changed; even the Jugendstil stucco ceilings had disappeared, and I can no longer remember that reunion which this coming year will already be two unimaginably long decades ago.

Since then I have only gone past the house, but never inside again. I look at the small balconies, with the neogothic bubble pattern in red sandstone, two tiny little balconies, on which our animal tragedies were played out. I kept rabbits there, or tried to keep them there, after they were no longer tolerated in the playroom or the corridor, due to the acrid smell of their urine, which formed prettily iridescent

puddles on the linoleum. And a young puppy that had whined in homesickness for its mother was put out onto the balcony, from which it brought the police by, early in the morning, because the neighbors couldn't stand it any more than my parents. All the animals that ended up on that balcony were given away to children who had yards. The children of my father's office clerk acquired many of my animals this way, and I envied them greatly. Only the large, colorful macaw, which got caught in the mesh curtains in the living room, thus enabling us to move on to more modern ones, never made it to the balcony. He was a tropical animal, and was immediately given back to the pet store.

Recently I drove past the house. I was just feeling amazed that Böll could drive, and then we were already at the corner and I saw that the almond tree at the entrance was missing. "Yes, the trash bin is there now," he said immediately, because he knew that almond tree. (It is not, however, I think, that the rich have so much trash, or not only that. Rather it is so rarely emptied. Back then the garbage was taken away daily. And packaging was smaller and containers were reused. Milk bottles, for example. The garbage was downright tiny in comparison to today. All the result of the shortage of manpower, including the packaging rather than the weighing-out of groceries. And so it is the prosperity after all. And that wages are more humane.)

Because of the giant dumpster, the children were no longer able to swing back and forth on the garden gate as we did, and as one could do in 1954, just as in the twenties.

The balconies flanked the 'salon,' in which sausages hung during the war, sent home by my father, with colorful postcards on which you could see poplar trees and

which we stuck in albums. After serving as the larder, it and the other front rooms were turned over to the English soldier billeted with us. I remember only that the English non-commissioned officer who lived there docked his little fox terrier's ears and tail, a bloody affair. And that we had whooping cough and then the apartment to ourselves again, because whooping cough is so catching. At that time, the 'salon' became the music room once again.

My mother was trained as a singer, but wasn't allowed to perform in the opera. Only one time did she sneak out and appear as Mignon, when her family still lived in Frankfurt. Then never again. I sat under the grand piano while she practiced and was presumed to be unmusical. Mother was allowed to sing for guests. At one point, she sang an English or French song, likely an English one, because she had spent a large part of her youth in England. At that, the guests left, slamming the door, something hardly imaginable after the Second World War. (Incidentally, this scene may have taken place on vacation and not on Riehlerstrasse.) The French and English language teachers at our secondary school had it rough, too; they were shunned by many children and probably also by colleagues. This was still true at the time of my final exams, that is, more than ten years after the war's end. And during the exams I was also punished by the school examiner for my enthusiasm for the Paneuropean Union. The Weimar Republic was less democratic than people think.

When I started my studies, I drew the consequences. I left home still hanging on my mother's apron strings. As a member of the socialist student group, I came back after my first semester hugely independent. "Family concerns don't interest me anymore," I explained at the train station, with the brutality still characteristic of this

age. “I’m interested only in humanity.” All through the break I sat on the balcony reading economic theory. By no means only Marx; I informed myself thoroughly. Later I had a working group with workers and students in the ‘study,’ which was my parents’ living room. I couldn’t go out at the time; I had a serious wound on my head, because I had been burned as I read the *Weltbühne* near a heat lamp with celluloid curlers in my hair. So my parents went away and left me their room for a week. The first one to arrive was a foreman from my uncle’s factory, who initially felt strange sitting in my father’s wing chair, but he soon got over it. We read *Das Kapital* from cover to cover, not just the slogans as people today like to do. When I was healthy again I went to many rallies, even those of the Nazis on the ‘Hasenheide’ in Berlin. There I decided to leave the country, before the regime change that I ‘saw coming,’ which got me accused of being an alarmist, if not by my parents.

Incidentally, my parents did not emigrate from this house; they left it soon after my departure, which for them was a ‘departure’ and for me was an emigration. After a half year, I was proven correct. They moved into a smaller, more modern apartment near Braunsfeld, of which I saw only the bare shell, climbing up on a ladder before I left Germany. I was given a room there, naturally. My mother sent me fabric samples for my couch and the curtains, and also the wallpaper. In that room, which I never got to see, she always put fresh flowers, she wrote. The furniture was transported to Holland by a ‘flight helper,’ while my parents simply took an excursion over the border for their silver wedding anniversary. Then my father became ill, of course, but I am speaking now about the homes.

"What do you remember about our apartment on Riehlerstrasse?" I asked my brother. "The little balcony," he said. "Mother always stood on the balcony and waved until I got to the Domstrasse. A few times I wished the street were shorter," he said. I don't remember that, maybe because I mostly rode my bicycle to school. "I'm sure we have totally different memories," he said. "The apartment wasn't particularly interesting. Your apartments in Florence and Rome—those were interesting."

I am not going to write about our Florentine apartment in the Via Camporeggi, where we both got our doctorates and where we spent a year as subtenants under conditions worth describing. This account of the 'homes' could easily swell to a proper biography, a book. And that must not happen, at least not today. Because this ms must be at the publisher's on January 2nd.

Thus, I am also skipping over why, when our study trip to Italy in the spring of 1933 proved to be what it had been from the beginning, namely emigration, we didn't travel on to the intellectually tantalizing Spain, where we would have been promptly thrown into the civil war. We were terrible mathematicians, and Spain wouldn't accept our university qualifications, in contrast to Italy. Moreover, Roman antiquity was a special field of interest to one of us. The other ventured into the thicket of Renaissance political theory, which had the advantage of bringing our fields closer together.

II

My Roman apartment I also saw again. The rest of the gardens and the cliffs on which the house had stood. It was on the Piano Regolatorio, the urbanization plan, when we moved in in 1936. And we had barely moved out, involuntarily, when the Via Monte Tarpeo was torn down behind us.

It was our first apartment of any kind, something that you rent empty, for which you sign a contract, and which you make livable with furniture from flea markets, the 'Campo dei Fiori,' and the nearby second-hand shops. After both passing our doctoral exams we got married right away and could legally sign a lease, which was for us almost as weird as the marriage itself.

Before that, we had always lived in sublets: with the same landlord, in Rome and in Florence. This simple fact, which we didn't conceal, at that time shut the doors of respectable circles to us, even those of the Roman Germans, which was of little concern to us—otherwise we would have kept up appearances.

We moved into the apartment of Eleonora Duse. I have always had particularly good luck with apartments. I barely dare to write that down. The place was already promised to someone when we heard about it, but the previous tenant was expecting a child. The baby was delayed, it would have been a ten- or eleven-month term; she must have miscalculated. The other party lost patience. We were waiting in a furnished room in Babuino. We were allowed to sign and move in. Into the top floor of the tallest house on Via Monte Tarpeo. On the ground floor lived the 'Russian Mallarmé,' Vyacheslav Ivanov. Also an émigré, Greek specialist at the Germanicum, one of the 'crabs,' as they were called because of their red robes. "*I*

Gamberi." Downstairs in the entrance hall was a marble plaque that honored Duse. Duse had occupied the entire top floor, with a view of St. Peter's on the street side. We got the more attractive half, across from the Palatine. A hundred-year old wisteria climbed up to our narrow terrace, on which Damayanti, the bat, lived in a piece of discarded stovepipe, and was fed small pieces of orange at night. To the west was the tower-like four-room apartment, of which we rented two rooms to an office worker who was gone during the day. It looked out over the Tiber and Aventine. It was so bright from the afternoon sun that I mechanically hit the light switch, but then the bulb went on instead of out, although you could barely tell in all the brightness.

It was a headily beautiful apartment reached by many stairs. First up the Cordenata to the capitol, where, in Michelangelo's hall, in the Palazzo dei Conservatori, civil marriages took place, including ours, and then up to the fifth floor of this tallest house on the street, 98 more steps. We had a terrible time there, as did Duse, actually: unforgettable.

> It smells of the wisteria
> the Via Monte Tarpeo,
> Marcus Aurelius is once again our doorman.
> The evening sun gilds the Tiber,
> then the nightingale sings to us from the Palatine Hill.

I wrote that a good twenty years later, in Spain, as I put together the 'Dreamhouse' in "I am inviting you."[22]

The head of d'Annunzio, given to us by a sculptor friend as a wedding and housewarming present, a small, silver bust with a distinctive profile (years ago, the poet is supposed to have shaved his hair off upon receipt of the bust, out of

[22] *Nur eine Rose als Stütze*, p. 32 ff.

enthusiasm for his own noble skull shape; we remember him with a bare head, for which our friend gave himself credit): we bore this dubious gift without further consequences. As a precaution I put the head in the boarder's room, where I was confronted with it only in the afternoon when I gave language lessons there.

It is well known that Eleonora Duse bought *Il Fuoco* from d'Annunzio; it cost her her whole fortune. He rewrote the novel. She died in poverty. This deal, we heard, had happened in our apartment. The six-panel movable wall of mirrors evoked Duse; it separated our rooms and could be arranged to bring the Palatine Hill and the wisteria into the room. And also the occupant of the neighboring room at his desk. She supposedly used this ingenious mirror system for rehearsals. In the part of the apartment we had sublet, one of the rooms had a wide strip of mirror high up along one side of the room. It never became clear to us what sort of mirrored ceiling it was intended to replace or outdo. She had had the small, flirtatious bathroom laid from top to bottom with smooth ivory-colored porcelain tiles. The bathtub and water heater, however, had done their time, and the very peculiar landlord had acquiesced when we suggested an almost new tub offered in the 'flower market.' The electric hot water heater we had received from my mother was used with great pleasure by our boarder, the early riser, so that we mostly took cold showers in that elegant room. Instead we had 'Habakuk,' the plucky little slow-burning stove in the corridor that heated the whole apartment, so that the wall behind it bubbled and peeled, no matter how sturdy the asbestos shields were that were mounted there. It was surely the best heated apartment this side of the Forum. And ants came from afar, climbing in a long line to warm themselves at our place in the winter.

Downstairs, the wisteria was rooted in a tiny garden that belonged to the Ivanov apartment. We had barely settled in when the Ivanovs came up to make introductions. First, the tall, crooked figure of the old poet, with a white chaplet, a wayward, slightly reddened face, clear and piercing eyes, and with a bowler hat of an older design over his loose-hanging hair, which he didn't remove even indoors, as, so we thought, they might do in Russia in winter. After him came the daughter, a blonde, a somewhat gangly pianist, with a face as if carved from wood and a nose that was always reddened in winter. Behind her came the small, delicate, pale doctor of philosophy, his life-long assistant, a woman who could do anything, knew everything, and was at the same time present, and, because of her sheer inconspicuousness, not present. She was called 'the Flamingo,' why 'Flamingo' I have forgotten. With her you could look things up, as if in an encyclopedia. Ivanov would ask, Where was it, Flamingo?: in Aristotle or in Plato, or whoever the quotation was by. And she would give the exact citation, from the authoritative edition, from memory. It would be impossible to describe what she was wearing on this or some other occasion. It had no meaning in any case, not that she was dowdy. When we saw her again, twenty-five years later, she was wearing an elegant fur coat, a Persian lamb, which made me downright excited for her.

One after another these three came into the room, in single file, and the hat on the distinguished head of the old man, one of the most famous living poets, and the dissimilarity of the women, and the ceremoniousness of the entrance made a strong impression on us. Old Ivanov, in contrast, was more interested in the books that lined the walls, as always with us, than in the new tenants. He had lost his when he fled.

We had had them sent after us, from Heidelberg, from Frankfurt, from Cologne. With that, our arrival immediately became important to him. The friendship between the top and bottom floors arose on its own. When we made a return visit it was admittedly less ceremonial: A slipper was flying through the air just as the door opened. The hot-tempered old man had aimed for Flamingo's head. I jumped back so that I wouldn't be in the line of fire.

Down there we drank tea, there poems were read and discussed, there, during an illness, I came to know Russian helpfulness, which cannot be compared to any other helpfulness of strangers that I have experienced in my life. Except, again, from a Russian.

Even the owners who lived on the floor below us were people who warrant a little story. They went to their villa in the Alban hills at the time when we had to leave the house, because it upset them so. And people avoid the sight of those they feel sorry for. I, however, sat on the floor in the empty corner where my bed had stood and didn't want to get up.

And the movers who carried out the furniture and the heavy book crates that were shipped to England—for which the proceeds from my parents' silver and porcelain were just enough, because we had also purchased books from others who, like us, had to leave the country and left their books behind—, the movers shook their heads and said over and over: "*Il mondo gira, signora, il mondo gira*." Which meant to suggest that the world turns, which it does, and that other times will come. In the end it's a question of life expectancy. And as I sat on the floor in the corner of the room and cried, I was barely more than halfway between twenty and thirty. And the

landlord's servant said: "It's good that madam has left, she wouldn't want to see this."

Between our moving in, together with the appearance of the three Ivanovs, and this displacement lay not more than two years, although it always seemed longer to me. A lot was going on in those days. Hitler's annexation of Austria, for example. Hitler's visit to Rome and the establishment of the Rome-Berlin 'Axis,' the incursion into Czechoslovakia. Each of these events had direct consequences for German émigrés. The Spanish civil war, the Italo-Abyssinian war, all that began in these years that were full to bursting with such events. Meanwhile, I was giving German lessons from morning to evening, that is, from 8:30 until 8:30, in the mornings away from the house, after noon at home. Because more and more Italians were learning German, the worse the political situation got for us. In the meantime, my husband was dedicating himself to his field of work, Roman religious history, and swinging between millennia: from the 'gods of the hour' and 'naked gods' in the late thirties, who became ever more objectionable, and back. At shorter and shorter intervals the police came to check our papers. And in the morning the secret policeman greeted my husband on the Piazza Venezia with the observation: "So professor, you worked late again last night," because our house was quite exposed and during official celebrations on the 'Via dell'Impero' the roof key was confiscated.

In the apartment there was a small, tube-like storage room, a *bugigattolo*, a cat's hiding place, as it is called in Italian. There in the armoire stood the small suitcases, packed and ready, for many weeks. Or was it one week. Endless days. We left the house before five, because they came before six if they were going to take you

away, and rode around Rome in the ‘Cicolare Rossa’ or the ‘Nera.’ And met our landlord in the bar on the Piazza Venezia, where the three of us had breakfast: a cappuccino and a brioche, as they did in Italy. Then we began the day as if everything were normal. One night, I couldn’t take it anymore. In an hour, we resolved to abandon everything, and left for Sicily in the middle of the night. The very next morning they came to haul us to prison, where all of Hitler’s opponents and victims were collected during Hitler’s visit to Rome. Those two years that we spent in the Duse apartment were full of such episodes, one after another; she must have had a similarly wretched time there.

> The evening sun gilds the Tiber,
> then the nightingale sings to us from the Palatine Hill.

Yes, it’s true, we had happy moments there. No, even that is wrong. It was a happy time, during which we were repeatedly alarmed and hunted. For us, who were young and together, who every morning watched the sun rise over the Forum and the Palatine Hill, over that splendid and adored city, and who read together in the evening what he had written that day, it was a stressful time, during which we could maintain continuity only for short periods at a time. We tried over and over. Objectively and seen from the outside, it was a difficult time. Politically and economically. But only from the outside. Only objectively.

The housing complex, which now contains the finance ministry and is attached to the small Capitoline post office, is the only building still standing from the former Via Monte Tarpeo, the street on which Ivanov lived and Duse and also Rilke (Mommsen lived just around the corner) and which, in 1939, still before the outbreak of war, was torn down and planted over. If you stand with your back to the finance

ministry you can still see in the elbow of the turn, where the newly laid-out street heads down to the former ‘Via della Consolazione’ and to the Forum, Ivanov’s little garden with his cypress tree, where house number 69 stood for several centuries.

By the way, I learned to cook from the little old wife of the concierge next door, Angelinoca (which can be translated as ‘Ole Angelica’). And my cooking isn’t bad.

III

We lived only briefly, hardly more than half a year, in the house that we moved into with my parents just after the start of the war. It was in Minehead, Somerset, on the Bristol Channel, where they occupied the two lower rooms and we the two upper rooms, while I was a teacher at St. Aldwyn’s College and taught Italian, French, and perhaps Latin, in my still imperfect English (there was no call for German, of course**).** We never got to see the wisteria vines that we planted out of nostalgia for the Roman ones, or the other bushes and flowers that we brought in part from the woods, where rhododendrons and fuchsias grew in this climate, which is mild like Ireland’s. We carried the books up the stairs, creating a chain, the four of us. Because the staircase was too narrow for the crates. And we brought the books downstairs, where they would be repacked into the crates in the garage (there was room, as we didn’t have a car). A few more; of course, some English ones had been added.

That was the last time that I saw my father, as he helped us pack the books. We acted as though it was something funny and quoted Schiller's "Bell." The bucket brigade.

