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FRANZ FÜHMANN :

A STUDY THROUGH TRANSLATION

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By

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## SCOPE AND CONTENTS

The results of an intensive analysis of writings by Franz Fühmann will not be presented in the traditional form of a discussion, but rather as an actual recreation in another language of the specific texts under study.

This thesis, then, presents three stories from Franz Fühmann's 1977 collection entitled Bagatelle, rundum positiv in English translation.

A preliminary chapter serves to introduce this contemporary writer from the German Democratic Republic, and to acquaint the reader with the cultural, political scene within which Fühmann has been working.

In the concluding chapter, particular problems encountered in translation are pointed out, and solutions to these problems are explained. These solutions were devised subsequent to my gaining insight into the material.

The bibliography catalogues all literature produced by Franz Fühmann prior to 1980, and also everything written on him and his work to date. It is intended to be a list of all the sources available for an exhaustive Fühmann study, not merely a catalogue of the publications actually used for the purpose of this thesis.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A presentation by Franz Fühmann himself sparked my interest in this author, and the encouragement of Dr. K. Denner spurred me on to carry out this translation project.

It was at a reading held at Erlangen in the Federal Republic of Germany in May, 1978, that Franz Fühmann and his book, Bagatelle, rundum positiv, were introduced to me. And it was on the suggestion of Mr. Fühmann that the following stories were chosen for translation.

I should like to thank my supervisor, Dr. K. Denner, for making this endeavour a stimulating one - for providing valuable criticism, and giving constant support. I am also grateful to my readers, Dr. G. Teuscher and Mr. J. B. Lawson, for their many pertinent suggestions, and to Dr. C. G. Chapple for his help in compiling the bibliography.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
I INTRODUCTION .....	1.
1. Biographical Notes .....	1.
2. Cultural Politics in the German Democratic Republic .....	5.
II THREE NAKED MEN .....	20.
III MERE TRIVIA - TOTAL EFFECT: POSITIVE .....	41.
IV TALE OF MIRRORS .....	68.
V TRANSLATOR'S NOTES .....	98.
1. Lexical Problems .....	98.
2. Syntactical Problems .....	103.
VI NOTES .....	112.
VII BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	115.
1. Fühmann's Publications .....	115.
2. Secondary Literature .....	120.
3. General Reference Works .....	124.

## INTRODUCTION

Franz Fühmann is an East German writer who has been rising to fame on the German literary scene since the mid-1950's. In my opinion his writing is of such high calibre, that its appeal could be universal, but due to linguistic barriers it cannot be read and appreciated beyond German borders.

Translation breaks down these linguistic barriers, thereby improving international understanding. With a view not only to promoting international understanding, but also to helping the English reader understand East Germany's Franz Fühmann, I have translated into the English language three short stories recently published by Fühmann. If the literary value and meaning of these translated stories is to be appreciated, however, an awareness of the author's background and of the context giving rise to his writing is necessary, and for this reason the following introductory comments are being provided before the actual stories in translation are presented.

### Biographical Notes

Franz Fühmann was born in 1922 in the "Sudetenland,"<sup>1</sup> an area of western Czechoslovakia where German-speaking

people constituted a substantial minority.<sup>2</sup> Other national groups, such as the Hungarians and Ukrainians, were also represented in Czechoslovakia,<sup>3</sup> but Fühmann himself is of German extraction. Having had to co-exist not only with the various minorities, but also with the native Czechs and Slovaks, Fühmann grew up in a multilingual environment. Living in a milieu where he used his mother tongue and was exposed to various other languages, Fühmann could acquire diverse language skills.

Environment affected Fühmann not only from a linguistic point of view, but socially and politically as well. The attitudes prevailing within his own surroundings were petit bourgeois, fascist ones.<sup>4</sup> His father, a pharmacist by profession, was so supportive of German nationalistic, fascist politics, that he became the founder of his local branch of the Nazi Party.<sup>5</sup> The young Fühmann's actions appear to have been in keeping with his father's political views, for he volunteered for the armed services while still in secondary school.<sup>6</sup> Later he was drafted and thus became involved in the military aspects of Nazi Germany and World War II.<sup>7</sup> He was kept in the Soviet Union as a prisoner of war until 1949, at which time he was permitted to return to Germany.<sup>8</sup> Fühmann himself has provided this sketch of the early years of his life:

Jahrgang 1922; rüde nationalistisch-faschistische Lebenssphäre (Sudetenland, Vater Begründer der Ortsgruppe der NSDAP in meinem Heimatdorf); Kindheit im 'Deutschen Turnverein' (HJ); 'Wir wollen heim ins Reich'; nach der Okkupation SA; 'Führer befehl, wir folgen!'; Angst, zum Kriegseinsatz zu spät zu kommen; freiwillige Meldung, nach dem Abitur 1941 RAD, Wehrmacht, Osten, Süden, Lazarett, Kapitulation, 5 Jahre Kriegsgefangenschaft.<sup>9</sup>

By the time Fühmann's involvement in the war was over, he had seen and experienced for himself the negative effects fascism can have on people. Subsequently he decided that fascism would have to be eradicated and that it was essential for him to come to terms with the experiences he had had during fascist times. The principles of socialism, he felt, provided a means of accomplishing this.<sup>10</sup> Fühmann explains how it was that he adopted this point of view and states, "Ich gehöre einer Generation an, die über Auschwitz zum Sozialismus gekommen ist."<sup>11</sup> What he is saying is that he belongs to a generation which arrived at socialism via Auschwitz. Upon reaching this conclusion, he chose to live in the German Democratic Republic when released from prison in 1949.

Although Fühmann had published some poetry as early as 1942,<sup>12</sup> a bibliography of his works, as it appears

at the end of this thesis, reveals that his writing career actually began after 1949, in the GDR. This bibliography also indicates that there are certain prevailing tendencies in Fühmann's work. Ancient myths and fables, as well as medieval and Shakespearean literature, for instance, seem to be preferred sources for subject-matter. Related to this are the Märchen, or fairy tales also represented in his work. When titles with such fanciful terms as Die Insel der Träume (The Island of Dreams), Eine Idylle (An Idyllic Place), Spuk (Spook), or Stürzende Schatten (Plunging Shadows) are considered, a preoccupation on the part of Fühmann with intangible elements like fantasy and dreams is suggested. The fact that Fühmann has worked on writers such as E. T. A. Hoffmann or Sarah Kirsch, shows that he is indeed interested in literature containing phantasmal, fairy-tale elements in connection with realistic ones. It is also interesting to note that Fühmann has written on Ernst Barlach, the early twentieth-century sculptor, writer, and graphic artist renowned for his highly expressive style and mystic themes. In addition to revealing certain thematic and stylistic interests of Franz Fühmann, the bibliography shows that he has produced such work as poetry, short stories, translations of Czech, Hungarian, and Polish poetry, and children's stories.



Fühmann is held in high esteem in his country, as is indicated by the numerous East German awards he has received for literary achievement.<sup>13</sup>

More and more of his writings are now being published in the Federal Republic of Germany and in Switzerland. English translations of some of his works have also appeared. And Franz Fühmann is becoming known in the West.

#### Cultural Politics in the German Democratic Republic

1945 marks the beginning of a new era in Germany's development. In a state of total ruin, the country was faced with the problem of recovery. Not only did actual reconstruction of buildings, cities, and industries have to take place, but also the rebuilding of morale.

With a view to lifting the morale of the German people, Antifascists, Communists, and Social Democrats founded a cultural organization known as the "Kulturbund zur demokratischen Erneuerung Deutschlands."<sup>14</sup> This took place after the end of the Second World War, on July 4th, 1945. Although it was the Soviet administration of occupied Germany which gave impetus to the creation of the "Kulturbund,"<sup>15</sup> intellectuals of all German areas were eager to renew cultural activity in a democratic manner.<sup>16</sup> People renowned and respected

within the field of German literature participated in the "Kulturbund." Gerhart Hauptmann, for example, became the honorary president of the organization in Berlin, while Ricarda Huch held that post for the Thuringian branch, and Johannes Becher served on the executive committee.<sup>17</sup> Some of the major goals of the "Kulturbund" included the elimination of literature stemming from the Nazi era, and the promotion of literature following humanist traditions.<sup>18</sup> Established on the initiative of the Soviet administration, these principles constituted the foundation of what was to be the cultural development programme of that part of Germany which would later become a new socialist state. Indeed, when Germany was split into two separate entities in 1949, the Federal Republic broke with the "Kulturbund," while East Germany chose to maintain the organization. Within this new East German political framework, the "Kulturbund," then under the leadership of Johannes Becher, became responsible for implementing cultural policies at a practical level.<sup>19</sup>

After 1949, the actual decisions pertaining to the direction cultural policy should take were made by the State - not by the "Kulturbund." The State began by incorporating its position on the arts and the sciences into the very Constitution of the German Democratic Republic. This is evident in Article 39, for instance,

which states: "Die Kunst, die Wissenschaft und ihre Lehre sind frei."<sup>20</sup> This Article indicates that the arts and sciences, and the principles thereof, are free. A subsequent qualifying statement specifies:

Der Staat nimmt an ihrer Pflege teil und gewährt ihnen Schutz, insbesondere gegen den Mißbrauch für Zwecke, die den Bestimmungen und dem Geist der Verfassung widersprechen.<sup>21</sup>

Through this clause the State indicates that it will support and protect the arts and sciences, and that it will also check for any misuse made of them - misuse causing the spirit of the Constitution to be contradicted.

Since the Constitution refers to the arts and sciences in general, writers, working within the framework of the arts, understood Article 39 as being applicable to them. A more distinct picture of the writer's role and the nature of his work was provided by Walter Ulbricht, chairman of the GDR's ruling SED Party, during this Party's 1952 convention. Given the reality of a new political state having to build itself up out of ruins, it was decided that principles for the structure of a socialist system within GDR society would have to be established. Literature, seen as an educational tool, was to play a part in building this new system. It was to depict quite realistically the new

socialist ideals and inspire the people to strive for these ideals. In other words, authors were to help the State materialize its goals by communicating these goals to the people through literary works written in the style of Socialist Realism. In fact, Walter Ulbricht stated:

Im Mittelpunkt des künstlerischen Schaffens muß der neue Mensch stehen, der Kämpfer für ein einheitliches, demokratisches Deutschland, der Aktivist, der Held des sozialistischen Aufbaus. Indem der Künstler dieses Neue, dieses Fortschrittliche in der Zeit gestaltet, hilft er mit, Millionen zu fortschrittlichen Menschen zu erziehen.<sup>22</sup>

The writers convened shortly thereafter to discuss Ulbricht's plan further. Using his statement as their foundation, they were able to develop specific thematic guidelines, and categorized the themes proposed: 1. The new life on the land, 2. Development of the key aspects of GDR industry, and 3. Reconstruction of Berlin.<sup>23</sup>

While specific types of subject-matter were being encouraged, certain modes of writing were being discouraged. Stephan Hermlin, for instance, was forced to appear in court in 1952 for having published poetry of too cryptic a nature in his book, Flug der Taube. The following criticism was made:

Zu oft noch muß der nach dem Sinn forschende Leser raten, deuteln, interpretieren... Sich von subjektiven Gedankenverbindungen treiben zu lassen, das bedeutet Verzicht auf die bewußte Gestaltung der Wirklichkeit. Den roten Faden der leitenden Idee eines Gedichts von Zufälligkeiten der Sprachmusik, des Rhythmus, eines Reims, einer Alliteration überwuchern zu lassen, das ist ein Rest von Glauben an die Spontaneität im künstlerischen Schaffen.<sup>24</sup>

Evidently, then, formal and rhetorical devices were to be abandoned, and so very serious limitations were being placed on the writer's creative freedom.

The East German author of the 1950's was therefore provided with themes on which to write, with instructions as to which means of expression to avoid and which to favour, with a role to fulfil - the role of persuading people to live according to socialist ideals, and he found himself in the position of having to follow these directives if he did not want to be faced with charges of unconstitutional behaviour.

At the end of the 1950's another stage in the development of the German Democratic Republic's cultural policy began. In the space of the previous ten years, writers had not been following the prescribed modes of writing faithfully and whole-heartedly. Socialist

Realism was not yet clearly evident in the literature. Formalism, which in the opinion of the SED Party meant ascribing importance to the form of a literary work rather than to its concepts and content,<sup>25</sup> was still evident in the current writing, so when the "Kulturbund" convened early in 1958, it was decided that a cultural revolution was necessary. Socialist Realism was proclaimed the only course for the GDR to follow, and a new responsibility was placed upon the people:

Man applaudierte der Feststellung, daß ,allein der sozialistische Humanismus der reale Humanismus unseres Jahrhunderts ist' und verpflichtete sich, ,für eine neue Lebensweise: für sozialistische Beziehungen im täglichen Leben aller schaffenden Menschen unserer Republik, für sozialistische Moral und Ethik' zu wirken.<sup>26</sup>

These ideals, intangible objects of discussion in 1958, came a step closer to realization in 1959 when it was decided that socialism was to be pursued actively, become a way of life, and be promoted by all. A brigade of young people working in the aluminum industry at Bitterfeld, initiated a movement aimed at achieving these goals.<sup>27</sup> These young people first called upon all brigades in GDR industries to compete for the title of "Socialist Work Brigade" - "socialist work" meaning a

combination of working, learning, and living in the spirit of socialism.<sup>28</sup> This movement was later extended to the literary sphere, and a contest encouraging workers everywhere to write on the events happening around them was organized. A writers' conference was held at Bitterfeld to further discuss this contest, and it was there that new literary principles were clearly laid out. These literary aims became known under the title of the "Bitterfelder Weg."<sup>29</sup> In accordance with this new plan, workers were encouraged not only to read, but also to produce literature. It was decided that the socialist revolution in East Germany as a theme in literature was to be viewed especially favourably, and funds from the cultural budget were to be used primarily to support artistic literary activity serving the socialist cause. Publishers and writers were to co-ordinate their activities and align them to the new directions in literature. All suggestions that had been made at Bitterfeld for developing art, entertainment, and cheerful ideas in literature were to be incorporated into a system of effective measures which could also be extended to apply to the other arts. The participants in the conference at Bitterfeld were able to sum up their decisions, as they have just been outlined in English, in six points - the focal points of the "Bitterfelder Weg." The German version of the decisions was:

1. Die Bewegung des lesenden Arbeiters weiterzuentwickeln und sie zu ergänzen durch eine Bewegung des schreibenden Arbeiters.
2. Die Schriftsteller, die sich die literarische Gestaltung von Problemen der sozialistischen Umwälzung in der DDR zum Thema nehmen, bevorzugt zu fördern.
3. Die Verlage aufzufordern, ihre Arbeit mit den Autoren und ihre Verlagstätigkeit in dieser Richtung zu ändern.
4. Die Mittel des Kulturfonds so zu verwenden, daß vor allem die künstlerische Tätigkeit unterstützt wird, die der sozialistischen Kultur dient.
5. Die in der Aussprache unterbreiteten Vorschläge zur Entwicklung der Kunst, der Unterhaltung, und der heiteren Muse zu einem ganzen System wirksamer Maßnahmen zusammenzufassen.
6. Der Kulturkommission beim Politbüro des ZK der SED vorzuschlagen, diese Maßnahmen auf die anderen Künste auszudehnen.<sup>30</sup>

One of the main goals of the "Bitterfelder Weg" was to bridge the gap which existed between art and life. To this end writers were urged to serve as members of the work force, and in order to facilitate this, the "Kulturbund" acted as go-between for companies and writers, thereby arranging jobs for writers. The idea was that after such working experience, a writer would have subject-matter on which to base a book. Reflective literature would no longer be written and literature as an autonomous enterprise would come to an end. Instead,



an interrelationship between literature and social development would be established. Literature would now be an instrument to be used by the State for educational purposes.<sup>31</sup>

The decisions reached at Bitterfeld did indeed produce changes in the literary climate of the GDR. The general population began to take literature more seriously and people participated in the government's promotion of writing. There was widespread support of writing contests, for example, and of reading groups, and in the spirit of socialism, even groups that worked collectively on a literary creation were established.<sup>32</sup>

With the dawn of the "Bitterfelder Weg," the sphere of the writer's creative possibilities became considerably more limited, but much more energy was to be channelled into this limited new literary sphere by all people - professional writers and the general public alike.

