

“Almost Poetic”: Alfred Döblin’s Subversive Theater

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Dedicated to the memory of Hans-Jürgen Wrede

“Am Bahnhof stand ein Sauerampfer,
sah immer nur Züge
und nie einen Dampfer.
Armer Sauerampfer.”

— Hans-Jürgen Wrede, frei nach Joachim Ringelnatz

Abstract

This dissertation explores elements of objectification, artistic control, and power in three of Döblin's plays: *Lydia und Mäxchen*, *Comteß Mizzi*, and *Die Ehe*. In the first chapter I address the nature of, and relationships between, characters and things that people these plays, and outline Döblin's animation of props, and their elevation to the status of characters in his initial play *Lydia und Mäxchen*, the objectification of characters in his second play *Comteß Mizzi*, and a combination thereof in his final play *Die Ehe*. In the second chapter I treat issues of artistic control. While his debut play contains multiple and unconventional loci of control, the focus of his second play lies on artistic restrictions and its consequences. In his final play Döblin addresses social forces which rule different classes. In the third chapter I connect the elements of objectification and uprising with matters of control by arguing that Döblin employs Marxist themes throughout his plays. In *Lydia und Mäxchen* I compare the uprising of the props against the poet (and all things human) to the uprising of the working class against the bourgeoisie. In *Comteß Mizzi* I discuss matters of human mechanization and the alienation of labor. In *Die Ehe* I address the lack of control that members of all classes experience since capitalism establishes itself as reigning force.

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Introduction

“Ihr wißt, auf unsern deutschen Bühnen
Probiert ein jeder, was er mag.”¹

Before delving into my dissertation’s subject matter, I will provide a brief biographical and literary overview, including synopses of the plays that I discuss. Alfred Döblin, born on 10 August 1878, in Stettin as one of six siblings became fatherless when he was almost ten years old when his father left the family, and, with his young lover, embarked to the United States. The loss of the father led to his family’s financial hardship, leaving his mother without the means to provide for the family. Shortly thereafter, also in 1888, the family moved to Berlin. Among others, Döblin’s biographer Wilfried F. Schoeller argues that this event shaped some of Döblin’s own life decisions. For instance, Döblin felt a strong sense of responsibility towards the important women in his life—his mother and his wife. His loyalty to his mother prevented a continuation of an early relationship with the young nurse Frieda Kunke since his mother did not

¹ Goethe, *Faust I*.

approve of her as a viable option for her son: “Der Familienrat sprach, Döblin lässt es durchblicken, ein eindeutiges Urteil: Er durfte Frieda Kunke nicht heiraten, denn er sollte vermutlich nicht mit einem armen Mädchen in die Welt schreiten, er sollte nach oben heiraten” (Schoeller 89).² In 1911, Frieda Kunke gave birth to their son Bodo.

After completing his medical studies and while working as doctor at the Urban Hospital in Berlin, Döblin met Erna Reiss, a medical assistant on his ward. Considering her a more agreeable match Döblin married her, and thus, embarked on a complicated marriage. Döblin describes their engagement as follows: “Da Erna an der Verlobung festhielt, wurde diese gegen meinen Willen vollzogen: Man bat mich, Klavier zu spielen und zu singen; ich schlug Brahms vor: ‘O Tod, wie süß bist du.’ Alles verlief friedlich. Ich zog begossen ab ins Krankenhaus, sagte mir: Ich habe mir den Hals abgeschnitten” (Schoeller 97).³ The two married in 1912, and had their first son, Peter, in the same year. Sons Wolfgang and Klaus followed in 1915 and 1917 respectively. The couple had four children together. Their youngest son Stefan was born in 1926. Starting in 1921, Döblin engaged in an off and on relationship with photographer Yolla Niklas, and biographers

² Trans.: “The family counsel spoke, Döblin implies, an irrefutable verdict: He was not allowed to marry Frieda Kunke because he was not supposed to walk into the world with a poor girl; he was supposed to marry up” (Schoeller 89).

³ Trans.: “Since Erna insisted on the engagement, it was being executed against my will: I was being asked to play the piano and to sing; I proposed Brahms: ‘Oh death, how sweet art thou.’ Everything was peaceful. I left crestfallen for the hospital, told myself: I have cut my throat” (Schoeller 97).

speculate that the traumatic childhood experience of his father's abandoning the family prevented Döblin from leaving his wife Erna to establish an official relationship with Yolla. Döblin (similarly to some of his dramatic characters), trapped within social structures with certain expectations, followed his mother's advice for finding a partner instead of allowing his heart to guide him. He remained in the marriage with Erna instead of fully committing to Yolla.

The rising Nazi party presented a threat to Döblin as a secular Jew which he, however, did not realize at first. Döblin's friends advised him to leave the country in the early 1930s. Not too concerned initially, he laughed about the advances of the Nazi party, but, after the burning of the Reichstag he realized the seriousness of the national socialist threat. Initially he emigrated to Zurich, Switzerland, first alone, then his family followed. Later that year, in September 1933, they moved to Paris, France. In 1940, after fleeing through France, and via Marseille, Barcelona, Madrid to Lisbon, Döblin, his wife, and their youngest son Stefan eventually departed Europe for the United States, and arrived in New York, on 9 September of that year. Earlier in the year their son Wolfgang committed suicide during his flight from German troops—a tragedy of which his parents only learn at the end of the war.

Initially employed by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, Döblin had trouble continuing his literary work during his US exile. In 1941, Döblin, his wife, and

Stefan converted to Catholicism, a move his friends and foes widely criticized. Eager to return home after the war ended, Döbblin returned to Germany on 9 November 1945, and lived in Baden-Baden. Only two years later, Döbblin revisited Berlin for the first time. Although his exile in the United States was not easy for Döbblin he left with mixed feelings: “Viel ist uns in diesem Land zuteil geworden. Leb wohl Amerika. Du hast mich nicht gemocht. Ich liebe dich doch” (Schoeller 628).⁴ Despite the fact that Alfred Döbblin was a household name before World War II, and in spite of his desire and initiative to return to his home country shortly after its end, Döbblin failed to reestablish himself in Germany. Struggling to determine how to help his country and its people, and to successfully reestablish himself, he proclaimed:

Ich kann nach den sieben Jahren, jetzt, wo ich mein Domizil in Deutschland wieder aufgeben, mir resumieren [*sic*]: es war ein lehrreicher Besuch, aber ich bin in diesem Lande, in dem ich und meine Eltern geboren sind, überflüssig, und stelle fest, mit jeder erdenklichen

⁴ Trans.: “We have received much in this country. Farewell America. You did not like me. I love you still/nevertheless/anyway” (Schoeller 628).

Sicherheit: "Der Geist, der mir im Busen wohnt, er kann nach außen nichts bewegen." (Schoeller 792)⁵

Suffering from Parkinson disease as early as 1949, and from a heart attack in 1952, he left Germany for France in 1953. On 26 June 1957, Döblin died in the hospital in Emmendingen, and Erna committed suicide on 15 September of the same year. The two are buried with their son Wolfgang in Housseras, France.

To elucidate Döblin's literary achievements, I will provide a brief, selective overview. Writing the essay *Modern* and his debut novel *Jagende Rosse* during his final years of secondary school Döblin revealed his attraction to literature at a young age. While studying medicine from 1900 to 1905, he wrote his second novel *Worte und Zufälle*, two essays on Nietzsche, and the short story "Die Ermordung einer Butterblume." In 1905, he completed his doctorate with his study *Gedächtnisstörungen bei der Korsakoffschen Psychose*, and wrote his debut play *Lydia und Mäxchen: Tiefe Verbeugung in einem Akt*, which became his first publication in 1906 under the pseudonym Alfred Börne (Schoeller 85). Döblin wrote *Comteß Mizzi* in 1909, but, deemed too sexual, his second drama went unpublished. From 1910 to 1915, Döblin served as a main contributor to

⁵ Trans.: "After seven years I can now, that I surrender my domicile in Germany again, summarize: it was an educational visit, but in this country, in which I and my parents were born, I am superfluous, and I observe firmly with every conceivable certainty: 'The spirit that lives in my bosom cannot move anything on the outside'" (Schoeller 792). Here, Döblin references the scene "Studierzimmer" in Goethe's *Faust*: "Der Geist, der mir im Busen wohnt, er kann nach außen nichts bewegen" (1566-69).

Herwarth Walden's magazine *Der Sturm*. In 1912, his first collection of novellas *Die Ermordung einer Butterblume* appeared, of which individual stories were accompanied by wood cuts from Ernst Ludwig Kirchner.

From 1914 to 1933, Döblin held a publishing contract with the S. Fischer publishing house. In 1916, *Die drei Sprünge des Wang-lun* was published, a novel for which Döblin received the Fontane-Preis. The following year *Die Lobensteiner reisen nach Böhmen* appeared, and in 1918, *Wadzeks Kampf mit der Dampfturbine*. Between 1919 and 1924, Döblin wrote political and critical glosses using the pseudonym Linke Poot. In 1920, his novel *Wallenstein* and his third play *Lusitania* appeared. In 1921, Döblin published his fourth drama *Die Nonnen von Kemnade*, and, in 1924, his futuristic novel *Berge Meere und Giganten* and the criminal study *Die beiden Freundinnen und ihr Giftmord*. In 1925, his travel report *Reise in Polen*, followed by his epic verse *Manas*, and in 1927, his natural philosophical essay *Das Ich über der Natur* were published. In the same year, Döblin began writing *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, the text that marks the pinnacle of his literary career.

Published in 1929, this modern collage novel represents Döblin's biggest literary success, and still holds a high rank amongst world literature titles. It continues to be Döblin's most famous text, a fact on which the author remarked throughout his lifetime. *Berlin Alexanderplatz* dwarfs all of his remaining literary texts and even now, almost one hundred years later, **it** is still the Döblin text

students and scholars study. Shortly after its publication, in 1930, his final play *Die Ehe* premiered, but the Nazis soon prohibited its performance. In 1931, Döblin wrote his essay *Wissen und Verändern!*. The same year also saw several adaptations of *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, such as the radio play and the film. (Döblin collaborated on the script with Phil Jutzi).⁶ In 1932, a new version of the adventure book *Berge Meere und Giganten*, now titled *Giganten* appeared.

The year 1933 marked the end of Döblin's publication streak, the same year in which *Unser Dasein* and *Jüdische Erneuerung* appeared. Although the first one was still published in Berlin, the second one was published in Amsterdam since Döblin, forced into exile, left Germany on 28 February 1933, and traveled to Switzerland—a journey that marked the beginning of over a decade in exile (Schoeller 404). Thus, there was a clear caesura in Döblin's oeuvre since he could no longer successfully publish during this time, and in spite of his immediate return following the end of World War II, he failed to take root in Germany again. While the war stifled his prose production he continued to write dramatic and filmic sequences during his time at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer in Hollywood.

The Nazi-era and the outbreak of World War II curtailed the peak of Döblin's literary production, disrupting Döblin's life and writing. In 1934, his first exile novel *Babylonische Wandrung* appeared, and the novels *Pardon wird nicht*

⁶ In 1980, Rainer Werner Fassbinder adapts the novel into a fourteen hour long TV series.

gegeben and *Flucht und Sammlung des Judenvolks* followed one year later. By 1943, Döblin completed two trilogies: *Amazonas* and *November 1918*. In 1946, the religious discussion *Der unsterbliche Mensch* and the novella *Der Oberst und der Dichter oder Das menschliche Herz* appeared. In the same year Döblin's observations of the Nuremberg trials appeared under the pseudonym Hans Fiedeler. In the same year, he became editor of the literary magazine *Das Goldene Tor*, and he remained in that position until 1951. Over the course of the next few years the individual parts of the *November* trilogy were published, followed by his autobiography *Schicksalsreise*, in 1949. In 1956, his final novel, which he started to write in 1945, *Hamlet oder Die lange Nacht nimmt ein Ende*, appeared.

Recently there has been a renewed interest in Döblin's texts, and S. Fisher has published approximately thirty new editions containing new scholarly introductions over the course of the last decade. A new film version of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* has been announced to appear in 2018. The New York Review of Books published his novel *The Three Leaps of Wang Lun* in 2015, and the short story collection *Bright Magic*, containing the collection *The Murder of a Buttercup* and several of his later tales in 2016, making some of them available in English for the first time. A new English translation of *Berlin Alexanderplatz* appeared in March 2018. This effort to republish and retranslate Döblin's texts indicates the

universal nature of his themes and styles. Döblin's complex and contradictory outlooks continue to make his texts meaningful.

Over the course of his life Döblin straddled different, often irreconcilable, spheres in various realms. On a literary level he produced a variety of different texts—novels, dramas, epic verse, short stories, essays, and political tests—and encountered the challenges of living removed from one's linguistic home during his years in exile. On a religious level Döblin grappled with different approaches, the most obvious of which concern his conversion from Judaism to Christianity late in his life. In the personal realm Döblin often appears torn between fulfilling expectations and following his heart, considering the conflict revealed in his relationships with women. Frieda Kunke, his first love, was not a viable option. The relationship with his wife Erna Reiss was complicated in various ways even before their engagement. Photographer Yolla Niclas, whom he thought of as his soul sister from the time they met in 1921, remained in his life throughout its course.

Although acknowledged as an influential writer during the first half of the twentieth century and into the present Alfred Döblin's well-renowned contributions to the genre of the novel often overshadow his dramatic contributions. Overlooked by many scholars in German Studies or remembered exclusively for his innovative and bestselling 1929 collage novel *Berlin*

Alexanderplatz, Döblin's plays, although they pale in comparison to the rest of his extensive oeuvre, deserve scholarly attention. As Döblin himself claims:

(Ich bin der Feind des Persönlichen. Es ist nichts als Schwindel und Lyrik damit. Zum Epischen taugen Einzelpersonen und ihre sogenannten Schicksale nicht.) Hier werden sie Stimme der Massen, die die eigentliche wie natürliche so epische Person ist. (Metzler 413)⁷

In his epic as well as his dramatic texts, Döblin devotes his attention to the oppressed, and lends them his voice.

While Döblin wrote thirteen novels, countless short stories, theoretical, and philosophical writings, he composed only five dramas over the course of his career. Although some Döblin scholars scoff at his dramas I believe that a closer look at a selection of them adds to the understanding of Alfred Döblin and his work. Stylistically, all five plays—*Lydia und Mäxchen* (1906), *Comteß Mizzi* (1908), *Lusitania* (1920), *Die Nonnen von Kemnade* (1923), and *Die Ehe* (1930)—differ from one another, though each show Döblin's mark—that of experimentation. While each of his five complete dramas addresses different issues and follows different forms, each also contains parallel or intertwining themes. For instance, his

⁷ Trans.: "(I am the enemy of the personal. It is nothing but deception poetry. Individuals and their so called fates don't serve an epic well.) Here they become the voices of the masses, who are the actual, natural, and epical person" (Metzler 413). Interestingly, Döblin's quotation ties in with *Unternehmer's* viewpoint, but with a twist. Döblin labels personal matters lyrical, and his character creation considers them novelistic material.

dramas include elements of filmic text, address social injustices, and also raise questions about dramatic form.

His debut drama *Lydia und Mäxchen* stems from the beginnings of his literary career. Reacting to his mother's criticism of his writing as frivolous endeavor, Döblin initially tried to hide his literary ambitions, and published his first text under the pseudonym Alfred Börne. The play aligns with the expressionist tradition in which the props assume lives of their own and a poet's words materialize on stage as specter actors. In 1907, between his first and second dramas Döblin also worked out some notes for a potential drama on St. Francis, which remains fragmentary, however. Two years after his debut play, Döblin wrote *Comteß Mizzi*, in which young Mizzi, whose father oppresses her and prostitutes her to paying customers while advertising his venture as a place where clients can find "repletion and blessing" (Döblin 39). After this initial dramatic effort Döblin took a ten year hiatus. Concluding World War I, he resumed his career's dramatic strand and composed *Lusitania*, a play that was not received well by the political right, which expected a portrayal of the grandeur of the German army. Instead Döblin treated the issue in his regular manner, that is in a critical way. Next, Döblin decided to write a historical play—*Die Nonnen von Kemnade*—based on the account of Judith, an abbess of Kemnade convent. His final play *Die Ehe* decries social injustices. Performed, but booed, the

play eventually was censored and prohibited by the rising Nazi party. With his ensuing emigration, Döblin ceased play writing altogether if we disregard script writing for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer in Hollywood. Döblin's dramatic texts demonstrate his continued treatment of a catalog of questions.

This dissertation explores elements of objectification, artistic control, and power in three of Döblin's plays: *Lydia und Mäxchen*, *Comteß Mizzi*, and *Die Ehe*. In the first chapter I address the nature of, and relationships between, characters and things that people these plays, and outline Döblin's animation of props, and their elevation to the status of characters in his initial play *Lydia und Mäxchen*, the objectification of characters in his second play *Comteß Mizzi*, and a combination thereof in his final play *Die Ehe*. In the second chapter I treat issues of artistic control. While his debut play contains multiple and unconventional loci of control, the focus of his second play lies on artistic restrictions and its consequences. In his final play Döblin addresses social forces which rule different classes. In the third chapter I connect the elements of objectification and uprising with matters of control by arguing that Döblin employs Marxist themes throughout his plays. In *Lydia und Mäxchen* I compare the uprising of the props against the poet (and all things human) to the uprising of the working class against the bourgeoisie. In *Comteß Mizzi* I discuss matters of human mechanization and the alienation of labor. In *Die Ehe* I address the lack of control

that members of all classes experience since capitalism establishes itself as reigning force. Before delving into my argument, I will provide a brief overview of these three plays.

Lydia und Mäxchen

Döblin's debut play *Lydia und Mäxchen: Tiefe Verbeugung in einem Akt* is a "grotesque literary satire" in one act (Keppler-Tasaki 630). As Döblin's first publication, it can be interpreted as an introduction of the artist to his audience—Döblin's first appearance on the literary stage. This being his first deep bow he felt it was necessary to assume the pseudonym of Alfred Börne. The play consists of three intertwining plot strands. First, there is a line of plot happening on the theater level which involves the play's poet, the theater director, and the two actors who were to act the protagonists' roles. These two, however, are in absentia since they have fled the scene in terror. The audience never meets these two, but only hears the director and poet's reference to them. The second plot strand deals with the three animated objects who find themselves as part of the animate world, a predicament with which each of them deals differently. The chair turns into the leader of this prop gang, and animates his friends to rebel against all things human. Part of this plot strand, on another level, is the hobgoblin, who intervenes twice in the play's plot. Once he acts from inside a

picture hanging on the wall, and later he exits the picture, and, using fire arms, impacts the play irreparably.