In between we had lived in various kinds of furnished rooms, in Rome, in London, in Oxford, and now in Minehead as well. All very briefly. In Minehead with the gardener who fertilized his grapevines with blood in the fall. I don't know from what animal anymore. But it unsettled me, and it appears in "Whoever is Affected," which I wrote in October of 1953 on Vinalhaven, an island in Maine, before our return across the Atlantic:

> Thus he is sought out
> and punished
> and must eat the dust
> on all the country roads of betrayal
> from the soles of the disappointed
> and because it is autumn
> his blood should
> feed the large grapevines
> and harden them against the frost.

That was the last thing I wrote before our return to Europe in 1954, to Germany, as I thought then and still think. Home, then, where I briefly saw my parents' apartment in Cologne, and heard, to my relief, that the child who is now a child where I was a child, instead of a guinea pig lets a hamster run through the rooms.

IV

We also saw our house in Santo Domingo again. After exactly twenty years, in the spring of 1973. We arrived at just the right time, when it was already vacated and supposed to make way for a clinic. We read the sign with the name of the clinic and the architects as we drove by on our way from the airport to the new hotel which stood where earlier only banana and yucca plants and a few huts were and where now one of the new villa sections lies.

> Fatherland . . .
> on the spacious trays of memory
> two or three near-cities[23]

The near-city has become a city of millions. The house that once stood far outside is close to the downtown now, thanks to the great expansion. Even the old airport that was built after our arrival, when the last passenger steamers had been sunk and the Antilles became reachable only by plane, is now surrounded by villas and more central than our house at that time. The current airport is splendidly laid out on a coral bay that years ago was the favorite swimming spot, now replaced by a more distant one. A proper freeway runs to it where cars used to bounce along; the palm border was left standing and transformed into a kind of park. Arrival is disorientingly magnificent now. In 1940 we landed on a small runway in the middle of sugarcane fields, as I describe in my letter to Günter Eich (and also in the story of "The Island and the One-eared Tomcat.")

Although later the 'new' airport was there, from which we left in 1953, it had an exciting novelty to us. Just as one came onto the airfield, which at the time was

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[23] Héctor Incháustegui-Cabral, "Traurige Weise für das Vaterland, das ich liebe" in *Rose aus Asche*, ed. Erwin Walter Palm (Munich, 1955) p. 42.

served only by PanAm, which connected the island to New York via Puerto Rico or to Miami via Santiago de Cuba, when one came out of the customs building there was a large signpost with many arms, pointing at angles into the air. On these signs in the air were the distance in kilometers by plane to the world's great cities: New York, Paris, London, Madrid, Rome, Tokyo, Buenos Aires, and probably also Rio and Mexico. Yes, really. I have never seen another one at any airport, either before or since. And nowhere else would it have excited me so much as on that island. There was something surreal but also tangible about it. I don't know where I'd be if I hadn't specifically gone back on gloomy days to stand under this sign post and look at its arms pointing in the air toward the cities, which actually existed, which were reachable only by plane, because we lived down by the sea, where the airport lay far out, where the plateau sloped up to the mountains. Those cities lay out of range for us for a long time. Financially and in every way. At some point we saw them appear, a few: Miami was the first. The continent.

Those who don't remember can already tell from the connecting flights that Santo Domingo lies between Cuba and Puerto Rico (Enzensberger and *Merian* popularized the area around us), and that to the west you come first to Haiti, which lies on the same island, the middle of the three 'Greater Antilles,' and to the east to Puerto Rico, subtropical islands in the Caribbean Sea, whose waters seemed to us at the time a much duller blue than those of the Mediterranean, which may have been a prejudice. "You don't have dolphins," we scolded it. For us it was missing all the mythological figures, beginning with Arion. There were plenty of sharks. And you can eat turtle there the way people eat chicken elsewhere, and they taste similar, only

less appetizing. (It is as wishy-washy as chicken has become here.) The Caribbean Sea, in any case (now called 'the Caribbean,' see *Merian*) was right behind our house at the time. Or almost right there. I went out the kitchen door in my bathing suit. First there was a small, cleared patio, almost a courtyard, where the rabbit hutch was, on the tarpaper roof of which our tomcat and lady cat lounged in the sun, more for their pleasure than for the rabbits, probably (the former enjoyed the smell, while all the latter smelled was danger, as is the case in such situations; we shouldn't have allowed it). "Vivere pericolosamente," as Mussolini still demanded at the time, but they had the wire mesh. No, I won't go on; someone said they multiplied more rapidly because of it, out of sheer fright. Then there was the outdoor fireplace for boiling the laundry, large stones on which wood was piled. And then there was also an unused fountain, a one-room shed, intended in the rural style for the maid but lived in by our tenant, and a hovel known as the 'garage.' Here, behind the kitchen, where cacti grew and grow, the car of the Mexican ambassador would stop, as did those of other visitors who didn't want to be seen by the police, but no doubt always were anyway. Behind this odd yard were the trees from which wood was chopped, simply branches cut away with a machete, there were red-blooming acacias among them, called Flamboyants, which are also found here and there in Andalusia, and after that a scant half kilometer of plains grass, which we fed to the rabbits, although it would have been sufficient for much different animals. (People with children might have kept a small donkey there; they are so delicate in the Antilles, like the donkeys of Pantelleria.) The grass grew out of hand. That is, it grew higher and higher, like all green things in the tropics, and had to be cut several times a year, at a high price. We took over the whole thing in

disarray and in its natural condition, criticized the previous tenants, and left it that way. Through the grass, which was sometimes as tall as me, I had a sort of 'trampled path' down to the Avenida Washington (some who read this will envy me for my Hitler, although it was highly unenviable, even if not devoid of comfort.) At that time the avenida was neither driven nor walked on, at least not out that far. I crossed it in my bathing suit and came into a somewhat run-down waterside park where popular dance festivals were held on Sundays. I walked past a dove cote and into the sea. If the neighbors saw me going in, they would say admonishingly and without change over the years: "*Señora*? and the shark?" Always singular. But I was alone with the pelicans that flew away above me, heading east in the morning, west in the evening, as the case might be.

When we got to the corner where I had crossed the avenida, the friend who had picked us up from the airport said: "And your property was here, do you remember?" Of course everything was built up, because the area had been engulfed by the city. But we drove around the block and went past our house, slowly enough to read the sign that simultaneously entered our field of vision. And to see that the house was already empty. The neighboring house, formerly a stately bungalow, was also vacant, while on the other side of the street, the planned 'Palace of Fine Arts,' a large, neoclassical main structure with wide front steps, contributed to the citification of the street.

Then we drove back to the Avenida Washington and came to the corner where the avenida used to end, but now goes on. No trace remained of the large banner that hung above the temporary end of the street along the shore, which I walked past every

day and which read: ‘Trujillo pays the wages’ (literally: Trujillo signs the checks.) In the evening the text was illuminated with bulbs, but it was also very visible during the day. Salaries were paid punctually, though they were mostly encumbered in advance, by the Trujillo regime, naturally, and, with the high interest rates, had quite decreased by payout time. But in Haiti and Cuba, there was no punctuality at all; a year’s delay was nothing special, at least not in those days. And that was all expressed understandably by the banner. We had barely been dropped off at the hotel to relax from the journey when we took a taxi and rode back to our house. (I say ‘our’ house because we lived there for so long. At no point did we actually own houses or apartments.)

We lived there for ten of the twelve years we spent in Santo Domingo, more precisely, in Ciudad Trujillo, Trujillo City, as it was appropriately called. The whole country might have been named after him. Meanwhile, the city is once again called Santo Domingo, as always since 1502. “You’re in luck,” said the owner of the ship as we departed from Montreal, sailing down the St. Lawrence. “Until recently a tyrant named Molina was in charge there. He’s supposed to have been a monster. The current head is named Trujillo and seems a bit more bearable.” The dictator was called Trujillo Molina, because the Spanish combine fathers’ and mothers’ names (Rafael was his first name). He killed many people, in huge battles with the Haitians but also routinely. Many refugees owe their lives to him. He took them in to ‘whiten’ his country, without regard for their political beliefs or their religion or ‘race,’ Spanish republicans and communists, the so-called ‘centroeuropeans,’ victims of Hitler from Germany, Austria, and the nearby occupied countries. He let them

disembark. And that was a lot at the time. Those who had to go back were killed at home. Or weren't allowed to land and sailed from harbor to harbor until their ships were sunk. He didn't demand huge sums of money like other countries, he didn't take only specialists with useful skills such as electrical engineers, bridge builders, doctors etc. He took intellectuals as well as tradesmen and farmers, he employed them and he watched over them.

He built up the new university with the Spaniards, an academy of arts with the Spaniards, an orchestra with the Spaniards, a school for diplomats with the Spaniards. Almost nothing with the centroeuropeans, who initially had a language barrier and many of whom tried their hand at agriculture, among them Saul Steinberg, the cartoonist who became world-famous in New York after the war. Our intellectuals had mostly gone to the United States early on. On the journey over, we ourselves, with Italian and Latin as a bridge, had read the Spanish poets rather than grammar books like *Brush up your Spanish*, and soon connected with the Spaniards.

You could not be grateful to the dictator, you could not not be grateful to the dictator, he was a terrifying life-saver. The people were friendly, and happy to have us. Especially the intellectuals. We brought the 'world' with us. We loved that country where we were prisoners, something that never loses its sense of uneasiness. We despaired constantly. We changed a lot. The bond, the friendships remained, when we gradually moved away after the war, almost all of us. We encounter each other, those who were there, as if we had gone to school together. And we did, too. A 'learning process' of the most expensive kind. We embrace when we meet, like siblings. Even those who are happy to finally be out of sight of one another.

Thus this house we were standing in front of had always been only a temporary home: a refuge on the edge, where one cannot walk any farther, one has already gone so far, but just waits to see whether one will be allowed to go on living. If the world starts turning again. In retrospect, all of our residences revealed themselves as temporary, waystations, for shorter and shorter times. But only in hindsight. We were planning to stay. Not here. But we stayed here longer than anywhere. This 'edge' became a second home, despite everything. The people who took us in, a kind of second family (like family, for life, without any need to write.)

> . . . and in distant lands
> one pulls a chair up to the table for you
> beside the housewife
> and everyone gives you something from his plate
> when the bowl is already empty
> as if a child had come home late . . .
> And the dark mango trees
> and the chestnuts
> grow side by side
> in your heart[24]

It was in this house that I, in November of 1951, suddenly began to write poems: in this room that opened onto the terrace and had a little bay window and was always so green from the trees around it and the moist air, as if one had walked into an aquarium (but where new tenants in the meantime have closed out the trees with blinds. There weren't many left either).

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[24]. Written in 1955 or 1956 in Munich, the first poem that I wrote after my return. *Nur eine Rose als Stütze*, p. 10 ff. It first appeared in Spanish in June 1957 in *Caracola* (Málaga), dedicated to Manuel A. Amiama and Francisco Prats Ramírez.

Our garden was no longer in good shape, which it really never had been anyway. Everything was now bare, an unfriendly little desert. The same new tenants, whom we promptly met, were proud to have constructed a dance floor there. We disapproved of their attempts at Europeanizing, inside and out. The small sidewalk, the bushes, and the palms were gone, and even the big, pepper-red-blooming Flamboyant, over whose branches the rats had walked onto our roof at night. First you saw them, then you heard them jump. The zinc roof on which they landed had been replaced with one of concrete, the wood posts of the terrace with solid columns of cement. The agave hedge that demarcated the property from the outside and which occasioned frequent visits from Trujillo's officers because it blocked the view from up the street, but which we doggedly defended ("First bring us a written order from the president," we said): it had disappeared. (Whether before him or after, who knows. The bullet didn't hit him here.)

We went around our house. Right, the kitchen door was only stuck shut. Thus we could enter our own house after twenty years without witnesses: we, its short-lived occupants, and now its last visitors before the bulldozers. We repossessed it properly before we left. We opened all the shutters on its almost innumerable windows (at least twenty-five or thirty, it was really riddled with them). It now lacked windowpanes. The cracks in the stairwell from the 1949 earthquake were still visible. The stairs were, as always, painted with 'cat-head color,' a matte reddish-brown. We had lived upstairs, in three rooms, as we do now; we had rented out the ground floor; only our kitchen was downstairs. We walked through his room, opened the window next to his desk, yes, the brightly foliated trees with the pale pink blooms were still

there, they bloomed the entire winter. These tender trees, they almost represented Europe to us; the thick, shapeless banana leaves used to make us nervous—it's hard to understand after the fact. Then we stood on the broad terrace that connected our two rooms on the exterior, as it almost always is for us. Almost always we can look in each other's window, ever since the Via Monte Tarpeo. On this terrace we began our days, rarely without rabbits or cats. For a long time our favorite rabbit kept us company at breakfast. It would be carried up the stairs, struggling and sometimes slashing a pajama jacket with its hind legs, and then sit on the third chair.

The rabbits were supposedly run over by our neighbors, but quite definitely eaten while we were in the mountains during the summer. We couldn't direct grief and resentment of this kind (a duck was also 'run over') at the person responsible. Because the person responsible was a good and also wealthy neighbor, and in difficult times we could count on him: he vouched for us at his bank, the New York City Bank, which, to be sure, Trujillo also owned, or co-owned, but which, as an international bank, had normal business practices, so that our university salaries, to collective wonder—almost collective resentment—remained unconfiscated year after year. A singular case in the humanities faculty.

Our favorite rabbit was no ordinary rabbit, and a gift of the German zoo director, the same one who sneaked up from behind on the small crocodile that had escaped from its cage and the zoo and had almost reached Trujillo's palace on the obviously not exceedingly traveled Avenida Bolivar, outside of the city: a solid house across from Trujillo's own 'President Beer' brewery, everything well surrounded by walls. He stepped behind the crocodile, shut its eyes with both thumbs, pulled it into

his arms, and lifted it onto the truck. Why the crocodile, as it was lifted, didn't open its eyes again, I have never understood. The zoo director was the sole survivor of several Orinoco expeditions, as people told us in whispers. Maybe the crocodile was afraid. For me, the act as such is one of the wonders of the world, and comes up in my most recent volume of poetry. Under the title "As a precaution":

> He who bites the dog back
> he who steps on the head of the serpent
> he who holds shut the eyes of the caiman
> he's got it right.

All of these things really happened; as I said, that poem describes reality, it invents nothing. The snake: the zoo director talked about it when the subject of the crocodile's outing to see the ruler came up. The dog, however, was bitten by a totally average American in Washington DC. Both are supposed to have had good teeth. The moon as a possible repository for undesirables has, since I wrote this,[25] become a questionable destination; there would be no shortage of political undesirables, but there continues to be room on and under the earth, and the cost would be extravagant. Thus this metaphor must remain unredeemed for a while.

After breakfast it became too hot on the large terrace. Only after sunset, when the wind had changed, did it come back into favor; we sat there so long, alone or with friends, until in winter one even had to put on a light jacket or wrap. Because of the high humidity, you freeze at 20 or 22 degrees Celsius. Downstairs in the hall, where the pile of suitcases stood, the big brown wicker suitcases from the twenties that we had received from our families, which we stored on beams six inches above the stone

[25] First edition 1956, San Rafael de la Sierra.

floor, camouflaged by a fabric-covered frame, our winter coats and two-piece dresses and all the things people wear for most of the year in Europe were moldering away. My beloved velvet dress from Rome, my blue housedress, some of the clothing salvageable, some later stolen, everything growing daily—whether camphored or not—soggier and smellier. For the time being, in any case, of no interest to us.

We spent the day in half-darkness, as is customary in the south. In the afternoon I would type in the bathroom, a large room with an old tub, to which hot water had to be carried upstairs in buckets when someone was sick. Otherwise we bathed in cold water. In the same giant room was the toilet, often with a wide-eyed toad in it. And there, or on the narrow terrace just outside which caught the sea breeze, I typed all afternoon, wearing only a slip. Late at night, when the water was cool enough for rinsing, I developed my negatives there (on ice) and made enlargements of the architectural photos for my husband's publications. On a gas pipe, a bucket with a camera with double exposures under it would be laboriously slid up and down. Each time a test of strength. (The fine adjustment mechanism worked normally.) Many a night I worked there behind closed shutters; the moon was too bright for a darkroom.

Usually, though, in the evening we sat on the front terrace, which now had the land breeze: on the rocking chairs, with their woven sisal seats, the agave fiber, around the low wooden table with the big floor lamp, all made by a Spanish revolutionary, a good cabinetmaker. With the exception of the lamp, his standard

models, and much in demand, instead of the colorfully painted wooden rocking chairs from 'Cibao,'[26] which were and are ubiquitous in that country.

We also had some very remarkable foreign visitors, from André Breton to Emil Ludwig, whoever happened to come through on their way to Mexico or the US or, after the war, on their way home to Europe. The guests were given iced tea with Dominican rum and tropical lemons or light, fermented, slightly foamy pineapple juice. If any of them missed whiskey or cognac, they didn't show it. (Later, in New York, when I served tropical drinks in a plastic wastebasket, they were a great success and everyone got enormously drunk. A painter, fairly famous at the time, drew me with one of the newly invented felt-tip pens on a hot dog plate; I was standing on the top of a pyramid of furniture, up near the ceiling, why, I no longer know. Ten years later, the drawing served as the cover for *Here*. On our terrace, nobody actually got drunk.)