During the five years following establishment of the "Bitterfelder Weg," this new plan was an issue in the forefront of East Germany's cultural policies. However, when a second conference was held at Bitterfeld in 1964 to discuss the future course of GDR cultural policy, and the original goals of "Bitterfeld" were reiterated, the general consensus was that these goals had not been achieved in the first five years after implementation of the plan. In reality, the authors had

Writers were still viewed as an extension of the Party and they were still being urged to follow the "Bitterfelder Weg" more closely. It was agreed, however, that since the content of literature was being stressed, the form would no longer be an issue. The formal limitations that writers had previously known, were lifted.<sup>37</sup> If this appeared to signal the start of a more liberal literary climate in the GDR, hope of that was dashed when a new government policy on publishing was introduced. Under this new policy, East German publishers lost their right to deal freely with foreign publishing companies. The State would supervise all dealings from then on and thereby have control over selecting the GDR literature it felt was suitable for publication outside the country.<sup>38</sup> After the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, a conference was held in the GDR to discuss the situation of cultural politics. It was agreed that fundamentally everything was in order in East Germany, but Walter Ulbricht did emphasize that socialist concerns needed to be much more extensively exposed. He pointed out that the situation had become far more complex in recent times, and that writers would therefore have to delve more deeply into the subject-matter to promote better understanding of the situation. The reasoning behind this was that it was necessary to establish a direction

for the future - not to achieve an understanding of the past.<sup>39</sup> The State's call for more conscientious and penetrating treatment of socialist themes therefore seemed to be becoming more intense. On the whole, then, it appeared that the State was in fact practising stricter control in the literary field as the 1960's drew to a close.

In the 1970's, however, the literary climate in the GDR, from a superficial point of view, seemed to be turning more liberal. This was due to the fact that the SED Party had come under the leadership of a new man, Erich Honecker, who seemed to be lifting that aspect of the "Bitterfelder Weg" which prescribed the restrictions in literary creation. This is evident in the view Honecker expressed on cultural policy - the view that on the basis of socialism there can be no taboos in the artistic and literary sphere: "Wenn man von der festen Position des Sozialismus ausgeht, kann es meines Erachtens auf dem Gebiet von Kunst und Literatur keine Tabus geben."<sup>40</sup> The snag, however, was that Ulbricht's policy of supervising all international dealings of the publishing companies had not been eliminated. The copyright office could simply refuse publishing rights for a book viewed as inappropriate. Violations of copyright laws by an East German author could result in his loss of civil

rights, as was the case with Wolf Biermann in 1976. In the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung a writer's displeasure and a journalist's concern about this situation were expressed:

,Das Messer an der Kehle der Schriftsteller der Republik' nannte Stefan Heym das ,Büro für Urheberrechte' in Ost-Berlin. Die Erklärung, in der Heym die augenblickliche Drangsal der Schriftsteller in der DDR mit diesem Bild beschrieb, wurde von der britischen Nachrichtenagentur Reuter verbreitet und hat großes Aufsehen erregt. Nicht zum ersten Mal haben die schreibenden Bürger des kommunistischen deutschen Staates Ursache, Beschwerde zu führen. Doch nie zuvor erreichte ihre Klage so viele und so aufmerksame Adressaten.<sup>41</sup>

Stefan Heym, himself an East German writer, is calling the copyright office a knife at the throat of GDR authors, and this complaint was picked up and presented to the public by the British news agency Reuter. The German journalist feels that although this is not the first time East German writers have had reason to complain, it is new that the complaint received such widespread publicity.

All of this would indicate, then, that although certain liberalization in cultural policy took place in the 1970's, the State reserved the right to limit the extent

to which the writers were granted liberty, and the power to take extreme measures for eliminating literature of a threatening nature, thus ensuring that the liberalization would not give rise to literature that could have a negative effect on the country.

The following stories by Franz Fühmann stem from this last period - a period when writers were allowed to express their concerns more freely. However, if a writer wanted to prevent his work from being denounced and consequently restricted by the State, certain official demands still had to be met. Literature could not be exceedingly critical of East Germany, and those aspects of "Bitterfeld" that had been upheld, would have to be followed.

### THREE NAKED MEN

They were not at the sauna often - it seemed I had seen them a total of four or five times - but I am nevertheless in a position to give an accurate description of them. They came and went, and their motions between coming and going were always identical, and I am firmly convinced that even if they were not to return until years later, they would still act just as they had the first time, even if they were no longer the same three naked men.

Two were of average height - the one a little above, the other a little below mid-average - and their weight was also still within the range of normal, even though a touch of flabbiness, especially in the faces, indicated that now in their early forties, they would surely soon have trouble keeping their weight down. The man between them was fleshy. He was a whole head smaller, squat, thickset, yet surprisingly agile, and overgrown with an iron-gray sort of frizz which covered even the shoulders and grew right around the knees. When he perspired, he shone with a silvery lustre. The hair on his head was also thick, although he already seemed to be in his mid-fifties; it was grayish brown, slightly waved, combed back from the forehead, and kept quite short. He had

neither beard nor sideburns, and he always looked freshly shaven. But perhaps he had a sparse beard, which is often the case with furry men, for from the chin to the temples the skin showed no trace of that bothersome purplish tinge which develops after years of shaving. And so the cheeks glowed moonwhite and full above the mossy shoulders. The neck was very short, the face had next to no wrinkles, the not-so-high forehead was nearly smooth as well; only the chin was marked by a heart-shaped dimple which pointed right down to the lower jaw. Small mouth, small ears, the neck firm; the eyes I shall come to. His hands had a delicate look despite the blunt fingertips, the nails - the toenails as well - were smooth, filed uniformly to an oval, without nicks, rosy, with well-defined half-moons, and the palms of his hands and soles of his feet were without callouses and soft, almost womanish. Scrupulously clean; bare traces of perfume or fine soap. Broad chest, most definitely a potbelly, and a substantial one at that, but fleshy, not fat, and nicely rounded rather than droopy; legs stocky, genitals compact, and little contrast between the pubic hair and the wool covering the potbelly and chest. Massive wedding band, strong set of teeth with gold displayed there as well; fresh breath, no glasses. So much health is seldom seen at this age.

Now his eyes. They were light-brown and round as balls, and the rims of them also formed a circle, and when he spoke these eyes moved in a manner which almost produced the effect of a "wandering gaze" had this movement been smooth and "mouselike," had it been of a bashful nature. It was a scrutinizing stare, but this term, too, is inexact, for this scrutiny did not involve a searching perusal of the object, but rather abrupt shifts first of the head and then of the gaze; it was a sum of instantaneous impressions of firmly fixed parts, faceted images of an insect eye which perceives chronological blocks of reality, and it strangely enough always focused around the outer limits of the object. And so he viewed the head and feet of a person, always only head and feet, of everyone, and this with such shocking, unabashed matter-of-factly legitimate assurance, that it did not fit into the category of boorishness. It might perhaps even have been tolerable had he scrutinized the penises in this way. Never did he conceal a glance, never did he bashfully look away when someone noticed him staring, and never would he have let himself be disturbed - ; I must admit that I am unaware of any such attempt ever having been made.

Although I intended to find out what kind of clothes he wore, I missed the chance each time. You see, you enter from the street or from the medical baths



downstairs, come up to the sauna, go into the changing rooms - three cramped aisles between four walls of narrow, metal lockers - and naked, you pass through a self-closing glass door, and then set foot in the ante-room with the cold water tank and the showers - a room from which the door on the right leads into the actual sauna chamber, and the one on the left into the resting room. Saunas are offered in four unreasonably brief shifts during the afternoon, so nobody wants to waste time changing, and since the threesome always came a little late and left a little early, I did not see them until they set foot in the anteroom, and then of course they were already undressed. They always filed in like geese. Over top of the woolly man's head, with a tap of the fingertips, the leader - the taller man - left the door, which had been pulled open in the changing room and was already swinging shut, for the end man to take - the shorter man - whose eager hand grabbed the door over top of the woolly man's head and pulled it open again. An entrance procedure that is hard to describe, but which attracted no attention even though it was repeated, with appropriate modifications of course, at each and every door: into the sauna chamber, out of the sauna chamber, into the resting room, out of the resting room, this circuit three times, and finally back into the

changing room, and so it went on each of the five visits. Never did the woolly one have to touch a door, but then again, never was one opened up before him fawningly; never did he presumptuously lead the way into a room, but having passed through a door, the leader always took a step sideways, the end man opened the door, and even during slowdown and standstill the two of them kept their half step distance behind the centre man, who had thus come out in front. All of this looked completely natural and was performed as if preceded by long rehearsal, although such rites could most certainly not be drilled, and could probably not even stem from any directive. They just happen; they are simply the form that a procedure of any importance whatsoever must take on, and so they are natural after all: they are an expression of the nature of society. Wrapped up as I was at that time in aesthetic and theoretic brooding in search of a justification for form, I was most receptive to this insight.

Indeed: the difference between living and petrified form, which I intended to work out through a comparison of two sonnets - thematically related texts by Gryphius and Emanuel Geibel\* perhaps - or else through

\* Andreas Gryphius was one of the most eminent German poets of the seventeenth century, comparable to the English John Milton. By contrast, Emanuel

something more difficult, but also more impressive; through a comparison of two terms from analogous authors. And as far as living form is concerned, I could hardly have found better occasion to study it than right here, and especially at those times when the threesome entered the sauna. A ceremony of solemn entry would have upset us, because then the door would have had to remain open for an indecently long period of time, and that was a sore subject with everyone. And rightly so: the stove's maximum heating capacity of seventy-five degrees was totally unsatisfactory and just beforehand we had quarreled with a gang of rowdies who had wanted to test their strength and had almost pushed the door off its hinges as they barged in - we made our verbal attack, and in this case we would not have shied from a physical attack either, but the threesome gave us no trouble. The taller man had barely unlatched the door and already the woolly one had slipped through, and the shorter one closed it again. They could not have gone about it any more quickly. But it was like them to stick firmly to rules. That they did not stay overtime in the sauna I have already mentioned; that they made no noise and

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Geibel, whose poetry is of lesser literary value, was a poet of the nineteenth century, comparable to his English contemporary, Lord Alfred Tennyson.

neither smoked nor drank alcoholic beverages goes without saying, and when the woolly one brought a handbrush - but this happened only on the first visit - into the sauna chamber, he made no use of it after spotting the sign banning brushes, even though only a few people were inside on the benches and nobody was sitting immediately beside him. He was considerate enough never to jump - a sin most of the others were guilty of - into the cold tank when someone whom he could have splashed was standing nearby - and of course he always took a shower first, which is another thing that not everyone did.

He always jumped into the cold tank in a crouching position with knees pulled up towards the chest, but never with the arms embracing the legs - the artlessness was touching. Neither one of his companions followed him. Chicken-heartedness? Whatever the reason, they occupied the two accessible approaches to the tank - the two inaccessible edges were part of the back right cornerwalls of the anteroom - with such wary lassitude that everyone steered clear of it. But they let me descend the steps into the icy water without raising an eyebrow one time when the woolly one was still busy romping around. Of course it was not like me to challenge them; I had perspired, showered, and had then wanted to cool off - that was all. And since I knew that the woolly

one could endure the cold water longer than any of us, I broke with my usual custom and joined him in the water. As a rule, I like to wait until the tank is empty. I generally hold on to the railing and take just a quick dip, and since the cold water instantly chills a person to the bone, I do not want to block the way for anyone wanting to climb out, and for this reason I wait. But I knew that the woolly one would linger. After the big jump (in crouching position, you will remember) he would always stay submerged for a moment, and then, having vigorously pushed off from the bottom, he would rise upwards, up over the haunches, throw his hands over his head, and splash back down. Bobbing up and down and sputtering and thrashing about in this way, he would cross the tank to where a jet of fresh water as thick as an arm came gushing in. Erect, with chest high, he would stand in the stream of water stretching and writhing his shoulders until his lips turned blue, and - still bobbing up and down - hurry towards the snugly softness of the yellowy-white, fleecy towel awaiting him in the hands of the taller man at the side of the steps leading into the tank. And so he stood in the stream of water seeming to feel nothing but contentment. He splashed around like a child; the sensuous thrill of it was obvious in the steady glow of his cheeks. And since I shared that

feeling, it so happened that I took him to be one of us - one of the sauna crowd - and wanted to toss him one of those phrases often used in this sort of context. And even though they involve no more than a smile or chuckle shared by everyday associates brought together by chance, they still do stem from a shared experience and express this fellowship. A feeling of well-being, and arising from that, a naive, barely expressible urge to communicate - with gestures rather than words. And so I did not go right back up the steps after my dip, but with the intention of saying something, I turned to him as he was also turning towards me. But then I felt a stare at the back of my neck and changed my mind. It was one of those all-seeing stares that penetrates all traces of innocence whatsoever. I spun around and saw the shorter man standing casually between the edge of the tank and the stone benches where people leave their bathing things. His stance was more lax than usual, all weight was on the left leg, the right heel on the stone bench, hands behind his back, jaw set, the gaze calmly fixed on a spot in the greenish water somewhere between me and the woolly one. He did not move, but right that instant I felt a bodyless shadow jump between me and the woolly one from the direction of the stone bench; a noiseless flop, icy coldness. Shivering, I

took a step backwards into the tank and saw the woolly one climb up the steps, wrap himself in the towel, and, followed by the shorter one, enter the resting room through the door which the taller one had pushed open in front of him.