Third and last, the play contains a plot strand in which two specter actors people the stage, and conclude the performance of the play within the play. The poet, believing that they represent his words incarnate, is ecstatic about this development. The audience only witnesses the specter actors in action in the third act of the play within the play although they already performed the second act as well prior to the opening of Döblin's play. These three different plot strands intermingle throughout the course of the play. Now, meet the cast: the chair, the locker, the candelabra, the hobgoblin, and the man in the moon, the poet, the stage director, the firefighter, Lydia, Mäxchen, mercenaries, and a messenger.⁸

⁸ Note on grammatical gender: In Döblin's original text, a grammatical gender of der, die, or das accompanies the props' labels, reading in German "der Stuhl," "der Kandelaber," "das Spind" (although "Spind" can either have a masculine or a neuter article). This means that chair and candelabra have a masculine grammatical gender, and the locker is neuter. Although any of these translates into English "the" I refer to these props, as he, she, and it/he respectively. Here is my reasoning: The chair identifies himself as a man: "Aber wenn ein Mann in meinem Alter so Seltsames und Ergreifendes erlebt, so hat er ein Recht zu toben" (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 64). The props awakened or became animated because of the specter actors in playing the second act, the act prior to the opening of the play. Either that or that makes him want to move (toben). The candelabra demonstrates stereotypical feminine tendencies since she asks for silk stockings and bows: "Schenkst du mir die Schuhe der Lydia?" (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 64). While the chair and candelabra refer to the locker in a way that implies he is an elderly man (they reference senility and camphor), the locker himself defies this notion: "Mich macht alles wirt. Ich bin bloß ein Spind und will meine Ruhe," and (initially) insists on his thingness (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 60). (Later, once the chair insists again that he stop complaining the locker sounds submissive "Ai, ai" (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 78).

Next, a brief breakdown of the scenes follows: In scene one, Döblin sets the stage for us by catapulting his audience into the intermission of the play within the play to witness a discussion amongst the three main props—the chair, the locker, and the candelabra—who begin waking and acting up, and discussing what it means to be alive. In the second scene the play’s poet and the theater director feud about whether or not to continue the performance of the three-act play within this one act-play since the two human actors Förster and Warnicke fled after the first act. Upon the director’s inquiry who played in the second act, the poet reveals that it was the incarnation of his words. The chair makes advances on the poet, and, after a wrestling match between poet and director, the poet manages to ring the bell which indicates the end of the intermission.

Although short, scene three plays a crucial role as it expresses the chair’s resolution to actively engage with his surrounding world. In the fourth scene the poet soliloquizes about the disinterested audience, and reveals his realization that his words incarnate, the specter actors, are escaping his control. In the following scene we glimpse Lydia’s funeral procession à la Snow White in a glass coffin. Taking a break, Max sends three mercenaries off to the pub and stays behind, alone with Lydia. Although of little content, this scene functions as a transitional one, and moves our attention from the “belebte Dingwelt” to the play’s title characters. Scene six, containing another soliloquy, serves as the

counterpart to scene four with both scenes bookending the funeral procession. Here, Max soliloquizes about his love for Lydia, and his speech culminates in his bashing of her coffin with his battle sword, causing its glass to shatter.

As the play's longest scene, scene seven includes almost every character: two specter actors as Lydia and Mäxchen, the animated props, and the poet perform, and the hobgoblin makes its first appearance. The chaos of the previous scene culminates in scene eight as the three props begin their revolution, and the hobgoblin kills the specters. Neither poet nor director can prevent what's happening on stage. Art unleashed! Scene nine portrays a distraught poet, lamenting the murder of his creations. A fireman arrives, and the director brings the requested revolver, but too late. As the curtain drops and the play ends, the poet's grief turns into anger, initially directed at the specter actors, whom he now berates as "Höllengeister," and then at the audience, whom he accuses of having derived enjoyment from the spectacle. The play ends on a light note, with superficial, unsubstantial acclaim and criticism.

Comteß Mizzi

Döblin composed his second play in one act divided into fifteen scenes. Keppler-Tasaki labels it as a "filmreifen Skandalexotismus" (632). Meet the cast: the count, Mizzi, the title's countess, Baron Neustätter, Abdul Abbas, Excellency,

Peter the poet, Xaver the sculptor, Wilhelm Prölss, Clarisse, Erna, Frau Fröhlich, gentlemen and ladies.⁹ Although not listed as a character, the statue of Demeter is the play's central prop. The play opens with Erna and Clarisse's debate about the tasks of the sacred daughters. When Erna complains about being stuck inside the count's abode Clarisse comforts her, saying that she will adapt to her fate after the first few months of prostitution. Frau Fröhlich enters in scene two, calling the two to order, and indicating that Mizzi is feeling better. Scene three introduces Neustätter, Excellency, and Willi (although he doesn't speak). Frau Fröhlich insists on Excellency being incognito, and expresses her happiness about his appearance as representative of the authorities. In the fourth scene it becomes clear that Excellency came prepared to close the brothel, with Neustätter serving as a mole for the operation. Neustätter, Wilhelm, and Excellency discuss the value of the count's business. In the next (very short) scene, Excellency mentions a letter he received from Mizzi that indicates that she, too, serves her father as "sacred daughter," and thanks Neustätter for his work for which—he announces—he will experience a triumph today.

The sixth and longest scene deals with art. Following a discussion on the effects of the sight of a naked woman on men, Mizzi enters for the first time, and we witness interactions between her, Peter the poet, Xaver the sculptor, and

⁹ While Döblin labels one character in cast list as "Klarisse" he labels her "Clarisse" throughout the entire play, both, preceding her lines and whenever characters address her.

others. In Mizzi's first monologue she prays to Demeter—from the moment she enters the stage she's in despair, but masks it by explaining that she is practicing for the evening's play. A discussion of marriage as a universal piece of furniture ensues when Peter enters. Mizzi invites him to sit with her, and explains the nature of the men who seek her. Peter explains the inspiration he felt when he was with Mizzi as a younger man. As Xaver enters Peter explains his universal mourning project, and Xaver explains his latest job of sculpting his employer's visitors in bread, upon which he reveals his realization that life depends on nothing. Aside from the main action Xaver invites Peter to become a martyr, and indicates that authorities have encircled the house. Peter, envying Xaver for his convictions and his possession of a crest, explains that he has nothing in which to believe, but Xaver points out that Peter's forgetfulness will also come in handy. A Fräulein inquires with Mizzi if she is not allowed to emotionally engage with the men whom she serves, and remarks that that would be beyond all strength. As Excellency remarks on the unfairness of this endeavor, Mizzi, suspicious of him, inquires about his identity, and about his source of access. When he replies that Neustätter let him in, Mizzi realizes that the raid will take place today, and she tells him: "Es ist gelogen, ich bin niemand's Opfer" (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 99).¹⁰

¹⁰ Trans.: "It is a lie. I am no one's victim" (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 99).

In the next scene the count and Abdul Abbas enter, and, after a brief encounter with Mizzi, Abdul Abbas reveals that Siddi's brothers are after the count, and would like to avenge Siddi's murder. In the eighth scene a figure emerges from behind the Demeter statue to remind him of his crime. The ninth scene contains a brief encounter between the count and Neustätter, in which the count issues a warning to Neustätter. In scene ten Mizzi expresses her regret about having fallen for Neustätter. She indicates that her father sent her to Neustätter, and that she forgot one of the requirements of a sacred daughter—to return home. Mizzi expresses her intent to sin, and Clarisse asks if she will participate in the play. Mizzi agrees, and Neustätter says he cannot stand to see her in the arms of another, and pulls out his pocket revolver.

Scene eleven discusses pre-play arrangements, while two gentlemen exchange their ideas about a potential laboratory in the count's house: "Sie sollen mit Tieren, Hunden und Katzen, auch Menschen, die sonderbarsten Versuche machen. Mit chemischen Mittel[n], allerlei Combinationen [*sic*] in ekstatische Zustände versetzen. ... Oh die gehen der Liebe zu Leibe.¹¹ Der Fanatismus ist

¹¹ NB! Throughout this document I treat incorrect spellings contained in Döblin's script as follows: if it is an isolated word surrounded by correctly spelled words I indicate the incorrect one with [*sic*], and if numerous incorrectly spelled words for dialect occur I leave them unattended.

schon erschreckend" (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 105).¹² Even Excellency begins taking pleasure in participating in the undertaking which he came to expose. In the twelfth scene various characters embark on the evening's play. Mizzi enters, wanders from one to the other, and Neustätter, by now desperate, exclaims that he will punish the man responsible for turning Mizzi into a prostitute (her father), saying that Mizzi is a prostitute through and through, but that it is not her fault.

Mizzi's soliloquy culminates in her suicide in scene thirteen, and scene fourteen shows Abdul Abbas covering her body, kneeling down, and praying for her. Scene fifteen shows the count entering the room in which Mizzi's corpse lies, and he reveals his intention of using her in Siddi's place. Abdul urges the count to follow him into his homeland, and the count strikes down Neustätter who has been waiting for him, and picking up Mizzi's corpse, he says: "Die Erde nimmt alles auf. Du bist so schnell gelaufen, kleine Mizzi, zu deiner Mutter. Will sehen, daß ich Euch einhole" (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 111).¹³ The play ends with Abdul summoning the count to follow him home.

¹² Trans.: "Supposedly, they conduct the strangest experiments with animals, dogs and cats, even people. With chemical stuff, with all kinds of combinations they transfer them into ecstatic states. ... Oh they are bearing down on love. Fanaticism is terrifying" (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 105). The original wording "der Liebe zu Leibe gehen" demonstrates love embodied within a physical body and makes for a nice play on words.

¹³ Trans.: "The earth accepts everything. You ran so fast, little Mizzi, to your mother. I will see to catch up with you" (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 111).

Die Ehe

Döblin's final play *Die Ehe*, which he labeled "Volksstück mit aufklärendem Hintergrund," consists of a prelude and three main scenes subdivided in sections (Döblin 227). The prelude consists of nine sequences that portray a poet and his wife as they undergo the progression of a play's lifecycle from conception to performance to critique. The play does not list the characters, which change in each scene, and presents three separate scenarios. Some of the characters which people the three scenes convene in the play's final sequences. The protagonists in scene one are Karl and Guste, a working-class couple, who are joined by her mother, a doctor, a woman from the welfare office, a druggist, and an old woman who performs abortions.¹⁴ The center of the second scene consists of a gardener's family of eight in search of a place to live. Unternehmer, a businessman, Lucie, his daughter, and Georg, her husband, dominate the third scene.

The first scene contains twenty sequences that portray a young woman, Guste, and her plight of an unwanted pregnancy. The first scene points to the changes societies undergo over time. The next scene shows Karl and Guste, and reveals that Karl has lost his job. Guste is confident that he will find another one soon, while, in the next scene, her mother laments the fact that she married such

¹⁴ NB! For ease of reading and avoidance of confusion I will refer to this character as "Guste." While her husband addresses her as "Guste" Döblin labels her as "Frau," for the sake of her representative function as a stand in for (m)any members of her class. Similarly, I will refer to Guste's husband as "Karl" although, he too, is labeled as "Mann." Understanding the underlying reasons for Döblin's labels this will simplify the comprehension of this synopsis.

a good-for-nothing man who cannot provide for them, and cautions her to wait with her family planning. In the fourth scene Guste reveals that her mother's warning comes too late since she is already pregnant. Sequence five shows her seeking help from a doctor, asking him first for work, then for help in finding an apartment (the couple lives with her mother), and finally for an abortion. The doctor refuses to assist with any of her requests. Scene six shows the doctor complaining about his job, and scene seven shows Guste's husband Karl in a bar. In scene eight Guste approaches a nurse in the welfare office, but finds no relief as the nurse offers her to deliver the baby in a home, and to nurse another woman's child. Guste expresses her wish for work or an apartment, requests that are met with a lack of understanding, and the nurse accuses Guste of her intent to continue to have fun.

In the next scene, the narrator, in a comforting manner, guides Guste towards the druggist: "Komm gehn [*sic*] wir weiter, liebes Kind. Zwei Türen sind zugeschlagen, bei Menschen wirst du keine Hilfe finden. Aber da ist eine dritte Tür" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 247).¹⁵ The druggist in the tenth sequence sells her two packages of a special medicine for 7,50 Mark, her entire week's money. The next sequence reveals that the medicine failed to unfold its advertised effects, and Guste, having saved up another ten Mark, visits the house of an old woman.

¹⁵ Trans.: "Come we'll move on, dear child. Two doors slammed shut, you will not find help from people. But there is a third door" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 247).

Sequence twelve reveals Karl dancing with another woman, and the next one presents the old woman's soliloquy about her job of performing illegal abortions.

Scene fourteen contains the conversation between Guste and the old woman, who reveals that the woman who used to perform abortions moved, and was murdered (on May 1st), but ultimately explains that anyone can perform abortions, and that she will do it for ten Marks. Foreshadowing, she inquires about Guste's address in case she gets sick.

Scene fifteen portrays the nervous old woman, clamoring about Guste who seems to be suffering from complications of the abortion. Döblin scripts a dark death appearance into this sequence, and a filmic clip showing a steam hammer in action, a house burning in a fire, and a derailed train. The next sequence depicts the old woman seeking Karl in the bar to inform him about his wife. In sequence seventeen, still containing the dark appearance, Karl realizes that his wife is dead. The old woman explains that she has performed abortions many times. Next, Karl calls for the doctor, and, once inside (in the next sequence) the doctor recognizes Guste, while the appearance of death plays back Guste's plea for help she uttered previously in his office, attempting to induce guilt. When the doctor points out to the old woman that she can tell her story at the police station she inquires directly why he hasn't helped Guste before. And Karl complains because the procedure cost his money. This scene closes with a

mourning procession for Guste, in which her husband laments her death, with a narrator, and a sign that ultimately advises “Wissen und verändern!”—know and change! (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 255). A loudspeaker complains: “Es bewegt sich alles, der Mensch wird geboren, lebt, altert, stirbt. Staaten wachsen, gehen zugrunde. Wer erstickt, muß sich Luft machen!” (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 255).¹⁶

Next up is the interlude that consists of three sequences, and which I will discuss in greater detail in my final chapter. Here is a synopsis: First, a race horse in a banquet hall receives champagne and oats, and its droppings are preserved for posterity. Second, an image that explains the compensation a baron receives because his ancestors at one point were no longer allowed to hold serfs. Third, a war widow calls an eye doctor and asks him to help justice to see again. After justice loses her blindfold, and takes a good look around, she starts to run, catches up with the Finnish world record runner, and surpasses him, in her attempt to run away from the injustices surrounding her.

The second scene consists of eighteen sequences that portray the plight of a large family. The first sequence sets the stage of family H.—too embarrassed to reveal its full name—whose father is unemployed due to a prolonged illness. The oldest daughter is fourteen and the youngest child is eleven months old. The daughter explains that their old landlord sued the family because he did not like

¹⁶ Trans.: “Everything moves, man is born, lives, ages, dies. States grow and wither. The one who suffocates needs to get air!” (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 255). ... And “it’s all vanity.”

the children's noise, so that the family now has no apartment, but lives in a dark room in an attic. Hopeful because of their "urgency ticket" they set out to find an apartment. Next, Döblin depicts three additional families, who are all pleading with a potential landlord to receive his apartment. Then the landlord introduces his position: "Ich habe das Haus in der Inflation für einen Pappensiel gekauft, und nun habe ich es und bin ein großer Mann und habe über viele Menschen etwas zu sagen" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 261).¹⁷ Then, the landlord questions the applicants, and chooses a person of means who claims that he will pay by the first of each month. The families in need all depart. In the fifth sequence the narrator explains the powerlessness of the government that cannot manage to get families into houses and apartments.

In the following sequence, set in a housing office, the oldest daughter explains that the family members have dropped from eight to seven since the baby died in their prior living arrangement, and the father, after unsuccessfully pleading with the officer, threatens violence. The official, hiding behind laws, refuses to accept responsibility, and the family leave with another address. In sequence seven two speculators discuss the baseness of the poor, and that they should worry about culture (Beethoven and Goethe) rather than griping about the lack of food and living space. Next, a woman from a private association stops

¹⁷ Trans.: "I bought a house on the cheap during inflation, and I have it, and I am a big man who holds power over many people" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 261).

in and offers to help, but explains that, after searching for an apartment, it was simply not possible to find one that would be affordable, and thus, she presents her alternative plan to take the children away so that they could live in a children's home. Since the mother refuses this offer, the woman leaves offended. The next sequence portrays the woman from the previous one, one of the speculators, and the oldest daughter. The speculator argues that apartments for workers don't need to be nice if factories are bright and big since workers only sleep in their apartments.

In the next sequence a police man takes the oldest daughter and one of her brothers to a children's home against their will. The eleventh sequence reveals that the father has died, and brother and sister climb over the fence and escape. Next, Döblin depicts the mother in an infirmary, and she explains the injustices she has experienced, and regrets not having died with her husband since now her kids have been taken away, and the family has been torn apart. Sequence thirteen reveals the reunification between mother, daughter, and son. The next sequence displays two workers who converse, and ultimately exclaim: "Wer von gestern ist, kommt unter die Räder. Das Geld regiert die Welt, das Geld versteht keine Spaß. ... Verheiratete Männer sind halbe Männer. Was een guter Prolet ist, is Soldat, und ein Soldat hat keine Frau und keene Kinder" (Döblin, *Die Ehe*

278).¹⁸ Then, the daughter follows her mother who is walking towards a forest, trying to get away from people. The daughter, suspicious of her mother's plan says she would like to return to the children's home.

In the next sequence, the daughter lags behind, approaches a boy scout, and asks him for a sandwich and inquires about police. The boy indicates that a police man is following. The girl asks the police man for help, and, when he asks about her address, she gets worried about being taken back to a home. In the seventeenth sequence the police man explains that the woman is not allowed to spend the night in the forest since that is the realm of the field police, to which the mother replies: "Die Feldpolizei, und ich kann nicht hier sitzen und hier übernachten? Ihr Jagdhunde, ihr Mörder, ihr Verbrecher, schämt ihr euch nicht, mich zu verjagen, wir sind jetzt schon sechs Stunden gelaufen, das Kind muß schlafen. Das ist hier Gottes freie Natur" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 281).¹⁹ The final sequence summarizes this family's plight, and ends with: "Familien zerschlagen, Menschen zerblasen wie Späne, – das kann das Geld, der Tischler, dieser große Hobler!" and calls to action "Späne, wir sind Späne, und wo ist denn ein Brett?"