My pineapple tortes made in the style of German apple tortes, but in the absence of apples with pineapples (pineapple pieces release more water when they are sugared and must be well drained) were renowned. Likewise the Sacher tortes that we had delivered to our friends' homes at Christmas, because there were no pastry shops at that time. (Only one Austrian immigrant. Not bad.) These cakes, as well as the bread and rolls, were baked in a peculiar baking box made of aluminum that was lifted from one coal fire to the next, several times during the baking. The fire was fanned with palm fronds, the stove was arranged so that every burner was open underneath. Naturally there were already many people at the time who didn't cook that way anymore, but rather with electricity. I don't know if there was also butane,

[26] A northern province. Columbus' dreamland, *Cipango*.

which almost everyone uses except the women in remote villages, and almost all of them as well. Ice was still brought to us in blocks, as in Cologne in my childhood, and then wrapped in sacks or newspapers, while the extremely expensive electric ice boxes, twice as expensive as in their country of origin, already stood in every embassy and in the houses of importers and exporters, mostly in their best rooms, a kind of house god, as is fitting in the tropics for a cooling device. The intellectuals, be they high-ranking Spanish officials in exile who were employed at the university or schools, or painters, or musicians, did everything in the traditional ways of the Antilles, which was the cheapest. We differed only in the way we did laundry: the Spanish whitened their clothes in caustic lye, while we boiled ours in five-liter oil canisters over logs in the yard, stirring with a stick. Neither we nor the Spaniards hung our laundry out to dry on barbed wire, as was, and maybe still is common practice there and in all of Latin America. (Just as we didn't dry our meats on barbed wire or in the sun.) As in most countries in the 'third world,' the laundry is or was usually pounded on stones in cold water, something one can still see at many places on the rivers in southern Europe. Indeed without regard for the status of the owner, the laundry of the poor as well as that of the guests at luxury hotels, if they send out their wash. Until the washing machine did away with these 'democratic' stones and straightened the backs of the washerwomen.

As we went through our house, in the afternoon, but with good light, because when it gets dark there—there is no twilight that close to the equator, night falls immediately—we came to the historic stain on the floor of our dining room. There it was. Twenty years had done little more than the hydrochloric acid that we had tried.

Usually such wood floors are or were scoured with sand and brushes, as they once were in Europe. The stain under our table, which since then has been removed along with the floor itself, was a memorable one, and I wonder today why we ever tried to get rid of it at all.

Our table and chairs were almost like the ones we have now, only more rustic, both made by Spanish carpenters. Instead of Spanish walnut trees, they used mahogany (as I had replaced the apples with pineapples). Unfinished, waxed mahogany (not the polished kind used in German marriage beds). The chairs were straight and high-backed and strictly Spanish, with seats woven from sisal. One of our most flamboyant guests, Emil Ludwig, shoved the stern Spanish chair back and stretched his full length on the floor so he could feed the two cats roast guinea fowl face to face. That doesn't happen every day. Otherwise the floor would've looked quite different. It was Ludwig's first night at our house. We had all silently survived the moment of shock when he saw our German library—the German books were in the dining room, and, like all of our books, organized in unmistakable chronological order. We began to like him when he stood there and wordlessly noted that he was missing. "We're having the biographies delivered too, a crate full," we remembered. But he sent us a single, thin book, "the most unsalable of my books," as he wrote, *Tom and Sylvester*, an intimate and lovable epic poem.

A week after this evening, when we took him to the airport, where the sign post, Shiva-like, raised its many arms in the air, we apprehensively watched him leave, and definitely not because of the books. Façade-climbing students had appeared in his hotel room—he was staying in the presidential suite—to give him the

surprising message that the country was being run undemocratically, about which they offered details. It was one of many incidents that caused us to gaze sheepishly after his airplane. We had been assigned to him, there was no other German professor at the university, we were driven through the city and country with him in a car with the number 1 on its license plate. He wouldn't write the biography of the dictator, on account of which he had been invited, and we would never be able to prove that we had tried our best.

So we stood next to the sign post, while he flew toward New York, which really existed, and we stayed on the ground on the island, people without passports, as good as walled-in.

His little joke in Washington about the façade-climbers in the luxury hotel of the well-guarded city who had asked him to be their liberator, or even a conversation about the biography could have cost us our lives. On the new hospital building, near the spot where the banner had been, we saw in 1973 the name of a friend, a young doctor whose North American guests had been less discreet: a late tribute to the murdered man. I learned back then that drowning victims must be swollen, otherwise they are bodies that someone threw in the harbor. (That's also why it was my first question if my friend Fritz Bauer, the district attorney, was thin or fat when they found him in his bathtub. Although in his case it wouldn't have resolved much.) In this doctor's laboratory, I was allowed to use the Leica he used for his biological slides to make reproductions from art books. On one such occasion, the Negro leg about which I wrote in "Report from an Island" was lying there. By the way, he was our only close friend in twelve years to die in that manner.

We saw only much later, after most of us had moved away, that he was the start of a 'trend' among our acquaintances. — The next one was a Spanish professor who was Trujillo's private secretary for a time (incidentally only a sporadic visitor to our terrace). In Mexico he wrote a book called: *I was the private secretary to* . . . The book was negative and was purchased by Trujillo. Whereupon he rewrote it: *I was private secretary to* . . . This time positive. The second book was again bought up by Trujillo and again disposed of. I can still see it before me: a dark, grass-green cover, with an old-fashioned inkwell and accompanying quill pen on the front. (It was sent to us by the university, two copies, one for each of us.) As if he were trying to outdo d'Annunzio's macabre game with *Fire*, the author wrote the book a third time. That during this project he was involved in a fatal automobile accident lies perhaps in the nature of the beast. — Much more serious was the case of the Basque at Columbia University who made use of his native knowledge in his doctoral thesis. He was last seen at 117th and Broadway. The international press went wild. Nobody noticed that the thesis disappeared, too. (His death was painted in colors worthy of Malraux's *Condition humaine.* But nobody had heard anything for sure.) — A closer friend of ours, a Catalonian, was pulled out of a plane on a business trip, on that famous airfield, likewise forever. All of this was after our time, in a moment of heightened resistance and heightened repression. We had caught the 'quietest' twelve years. "If you saw a revolver lying on the street in Trujillo's time, you crossed the street," a taxi driver said to us in 1973, sounding almost melancholy, as the radio broadcast the murders of the past twenty-four hours. Every incident a typical calamity; the Encyclopedia Britannica that we consulted before our departure from the British

Channel offered no reassuring information: The country had looked this way throughout its history, like an ever-increasing portion of the world today.

In any case, Emil Ludwig kept mum. And after half a year, we stopped being afraid.

I still have his very unusual parting gift. He bought a small, inlaid mahogany box in a 'giftshop,' and then, to our amazement, had the driver of the number 1 car stop in front of the cathedral on 'Columbus Square,' the main square of the city, and ordered him through us to climb up onto the dictator's car and pluck blooming branches from the oleander that stood there at the time. We were half-dead from shock and wonderment. Shutting the crocodile's eyes must have seemed like a ho-hum, routine action by comparison. Later he presented me with the little box with oleander blossoms in it. On top of the blossoms a small card with lines from a poem. And—God knows how he pulled this off—when I opened it, a butterfly flew out. The little box sits on the floor next to my couch and serves as the drawer of an imaginary nightstand. Whenever it threatens to fall apart, I glue it.

In Santo Domingo, there are almost no mahogany carving studios anymore, because all the trees have been cut down, and the remaining ones are protected. In those days there was a flood of mahogany pieces, and in the border regions mahogany was even cut up for firewood. Despite all of these wonderful things, we quarreled dreadfully with Ludwig, for example about the then-moot question of whether Germany should use the black, red and gold flag again, or whether, as he pictured it, it should have a white permanent flag. Here I am looking in the Rowohlt Encyclopedia of Literature and reading the miniscule article about the Ludwig

biographies. One would never expect that at a major football game in the USA in 1941 the announcer would proclaim: “Among you is sitting Emil Ludwig, who is seeing his first American football game,” and that thousands would rise to greet him. Just as they would’ve stood in Buenos Aires or Rio, where today he is still read more than in Germany, like the other internationally successful author, Stefan Zweig.

But I’m writing here not about Ludwig, but about our house, in which he often sat, in the evening on our large terrace, like all our guests, and at midday on the narrow one behind the bathroom. While Frau Ludwig napped at the hotel, he sat there and competed with my husband in translating a Tasso poem from the Italian: a surprisingly childlike and spontaneous person, this prototype of the ‘asphalt writer.’

From the rear terrace the cats jumped in bold leaps into the garden. I sometimes waited on the front one with unease, an unease that luckily remained unfounded—Ludwig’s departure was in no way our only headache—until E. emerged between the palms along the avenida.

André Breton sat on the front terrace, not the rear, more than once. The first time as he was travelling from Paris to New York via Santo Domingo and Haiti. (Anna Seghers and Victor Serge, who came through in 1941 on their way to Mexico, I unfortunately missed. They held court for a whole day in the mirror-lined café above the ‘Ateneo.’ Serge filled the city with dark prophesies. It seems he overestimated the seductive effect of German nylon stockings on the Russian populace.) And in 1945 or 1946, when Breton rolled the same path up after himself, so to speak, as he returned to Paris. And many Spaniards, among them quite a few from the circle of García Lorca. And Latin Americans, scientists, poets, musicians,

sculptors, painters. And finally people from all over. I don't know why, upon returning to the terrace, I mentioned our breakfasts with the rabbits first. Wilfredo Lam, the Chinese-Cuban painter with a German wife who painted horrible sugarcane idols—that was at our first house, which is still standing and for the moment remains unthreatened, although it is a much worse house.

It was there that we again unpacked the books packed on the Bristol Channel. By no means immediately, by no means all from the same crate in which we had placed them at the foot of the stairs. The English transport company had packed a portion of the crates' contents into a cargo crate, along with the Roman furniture, but, due to lack of money, they couldn't be shipped. In fact, the things were auctioned off on the dock in London, together with all our bedding: a real Easter egg for the buyer. My mother alone packed the books back into crates, during the 'Blitz,' on the London dock. She wasn't used to dealing with books and did it dutifully, but in tears. My father was already behind bars there, as a German. She used boxes that were much too large and cracked at the corners. But most of them arrived. The ship that brought the books across the Atlantic was not sunk until its return trip, although we received the cargo documents and the news that it had sunk at the same time. Initially we stored the crates down at the ground level in a shallow basement. These houses don't have true cellars; they are descendents of the stilt houses one still sees on the interior parts of the island, including in cities. When cyclones threatened, the crates were carried up into the house (the only other floor was like a raised ground floor) with help from all the neighborhood boys. And the doors were nailed shut, as was and is the custom there.

At that time our first house already had a concrete roof, which is a big advantage in cyclones. Only during earthquakes is a zinc roof more appropriate, because it undulates as flexibly as a building by Frank Lloyd Wright. The zinc roof of our second house was said in fact to have been blown away by the great cyclone of 1930. The new one, people assured us, was screwed on with especially good screws. We hesitated, on account of the books, because cyclones occur more frequently than earthquakes, at least one 'warning' per summer. In the first years, we packed up the books in case the roof blew off again. One doesn't stay so heroic. Definitely not in that heat.

Both houses also survived the earthquake of 1949. The new house, which had the lighter roof, was, on the other hand, right on the sea, and in earthquakes the waves often sloshed up as high as the house. I didn't flee to the upper city, as did many inhabitants of the *avenida*. On the contrary, I had just taken my husband to the airport and had to struggle against the tide of people to get back down to the house and the books, a loyalty that nobody appreciated.

Earthquakes are in fact the first thing that Germans think about when they think about Santo Domingo. Or thought about, the older generation that is. Kleist's *Earthquake of St. Domingo*, an association that is doubly misleading. Because Kleist's story is actually called *The Engagement in St. Domingo* ('The earthquake' was in 'Chile'), and it doesn't even take place in Santo Domingo, but in Haiti, the neighbor to the west, a Negro republic with French traditions, where today any Negro immigrant immediately has citizenship, like every Jew in Israel. Whereas the Dominican Republic, with its capitol of Santo Domingo (in German falsely known as

San Domingo, because for Germans saints are evidently Italian) is populated by mulattos and is a daughter republic of Spain. The two states have extremely different temperaments: the Dominicans are earnest and hardworking, “with their eternal high C.” The Haitians, despite stark poverty, merry and carefree.

I won’t discuss our first house, which is difficult to find in its current surroundings, and in which we grew accustomed to the country. The ‘one-eared cat’ lived there with us. I shall write about our arrival and the one-eared cat in my next book, *Report from an Island*. (In that you will find everything that I leave out here, and much more.) It was in this house that the first unexpected visitor knocked on the door one evening. A strange, dark-skinned fellow in a khaki safari suit seemed at the time doubly strange and dangerous, and was perhaps one of Trujillo’s policemen. He laughed when he saw our distrust and reassuringly gave us his name. So-and-so had sent him. We laughed when he refused the first iced coffee of his life as asking too much of him. Coffee was something hot that was served not in glasses but in small cups without saucers. None of us ever forgot that moment. He was a medical student and then our doctor for a long time.

In this first house we initially had a borrowed radio for the reports on the war. Then a Telefunken Tosca, which served us loyally without a single repair for twelve years. We acquired it used in a shabby hut in the upper city, which was a shanty town at the time but is now the residential area. We were attached to the reports from Europe as if by an umbilical cord. But the BBC and the American stations also broadcast excellent music programs, of a quality unimaginable today.

One of the main events, though somewhat later, in our new, eventful house was the acquisition of a record player that plugged into the Tosca (who cared about hi-fi and amplifiers back then!) The record player was sinfully expensive, like all imports. I had bought it on the promise of many friends that we could play their records. Even by our departure we had never owned so much as one record. A kind of custom developed: those of our friends and acquaintances—frequently diplomats or ministers, whose jobs required that they travel—who were going to London or the USA would call up and ask: "What kind of records should I bring back?" Thus E. contributed to the construction of record collections, to which we had free access. I should also mention the wonderful records owned by the British Council, which came through the British embassy. The standards in those days were immensely high, and we celebrated music orgies that almost ruined us for concerts.

That this was after the war you can see because we had a telephone instead of a messenger-boy. The purchase of the record player was probably our reaction to the departure of the Spanish composer and conductor Enrique Casal Chapí, a former collaborator with Lorca's traveling theater, 'La Baraca,' who soon after the war accepted the direction of an orchestra in Montevideo. I can still see him appearing from among the palm trees; nobody but the neighbors came to our house as often. Nobody played Scarlatti like that. Nobody went over E.'s Spanish texts with me so lucidly or quickly. Nobody was more witty at the cost of others. How many worries we laughed away together. All by himself he could have replaced the city of Madrid. And yet he was among those whose creativity suffered from exile and the backbreaking, petty details. We are protected in pairs.

In this house the book *The Monuments of the Island of Hispaniola* was finished, despite all the difficulties. With a section on cultural history. As a comfort and a compensation for the aborted 1939 book about Roman architecture against the backdrop of Roman religious history. Even though it could not be printed immediately either, but only years after our departure, in 1956-1957, in Spain. By the famous printer Seix y Barral.

In this house the republic's Monument Protection Act was drawn up. E. had been made a consultant to the commission for monument preservation. Soon after the war I was appointed to the professorship in German.

In this house, where we lived from hand to mouth, as long as the 'hand' was healthy, without a cent to save, without a bank account, and without insurance—not to mention social security. If you had to cancel a class due to illness, you weren't paid. Not until after the war were regular monthly salaries introduced—though without doctors' bills. Only medications, lab tests, and x-rays cost us anything; doctors' care was given generously, day and night, and we were never billed. Altogether, the helpfulness of the Dominicans was exemplary. On the first Christmas after their arrival, needy immigrants were given back their rental payments by the homeowners. In more than one case. To be sure, well-to-do immigrants with earnings who had a claim on the small public budget were targeted. In more than one case. The intrigues were often full of drama. But that happened not only to strangers, but equally to natives: the tug of war over the small pot. And never, under no circumstances, would you be abandoned by your friends, but rather comforted, advised, and defended, as if you had been born there and belonged.

I began this passage with “In this house, where.” But how could I sum up my life in this house without giving thanks to those in the middle, without whom we might not have survived and perhaps or definitely would not have survived so well. “ . . . *Y sin dinero y sin renta/ en el punte que trajo se sustenta*” (“and without money and without secure income/ he preserves his standard of living”) as was said of the Spanish arrivals in the sixteenth century—but it wasn’t that simple in the twentieth.

“In this house,” I begin again, and can already see the sentence gorging on nostalgia again. In this house, where we lived and survived with a Rolleiflex and finally a Leica (both of them still with us, ready to celebrate their anniversaries: the Rollei almost 40, the Leica 25) with the Remington portable that I had been given for my graduation (no, that fell out of the plane in Puerto Rico on our return trip and died instantly), with my old Telefunken Tosca and with a record player and with our books, animals, and friends, the world opened up to us in many ways. Material and immaterial.

From this house, E. traveled through all of South and Central America, always on the invitation of universities and congresses, at the time with a (usually official) temporary Dominican passport. (“Born in Frankfurt in the Dominican Republic, representative of the University of Sto. Domingo” one such document read.) There we received our first German newspapers, an issue of the *Neue Deutsche Zeitung* and the *Gegenwart*. Jahnn’s *Wooden Ship*, Benn’s *Static Poems* and Eich’s *Remote Homesteads* reached us there. And a student from Heidelberg visited us, an exceedingly enterprising and clever young man who wished to study tropical medicine there. He had tied his patients in a nearby town to the feet of their beds

when he appeared on our rear terrace on Sundays. He established contacts with Germany with customary competence: to Heidelberg, to Bonn. He spread the word to our friends and teachers from our student days that we were still alive. And immediately after E.'s 'Guggenheim Fellowship,' which meant a year in the US for both of us—we were already in New York—came the invitation from the German Academic Exchange Service.