In the resting room he rested, as usual, conscientiously. But here, again as usual, the rest was pleasure no more. He made laborious attempts at relaxing, and so he rested without resting. He was lying - (all five cots were visible through the glass door) he was indeed lying still on his back, eyes closed, hands folded under his head, and legs straight, but at the same time he was lying as if moulded in perfect symmetry and after one minute at the most, he began to move his lips in brooding monologue and wrinkle his brow. Then he seemed to catch himself at this forbidden restlessness, and he clamped his mouth shut and lay totally still for the next minute. Usually only the taller one accompanied him to the resting room; during this interval the shorter one lathered up - something done only seldom by the taller one and never by the woolly one. The thrill that the woolly one experienced in the cold tank, the shorter man felt in the hot shower. Lolling languidly, he let the water pellets beat down upon his skin for several minutes. Then he scrubbed

with soap everywhere from bald forehead right down to the ankles, showered, lathered up once more, rinsed it all off using a cloth, washed - in crouching position - his feet, and for a third time lathered up the areas he was especially intent on cleansing thoroughly: face, neck, groin, penis, and the rear cleavage. And, stooped over with legs spread wide, he washed the latter yet a fourth time. After the soap treatment, he turned the shower on as hot as he could bear it and stood there gasping with pleasure. Then, his whole body steaming, he placed the pink soap neatly into its little dish, and by then the woolly one was usually already returning with the taller one, and they all left for the sweat-room. As already mentioned, the entire threesome was in the resting room this time, the taller one dozing, the woolly one resting restlessly, the shorter one dangling arms and legs off the sides of the cot. And when they came back into the anteroom, he was whistling - the shorter one that is - merrily to himself.

And then the unexpected happened.

In the sauna chamber (I had slipped in right after the threesome), by nodding coaxingly and gesturing with his hands, palms up, bent from beside his hips up towards himself, the woolly one once again invited his companions, who had seated themselves as they always did on a bench



one level beneath him, to join him up there. And once again he did this after having uttered the first few words of a conversation - or rather, after having expressed in a low voice a few words incomprehensible to those of us sitting around him, but acknowledged with eager nods or smiles by the two who were attentively listening to the sounds coming from above. And as it always happened after this sign of favour, their faces lit up with the joy of having been blessed in this special way. The smile of the taller one revealed his rejoicing, while for the shorter one it was one of satisfaction. But both their smiles were reminiscent of the smiles of Arctic people who marvel each year anew when, after a long winter's bondage, the sun's first glimmering rays creep over the horizon. Up to this point the customary routine had also been followed on this particular day: the entrance ritual, the seating arrangement by rank, the first words, the uplift, and the leap of two sedate men upwards and almost over backwards. But then, instead of continuing his whispered remarks, the woolly man asked, in a tone of voice as loud as any of ours, what the temperature reading was. And when the taller one replied in a hushed voice that it was seventy-four degrees, the woolly one asked - and still loud enough for everyone to hear - whether that was seventy-four degrees Rankine scale or Fahrenheit. And still facing the taller man, but

meaning all of us, he continued his queries by asking if anyone had heard the joke about the man who had gone to Leipzig to see the doctor for his annual physical check-up - and all this was simply unheard of. Of course it was not the joke that was unheard of, but rather the fact that he was including all of us. Beforehand, as already indicated, he had addressed only the two others, quietly, meaningfully, with quiet and meaningful gestures and long pauses between the individual words. And these he set as if they were symbols for the ultimate - in a subdued, insistent, final manner, and sometimes the words were accompanied by that infathomable smile which was intended only for a chosen few and which determined the weal and woe of outsiders - a smile approved by the two men with a gesture that was no longer a nod of acceptance but almost a submissive bow to the hand of Fate. At least that is what it looked like, and never had we perceived more than inscrutable rumblings; never would we have been able to read his lips; never had the changing facial expressions of the two companions revealed any part of the message - and now he was addressing all of us, and with a joke at that! Naturally he did not wait for anyone to answer with a yes or no, but rather continued - after a pause during which his mouth opened and his eyes scanned us once more before he focussed them, as all do who teach, on an imaginary spot on a distant back wall -

continued, as he leaned slightly forwards, with his speech. And hand motions were interspersed among the words marking the long breaks between the phrases that made up his story, which told of a man who had just been to Leipzig to see the doctor for a checkup. After the doctor's appointment, a colleague had asked him about his state of health, whereupon - and at that point he raised both head and voice - whereupon he had told him how the doctor had thought he was underweight but at the proper rank in scale. And after this phrase had been uttered, both the taller and the shorter man, out of incredulous delight, burst out chortling. And on that, the woolly one threw a jovial, gratified look into our blank-faced midst and, with the two men chortling anew, repeated this phrase in case we thought we had not heard correctly. After an artful pause, in which the undisguised anticipation of hearing his own punch line together with the expectation of being surrounded by enthusiastic laughter in a few moments time had made his eyes bulge and his lips and cheeks tremble, he could finally come out with it - with the punch line. It so happened that the two colleagues were taking a correspondence course in physics, and since the one had just been working on the chapter dealing with thermodynamics, he was always confusing Fahrenheit with the Rankine scale

of temperature. He had intended to quote the words of the doctor: "You are fair in height, but low 'n ..."

It was then that the shorter man broke into his next fit of laughter - a reverberating bellow - and the taller one did not join in until the woolly one, in a triumphant tone of voice, had had another go at the punch line and completed it: "You are fair in height but low in weight - Fahrenheit, you get it?"\* And then he himself laughed uproariously along with the other two, and the taller one slapped his knees, "rank in scale - "; and the shorter one, more aloofly and shaking his head between the more restrained outbreaks of laughter: "He's really something!" And round with delight, the brown, the crystal-clear eyes of the woolly man shone once again with childlike enthusiasm, just as earlier in the cold tank. And with a Cheshire cat grin, he was already lifting his hands, this time to slap his knees instead of the surface of the water. And then the laughter of the other two fizzled out in the still of the silence, for all around everyone remained silent - an apathetic silence, on every bench, total silence - and helplessly the woolly one proceeded to spell it out: "He confused the two, you see." Then his gaze once more wandered off into the distance, but right away became fixed on his

\*see pp. 101-103 of Translator's Notes

toes again; and in the stove the crackle of a stone. Crackling in the stove - but of course, we were, after all, in a sauna bath what with its dry, hot air and the dry, hot wood and the unmercifully lit, dry, hot, Sahara-coloured interior where every hair and every fibre and every bead of perspiration evaporating on the woodgrain is visible. If he had told this joke in the steambath, in the wallowing vapours where fantasy and wellwishing wallow as well, within the drifting clouds which billow over and under each other and from which faces and bellies and hands and words and goodwill emerge - vague images in the seething mist, diffusing soothing cool, abandon, affect, and abundance - perhaps there, where all were common, there would have been some laughter, some rollicking howls emerging from the surging steam, good cheer oozing out of every pore. But that is not where he went. And here? It was all merciless: merciless the air, merciless the heat, merciless the dryness, merciless the isolation, a mercilessly wasted moment of an almost impossible convergence. But right away, in a casual manner and in a tone of voice just loud enough for us to barely understand, but addressing only the taller man directly, the woolly one looked at him and said, "Oh, so you've already heard that one." And then, after the two had nodded, but without having

expected them to nod, and acting as if nothing had ever happened - in fact, nothing had - he began to speak the same way as before: inaudibly, meaningfully, with very long pauses and assuring, underscoring gestures. And then he once again raised his eyes to look at all of us, who had stayed and were busy chatting about this and that, the sort of thing you chat about in the sauna - unimportant things, trifling matters, subdued words, syllables, particles - and in one sweeping glance he looked at us all - indifferently, lazily disregarding each individual and thereby snubbing all of us. And then, while saying something to the shorter one, he stood up even though his time was not up yet (he always stayed in the sauna chamber for exactly twelve minutes - a period of time which was obviously unpleasant for the taller one, who was very quickly covered with beads of perspiration but endured nevertheless, naturally). So he entered the anteroom without being soaking wet while the taller man glided through the door a hairsbreadth ahead of him and the shorter one trailed by only a hairsbreadth and shut the door. Outside then, but only after showering of course, the woolly one did deep-knee-bends. He did some twenty of them and kept track by counting along silently. Then he sprayed off his knees and calves with cold water coming from a hose which the taller one

was holding for him to take as soon as he reached for it. And then he left the sauna for good - fifteen minutes early and, as always, without saying good-bye.

I thought he would not be back, but the very next time he walked in - late, as usual. However, his shower was shorter than usual. He then went straight into the sauna chamber even though it was full in there, sat down without any hesitation in a space in the middle row, and his companions joined the new-comers on the bottom bench. About one minute elapsed in total silence and then the woolly one uttered two incomprehensible words. The shorter man jumped up, rushed over to the thermometer, and, bending his knees slightly, he examined the scale at great length. After he had gone back and given a report, the woolly one turned his head very slowly from a straight-ahead position to the far right, from there to the far left, and from there back to centre position. With his eyes raised towards the thermometer, he stared at the numbers which could not be deciphered from where he sat, and finally voiced his clearly comprehensible complaint ("It's too low again") to his neighbours. And this he did in a tone of disapproval in which were mixed satisfaction at seeing something occur as confidently expected, but also honest surprise at the expectation actually having materialized - a tone which in itself came close to portraying the very enigma of predestination.

Instantaneously all eyes turned toward the thermometer. As always, it read seventy-four degrees, and then we heard the woolly one repeat, but this time merely in a disapproving tone, that this was too low for a sauna. But by then he had already stood up and gone to the shower room, and in passing through the door he conveyed an order to the trailing shorter man, not loud enough for us to hear, but which this man acknowledged nodding vigorously. Then he left, and the following day the sauna was closed. Rumour had it that a screen to protect against drafts was being installed, and when they reopened after nine weeks, a leather screen was built up around the door, and the thermometer held a steady eighty degrees. Presumably everyone was now eagerly awaiting the day of the woolly one's return, and besides that, I was curious for once to see his reaction to a totally surprising occurrence - unpredictable not only from the point of view of the end result, but also from the point of view of its very conception. And I decided that the next time I would somehow manage to squeeze in between him and his companions up on the top bench, but he never showed himself in our midst again. Or rather, only after his not having appeared for quite some time, did this idea come to me. Then other ones occurred to me as well: to challenge him either by simply speaking to



him, or by asking him when he scrutinized me if there was something he wanted me to do. But as I said, I never did get to do these things, and even if he should still turn up someday, I probably will not follow through anyway.

And by the way, I did just happen to meet him on the street the other day. I was on my way to a meeting of the Association of Friends of Aesthetic Research to defend my aforementioned paper on the need for form (at which, while on the topic, I was unsuccessful: to my amazement I was criticized - I really had not counted on this happening - as being guilty of a rather serious misinterpretation of German Baroque poetry), when I spotted him in a black limousine which was driving down the avenue that I happened to be walking up. I recognized him right away. The taller man was driving, the shorter one was sitting in the passenger seat, and just as in the sauna, the woolly one was sitting behind them both, and the eyes that were round as balls darted about, casting infathomable glances up and down the sidewalk. Then these eyes met mine, and he actually seemed to recognize me. He smiled slightly - very briefly of course - only a trace of a smile, but a smile nevertheless - and then he gave me a wellwishing nod. But already the car was leaving the pavement and, following

a gentle spiral, was climbing slowly, steadily, right through the air into a silently and outwards opening fifth or sixth storey window of the high-rise by the marketplace - a window which then drew shut silently and as softly as the wings of a butterfly behind the man who had thus ascended to another realm.

MERE TRIVIA - TOTAL EFFECT:

POSITIVE

The circumstances surrounding the practice of my profession, which strike me at times as tragic, include the fact that certain experiences, which only later reveal themselves as having been the beginning for important developments and for this reason seem particularly worth recounting, are experiences that took place in a rather insignificant, even irrelevant way. Hardly anything happened, as we so often say. Two people bumping into each other on the stairs, two people glancing into a shop window at the same time, a hello that was left unsaid, words that were withheld - that was all. And experience has taught me that subject-matter goes awry if attempts are made to enlarge upon it or to suggest right at the outset an ending which can only be reached by working through an intricate maze. And so it was in this case. What I have to tell is the story of an eagerly awaited encounter which later - well, how this encounter ends and what it yields will come to light in due time. It lasted a scant ten minutes, but nevertheless I will try to describe it.