¹⁸ Trans.: "Those who are from yesterday will get under the wheels. Money rules the world, money doesn't get jokes. ... Married men are half men. Those who are good proletarians are soldiers, and a soldier doesn't have a wife and children" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 278).

¹⁹ Trans.: "The field police, and I cannot sit here and spend the night? You hounds, you murderers, you criminals, are you not ashamed to chase me away, we've been walking for six hours, the child has to sleep. This is God's free nature" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 281). The mother's inquiry is reminiscent of Bartleby's employer's questions in Herman Melville's *Bartleby, the Scrivener*: "What earthly right do you have?"

Das Brett ist nicht zu sehen, zu sehen ist ein Dreck. Der Tischler hobelt täglich bis in die Nacht hinein, wir wollen nicht mehr Späne, wir wollen Tischler sein" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 282).²⁰

The final scene consists of twenty-eight sequences, and offers alternatives for sequences twenty to twenty-two. First, we meet Unternehmer, a character who owns a business, and has a daughter but who, void of all personal elements, describes himself entirely in business terms. Next, the narrator introduces Lucie, Unternehmer's daughter, as a fashion girl. Next, Lucie expresses that she wants to take over her father's company, but he instructs her to marry instead since he cannot conceive of a woman running a company. After resenting this idea Lucie exclaims that—to please her father—she will marry. Next, she breaks up with her boyfriend, who is shocked that Lucie is not loyal to him, which is an idea she considers preposterous. Then, Lucie throws a party to find a husband, and she explains her proceedings to her father, who states: "Ich habe nicht gewünscht, Lucie, daß du dir einen Mann auf einem Fest aussuchst. Welche Vorkehrungen du triffst, um einen Mann zu finden, ist mir gleich. Die Arbeitsmethoden der Menschen sind verschieden. Mich interessiert nur das Resultat" (Döblin, *Die Ehe*

²⁰ Trans.: "Families shattered, people blown apart like shavings, — that's what money can do, the carpenter, this big planer! ... Shavings, we are shavings, and where is a board? The board is not to be seen, what's visible is dirt/nothing. The carpenter planes daily until nighttime, we no longer want to be shavings, we want to be the carpenter" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 282).

286).²¹ In sequence eight Lucie encounters Georg, and expresses her desire to marry him, an idea he considers outdated and foolish. He tries to leave, and she leaves along with him. In a monologue she expresses her determination to marry Georg. A worker's song about his hard life follows.

In the next sequence, the audience learns that Georg is now fully invested in the company, and that he has already forgotten about Lucie. Next, a conversation ensues in which Lucie and Georg promise each other not to change during marriage. Next, the workers accuse Unternehmer for working to increase his financial gains while they continuously work while remaining poor.

Unternehmer tells them that he, too, doesn't have much of a life, and encourages them—addressing them as children—to work for him. Next, Georg shares with Unternehmer the travels he and Lucie went on, but Unternehmer explains that one day Georg will be just like him, a prognosis to which Georg alarmingly replies: “Ich fürchte mich. Einmal bin ich ein junger Mann gewesen, bin durch eine offene Tür in das Haus getänzelt, habe den Reichtum ausgenutzt, das war lustig. Ich führe einen vorbildlichen Haushalt, ich werfe mich zu Hause schlaff in einen Stuhl, ich schlucke meine Mahlzeit herunter, meine Gedanken sind auch

²¹ Trans.: “I did not ask you, Lucie, to pick a man at a party. Which measures you take to find a man, doesn't matter to me. People's working methods differ. I am only interested in the result” (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 286).

nachts bei dem Werk. Bei dem Werk, bei dem Werk. Ich fürchte mich. Ich muß mir Luft machen. Wozu bin ich reich, wozu bin ich frei?" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 294).²²

In the following sequence a narrator, and a couple of people exchange gossip, and imply Georg is having an affair with an employee, Fräulein Y. Next, Fräulein Y brags about the affair with Georg, indicating that she may have been meaningless before, but her fame has risen since the junior boss became her boyfriend. This plot strand yields into sequence seventeen, in which Lucie accuses Georg of having an affair; however, Georg's response indicates that it is Lucie who does not abide by their original agreement of remaining unchanged in marriage, and of continuing with their lives as before. In the next couple sequences Lucie seeks help from her father. Initially unsuccessful, Lucie requests that her father emerge from his confining structure-like costume, which he does, unhappily promising to help his daughter. The next sequence depicts Georg in a sanatorium, where a doctor diagnoses him with foolishness after confirming that he does not suffer from a "Wiener Würstchen," and that his wife should have come for treatment (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 305).²³ Fräulein Y appears and eagerly lays out her plans for a future together, causing Georg to understand that the affair

²² Trans.: "I am scared. Once I was a young man, danced through an open door into the house, took advantage of the wealth, that was funny. I am leading a model household, I throw myself flaccidly into a chair, I swallow my mean, my thoughts are with the company even at night. With the company, with the company. I am scared. I have to get air. What for am I rich? What for am I free?" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 294).

²³ The term "Wiener Würstchen" is used here as a synonym for a mental disorder because of Sigmund Freud's location in Vienna.

produced the wish in Fräulein Y for a joint future, and since this is the last thing Georg wants, he takes the train back home, and in the next sequence, runs to Unternehmer, and declares that he is back and ready to work.

Following that sequence Unternehmer cautions Georg not to upset his daughter. His reasoning, however, is not that of a caring father, but rather his concern for “society.” Georg is not to upset its order so as not to upset the role of the company as a part thereof. Next, Georg returns to Lucie, who, too, now displays some of her father’s attributes: “Die Arbeitsmethoden der Menschen sind verschieden. Mich interessiert nur das Resultat” (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 309).²⁴ Telling each other that they are glad to have returned, they also intend to continue with their affairs as they please, but with an added element: “Verschwiegenheit” (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 311).²⁵ They commit themselves to their love, and allow each other loopholes. In the following two sequences a salesman sells the idea of screens first to Lucie, and then to Georg so that the two can protect their marriage. Next, Lucie and her boyfriend Bobbie resume their affair with each other, and Lucie inquires with her father if he is happy now, to which he simply replies that he is content if they don’t disturb him.

²⁴ Trans.: “People’s working methods differ. I am only interested in the result” (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 309).

²⁵ Just like the prelude’s poet and his wife reduce the complexities of inter-human relationships to “Wasserstoffsperoxyd” this couple reduces it to discreetness.

The following five sequences depict various characters, and is headed by texts, such as “Der Sumpf der Gesellschaft,” “Die Gesellschaft ist heilig,” “Das Kapital schützt die Gesellschaft” (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 316-17).²⁶ Sequence thirty depicts the narrator attempting to hold Unternehmer accountable for this “swamp of society,” but he insists on the fictitious nature of personal issues. Karl and Guste from scene one recognize that their fate was not one imposed by God, but rather by society, and people like Unternehmer. The final sequence ends with the narrator’s call to action: “Er [Unternehmer] wartet auf den, der ihn bezwingt!” (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 319).²⁷ The chorus concludes:

Der Mensch regiert die Welt, der Mensch bezwingt das Geld! Der Mensch muß kämpfen und um sich schlagen, bis ihm die Macht ist zugefallen!
 Dem Geld die Macht aus den Klauen, das harte Herz niedergekämpft, die Eisenketten abgeworfen, unser Feuer brennt! ... Freunde, liebe Freunde, seid unverzagt, einmal für uns der Morgen tagt, einmal kommt Brot und Freiheit und Licht für uns und für jedes Menschengesicht. (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 319)²⁸

²⁶ Trans.: “The swamp of society,” “Society is holy,” “The capital protects society” (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 316-17).

²⁷ Trans.: “He [Unternehmer] is waiting for someone to vanquish him!” (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 319).

²⁸ Trans.: “Man governs the world, man conquers money! Man has to fight and lash out until he receives power! Pry the power out of money’s claws, overpower the hard heart, cast off the iron chains, our fire is burning! ... Friends, dear friends, be undismayed, some time morning will dawn for us, some time bread, and freedom, and light will come for us and for every human face” (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 319).

The minimalism and the various disruptions throughout align this play with epic theater trends (Keppler-Tasaki 636).

Chapter One

Dramatic Theory I: People and Things

“Das Drama (auf der Bühne) ist erschöpfender als der Roman, weil wir alles sehen, wovon wir sonst nur lesen.”²⁹

In the first part of this chapter I will explore the nature of objects and the interrelations between people and things in three of Döblin’s plays: *Lydia und Mäxchen*, *Comteß Mizzi*, and *Die Ehe*. In each of these plays Döblin blurs the lines between the different realms objects and characters inhabit, flipping or merging the two by objectifying characters and animating props. For instance, each of the plays contains objects which either seize power, leave their inanimate realm and enter the human realm, assume motion and speech, or presents human characters who are either powerlessly objectified by others, or submit their power to objects. In doing so Döblin points to the importance of objects, and to the objectification of people as a result of a society in which members aim to possess people and things alike. In the second part, I will add to this discussion of objectification by focusing on Döblin’s portrayal of women who are trapped in

²⁹ Franz Kafka, *Tagebücher*, 28 October 1911.

and restricted by patriarchic constructions. Each of these plays contains female characters who find themselves tethered to societal norms which exploit them without providing for them. A female character might be married to a man for her father's political gain, or she might not be married at all, but rather function as a prostitute serving male characters. Even female characters tied to a man by choice don't receive protection. Döblin indicates that there is no space for women in society in which they can feel safe. Even if they conform they do not receive protection in this male-dominated world. In the final part of this chapter I will discuss the differences between texts to be read versus those to be performed. Döblin's treatment of these issues in his dramas sheds light on his choice of venturing into the dramatic realm.

Before starting my analysis of these three plays I will provide brief summaries of each. Allow me to set the stage for you, open the curtain, and introduce you to the cast of Döblin's debut play *Lydia und Mäxchen: Tiefe Verbeugung in einem Akt*, a one-act play with nine scenes. Set in a theater it treats dramatic concerns in its main plot while a play within the play revolves around a love story.³⁰ Contrary to convention, however, we do not first encounter the play's cast, but rather the props, not in their usual role as props though, but engaged in animated discussion: the chair, the locker, and the candelabra debate

³⁰ Döblin identifies time and place of his play as follows:
 "Ort: Eine Bühne.
 Zeit: Während einer Vorstellung" (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 57).

philosophical and existential questions, and behave quite humanly, including the human obsession with possessions. Döblin's irony is at its best here as he presents things that want things. In addition to scared actors fleeing the theater Döblin scripts a neurotic, megalomaniac poet, a defeatist director, ghostly specter actors, and animated props into his debut play. As if these were not enough elements to create confusion, Döblin adds to the cast of rebellious three-dimensional props the two dimensional "Klabautermann," a hobgoblin who descends from a painting onto the stage to wreak havoc.³¹ Over the course of the play's nine scenes characters and props commingle with the poet, director, and specter actors.

While the props rebel in *Lydia und Mäxchen*, characters behave prop-like and exhibit little self-determination in the next play, a one-act "Spiel" with fifteen scenes. Welcome to the fun house, or, to Döblin's second play *Comteß Mizzi*, set in a luxury brothel, in which the count both covets and prostitutes his daughter Mizzi and other formidable women he labels as "geweihte Töchter" (Döblin 86). Inspired by a Viennese scandal, Döblin criticizes this male phantasy, revealing the absurdity of the count's impression that his business provides a viable marriage alternative to young women. While selected young women learn the trade of self-sacrificing wish-fulfiller men can still have it both: marital care and

³¹ Döblin uses the German "Klabautermann" which describes a water spirit that is typically found on ships. "Hobgoblin" is the best translation I could find in English.

extramarital carnal pleasures.³² In this play we encounter a diverse cast, such as a poet, a sculptor, a count, a clergyman, and, of course, young women. Topics range from pondering marriage and its use as practical “Universalmöbel,” to musings on art and its benefits. While Döblin refrains from animating any props in *Comteß Mizzi*, he scripts a couple of objects propelling the plot, and deals with the objectification of women and artists. While the props in his first play came alive, here the protagonist and victim of objectification dies. This play, too, deals with the subject of dramatic performance.

Perhaps his least creatively titled play *Die Ehe* consists of a prelude, three acts, and presents therefore, three snapshots of married life: the first depicts the challenges of a young married woman seeking an abortion, the next those of a poor family in search of appropriate housing, and the last those of an

³² “Das sind Mädchen, junge Mädchen, – schöne Frauen, die wir erziehen, (*leiser*) die wir beladen mit allem, was sich süßes und zärtliches in den Magazinen der Liebe seit Jahrtausenden aufgestapelt hat, – und die wir eines Tages entlassen. Sie gehen lautlos auf bloßen Füßen wie die Amazonen zum Brautkampf. Überall, wo sie gehen, entzünden sich Hochzeitsfackeln; die finstersten, trockensten Herzen fangen zu knistern an. Der Boden schwingt unter ihren Füßen, aber sie lauschen nur still auf den Ruf, der sie schickt und gehen heißt, und kehren heim. Haben sie die küssenden Münder zum Gebet geschlossen, den Seelen ihr Gewicht und ihre Angst abgenommen, ziehen sie sich wie die Schnecken in ihr Haus zurück, – rascheln davon, unverbrannt wie Salamander. Dies sind unsere geweihten Töchter” (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 86).
Trans.:

“These are girls, young girls, – beautiful women, whom we educate, (*more quiet*) onto whom we load everything sweet and tender that accumulated in the magazines of love for thousands of years, – and whom we will release one day. They walk silently on bare feet like Amazons in a bridle combat. Wherever they go wedding torches ignite; the darkest, driest hearts begin to sizzle. The floor swings underneath their feet, but they only listen silently to the call, which sends them out and retrieves them, and they return. Once the kissing mouths are closed in prayer, and they alleviated the weight and fear of the souls, they retreat like snails into their houses, – rustle away, unburnt like salamanders. They are our sacred daughters” (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 86).

entrepreneur's bourgeoisie daughter, eager to take over her father's business.³³

In each scene Döblin portrays the difficulties his characters face, such as unplanned pregnancies and prohibited abortions, poverty and society's judgment thereof, and male-dominated business worlds, to which even emancipated women have to submit. Now that you have an understanding of some of the plot strands of these plays let us dive right in. Get comfortable in your seats as the lights dim, and the curtain lifts. (*Lights down. Curtain lifts.*)

“He treats objects like women”: People, Props, and Prostitution³⁴

Chair, Locker, and Candelabra

With the opening of *Lydia und Mäxchen* Döblin catapults us directly into the second act of the play within the play, thus, opening this drama in medias res, and introducing us immediately to some of the cast of animate objects: the chair, the locker, and the candelabra. Soon thereafter, that play's director and poet reveal to readers and audience members that the human actors who initially played the roles of Lydia and Mäxchen have fled the theater in fear “als ob der Teufel ihnen auf den Hacken säße,” indicating the deviation from the norm that

³³ Each of the play's three acts consists of twenty, eighteen, and twenty-two scenes respectively, as well as a nine-scene prelude (and thus, of quite substantial length), and a *Zwischenspiel* with three tableaux between acts One and Two.

³⁴ The Dude in *The Big Lebowski* as he complains to the Sheriff of Malibu County about porn producer Jackie Treehorn.

the play (the play within the play) about to unfold will not be performed by human actors playing their parts (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 61).³⁵ As a result, the stage director intends to halt the play, arguing that it cannot resume without its actors (perhaps not an entirely illogical assumption) while the poet strongly believes in his creation. He is convinced that the written words to which he gave birth (“was ich geboren”)³⁶ will come alive, and thus introduces the spiritual element, namely the specter actors into the mix: “Die Geister sind es, (*flüsternd*) die Gespenster, mein fleischgeworden Wort, meine erlösten Gestalten. Sie haben sich herabgefunden, jetzt hab’ ich sie geboren” (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 62).³⁷ Contrary to the poet’s belief that these ghosts resemble his words incarnate, after briefly sticking to the script, they soon begin to improvise, and act independently of the script. (Technically they cannot resemble the poet’s words in the flesh since, as ghosts, they consist of non-corporal matter.) Döblin establishes the discrepancy between the poet’s label for his artistic creation “mein fleischgeworden Wort” and their ethereal existence (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 62).³⁸ The character of the poet, fearful of his creation, and dubious about other

³⁵ Trans.: “as if the devil was after them” (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 61).

³⁶ Trans.: “to which I gave birth” (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 62).

³⁷ Trans.: “It is the ghosts, (*whispering*) the ghosts, my word that has become flesh, my redeemed figures. They have found their way down, now I have given birth to them.” (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 62)

³⁸ Trans.: “my words that turned into flesh” (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 62).

The specter actors add another element of complication to the play since they, too, are played by humans.

elements on stage, such as the props, simultaneously presents himself as a god-like figure: he wrote the fictional characters from his play into being, and they turn into visible versions of his words.³⁹ Similarly to the ambiguous nature of the specter actors, Döblin imbues the figure of the poet with contradictory qualities as well, and therefore, makes him perhaps the most human creation in this play. On the one hand, the poet feels complete confidence in the power of his verbal creation: his plays will be acted out even in the absence of actors. On the other hand, while trusting the spirit world to bring his play to life, he harbors doubts about the objects, and tries to shush them.