I won't talk here about the tiny house on Vinalhaven in Penobscot Bay in the state of Maine, where you are so far north that the sea has southern colors again, and where laurels grow out of basalt crevices as in Italy and the seagulls take care of garbage removal. Even though I wrote "Whoever is Affected"[27] there, the last poem I wrote before my return, and which, I know now but didn't know then, anticipated that return.

I returned once more to the house, in February of 1954, and packed the books into crates with the help of a young Romanian poet who had come only after the war. Only Voltaire had to be sacrificed, the Kehler edition, 72 volumes. I sold him and Frederick the Great, likewise an edition from that time, for money for the voyage. I left the crates behind, soldered into zinc boxes in the entryway to the house: a kind of barricade, a full railroad car load. It was shipped back to us in Heidelberg almost ten years later by our former subtenant, who took over the house. (I have already recounted the books' arrival in Hainsbachweg in "Literary 'Notions.'"[28]) In retrospect, I can see as I'm writing, that is, now, in January 1974, that it was in this house that a new life began for us, our current life. Both of us changed our

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[27] *Nur eine Rose als Stütze,* p. 46 ff. First published in *Neue Rundschau,* 1957, III.
[28] See p. 60.

professional focus there, I, my existence. My husband from classical antiquity to Spanish-American art and cultural history. From there he became famous on the entire American continent and then in Europe as well. "You can do it from the smallest place, the most remote," we told ourselves again and again, when we felt trapped on the island. I began to write in this house, in November 1951, shortly after the death of my mother.[29]

Above all, it was the house in which the persecution ended and we slowly became accustomed again (I'm holding my breath as I write this) to having nobody after us.

Perhaps it was not a bad sign that the little typewriter that had accompanied me all these years fell out of the luggage bay of the plane in Puerto Rico and was smashed to bits. And that my suitcase repeated the typewriter's message as the ship docked in Bremerhaven. "The ship was higher than a house. The crane opened too early, one of the suitcases came loose and fell onto the pavement. Mine. It split open, diagonally, from corner to corner. Nothing fell out. But the suitcase had unmistakably reached the end of its journey. The suitcase with which I had left."[30]

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Maybe it never would have occurred to me to write about 'my homes' if I didn't live here in Heidelberg high above the Neckar, with a view of all my student rooms: as if I had never left. As if everything had gone by the book, and I had studied down there, in that building, over whose entrance Gundolf's words are inscribed: "To

[29] Previously published: 3 texts in *Nur eine Rose als Stütze*, p. 57-59 and *Höhlenbilder*, limited edition, 1968.
[30] *Das zweite Paradies*, p. 115. Text slightly altered.

the living spirit" (there once more. In the meantime it read "To the German spirit"). As if I had met a student there, however many decades ago, in the cafeteria in the Marstallhof, which is still the cafeteria, with whom I had sat in the main auditorium there, in Jaspers's lectures and seminars, passing notes, and whom I had married after we took our mutual doctoral exams, and who is now a professor in Heidelberg (although in a different subject), as he had wished for even as a student.

As if it were a movie, whose middle and main section merely had to be cut out, and both ends fit together seamlessly. Nothing is cut out of life. Diximus hesternae, "I continue where we left off," said Jaspers in 1945, as he always did at the beginning of class, when he resumed his lectures in the old lecture hall after an approximately ten-year interruption.

We had been away for twenty-two years when we landed in Bremen. But before we were settled in Heidelberg again it was just under three decades since we had left the city and Germany. "You are leaving the country of your birth . . . , the day of your emigration is set. It was a good day because you could still walk upright, you didn't fall on your face because you had been pushed from behind. No one threw you out, you left almost on your own. It is important not to be publicly humiliated. You needn't tell anybody about the willow tree under which you cried before you left. A small willow tree, it would be big now. We looked for it, but the river has been dammed up where it stood."[31] The apartment, at the end of Neuenheim, almost in Handschuhsheim, depending on how you look at it, would have been far out in my student days. Today it's very close, the towns have grown together, everywhere on earth. New suburbs are on the outskirts.

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[31] *Das zweite Paradies*, p. 72.

It was in the winter of 1960-1961 that we found an apartment in Heidelberg, the kind real people have, the first that wasn't a refugee apartment since 1936, when we moved into the old home of the Duse on the Capitol. All the suitcases, all the books came from Santo Domingo, from Madrid, from Munich, from Frankfurt (only stored initially in the basement, because the shelves took a while). The cherry tree outside the window that was still bare was soon in full bloom. And the forsythia. And outside the bathroom a hawthorn. And the large chestnut trees were getting ready. Countless birds. Two tame squirrels. Even a nice cleaning woman. Though it was no apartment on the Capitol or over the Prado, it was still perhaps the nicest that I have ever had. I had never had it so good and so comfortable. A wonderful setting. The play isn't always appropriate for the setting.

"By now we are largely adjusted," I wrote to the Eichs in May of 1961. "Sometimes I think we have proven that we understand how to find the twigs for a proper nest, like other people, at least like other people, I mean properly brooding birds. Now we could take each other by the hand and leave this proof behind, and all our acquired possessions, and go somewhere where we have a bed and a table (one for each of us, of course). Maybe you find it morbid, maybe you understand. The trees are incomparable, grouped around the house, and inside everything is bright. There is even a nightingale." I had written about our return beforehand from Madrid: ". . . this new life in Heidelberg, which requires so much courage, as things stand, that one can barely muster it. Just think: this return seemed to me to require more courage than our earlier 'beginnings,' which were also no joke. Santo Domingo, oh, you wouldn't believe it, what it was like when we were put down in 1940 by a small

hydro-plane on a desolate coast in pouring rain, the air thick enough to cut with a knife.[32] Yet everything was still unknown, if also oppressive in many respects. Now you know what you fear, and I find that almost worse."

As I went to the house for the first time, with the keys, but alone, strange to say—surely I went there the morning after my arrival from Madrid; initially we stayed in the hospice by the old bridge—the first thing that excited me was the mailbox, which was outside the house, before you went up the exterior steps to the tower-like staircase. It was the first mailbox of my own that I had ever had. First there was my parents' mailbox: the mailboxes for the whole house were on the raised ground floor, I can still see it. Then I had always had student rooms. In Rome the concierge's wife took in the mail, which at the time made it possible for her to carry out a sort of check for the fascist police: nothing productive, because she was not very literate. In England the mail was shoved under the front door or tossed through a slot onto the hall floor. In Santo Domingo the mail carrier came by bicycle and dropped the mail off down in the kitchen. In the USA we lived in a residential hotel. In Spain we had the concierge's wife again, who actually put everything neatly into a compartment, as if in a hotel. I was thus almost fifty years old when I first got a mailbox and a mailbox key.

I immediately opened the mailbox, although nothing could be in it, because we didn't even live there yet. For me it was a game to have a mailbox. Someone was playing along: there was a letter inside. It was from a rose grower from Zweibrücken who must have gotten the address from S. Fischer Verlag. He had just read my book

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[32] Cf. *Die Insel*, p. 115. I found this letter to the Eichs when I reviewed our correspondence on *Du darfst einen Löffel haben* again.

Only a Rose for Support and asked whether he might send me rosebushes. I received this letter even before I had set foot inside the apartment, the first 'normal' home of my lifetime. And it was also the first time that I was in a position to accept something as 'solid' as rosebushes. I had lived out of suitcases for nine years, as a subtenant. But now there was a yard, though it belonged to the first floor, and I could look down at the roses only from the terrace. And even before we had settled in, the roses arrived, crates full of rose bushes. (I took some of these roses with me when we moved and still have them today, and they're down in the garden again. Or in my room until late in the fall.)

At some point in those first days I was standing in a smock on a ladder when a little girl appeared in the doorway, the neighbors' daughter, and asked: "Is it true that you're Hilde Domin?" I don't know which of us was more self-conscious; she was the first unknown reader I saw with my own eyes (although the rose crates had just come). The book had been released in the fall of 1959 when I was in Madrid, and only after my return did it begin to be a 'book' for me. Until then, I had by no means dared to go into a book store to see it or to ask after it and introduce myself. Something like that still demands effort of me today.

I had brought some of the furniture from the 'Rastro' in Madrid, a flea market comparable to Rome's 'Campo dei Fiori.' Two large 'mesas de campo,' tables like those taken on military campaigns or on journeys and set up in tents: simple walnut slabs with collapsible supports reinforced with iron rods, such you see in the paintings of Velázquez, for example. The tops of such tables are old, at least the wood is, while the supports and iron rods are merely 'in that style.' To go with them, brightly painted

Valencian peasant's chairs from the 18th century with straw seats. They are as heavy as dead bodies and get white wounds when they are bumped. Everything else, although there wasn't much else, modern and functional, easy to mix. Instead of the obligatory matched chair sets, teak garden furniture painted white, as if the living room were an outdoor café. All of it, even now, including the lack of comfort, was a variation on the Roman and then the Dominican homes: settings for the dialog before the invention of the family and bourgeois society.

The main fixtures—with the exception of the bookshelves and the aluminum ladder, and of course the books themselves—are perhaps two birds, a large clay flightless bird, an Iberian 'primeval bird,' actually an antique drinking vessel, like the ones made from old models in Catalonia: my first purchase when the return to Heidelberg became definite. It was, so to speak, the first item I tried out after nine years of roaming around, as it is when one gets a real home and can simply buy something like this bird. The second bird is a wooden dove, almost still white, or at least light, that hovers with outspread wings on an invisible nylon thread, and flies from a corner of the room from which it cannot escape, from which no bird could escape. Incidentally, I should have spoken about the outspread wings in the singular, because the right one is almost entirely broken off (which always amazed me anew when I came back from a trip, as if it had just been damaged). It is an old village church dove, a Pentecostal dove, early or provincial, which comes out to the same thing, totally free of ornamentation and naturalistic. It lay on the table of a second-hand dealer in the Rastro, when I went furniture-hunting. "It was once a holy spirit," I

said to a visitor. “Why was?” he replied. Even in our new apartment we moved cupboards and even a wall until a corner emerged, in the middle of my tower room, from which the dove can’t fly, but flies: a little above our heads, you can see the pink beak and the little red feet, pressed to the body.

> . . . when I lose everything,
> I’ll take you with me,
> dove of worm-eaten wood,
> because of the gentle sway
> of your single unbroken
> wing[33]

I wrote during our move onto Hainsbachweg.

A big help when we were getting settled was the woman who lived downstairs; suddenly I had younger sister. First, she lent me furniture until ours arrived. Later she asked to have my manuscripts, because I myself throw them away when I’ve typed them up. So I can get something from her when I am sometimes asked for originals. But now I have to write to another city, for we all left the house we loved very much and in which I worked well, but was sicker than I had been anywhere else since the first part of the Hitler era (when I was constantly ill and could barely recover). Despite the roses and nightingales it became a bad place for me, maybe the worst since Rome. Disappointments and sickening experiences as almost nowhere else.

That Hitler’s brother-in-law moved into the attic apartment above us, because he had gotten divorced in order to marry the woman who lived there, I mention only as part of the constellation. (He had to have the mandatory German shepherd put

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[33] “Versprechen an eine Taube” S. Fischer Almanach 1962, p. 107 f.

down; the landlord didn't allow animals.) The first we saw of him was the so-called 'Persilschein,' [exculpatory affidavit—Trans.] with legitimate signatures, that he insisted we see. At some point he showed up. I had just gone downstairs to borrow eggs from my friend; I was only half settled in. As I came out of the ground floor apartment, carefully holding the eggs level in their paper carton, the front door opened and I stood face to face with an old man who had to be him: Hitler's brother-in-law, our new neighbor. Completely on their own, the eggs fell to the floor between us. It's hard to say who was more startled. Chaplin himself couldn't have staged it more effectively. Otherwise the relationship was proper and formal; he left the house before us, feet first, he had had cancer. No sooner was he dead than he could have become rich; he was in line to be Hitler's heir for the royalties from *Mein Kampf*.

I am not going to address the circumstances of our moving out; it coincided with the departure of my friend. The house replaced its tenants and then the paint job, from top to bottom, and the splendid chestnuts that hung low over the street were cut down shortly afterward. And soon that reticent little street will be built up with fashionable terraced houses. I signed the residents' petition against the project.

A realtor who knows my poems found us this apartment in which I am sitting and writing. It is the most beautiful one that we have had since the Via Monte Tarpeo, something I am almost afraid to say. I didn't think it was true when she told me the address. (There were people living here who found it too remote, and she found them something elsewhere.) There aren't any nightingales here, that's true, but they've also left the other house. The collard doves with their delicate throats are here, and thrushes and blackbirds, and even a golden oriole, and in winter a kingfisher. I have a

tower room, half round like Droste's and with four windows, right across from the Geisberg with its wonderful dense trees, beautiful in every season, even the delicate trunks in winter, each of which I can almost know individually. And down below, the city and the Neckar. A Hölderlin view, people say. It is a room in which nobody could willingly give up on life, because as long as one gets through the night, waking up is too beautiful. A room as if designed for a person like me, who since my return to Heidelberg am, if anything, more on edge than before. Mannheim and Ludwigshafen, from here up this horizon is like a shoreline; the smokestacks become ships' funnels, and when the sun reddens the haze we have sunsets like on the southern sea.

The golden rooster atop the tower of St. Peter's, seemingly at eye-level, shows us the direction of the wind. We can hear the mood at the university, just within earshot. But we are always in range of the three sets of bells: the Jesuits', St. Peter's, and those of Holy Ghost. And of the glockenspiel down on the city hall.

(Incidentally, *Akzente* was founded in this house, in the attic. Höllerer was renting a little room up above the stairs, where a student lives now, from the old pastry maker's wife, Lene Schwehr. The Schwehr Bakery on the ground floor, on the main street, used to be our favorite bakery.)

Around this house my beginnings are grouped like suburbs. In a semicircle. I can almost see myself in the window. An independent life began for me here, in Heidelberg. From here I can even see the boarding house in which my mother, after helping me look for a room, left me in my cousin's ample arms, which was not a little appalling to the latter, at which my mother went back to Cologne and cut the

umbilical cord. Cologne in those days was much farther from Heidelberg than today, subjectively and objectively. But my laundry packages went punctually back and forth and never returned without extra cash and a roast chicken, at the time still something special, or the tapioca pudding I loved from my childhood or some other protective talisman.

I can see the ‘Anlage’ from the middle or right window of my tower, just below the Geisberg. I stayed there three times, twice on the right and once on the left, above the railroad that in those days traveled parallel to the street and has now receded into the mountain to make way for the so-called ‘southern beltway.’ (It needs to go even farther into the mountain, we need the tunnel for through traffic! The tunnels here are the big divisive issue I am involved in.) Where the magnificent chestnuts stood is a rainbow of parked cars. My room was in the house which until recently housed a hippie commune, it resembled a child’s room with bright floral wallpaper. I lived there in my second semester, when I met a live immigrant for the first time, a young Russian social democrat. I fell in love there for the first time. Perhaps it was a blessing that I burned my head during vacation when my celluloid curlers caught on fire. I had to break off the semester and continue my studies in Cologne until I was fully fledged and went to Berlin. For the summer semester of 1931, I returned to Heidelberg and moved to the right side of the ‘Anlage,’ into an attic with a view of St. Peter’s, very close to where I live now. How long those semesters were, interminably long, they took up so much more time than today. I still remember the dresses I wore to the dances at the international club and at the now-demolished castle casino, to long discussions in Café Krall, which took up the corner

side of what today is Schafheutl and had a corner entrance, and offered special pastries for students, the so-called ‘Krallinchen,’ for 10 pfennigs, a kind of entry fee and table rent, for which you could sit and talk until after midnight, until the chairs were put up on the tables.

It was the start of that summer semester when I ran into the previously mentioned student at a table in the cafeteria, on the very day he had arrived in Heidelberg. “Where do you live?” he asked, as we stood in line for food. “The Anlage, corner of Schiesstorstrasse” said a boy behind us, and I heard later that it had made a dubious impression. (Presumably it was someone from our ‘group,’ which had a sort of regular table.) Up in the attic we used to read Plato; he was a future classical scholar. The first in a long line of stray cats listened in and insisted on sleeping on the stairs, which led to protests from the landlord and finally to my move to Hirschgasse, into the famous Braus’sche Haus. A student rooming house from top to bottom, it was occupied mostly by journalism students (the Journalism Institute was in the Buhl House in those days.) Quite a few future emigrants also lived there, as well as future Goebbels assistants, but that was still unknowable.

The house is the first one diagonally across, you can see it from the living room and the terrace, especially in winter when the birches are bare. The whole year above Frau Schwehr’s window. I cooked infinitely old soup chickens on an electric hotplate there, my first attempt at cooking. Now there aren’t old chickens any longer that never get tender, and on whose account you might skip Jaspers. That was the semester when we paddled together as far upstream as Neckarsteinach. There were no locks above the one on Hirschgasse, which was conveniently located in a back alley

in the old city for his way home. You could still swim in the Neckar; there weren't gulls or swans, but there was a swimming area. I swam from shore to shore or as far as the Old Bridge. Or behind the boat; it was called 'Luderchen,' and it belonged to the fisherman Österreicher in Ziegelhausen.