In secure stages of life a sort of challenging confidence in one's existence is felt from time to time

and a massive onslaught of questions being asked and answered - would-be questions are all they really are - bears witness to this frame of mind. A person will ask about something and believe to know the substance of the answer; only the manner and the reason are supposedly not yet known. A teacher, for instance, will ask why it is that his lessons are so good and plunge head over heels into the adventure of finding the sufficient reason. And lo and behold - he will actually come up with it. Whether his lesson is really good, or whether even he is good, is thus a matter not at all up for discussion, but adventure will be adventure: while looking for the reason, it can so happen that the cloven foot of the devil is uncovered in the search for the manner - a different substance - and with reference to this, the questions could then begin. But this hidden foot of the devil need not necessarily be seen, and often, especially in cases where a pillar of the social order poses such questions, it really is not seen. In the paper I had read about heroes, heroes of our time, about men who further the advancement of our society inasmuch as they vacate a well-paid job for an extended period of time, not shying away from making material sacrifices - often quite trying ones - in order to boost sluggish brigades and departments requiring skilled

labour, by providing their never failing services as zealous workers. Reports of such cases used to appear in profusion, and these cases I found challenging. Having had enough of tiresome trudges through a distant past, I had for weeks been looking for subject-matter which would spotlight present concerns and thereby be of benefit to my society. And suddenly I had found it, right here on the breakfast table, begging to be moulded into shape. What material! What conflicts! What struggles! The mental anguish - and I was struck by the thought - such a man must have experienced before he finally decided to take a full twenty-five-per-cent - so it was reported - drop in pay, and to give up a secure position for a new start somewhere else, where only the hardships and disadvantages could be guaranteed! What could have induced him to make a change so profoundly painful for his own life and that of his family? How - and how contradictory and stimulating at the same time - could there have been such a merging of demands - internal and external ones, of his own sense of duty and the pressures from pillars of the social order? How did such a web of causes and effects interlace? What form of expression did their course of combined action find? What I mean is, how and why did some nobody become a hero? Or let me ask a little differently, in what way

was life the precursor of literature? I did not know the answer. Up until now I had done no more than tour factories as the member of some delegation, but I did know something that everyone knew: here was subject-matter that was a gold-mine! And even if I were to be overestimating the severity and duration of such tormenting decision-making, would this then - manifestation of their civic virtue - not be so much the more worth exploring? To ask this question was to answer it affirmatively, and it was a favourable time for such responses. That very hour I contacted one of the factories cited - an equipment manufacturing plant in O. - and an hour later I was already on board a train, and another two hours later a representative of the company's management was assuring me that they were aware of their duties towards literature and would therefore give me their support - their full-fledged support! The friend in the front office promised this with a gesture of calm assurance. In this little story, he - this friend - will only be encountered again on the telephone, so would anyone insist that I give a description of him? Perhaps just these details: mid-thirties, smugly well-dressed, brush-cut, a lackadaisical lilt in the voice. He confirmed the fact that we were dealing with the brigade called RED OCTOBER. Under the direction of an old

brigade leader, things had gone downhill, he said, and he quoted figures. He, the man discharged from duty, had presumably been opposed to innovative methods, and he made reference to a work process that meant absolutely nothing to me. Because of him, this individual relieved of his duty, this dud, the brigade had degenerated politically as well, he said, for one thing does lead to another. And here this front-office friend cited an example, and I found that to be terrible. The friend continued, saying that now however, and his voice became a shade more lackadaisical, that now, with their - well, how should one put it - their usual resolution, the management had taken preventative measures against anything worse happening, and had posted an efficient brigade leader from another department - had posted him to a certain position, of course - or put more precisely: a transfer had been suggested to him, and naturally I was aware of all the details, this friend presumed. Those were exactly the details that I wanted to find out about, but the front-office friend did not know much more either. In answer to my question, he was only able, after a little mental arithmetic, to quote the amount of the financial sacrifice involved: probably about three hundred marks. - Per month? - Why sure. - That was one third of the wages, if not more, and could

possibly mean doing without that long-planned vacation trip. And now I was itching to speak with the brigade leader, but he still had unavoidable obligations to fulfil in the other department. The brigade RED OCTOBER was working externally somewhere, and so I had no choice but to book a new appointment: the following week at the same time, and then straight to the brigade - South End, Machine Shop, Production Hall Five. I took the noon train back, and since just a short while ago a daily newspaper had asked me for information regarding the plans for my next project, I took this opportunity to free my mind of this aspiration by formulating a short note: the subject-matter which had come to me as a breakfast surprise; the lackadaisical friend; the hero; the dud; the joy that this undertaking of social significance instilled in the author, and finally something I simply had not been able to pass up - a description of the panorama of Production Hall Five, and especially of the cobblestone street leading up to and right on past the Hall. "The street which is littered with subject-matter ..." Usually I avoid commenting on incomplete projects, but that time I did so anyway, and because the reason seemed worthwhile enough to me, it was even a pleasure to do so.



At the appointed time I made my appearance. The brigade leader was fetched and then, there he was: medium height, a man around forty, a little younger than I; blue coveralls, cloth cap with visor, pointed nose in spite of an almost full face; modest, showing calm assurance. Going by his manner at least, I had expected him to be just about like this, and this concurrence of imagination and reality helped me to overcome the misgivings that had arisen in me during the train trip. Since I felt that I had to go all out preparing for this meeting, I had spent the previous night forcing myself to read from beginning to end - and that meant reading until dawn - a chapter on socialist economics. So then, as gravel and pines rushed by and as I kept dozing off due to this extravagance, my own subject-matter suddenly struck me as being so dubious that I wanted to terminate my trip at the very next stop and go back home. I was haunted by the suspicion that I might be on a wild goose chase, or even setting out to do something absolutely ridiculous. And even when, after having tested myself in a sober frame of mind and with my alertness restored, I was able to dismiss this feeling as harmless stage-fright, it just took hold of me again very soon afterwards, and in a still more vicious way. It seemed as if I - together with my subject-matter and my project - were

moving about in a realm of shadows far removed from real life. A man wearing a faded, bulky knapsack and carrying a bundle of wallpaper moulding boarded the train, then a girl with a dachshund, then two white-haired ladies - and to me they seemed to be beings from a different world - a world called LIFE - which up to the present, I, strange as it may sound, had passed right on by. Ridiculous, I had told myself. Where else but there, where you are now headed, the domain of the all-encompassing creativity of work, could life possibly be more real and substantial? And how else could you possibly make life any more intensely real than by attempting to be of benefit to your society to the extent in which it lies in your capacity to do so, and according to the expressly stated wishes of this society? The train jerked ahead; gravel and pines; the girl bit into an apple - a girl; the dachshund growled - a dachshund, and the man with the bundle of moulding unfolded a newspaper, and another report of some workaday hero caught my eye. "Well, there you go!" I had told myself and had gradually calmed down again, but not until the brigade leader was standing in front of me did I come completely out of my daze. And now it was the uneasiness that seemed shadowy and ridiculous. Relieved I shouted my name over the shriek of metal, and the brigade leader

nodded and shook my outstretched hand. "I know," he said, "you are the author" - and he stalled and seemed to grope for my name or for something to say about me, and then came to a finish by saying: "who wrote the article." "You have read it?" I asked, and was immediately annoyed at having asked such a silly question. Naturally he had read the article if he made mention of it, and there was that insecurity returning once again, and now I finally knew the root of it, too. It was dismal and verged on embarrassment: I had made a statement about someone and had called him a hero and had bestowed praise upon him without having exchanged even a single word with him. And even though I had endeavoured to comment only on the facts reported to me - the brigade which had so pitifully deteriorated - politically and otherwise - due to the forerunner's mismanagement, his exemplary decision, his substantial financial sacrifice (the amount of which I had not mentioned, I confess), and the benefit of his action in the social context - my behaviour had still been tactless. And without even waiting for an answer to my question, I began to explain that before having sat down in front of my typewriter, I had tried to reach him for consultation, but my newfound friend shrugged this off in a modest yet generous manner. Calmly he said that

everything was true, and I breathed a sigh of relief and came out with some sort of small talk during which I referred to him by name: Walter. But the brigade leader tugged at the visor of his cap and said that he was not Walter. Walter would not be here for another two days. He was the old one - Werner. Ah yes, and the metal screamed. At moments like these, nothing happens. The important thing is how one continues, and in this case Werner simply went on talking and said, in an apologetic tone of voice, that the new man - Walter - had unexpectedly been sent away for training and would therefore not be arriving for two days. For this reason, he - Werner - had sent me a note, but apparently it had not yet arrived. His words seemed to be emerging fuzzily from some remote, faraway place; and fighting feelings of dismay, anger, and embarrassment, I tried to understand my situation. To leave immediately was the first thought that entered my mind. To simply turn around and silently - no - indignantly - no - calmly leave and complain to the management about this dud who had seen no need for sending me a telegram and had sent just a ridiculous little note instead. The second thought, occurring almost simultaneously with, but still clearly differentiated from the first, included the reproach that I should never have written such an article relying

merely on hearsay; the excuse that I had related confirmable information, the counter-question of whether this was really true, and the furious counterdefence that what I had written was socially necessary and that personal sentimentality would just have to take a back-seat here. And amid all that, among the excuses which forced their way into my sphere of consciousness as if punched out, the notion that the brigade leader would now shed his reserve, which had already been tending towards amiability, and become violent suddenly entered and established itself in my mind. And since I then very clearly felt that this reaction would be only fair and reasonable, I took a step backwards, and, as silly as this may sound, looked around for protection. Werner, however - and this is what happened at about the second minute - Werner spoke more and more uneasily, with a voice faltering more and more helplessly, and his face became redder and redder, and while recovering his breath, he even took off his cap. Then, clenching it firmly in his fist, and after pausing to await an answer, he pushed it up over his forehead and back onto his head. His co-workers, who were operating the machinery around us and were busy among the sheet-metal stacks, paid no attention to us. Anew I heard him comment that I must be very disappointed not to have been able to meet with Walter, and then he fell into silence. The

realization that I would finally have to say something - yes or no, preferably both - penetrated the conflict of my mixed feelings, and I did say something. "Yes no," I said, still expecting a fist to suddenly be thrust my way, placing the accent on the "no" but also on the "yes" having been able to become more composed as well, and at the same time I watched a drill bite its way into a sheet of metal, spiralling into emptiness. I saw metal within metal, and the fact that I ought to be wearing safety goggles shot into my mind. The screeching sound had since swollen to a shriek, and then it burst. The drill bit plunged freely into the space below, and Werner cleared his throat and said that what I had written was correct. "It made no sense to me until I read the paper," he said, and the drill bit rose out of the punctured metal which, released from the brace, was pushed further down the line, and was now being fastened down again. The political aspect, he was saying, he had not really been able to handle. This I had done absolutely correctly, he was saying, and that very instant my anger suddenly changed into pride, and in my heart I was no longer embarrassed, but touched. "You see, that's our workmen, our readers for you!" I thought, and my pride pointed to the relationship between my society and literature. So

that was the effect even so brief an article produced. Even though it contained sharpest criticism, it was welcomed for its helpfulness. Wasn't that just wonderful? "You'll still manage that - the political aspect," I said comfortingly, and Werner laughed: heartily, with relief, jovially, freed of worry, and then I laughed, too. All my fear had dissipated and in this moment of unquestionable certainty, I suddenly felt sorry for the man with the knapsack whom I, back on the train, had considered a representative of real life, although he was probably just an ordinary Joe and a slave to his home and allotment garden. What demon had possessed me; to what sort of insanity had I almost fallen prey! Of course it had been right to come here. Here and nowhere else the real world was to be found. Here and only here the throb of genuine, true, invigorating life was to be felt. Here was the street where subject-matter only needed to be gathered up off the ground, for this encounter, too, had been subject-matter which would be useful some day - and how! I believe that at that moment a massive volume of stories appeared to my mind's eye, and I already had a title for it, too. Don't worry, you're going to manage, the political aspect as well!" I was saying in a tone of voice that was shifting from a comforting to a reinforcing note.

And jokingly I hinted at the location where that event had taken place, as if intending to give a sneak preview of an upcoming story, and right away to put the model of political usefulness to a sort of test, and, last but not least, to let him know, still before I left, that despite the gravity of the matter, I no longer blamed him for that incident which the front-office friend had reported to me and which my article had criticized with sharp words. "Well, I don't know - it didn't happen quite that way," replied Werner, uneasy once again, and upon having asked in great surprise how it really had happened then, I discovered - between the lines, as it were - circumstances which differed considerably from those told to me by the lackadaisical friend. "Off to the lunch room instead of the solidarity meeting": this was the slogan to which his version - the semi-official one - could be reduced. According to the brigade leader's version, however, his crew had had to take a lunch break due to a sudden need having arisen for them to work their regular shift and a night shift back to back, and because the lunch room was to have closed just a little while later, this break had conflicted with the time of the meeting. To do without a lunch break would have been too much to ask of his people, but of course he should have given



preference to politics rather than to production, he was saying in conclusion - he had realized that now. I was bewildered. The reason for the night shift was something I wanted to have clarified, and Werner explained that they had been dealing with a corrective procedure which, although it had not been specially prescribed, had seemed necessary to both him and the supervisor - with the replacement of an instrument which, in the light of experience, rapidly wears out, by a newly designed, more sturdy one. The work could naturally have been done after delivery, except that it would have been outside the country then! - at a much higher cost and at the risk of a machine breakdown. "But that turns everything upside down!" I thought, and asked - at about the end of the fifth minute - whether this corrective procedure could not just as well have been carried out on the following day. And when Werner replied negatively, pointing out the freighter's sailing date, and when he responded to my question of whether the management was aware of all that, with an ambiguous "ah, well!", I felt so caught up in this matter, that I now intended to get right to the bottom of it. If Werner was right - and his story spoke greatly in his favour - then there was nothing for him to understand. Then he had acknowledged my criticism out of feelings

of resignation or perhaps even of cynicism, and my article had even given support to this attitude, or else this confession was based on a political attitude that was unfortunate, downright hostile to the everyday world, and my article had then helped shape this conception. Either way, my written words had been harmful. I owed Werner an explanation, and for that I had to get to the root of the matter. "Tell me all about everything right from the start," I requested, but Werner shrugged his shoulders, remarking that he had already said everything. He assumed a pose of tranquility, yet I sensed his despondency - at least that is how I interpreted the tone of his voice changing as it had, to a rejecting note. It seemed to me that he had been in the right after all, I was badgering, not heeding an inner warning to stop now, and kept on badgering, the corrective procedure had been the right course of action after all - the management must certainly give him that much credit - or had he perhaps not yet had a chance to explain these circumstances to them? Werner was twisting his cap around again. "Ah, well!" he said as once before, and at the same time he dismissed the matter with the same gesture of embarrassed belittlement. And then, after a moment of reflection, and with noticeable indignation, he suggested that if I wanted to write about this again,