While the things, too, are played by actors, they differ from those actors playing the roles of other humans in the play. Although Döblin complicates that category in itself, too, by employing different groups of actors: there are the two human actors intended to play the roles of Lydia and Mäxchen, who flee the scene before the play opens. Then there are the two ghosts who actually play Lydia and Mäxchen's roles. Next, the poet, director, and the fireman – intruders from the outside world – enter the play's stage. Finally, there are the actors who play the objects, such as the chair, candelabra, and the locker, and on a yet more removed level, the hobgoblin, who exits the landscape of the painted picture in which he resides. And even the moon, looking on from outside, turns into a

³⁹ John 1:14

character and plays a small part. In any play actors and props share the physical space of the stage; however, typically their realms are separate. Actors, in moving about and propelling the play's plot through action and speech, act while objects on stage traditionally serve as a backdrop for the play's events.⁴⁰ In their conventional role the objects serve as an integral part of a performance since they aid in setting the tone and establishing a play's atmosphere. In *Lydia und Mäxchen*, however, Döblin equips them with the qualities of mobility, thought, and speech so that the normally immobile props not only create the play's atmosphere, but also move on stage, and interfere with the play's plot. Not unlike the play's human actors Förster and Warnicke, who played Lydia and Mäxchen during the first act prior to the play's actual opening, but left the theater in fear, the things, too, reveal themselves as fickle and volatile (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 61). For instance, in the first scene the chair exclaims: "Wir sind lebendig, von großem Einfluß, und ich glaube, er hilft uns zu unserem

⁴⁰ The *OED* provides the following etymology for the verb "to act": "classical Latin *āct-*, past participial stem of *agere* to drive, to come, go, to cause to move, to push, to set in motion, stir up, to emit, to make, construct, produce, to lead, bring, to drive back or away, to urge, incite, to do, perform, achieve, accomplish, to take action, to do something, to work at, to be busy at, to be busy, to work, to stage (a play), to take a part in (a play), to perform (a part) in a play, to perform (in a play), to play the part of, to behave as, to pretend to be, to strive for, to carry out, execute, discharge, to manage, administer, to celebrate, observe, to spend (time), to experience, enjoy, to live, to proceed, behave, to transact, to discuss, argue, debate, to arrange, agree on, to decree, enact, to press, urge, plead, to deliver (a speech) < the same Indo-European base as ancient Greek *ἄγειν* to lead, bring, drive, Sanskrit *aj-* to drive. Compare earlier *act* n., *enact* v. Most of the main senses of this word have earlier parallels at *act* n.; the noun is likely to have influenced the semantic development of the verb." (*OED Online*, "to act," accessed 10/26/15).

Recht, der Dichter" (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 59).⁴¹ Only a couple of lines later, he recalibrates: "Ich lebe und empöre mich. Rache für mein verschlafenes Leben, Rache an allem Menschlichen," a war cry against everything human—including the poet (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 59).⁴² Ironically, the chair, while seeking access to and engagement with the human world, curses it, and blames it for banning objects to the inanimate realm. Thus, Döblin points to the power of the word yet again, suggesting that the human desire to label, categorize, and therefore, explain every thing bans those things into a realm outside our own. That which we label and position is part of the object world because of our relationship to it. Our acting as subjects places things (and potentially animals and people) into the position of object.

Thinking about the relationship between the signified and the signifier Döblin cleverly realizes this concept in *Lydia und Mäxchen* on stage, allowing the objects to leave their inanimate realm.⁴³ Imbuing props with human characteristics Döblin blurs the lines of arbitrary categorizations: Labels such as "chair," "locker," "candelabra," and "hobgoblin" lose meaning as they no longer reflect their usual characteristics. Thus, Döblin heightens the already integral

⁴¹ Trans.: "We are alive, of big influence, and I believe he will help to our rights, the poet" (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 59).

⁴² Trans.: "I live and revolt. Revenge for my sleepy life, revenge on all of humanity" (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 59).

⁴³ Ferdinand de Saussure, *General Course in Linguistics*.

ambiguity of dramatic performances. In any theater production the word chair mentioned in the stage directions within the drama conjures up the image of a specific chair within each reader's mind, and therefore, different versions of the same chair exist in readers' imaginations. The audience in the theater, however, sees a particular chair on stage, and thus encounters a specific object which most likely does not coincide with the one evoked by their imaginations while reading.

The chair on stage in *Lydia und Mäxchen*, however, not only defies this verbal categorization, but also defies the entire concept of chair as something that typically neither moves nor speaks on its own accord. Döblin's rendering of the chair, however, does exactly that and more. It moves independently, corners the poet, and speaks within the "Dingwelt," but also beyond these boundaries, entering the human realm on multiple occasions:

Tralalala. Es geht los. Die Gespenster kommen. Verzeihen Sie, teure
Gesinnungsgenossen, meinen Freudenausbruch. Aber wenn ein Mann in
meinem Alter so Seltsames und Ergreifendes erlebt, so hat er ein Recht,
zu toben. Welch ein Dichter ist das! Und welch herrlicher Akt droht uns!
Ich verhalte mich völlig als Zuschauer, so objektiv, wie nur möglich. Aber
im entscheidenden Moment werde ich hervortreten, mannhaft
aussprechen. ... Wir stehen hier nicht mehr als Kulissen herum. Was die

Gespenster können, können wir auch. Der Dichter unterschätzt uns. Jetzt ermannt Euch. Einen Kreuzzug auf die Menschen predige ich, auf Dichter und Gespenster und alle. Wüsten wir wie Hunnen umher, wenn der Augenblick gekommen ist; mit Mut und Gebrüll. ... Ich reiße der Lydia die Kleider ab, werde sie kurzer Hand umbringen und schenk' Dir die Lydia als Berlocque. (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 64-5)⁴⁴

While each of the three props reacts differently to their newly discovered role as agents in the world, the chair assumes the most active and rebellious role.

Additionally, the chair and his compatriots not only converse, but also exhibit critical thinking skills. For example, the locker expresses his confusion about his "Beseeltheit," his "soulfulness," having been torn out of the realm of inanimate objects by Döblin's stage directions, and wishes to return to its still stupor:

"Warum ich nur leben soll? Ich komme mir so unwahrscheinlich vor" (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 60). And a little later he adds: "Ich geh zum Dichter und bitte um Pensionierung vom Leben," thus, indicating that the poet holds a lot of

⁴⁴ Trans.: "Tralalala. It begins. The specters are coming. Please excuse, dear like-minded people, my outburst of joy. But when a man my age experiences something so strange and moving, he has the right to rage. What a poet he is! And which marvelous act is threatening us! I will behave completely as spectator, as objective as possible. But in the crucial moment I will step out, speak manly. ... We will no longer stand here as setting. Whatever the specters can do we can do too. The poet underestimates us. Now man up. I preach a crusade against the people, against poets, and specters, and all. Let's ravage like the huns, when the moment comes; with courage and roar. ... I will tear down Lydia's dress, will simply kill her, and give her to you as trinket" (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 64-5).

power—enough to exempt him from life (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 60).⁴⁵ The locker's fearful reaction to his sudden animation also includes fear of other objects: "Ich habe solche Furcht vor allen Sachen. Sie stehen da, als wollten sie springen auf mich" (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 58).⁴⁶ In addition to his concerns about humans he worries about all things. While Döblin categorizes the other things as "totes Gerümpel" – "dead clutter" the chair soon enters into an animated existentialist discussion with the locker and the candelabra (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 58).

The latter, upon her awaking instantly buys into the concept of materialism, and covets Lydia's shoes. The chair, navigating from silent object to engaged actor, takes Lydia's sash from her, and beautifies the candelabra with it,

⁴⁵ To contextualize this passage I am including the chair's lines of this interaction as well.

SPIND: Warum ich nur leben soll? Ich komme mir so unwahrscheinlich vor.

...

STUHL (*ausbrechend*) Und jetzt hörst Du auf zu stören. Ich hasse das Stänkern auf den Tod, Dämlack blödsinniger. Und schließlich – wir sind beseelt und haben uns anständig zu benehmen; besonders Du mit Deinem Marasmus senilis. ... Wir dürfen das nicht dulden. Er zieht das Heiligste in den Staub. Man muß ihm beibringen –

SPIND: Ich geh zum Dichter und bitte um Pensionierung vom Leben. (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 60)

Trans.:

LOCKER: Why should I be alive? I feel so improbable.

...

CHAIR (*errupting*) And now you will stop disturbing. I hate your complaining about death, idiotic jerk. And finally – we have souls and have to behave properly; especially you with your Marasmus seniles. ... We cannot tolerate that. He drags the most sacred into the dust. We have to teach him –

LOCKER: I will go to the poet and request from him my retirement from life. (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 60)

⁴⁶ Trans.: "I am so terrified of all things. They are standing there as if they want to jump on me" (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 58).

who then demands “*(flüsternd)* Gib’ mir mehr von ihr; sie ist so schön” (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 76).⁴⁷ Not phased by her entry into the human world, the candelabra yearns to participate in the material elements of human life: ironically, she desires other things.⁴⁸ As characters abandon the stage, and thus the realm of action the things continuously liberate themselves and exert their influence:

(Der Kandelaber wirft die Glocke schmetternd hinter den Dichter drein; der Stuhl, der schon während der letzten Debatte vergnügt herumgehüpft ist, gibt dem Dichter mit einem leisen Jauchzer einen Stoß ins Gesäß. Die Sachen bewegen sich von hier ab mit immer größerer zuckender Unruhe und Freiheit.)
(Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 76)⁴⁹

As people and characters’ freedoms are increasingly curtailed the things gain more freedom. The three main props start out quietly whispering to each other, but their carefulness morphs into ever increasing noise, and ultimately action while actors flee, the director despairs, and the poet is disillusioned. Using these various elements, existential angst, rebellion and revolution, and materialistic

⁴⁷ Trans.: “*(whispering)* Give me more of her; she is so beautiful” (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 76).

⁴⁸ See Döblin’s text *Das Märchen vom Materialismus*.

⁴⁹ Trans.: “*(The candelabra throws the bell after the poet; the chair, which was jumping around joyfully during the last debate, shoves the poet with a quiet cheer into his derriere. The things are moving from here on out with ever increasing twitching turmoil and freedom.)*” (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 76)

desires Döblin blurs the line of presupposed categories, a practice he extends to the spectator realm as well.

Reluctant to leave the success of his play within the debut drama to chance he even includes an audience in the play. This fictitious audience exhibits a couple of different reactions, on the one hand admitting that the play was “enjoyable,” and on the other providing space for critical remarks, albeit only the space, and not the typical criticism itself: “Alle finden das Stück reizend, bis auf zwei Stellen, nämlich erstens –, zweitens – Schade, daß selbst den schönsten Sachen solche Mängel anhaften –“ (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 80).⁵⁰ Providing a structure for potential criticism but leaving it devoid of content, Döblin satirizes audience members who seek merely entertainment at the theater. Refusing to reflect on the play and its implications, this audience exclusively utters superficial criticism. And even in these closing lines, Döblin refers to the things (including the most beautiful ones) and to their flawed nature. We can interpret this in a couple of ways: first, this might reference the things inhabiting the play—the chair, the locker, and the candelabra—since they are flawed in their humanness and don’t “behave” as expected. Second, it could refer to the play itself: it is both beautiful but flawed as it cannot transcend its own realm.

⁵⁰ Trans.: “Everyone considers the piece charming, except for two parts, namely first –, second – Too bad that even the most beautiful things have such flaws” (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 80).

Demeter's Dagger

Döblin reverses the role props play between his first and second plays. While props in *Lydia und Mäxchen* function as animated, enlivened objects, who abandon their immobility and participate in life, the props in *Comteß Mizzi* remain lifeless and inanimate. Instead, here characters assume prop-like qualities. Döblin chooses a prop—the Demeter statue—to play the central role in *Comteß Mizzi*, and presents the title character as an object, dominated by lovers, authorities, and her father. Döblin introduces a couple of props, the statue of Demeter and the dagger, in the initial stage directions: “Links vom Zuschauer vorne die überlebensgroße Statue der Demeter; vor dem Sockel auf einem sehr schmalen Piedestal ein goldgefaßtes Glaskästchen; darin auf rotem Samt ein Dolch” (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 81).⁵¹ As the most pivotal prop in *Comteß Mizzi* the Demeter statue permeates the entire play, referenced in stage directions, character conversations, and providing the weapon for the play’s dramatic conclusion. In front of the statue Döblin places a glass box containing the dagger, which Mizzi later uses to commit suicide. While the hobgoblin in *Lydia und Mäxchen* steps out of his painting with a dagger to kill the poet’s creation, the statue of Demeter silently offers Mizzi the dagger silently.

⁵¹ Trans.: “Up front, to the left of the audience is the larger than life statue of Demeter; in front of the base is a very narrow pedestal on top of which is a glass box with a gold border; in it on red velvet a dagger” (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 81).

The German word “überlebensgroß” carries multiple meanings: it implies “larger than life,” and its first part, “überleben,” also contains the notion of “surviving.”

From the beginning characters emphasize Demeter's central position. For instance, Erna advises Clarisse in the opening scene: "Stoß nicht gegen den Kerl. Wie heißt der Teufel eigentlich?," and explains: "Demeter. ... Wir beten zu ihr, wir opfern ihr. – Und du bist heute dran" (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 82).⁵² And later, once Wilhelm explains the role of the sacred daughters, he asks: "Wer könnte leben ohne sie? Wer wünschte nicht eines Abends mit einer von ihnen zu sterben? zu verbrennen? Tuen manche. Ihre Namen lernt jeder kennen, den der Graf aufnimmt; und den Demeter, die Kybele, bindet"⁵³ (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 87).⁵⁴ Wilhelm thus indicates that Demeter binds the sacred daughters in her cult. Neustätter, too, mentions the statue and the dagger, with which Mizzi commits suicide, and which Siddi potentially used to kill herself: "Man erzählt sich, daß er [der Graf] jeden Mittag zwischen 11 und 12 Uhr, Tag um Tag, sich fremdländisch vermummt, lange vor dieser Bildsäule sitzt, über dem Dolch hier in dem

⁵² Trans.: "Don't bump against that guy. What is that devil's name?" Clarisse explains: "Demeter. ... We pray to her, we make sacrifices for her. – And today it is your turn" (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 82).

⁵³ In the twelfth scene, Döblin introduces additional elements of Demeter's veneration. For example, a character labeled as "EINER MIT STIERMASKE" enters, and, bearing a "zappelnde Dirne," exclaims: "Der Göttin zu Ehren bring ich ein Opfer" (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 106).

⁵⁴ Trans.: "Who could live without them? Who doesn't wish to die with one of them one evening? to burn? Some do. The names of everyone the count takes and whom Demeter, the Cybele binds, are known" (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 87).

Glaskästchen brütet" (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 89).⁵⁵ In his daily reflections by the Demeter statue the count might ponder his guilt for Siddi's death.⁵⁶

Demeter's role culminates when Mizzi places the statue in the center of her own expression of agony:

MIZZI (*hängt mit dem Blick an der Bildsäule.*): Das ist eigentlich gleich zu wem man betet.⁵⁷ Weiß ich sie nur mütterlich. (*Dicht vor der Säule, abgehackt, vom Flüstern bis zum Schrei am Schluß*) Wenn Gewalt in dir ist, du Göttin, mach mich frei. Wenn Gewalt in dir ist, Göttin, zeig mir den Weg, zeig mir einen Weg, welchen du willst. Steh mir bei. Ich opfere dir, was du von mir willst, willst du mein Gold, willst du D[i]amanten von mir, willst du mein Haar, meine Finger, meine Hände. Ich will morgens und abends, – morgens und abends und mittags will ich vor dir knieen, an den Straßenecken und Plätzen für dich betteln, mich jedem Betrunknen hingeben, in den Dorfkneipen dein Lob singen, die mir geholfen hat, wo die frommen Bilder stumm geblieben, und nur Glas und

⁵⁵ Trans.: "The talk is that he [the count] dresses up in foreign garbs each day between 11 and 12 o'clock, sits for a long time in front of the statue, and ponders over the dagger in this glass case here" (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 89).

⁵⁶ In *Die geweihten Töchter* the count recognizes that his lust lead Mizzi's mother to commit suicide, and he wishes to repent. Consequently, he establishes the sacred daughters, so that the entire establishment is founded on his feelings of guilt, regret, and his desire to atone (himself).

⁵⁷ This passage may be an indicator of Döblin's own doubts about religion. While his biggest religious expression was certainly his conversion from Judaism to Christianity, he also dabbled in other religions.

Farbe waren.⁵⁸ Du kannst den Stein aufhalten; er rollt immer näher, denn ich hab mich versündigt und muss zu Grunde gehen.⁵⁹ Und wenn du mir nicht hilfst, so muß ich dich zerbrechen, dich erschlagen und zermalmen, wenn du nur lebstest, du Maske, du weiße tote Heuchlerin. –.⁶⁰ (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 91)⁶¹

Beginning her monologue denouncing religious traditions she expresses her belief that it is irrelevant to whom one prays, and instead, emphasizes Demeter's

⁵⁸ The words "glass" and "colors" are reminiscent of stain-glass windows, and hence churches, and imply that for Mizzi Demeter has more to offer than the average church.

⁵⁹ In retrospect, Mizzi considers the betrayal of her father as a sin, and believes her fall is unavoidable. Her phrase "zu Grunde gehen" also aligns with the image of entering the underworld. Like Persephone who had to remain in the underworld once she ate pomegranate seeds, both characters are part of something that cannot be undone.

⁶⁰ The word "mask" implies a tool to hide one's face/expression, and is also used in theater performances. While actors require masks (in the broadest sense: actual masks, but also make-up) to portray a character that does not coincide with themselves, people also mask their faces with facial expressions to not reveal their true emotions. Here, Demeter, as marble statue, wears a mask of white cold stone, and thus, indicates her lifelessness.

⁶¹ Trans.: MIZZI (*hangs with her gaze on the statue.*): It actually doesn't matter to whom one prays. I only know her motherly. (*Closely in front of the statue, staccato, starting in a whisper and increasing to a scream at the end*) If there is force in you, you goddess, free me. If there is force in you, goddess, show me the way, show me whichever way you want. Stand by me. I will sacrifice for you what you want, do you want gold, do you want diamonds from me, do you want my hair, my fingers, my hands. I will in the morning and in the evening, – mornings and evenings and middays I want to kneel before you at street corners and squares and beg for you, give myself to every drunk, sing your praise in the taverns, you who helped me, when the pious pictures remained silent, and were only glass and color. You can stop the stone; it rolls closer and closer because I have sinned and have to go down. And if you won't help be I will have to break you, beat you and crush you, if you only were alive, you mask, you white dead fraud, –. (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 91)"

motherly qualities.⁶² Ironically, her insight then turns into a prayer, in which Mizzi beseeches Demeter to show her the way if her power as goddess is real, a deal for which she would willingly sacrifice not only possessions, but also her body in parts and in whole, offering to prostitute herself for the goddess. Mizzi, hoping for Demeter's help, complains that the "sacred pictures" remain lifeless stain and glass. While the statue, too, consists of inanimate material, Mizzi somehow bestows her hope on the goddess initially, believing that Demeter can help her by stopping the rolling rock about to crush her; however, her plea transforms into a threat: Should Demeter fail to help her, Mizzi vows to break that "white, dead hypocrite." That Mizzi's only place for hope and salvation is such a lifeless object demonstrates the extent of her despair. In the world of the living Mizzi is required to uphold her mask, and she cannot express her real feelings. Unable to approach her selfish father, who harbors a sexual interest in

⁶² Here is a little more information on Demeter's significance: Demeter, as goddess of the grain, agriculture, life, and earth serves as cornerstone in *Comteß Mizzi*. With his naming of Mizzi's mother as Siddi Döblin reminds his readers of another label for Demeter: Sito, meaning "she of the grains" (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 101). Döblin's film scripts *Siddi* and *Die geweihten Töchter* function as continuations of this play. Mizzi's mother Siddi has been killed by the count, Mizzi's father, directly or indirectly. While the count did not personally drive the dagger into her throat (if we trust Döblin's 1920 film script *Die geweihten Töchter*), he drove her to commit suicide once she gave birth to Mizzi, the result of the count's rape of Siddi. Demeter, as keeper of the dagger and mother figure herself, points to Mizzi as potential candidate for Persephone, goddess of the underworld of the count's (Hades?) high-end brothel; however, here the roles may be reversed: Mizzi's mother is not looking for Mizzi, but Mizzi seeks Demeter's help and advice, while her father the count fulfills the role of Hades, who – spellbound by her beauty – longs to keep Mizzi to himself. Perhaps death reunites Mizzi and her mother, and allows Mizzi to escape her father's oppressive "underworld." In *Die geweihten Töchter* the count and Mizzi's mother are reunited in death, consumed in flames. Thus, Demeter assumes a central role as provider of the dagger, a role that stands entirely opposite to her role as life-giver since here she serves as death-bringer.

her, Mizzi finds herself to be somewhat fatherless, considering the typical paternal role as one that offers safety and protection instead of betrayal and exploitation. Motherless—her biological mother being dead—she turns to Demeter, hoping to find in her a mother substitute. Receiving neither help from her father nor from Demeter Mizzi is left to her own devices.