My next and last room in Heidelberg lies on a diagonal line below us and to the right, on Karlstrasse. When I came back, the house was still standing, along with the Hellenistic plaster 'Muse' in the lobby. It was a famous house, the Thibaut House. Upstairs lived Richard Benz. I rented a room on the second floor from the flautist from the opera. Before me Christiane von Hofmannsthal had lived there. And between her and me a redheaded journalism student, whom I knew only in passing, but from whom I inherited the room. In 1946 I ran into her by chance in New York City, in the New York Public Library or at Columbia University, and belatedly 'returned the favor' for the room: I set her up with a brotherly friend of mine, a Dominican in exile. They got married immediately.

The flautist's apartment had something about it. The marriage of Heinrich Zimmer and Christiane von Hofmannsthal also began there, the preliminaries of which the landlords did not recall fondly. When I threw the key down in the evening—the house was apparently locked up early—Frau Schmiedl scolded: "Just like Fräulein von Hofmannsthal!" In the morning I retrieved the key from a small bakery on Hauptstrasse that still exists and has recently expanded significantly. In the back the Thibaut House had a park-like garden that extended up to the castle. There we had our first rabbits, our first joint possessions, acquired at the Wrede Market. They were named Leontion and Chrysostomos and were very tame, and we often let

them free to run around on the grass. We lived near one another. His room, the first I rented for him, had an unusual previous tenant, too: Alfred Mombert. The house still exists today, except that cars always are parked in front when I am coming down from the castle and go through the Friesenberg to the Karlstor. What used to be the Thibaut House is now the German Department, with a different arrangement of stories; my bed on the former second floor would now hang in the air about halfway between the first and second. Where we kept our rabbits is now a paved parking lot instead of grass and hedges. Beyond that is the old garden, into which I haven't ventured.

In those days student rooms still had small sinks, barely larger than in Goethe's time. I always had a so-called 'hippopotamus tub' with me, a large, round rubber basin in which you could pour water over yourself properly: cold, as I was used to from home. My 'room' consisted of two adjoining rooms, a lovely tube, with two windows onto the street and divided in the middle by a curtain. In back was the bedroom, in front the living room with Biedermeier furniture. The same arrangement about which Heinrich Zimmer immediately inquired with expert knowledge. I also had my first secondhand books there. There I learned how important it is to read the newspaper above the fold as well, not just the culture section. Everything that happened there was for the first time. But also plenty for the last.

On Karlstrasse there lived at the time supporters of both extreme parties. The children played 'marching,' Communists or Nazis, depending on their parents, who, through the open window, contributed the International on their gramophones or the Horst Wessel song on the harmonium. It was a kind of song war in the narrow street:

which anthem could drown out the other. That soon became clear. But by then we had already left the country. The white rabbits, on whose account we kept rabbits in many countries and still in the Antilles, we gave to the Zimmers, on the condition that they were never to be eaten. When we met Heinrich and Christiane Zimmer on a street in Oxford in the days before the war, we were coming from opposite directions, tiptoeing along the street. I can still picture us crossing the street, both couples arm in arm and headed toward each other. One of us opened his mouth and asked: “Please, what became of the rabbits?” And they told us. None of the four of us was in the mood for laughter as we began the conversation.

‘Leontion’ and ‘Chrysostomos,’ ‘Lion’ and ‘Goldmuzzle’—my mother reprimanded us for giving them such harebrained Greek names when they visited us in Heidelberg and accepted him as a son, long before we stood on the Capitol after our respective doctoral exams, in front of the Roman clerk with the tri-color sash around his waist, as is the custom for marriage ceremonies there, and then moved into the Via Monte Tarpeo.

From where we have come back to Heidelberg after a detour halfway around the globe. And now at last on the ‘Jetta Hill’ above the city. Where I am writing about my ‘homes,’ my ‘residences.’ And am scared when I use the plural. Today, on the last evening of 1973. And I remember how Droste’s tower room above Lake Constance suddenly began to swim and spin with me so that I almost fell, when I was there in the spring, while in reality it was only a ship on the lake outside that was moving from window to window. And the room stabilized again.

At four the last friend left. I am alone on the last summit of the year as if on a ship. Yesterday we had a six-minute call from Heidelberg to Mexico. “How are you faring in your favorite tower?” he said. “I’m working well,” I said. “I’ll finish tomorrow. And soon I will be ready to travel.” And when I say ‘travel,’ I mean travel. A departure with a return ticket. Where I can arrive home and turn the key, open my door and climb the stairs and be home, like other people. Though I know it is not the first time for most.

“And no more plantains”

A Report on the End of the War

The newspaper’s sirens let loose three piercing howls. Then all the sirens in the city joined in. It was a terrible racket. Because our radio was off being repaired, I rushed into the street to the nearest public telephone to hear what had happened. (Three blasts—in the city on the island that meant news of international significance. For local happenings it was two blasts. One was just for the electrician.)

Across the street, on the corner in front of the telephone booth, a man was sitting on the curb, legs outstretched, his back against the lamppost. He was barefoot. His dark blue cotton pants had neat patches of pale blue, like little pieces of clear sky on a cloudy afternoon. A less skilled hand had sewn more adventurous colors onto one pant leg, while the other ended most irregularly in a fringe. The upper piece of his clothing consisted of a sugar sack, fashioned into a kind of sleeveless smock. The large, red letters of the sugar mill were already almost totally washed out and the article of clothing had reached that critical state when the threadbare scraps of material barely held together across the expanses of bare skin. As for his face, two continents had come together to produce this son of a third: the dark skin of the African covered his angular Asian features and above the narrow Mongolian eyes sprouted the short, wooly hair of a Negro. The serenity with which he sat there was thoroughly tropical. It was a hot afternoon, and he was the only person on the whole *avenida*. As I approached him, I thought, “Just look at him, this fellow, how enviable he is! Carefree like our cat! There he sits on the edge of history and chews his

peanuts. The sirens are only for us. Our weal and woe are shouted from the loudspeakers. For him, it's nothing but noise: a modern fairytale, things that are taking place somewhere far away, where nobody ever goes."

As I walked past him, he looked up and said, "Wonderful news, *Señora*. Wonderful! The war is over! Peace!"

His Chinese eyes glistened with happiness. I stood still. I didn't need to make a call anymore. He had already heard it on the radio.

So there it was, the great, long awaited news. I felt nothing . . . as it is when something you've longed for arrives and the tension lets up: for a moment, you are lifted out of context, hoisted into make-believe. Then you are dropped into some depth from which you resurface only slowly. Feeling is suspended.

Suddenly I heard a voice saying, "Well, that means that I'll be in Paris next month."

I didn't realize immediately who was speaking. I had completely forgotten the Negro. There he sat against his lamppost, raised his grinning face to me, and repeated several times in the face of my dull astonishment, "That's right, *Señora*, next month."

All I could do was stare at him. I seemed to have lost my balance. He began to sing:

Ding dong,
The war is over.
Now they go home

He sang and nodded his head in rhythm and chewed peanuts. He was beaming with bliss. No, he wasn't the slightest bit drunk.

"Por favor," I asked, "What are you saying?"

"Very simple," he answered, pleased that I appeared to be finally giving him my full attention. "I work for . . ." (he named a French refugee, whom the war had brought here). "He had a cinema in Paris. Now he's going back immediately. And he's taking me with him. Ding dong, ding dong."

I kept staring at him. With visible self-satisfaction, he went on, "*Si, Señora*," he said, "I've been with him for three years. Every time I was fed up with work and about ready to leave and do nothing for a few months, I thought about Paris and held back. But recently it really got to be too much, all the work and the endless waiting game. So I promised my saint a candle if he would make sure that the war finally ended this month. That was a good idea. It had immediate returns. Too bad it didn't occur to me earlier! 'Ding dong, now they're all going home,' and I'm going with you."

Did I know Paris? Yes, I knew it. And was it really true that people didn't eat plantains there? I could only verify that he was well informed. "How strange," he said, "What a big deal the people here make about a place where there aren't even any plantains! But it doesn't matter to me. I've waited for this for so long. Now the war is past and now it's off to Paris, plantains or not."

Ding dong,
the war is over,
ding dong.

I heard him singing as I went home, still wholly stunned.

E. was already standing at the house door, pale and agitated. "It's over," I called, "over, finally over! Just think, the French are already making plans for the

journey home. Even the tattered Negro over there on the side of the road has a ticket to Europe in his pocket."

In the garden next door, the chauffeur of Don Abelardo was raising the flag. It was already higher than the coconut trees. Silently we went upstairs and hung the national flag over the terrace railing.

The Island and the One-eared Tomcat[34]

I lived on an island that was very different from the islands you know. In the afternoon, punctually at five o'clock, the parrots flew over the house, a green cloud. Like doves, only green. They didn't circle, they flew past, and they conversed very loudly in their own language. We can't learn their language, that they know. But they can learn ours.

I came to the island quite suddenly. A small plane landed on the water by the island. That is, on the sea, which is very blue there, naturally. I was sitting in the airplane. The door was opened. By the door there was a wooden gangway: two boards and a handrail, as when you get into a rowboat. Beyond the wooden boards was the firm ground of the island. Behind me, the airplane took off. I had no choice then. Nobody can stay on the wooden gangway. That is how I came onto the island. For many years, no airplane came to pick me up. So I stayed there. I had it better than Robinson; there were already people there. I'll tell you about them soon.

The most beautiful thing was that the sky was always blue. Except at night, of course. But even at night it was very bright. That was because the stars and the moon were bigger. The moon lay on its back, as if it were lying in a cradle. Completely different from here. When it was full, you could read by its light, and it made little shadows for the trees, better defined than on one of our gray days.

Because it was always blue and also very hot, the houses had only window openings, but no windows. Yes, truly. Why should the houses have had windows

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[34] *Bericht von einer Insel.*

when it was always blue and hot. When it rained, people simply closed the shutters. Then it got dark in the room, as at night, when we also closed them. It rains only briefly there, though, and soon it's blue again.

When it rains there, people take their shoes off. The poor people, of course. But there are many of those, because they only have one pair of shoes, and they protect them more than they do their feet. In many places in the world, poor people remove their shoes when it rains, so they won't get wet.

The people who live there have brown feet. Like café au lait or like hot chocolate. Some are also black. In general they are dark-skinned people. People think there is a big difference. I know better. Because once I went to a hospital and there lay a leg in a box, it had been cut off. "Amputated," said the doctors. It was a black leg, almost like coal, it was so black. There it lay in the box and I couldn't look away, although I didn't want to look at it, either. At the place where it had been hacked off, you could see the leg from the inside. The black skin was no thicker than an apple peel. Under it, the leg was red. Just as all legs, including yours, are red inside. You see it when you fall down.

As I headed home and came to the banana palms with their oily leaves, and the bananas looked very green and very tiresome, much more tiresome than apples, a small cat came toward me. She was very pretty and very striped. She had only one ear. I had never seen a one-eared cat. I could tell you a lot about the cat, because we became friends, the one-eared cat and I. But not today. Only that it was a tomcat, and no "she," I want to tell you that. One can recognize a tom immediately: tomcats have much broader heads.

Everything I've recounted here is true. You can ask anyone.

—Whether it's true that tomcats have wider heads than females,

—Whether it's true that skin is thinner than an apple peel and that people are all the same underneath,

—Whether it's true that poor people are more concerned about their shoes than their feet,

—Whether the moon lies on its back in tropical skies and you can read at night there,

—Whether the parrots can learn our language, but we can't learn theirs?

Everyone knows all that if they know anything. You need to come to me only for things concerning the one-eared cat, because few people have met a one-eared cat in their life, although there's an island where the cats don't have tails. Not one cat there has a tail. And that is another thing about which you can ask anyone. And it's an entirely different island, much closer to here.

Returning[35]

For Ramona Rodríguez, “pobreo de solemnidad,” formerly Jarabacoa (Cibao).

Currently living in a shanty town behind the “New Market,” Santo Domingo, D.R.

Just now I’m unlearning
the value
of an empty
tin can.

I’ve just learned
to throw away a tin can
with which my friend Ramona
for me
the guest
with which my friend Ramona
dips water for me
from the large, earthen jug
in the corner of the hut
when I thirst
at the edge of the world.

Just now I’m learning from you
to forget
the value of an empty
tin can.

[35] *Hier* p. 30.

Hilde Domin interviews Heinrich Heine:

Heidelberg, 1972

Heine's "answers" are verbatim quotations, mostly from his later prose works. Where, to move the 'conversation' along, portions have been omitted, it is indicated, as is conventional, with an ellipsis. In a single case, ('answer' 6) an obsolete term from the polemics of the time has been replaced by a contemporary one (*Aristocrat = elite)*. In 'answer' 2, two different emigration reports have been used. Beyond that, no montage.

Domin: Herr Heine, I would like to ask you about a few current problems:
"The whole of contemporary history is now just a history of the hunt. Now is the time of the all-out persecution of liberal ideas . . . And there is no shortage of educated hounds to retrieve the bloody words. Berlin is feeding the best pack, and I can already hear the hounds baying," as you wrote in 1931.

Heine: On March 8, 1831.

Domin: Forgive me. It's so easy to mix up the centuries.

Heine: The homeland air was becoming more unhealthy for me every day, and I had to think seriously about a change of scenery. — Since May 1831, I have lived in France.

Domin: I left Germany in 1932. The air was almost unbreatheable by then, although not everyone noticed it right away. How do you find it here today, for instance, for writers?

Heine: When you hit a man's coat, the blow also injures the man inside that coat, and if one mocks German poetic form, then inevitably the word itself is hurt.

Domin: German words, you stress that so heavily. But as an émigré you managed to publish in French. And with success.

Heine: These words are our most sacred possessions, after all . . . , a fatherland even for him who was denied one through folly and malice.

Domin: You were the first to put it that way. Only a hundred years before this last, most recent, generation of German-Jewish writers. Because we, the survivors of this persecution, are the last in German history.

Heine: . . . while modern German literature was initiated by me.

Domin: They are saying it's over, calling for the complete expulsion of poets from the language. Everyone lives in it, even those who were allowed to keep the ground under

their feet. People are denying lyric poetry the right to live because it is elitist and undemocratic. Have you heard that?

Heine: Yes, society is essentially republican . . . The laurels of a great poet were as hated to our republicans as the purple of a great king.

Domin: Here they dismiss poetry across the board as politically ineffective. At the same time they demand poetry for the masses, and everyone is supposed to be able to write it.

Heine: Many times we've heard the claim: "The real democrat writes like the people, sincerely, simply and badly . . ." But not everyone is capable of writing badly . . . , and promptly it was charged: "He is an elitist, a lover of form, a friend of art, an enemy of the people."

Domin: Recently, when I said publicly, "Under Hitler it was called 'writing so that every storm trooper can understand it,'" I was accused of 'low-budget anti-fascism.' Imagine that—'low-budget'! Who would have thought it possible in the Federal Republic!

Heine: Indeed, given the remarkable succession of slogans and representatives in the great struggle . . .

Domin: It is a comfort that poetry outlives its opponents. “Any word born of light/ pierces the darkness on its flight,” wrote Loerke in 1941 as his testament.

Heine: Every era believes its struggle is the most important . . . although historical precedent tells us that one day our grandchildren will look down on this battle, perhaps with the same indifference with which we look down on the struggle of the first humans, who had to fight equally greedy monsters, lindworms, and ogres.

Domin: You had also been forbidden to write, like Loerke, like so many. Your political and religious writings were not allowed to be distributed after ’35.

Heine: You are familiar with the parliamentary resolution of December 1835, by which all my writings were banned . . . I knew that the most disdainful bravado had been successful . . . in making people believe that I was the head of a school that had conspired to overthrow every civil and moral institution.

Domin: To me, informers are also the worst.

Heine: Anyone who has ever spent his days in exile . . . who has ever dragged himself up and down the hard stairs of a foreign land, . . . he will understand.

Domin: Both Germanies claim you today. You are being published in many editions. And opinions on you are divided, as in your lifetime.

Heine: They praise me or they criticize me, but always with passion and without end. They hate me, they deify me, they disrespect me . . .

Domin: At the moment, you belong to the few poets who are 'in' with us, for extraliterary reasons, so to speak. You and Hölderlin and Hesse, each in a different disguise. Hölderlin, until recently a Nazi idol ("What's to be done with one who says hölderlin and means himmler?" I'm quoting Enzensberger now), packaged as Andreas Baader, as a potential assassin. Hesse—isolated and unhappy though he was at the end—rehabilitated as a hippie. You yourself, canonized as a Marxist, a proto-Benjamin.

Heine: I saw the birds hatch, which later struck up the new types of song. I saw Hegel with an almost comically earnest face sitting on the fatal eggs like a mother hen and I heard him clucking.

Domin: Please, what do you think of political poetry? The only kind that people here still tolerate?

Heine: "My song is pointless. Yes, pointless
like love, like life
like the Creator along with the creation
. . .
My beloved Pegasus
Is no practical, virtuous

cart-horse of the bourgeoisie,
Nor a war horse of party fury
that theatrically stamps and whinnies!"