I should consult the management of the company instead, and let the people there explain it all; and now with intensity: the political aspects were none of his business, that - and at that point he stopped himself, but I knew what he had been about to say: that was what I had found out for myself! The unexpected abruptness disquieted, the sudden break startled me, and the notion that from now on I would see appeals being made to my writing to find dispute with my spoken words, suppressed a pack of questions which had suddenly arisen: whether he could make decisions such as the one of arbitrary equipment change, by his own authority; the level at which such decisions were actually made; the official channels through which the case had to pass - which were the higher and which the highest ones, and how this hierarchy interlocked in the mechanism of task allotment; in which matters was it a case of requesting, entreating, summoning, appointing, or commanding. Furthermore: if, and to what extent, it was conscience versus profit-seeking in this matter, farsightedness versus shortsightedness, responsibility versus indolence, but perhaps also overview and experience versus enthusiasm and goodwill. Or else - and these were thoughts that came to me for the first time and with overwhelming matter-of-factness - if by any chance an individual had become

caught at, or had perhaps even been manipulated to the point where the interests of two parties intersected and where the origins of such emanations in general and this one in particular lay - in the manufacturing sphere, or at a higher level, or at a yet higher one; in the area of economics or personnel; theory or pragmatism, in the realm of giving or of obeying orders, and in addition to that, the almost absurdly simple questions, what sort of a meeting had taken place and what sort of equipment had been under discussion, turbines, mousetraps, freezers, motors - I knew nothing, you see, and should have known all this and a hundred times more from the first line forward, but now there was no time for questions. If avoiding further reinforcement of the brigade leader in his behaviour, if at least making my thoughtlessness understandable, if still preventing this unexpected meeting from sinking into a pit of embarrassment was what I wanted, then I would have to correct myself on the spot. "My article was wrong, I should not have written it!" I said, and was startled by the abruptness of these words, which must have come from my mouth. I hesitated and wanted to start afresh, but then the other man had already answered by posing a question to which there could be no reply, one word only, a single syllable: "Oh?" - and very short, brusque, an outburst,

and this syllable sobered me. I believed I was hearing nothing but mockery. And this mockery again made previous things comprehensible, and when the familiar gesture of dismissal followed as well, I said to myself: "Why are you still here?" It was clear to me that the brigade leader regarded me as someone who had written contrary to better judgement, who was, shall we say, an accomplice to the management of the company for which he felt nothing but disdain, as someone who had been sent forward by the lackadaisical friend, inspired by this front-office friend - no other blow could have humiliated me so, especially since I sensed that all of this was not so far removed from the truth. The notion that I should never have become involved in this shot through my head, the proverb about the cobbler who should stick to his last would not leave my mind, and with firm conviction I told myself: "You have been naive: fine and good; but here malice on your part is being insinuated; so apologize once more and then go; everything has obviously been messed up; anything further will just be embarrassing!" Indeed: even if the question had not been meant to offend me, what on earth was I still doing here? To probe Werner any further would have been inadvisable, and I would probably be demanding too much of him, too. The political aspect really did not seem

to be his business; my article I had regretted; establishing a relationship of trust had not worked out, and should I ever want to set the lunch room story straight, the new brigade leader would be in a better position to help me make progress than the old one. "Alright then," I said in that tone of voice that precedes the motion of offering one's hand for the farewell handshake, but that was something Werner did not seem to have expected. He looked at me as disbelievingly as a child and was tugging at his cap again, and when he then still laughed abashedly, he looked downright helpless. Had his question really not been mockery, his gesture not rejection, his account of the effect of my writing on him really free of cynicism? I could almost believe this - indeed, I had to believe it when I saw him standing before me with his half-open mouth and his big, questioning eyes set in a crimson face. But why had he then reacted to my questions so negatively? Out of shyness, out of disconcertedness, out of fear of greater conflicts arising; were wishes and counter-wishes wrestling within him - the wish for elucidation and the counter-wish for obfuscation; did he expect to get illumination from me, who was expecting to get it from him; had my perplexity been shared by him, my naivete been no different from his, and were we now disappointing each other in proportion

to our previous expectations? Had this driven us into using a tone of voice which nobody had intended to use; did my stopping our conversation now affect him in the same way that his brusqueness had previously affected me; had everything run smoothly up to this point, and had confusion not begun to threaten until now? No matter, my decision had been made, the matter had to come to an end, and I groped for a farewell platitude which would be satisfactory to everyone, but before I had struck upon one, the door to a cubicle off to the side opened and a baldheaded man - probably the boss - waved excitedly, calling me to the telephone. The person wanting to talk to me was the lackadaisical friend; I recognized his voice immediately. He owed me an apology, he was lilting, and I had a devilishly clear image of him in my mind: an apology for my having ended up, something he had unfortunately just found out about, in the wrong place; the dud had probably not even managed to inform me of the new man's training course, and angrily I said: "Oh yes he did!" but the friend did not react to that. He did pause ever so slightly for the sake of courtesy, just long enough to indicate that he had heard my objection, and just briefly enough to show that he regarded it as being inconsequential, then he carried on indifferently. He had looked around for

a substitute, and already a different brigade was awaiting me - a brigade into which a newcomer, also at the cost of a substantial cut in pay - and this was of course what I wanted to evaluate - had just come - the Varnishing Brigade PROGRESS, Production Hall Seventeen, just barely short of the north end of the cobblestone street. And this last phrase he uttered using the same tone of voice that is usual among a group of men in a huddle - at least his insistent allusions to that miserable article of mine struck me in this way. Up in arms I said, "Listen!" and was planning to say no, point-blank; oh yes: there was no way I could possibly miss it, the front-office friend was continuing in an undisturbed manner; the brigade was looking forward to it very much; I had already been highly recommended to them, and even though a meeting, which was just about to begin, would unfortunately prevent him from accompanying me, he still wanted to tell me how beneficial my article had been! It had been turned to good use by everyone, by the metal-casters, by the mechanics, by the varnishers, and of course by RED OCTOBER as well; it had expedited two cases which were subject to the same decision, indeed, it had even - and this was really something - made an impression on the dud! It had really hit him hard to see how seriously his case was



being taken - by the broadcasting world, by the press, and even by a writer who had recently appeared on television! He then found a second pause to be in order, and I promptly asked just the one thing: "Broadcasting?" and the friend, nonchalantly: "Yes, broadcasting; my article had been broadcast by the local station, was I not aware of this," and replying negatively, I heard a lady's voice: "Please, Comrade Butzke, go see the old boss!" and Butzke: "Yes, coming!" Looking through the open door that very moment, I saw the baldheaded man speaking with Werner, then I heard Butzke lilting again, and heard: "The meeting," he would have to stop talking now; and heard: "Indeed, the pen is mightier than the sword!" and heard: "Deep understanding!" and heard: "Political insight!" and heard: "Beneficial, most beneficial, I wish you every further success!" and then the telephone clicked. I hung up and saw that the brigade leader had left. The boss was standing in the doorway. "Is Werner gone already?" I heard myself ask, and the boss nodded and said that Comrade Butzke had assigned him to take me to Production Hall Seventeen right away. Varnishers' Brigade PROGRESS - was that not the one - which was already on its way to the auditorium (we did not want to make them wait). And I felt myself nodding, and felt myself trotting, and even

though I had wanted to ask - when I was leaving the cubicle - about the place where Werner worked, I now feared having to pass by there. Screeching metal, we walked and walked, and in time to our footsteps, words connected as they do in the course of dozing off, to form a nonsensical sentence; the equivalence of the complex cyclic process integrates the optimum variant of presumption. Or had I read that last night? I brooded. - Screeching metal; brightness; wings of the gate spread open; "this is where Werner's brigade works," the boss was saying, "over there" - and I looked in the direction of his outstretched arm and saw a drill bite its way into the metal; a blue spiral; the drill plunged downward; the screech exploded; the drill rose upward; the metal jerked forward; drills screeching; faces stared - bright spots - and jerkily moved toward one another and looked at the metal, now that I was looking in that direction; was Werner amongst them? I could not tell. The boss was saying something. We walked through the gate; the cobblestone street: "Why, you've described everything accurately!" he said, and I said: "Oh sure!" "The flowers over there," said the boss, "I never saw them before, the roses, you walk through your own place of work as if you were blind, so a writer has to come along before your eyes are opened - Flowers! - Of course,

there they were, just as I had described them:

"... stretching up over the cobbled, oil-stained gray, up out of the gravel strewn over the flower beds, diamond-shaped to run alongside the production hall ... a sudden red and yellow and white and orange bordering the street which is littered with subject-matter ..."

And I was thinking that this street passed by the railway station, and that I could still catch the noon train, and I wanted - just as at the beginning - simply to leave, to go down the street and through the gate and out of the complex. And I was walking, and then I heard someone saying: "Beneficial, very beneficial," so he spoke, "the article was really helpful to us. We put it to good use everywhere, among the metal-casters, among the mechanics, among the varnishers, in the RED OCTOBER brigade as well, and it served to determine two similar cases ..." But that was what I had been yearning for, and it had been said, had it not? Was I dreaming? Where was I walking, where did I want to go? I turned away from the street towards the flower beds and touched a rose: a rose, and felt the thorn: a thorn, and picked up gravel: gravel, and threw it onto the oil-stained cobblestone street: an oil-stained cobblestone street, and was it not subject-matter that was lying on it? Don't you see: if someone sacrificed material well-being

to help a lagging co-worker, was he then not a hero, and was that not subject-matter, and was it not lying here on this street? Yes indeed, right here on these gravel-bestrewn, dull blue cobblestones bordering the flower beds at my feet; and if someone absorbed even unjust criticism in so sincere a way that he would offer to shake the writer's hand and also be eager, in spite of the reluctance he himself was feeling, to find out everything, was that not also subject-matter of this street, and that a few lines could affect a company, and that subsequently a writer could come and go as if the factory were his own library - was that not also worth communicating? And if that is the way everything was - and everything was that way - were perhaps not also, alongside the subject-matter, new creative laws lying on this street, possibly this one: that usefulness in the sphere of large matters and tangible truth in the sphere of small matters by no means presuppose one another, since a new principle - that of collectivism - was appearing in literature in increasing measure; the principle of the thousand eyes of society as compared to the mere two eyes of the solitary individual, and the big truth as compared to the small? And then it seemed to me as if I was hearing someone asking: "Oh?" One word only, and a familiar voice, one single syllable,

very short, already faded away, and with firm conviction I said: "Yes, it is this way and no other way: a rose is a rose, a stone is a stone, a hero is a hero, and subject-matter is subject-matter, and if, "this I was adding with an obstinacy that finally awakened in me, "and if this subject-matter is lying on the street, then, be it as big or small as it will, then its total effect is positive!" At that moment I experienced a feeling of lightness previously unknown to me; the voice of the dud had ceased; I released the rose in my hand and saw it, and the cobblestone pavement, and the production halls, just as I saw flowers and streets and buildings anywhere else, the real world, true life: defying gravity, as in a dream, coloured shadows, all spread out like something needing to be filled in, and I myself felt as if I were suspended within a dream - and no wonder, after that sleepless night of mine.

"And there is Production Hall Seventeen," the boss was saying, "we will soon be entering the auditorium, which I confess is not as nice as the auditorium in our Production Hall Five," and I nodded and said yes, and together with the master walked towards Production Hall Seventeen and its auditorium, being unfamiliar with it, but already knowing that it was not as nice as the auditorium in Production Hall Five.

## TALE OF MIRRORS

The fact that I experienced this little story the way I did, I owe only to a mirror, and if any worthwhile lesson is to be learned from it, then it would perhaps be that there should be no mirrors in auditoriums and that those already there should be covered.

The one to which I am referring was, or perhaps still is hanging in the combination cafeteria and auditorium of the Thuringian rock-salt mine at T., or put more precisely, it is a built-in mirror, and to be completely accurate, there are two of them, on the inner sides of the narrow pillars which have the narrow front side facing forwards and which appear right behind the doorway. It is a swinging door which is kept open all summer long thereby permitting, from the far end of the centre table, by way of the mirror, a view into the hallway that intersects at right angles right behind the door, over to the terrace steps and on into the outside area beyond. They - the mirrors - were surrounded by thick gold moulding, a rounded ridge with two rows of fluting, but that is unimportant at this point, and therefore I do not want to give any further description. What does matter, are not the accompanying circumstances: a company's anniversary celebration; the local press;

me, carried there by chance; and now, in the middle of the morning, a reception held by the union administration for deserving veterans of the work force.

When I arrived, ten minutes ahead of time, the old men were sitting there ready to start and had been sitting like that for an hour - for the hour since the last bus of the morning had arrived. - The head table for the chairman's committee was still vacant. - They were sitting around the centre table; some forty of them; I knew no one; it was after all only my second day here. - August, white, very warm, but they were sitting there in their Sunday best, deep black or braised brown suits, buttoned up, white semistiff-collared shirts, the red ties with small knots, only two or three in miner's gear. Before each, a place set for coffee; before each, three carnations; before each, a shot glass; before each, the picture of the mine - gold-framed and four times the size of a postcard: the old brick shaft house with the old pithead and its frosted-glass windows, the old offices, the old yard, the old waste heaps, but up above a sky that even here, in old black-and-white, gleamed with false freshness. - No women. - Coffee was being set out; two very young things, still, or already, too tired to giggle, were standing by the food counter that had been painted blue, each holding two large coffee

pots which had just been passed into their hands from over this counter; the pots were steaming; it was eight before nine. Leaning backwards, the young things held the pots hesitantly for a moment, then looked at the metal clock with the ornate hands, and set the pots back onto the counter. The old men were sitting. - Seven before nine.

The pots were steaming.