Mizzi receives coldness and hardness from both potential mother and father figures: the bringer-of-life goddess Demeter is hard and cold as stone, and the count lusts after her and prostitutes her. Preventing Mizzi from establishing a bond with another man he dooms her to serve as prostitute, and expects her to remain unattached and untouched, an idea to which we will return later.⁶³

Demeter occurs throughout the entire play. For instance, in the short eighth and ninth scenes the stage directions mention Demeter when “a black figure” emerges from behind the statue, and the count slowly paces towards Demeter.

Peter and other characters sing to Demeter in scene twelve. The focus on

Demeter culminates in the thirteenth scene in which Mizzi takes the dagger from the box located in front of Demeter and commits suicide. While the main thing,

⁶³ Ironically, it is exactly this detachment—provided we trust Döblin’s later script of *Die geweihten Töchter* as an additional source—that is the root cause underlying the count’s business idea. Mizzi’s mother, Siddi was not interested in the count: “Aber so oft ich zu ihr kam, geschah dasselbe. Sie blühte nur so abgewandt,” implying the count’s belief that Siddi concealed her true emotions towards him (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 101).

Trans.: “But as often as I sought her, the same thing happened. She blossomed only turned away” (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 101).

In that case, however, Siddi’s averted blossoming could have also been the count’s misinterpretation of the situation since Siddi was indeed unsuccessfully trying to prevent a sexual encounter between her and the count.

the Demeter statue which propels the play's action and resolves Mizzi's conflict, remains lifeless, its title character is objectified and dominated continuously from the play's beginning.

Prior to Mizzi's appearance on stage Döblin presents her as an adorable object, and, by way of character description and discussion among other characters, establishes an image within readers' and audience members' minds that equals that of every man's dream: Mizzi—the most refined, most beautiful, most wistful of the sacred daughters—captures the male imagination, and captivates male characters such as her father, Neustätter, Peter, Xaver, and even Excellency. While Döblin plants the seed of Mizzi's beauty in his readers' and audience members' minds from the play's outset, he withholds Mizzi's entrance until the sixth scene. Upon her initial appearance on stage, and upon receiving a reminder of her purpose from Clarisse, Mizzi immediately confronts us with her view of herself as an aesthetically pleasing object: "Ich bin nur schön. An meinem Körper ist nichts, was nicht jedem, Mann oder Weib, schön und begehrenswert

erschiene" (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 92-3).⁶⁴ Her beauty is her purpose, and in her mind her beauty serves as visual evidence of, and, thus, directly links to her piety and graciousness: "Und so ist meine Seele fromm und gut" (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 93). Mizzi's body, however, also, carries a blemish, a "Brandzeichen," perhaps an indication that even the most beautiful things have flaws, a sentiment Döblin

⁶⁴ Here is the context surrounding Mizzi's quotation:

FRÄULEIN: Nicht wahr doch, wir stillen Bürgersleute, die ihrem bischen [*sic*] Beruf Jahr um Jahr nachgehen, und ohne Leben und ohne Aufgabe sind, – das müßte schon ein rechtes Feuerlein sein, das uns heiß machen wollte.

CLARISSE: Aufgabe, Leben, Mizzi. Unsere Aufgabe – .

MIZZI (*die versunken mit dem Gesicht in den Zuschauerraum gesessen hat, still*): Unsere Aufgabe. Ich bin nur schön. An meinem Körper ist nichts, was nicht jedem, Mann oder Weib, schön und begehrenswert erschiene. Und so ist meine Seele fromm und gut. (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 92-3)

Trans.:

FRÄULEIN: Yes, indeed, us quiet bourgeoisie who go about our small occupation year after year and who are without life and without purpose, – that would have to be quite the fire to make us hot.

CLARISSE: Purpose, life, Mizzi. Our purpose – .

MIZZI (*who has been sitting lost in thought facing the audience*): Our purpose. I am only beautiful. On my body there is nothing that would not appear beautiful and desirable to every man and woman. And thus my soul is pious and good. (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 92-3)

The Fräulein, in comparing her life to those of the sacred daughters, and believing she has no life or purpose, introduces the idea of a fire that could ignite her and the likes of her (McLuhan?). Furthermore, Clarisse's exclamation equates the words "purpose" and "life." And Mizzi lists them as if they hold equal values. Thus, Mizzi can be equated with purpose and life, an equation that might work, considering that she is the provider of exactly those two things—purpose and life—for her customers. Döblin's word choice of "erschiene"—"would appear" is interesting since it presents us with the ambiguity of Mizzi's beauty since she uses the word in its subjunctive, not its indicative form.

expresses at the conclusion of his debut play.⁶⁵ Her beauty—perhaps that which a good piece of art or a play encapsulates—distracts those who summon her from within their sad realities: “Sie kommen zu mir, so verkümmert, so jämmerlich wie eine Drossel im Regen. Und wie sie die Köpfe heben, wenn ich sie nur eine halbe Stunde gebadet habe. Wie sie sich unter meinen Händen strecken, zittern und aufschauern. Wieder Mut zu sich bekommen” (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 93).⁶⁶ Here, Mizzi explains her role, her “Aufgabe,” as sacred daughter: Taught to disregard her own emotions, and to suspend her wishes, she is to improve the

⁶⁵ Mizzi is adorned with a blemish on her body, underneath her breast, a mark that receives mention twice throughout the play. Once, Peter explains: “... wir entdeckten das Brandmal unter der linken Brust – . Und die Entdeckung dieses – Tages schien mir wichtiger als die Americas durch Kolumbus 1[493] (*nachdenklich*)” (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 94).

Trans: “... we discovered the birthmark below the left breast – . Und this discovery of this – day appears to me more important than that of America through Columbus 1[493] (*thoughtfully*)” (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 94).

Thus, Peter measures such a physical discovery as more important than geographical ones, as the marker for discovering love and lust. Towards the end of the play, as Mizzi utters her last lines, the birthmark resurfaces: “Nichts sehen, nichts hören! Weg! (*sucht im Zimmer*) Kein Revolver, kein Revolver. Der Dolch (*zerschlägt den Kasten, hört Schritte*) Oh nicht so bald. – Ich will nicht, – ich mag noch nicht. – Hier durch das Brandzeichen hindurch,” and, thus, references her blemish (perhaps an indication of the imperfection of beauty?) as well (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 109-10).

Trans.: “See nothing, hear nothing! Away! (*searches in the room*) No revolver, no revolver. The dagger (*breaks the case, hears steps*) Oh not so soon. – I don’t want to, – I don’t want to yet. – Here through the birthmark” (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 109-10).

⁶⁶ Trans.: “They come to me so withered, so pitiful like a thrush in the rain. And how they lift their heads once I have bathed them for half an hour. How they stretch underneath my hands, shivering and shuddering. Regaining courage for themselves” (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 93).

conditions of those who seek her services – at least temporarily.⁶⁷ They come to her withered and hopeless, and leave stretched and encouraged. Their sexual potency translates into their newly gained optimism. It is her job to rejuvenate those impoverished souls who have lost touch with life’s pleasures. Mizzi, representing artistic perfection, conjures feelings that lay dormant in these men. As a consequence her clients are re-encouraged while Mizzi—supposedly untouched—returns home to await her next client.

But, can Mizzi represent perfected, flawless beauty? After all, Döblin also equips her with a blemish, a “Brandmal,” and perhaps this is, not unlike in Hawthorne’s *The Birthmark*, an indication of the imperfection of that which is alive and constantly evolving.⁶⁸ Art, and Mizzi as representation thereof, cannot be entirely flawless if we expect it to have a bearing on life. Given that Mizzi’s blemish receives mention only twice throughout the drama—in Peter’s mention of its discovery, and in Mizzi’s suicide—it is perhaps only apparent to those who

⁶⁷ The previous part of Mizzi’s explanation of her duty as sacred daughter reads: “Setz dich hierher, mein Dichterlein. Komm, du hast doch noch nicht getrunken? – Wenn ich einen fremden Menschen an den Händen halte, dünk ich mich bald wie ein Brunnenbauer. Ehe man auf Grundwasser kommt, nein viel Schlamm, Sand und Gips, – Steine, die sich kaum mit Dynamit sprengen lassen. Sie kommen zu mir ...” (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 93).

Trans.:

“Sit down here, my little poet. Komm, you have not been drinking yet, have you? – When I am holding a stranger by the hands, I feel like a well builder. Before reaching groundwater there’s a lot of mud, sand and plaster, – rocks that can hardly be blasted with dynamite. They are coming to me ...” (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 93).

She invites Peter to “drink” of her (as a spring of life – Christ-like), to have her rejuvenate him, and explains her hard task she has to perform for her customers. Before she can reach their inner workings she has to dig through material (including materials that one might use for sculpting).

⁶⁸ Trans.: Literally, the compound noun “Brandmal” translates into “burn mark.”

know her beyond superficiality (Peter and Mizzi), and remains hidden to her clients, who, even if repeatedly, only seek her services temporarily. Her clients may be oblivious to her flaws, one of which her birthmark represents, because they see in Mizzi only that which they want to see, her superficial perfection. Those who consume her as an illusion of perfection, remain blind to her true meaning, and thus, also to the true meaning of art.⁶⁹

While the sacred daughters receive the worst of the deal, the recipients of their art blossom since Mizzi's art inspires its consumers—at least temporarily. As Mizzi describes, under her touch the men become courageous again. In response to a man's comment that those she pleasures leave her disappointedly, Mizzi replies:

Höhen Sie nicht! Das ist der Fluch, der auf Ihnen allen liegt und sie ekel macht. Sie sitzen in den Kirchen, sie beten zu einem Gott, an den sie nicht glauben. Mit aller Macht zwingt Ihr Eure Herzen zu ihm, der Euch helfen soll, weil Ihr hoffnungslos und schal seid. Resurge me, resurge me! Steh mir bei! Warum seid Ihr geängstigt, was läßt Euch keine Ruhe? Weil Ihr die Türen in Euren Seelen geöffnet habt, der Pfuhl ist da, hinein mit dem Lebendigen, Zuckenden. Und nun gibt es keine Ruhe. Es will wieder herauf, und bohrt und drängt, Euer Heimliches, unser Heißes und

⁶⁹ Henry James' *The Real Thing* comes to mind, and the comment about the real thing and the perfect being so much less desirable than that which has flaws.

Glückloses, das Euch sündig macht und das Ihr in Euren Zimmern
 versteckt, als ob es eine Mißgeburt wäre. Resurge me! Wie es ruft! Das
 schmutzige Gesicht hebt! Und auf Eure Verwandlung wartet! Auf Eure
 rettenden vereinigenden Hände! Auf Eure Wiedervereinigung mit ihm.

(Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 93-4)^{70 71}

⁷⁰ Trans.: “Don’t scoff at that! That is the curse that lies on all of them and makes them disgusting. They sit in the churches, they pray to a god in whom they don’t believe. With all your power you force your hearts to him who is supposed to help you because you are hopeless and stale. Resurge me, resurge me! Stand by me! Why are you afraid, what is it that doesn’t allow you to be in peace? Because you have opened the doors in your souls, the murky pool is there, throw everything into it that is alive and twitching. And now it does not leave you in peace. It wants to emerge again, it persists and urges, your secret our hotness and lucklessness, that which makes you sin and which you hide in your rooms, as if it was a monstrosity (literally a “miscarriage”). Resurge me! How it calls out! Lifts its dirty face! And waits for your metamorphosis! For your rescuing uniting hands! For your reunification with him” (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 93-4). Interestingly, Döblin chose to express the sentiment of rising from the dead/rebirth her clients intimate to her in English when Mizzi relates their requests to her. Looking at the meaning of the word “resurge” I came across the following definitions: “to get up again ... to become active again, revive, in post-classical Latin also to rise again (from the dead) (Vetus Latina)” (“resurge” *OED Online*). Any of these define Mizzi’s task to make her clients feel alive and of use again.

⁷¹ Döblin’s word choices of “Pfuhl” and “Zuckenden” in the above quotation remind me of two crucial sections—one in Part I and the other in Part II—of Goethe’s *Faust*. Faust’s opening monologue in *Faust I* contains the verb “zucken:” “Welch Schauspiel! Aber ach! ein Schauspiel nur! / Wo fass ich dich, unendliche Natur? / Euch Brüste, wo? Ihr Quellen alles Lebens, / An denen Himmel und Erde hängt, / Dahin die welke Brust sich drängt – / Ihr quellt, ihr tränkt, und schmacht ich so vergebens? ... Es dampft! Es zucken rote Strahlen / Mir um das Haupt – Es weht / Ein Schauer vom Gewölb herab / Und faßt mich an! / Ich fühl’s, du schwebst um mich, erflehter Geist / Enthülle dich! / Ha! wie’s in meinem Herzen reißt! / Zu neuen Gefühlen / All meine Sinnen sich erwählen! / Ich fühle ganz mein Herz dir hingegeben! / Du mußt! du mußt! und kostet es mein Leben!” (Goethe 454-82).

His closing monologue in *Faust II* contains the word “Pfuhl:” “Ein Sumpf zieht am Gebirge hin, / Verpestet alles schon Errungne; / Den faulen Pfuhl auch abzuziehn, / Das Letzte wär’ das Höchsterrungne” (Goethe 11559-62). The Pfuhl here poisons all that has already been accomplished, a concept that Döblin employs similarly in his play since Mizzi criticizes her clients for allowing themselves to give in to their dark desires. Döblin’s word choices refer to those that bookmark Goethe’s *Faust*, using words that occur in Faust’s initial and final monologues on stage. The final lines of his opening dialogue mirror the feeling Mizzi ascribes to her clients. They are the ones whose hearts feel tugged by Mizzi’s art, and who feel rejuvenated and encouraged.

Addressing several elements of human helplessness and selfishness in her speech, Mizzi uncovers men's unfaithfulness and faithlessness. She claims that her clients attend churches without believing; however, after experiencing the art of the sacred daughters they discover the religion of love (or so they believe). In their sexual enterprises with the sacred daughters, the men feel as if they merged with these selfless life-givers. While her clients draw on Mizzi to restore their own energy and happiness, Mizzi reveals that their illusions rest on her unhappiness. In addition to her address to Demeter, this reply represents the second instance in which Mizzi removes her mask and provides insights into her mind. She expresses her disgust with her clients who seek reprieve from their sins in churches, but willingly return to Mizzi and sin again. To be used for their purposes by many men is Mizzi's fate, a fate worse than she could expect from a marriage to one man. Therefore, the count's project may present men with additional options, but leaves those catering to their wishes—the sacred daughters—unfulfilled, unhappy, and dependent, and renders them as useable objects.

Screens and Silence

In his final play *Die Ehe* Döblin does both, he treats the objectification of women, and emphasizes the usefulness of objects to regulate human interactions.

The prelude includes a discussion about superficial elements of beauty that may render a woman an object, and objects that help obscure the nature of marital relationships. In his longest play, Döblin draws on a more conventional arrangement, presenting marriages in each of the play's three main parts that feature the woman as the disadvantaged partner. While Döblin depicts three different kinds of marriage and family scenarios in the play's three main scenes he adds yet another dimension in the prelude which provides insights into the marriage of the poet and his wife. In addition to offering another couple's take on marriage, the poet in the prelude conceives of a play, which is not *Die Ehe*, but which also deals with marriage and its problems. (Each of the three Döblin plays discussed here contains a play within the play that elucidates both, the play's subject matter and the state of the theater and dramatic performances.) Content-wise this play within the play represents an anti-version to Döblin's play. Instead of treating social injustices, the play within the play depicts a love triangle between one man and two women. Instead of existential problems such as a lack of money or work the play grapples with love and its inconsistencies, and how the three characters navigate these. Unlike *Die Ehe*, this play is almost devoid of a critical dimension except for textual interspersions, the real-life content of which juxtaposes the superficial love story.

As the poet and his wife discuss the play's content, its (as well as their) superficiality is revealed. The author provides a plot summary: the girlfriend of a married woman moves in with the couple and starts an affair with the husband. The wife catches the two of them red-handed upon which the husband and girlfriend move out. Next, another woman disturbs this relationship, causing the husband to move in with her. The author explains this blow of fate: "Und sie ziehen hinaus, die Freundin entsagt, und nun enthüllt sich der Hauptgedanke. Jene Schwarze, die den Mann der Freundin geraubt hat, ist — Paula, niemand anders, seine Frau, die sich verkleidet hat, der Mann erkennt sie nicht" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 229).⁷² The author resumes with a moving recognition scene. His wife, however, poses the following question: "Wenn — aber Robert wieder eine blonde will?" to which the author inquires: "Du weißt es nicht?," and his wife replies "Sie färbt sich die Haare?" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 230).⁷³ This dialogue produces the magical final word of the play:

DICHTER: Das Schicksal hat seine Grenze am Menschen! Das heimliche
Schlußwort des Stückes heißt —

FRAU: Wasserstoffsperoxyd.