Domin: On that we agree. Writing has no 'point.' The text acquires a 'point': on its way from the author to the reader. Even Enzensberger (I like to refer to Enzensberger, he is canonized, I am not) agreed with us. Since that time he said: "No volumes of poetry, instead analyses and rocks." What do you think of that?

Heine: Are we going to start the course with the system of the Comité de salut publique or with the system of the Ordre légal? These questions tremble in every heart, and anyone who has anything dear to lose, even if it's just his own head, whispers apprehensively: Will the German revolution be a dry one, or a wet and red one?

Domin: And what should that depend on, in your opinion?

Heine: On the moral state of the people and especially on their political literacy.

Domin: You are an enlightener *par excellence*.

Heine: That's the blessing of the freedom of the press: it robs the bold language of the demagogue of the enchantment of novelty, . . . neutralizes it through equally passionate counter-arguments and smothers in their infancy the lying rumors that,

sown through accident or malice, so fatally proliferate in secrecy . . . It is no less true . . . that where the idea guillotine has been chopping away soon the human censorship will be implemented, that that same slave who put thoughts to death will perform the hangman's duties on human beings.

Domin: The guillotine is out of style. They use prisons, work camps, mental institutions for censorship of humans. For us in the Federal Republic, freedom of the press is guaranteed by the constitution. In actuality there is a struggle to control the opinion-molding machines.

Heine: These intellectual executioners make us into criminals, and the writer, who, like a mother in labor, is apprehensively excited while writing, in this situation very often commits thought-infanticide, out of crazed fear of the censor's sword.

Domin: It doesn't even come to that, at least not for us. A wise man said: We don't need a propaganda minister or censor anymore, everyone thinks for himself—what he's supposed to think. The conforming force of our apparatus has something sinister about it. Independence is virtually punishable.

Heine: Only evil and common natures find gain in revolution. In the worst case, when it happens to fail they always know to pull their heads out of the noose. But whether a revolution succeeds or collapses, men with noble hearts will always be its victims.

Domin: That is what is frustrating. Because a friend of your group denounced you.

Heine: I was always a fighter for the revolution and for democratic ideas.

Domin: You never escape from that balanced view. You always see the two-headedness of every experience. Precisely that makes you our contemporary.

Heine: We don't seize an idea, rather the idea seizes us . . . and drags us into the arena so that we, forced to be gladiators, fight for it.

Domin: A moment ago you changed the subject to Hegel. Your stance on the Communists?

Heine: Indeed, it fills me with horror and fear to think about the time when these iconoclasts come to power. With their callused hands they will destroy beauty and all of its marble statues . . . and all the playthings and all the frippery of art that the poets so loved . . . the roses, those idle brides of the nightingales will suffer the same fate. The nightingales, those useless singers, will be chased away. And out of my *Book of Songs* the grocer will make cones with which to wrap coffee and tobacco for the old ladies of the future. I foresee all of this and an indescribable sadness seizes me as I think of the impending ruin of my verses and the whole romantic old world at the hands of the victorious proletariat.

Domin: None of that has occurred. Did Stalin put roses or his fellow combatants on trial? In Moscow they have subway stations of marble with crystal chandeliers. And in the GDR the largest Heine edition of all time is being prepared.

Heine: A generous desperation seizes hold of me and I cry: it has long since been judged and condemned, this old society. May justice be done . . . and praised be the grocer who will one day make cones out of my poems so that the good old women of the future, who in our current, unjust world must do without these amenities, can have their coffee and tobacco wrapped up. *Fiat iustitia, pereat mundus*.

Domin: Herr Heine, please, your manuscripts are being well looked after: in Düsseldorf, in Weimar, in Paris. But justice? Censorship? Don't misunderstand me. The Federal Republic is the most good-natured and liberal state that ever existed on German soil.

Heine: I have never placed much value on the glory of the poet . . . I was a good soldier in the battle for the liberation of humanity.

Domin: When human beings finally become robots, the battle is over, "Then we find ourselves in an age in which neither 'true' nor 'untrue' exists: in sleep or nightmares from which nothing can awaken us," said Merleau-Ponty, one of your Frenchmen.

Heine: When one day, God forbid, freedom has disappeared from the whole world, then a German dreamer will rediscover it in his dreams.

Domin: Germany, Heine? You are just as split about that as you are on the question of revolution.

Heine: Germany is us.

Domin: The passion with which you say that. I'm familiar with that.

Heine: A person can love his fatherland and spend eighty years there without realizing it. But for that he must have stayed at home. The essence of spring is not recognized until winter . . . Similarly, German love for the fatherland begins only at the German border.

Domin: When the Düsseldorfers read that, they may be more inclined to name the university after you. Even if your stylization into the "proto-Benjamin" contains a small kernel of truth.

Heine: Moses was already such a socialist, although, as a practical man, he sought only to remodel established customs, notably in regard to property . . . Freedom was always foremost in the thinking of the great emancipator, and his commandments dealing with poverty seethe with it.

Domin: Don’t you know that Israel is considered the refuge of imperialism by a good number of the anti-imperialist youth of the world?

Heine: In ’48 this question always seemed to have been settled for good, but as with so many other accomplishments of German hope, even the matter in question, things in our homeland may appear quite regressive today.

Domin: ‘Regressive’? There you would do the Federal Republic an injustice. I was speaking of an international inclination. Racial hatred barely exists here anymore and not at all in the younger generation. Hatred has new names, today the fanaticism is horrible here. The factional hatred, the destruction of dialog. Objectivity has become a curse word.

Heine: Out of the depths of the soul it wells up,
German hatred! Enormously it swells up,
And with its poisons nearly fills
the Heidelberg keg atop the hills.

Domin: Perhaps you would like to take this opportunity to tour Heidelberg a bit.

Heine: I haven’t heard German nightingales sing for . . . years.

Domin: The nightingale? All that's gone. Industry murdered it. Suleika's west wind is not what it was. "*Flowers, meadows, forest and hill/ are moistened by your breath*"—no, no: not by 'tears,' *by smog*. The fumes from Ludwigshafen and Mannheim. You know. But the keg is in one piece, as you knew it, and only a few steps from here. It's also only five minutes to the university. There you could read in the courtyard, by the Witch's Tower, spray-painted in red: "Punch peace in the face!" Of course it is only a minority, I said that already. But very active.

Heine: "*My foot trembled with eagerness/ to stomp on German ground.*"

Domin: Heinrich Heine, thank you for speaking with us.

R. A. Bauer Interviews Hilde Domin:

Heidelberg, 1972

Bauer: An end to poetry can be thought of only as the end of humanity, Erich Fried said recently at the literature symposium in the Klagenfurt Town Hall. What are your thoughts on that, my dear Hilde Domin?

Domin: We were entirely in agreement on that point: Wellershoff too, and Jandl, and Jürgen Becker. I have (in *Wozu Lyrik heute?*) formulated it this way: "It was the same water that comes up to the neck of the human being and art." Instead of a crisis of literature, we should talk about a crisis of humanity.

Bauer: Günter Herburger presented the bold opposing thesis that in a concrete democracy the end of elite creation of poetry coincides with the beginning of "poetry for all, in a society without a superstructure." — Do you share that outlook?

Domin: A romantic and irrational thesis that met with heavy criticism, not just from me. The desire that everyone be a poet in the future is just as preposterous as that every driver should be able to construct his own car. This blindness to reality is inconsistent, for example, with the line from Karl Marx: "From each according to his ability."

Bauer: Two years ago at the PEN conference in the Darmstadt Orangerie, you yourself coined and defined the critical term 'anticipatory conformism,' and maintained that authors were called "to name the facts of reality." What, for example, do you mean by that?

Domin: 'Anticipatory conformism' is not only trying to 'be right today,' but also endeavoring to position oneself optimally tomorrow. Thus, anticipatory conformism also imposes uniformity on the future: though these are actually brought into existence through ingratiation with not-yet existent power relationships. Reality will become clear only through the unflinching enumeration of facts. Clichés cover it up. But words become empty and must be diligently brought 'up to date' with reality if they're going to avoid solidifying into clichés. That is naturally a concern of the wordsmiths, that is, the writers. For that they need the courage to be disturbing.

Bauer: You, Hilde, Domin, lived abroad as an émigré for over twenty years and returned home to the Federal Republic in 1954. Traces of this return home are chronicled in your novel *The Second Paradise*. Was this book an act of liberation for you, something like a 'rebirth'?

Domin: 'Rebirth,' that was when I suddenly began to write. This rebirth can be dated exactly: it was November 1951, almost three years before my return. By the way, every book is an 'act of liberation.' Also every poem. Naming, putting into words,

‘objectification,’ that is, makes us free—or at least freer. The experience of exile and homecoming is as present in my poetry as in my prose.

Bauer: In a self-portrait you admitted that you had “gone home to the word.” The words, however, were German words. And because of that you came back across the sea. — What was that homecoming like, doesn’t bitterness set in after a short euphoria?

Domin: I don’t think you will find bitterness in my work. I am not a person who looks backward, I see everything with an eye to the future. And as for Germany, it is certainly not the best possible one, but the most good-natured, reform-minded Germany that has ever—since 9 A.D.—existed in this territory.

Bauer: In your recently published, well received volume *Postwar and Discord—Poems as Index, 1945-1970,* you argue that it is politicization that threatens to do in literature, “by increasingly monopolizing the interest of the reader as well as the author.” — Do you see a threat to literature in the increasing politicization of the writers’ associations, and why?

Domin: One needs to make careful distinctions. The politicization of authors as citizens is one thing. Turning lyric poetry into a compulsory political exercise is something else entirely. “The political task of the poem is to reject any task,” said Enzensberger, who then radically demanded a rejection of literature, but himself

continued to write poems: because they were as necessary to him as breathing. I myself have never spoken against political subject matter as such, when a political event becomes personal to the author, as personal as his own death or his own need to kill. I have only opposed the production of versified editorials on the assembly line. Consensus now exists that this serves neither literature nor politics.

Bauer: For you, Hilde Domin, Dieter Fringeli said “the writing of poems is an elementary, human act,” and the poem is also for you a “guarantee of freedom.” Is that the case, and do you believe that this is why poetry must exist and will exist in the future?

Domin: Yes, I believe that, and it’s even verifiable. Herbert Marcuse himself recently (Cologne, 1971) came around to this position and described it as “objectively reactionary” to dismiss poetry as bourgeois and obsolete. A society without art, no matter which, is barbarous, he said.

Bauer: Joachim Günther well-meaningly implied that you wanted in essence to convert “the executioners of the poem,” ergo to “stop a far-reaching trial in the last minute before the sentence is carried out.” — What do you see as the ‘aim’ of your poetological efforts?

Domin: In fact, I defend poetry in the language of its opponents. (Why should I defend it in the language of its friends?) It is a productive thought experiment, it

makes the theory limber. Incidentally this daily threat of the execution of poetry is a specifically West German phenomenon. Elsewhere, in Russia, for example, or the USA, poetry is doing fine. It is full of vitality, and there are rumors that, thanks to the excellent contacts made possible by the Moscow and Warsaw agreements, the gravediggers of literature are going to be painted by their colleagues abroad as antiquated—once again West Germany must try to catch up.

Bauer: To the question of where your poems come from, you once answered, "They come from far off . . . as if a magnet were pulling them here . . ."—Does that mean that you don't think much of the deliberate making of modern verse?

Domin: Associations, even farfetched ones, suddenly shape themselves into 'patterns' if a catalyst is present. The creative process itself is a schizophrenic occurrence. The writer splits himself into a kind of supplier and a watchdog, into "a hot and a cold agent," as I called it. The cold one watches over the craft part, that is, over the 'making.' Both are necessary. Poetry mobilizes the entire human being, emotion and reason: the author as well as the reader.

Bauer: A poem doesn't belong to the author, but rather to the reader, you have said. Doesn't that contradict the idea that poems are exclusive and elitist?

Domin: That the poem no longer belongs to the author but the reader—that is exactly, if you will, what is 'democratic' about poetry: that it can be 'used' by every reader

who has been in the corresponding archetypical situation, that every reader can stand in the shoes of the author, when he makes the poem his own.

Bauer: Your pen is the source of a remarkable formulation: “Every poem is an appeal against availability, against codependency. That is, against the transformation of the human being into a machine.” Which you said is the same as or worse than transformation into a monster.

Domin: Indeed, the poem makes the reader into the subject, where he would otherwise be the mere object of its action. It allows him to comprehend his own experiences simultaneously as personal and exemplary. The more the consciousness of one’s own identity is sharpened—we are living in an identity crisis as well as in a crisis of communication—the less suited he is to becoming a robot.

Bauer: You have played a crucial role in the rejuvenation of German-language poetry, but have largely foregone ‘artistic language experiments.’ You have said: “I demand of the poems that they do what they are capable of: that they mobilize the human in the reader.” — Would that even be attainable without commitment and political pragmatism?

Domin: When I got back to Germany in 1954, I had already put behind me and assimilated what people here still had to catch up on, for example, Surrealism. “Once more we are writing poems that are clear and precise . . . we don’t stutter anymore

and we don’t scream . . .” wrote Walter Jens in 1959 when my first volume of poetry was published. By the way, I consider myself radically committed, I am a political person from head to toe. Fate took care of that, I don’t deserve any credit. My poems are an appeal to preparedness for accountability. Accountability must always be mobilized anew. From *Whoever it Affects* in 1953 to *Abel Stands Up* in 1970, you can see the path I have taken. I am a caller. Who would call without the belief that communication is possible? Poems are predicated on the communication that they themselves engender.

Bauer: Hilde Domin, thank you for speaking with us.

10 Proven Means for Prevention of Progress and for Promoting Fiendish Offspring

(plus an antidote as a bonus)

1. Head, heart, and stomach remedies to make the medicine digestible: Let the means be justified by whatever the end may be. (As they say: All's well that ends well. We are cleverer than our fathers were.)

2. Means for advancement of inhumanity: Take out a lease on the good. That way we become a part of that power that always wants the good but still creates evil.

3. Means to train yourself and others to be followers: Keep tabs on whose bread to butter and whose to over-salt. Careful: solidarity can ruin the best followership.

4. Means to train people for Fascism: Choose the appropriate Other (or Others). Then pounce on them, 100 against 1. They are not people like you and I, they are 'pests,' unworthy of attention. Shit is (the second best) cement for fascist groups.

5. Means to create lukewarmness: Do everything just 'a little.' Be a little happy, a little ashamed, a little angry. But never use the ballot, not even a little.

6. Means to unlearn the last bit of moral courage: Unnecessary, already accomplished.

7. Means to give up thinking for oneself: Never adhere to the facts, only to clichés.

8. Means for introducing silent terror: See above, under 3.

9. Means for introducing blatant terror: See above, under 4.

10. Means for journalists and editors to help lower the democratic standard: half the news that's fit to print.

11. Free, as a bonus: Means to screw up your own career: Be disturbing, first and foremost to yourself. Damage yourself by not falling into step, by looking rather than looking away, by standing up and protesting when everyone remains seated (those described in 2, 3, 5, 6, 7), as if they had a theater seat under their behinds, by deciding from case to case and then only after knowing the situation. With that you can harm yourself enormously.

Here the harm to the individual becomes useful to society. For points 1-10 the opposite is true.

That is the dialectic of loss and profit.

Postulate[36]

I want a strip of paper
as big as me
one meter sixty
on it a poem
that cries
whenever someone passes by
cries in black letters
that demands something impossible
moral courage for example
this bravery that no animal has
empathy for example
solidarity instead of mob mentality
to make foreign words
native in action.

Human being
animal with moral courage
human being
animal that knows empathy
human being foreign word-animal word-animal
animal
that writes poems
poem
that demands the impossible
of everyone who passes by
urgently
irresistibly

[36] *Ich will dich*, p. 9 ff. ("Drei Arten Gedichte aufzuschreiben," 3).

as if it were calling out

‘Drink Coca-Cola’

Acceptance Speech upon the Conferral of the Droste Prize in Meersburg

A literary prize today is a tricky thing. Almost like the commitment to literature. From that an unvarying ritual has emerged, dictating how the—conformist—author should accept such a distinction: Uttering powerful expressions of indignation he grabs the money and slams the door behind him. That is what the role calls for in this moment.

I can't comply with that, or with any prescribed role. I am not cut out to be a conformist. Thus I want to tell you frankly that this prize has made me happy. Because of Meersburg, because of Droste, and also because it was the first big prize that Nelly Sachs received, and because it was this Meersburg prize that prompted her to return to Germany for the first time. "A fairytale trip," as she wrote to me in Madrid at the time. "Welcomed in Zurich with so much love, and in Meersburg the decency of the young people," she wrote in June 1960, because she had of course been afraid of the German young people, like every returnee in that situation. As I, too, had been afraid in 1954. Thus this prize has all sorts of positive connections, and a person like me can't help being happy about it, even when she knows that prizes don't add anything to a work that it didn't already have.