The old men were sitting and smoking and being still; they were sitting stiffly; the smoke was bad, but within their silence a person could, if he shared the silence unreservedly, come to feel at home. - I took the liberty of looking at them. - They were legends, unmistakably marked, yet hard to distinguish from one another, to be read entirely off the facial images. - Life salt cured. - Each one of them had his hands placed in front of him on the table, hands leathered by the salt as were their faces, long, haggard faces with long creases, already bristly again despite having been shaven, ice-gray just like the flat, close-lying, generally scant growth of hair. - Sometimes one or the other of the men would look at the photograph without picking it up in his hand; then he would look at it just as someone's lot in life is looked at, which, as we all know, for a large part takes its shape in buildings:



the childhood home, the school, the church, the dance hall, the army barracks, the place of work, the family home, the grave. One man on the other side of the table diagonally across from me, leaned over sideways from the hip, keeping his neck stiff; he looked up the conveying tower and then I saw the space deep down in the darkness below, the walls and pillars I saw as the salt rock-faced, and the cigarette and pipe smoke wafted like the eternal dust of the mine, whirling, swirling salt that seared and burned those that it enveiled. - Perhaps he still bore scars on his chest; they are of the sort that are kept concealed. - In the mine the sores can be seen. He continued to sit this way, inclined to one side, with his mouth half open; he pressed his eyes shut; were they following the images passing through his mind? - Not a flicker. - In the room, quiet shuffling; rasping and coughing; the stillness of the mine shortly before the blast, but part of the silence was also the exchange of words here and there, always with the immediate neighbour, never across the table; always with horizontal gestures, never loud. On the table, plates full of ham sandwiches were set out; they had been carefully arranged, with sliced pickles and parsley which are normally not to be had around this time of year; but still, something made them look like stage props -

I do not know why. Perhaps it was this: the slightly exaggerated showiness, the slight lack of imagination, but even that would be unfair. Of course nobody was reaching to help himself yet. - Across from me and beside me were only plates and coffee cups - that is to say, seats for other guests - but besides me, nobody else had appeared; this gathering was a routine thing, an obligatory necessity, but uninteresting. None of the old fellows took notice of me, although the question of my identity must certainly have arisen in their verbal exchanges, but just as certainly this question must have arisen only in passing; it was not important. If I belonged to the mine, they would know who I was; if I had been appointed to become part of it in future, I would not be sitting at the end of the table, and not alone, and not before the starting time, and probably not at this reception at all. And for that reason there were no furtive glances either. Even the men that I looked at did not respond in any way, and on the other hand experience was warning me that it was senseless to try to strike up conversation with them. I would at best uncover a few details about their daily lives, which I could just as well imagine on my own, but which would block any sort of possibility of reaching them. - Was it not the best thing altogether to imagine what

needed to be known? - While in the process of bluntly resisting this temptation, a change jolted the silence around me.

I looked at the clock.

It was three past nine.

The mine cultivates punctuality: the descent by cable; the trip down the shaft; the rhythm of the conveyors; the meetings timed down to the minute, having to start punctually because everyone leaves remorselessly when the shift busses honk their horns outside the grounds. A head emerged from behind the food-counter window and looked at the clock: a head common to all sovereigns of the kitchen, swollen with the steam of mashed potatoes and pale green from the swill of boiled cabbage, and the eternally crooked cap displaying the company emblem, in this case a pale blue T within a salt crystal. The young things, with pots already in hand, looked at the head lingering in the window, blinking disbelievingly as it looked at the clock at which everyone on my side of the table was now looking; and the man opposite me, still slanted sideways, unbuttoned his suit coat, opened it with deliberation, pulled a silver watch out of his pocket, set it onto his knee keeping it encased in his hand, and looked at it from an acute angle, polished the glass on his pants, looked at it a

second time, then put it back into his pocket: four past nine. He sat up straight in front of the photo. The restlessness that total silence produces, set in. Conversation had long since ceased, but now there was not even any more coughing or shuffling, everyone was watching the open door beyond which nothing but the corridor intersection could be seen, and there I discovered the mirror, but it too showed only the empty hallway.

Had there been an accident?

Five past nine.

Into the mirror stepped the Party secretary.

I recognized him immediately; I had seen him the day before at the anniversary meeting, among the company executives on the platform, in front of the pithead building, beneath the rotating pulleys of the shaft house. His mutton-chop sideburns were unmistakable, likewise his green, checkered shirt. He slowly came up the terrace stairs, stepped into the hallway, looked toward the open door, listened, heard silence and nodded; then he looked to check the time. It was a wristwatch in his case, and now it was the look of a self-assured person who once more seeks reassurance of something totally certain for the sheer pleasure of experiencing certainty. The careless nature of his composure eased

the stockiness of his body. He had plenty of time, nothing was rushing him; he shook his left wrist, without making use of his right hand, free of the sleeve when the watch failed to come to immediate view. Then he glanced into the matt-gold glitter beneath which the little wheels turned smoothly, nodded again, straightened out his sleeve, and with this action began to breathe as if he had just raced across the grounds: while still standing, he pushed his shoulders back, exhaled forcefully and abruptly and sucked in his breath shallowly, and having paced himself in this way, he moved towards the hall in an almost running stride. The man under pressure who, despite being unbelievably overworked, insists on dedicating time even to this one more function - this is how he was rushing towards us, symbolically pushing the door, already propped open, even more out of his way. And with his right hand thus outstretched, ready to use for adding emphasis to his apologetic joke, and with his mouth already poised open to make this joke, he was waving a friendly greeting toward the chairman's committee - and then he saw the empty table, and faltered, and froze.

It was exactly six minutes past nine.

While he was entering, and he still was, while he lingered beneath the arch of the doorway as if in a

trance, the silence began to break; it was just the lifting of heads, actually just the flickering of eyelids, the instant of an instant, but it was accompanied by that deep sort of sigh which serves to acknowledge that the cogs were catching again - the cogwheel of which their own existence was such an integral part, as it always had been - that the reliable certainty of everything that was to happen warranted a basic feeling of a secure existence. - The man who had appeared was guarantee of this. The head in the food-counter window disappeared; the young things lifted the pots, and that reconciling sound of chairs being moved around to a comfortable position - expectation of a genial gathering - might even have drawn the official proceedings into the comfortable spirit, had the Party secretary now stepped over the - physically non-existent - threshold; now, and not the second following this one, which he endured in petrification, for during that second the whole group petrified and then stayed in this stony state while the Party secretary began to move again, even though but three steps forward. During that second, when everything was shattered, he had been looking at the head table continuously, but in a different way than he had looked at the clock beforehand: persistent despite the bewilderment in his eyes, disbelieving despite the

clear state of affairs, and in both these displays of non-acceptance, such an expression of sudden powerlessness that speculation as to its outcome was a source of fear. - Something quite unsettling was unfolding. - For the entire time that he had spent coming to grips with the situation, he had kept his right hand raised, then it fell, slowly, towards his hip, and with a sudden twitch of his body, his eyelids and lips moved as well, disconcertedly, though he was still not speaking.

Obviously he was engrossed in strenuous contemplation.

Has the complexity of his situation been understood? - The gathering was the union administration's concern, and it was up to the Party secretary whether he chose to attend or not; of course it had been agreed upon that he would come, or else he would not have presumed that the opening would be delayed on his account. But now, despite his calculatedly late arrival, he had made an unsuitably early appearance; neither the union leaders nor the company administrators were present, and the question now arising was: what should he do?

The answer actually presupposed an investigation into the kind of extraordinary event that was forcing the latecomers to come even later still - for an extraordinary event was all it could be - but I am

certain that he did not think of that. - Nothing, absolutely nothing could have happened to justify this delay: any incident in the mine, not to mention any accident, would have been reported to him, and to him first of all: for they had seen him strolling across the grounds and they knew where he could be reached ... They, that was always somebody; in any case it was at least the dispatcher. - So what could be done? - Laugh, go forward, take a seat in the chairman's area, and be friendly to the old men by striking up a conversation which at any time now - and it really had to be only a matter of moments - could switch back to the reception, and due to their improvising in such an animated manner, could throw the reception off the usual protocolary track. - I confess my naivete in having expected this to happen. - As he stood there across the threshold, the position of my head determined whether I saw him in the mirror or in the flesh as well, and when I thought he would go forward and strike up the conversation, I was already seeing him in our midst, and did without the image relayed by the mirror. But when he then froze in the doorway, and curiosity arose in me as to what other course of action he could choose, I saw him as an actor in a play, and then I looked towards the pillar and saw him as though he were on a stage, in



the showcase, framed, standing out in relief, and with me as the only audience. It was the most fantastic sort of theatre; perfectly imaginary, and perfectly real. - The only thing missing was a prompter, yet that was precisely what he needed; he stood there as if his part - right down to the last motion - had escaped him, and his helplessness would have roused sympathy had it not been for that unsettling element I was sensing almost jarringly now. You see, he finally took a step into the hall, out of the mirror, and I have to admit that I leaned backwards; the fact that I kept the Party secretary in the mirror was th unintentional consequence of a simultaneous turn to the side. But then he took a second and a third step, and he had left the golden frame for good and was now standing at the edge of the table across from me, still looking at the emptiness up front, and suddenly ripping the chair backwards with his foot in an abrupt display of emotion, and turning away from the chairman's area, he sat down in the seat where he was standing; he let himself drop; over the corner of the chair with his legs spread wide; face towards the door; back towards the group; and he shoved the cup and plate away as if he could eliminate irritation from the world with one single motion. An action that was violent and uncontrolled and that

spread right up to his table partner who, sitting two chairs away, moved a bit; surely not intentional; surely not coincidental; and after the clattering of the stone-ware, a silence set in; or put more exactly, a vacuum of sounds that was just as ridiculous as it was bad - where even time faded away. Ridiculous that the Party secretary said nothing, that he sat there exuding unkindness and showed annoyance which to me seemed clearly attributable to his anger with even himself. He was, by the way, no longer panting although his mouth still hung open. - Now he closed it; it was a snapping motion, this ridiculous as well. - What seemed bad to me was that he was proving to be so helpless; worse, that he drew the group into his ill humour through his provoking failure to show any initiative whatsoever, crippling the only initiative that had still seemed possible. This initiative would have been to continue waiting as before and therefore return to the little conversations with the table partners, to the shuffling, to the coughing, to the moving around of chairs, to the panting, to viewing the photograph, to looking at the clock, in short, to all the tiniest manifestations of human existence that had already been making the time pass for the past hour. - Now time stood still; distressingly unsettling. - Time salt cured. - How long

that took I cannot say; as the others, I was no longer watching the clock. - Not even this. - Surely not a full minute, scarcely a half-minute, but it lasted longer than the hundred preceding ones.

Finally: were footsteps sounding out there?

I looked into the mirror.

Two burly men were hurrying in; the taller one in miner's gear, the smaller one in a wafting white work-coat: the union leader and the director of the company. Ever since yesterday's meeting it was not difficult to identify them either. - Besides: who else should they be? They really were hurrying; they were not pretending; they were sweating; they were wheezing; I heard and saw them and the Party secretary, too, had to be hearing them, but even though he sat facing in that direction, he did not do as his table partners did - look towards the doorway. - He looked down at his knees and on top of it all, started drumming his fingers now, hard, with all five hard tips, in a slowly tapped-out rhythm; apparently he was thinking again and had finally made his decision, for when the two appeared in the doorway, and the union leader breathlessly blurted out a "sorry" while still on the threshold, the Party secretary, with a toss of his head, stopped his drumming by chopping down with the side of his hand, and his glance captured

the two of them almost tangibly, so much so that they, who had only now noticed the man who had arrived earlier than they, actually shrank back and the word of apology on their lips died away. I saw them standing between the narrow pillars, the white workcoat still in motion as if flared out by the waiting man's ill humour; they stared at the Party secretary who they had hoped would not yet have arrived and whom they had never expected to see down here, and they turned to one another as though wanting to consult each other now, and yet did not exchange even a glance. Everyone's eyes upon them; an explanation absolutely necessary; but whenever the union leader wanted to begin one, he was overwhelmed by such shortness of breath that he stopped each time and struggled for air. Actually this was proof of his intention not to be late. However, the lack of understanding laughter as voucher for this intention was simply another reminder of the delayed arrival, and consequently the alibi became incriminating. This, too, a sort of change into salt; logic is petrified in this way. - The director of the company white, soundless expectation; the Party secretary in gloomy silence; the veterans mute and mum. - I did not matter. - The young things held the pots that were no longer steaming; the time, just barely back in motion, was threatening

to come to a standstill again - no, that was no threat, that was no longer possible, perhaps it was at a standstill now for the breathless man, but not for us anymore, at least not for me, watching this scene with such anticipation that I felt seriously tempted to knock the mirror out of the wall just to see these three inside the frame. The union leader was still gasping, but he took his first step into the hall, with his right hand sweeping out in one of those expansive gestures that is part of the basic, modern-day means of making oneself understood. And that very moment, when the breathless man had recovered enough to present his apology, the Party secretary said - but not as a joke, as this comment is generally used: "You've got your nerve!"

I lost sight of his countenance; remaining seated, he had turned himself away from the table, not allowing the entrants to leave his sight, and had turned his back on all of us. Instead I heard his voice and was startled; not because it was a bellowing one; on the contrary. - A man holding such a position is of course often forced to speak loudly because of the noise level at work; for this reason the tone of voice is generally rough and the speech almost like a bark, which was the case here as well, but in an unsettling sense. He spoke quietly, which made the roughness sound hoarse, and since it was

also shaded with a lurking threat, his growling lacked all trace of good cheer. Gruffness always includes an element of goodwill, at least the hope of it; this manner of speaking promised only intensification, the subdued nature of it was treacherous, and most unpleasant of all was a note of ungraciousness that I considered completely inadmissible: besides the fact that the two latecomers should have been given a chance to defend themselves, the Party secretary had not set an example for model behaviour and it was not nice - nonsense, it was hypocritical to exaggerate someone else's lateness to such a degree. From another point of view, I found it commendable that he, holding the position he did, was willing to show that it was necessary to take human concerns seriously - even one as inoperative and useless for production as showing respect for the senior workers - even though, seen from yet another point of view, his own reaction was exactly ... but why should I brood over that? It was not my place to weigh out the pros and cons of his behaviour; I was visiting, and had by chance wandered into a play I was determined to enjoy. As a matter of fact, it was no longer being staged within the mirror, but the narrow pillar on the left and the veteran's head on the right provided a suitable frame as well; outside the window the waste heaps made

a good backdrop, and the young things with their massive pots looked as though they were extra players in some future scene for which the opening, however, remained totally uncertain.

Who was the author of this play anyway?

Was it playing on its own?

My curiosity grew.

The union man took another deep breath. With slow jerks he raised his right shoulder as if he were wresting a door off its hinges and simultaneously produced long, deep sighs, longer than necessary and deeper than appropriate, helpless sign of defensiveness, and a black miner's outfit, touched up with silver mining hammers, grotesquely enveloped this picture of woe. The company director's face now revealed a most remarkable combination of curiosity and dissociation: he looked over at the union man standing one step away as if an explanation for why the assembly had had to wait so long were forthcoming, and his curiosity, too, already foreshadowed the scepticism with which he would be accepting this explanation! The corners of his mouth were already slightly puckered, his nose already wrinkled, his eyes already squinting, and the fingers on his dangling left hand were already spread so as to indicate retreat from the colleague. The Party secretary,

who had been slouching in his chair with his shoulders almost bent over his knees and who had been holding his chin in his hands ever since he had made his exclamation, was slowly straightening up against the back of the chair again. - Usually a fourth act begins this way. - I would have given my eyeteeth to see the faces of all those enacting the scene and I looked at the window across from me. But although the gray of the waste showed up almost slate-black in the whitewashed hall, nothing was being mirrored there.