⁷² Trans.: "And they move out, the girlfriend forsakes, and now the main thought is revealed. That black one, who took away the man of the girlfriend, is — Paula, no one else than his wife who dressed up, her husband doesn't recognize her" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 229).

⁷³ Trans.: "But what if Robert wants a blonde one again? ... You don't know? ... Will she color her hair?" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 230).

DICHTER: Ja. (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 230)⁷⁴

With this final word “Wasserstoffsperoxyd” Döblin foreshadows the end of the entire play since the play within the play and *Die Ehe* itself share the resolution to marital problems. Both suggest objects to overcome marital difficulties. While the play within the play suggests “Wasserstoffsperoxyd,” in the actual play’s ultimate scene Georg and Lucie solve their problems with another consumable item—“Wandschirm[e]” and “Verschwiegenheit” (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 312). Rather than valuing interpersonal qualities and communication Lucie and Georg rely on things and the absence of communication to help them navigate their marriage. The screen is to shield and protect the couple’s privacy, while discreteness and silence create the secretive circumstances in which they can maintain their extramarital affairs. Continuing his trend of employing objects to propel the action also in his final play Döblin portrays characters which function as objects. In addition to the women presented in each of the three acts who fail to gain control over their circumstances, Döblin also portrays a man who fulfills a specific function, and who has to produce for others: the poet in the prelude. Adding to the disadvantaged cast of characters in this play Döblin includes a

⁷⁴ Trans.:

DICHTER: Fate reaches its boundaries with people! The secret final word of the play is —

FRAU: Hydrogen peroxide.

DICHTER: Yes. (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 230)

The poet expresses his belief that fate cannot fully operate in the human realm because people find a way around it—a deep philosophical query, which he exemplifies using the superficial issue of synthetic hair color.

word smith, and returns to his initial concern voiced in his debut play. The author or poet who appears to be a powerful man is also used as a tool himself.

For instance, protected from the outside world and sheltered in a creative sanctum, the prelude's poet has no concept of the world outside his confines, and as a result fails to connect with members of the actual working world. His wife shelters him, treating him like something precious that needs to be locked up:

Ich habe das Glück, die Frau dieses einzigartigen Mannes zu sein. Ich habe nicht nur wie andere Frauen für seine äußere Ordnung zu sorgen, für seine Kleidung, seine Wäsche, seine Korrespondenz, – ich habe vor allem die Ruhe und Abgeschlossenheit zu schaffen, deren diese zarte Seele bedarf. Obwohl sein Ruhm nicht unbestritten ist, weiß ich, wer er ist und was wir ihm alle schulden. Hier liegen Teppiche, damit ihn kein Schritt stört. Die Türen unserer Zimmer sind gepolstert. Hierher langt kein Telefon, ich halte die Zeitungen von ihm fern. (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 227-8)⁷⁵

While her concern for her husband explains his "Weltfremdheit," we can also interpret it as her reduction of him to the one purpose he serves: to create text and be famous. In order to fulfill this role, the poet overlooks criticisms he

⁷⁵ Trans.: "I am so lucky to be wife of this extraordinary man. I don't only have to provide his exterior order like other women, his clothes, his washing, his correspondence, – above all things I have to provide quiet and seclusion which this tender soul requires. Although his fame is undisputed, I know who he is and what we all owe him. Here are rugs so that no steps disturbs him. The doors of our rooms are padded. No phone reaches here, and I am keeping the newspapers away from him" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 227-8).

receives, and convinces himself of his grandeur. For instance, as two workers are cleaning up the stage, the following conversation ensues:

DICHTER: Ich bin der Dichter dieses Stücks. Es war ein ungeheures Erlebnis.

ARBEITER: Wat ungeheures Erlebnis. (*Drängeln ihn weg.*)

DICHTER: Ich habe den Menschen ihre Seele gezeigt, mein Stück ist ein Kunstwerk, das verstehen Sie nicht.

ARBEITER: Wolln wir auch nicht, können keine Kunstwerke brauchen, im Krieg gibts keine Kunstwerke.

DICHTER: Wo ist Krieg, es ist Frieden.

ARBEITER: Sagen Sie, Wer im Fett sitzt, sagt Frieden. Ist nicht Frieden.

Und weil Sie det nicht wissen, Herr, sage ich Ihnen, hier weg! Bühne frei.

(*Trommelwirbel.*) (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 235)⁷⁶

This interaction between author and workers displays the poet's ignorance.

Invigorated by the performance of his play, he believes to have shown audience members their souls while simultaneously asserting that the workers have no

⁷⁶ Trans.:

DICHTER: I am the poet of this piece. It was an extraordinary experience.

ARBEITER: What tremendous sensation. (*Pushing him away.*)

DICHTER: I showed the people their soul, my piece is a piece of art, you don't understand that.

ARBEITER: And we don't want to either, there's no use for art pieces, in war there are no pieces of art.

DICHTER: Where is war, it is peace.

ARBEITER: That's what you say, those who sit in gravy say it's peace. It is not peace. And because you don't know that, mister, I'll tell you get out! Clear the stage. (*drum roll.*) (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 235)

understanding for his artistic creation. But who then are the people, whose souls he believes to have revealed? They are certainly not the fictitious audience members retrieving their coats. Even those designated as audience members neither seek deeper meaning nor find a glimpse of their souls in the play. The workers defy the poet's artistic creation, arguing that there is no space for art in times of war, a concept which the poet, in turn, denies. He argues that it is peacetime, and the workers criticize him as someone who lacks nothing, and thus, believes to live in peace, oblivious to the struggles of others. The workers call for art that is practical and useful.

When the performance of this prelude play closes the author and his wife survey the result, and are pleased with the fire department's pipe installation to gather the audience's tears. A couple of workers comment on the practical usefulness of such a play, arguing that it could cause a desert to become fertile. While the author, high on his success, cannot stop praising his play, his wife intends to put him back into his "cell" (with padded doors): "'Komm, du mußt nach Hause, in dein Heim, schone dich.' ... Text: Der Dichter soll wieder eingemottet werden" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 232).⁷⁷ The wife intends to place the author

⁷⁷ Trans.: "'Come, you have to go home, into your home, Rest yourself.' ... Text: The poet is supposed to get mothballed again" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 232). While this translation reads "home" twice Döblin's use of "nach Hause" and "Heim" holds various meanings. While "Heim" can be used synonymously with "Haus" it can also imply the notion of an asylum, a meaning that can apply to this situation as well since Döblin's description of the poet's location within the house, and how she takes care of him is reminiscent of an asylum in which he might be locked away behind padded doors.

back into his space, to “mothball” him, and to release him only for the next public occasion. The author repeatedly mutters about “das ungeheure Erlebnis,” and Döblin juxtaposes the author’s overwhelming awe for his play with the reality in the theater: the audience is unimpressed, and the workers cannot look beyond the one practical use of the play. Döblin intersperses social criticism in text form between each scene, creating an opposition to the artistic concerns. The poet himself fails to understand the worries of the majority of people, and writes for “die feinen Leute” (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 227).

Not only the poet in the prelude, but also the protagonists of the three main acts suffer from a lack of empathy. Instead of offering support and understanding surrounding characters turn away from them, leaving them alone, and to their own devices. Döblin points to the dehumanizing elements of an economic system in which matters are only regulated half-way. For instance, the young woman in the first scene jumps through all of society’s hoops, and marries a man; however, her pregnancy, and her husband’s sudden unemployment upend her world. Without income, she cannot afford to have the baby. Those surrounding her offer flippant advice: her mother warns her to wait with having a baby (a warning that comes too late), while her husband turns away from her, telling her that a baby is her problem alone. Instead of helping his wife solve the issue of the unplanned pregnancy he—as his mother-in-law predicts—boozes

and philanders. Next, the young woman seeks professional help, an attempt that backfires as well, as the doctor neither advises her on such crucial matters as work or living arrangements, nor aborts the child. The doctor hides behind the law that dictates abortions to be illegal, and thus, excuses himself from helping a patient in need. The same law, however, presents no obstacle to the capitalist pharmacist, who scrupulously supplies the young woman with an expensive powder which he claims would remedy her problem, but which results in nothing. Since her request for an abortion is illegal the young woman remains powerless without any right to complain. Seeking help at a charitable institution, all she receives are accusations and misunderstandings. The charitable female worker accuses her of her frivolity and pleasure driven lifestyle and her refusal to assume responsibility. Unable to procure support or a professionally performed abortion (in an attempt to save herself, her husband and her child, and spare them financial hardship) the young woman finally dies at the hand of the female quack. The young woman loses her life because of judgmental inhumane economic and societal structures. And while her husband refused to help his wife initially, he laments her death retrospectively.

In the second scene, Döblin portrays a capitalistic and religious system in which neither men nor women can succeed without the necessary means. For instance, a poor family rich only in children abides by the religious system that

treats birth control punitively. In addition to religion, the state, too, supports the idea of having many children, without offering tangible assistance to families. Here, the mother repeatedly laments the fact that women are supposed to have children, but don't receive adequate support for them since the few governmental measures available don't provide sufficient help. For instance, the family receives a so-called "Dringlichkeitsschein" to expedite their search for living quarters, but nothing else happens (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 262). The government does not enforce its own measure, and available apartments go to those with the means to pay, a theme which permeates *Die Ehe*.

Opportunism abounds, and laws allow for opportunists to hide behind them, leaving no one personally responsible for his actions.⁷⁸ Money is the all-governing law, and objects hold power over characters while characters are objectified and powerless. Those on the dark side of the law, find themselves struggling to adapt to this golden calf. Up to this point in the play Döblin appears to portray a clear winner in this situation: the rich seem to enjoy life's and law's advantages, while the poor lack opportunities to escape their abysmal circumstances. And, while those struggling do indeed people the first two scenes, the third scene portrays representatives that appear to have adjusted well to the

⁷⁸ For example, Wirt in scene two expresses that he does not need to be a good person, and the Dame is offended, interpreting the woman's decline of the extended but misplaced help as impolite: "diese Leute haben kein Verständnis für unser Mitleid" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 270). Already in the "Vorspiel," the critic primarily worries about his earnings, instead of thinking about the play's review.

modern system, and use it to their advantages. But the well-to-do also pay a price, and transform from human into automaton.⁷⁹ The prime example of this is the business man Unternehmer who, aware of his dehumanization, repeats: “Man wage nicht, mich zu photographieren; wer meine Photographie will, nehme meine Werke auf. Man frage nicht nach meinem Lebenslauf, meine Zahlen — die Daten meiner Patente, die Krisen, die Rückschläge. Mehr bin ich nicht” (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 283).⁸⁰ Similarly, junior boss Georg initially exhibits fears about his potential reduction from a young man to a being that exclusively identifies with the factory.⁸¹ Döblin’s entrepreneurs have no mind for private lives (including their own), and instead constantly busy themselves with work.

Lucie, Unternehmer’s daughter, desires to become her father’s successor, but he instructs her to marry, explaining he has no use for a female successor.

⁷⁹ In scene eight of Brecht’s opera *Der Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny* Paul Ackermann exclaims: “Oh, Jungens, ich will doch gar kein Mensch sein” (Brecht 29).

⁸⁰ Trans.: “Don’t dare to photograph me; he who wants my photograph, should snap my plants. Don’t ask for my life’s events, my numbers – the date of my patents, the crises, the setbacks. I am nothing more than that” (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 283).

Unternehmer constantly refers to private problems as being the material of novels only; thus, he transports the private realm into the fictional world, and thereby catapults it out of existence. He himself is no longer a human being and has been reduced to his business. (Döblin also does not provide a personal name for him.)

⁸¹ “Georg: Ich fürchte mich. Einmal bin ich ein junger Mann gewesen, bin durch eine offene Tür in das Haus getänzelt, habe den Reichtum ausgenutzt, das war lustig. Ich führe einen vorbildlichen Haushalt, ich werfe mich zu Hause schlaff in einen Stuhl, ich schlucke meine Mahlzeit herunter, meine Gedanken sind auch nachts nur bei dem Werk. Bei dem Werk, bei dem Werk. Ich fürchte mich. Ich muß mir Luft machen. Wozu bin ich reich, wozu bin ich frei” (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 294)? Already the repetition of “bei dem Werk” underlines the monotony of working life itself. Further, I find Döblin’s choice of “Werk” interesting as the term could also label a literary work, as well as an opus or oeuvre, and he could have used “Fabrik,” for instance.

Lucie, not interested in marriage however, but ultimately succumbs to her father's wishes. She agrees to marry after his proposal of a pro forma marriage to provide a man to take over and lead the company. She picks a man, with whom she agrees that their marriage is not to change their lives, but finds herself unhappy when Georg betrays her with another woman. Uttering her unhappiness to her father, she hopes he will help her solve her marital problems:

UNTERNEHMER: ... Du bringst mir diesen Mann her, Lucie, du wirst mir nicht böse sein, wenn ich dir sage, wir arbeiten hier, wir können uns nicht mit Privatdingen aufhalten.

LUCIE: Ich weiß.

UNTERNEHMER: Hat er dir deine Freiheit genommen?⁸²

LUCIE: Eure Arbeit, macht euch nicht lächerlich mit eurer Arbeit! Lärm und Spektakel!

UNTERNEHMER: Sie ist wahnsinnig, das ist nicht meine Tochter.

⁸² "An die Stelle der alten bürgerlichen Gesellschaft mit ihren Klassen und Klassengegensätzen tritt eine Assoziation, worin die freie Entwicklung eines jeden die Bedingung für die freie Entwicklung aller ist" (Marx/Engels 66). This quotation is also reminiscent of Lucie and Georg's discussions regarding their individual freedoms and the lack thereof. Both feel trapped in their marriage in different ways.

LUCIE: Was kommt bei eurer Arbeit heraus? Für wen ist sie da?

Verfluchtes Goldenes Kalb! (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 301)⁸³

During this exchange, Unternehmer emphasizes the importance of his work; his work is his life. While Lucie initially desires to take over her father's company, after finding herself excluded and disrespected, she now condemns the importance the men place on work, decrying it as nothing but smoke and mirrors. Her father, however, believes that there is no such thing as a private life, and he bans all personal issues to the fictional realm. Döblin stresses this point in various ways: in the Unternehmer's costume, and his repetitive explanation that private life is material for novels only:⁸⁴ "Es ist die frechste Erpressung, es ist die

⁸³ Trans.:

UNTERNEHMER: ... You are bringing this man here, Lucie, you cannot be upset if I tell you that we work here, we cannot waste our time with private matters.

LUCIE: I know.

UNTERNEHMER: Did he take your freedom?

LUCIE: Your work, don't be ridiculous with your work! Racket and spectacle!

UNTERNEHMER: She is mad, that is not my daughter.

LUCIE: What's the result of your work? Whom does she serve? Damned golden calf! (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 301)

⁸⁴ At the scene's opening, Döblin's instructions for the appearance of Unternehmer read as follows: "(Der Unternehmer ist ein Aufbau oder Projection, Schornstein auf einem Kopf, Schreibmaschine und Telefonhörer aus den Händen, eine Fabrikfront als Brust, die Augen viereckige helle Fenster. Der Aufbau oder die Projektion ist der Hintergrund aller Szenen.)" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 282). This concise description of the Unternehmer reveals Döblin's standpoint. This "character" is not recognizable as such, or potentially cannot even be conceived of as one, since he appears as projection only. Döblin's word choice in this description indicates that Unternehmer does not appear as a factory, but rather that he *is* a factory: "...Schreibmaschine und Telefonhörer *aus* den Händen, eine Fabrikfront *als* Brust..." etc. (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 282). Furthermore, this construct/projection is to serve as background in every tableau during the third scene; therefore, Unternehmer is always present, even in scenes which portray Georg and Lucie's discussion about their marriage, or conversations between Georg and his lover. The character of Unternehmer is ever-present like a god.

komplette Romansituation. Von A bis Z unwahr, was du verlangst" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 303).⁸⁵ Lucie, inquiring about the significance of work, receives the following reply from the workers' chorus: "Wer ist denn da? Du bist nicht da, wir sind nicht da, die toten Maschinen sind da, die toten Sachen sind da, und Krise und Expansion und Krieg" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 302).⁸⁶ The chorus indicates that its members as well as Lucie are irrelevant, and thus, nonexistent entities. Only the dead things and machines play a role, and with them "crisis, expansion, and war." In this society an individuals' importance, regardless of economic status, diminishes while objects and objectives dominate.

The characters in all three of these plays find themselves in predicaments. Even those who appear to hold power are often powerless, and merely serve in functional roles (as is the case with *Unternehmer*) reminiscent to those of objects. Objects, on the other hand, gain influence and power over characters, and even other objects (as is the case with the candelabra in *Lydia und Mäxchen*). These three plays progress from a blunt revolution of things against people over an object's implicit offering of an object to a character that leads to her suicide to the veneration of the most powerful object there is: money. Döblin's rumination

⁸⁵ Trans.: "This is the most shameless blackmail, it is the utmost novelistic situation. From A to Z it is untrue what you demand" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 303).

⁸⁶ Trans.: "Who is here anyway? You are not here, we are not here, dead machines are here, dead things are here, crisis and expansion and war" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 302). Again, the objects rule. *Unternehmer*, unable to recognize people and their human needs, focuses on the things and concepts—things which are inanimate or "dead," and concepts that lead to death such as war.

about objects and their power over people, and the objectification of people stretches over the course of his limited dramatic career. He treats the latter of the two in his plays explicitly using the example of marriage.

**“Schuhauszieher, Taschentuch, Corsettstange”: Marriage as
“Universalmöbel”⁸⁷**

Döblin addresses the institution of marriage in each of these three plays—*Lydia und Mäxchen*, *Comteß Mizzi*, and *Die Ehe*—and treats it as another form of confining predicament his characters find themselves in. Characters, particularly female ones, trapped either in marital relationships, in alternative scenarios (like Mizzi in her father’s brothel), or in constricting societal structures, draw on desperate measures, such as faking their own death, committing suicide, or losing their sanity and surrendering emancipated positions. Each of these characters functions as an object for someone else, and none are free to live their lives. Some of these characters tolerate their situations (like Lucie in *Die Ehe*),

⁸⁷ “Universalmöbel” translates into universal/all around piece of furniture. Shortly after marrying Erna Reiss in 1912, Döblin wrote in *Jungfräulichkeit*: “Wenn die Ehe sich zur Alleininform und zum sichtbaren Ausdruck geschlechtlicher Beziehungen aufwerfen will, so zeigt sie sich damit ohne Bewusstsein ihrer eigenen Natur; denn sie hat es nicht wesentlich mit Sexualität zu tun. Und ebenso töricht ist die Forderung, alle Sexualbeziehungen im Rahmen der Ehe zu erfüllen, als wolle man verlangen, nur zur Mahlzeit und in bestimmten Lokalen Hunger zu haben” (Schoeller 99).