Because today we are repeatedly accused, we who write (and I include you, the jurors who still give prizes for this activity), which in itself is not really so bad—justifying oneself, always analyzing what we do and whether it is worth our lives to do it, because otherwise we should give it up—at this point, I'd like to read a self-

justification that was altered 150 years ago, and which I believe even Mitscherlich and Marcuse would still find sufficient. In 1820, at 23 years old, Droste wrote, as forward to the first part of her *Spiritual Year*: ". . . I had to give my work vestiges of a multiply oppressed and divided mind . . . there are many stains that are actually torn areas, where even the gentlest hands rub the hardest . . . It is for the secret but certainly widespread sect of those among whom love is greater than faith . . . I dare hope that my songs might touch many a hidden, sick vein, for I have spared no thoughts, not even the most secret."

For this sect, the sect for whom love is greater than faith and who (I am quoting Droste again) "in one hour ask more questions than seven wise men can answer in seven years . . . as if a constantly renewed victory in constantly renewed battles were the only thing to be won . . . ," for these unorthodox and unhappy questioners for whom love is greater than faith, she said, she was writing and it is for them we write, for them we have written, and for them we will write, in the East as in the West, because no society is conceivable or worth dreaming of in which this 'sect' is absent.

Open Letter to Nelly Sachs

On the topic of exile poetry

Dear Nelly,

I am writing you this letter, *publice*. I want to express publicly what you have done for me, because I think you have done it for many and can do it for many more. For everyone who, in one way or another, suffers from the same trauma. I want to establish that and then I also want to attempt to analyze it.

At the end of the war, I saw pictures from the concentration camps for the first time. Many saw them for the first time then: outside of Germany, and above all also in Germany. Also in Germany, I repeat that explicitly. (I myself was far away, on an island in the Caribbean Sea.) For me, the worst was the piles of corpses: all of those naked, helpless bodies, like a repository for dismembered dolls, stacked atop one another. I couldn't stand looking at naked bodies anymore, especially sleeping ones—in the tropics people often sleep naked or nearly naked—without being terrified of the corpse dolls, those helpless objects of others' deeds. Every reclining person turned suddenly into a corpse, summoned up images of heaps of bodies. I never mentioned it at the time, I couldn't have said it to anyone, my horror was impossible to communicate. Should I have maybe said, "Don't go to sleep. Immediately there will be corpses lying there"?

When I read your poems, in the winter of 1959-1960, almost fifteen years later, you buried my dead, all those strange, terrible dead who came into my room. They went up in a white swirling foam, they lost the doll-like quality of people who

were only victims of this backward robot existence, and became part of the memory of all those who have died. In pain, but without bitterness, they dissolved in your words and rose like a milky haze; I saw it disintegrate, float away. I am breaking into tears as I write this, but nonetheless I want to express it, and publicly.

This great catharsis, this release was brought on by your poems, like one great poem: whereas your individual poems squeeze the reader and only rarely let go at the end. For that reason, I read your poems with passion. I find no other work that secures as yours does humanity's remembrance of these dead, these especially miserable dead among the many who died terribly. For that we must thank you: we, the survivors. We, who were spared as victims, and likewise those who survived on the side of the collaborators. And the younger generation who must inherit this whole burden, and for whom you have made it lighter.

The poet makes a larger contribution to 'living on,' to the collective living on (to give this wretched 'coming to terms' a human name for once) than all of the politicians together. You gave these dead a voice. With your words they—dolefully, but nonetheless—went the way that the dead go. Only someone who was a victim and an outcast and at the same time a German poet could do that. One whose own language is German and who is thus wholly a German. And who simultaneously counts completely among the victims.

I can speak about all of this frankly, more than anyone else. And I want to do it, too. At the award ceremony at St. Paul's, one hears that you are a Jewish poet. Is that true? Are you, Nelly Sachs, a 'Jewish poet'?

Viewed thematically, you are. But what is a Jew? Especially if one doesn't hold the beliefs. You are fortunate—you believe. But if one doesn't believe? You defined it for all of us: "On us, God practices destruction," you said. "A Jew is just like the others, only a little more so," Shaw said, very wittily, a definition one could just as well use for the Germans, but which is right only in a limited sense. (The poets are 'all a little more than others,' for example. 'More alive' if you will. You can't say that of the Jews.) Only in this respect is it true: more 'destruction' is practiced on us than on others. It is practiced exemplarily, again and again, as far back as the memory of the western world reaches. Please, don't misunderstand me, I don't think that we are put here so that the *conditio humana* can be imposed on us, over and over, on a public stage, representatively and unmitigatedly, a cautionary tale of a ruler of the world who needs us as his demonstration object. Sometimes theologians see a sort of higher purpose there. I merely see the reality, the mundane, historical reality, I'll take note of it: and with horror. As one views many things with horror that have happened and are happening. What is simply 'real.' The role of *Ecce homo* has more heavily and more starkly fallen to—been thrust upon—the Jews than upon others. Historically, it simply wasn't granted to them to be freed from their special status.

So you, in your poems, speak of this whipping boy of humanity, of the Jews, and almost solely of them. And almost only of those who were killed, almost a quarter century ago. And of yourself, the poet, who dies with them. With those who were driven to the utmost despair, to the outer limit of humanity. And who became a touchstone for others, a touchstone that called for the utmost humanity if one was not

to fall short. In the utmost, in an extreme sense, you are thus the voice of humanity. And your voice speaks German. To Germans.

A good book, I read recently, is a reader's book. A bad book, on the other hand, is the author's and only that. The same goes—and to a greater extent—for a poem. A good poem belongs to its reader, every single reader, no matter where or when he reads it or will read it. It renews itself with every reader, becomes the poem of very different readers, even if they don't all read it the same: rather each only the finest nuance that makes it 'his' poem.

In this sense already, fundamentally, your person retreats behind the work. As the person of every poet retreats behind his work. It would be irrelevant to a certain extent whether you were a Jew, assimilated or not, whether you were a woman, also what you have experienced. Only the work is important, and what you have put into it. And it would be visible only from the point of view of the reader. One could define an author out of his work, make him disappear into the thin air of abstraction. To be 'consistent' here would be a parlor trick of the intellect. Instead, the work devours the author, it feeds on his experiences, on his particular encounters with reality, that unrepeatable convergence of historical, social, and personal factors. The poem is the essence of what has been lived: made exemplary and available. Fate manifested in the personal. Suspended time brought to a point, frozen moments. Can the reader get them to flow again? Even the moments of an exceptional fate like yours? Or that of Lasker-Schüler or Kolmar? Why talk only about women here? The same goes for Heine and those who came after him, all the way up to Goll and Celan. I am not tallying up who ancestrally 'belongs,' we are working in an intellectual space,

speaking of the concrete reality which poets have to live and transform into language. The ‘exceptional fate’ is perhaps comparable to the special experiences of those on the edge, to name only one example: depending on the historical circumstances, depending on the individual disposition, the relation of exceptional experience to the collective experience will vary (and will also be transposed to different levels), in the course of which, in any case, even the specific will still be sublimated into a shared fate. At least for poets of distinction. He writes for all, the poet who can be an ‘inhabitant of the edge,’ even for those who aren’t. Nobody knows, either, to which border he may be banished. That is true of all of us. We are all mortal. Under one star or another.

Therefore you write for everyone. Just like Droste, just like Lasker. Or like Mombert or like Trakl or whoever. And naturally, first and foremost for those whose mother tongue is German. And whose mother tongue will be German (or who read German like their own language). And thus you are a German poet and cannot be anything else. You, who speak of the victims and yourself barely escaped. And who are always sick from it. Your poetry lives on this, on this great tension, this ‘unification of the ununifiable,’ which poetry always was and today is even more, because reality gives us the most extreme tension to live in. This feature of modern poetry, the paradox that is on the tip of every tongue, is not made into art forms from nowhere; it must first and foremost be lived, lived in the most precarious way. One is thrown out and persecuted, excluded by a society, and in desperation one seizes the word and revives it, brings the word to life, the word that is simultaneously one’s own and one’s persecutors’. The person fleeing racial hatred is only the most unfortunate

overall, the most harshly negated among the exile poets. And while he is still fleeing and being pursued, maybe even killed, his word is already arming itself for the return, to move into the center of the persecutors' life, their language. And thus he gains an irrevocable citizenship, as if he had been allowed to stay peacefully at home and his word didn't have the power emanating from the intense experience that makes it so strong (or might even never have come into existence). And he can't help loving the language through which he lives and which gives him life. In which his life, however, was damaged. Here extreme trust and panic coincide, the yea and nay can no longer be separated. Here decision is anticipated, reconciliation of the irreconcilable generates itself, an—admittedly smaller—demonstration, measured on a harm scale, a reflection once more of 'that power that always wants the good but still creates evil.' Accordingly, all poets live a paradox (already in the increasing inability to unify the internal and the external, and in so many ways), the German poets of the Jewish fate, to give them a name, live in this historical moment, even a few—incalculable—degrees harsher.

May the well-meaning not tag us with a false and sentimental label. The voice will be heard because it is a German voice. How else would people in this country be inspired?

But why do I insist on it, since it's predestined, as I said, and can't contribute to the will to act or take anything from the reluctance to do so? Not one's own and not that of others. Only by the physical murder of the living word, only by a new book-burning can something thus unified be divided. And not even by that, because the word has already done its work, is already flowing into other words. I believe,

however, that it's necessary that the facts as such be clearly analyzed at last and classified in their sticky contradictoriness. *Sine ire et studio.* That is what I am attempting. To such an undertaking this celebration in your honor is suited above all else.

There is also no false nationalism there when I say 'German.' How would that sound in mouths like ours? The German poets are not a 'soccer team' who enter competitions to win honor for a national flag. It is simply a matter of circumstances. Language is the memory of mankind. The more languages one learns, the more one takes part in human recollection, which is made up of every language. The poets, more than others, keep this recollection alive and colorful. I mean: they preserve its virulence, by making the language, which is constantly being worn down and declawed, into something barbed and wounding. That is something one can do only with one's own language. Ours happens to be German. It is only an extension of the paradox that defines him that the outcast has a particularly alert connection to the word, precisely because of his intimacy with foreign languages, that he involuntarily becomes an 'ambassador,' bringing his own language to the foreign one, and, vice versa, bringing the world to his mother tongue.

Poets don't merely bring facts to memory, as science does. They do so in a singular way. You are a good example of that: Your poetry keeps the evil alive, holds the wound open, because you are the voice of these wretched dead. And at the same time you release them from evil. As poets of history and of our time have brought horror and simultaneously its catharsis.

Poetry is like great bells tolling: so that everyone listens. So that, within everyone, that element that has no purpose isn't falsified by compromise. And that goes for the despairing poem, and for the negative and 'exasperating' poem: It is a tolling bell. In truth, there is no 'anti' poem that couldn't, at the same time and more so, be a 'pro' poem: an invocation of helpers so that together something unbearable can be overcome. And in that lies the catharsis: in that last belief in mankind, without which poetry doesn't exist. Poetry appeals to the innocence in everyone, to the best in them: the freedom to be oneself. No artificial intelligence can do that, no apparatus, however well-functioning. Or any 'well-functioning' person. Only the 'I' can be his neighbor's 'you' and his brother's keeper. His brother's keeper. That huge omission!

Nelly, you are so far away. No, not in Sweden. On the way to the land "where rediscoveries await the soul-seekers." Forgive me for summoning you this way. Turn back and tell your young readers in Germany that every single one is needed, so that you haven't buried the dead in vain: in the German word. A word of love. The "love that moves the sun and the other stars," as the father of all exile poets says.

Appendix

The Experience of Exile

Studies of the Behavioral Typology

Exile I define as a place that the contemporary German has absolutely no chance—fortunately—of experiencing. Not so long as our constitution is in force.

For the West German citizen there is only so-called ‘exile,’ exile in quotation marks. It lacks every distinguishing feature. Anyone who wants to can go away, to Sweden or Italy or wherever he wishes. And then commute between his home and the place where he earns his living. And when it suits him professionally, he moves back, and nobody notices except at most the tax agency.

The contemporary German lacks that extreme experience, which to many people of my generation was as inescapable as a severe and horribly life-altering illness. At the same time, this extreme circumstance is a historical one only for us as West Germans. For others, it is the most urgent present and offers them the same or similar challenges as were imposed on us, even if the practical circumstances are different.

Those who are placed outside of the normal laws find themselves in a situation that follows laws of its own. We are talking about the removal of an individual from the normal context of his life, to be specific a violent and involuntary removal. Being consigned to a category of the kind that in no way resembles his earlier environment. He is thrust into an unusual position, and condemned to it; he is also made recognizable to others as occupying an atypical existence. From this, all kinds of identity problems ensue that can be solved or bridged only on a case-by-case

basis, and, as long as the state of exile persists, can be resolved only approximately, never definitively.

Identification. That means primarily that of the exile with his role as an exile. Then that of the exile with his new country or the sequential places of refuge, which could be "immigrant countries," like the USA, for example, or not, like France, to name two extremes (*étranger* is the word in France, *fils d'étranger, petit fils d'étranger*—stranger, son of a stranger, grandson of a stranger). And then the identification with his land of origin, called into question but not dissolved either and rendered null and void. Today that country of origin has an odd ring to it when described as one's homeland. "Despite everything the world is not yet our home," an ex-émigré put it.

We are talking here about the specific exile experience of our time, about exile in this century. In earlier centuries its nature was very different. Even though the underlying problems were fundamentally the same, they weren't taken to such an extreme. For Dante, it sufficed to go from Florence to Pisa, while those persecuted by Hitler were pursued from continent to continent. It wasn't merely a question of the spatial dimension, but also of groups consisting of many thousands who were involuntarily removed, if not exterminated, groups for whose remaining members, survivors of emigration and particularly of the concentration camps, the pretty word 'DP = displaced persons' was coined.

Here I will try to extract behavioral patterns, that is, orientation methods, from within a given societal situation, whose sociopolitical causes are presumed to be familiar and can be read up on at any time.

To demarcate this situation against any potential misunderstanding: The situation of emigrants or exiles bears no resemblance to that of the traveler, even if the backdrop may be the same. Nor to that of the penniless wayfarer who is traveling by hitchhiking. Or to that of hippies hanging out on the church steps of exotic lands. Or even to that of the guest workers.

The source material to which we must adhere here is the experiences of the exiled themselves, the author not excluded. Starting in classical antiquity, people have frequently relied on the revenants, on the reanimated dead or seemingly dead, to describe how it was 'on the other side.' That wasn't especially fruitful. A séance with someone who has returned from exile is much more concrete. Anyone who would like to give further attention to such questions, and there has been, until very recently, precious little done along those lines, must first distinguish between those people who take in the experience naïvely, as destiny, and those who compare and reflect on their own fate. The former are suitable only for statistics, ideally they would be interviewed with a tape recorder. (Similar to what the American sociologist Oscar Lewis did with Mexican slum inhabitants.) In any case the range of experiences differs widely, depending on the age group. In 'immigrant countries' the children have assimilated, and thus, to some degree, if not completely, been able to remedy the special situation for themselves. The most helpless were the older generation, who today are already decimated. And among them the intellectuals, contrary to what one might assume, were in perhaps an even more difficult situation. (Jean Amery has spoken out in detail and also in general about the particular ineptitude of intellectuals, for example when it came to surviving concentration camps.) This is not the case, of

course, for highly trained and receptive minds who are capable of readjusting their old habits and expectations completely, or almost completely, and starting fresh.

Then there is my generation, those who were affected by exile very early as students or schoolchildren, at an age of heightened willingness to learn, to observe their own behavior as well as that of their surroundings critically, and of still fluctuating expectations. A critical attitude towards one's own identity, in any case, already acute; at this age one is unusually open to diverse experiences. There is a maximum of psychological elasticity on the matter handed over to them—without particular merit on the part of those affected.

So the capacity for disinterested appraisal of the situation and the lack of professional constraints makes awareness easier and likewise the implementation of awareness in practice. So that, for example, I left Germany shortly before the takeover, while important scholars like Arnold Bergsträsser, Karl Mannheim, or Alfred Weber thought I was 'simply overworked.' ("What you are imagining could never happen. Not here!" (Horkheimer was an exception, while Adorno at first thought that he could survive the winter in Germany.) I then went through what I call 'permanent flight,' which is what the majority who initially stayed in Europe went through—provided it didn't catch up with them. After many precarious changes of location, all involuntary, I've been in Heidelberg again, my old university town, since the winter semester of 1960-1961. I find that the experience of returning is far more strongly suggested in my work than exile, although it is only a question of emphasis, in that returning, for me, actually means 'returning from exile.'

Here I arrive at the first ambiguity. This is a report on ambiguity or even on paradoxes, it is an attempt at a clarification of the 'unclear,' of circumstances that defy clarification, in which the human being is always 'on the edge.' The challenge is to know exactly which edge one is on at the moment.

Returning, I said, is returning from exile. Even the nomenclature is tricky here. 'Exile' is a prettier word for emigration. While we were in it, no exile would call us that—we were emigrants. Emigrants were expatriates. We weren't really expatriates, although we did expatriate. Expatriates are voluntary emigrants, but we were involuntary emigrants. It's not true that we could have gone back, although a few did and in doing so were killed. 'Exile' is preeminently a political term. Of course, these expatriates were in part 'also' political refugees, but only in part, although some would have liked to be completely so.