The young things set the pots aside.

Perfect stillness.

Eight past nine.

Still wheezing slightly, the union leader began, "We ...," but simultaneously, and before the director of the company could even have excluded himself from this "we," and loudly now, and in an absolutely matter-of-fact, and absolutely unsettling tone, the Party secretary repeated his: "You've got your nerve!" This time every syllable was stressed. The union man interrupted himself once again; just when the director of the company, who had now very obviously been drawn in as his ally, took to continuing astutely what he wanted to say, the man clad in the green shirt completed his sentence: "You've got your nerve - letting the Party wait!"



Who? - The Party?? - Him??? - And now - once the broad-shouldered man sitting upright had crossed his legs and started his drumming again, this time on his thigh with outstretched fingers and with steady intensification right up to the last tap - now both of them - company and union - began a rapid report that seemed to come from one single mouth. A truck that had been promised for the anniversary celebration had not - . "I am aware of that!" the Party secretary interrupted in a cutting tone, "I know that, I know!" and as a hurtful aside added that the assistant had long since been assigned to take care of it. And with a smacking slap, stopping his drumming, he made the annihilating statement: "And so you simply let the Party wait?"

White heat. - Were my ears to be trusted?

The man in the green shirt had jumped up and without looking around, had quickly gone up to the head table and was now sitting in the centre chair of three there, and in front of which a cup, plate, and shot glass were set out. Altogether there were five chairs; no places set in front of the two at the corners of the table, a precise calculation. He sat down in the same way as he had once before: by ripping the chair back with his foot and flopping down. Then, sitting there in the chairman's seat, he sat, sat up front, sat for everyone

to see, sat within time that was in motion once again, and he seemed finally to have found himself. Making a show of it, he arranged himself on the seat, and in the elbow joint twisted his forearms around on the table as if he were confirming the support that the arms found everywhere. He inhaled and exhaled and no longer seemed to need to gain hold of himself by fidgeting with his fingers. He did indeed prepare to let out a roll of the finger-drumming again, but stopped right after the first tap and clenched his fist around his thumb for a moment. Then he slowly straightened his hands and looked at them - hands extending from within the cover of his wristwatch and shirtsleeves and lying on the tabletop in front of him as if totally strange to him: almost red beside the green; blubbery fingers, and the blubber bordered by a fringe of hair - miniatures of his mutton-chop face. And with a Cheshire cat grin, and spreading and stretching his fingers until the joints cracked, he raised his eyes to the veterans, and while company and union were still walking and standing, he looked down the row, up the row, with a scrutinizing stare, yet once in a while with a noticeable sign of recognition, as in the case of the person opposite me. And without hesitation his glance also swept over me. - The scrutiny seemed to have satisfied him. He slapped

his hands back onto the tabletop, drew his elbows in closer to his body, and then greeted the veterans with several enthusiastic nods - fully playing the chairman's role. - Wordlessly, but obviously a greeting. And then he laughed, loudly, and just once, and folded his arms over his chest. And beside him the humiliated union leader was still standing in embarrassment.

Has the complexity, this time of the union man's situation been understood?

As I was figuring it out and figuring that the seat which the Party secretary had taken belonged to the chairman of this reception, that is to say, to the union representative and by no stretch of the imagination to this man who was here only as a visitor and who could have at best sat to the right, but actually would have sat to the left of the chairman, had he arrived last as had been planned - : so, as I (who in any event was at least sitting in the right place) was untangling this web of positions and ranks, at the same time seeing that while the director of the company headed for his designated chair on the left, the union man, amid the torment of choosing between the duties of being chairman of the reception and obedience to the Party, timidly touched the back of the centre chair - timidly, but with three fingertips nevertheless; a motion used when

grasping at straws, a clutching motion, a motion indicating the possibility of alerting someone, imaginary, but still just possibility, whereupon the Party secretary, still seated and arms still folded, reacted by shoving his chair backward with a sudden jerk, so that the union man, who had had to jump aside and was pushed against the righthand chair, finally dropped himself there, hesitating slightly, mainly to maintain balance; as I tried to lose my confusion over this scene - having viewed it - and while losing confusion perused, and while perusing mused, I remembered, always being prepared as I was for a mine visit and the subsequent shower by carrying a towel, soap and comb, that I had a pocket mirror in my briefcase. - The temptation was too great. - I blindly dug around in the case and then, when my fingers had touched upon the mirror, I felt like a boy taking a forbidden peek through a knothole. - It was silly, yet irresistible; the one - farcical - path to truth, a touch of madness and obstinacy as well. I pulled the mirror out and set it up at knee level. And in this lapse of time, when I saw mainly myself, I heard the Party secretary ask - and not even in an all too unfriendly manner - if Sepp did not want finally to get started: we had been waiting for him for such a long time that it was unnecessary for him to wait now.

And then I heard him laugh once more, a barking sound, and rough, and a promise of harshness, and with this, ultimately a feeling of goodwill, and then laughter everywhere, up front as well as down amongst us. And then the mirror was at the proper angle, and I saw the union man getting up - blackish silver miner - and heard him begin: "My dear fellow workers - " And while the reception was coming off with coffee gurgling and chairs shuffling and young things stalking and matches being struck and pipe lids being clicked and cups clinking and sugar crunching and spoons clattering and bun-chewing and glasses being tinkled and schnapps guggling and coughing and sniffing and sneezing and snorting and the steady drone of conversation, I noticed - to my amazement - that the scene up front had become transposed in my mirror: the union man was standing on the lefthand side and the director of the company on the right.

Indeed, I had to take three deep breaths before I remembered that in mirrors the world is horizontally inverted, left and right inversed, only centre remains centre, but a centre lacking dimension. - Laws of optics; I was confused all over again; and while I was contemplating whether or not a face changes when the left and right sides are reversed, I examined the Party secretary first with use of the mirror and then not using it,

without, however, being able to discover a difference between him and himself. Instead, amid this activity around his mutton-chop sideburns and green shirt, his greeting popped back into my mind, and only now with the full impact of its meaning: "You've got your nerve! Letting the Party wait!"

So he was the Party? - I looked him over, looked at his comportment and deportment: how he unabashedly looked at his watch; how his face displayed a glowering gaze, how it displayed a revitalizing gaze; how, when the union man told of a basically banal but impressive-sounding comment, he nodded with an air of official importance as if to show that only thereby would the report become real; how, during the boasting speech about great achievements in the mine, he tugged at the company director's workcoat and began to whisper instructions into the ear of this man, who was then leaning over towards him; how he once again folded his arms, how he burst into laughter; how he guzzled cognac; how he lit a cigarette; how he impatiently drummed on the tabletop; how he sat; how he listened; how he did not listen - : was he the Party? His mouth was now poised open just as it had been beneath the arch of the doorway, but this time it was an expression of glowing contentment. I was no longer paying attention to

whether or not anyone was watching me as I wielded the mirror, but nobody seemed to notice, and the smoke was indeed hanging in the hall like a veil. - Now there was applause; now more coffee served; the speech - fourteen minutes - had been finished; hubbub, and suddenly I lost him in the mirror. He had leaned diagonally across the table and was speaking with one of the veterans, and then I saw the whitewashed rear wall, just a white void, to be filled as a person saw fit, and then the thought occurred to me whether this wall might not be a more adequate likeness of him - : judging by his exclamation, he as an individual no longer mattered; what did matter was his ability - perfected to the point of being a character trait - to embody the Party and to express this embodiment at any time in relation to any given concrete situation as his Self in opinion as in attitude (and as I knew, even then - indeed, precisely then when today's opinion should be diametrically opposed to yesterday's), the result being that, from a sociological point of view, he was something like a thing in itself, man of sheer function, a sheer role player, and his personality - the essence of which was the lack of one - was taken as being his role in life. I struggled not to see it that way, and in the mirror I saw emerging from the chalky wall face upon face of all those I knew

as embodiments of the Party, men and women, stout ones and haggard ones, smooth ones and rough ones, harsh ones and gentle ones, and scarcely having set eyes on them, their features were diffusing, the individual contours were disintegrating, appearing, disappearing clouds, formless forms embracing all form, parts of a chalky wall, indistinguishable from one another, uniform, white salt, dribbling away ... I was startled; a set of mutton-chop sideburns stepped into the mirror which had almost fallen out of my hand as I had dozed off ... Mutton chops, green shirt, and this image remained, the Party secretary of the salt mine at T. And sincerely grateful, I saw him as a man whose still unrefined, helpless churlishness was almost a lovable personal trait. Now he stood up; my mirror followed, and he - embodiment of the Party - summed up: "Dear associates, veterans of the work force - " : closing remarks even after no discussion. - Later I found out that he was very new. Outside the window the morning bus was already driving up to wait for exactly eleven minutes and then transport above all colleagues from the administrative sector, and this time some of the veterans as well, to L. - to the regional centre. And to sum up in a few words the reception which, to quote the Party secretary, had been so successful despite the unfortunate beginning,



he referred to the constant concern of the company, of the State, and, above all, of the Party for the veterans, the never tiring senior workers, the miners' guard of honour, the - as the writer called them, according to the Party secretary - Lords of the Salt - ; all in all it had been a nice speech, but it occurred to me (and only now did I have all three of them captured in the mirror again), it occurred to me as he was speaking, and the company was taking notes, and the union was beaming, and as even the young things were no longer yawning, and the head appeared in the food-counter window so as to share in listening to the closing remarks with deep emotion - nevertheless the terrible doubt occurred to me during all of this as to whether the matter at hand ever really meant anything to him, whatever the matter happened to be at any given time: veterans' reception, cultural conference, management training session, advisory meetings on production, or whether his primary goal was not always to demonstrate everywhere this playing of parts, and getting down to brass tacks only the secondary goal. It was unfair before this speech; certainly. - If only he had not purposely been late; if only I had not looked into the mirror; if only he had not uttered that phrase! - But was it his phrase? If only his behaviour had not been in keeping with it! - Outside the bus was honking.

Outside the bus was honking, another three minutes and the Party secretary had finished: a good-bye and good luck!, and everyone got up; the young things took the empty pots; the head in the food-counter window disappeared; the hands of the clock jumped to nine forty-two; packing my mirror away I headed for the door, and at that point the Party secretary approached me. - Union leader and director of the company followed. - I must be the writer, said the one embodying the Party, and he stretched his hand out to me without introducing himself and continued to say, shaking my hand, that I was absolutely right in starting here. The Party had been informed and was having a list set up by the company of all I was to be shown. And as he had already suggested, it had been absolutely correct to begin here with the senior workers. Here I would find subject-matter galore - the most exciting events. What treasures these lives concealed had already been briefly mentioned by him, and he motioned to the man opposite me, the old one with the stiff neck, and the old man limped around the table, and so now we were in the mirror on the pillar: green shirt; sports shirt; miner's gear; white lab coat; Sunday suit; and: this one here, for example, he could tell a story - sixty years in salt, sixty valiant years, a life of fulfilment, mirror of the class, and at the

peak - and then he who embodied the Party put his arm around the old man's shoulder - at the peak of his mining career he had accepted the flag of honour for the mine from the hand of the Party, and the old man nodded with a stiff neck on which I noticed a terrible scar. And the union man nodded, and the director of the company nodded, and I nodded, too, and the Party secretary acknowledged our nodding with a nod. Five heads moving, five stories, and the old man, holding up the photo, which he carried in his hand like a treasure, said that he had been thinking of that all along. And when he held it up, the back of the photo - white cardboard - appeared in the mirror.

## TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

In this chapter some of the problems I encountered in translating the preceding three texts, and strategies I chose to use in solving such problems, will be pointed out and explained by means of a few concrete examples. Not interpretive comments, but rather only general observations will be made. Although I shall be drawing the reader's attention only to a very limited number of problems, difficulties of similar nature abound, and my general comments are to be applied whenever appropriate.

### Lexical Problems

The first step in translation is finding equivalent vocabulary, and even at this level problems requiring careful consideration arose. Only a few problems will be pointed out, but they are representative of the sort of problems inherent in Fühmann's preceding three stories.

After close examination of the texts, I found, for instance, that Fühmann has used allusive vocabulary. The terms used are often ambiguous; that is to say, they can be seen, but must not necessarily be seen, as allusions to anything in particular.

Terms that could be understood as stemming from the religious domain represent a specific type of reference. Vocabulary with such religious overtones was the most readily apparent sort of allusion, especially in Three Naked Men. Words such as "Riten"<sup>42</sup> and "sündigen,"<sup>43</sup> which are plainly from the spiritual domain, I translated with equally straightforward terms: "rites" (see p.24) and "sin" (see p.26). Since references such as these direct the reader's attention towards religion, I found that when faced with ambiguous examples, I tended to choose English terms which also allude to the religious sphere. "Der Entrückte,"<sup>44</sup> for instance, can suggest a person who has been lifted from the world by divine forces, or it can simply signify someone who has become removed or been withdrawn in some way. "Ascension" in English carries connotations similar to the German "Entrückung," so I called "der Entrückte" a "man who had ascended" (see p.40). The term "ascend" can have a purely secular meaning, as can "entrückt," or it can carry spiritual overtones, and in connection with "to another realm" (see p.40) the religiousness is emphasized. Such emphasis is justified, I feel, since in Three Naked Men alone there are at least ten instances where allusions to religious terminology could be seen - a fact leading me to

believe that Fühmann has woven a religious thread into his stories. When faced with other ambiguous terms later, as was the case, for example, with "leibhaft"<sup>45</sup> in Mere Trivia - Total Effect: Positive, this previously established religious tendency had an influence in the choice of an equivalent English term. "Leibhaft" can have a simple, concrete meaning: "in person," or "in the flesh." However, this word can also indicate the diabolic. "Der Leibhaftige" is the devil himself. In order not to lose the possibility of a reference to diabolic elements, I translated "... ich sah ihn dabei leibhaft vor mir stehen ..." <sup>46</sup> as "... I had a devilishly clear image of him in my mind ..." (see p.61). My aim was, then, to provide adequate indication in the translation of the presence of what I viewed as a religious motif, and when other problems of similar nature arose, I treated them in a similar way.