Trans.:

“If marriage wants to pretend it can be the sole form and visible of expression of sexual relationships, it does so without knowledge of its own nature; because it doesn’t have anything to do with sexuality fundamentally. And just as foolish is the demand to satisfy all sexual relationship within marriage, as if one wanted to prescribe that one can only have an appetite at mealtime and in certain restaurants” (Schoeller 99).

other push back (like Lydia in *Lydia und Mäxchen*, or exit from stage and life (like Mizzi in *Comteß Mizzi*). In each of these plays Döblin draws attention to the inequality between characters. While each navigates a different scenario or time period, they share their struggles against an oppressive system.

“Ein Schwert bittet heißer als zehn Münder”⁸⁸

In the heart of his debut play, Döblin portrays title character Lydia, as played by a specter actor who, in fainting, feigns her death to escape a union with her uncle:

In meinem Garten war’s; eine Bank stand im Garten meines Palastes. Auf mich zu trat ein Mann mit grauen Augen, die mich – heischten, mein Oheim, der Herzog. Mein Vater ging neben ihm. Sie drangen auf mich schweigende ein, rissen an mir, zum tausendsten Male. Und wie mich der graue Herr küssen wollte, bin ich – umgefallen. (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 69)⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 68.

⁸⁹ Trans.: “It was in my garden; there was a bench in the garden of my palace. A man stepped towards me with his gray eyes which – demanded me, my uncle, the duke. My father was walking next to him. They closed in on me the silent one, tore on me for the thousandth time. And when the grey man wanted to kiss me, I – fainted” (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 69). There may be a potential connection here between the two hyphens and the “Leerstelle” in Heinrich von Kleist’s *Die Marquise von O....*. Lydia interrupts her thoughts, or censors her speech, and the second incident is such that she not only refuses to tell, but she explains that she fainted, implying that whatever happened was too much for her to handle.

Lydia, like Mizzi, falls victim to the domineering patriarchic structure, and the only escape she devises is an escalation of her passivity from being voiceless (“schweigende”) to fainting and feigning her death. While Lydia appears to be the victim of this structure, Mäxchen, too, has his grievances, and complains about her reign over his heart: “Ich habe keine Lust in mir gefunden, wo ich auch suchen ging. Wo eine wachsen wollte, mußte ich sie zerdrücken: Du, Du standest ob meiner Seele herrisch, qualenfordernd” (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 76).⁹⁰ Mäxchen not only indicates that he could not find love and desire during his time away from Lydia, but also accuses her of torturing him, saying that she ruled over his soul domineeringly. Ironically, Mäxchen’s use of the adjective “herrisch” contrasts with Lydia’s account of her potential rape by her uncle who was towering over her.⁹¹ Thus, Döblin presents a couple, both members of which find themselves trapped, unable to free themselves: one trapped by the convention that she has to marry a logical ally for her father, the other bound by love and that love’s tyranny, which also leads him to kill Lydia’s uncle, thereby committing a sin for which he receives absolution in advance.

⁹⁰ Trans.: “I found no pleasure inside me, wherever I went to look. Where one wanted to grow I had to squash it. You, you were towering over my soul domineeringly, demanding torment” (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 76).

⁹¹ Mäxchen’s accusation reminds one of the count’s excuse for raping Siddi as both accuse the women to be responsible for their own (the men’s) actions, and thus, both blame the victim.

Here again, Döblin presents a situation in which objects rule and words are powerless. Mäxchen's imploring of Lydia to awaken from her death are futile until he resolves to use his sword against her: "Ein Schwert bittet heißer als zehn Münder" (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 68).⁹² And indeed, once he draws his sword, and beats Lydia's coffin she awakens, providing additional evidence of the power of objects, and Döblin's characters' forceful use of them. Once Lydia awakens and attempts to orient herself she notices the objects surrounding her, and reminisces about her own things:

Ein Stuhl, ein Tisch, ein Spind, ein Teppich, – Ich bin die Prinzessin Lydia,
ich bin die Prinzessin Lydia. Ich habe einen Stall von zwanzig Schimmeln.
Ein Elefantenzahn hängt in meinem Zimmer von der Decke herab,
doppelt so groß als ich; an der Spitze unten ist ein Loch, in das ich
hineinkriechen kann; dann sieht mich keiner. Mein Zimmer ist blau,
Libellenflügel an den Tapeten. (*Schluchzend*) Soll ich mir alles herbeten?
Wo bin ich? Was willst du von mir? (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 68).⁹³

Similarly to his intermingling of different types of cast members, Döblin also mixes different sets in this scene. In terms of the play's plot, Mäxchen intercepts

⁹² Trans.: "One sword pleads hotter than ten mouths" (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 68).

⁹³ Trans.: "A chair, a table, a locker, a rug, – I am the princess Lydia, I am the princess Lydia. I have a stable of twenty white horses. An elephant tooth hanging off the ceiling in my room, twice as big as I am; down at the tip is a hole into which I can crawl; then nobody seems me. My room is blue, dragonfly wings on the wallpaper. (*Sobbing*) Am I supposed to conjure everything? Where am I? What do you want from me?" (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 68).

Lydia's mourning procession outside, and yet, Lydia describes the indoor set on stage in the theater. Additionally, she conjures an imaginary set, reciting her room as she remembers it. Commenting on the mundane objects of chair, table, locker, and rug she also reminds us, and perhaps even attempts to convince herself of her status as princess. Her repetition of the line "Ich bin die Prinzessin Lydia" indicates that its validity must seem unlikely to her (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 68). Interestingly, at the center of these lines is Lydia's description of a big elephant tooth, big enough to hide her. Lydia's space, however, only protects her from views, not from discovery.

And, Lydia ends her comments on her room's furnishings with these important questions: "Soll ich mir alles herbeten? Wo bin ich? Was willst du von mir?" (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 68).⁹⁴ As are subsequent female characters in Döblin's plays, Lydia is being acted upon, but herself holds little power to act. She went from being in love with Mäxchen to the prospect of being married to her uncle, and from there to being abducted by Mäxchen. She has no agency, and becomes a play ball in the hands of male characters. Powerless, she too, like Mizzi, addresses objects in hope that they may come alive, stand in for her, and protect her. Lydia's summoning of her own things, especially her place of protection, the elephant tooth, reminds me of Mizzi's prayer to Demeter. Neither

⁹⁴ Trans.: "Should I summon all of these things here? Where am I? What do you want from me?" (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 68).

character feels the safety of another character who might protect her. Sadly, both characters place their hope in things, a hope that Döblin ironically rewards since things resolve both of their predicaments even if in unexpected ways, as in Lydia's case. As an object exerting its power the Klabautermann kills Lydia (or at least the specter actor portraying her), while Mizzi takes initiative, and using Demeter's dagger, kills herself, and in doing so asserts herself for the first time in the play. *Lydia und Mäxchen* and *Comteß Mizzi* each contain implicit marriage criticisms.

"Bett, Waschtisch und Ofenschirm"⁹⁵

Rather than implicitly criticizing the debilitating stronghold societal structures hold over people and explicitly criticizing the traditional institution of marriage, as he does in his final play *Die Ehe*, and in his detective story *Die beiden Freundinnen und der Giftmord*, in *Comteß Mizzi* Döblin exemplifies the side effects of this institution, and the problems which arise from potential alternatives. The male characters in this play can have it both ways: they can reap the benefits of marriage, while also stepping outside its confines as they choose. Bored with the lifelong bonds they entered, men break free temporarily, and seek excitement and rejuvenation in their encounters with Mizzi. Döblin portrays the one-sidedness of

⁹⁵ Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 95.

such a system as men continue to exert power over women, in and out of marriage. For Neustätter, partially and occasionally possessing Mizzi does not suffice, and he intends to bind her to himself entirely. Adding the fact that the count lusts after his daughter, it becomes apparent that the count's experiment to establish a marriage alternative fails. Instead, his brothel simply shifts male power over women, and expands it to include additional women outside of marriages. For women, however, the count's brothel is not a viable alternative. Döblin deals with the commodification of women, and, depending on rank or class, of men, a theme that continues throughout his plays.

At one point in the play several male characters engage in a conversation about the concept of marriage. Speaking of inebriation, Peter remarks: "Der Rausch ist eine ernste Sache, meine Herrn. Weh dem, der lästert," to which Excellency, intent on suspending the count's brothel, replies: "Als Poesie gehts! Aber, um Gotteswillen, die Ehe meine Herrschaften, die Grundlage unserer Gesellschaft" (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 94)⁹⁶. Excellency connects inebriation to the concept of poetry, and thus, bans poetry to a realm outside of society, an idea to which Mizzi and Peter respond in disbelief, and about which Wilhelm explains:

... dieser Entdecker hat mehr gefunden als du. Kennst du das Sofa, das zugleich Bett, Waschtisch und Ofenschirm sein kann? Das ist sein Ideal.

⁹⁶ Trans.: "Intoxication is a serious matter, gentlemen. Don't slander it." ... "As poetry it is ok! But for heaven's sake, marriage gentlemen, the foundation of our society" (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 94).

Seine Ehe dient ferner als Schuhhauszieher, Taschentuch, Corsetstange für dich, mich, deinen vertrockneten Onkel und den verteufelten Lux. Das Universalmöbel. (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 95)⁹⁷

Here, Döblin—through the character of Wilhelm—parodies the institution of marriage. Wilhelm’s commentary on Excellency’s discovery reads as an advertisement for marriage, in which the only animated figures are men while women inhabit the roles of lifeless objects such as couches, beds, wash tables, fire screens, shoehorns, handkerchiefs, and corset stays. In short, Wilhelm points out that marriage, from a male perspective can function as the “universal piece of furniture,” the piece of furniture that addresses all of men’s needs. (Only our familiarity with *Lydia und Mäxchen* provides a sliver of hope that this “Universalmöbel” may come alive.) Wilhelm, making fun of this attitude towards marriage subscribes to the count’s re-envisioned concept of life between men and women, and proudly presents the count’s project to Excellency. Instead of preparing women for marriage, the count prepares them for lives as Amazons of love. Wilhelm, ridiculing the old-fashioned institution of marriage, and its subsequent suppression of women, fails to recognize that the count’s alternative functions precisely as well, and leaves no room for a woman’s self-realization

⁹⁷ Trans.: “... this discoverer has found more than you. Do you know the couch that can be a bed, a washing stand and fire screen? That is his ideal. His marriage furthermore serves as shoe horn, handkerchief, corset stay for you, me, your dried up uncle and the devilish lynx. The universal piece of furniture” (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 95).

either. Mizzi, for instance, playing the role of a sacred daughter also inhabits the space of an object, a blank slate onto which each man can project his dreams and desires.

The count's sacred daughters (and Mizzi as the paramount example), resemble Demeter-like-goddesses, whose task—to revive and rejuvenate men—leads to their demise since the patriarchally structured society leaves no room for their self-expression. While the play repeatedly (and seemingly playfully) hints at human sacrifice, the count does indeed sacrifice his “sacred daughters” in this entirely selfish endeavor. While male characters in the play discuss the count's project in progressive terms, arguing that the sacred daughters alleviate boredom, and revive their relationships, the count's project provides no viable alternative for women as they continue to serve men. Wilhelm explains the function of the sacred daughters to Excellency:

Das sind Mädchen, junge Mädchen, – schöne Frauen, die wir erziehen, (*leiser*) die wir beladen mit allem, was sich süßes und zärtliches in den Magazinen der Liebe seit Jahrtausenden aufgestapelt hat, – und die wir eines Tages entlassen. Sie gehen lautlos auf bloßen Füßen wie die Amazonen zum Brautkampf. Überall, wo sie gehen, entzünden sich Hochzeitsfackeln; die finstersten, trockensten Herzen fangen zu knistern an. Der Boden schwingt unter ihren Füßen, aber sie lauschen nur still auf

den Ruf, der sie schickt und gehen heißt, und kehren heim. Haben sie die küssenden Münder zum Gebet geschlossen, den Seelen ihr Gewicht und ihre Angst abgenommen, ziehen sie sich wie die Schnecken in ihr Haus zurück, – rascheln davon, unverbrannt wie Salamander. Dies sind unsere geweihten Töchter. (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 86)⁹⁸

In his explanation of the concept of the sacred daughters to Excellency, Wilhelm claims that the sacred daughters return from their missions “unburnt;” however, Mizzi’s fate proves this claim’s fallacy. She finds herself emotionally torn between the forces that act upon her: her father’s strict dictum, Neustätter’s persistent wooing, and her betrayal of her father—a rift she cannot withstand, and which ultimately causes her to commit suicide. The invention of the concept of sacred daughters resembles a perfect solution only from the count’s and the clients’ perspectives.

Döblin presents marriage as an unequal institution in which husbands expect wives to cater to their every need, a viewpoint represented by Excellency,

⁹⁸ Trans.: “Those are girls, jung girls, – beautiful women, whom we raise, (*more quiet*) whom we load with everything sweet and tender that has been piled into the magazines of love over the millennia, – and whom we will let go one day. They are walking silently on naked feet like amazons to their wedding fight. Everywhere they go wedding torches light; the dark, dry hearts start to rustle. The ground swings underneath their feet, but they only listen calmly for the call that sends and summons them, and they return home. Once their kissing mouths are closed for prayer, and once they have alleviated the weight and fear from the souls they retract like snails into their house, rustle away, unburnt like salamanders. Those are our sacred daughters” (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 86).

Interestingly, the reference to salamanders implies that they may not be unharmed, but that they may have the capacity to replenish that which gets wounded or severed, and thus, categorizes woman as an animal.

who intends to protect this holy union by shutting down the count's luxury brothel. Perhaps Döblin criticizes more than just the institution of marriage, and leery of traditional gender-roles, points to the count's futile endeavor to create happiness-inducing "geweihte Töchter" instead of educating women for the traditional marital role as perfect wives.⁹⁹ Döblin treats the traditional marital institution as faulty (an idea to which he returns in his final play), and explicates ways in which it works against, and ultimately leads to women's destruction. The count's alternative to preparing women for marriage, namely to prepare them to fulfill every man's wishes, as opposed to those of only one man, is not sustainable as Döblin demonstrates with his heroine. Mizzi, precisely educated not to become a "Universalmöbel," is nevertheless claimed by Neustätter for that purpose. The demands men make on her, those of her father, and Neustätter, for instance, ultimately lead Mizzi to commit suicide at the play's conclusion. Ironically, the men believe in this marriage alternative, and deny its inequalities and detrimental effects on women.

"Adalin, Bromural, Veronal"¹⁰⁰

In his typical manner Alfred Döblin also opens his final play with a good portion of self-irony. Proceeding the actual play is a prelude that provides

⁹⁹ Trans.: "the sacred daughters"

¹⁰⁰ Döblin, *Die Ehe* 231

insights into the life of the character of the “Dichter.” In this prelude Döblin depicts a poet who is far removed from the real world. His wife keeps him away from the world and assures that his surroundings are suitable for his work, perhaps a noble endeavor, but also peculiar, given that the poet intends to reach an audience that is part of the world. Furthermore, the prelude, too, provides insight into the poet’s marriage. The poet’s wife serves as a kind of cheerleader for her husband, assuring him of his greatness, while simultaneously preparing for the stress related to her husband’s success: “Ich nehme Adalin, ich nehme Bromural, ich nehme Veronal 0,5, meine Ohren dröhnen vom Beifallklatschen, ich kann es nicht aushalten” (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 231).¹⁰¹ On the outside the poet’s wife pretends to be overly supportive and protective while another part of her cannot stand her husband’s fame and her service to him. The poet himself, utterly deluded, believes he has created a play that touches his audience profoundly. Once he utters this thought, Döblin provides evidence to the contrary: the audience leaves the theater unimpressed, and moves on with its day. The subject of the play is that of a love triangle. When the poet complains that his play has been swept off stage, a worker turns into the play’s narrator, and utters a call to action. While Döblin depicts conventional warfare, the

¹⁰¹ Trans.: “I take Adalin, I take Bromural, I take Veronal 0,5, my ears are roaring from the applause, I cannot take it” (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 231).

narrator points to the rather unapparent war—that of the workers, who have no work, no money, no means.¹⁰²

Written during the time of the world's greatest financial crisis, Döblin's final play treats significant political matters like the "Weltwirtschaftskrise," the debate about abortion, as well as theatrical and poetic concerns.¹⁰³ His final play includes lengthy instructions for theater directors:

Das Stück stellt in einem Querschnitt das Verhältnis der heutigen
Wirtschaft zu den menschlichen Formen der Ehe und der Familie dar. Das
Stück demonstriert: die heutige Wirtschaft wirkt zerstörend und
auflösend auf die alte Ehe und Familie, vermag aber von sich aus die
menschlichen Beziehungen nicht neu zu ordnen, ihr sind diese
menschlichen Beziehungen gleichgiltig [*sic*].¹⁰⁴ (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 226)¹⁰⁵

Döblin sets the stage, providing his intended interpretation of his final play.

While the prelude, both in terms of its subject matter and interpersonal communication between the poet and his wife, deals with marriage, his main

¹⁰² Something similar to this sweeping off stage also happens at the at the end of Lydia and Mäxchen as the fire department shows up.

¹⁰³ The SPD attempted to decriminalize abortion in 1920, but could not gain a majority.

¹⁰⁴ Döblin's view of economics conjures the naturalists' idea of nature: it doesn't consider human fate - a kind of economic naturalism.

¹⁰⁵ Trans.: "The play depicts the relation of the current economy to the human forms of marriage and family in a profile. The play demonstrates: today's economy has a destructive and disintegrating effect on the old marriage and family, but cannot regulate and reorganize the human relationships on its own, it is indifferent to these human relationships" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 226).

scenes, too, highlight the difficulties men and women face, even if they combine powers in the socially acknowledged institution of marriage. In this opening comment he claims that while modern economic structures exert destructive forces over traditional institutions like marriage they fail to provide alternative structures. They destroy existing structures, but do not rebuild any new ones. In the play's final scene Döblin resumes his more serious musings on marriage's obsolescence.