Above all, though, there was a large number of intellectuals who in no way wanted to be classified under this term. Here we encounter the second ambiguity: The emigrant or exile identifies with his situation—though objectively defined—only with extreme difficulty. That struck me about the Czech emigrants. We read that Goldstücker (and not only he) does not want to be an "émigré" and doesn't consider himself one. (The most recent example, the Chilean Altamirano, said in January 1974, in Havana: "I am not in exile, I am prepared to go back to Chile.") That is, he sees the state of affairs in Czechoslovakia as temporary (and 'temporary' is his own lifespan) and refuses to accept his own loss of citizenship, although it is a fact he lives with every day. I remember very specifically how strong the resistance was to accepting one's situation. (Naturally that varies with the person concerned, depending on the

strength with which he confronts reality.) The non-intellectual emigrant probably doesn't have such resistance to identifying with his own historical and political situation, at least I can't recall any middle-class emigrants who were so 'overwrought.' In other words, a pseudo-voluntary acceptance is established and maintained in certain rites of daily life, but in any crisis situation turns out to be a Life Lie. (It would be part of such a Life Lie, for example, if the emigrant strenuously avoided any kind of gathering with comrades in fate, and did not consider himself one of them or want others to consider him one, as if he were a simple world traveler, just out of money at the moment, just without a passport at the moment, just without this or that at the moment.) In the grips of an acute political crisis, when nobody is as helpless and as merely an object and non-person as the emigrant, he depends on the group's experience, which is irreplaceable. That unavoidably becomes the 'moment of truth,' *la hora de la verdad*. On the other hand, clinging to an emigrant association, and the resultant manufacture of an illusionary reality in the midst of a foreign, unassimilatible reality is merely another way to delay reorienting oneself.

Even more tricky than identification with the political-historical situation of the expelled, the denaturalized, the exiled, the emigrated, those who escaped one way or another, is the challenge of recognizing oneself and identifying with one's specific stigma, precisely in the case of the racially persecuted. The victim of political persecution at least knows why. He is a party, a member of a party that is inferior and will be erased. The friend/enemy situation is, at least as a starting point, voluntary or at least accepted. The racially persecuted by comparison are hard up, at least insofar as they have not felt any profound allegiance to their ethnic group, as member of

which they are suddenly persecuted, shown the door, and robbed of all rights. The emancipated German Jews identified much more strongly with the Germans than with Judaism. And it was by no means just as an attitude; it was a question of upbringing. Many didn't adhere to religion anymore, which makes identification easier. Schizophrenic cases occurred of false identification with the persecutor. For example, I know of a case where an older Jewish woman living in total seclusion, inactive, pampered, bourgeois, if ever there was anything bourgeois, read Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, became persuaded that Hitler was right, and accordingly hanged herself above her bed, as early as 1933. A woman who was generally regarded as a joke, because she had agoraphobia and thus was afraid to cross the street alone, hanged herself like a character from a classical tragedy (like Jocasta). Well known and much ridiculed, albeit with uneasy laughter, was the case of a department chairman who, likewise in 1933, sent the following telegram to Hitler: "I have dismissed the Jew X. Heil Hitler. Signed, X."

The opposite reaction, available only to a few Orthodox Jews, was that the whole emancipation had just been a deception, that it was the fate of the Jews to live in the Goluth, in banishment, in foreign lands, and never to have a homeland. Those who, in earnest, found their way back to Judaism found a foothold and solace. At the time a number of baptized Jews, for example Emil Ludwig, but not only he, broke away from Christianity, so as to make identification easier, that is, for reasons of spiritual hygiene, instead of undertaking an (already dubious) attempt to escape persecution in disguise. He felt better afterward, naturally, but I do not know whether he discovered any other sources of strength from it besides the consciousness of

personal bravery. The most widespread, the most justified identification in human terms with the ‘real’ Germany, is now represented by the persecuted and banished. (See Horkheimer’s assertion “. . . because we say that what German culture means, it is present in the Nazi era not in Germany, but where we are.”) In any case, the disorientation that resulted from the identity crisis and forced one into a permanent revision and questioning of one’s life made the perception and digestion of reality very difficult. Nothing equivalent happens to the ‘merely’ (I’m saying merely) politically persecuted. I myself lived in close proximity to Spanish republicans. With all the difficulties they had, this wasn’t one of them. Nobody denied them their right to be Spaniards.

The paradox for those affected was that often, and generally in the case of intellectuals, they were considered ambassadors of the German spirit and, thanks to their qualifications, functioned as promoters of that which had cast them out. That was unavoidable, for example, for the scholars in Latin America.

You Germans, so punctual, so conscientious. I have never felt that paradox more strongly than in our friendship with the public enemy number one in the Dominican Republic, an old historian whose visit to Spanish scholars, as well as to us, was forbidden by the vice chancellor. The Spanish republicans complied. We did not. “Germans don’t take orders” was the reaction at the university. This in the same moment when Germans were all taking orders. They let the Germans have their way, they got used to the idea that Germans don’t take orders. Maybe they sent a police car or a military vehicle after us when we visited the public enemy with visitors from

abroad. But nothing happened to us, because the respect for Germans (Hitler was a 'Big Rooster') was so great.

The dissemination of German scholarship and literature by the emigrants belongs in this chapter, as does, in contrast, the incorporation of poetry of every language by them, something that suddenly became influential at the end of the war and when publishing resumed. (Emigrated German intellectuals played a significant role in reattaching the severed threads to the outside world, willy as well as nilly.)

Especially paradoxical, again, was the situation of the writers, whose habitat was the German language. Scholarship can always be communicated in translation, although one must do some relearning, for what can be presupposed, and what must be laid out first, the so-called 'Pyramid of Knowledge,' is different in every scholarly tradition. That may still be applicable when the assimilation process is already underway. Aside from that, that intimate acquaintance with the abstract on which we Germans thrive is difficult to convey, and is lacking in the Spanish and Italians. German concepts often resulted in neologisms (mundividencia = weltanschauung) or were simply nationalized (hinterland).

But for the authors, including those who were translated, and they were few, translation remained a stopgap. Because now, strangely, and perhaps also not so strangely, precisely the persecuted and denaturalized contributed strongly to postwar poetry, I would like to briefly quote my description of the situation as I formulated it in my *Open Letter to Nelly Sachs* on the occasion of her 75th birthday in 1966. ('Situation' is here my most frequently used word; it is this position into which

people are brought and out of which the challenge arises that can be lived in but not resolved.)

"One is thrown out and persecuted, excluded by a society, and in desperation one seizes the word and revives it, brings the word to life, the word that is simultaneously one's own and one's persecutors'. The person fleeing racial hatred is only the most unfortunate overall, the most harshly negated among the exile poets. And while he is still fleeing and being pursued, maybe even killed, his word is already arming itself for the return, to move into the center of the persecutors' life, their language. And thus he gains an irrevocable citizenship, as if he had been allowed to stay peacefully at home and his word didn't have the power emanating from the intense experience that makes it so strong (or might even never have come into existence). And he can't help loving the language through which he lives and which gives him life. In which his life, however, was damaged. Here extreme trust and panic coincide, the yea and nay can no longer be separated. Here decision is anticipated, reconciliation of the irreconcilable generates itself, an—admittedly smaller—demonstration, measured on a harm scale, a reflection once more of 'that power that always wants the good but still creates evil.' Accordingly, all poets live a paradox (already in the increasing inability to unify the internal and the external, and in so many ways), the German poets of the Jewish fate, to give them a name, live in this historical moment, even a few—incalculable—degrees harsher."

An additional paradox, which seems even more paradoxical, is that in more than a few cases the stigmatization that was intended to revoke the emancipation certainly made the emancipation much stronger than would have been the case under

normal circumstances. One who was taken out of his normal context lost not only his familiar surroundings; he lost his family in a wider sense, the so-called extended family that is dwindling more and more anyway, but which definitely still existed in the thirties. Uncles, aunts, cousins, the parents' friends, in short the whole German-Jewish milieu disappeared as if swept away by a magic wand. Friends were no longer available to him in the form of neighbors, family, clubs, and other such social institutions; he made friends by coincidence and out of sympathy, catch as catch can. If he was young and learned the foreign language easily, that included contemporaries from the country that took him in. He, a German-Jewish émigré, had less contact than ever with Jews, unless he belonged among those who were brought back to Judaism by the compulsory labeling. (To my knowledge, statistics that would capture these groups do not exist.)

No less strange was the relationship to the host country. Because this foreigner was already excluded from the normal life of the others, because he was merely tolerated, a tolerance that could at any moment be rescinded. This tolerance was illustrated in the residence permit, often valid for a limited time, but always subject to cancellation. It was shown further in the approved or restricted work permit. The revocation of the work permit in many circumstances forced another emigration, to a country where exiles were more welcome. The continuing emigration, be it for economic or political reasons, resulted in progressive impoverishment and progressive helplessness and thus in progressive family crises. The increasing impoverishment in turn made subsequent moves increasingly difficult, because financial guarantees were demanded, lest the victims of persecution become

a burden on society. The Swiss police introduced the “J” stamp for passports, so they would know right away who was in particular need of help. Such a person was marked. He wasn’t allowed to be helped. This gave rise to the most grotesque situations, in which humans became puppets of the most absurd regulations. I remember our departure from England. Anyone with a minimum sum of money for a country of entry could have a visa. Anyone who had a visa could get authorization to leave. Anyone who had authorization to leave acquired permission to exchange a small amount of money. But anyone not able to make at the beginning that little exchange that he could make only at the end of the process, he didn’t get a visa, he wasn’t allowed to leave; how was he supposed to produce the money in the other country, even if, as for the lucky ones, there was someone there who would help him financially?

Today that sounds comical, and it is, too. But it was in no way funny for one who only yesterday was a ‘refugee from Nazi oppression’ and who tomorrow could already be imprisoned as a possible member of a ‘5th Column.’ And in any case arrested and put in preventive detention. Because the refugee, be he politically or racially targeted, is always dependent on his new country’s remaining an enemy of his mother country. In every political crisis, and the thirties were rife with political crises, that becomes urgent. When the host nation is antagonistic toward the emigrant’s homeland, the emigrant becomes, at critical moments, a citizen of the enemy nation, that is, a potential traitor. The burden of proof lies on him to show that he is loyal to his host country in every instance. He is watched, he is distrusted. Wherever he goes, the people suddenly fall silent and say: “Watch out, he isn’t one of

us." (With close friends this doesn't apply, or applies less.) But if the host country is allied with the hostile motherland, then the public enemy of one country is under suspicion in the other. Then perhaps he is a dangerous element, then it is demanded that he be locked up, deported, and in the worst cases even extradited. That is why he constantly needs reputable citizens who can vouch for him with the authorities. (All strangers can use that. The emigrant needs it more urgently—it is a matter of life or death for him.) This pariah situation requires the emigrant always to accept good-naturedly the role of the weaker one, to happily take the short end of the stick. He must, like every pariah, be a jack of all trades just to survive. And the minimum guarantees, the minimum assurances that everyone has, those he cannot count on.

An empirical judgment, if an entirely irrational one, is that those without a country are worse off than those who have their homeland as an enemy and oppressor. The stateless person, as well as the denaturalized one, in short a person without a passport, is nobody, they will make short work of him. (Recently a notice went out in the papers (*Rhein-Neckar-Zeitung, 4/5/73*) "For Raccoons, It's Curtains. Ruthless Eradication Recommended." Under this headline it read: "It is a stranger among the wild animals in our forests . . . the raccoon is thus fair game and at everyone's mercy . . . it remains a mystery why the raccoon is not, like the foxes of Baden-Württemberg, classified as a predator, as a huntable, unprotected animal, which would at least provide the guarantee that it would be hunted only by experts." "Did you read that about the raccoons?" I asked a young man. "They're upsetting our ecology," was the response. That had a familiar ring to it, only two letters were different: the economy was not able to absorb immigrants.) Without notice he is

deported, while others have weeks or months to prepare for and worry about the next step. (That is a proven fact. I was very interested, in this sense, when in 1954 an architect showed me a rebuilt building in the center of Frankfurt, some social agency. Inside were special counters for residents, non-residents, and 'stateless immigrants.' If I recall correctly, at the last counter one could communicate only through a closed pane of glass, as with cashiers at banks.)

It hardly needs to be demonstrated that for the person who must always and in every crisis prove himself, such a situation gets in the way of normal 'settling in.' He is again and again reminded of his special and dependent position, like other pariahs. (Probably the ex-convict, in many jobs the woman hired as an exception, etc. etc.) Identification with a new country requires certain stable relationships as the first prerequisite. In volatile political times, such as the thirties were, this prerequisite was not met.

Thus the exiled person constantly feels like a sort of touchstone that allows others to fail. Be it new friends in the host country who either support him vis-à-vis their authorities and agencies—or not. Be it old friends from the motherland, who arrive and avoid him. (And whom he must avoid, in case they seek him out, lest he harm them.) Even the family, in the narrowest sense, is put under tremendous strain. The generation gap is exacerbated by it, in that the older generation at first cannot speak the language as well as the children who grew up in the foreign country. And that no matter what it does, the family suffers a relatively high number of failures and disappointments, and inescapable helplessness that is detrimental to admiration. The same goes for spouses. Marriages are transformed into fighting and bickering

societies, or they break up. The temptation to escape from misery by marrying, to marry into a normal life, affects both partners when their life together is not extraordinarily close. In practice, a willingness to sacrifice and take refuge in unconditional mutual helpfulness is probably more common. I don't know if there are statistics. Again, these developments depend on coincidence and opportunity. Actually, the pariah is never a particularly sought-after partner.

Crisis situations usually reveal the lie behind arbitrary, state-sanctioned scapegoating. I remember how during one of the many crises of the late thirties a German consular employee said sincerely to a Jewish woman who was trying to obtain a passport, "What is this nonsense? Go home, there is a war on and we are all German." Literally. (He and others recognized, for a moment, 'only Germans.') Comparable is the following: At Christmas the leader of the—small—Nazi group in the Dominican Republic, at the time fresh off the boat, went to the home of a pair of Jewish painters from Stuttgart, and asked: "Can I spend Christmas with you? I'm so homesick." True, they had a decorated pine tree—there are no firs there—and even Christmas cookies. They didn't know if they should laugh or cry. That was in 1940.

One should also mention the mutual aid organizations of the emigrants themselves, who, with true German thoroughness, provided a good imitation, as if that would have been a help in crisis situations. "Don't stand out on the street. Speak in a quiet tone as the English do. Only English, even among yourselves. Carry an umbrella in all weather, with the tip pointing forward, as is customary here. Never ask what it was like yesterday. Never introduce yourself first. Where you are new, don't

drop in on people to introduce yourself before you have been given the sign that they want to associate with you," etc. etc.

All of this should be added to the topic of 'identification difficulties.'

As for practical difficulties, the residence permit and the work permit, or the conditional work permit, have already been mentioned. I also mention the papers, which were more important than health and everything else, even money, although money offered some protection—and, only after the papers, language ability—and whose meaning a citizen of the Federal Republic cannot even imagine. The travel papers that one has or doesn't have, because one's normal or already stamped papers are second or third class, are often the direct motivation for suicide. All the more because of state treaties that can include the sudden expulsion of emigrants, and practically did include it. Anyone with a stamped passport who was turned back at a border, who ever tried to cross illegally a border that was barred to him, but open to all others, has trouble today imagining that it was him to whom this happened.

I doubt that these experiences, in all their complexity, can be conveyed. Refugees from the East will immediately be able to envision the situation, even though they have more room to make their own decisions, and hence a more voluntary existence.

With this I arrive at the last identification hurdle, the political one. When instead of the German emigration, I here use the Spanish one as a demonstration object because of its unambiguousness, one thing could be asserted clearly: People had barely left behind their own sphere of activity when they showed a certain indifference toward the political problems of the host nation; all their interest was

focused on their own survival, as is probably natural. Even the highly political person feels—in the 'moment of truth,' which is not the moment of agitation or rhetoric—no responsibility like that he feels for the situation at home. To the extent he intervened, he was deported and put the whole group in danger. The exile is taken out of the running. Hopes and fears still concentrate on his homeland. It is useless to say anything for or against this; it was simply the way things were.

In Latin America, where the Spanish of the so-called 'old colony' simply fell in with Franco, as the Germans abroad rallied to Hitler almost automatically, the Spaniards got along fine with the Spanish republicans. The newcomers married into the family of the longtime residents, for both were above all Spaniards. In foreign lands the fight was not perpetuated.

That doesn't mean that individual social democrats, for example the Bonhoeffer/Leibholz family in England, did not immediately become close and have cordial contact with the Protestant church there. In different waystations and depending on the political status of the individual, there were various levels of involvement. I know of no case in which an emigrant in a host country could attain a leading political position, except in regard to his motherland, like Thomas Mann with Roosevelt.

To the extent that emigrated (or exiled) Germans could affect developments in their host countries, it was certainly not the political emigrants. It was the psychoanalysts, the sociologists, the philosophers, even the art historians, without whom the intellectual life of the host countries can no longer be imagined. No politician can claim as much.

In brief, I think I have shown that the situation of the exile is one of a continuous identity crisis, which finds its last and most absurd expression in the repeated and ‘dead serious’ utterance of so many exiled people: “I don’t want to be buried here.” The final refusal to stay on foreign soil for good, the supreme non-identification.

I return to my starting point: Exile is the most extreme experience of the *conditio humana*. ‘Being only a fleeting guest,’ ‘having as if we hadn’t,’ has stripped all the metaphors away and is imposed daily, and visibly, on the exile.

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