Not only did I attempt to render allusive vocabulary in the described nature, but also to recreate the phonetic effects often present. The steambath, for example, is referred to as a place "wo ... Wohlwallen wallen"<sup>47</sup> and my translation reads, "where ... well-wishing wallow" (see p.35). An alliteration very similar to the original German was produced in English. In this case the phonetic effect involved repetition

of the initial sounds of words, but assonance and consonance also occurred. "Zersprühende lindernde Kühle,"<sup>48</sup> for instance, repeats the long "ü" sound as well as an "-nde" ending. My equivalent English version reads "diffusing soothing cool" (see p.35). The internal sound repetitions are similar, and the English counterpart to the German endings is the suffix "-ing." In cases such as these it was my aim to create phonology equivalent to that of the original in order to enable the English reader to appreciate the rhetorical devices used by Fühmann for phonetic effect.

Besides being necessary for rendering certain rhetorical devices, the technique of translating a phonologic effect was used to overcome the very specific problem of recreating in the English language a play on words. A man had wanted to go to the fair in Leipzig and had said to the person selling train tickets: "Mir reaumieren nämlich heute zur Messe."<sup>49</sup> Literally translated this would be: "You see, we're reaumuring to the fair today." This makes no sense because the verb "reaumieren" (to reaumur) does not exist. The man, who was studying physics, had meant to say, "Mir fahren heute nach Leipzig zur Ms (Messe) ..."<sup>50</sup> This is a dialect way of saying what in proper German would be: "Wir fahren heute nach Leipzig ..." and in English means:

"We're going to Leipzig today." Saying "fahrenheit" had reminded the man of his studies, and he confused the Fahrenheit temperature scale with the Réaumur scale. When the ending "-en" was added to Réaumur, an imaginary German verb was created. The "verb" could be used in place of the verb "fahren," which sounds the same as the first two syllables of the term "Fahrenheit." When the spelling of the last syllable of Réaumur was changed in the new verb "reaumieren," it corresponded to the dialect pronunciation. "Fahrenheit" thus became "reaumieren heit." Although an imaginary verb "to reaumur" can be created in English, phonetically the term "Fahrenheit" does not allow for an English verb to be understood from it. The German principle of replacing a verb that was present in a phonetic sense, by an invented verb, could not be followed through in English. A new phonetic ambiguity had to be found if a parallel joke was to be created. Considering only the sound then, /farənhīt/ could signify on the one hand the Fahrenheit temperature scale, or on the other hand the phrase "fair in height." Another thermodynamic term then had to be found which phonetically would contain a phrase that seemed to be grammatically parallel to "fair in height," but that was nonsensical within this grammatical context. The term "Rankine scale"



provided such a solution. "Rankine scale" is the name of a temperature scale, as is "Réaumur." Phonetically, the term could be perceived as "rank in scale" - a phrase grammatically parallel to "fair in height," but meaningless. This became the foundation for an English play on words which could be similar in principle to what had been done in German. The only other necessary change in the English was an adaptation of the context of this play on words. Where "fahren" in German calls to mind a situation involving travel, "fair in height" calls to mind a situation where physical matters are discussed. Following that train of thought, I chose to use a medical setting and a new joke could be worked out quite readily. The sound of "Fahrenheit" causes certain meanings to be perceived in German, and in the English I maintained the sound of "Fahrenheit," but used the meanings perceived in English to recreate the play on words.

### Syntactical Problems

In keeping with the well-known tradition of German writers, Fühmann shows a liking for long and complicated sentences. Since modern English does not lend itself particularly well to such structures, rendering them is a fundamental problem facing the English translator.

It seems to me, however, that at times Fühmann's type of complexity involves some special, striking features which do not fall into the simple category of complexity. While the object of this discussion is not to determine any significance the syntax may hold, I do wish to explain to the English reader why I have often used sentence structure which in the English language appears to be unusual.

An example of the sort of structure to which I am referring occurs in Tale of Mirrors, for instance, when the narrator is pondering the just completed speech. His thoughts are expressed as follows:

... all in all it had been a nice speech, but it occurred to me (and only now did I have all three of them captured in the mirror again), it occurred to me as he was speaking, and the company was taking notes, and the union was beaming, and as even the young things were no longer yawning, and the head appeared in the food-counter window so as to share in listening to the closing remarks with deep emotion - nevertheless the terrible doubt occurred to me during all of this as to whether the matter at hand ever really meant anything to him, whatever the matter happened to be at any given time ... (see p.95)

The original German version reads:

... es war rundum eine schöne Rede, doch mir kam (und ich hatte sie jetzt wieder zu dritt im Spiegel), mir kam, da er sprach und der Betrieb sich Notizen machte, und die Gewerkschaft strahlte, und als sogar die Dinger jetzt nicht mehr gähnten, und der Kopf im Essenschalter erschien, das Schlußwort gerührt mit anzuhören - mir kam dennoch bei alldem der furchtbare Zweifel, ob es ihm wirklich je um die Sache ginge, was immer auch die Sache je wäre ...<sup>51</sup>

The technique evident here is repetition of the phrase "mir kam" at the beginning of three successive clauses. This sort of technique is a rhetorical device commonly known as "anaphora." The feature I find to be striking in this example is the fact that twice an attempt is made to express the main clause, but that each time the thought is interrupted before it can be completed. It is not until the third attempt that the main clause becomes complete. In German the indirect object and verb are repeated, while the subject "der furchtbare Zweifel" is delayed until the very end of the completed main clause. The result is that the reader must wait considerable time until the thought can be understood. It was therefore my aim to make the English reader also wait considerably before all the essential elements of the sentence were provided. This involved a problem

in translation, however. German grammar, unlike English, allows the dative object to precede the main verb, and the subject to trail. Rather than let the subject simply follow, Fühmann interjects clauses and repeats the "mir kam" after these interjections and before giving the subject. It is impossible to do this in English, so as a compromise I used the impersonal, indefinite subject "it" in the first two appropriate instances, and only in the third repetition replaced the "it" with the actual subject, "the terrible doubt." Although the English reader does have a subject, he still does not know the point of the sentence until quite late.

Similar construction is evident in Mere Trivia - Total Effect: Positive. After the narrator has come to the realization that his article had been written under a cloud of misconception, he must rectify the situation and has the following thought:

If avoiding further reinforcement of the brigade leader in his behaviour, if at least making my thoughtlessness understandable, if still preventing this unexpected meeting from sinking into a pit of embarrassment was what I wanted, then I would have to correct myself on the spot. (see p.58)

The German counterpart is:

Wenn ich den Brigadier in seiner Haltung  
 nicht weiter bestärken, wenn ich meine  
 Leichtfertigkeit wenigstens verstehbar  
 machen, wenn ich dies unerwartete Treffen  
 nicht doch noch ins Peinvolle abgleiten  
 lassen wollte, dann mußte ich mich auf  
 der Stelle berichtigen.<sup>52</sup>

Here anaphora is seen in the triple repetition of the subordinate conjunction "wenn." The structure of these subordinate clauses is parallel, except that the main verb "wollte" is understood in the first two clauses, not being stated until the last one. Again the reader is forced to wait for some time for the complete thought to become evident. Because German grammar calls for the main verb of a subordinate clause to end the clause, this delaying of the verb can be carried out quite easily. In English this is more problematic, since the main verb must appear quite early in the clause. In order to be able to recreate in English the effect of placing the main verb "wollte" at the end of the third clause, a different structure was necessary in English. The infinitives accompanying "wollte" were transformed into gerunds, thus making them subjects of the new verb "was." A noun clause "what I wanted" could be made to follow the copula verb and end the clause. This English noun clause could then be delayed in the same way that

the German main verb had been delayed. The effects of the English and German passages thereby became similar.

Just as I felt that anaphora of this sort of striking nature had to be recreated in the English language, it seemed necessary that clauses placed strikingly in German be positioned strikingly in English as well. In order to do this, I first had to differentiate between those German structures that were striking only from an English point of view, and those that were striking even within the German context. What had to be kept in mind was the fact that it is a characteristic of the German language to place modifying word groups before a matter to be modified, as in German's unique participial constructions. English does not allow for this sort of structure and tends to let modifying word groups trail, as in relative clauses. When the advancing of information was no more than a reflection of a typically German tendency, I rendered the situation by means of a typically English structure. However, often I felt that Fühmann had interjected a clause at a place which was unlikely even within the context of German syntax. In Three Naked Men one occasion when a sauna rule was violated is described at a time when the generally respectful behaviour of the three men is being discussed. Before this violation

is even fully expressed, however, another clause is interjected:

... and when the woolly one brought a handbrush - but this happened only on the first visit - into the sauna chamber, he made no use of it after spotting the sign banning brushes ... (see p.26)

The equivalent German version reads:

... und als der Wollige - es geschah dies nur beim ersten Besuch - eine Handbürste mit in die Schwitzstube brachte, ließ er sie nach einem Blick auf eines der Verbotsschilder unbenutzt ... <sup>53</sup>

In this example, the clause "es geschah dies nur beim ersten Besuch" is presented too far in advance, and therefore it stands out and strikes the reader - an effect emphasized by the punctuation. The reader is thus provided with a sort of apology before he had even realized that there is a shortcoming requiring excuse. This sort of stylistic technique can be observed elsewhere as well. In Tale of Mirrors, for instance, the narrator at one point thinks of sneaking a pocket mirror out of his bag. He feels that not only are his intentions improper, but that his having a mirror with him at all is a dubious matter. He comes to his own

defence in the following manner:

... I remembered, always being prepared as I was for a mine visit and the subsequent shower by carrying a towel, soap and comb, that I had a pocket mirror in my briefcase. (see p.90)

The original German is formulated as follows:

... da ... entsann ich mich, daß ich in meiner Aktentasche, immer auf eine Grubenfahrt und anschließendes Duschen vorbereitet, mit Handtuch, Seife und Kamm einen Taschenspiegel bei mir trug.<sup>54</sup>

The justification for his carrying a pocket mirror, "immer auf eine Grubenfahrt und anschließendes Duschen vorbereitet," is presented before the reader even knows that the narrator has a mirror in his possession at all. Once again the reader is faced with a striking sentence structure - a structure I have maintained in the English translation. I, too, placed the apology for a wrong in front of the wrong itself.

These examples have shown that although some passages in the English translation may appear to be unusual, they are reflections of a particular type of style Fühmann has used. As mentioned above, it is not the object of this discussion to determine whether or



not the style carries an independent significance, but since Fühmann consistently uses unusual syntax which produces a certain effect, I felt it was important to create a similar style in the translation. It is for that reason that I have often chosen to follow the original German style in the sentence structure of the English version.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Richard B. Morris and Graham W. Irwin, eds., Harper Encyclopedia of the Modern World (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1970), pp. 419-20.
- <sup>2</sup> Harper Encyclopedia, pp. 419-20.
- <sup>3</sup> Harper Encyclopedia, pp. 419-20.
- <sup>4</sup> "Fühmann, Franz," Lexikon deutschsprachiger Schriftsteller von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart, ed. Kurt Böttcher (Leipzig: VEB Bibliographisches Institut, 1972), pp. 240-41.
- <sup>5</sup> Franz Fühmann, Erfahrungen und Widersprüche. Versuche über Literatur (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1976), p. 18.
- <sup>6</sup> Fühmann, Erfahrungen, p. 18.
- <sup>7</sup> Fühmann, Erfahrungen, pp. 18-21.
- <sup>8</sup> Lexikon deutschsprachiger Schriftsteller, p. 240.
- <sup>9</sup> Fühmann, Erfahrungen, p. 18.
- <sup>10</sup> Fühmann, Erfahrungen, pp. 18-21.
- <sup>11</sup> Fühmann, Erfahrungen, p. 18.
- <sup>12</sup> Gregor Laschen, Lyrik in der DDR. Anmerkungen zur Sprachverfassung des modernen Gedichts, Literatur und Reflexion, Vol. 4 (Frankfurt a. M.: Athenäum, 1971), p. 141.
- <sup>13</sup> Lexikon deutschsprachiger Schriftsteller, p. 240.
- <sup>14</sup> Konrad Franke, Die Literatur der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, Kindlers Literaturgeschichte der Gegenwart in Einzelbänden (München: Kindler, 1971), p. 14.
- <sup>15</sup> "Deutscher Kulturbund," Brockhaus Enzyklopädie, IV (Wiesbaden: F. A. Brockhaus, 1968), p. 567.

- 16 Franke, p. 14.
- 17 Franke, p. 14.
- 18 Franke, p. 14.
- 19 Brockhaus, IV, p. 567.
- 20 Franke, p. 26.
- 21 Franke, p. 26.
- 22 Franke, p. 40.
- 23 Franke, p. 40.
- 24 Franke, p. 41.
- 25 Franke, p. 31.
- 26 Franke, p. 90.
- 27 Franke, pp. 98-99.
- 28 Franke, p. 99.
- 29 Franke, pp. 98-99.
- 30 Franke, p. 107.
- 31 Franke, p. 107.
- 32 Franke, pp. 107-9.
- 33 Franke, p. 128.
- 34 Franke, p. 129.
- 35 Franke, p. 139.
- 36 Franke, p. 139.
- 37 Franke, p. 141.
- 38 Franke, p. 141.
- 39 Franke, p. 153.

<sup>40</sup> Sabine Brandt, "Deutsche Literatur auf Umwegen. Über die Literaturpolitik und den Umfang der DDR-Literatur in der Bundesrepublik," Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 109, 11 May 1979, Feuilleton, p. 23.

<sup>41</sup> Brandt, Frankfurter Allgemeine, 11 May, 1979, p. 23.

<sup>42</sup> Franz Fühmann, Bagatelle, rundum positiv (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1978), p. 10.

<sup>43</sup> Fühmann, Bagatelle, p. 11.

<sup>44</sup> Fühmann, Bagatelle, p. 22.

<sup>45</sup> Fühmann, Bagatelle, p. 38.

<sup>46</sup> Fühmann, Bagatelle, p. 38.

<sup>47</sup> Fühmann, Bagatelle, p. 18.

<sup>48</sup> Fühmann, Bagatelle, p. 18.

<sup>49</sup> Fühmann, Bagatelle, p. 17.

<sup>50</sup> Fühmann, Bagatelle, p. 17.

<sup>51</sup> Fühmann, Bagatelle, p. 63.

<sup>52</sup> Fühmann, Bagatelle, p. 36.

<sup>53</sup> Fühmann, Bagatelle, p. 11.

<sup>54</sup> Fühmann, Bagatelle, p. 59.

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