In the play's third part Lucie, an entrepreneur's daughter, discovers that marriage is the only way her father will grant her indirect access to his company. Lucie, considering herself emancipated and empowered, feels ready to assume leadership in the company, but, when her father objects, gives in to his request to get married. Next, in explaining her brand new intent to get married to her boyfriend Bobbie, she clarifies that she will not marry him, "[w]eil ich dich gern habe," sends him away, adding that she plans to proceed in the same manner with her other boyfriends (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 285).¹⁰⁶ Lucie has little understanding for Bobbie's disbelief about her "Vielmännerei:" "Er liebt mich, und darum soll ich ihm treu sein! Witzbolde, die Männer! Ich werde heiraten. Man muß das Gesindel loswerden" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 286).¹⁰⁷ Lucie, used to having the

¹⁰⁶ Trans.: "because I like you" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 285).

¹⁰⁷ Trans.: "He loves me, and because of that I am supposed to be faithful to him! Jokers, these men! I will get married. I need to get rid of this riffraff" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 286).

boyfriends she wants, throws a party for the purpose of finding a spouse, and finds party crasher Georg to be a suitable match. While he tries to seduce her because of his interest in “traurige Menschen,” she decides to marry him, an idea he initially considers preposterous and alienating (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 287):

GEORG: Nein, mein Fräulein, sobald ich von Ehe höre, fall ich in Ohnmacht. Ich war drei- oder viermal verlobt.

LUCIE: Genau wissen Sie das nicht mehr.

GEORG: Es geht alles in eine einzige Schwärze über. Meine Gnädige, ich warne Sie, ich bin Menschenfreund.

LUCIE: Was ist denn mit der Ehe? Von einem gewissen Einkommen ab hören doch alle Eheprobleme auf. Man trägt sie wie Sie Ihren Smoking. Zu Hause gehen Sie doch – nach Belieben.

GEORG: Oh, Sie sind rührend! Sie können sich nicht denken, welcher abgrundtiefen Veränderung, Verblödung gesunde moderne Menschen verfallen, wenn sie eine Ehe eingehen. Es ist ein Rückfall in alte Entwicklungsstufen.

LUCIE: Aber Sie verstehen nicht. Bei kleinen Leuten!

GEORG: Oh, Sie hören nicht; ich rate Ihnen, bevor Sie diesen
 verhängnisvollen Schritt tun, überlegen Sie es sich. (Döblin, *Die Ehe*
 288-9)¹⁰⁸

Lucie and Georg arrange to get married, but without any spousal obligations to one another. Similarly to the meaningless “Dringlichkeitsscheine” in the play’s first scene, their marriage certificate is to remain just that—a pointless document. Lucie and Georg vow that neither of them will change, and that both are free to do as they please. Up until this point Döblin depicts Lucie as a female character who leads her life similarly to those of some of her male counterparts since she philanders as she pleases. It is her father who curtails her self-determination and liberties, and insists she get married. While he neither expresses moral qualms about his daughter’s behavior, nor prohibits her from behaving like a man in this realm, he nevertheless refuses to allow her to overstep the economic boundary

¹⁰⁸ Trans.:

GEORG: No, Miss, as soon as I hear about marriage I faint. I have been engaged three or four times.

LUCIE: You don’t remember exactly.

GEORG: It all dissolves into a single blackness. My gracious lady, I warn you, I am a humanist/ people friend.

LUCIE: What is it with marriage? Starting at a certain income level all problems in marriage end. You wear it like your tuxedo. At home you go – however you like.

GEORG: Oh, you are cute! You cannot imagine which abysmal changes and idiocy people fall into when they get married. It is a relapse into old stages of development.

LUCIE: But you don’t understand. That happens to little people!

GEORG: Oh, you are not listening; I advise you to ponder this well before you take this disastrous step. (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 288-9)

that separates men and women. Lucie may behave as promiscuous as a man, but cannot fully engage in her father's business, least of all in a leadership position.

Although Lucie intends her marriage to be of little consequence, she finds herself hurt once she discovers Georg's affair with an employee in her father's company. Döblin depicts the scene in which Lucie confronts Georg humorously as Lucie renounces the concept of marriage ("Es ist Unsinn mit dieser Ehe"), and accuses her father of having betrayed her (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 298).¹⁰⁹ Admitting to Georg that her pride is hurt, she accuses him of having a "Freundschaft mit einem Fräulein Y" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 299).¹¹⁰ Georg does not deny the accusation, indicating that Lucie, too, either has or has had "friends." When she negates this claim he counters that her lack thereof is not his fault. Lucie, increasingly enraged, asks about the nature of friendship, and replies:

LUCIE: Es ist alles!

GEORG: Bloß – nicht Ehe!

LUCIE: Was heißt dann Ehe?

GEORG: Das, was wir führen.

LUCIE: Lächerlich, laß das Affentheater, dann ist Ehe nichts.

¹⁰⁹ Trans.: "Marriage is nonsense" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 298).

¹¹⁰ Trans.: "Friendship with a Misses Y" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 299).

GEORG: Aber ich bin todernst, ich bin tief erschrocken, daß du keine Freunde mehr hast, wir haben verabredet, jeder bleibt, wie er war, und ich bin erschrocken über deine Auffassung von der Ehe.

LUCIE: Was ist meine Auffassung von der Ehe?

GEORG: Du nimmst Anstoß daran, daß ich unsere Verabredung halte. Ich aber nehme zur Kenntnis, daß du keine Freunde mehr hast, mit anderen Worten: daß du unsere Verabredung nicht hältst, daß du einen Betrug an mir verübst. ... Ich stelle fest, daß du unsere Ehe störst. (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 299)¹¹¹

The humiliation of her husband as junior boss of the company having an affair with a worker outrages her, but Georg points out that his behavior is in accordance with their marriage agreement, and further suggests his disappointment in Lucie's noncompliance with their marital agreement.

Knowing that in marrying Georg she provided her father with a man to lead the

¹¹¹ Trans.:

LUCIE: It [friendship] is everything!

GEORG: But not – marriage!

LUCIE: What does marriage mean then?

GEORG: That which we have.

LUCIE: Ridiculous, stop the nonsense, then marriage is nothing.

GEORG: But I am deathly serious, I am deeply terrified that you no longer have friends, we agreed that each one of us stays as we were, and I am horrified about your understanding of marriage.

LUCIE: What is my understanding of marriage?

GEORG: You are offended that I am keeping to our arrangement. I, however, notice that you no longer have any friends, in other words: that you are not keeping to our agreement, that you are betraying me. ... I observe that you are disturbing our marriage. (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 299)

company, Lucie briefly believes that Georg's professional ties might give her some leverage for negotiation. Her hopes are crushed, however, when he expresses his gratitude to Lucie for granting him access to her father's company, and responds: "Deine Sorgen sind Frauensorgen, sie sind Luft für das Werk und für mich" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 300).¹¹²

Not even an emancipated bourgeois woman holds any social power. She, too, is almost as helpless as her lower-class counterparts, with the exception that her life is not in danger, only her pride. Georg, reduced to a businessman, like Lucie's father, strictly separates company from private matters. He is the company, nothing else. In spite of her emancipation Lucie cannot leave the sphere men prescribe to her. Although Döblin scripted Lucie as an emancipated woman he doesn't allow her to cross over into the male economic sphere, and thus, points to the impermeable boundaries women encounter. But it is not only his female characters who are barred from entering certain realms, but his male characters, too, sacrifice parts of themselves. Unternehmer and Georg both lose their humanity to initially represent and ultimately transform into the business they embody. Thus, Döblin points to a hierarchy of oppression: male characters rule over female ones, but things rule over all characters, men and woman alike. Not even male characters freely move within their spheres. If characters are

¹¹² Trans.: "Your worries are those of women, they are air for the plant and for me" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 300).

bound by their scripts, and texts are bound by words who then can exert influence?

“Konsument des Wahren und Schönen”: The Spectator as Co-Author¹¹³

A printed text, intended to be read and not performed yields less ambiguity and more clarity than a performed one: The author secures his intentions in the small ink letters on each page. The reading process does not alter the text itself. Each reader will find the same letters on the book’s pages; however, audience members in a theater experience a variety of performances even if they visit the same production of the same play repeatedly.¹¹⁴ As reader of a novel, for instance, one can believe in the relationship between reader and character as well as reader and author; however, one cannot transfer that belief to the theater stage. Readers, having experienced intimate relationships with novel

¹¹³ George Tabori, in his discussion of Samuel Becket’s *Waiting for Godot* mentions Gertrude Stein, and credits her with the approach to involve the spectator on a different level:

“Diese hochgefährliche Dame war womöglich die erste Stückeschreiberin, die sich weigerte, Erklärungen anzubieten, wodurch sie den Zuschauern die hochgefährliche Freiheit lieferte, ihre eigenen Erklärungen zu finden – vielleicht die einzige Art der Zuschauerbeteiligung, die wirklich revolutionär ist; der Zuschauer hat die Chance, nicht Konsument des Wahren und Schönen zu sein, sondern Co-Autor” (Tabori 8).

Trans.:

“This highly dangerous lady was possibly the first playwright who refused to offer explanations, through which she provided the spectators the highly dangerous freedom to find their own explanations – perhaps the only kind of audience participation that is truly revolutionary; the spectator has the chance not to be consumer of truth and beauty, but coauthor” (Tabori 8).

¹¹⁴ This argument only holds for texts in their original language since the process of translation alters the text.

characters, enter the theater with that background, but experience a lack of intimacy as spectators instead. An audience member can neither get intimate with the characters on stage nor with their creator, the author. Of course, the latter also holds true for novels, but readers nevertheless can obtain the illusion that reading a novel provides intimate insights into its author as well. They may misconceive the fictional world they create in their minds with that which the author created in his. These limitations on dramatic performances simultaneously speak to their multiplicities.

The versatility of a text written to be performed is obvious since each director deciding to put on a performance of *Lydia und Mäxchen*, for example, produces the play in a different location, with different actors and props, and with his own personal interpretative twist; however, not all elements underlying the plurality of a dramatic text can be that easily compared or observed. Even the same production of the same play in the same theater with the same actors and props results in numerous different performances. The words the actors utter may remain the same, but other components vary based on the actors' energy level, mental condition, accuracy to replicate the costume and steps taken on stage, to name a few. Another way in which a dramatic performance holds many experiences inside one event manifests itself in the audience members. Instead of entering a fictional world between two book covers and losing oneself within

that world, or, as Henry James describes, to “get down into the arena and do my best to live and breathe and rub shoulders” with the struggling characters, attending a play precludes stepping entirely into the fictional realm as a dramatic performance is a real event, in which real people (including those that portray ghosts and objects) act out (outside our heads) the parts of characters originally invented on the pages of the text.¹¹⁵ As opposed to reading a text, the theater experience harbors obstacles and prescriptions that make it harder to overlook that we are dealing with a charade. Rather than losing oneself in a fictional world, audience members cannot help but be aware that they are indeed not rubbing elbows with fictional characters, but rather with real people—the remaining audience members in the theater. Since a theatrical performance does not subscribe to the illusion of granting its audience access into the characters’, director’s, or author’s mind it provides possibilities that a text to be read cannot offer.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ “It’s not that the muffled majesty of authorship doesn’t here ostensibly reign; but I catch myself again shaking it off and disavowing the pretence [*sic*] of it while I get down into the arena and do my best to live and breathe and rub shoulders and converse with the persons engaged in the struggle that provides for the others in the circling tiers the entertainment of the great game” (James 1323).

¹¹⁶ In a potential prologue to *Lydia und Mäxchen* Döblin writes: “Daß ich von der Bühne aus spreche, rechtfertigt sich durch die größere Resonanz dieses Podiums,” and thus indicates that he believes the theater to have a greater impact than written texts (Meyer 95).

Theatersalat

Furthermore, each audience member, although having watched the same performance, leaves the theater with different impressions and interpretations. Reasons for this phenomenon are manifold, ranging from different educational, economical, and cultural backgrounds to unique individual differences, such as a spectator's concentration and level of observation. For instance, different audience members pay attention to different details on stage since the experience presented is manifold as well. Involving sight, sound, smell, and touch, a performance offers multiple focal points for its audience, while a text directs a reader's focus more specifically. Döblin points to the limitless options a dramatic performance provides in his first play's epigraph: "Bei verdorbenem Magen wirkt Salat oft in jeder Form erfreulich. (*Eigene Beobachtung*)" (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 57).¹¹⁷ In suggesting a salad as a remedy for an upset stomach, Döblin opens his play with a dish which can be prepared in various ways. Such is the nature of a play as well. While all may be labeled "play" their contents and execution can vary greatly. *Lydia und Mäxchen* provides a great example of such a "Theatersalat," in which actors, objects, specters and directors mix and intermingle to create a fabric of endless possibilities.

¹¹⁷ Trans.: "For an upset stomach salad is often in any form enjoyable. (*Personal observation*)" (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 57).

Döblin points to the messy nature of multiple options for assembling the theater salad in his debut play and those to follow. In each of his plays he includes plays within the plays, and comments on the fickle nature of dramatic performances. There is always the risk that actors miss, omit, or mispronounce their lines, or disappear from stage and theater altogether. Treating the philosophical question of creative power, Döblin poses the possibility of the words assuming physical forms themselves. And the props in *Lydia und Mäxchen*, too, concern themselves with questions of acting as they increase their presence on stage, moving out of the realm of stage directions and into that of uttering their own lines. The chair, resentful for his “verschlafenes Leben”—of life in the spaces between lines—wants to act and step out of the quiet text and engage in verbal and physical exchanges (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 59). At the same time, it is exactly Döblin’s first “Theatersalat” that potentially lends itself better to reading and the imagination than to performing. After all, our mind doesn’t restrict our imagination, and thus it may be easier to think up the images that accompany Döblin’s words than it is to present them on stage.

Prostitutes and Substitutes

In *Comteß Mizzi*, too, Döblin addresses conceptual differences of texts intended to be read and those to be performed. Döblin thematizes the issue of

intimacy which readers may feel versus the clash spectators attending a performance of that text experience. Even on the content-level of his second play he treats not only prostitution but also the protagonist's self-sacrifice, or "Selbstaufgabe." Clarisse's exclamation "unsere Aufgabe," therefore, holds interpretative potential on multiple levels.¹¹⁸ Döblin enlightens the situation of literature: narratives intended to be read are comparable to women being consumed. Prostitutes, like books, remain even after clients or readers consume them.¹¹⁹ A play, however, will not remain after consumption.¹²⁰ The performance

¹¹⁸ Mizzi also exclaims: "Oh mein Vater hat Recht. Restlos sich aufgeben!" (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 93).

Trans.: "O my father was right. To renounce oneself entirely!" (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 93).

Mizzi's comment on her father's request for her self-sacrifice connects also with her pondering of her "Aufgabe" earlier in the play.

¹¹⁹ Something real always remains even if we emerge from the pretense of a fictional world, that something, however, differs. After reading a book the physical book, the text's vessel, remains; however, after her service to a client the prostitute, a person who is not merely a vessel for imagined fictions, remains as does the actor after a play's performance.

¹²⁰ In a review of Döblin's 1924 novel *Berge, Meere und Giganten* Axel Eggebrecht writes: "Vom lebenden Menschen sind wir's gewohnt, daß er sich immerfort entwickelt und wandelt. Bücher aber sehen wir, allen hübschen Metaphern zum Trotz, nur zögernd als gewachsene, als lebendige Wesen an. Fertige Dinge sind sie, starre Bauten, an denen nichts mehr zu ändern ist. So denken auch viele Dichter, vielleicht die meisten. Der Geburtsakt ist mit der Drucklegung abgeschlossen. Nun steht das Kind draußen in der Welt, hat sich allein durchzuschlagen ... Alfred Döblin's großer Gigantenroman, vor einem Jahrzehnt geschrieben, vor acht Jahren erschienen, wird uns jetzt in anderer Gestalt noch einmal dargeboten" (Schuster & Bode 151).

Trans.: "We are used to the fact that a live person continues to evolve and change. We regard books, however, in spite of all pretty metaphors, only reluctantly as lively beings. They are finished things, rigid structures, on which nothing can be changed anymore. Many poets think the same way, perhaps most of them. The act of birth is completed with printing. Now the child stands outside in the world, and has to fend for himself ... Alfred Döblin's big Giant-novel, written a decade ago, published eight years ago, is now presented to us again in a different form" (Schuster & Bode 151).

This quotation provides an inkling of insight into Döblin's understanding of the ever evolving piece of art, since he defies the notion that texts cease to morph and develop. This concept of art, therefore, is prevalent in various of his texts, not exclusively in his dramas.

is a short-lived experience with a prescribed timeframe and space, to name only a couple of external parameters. After the show only memories remain, memories which differ among audience members even if they visited the same performance. Once the curtain closes, that performed version of the play expires while the novel in its physical iteration remains in our hands once its cover closes. The completion of reading a novel does not prevent us from flipping back to its beginning, but at the end of the dramatic performance we cannot re-watch its beginning at our leisure.

In the theater we have to face the physical reality of that space. The time in which we occupy ourselves with the play is prescribed. We may want to linger in our musings about the performance, but may find ourselves interrupted by lights and people in the auditorium. As readers, on the other hand, we can allow written texts to abduct us, and take us into another world. The novel we read can function as an escape from our lives, just like Mizzi offers reprieve to her customers from their everydayness. Both, Mizzi's character and the written narrative, are surrogates for something else. Both are prostitutes and substitutes, concepts to which drama might offer an alternative.¹²¹ In his dramas, Döblin

¹²¹ Ironically, readers of narrative readily engage in a "human contract" with characters, when no actual humans are involved, while this option remains closed off if actual humans (in form of actors) are involved. The human contract there can be accessed via the actor, but not via the character. Novels enable their readers to get a sense of themselves in a new situation, by allowing them to identify with characters. The stage play does not allow for that type of seamless identification.

reminds us of this fallacy, and asserts that art should not be consumable, suggesting perhaps that while written texts may be easily consumable performed drama refutes this idea. Does he propose drama as the “real thing”?

Unlike a written narrative that allows its readers to develop intimate relationships with characters, a play interrupts, thwarts, and aborts potential relationship building between audience members and characters. Thus, the situation of audience members mirrors that of Mizzi’s customers. Going to the theater to engage visually with a play, the verbal concept underlying the play renders itself unsustainable, as we experience the discrepancy between that which we imagined in our reading of the drama prior to watching its performance, and that which we observe on stage. We can only uphold our mental image of characters and set temporarily until it clashes with the reality presented on stage. Our experience then is similar to that of Mizzi’s customers. They, too, can project onto Mizzi anything they like (e.g., their needs, voids, and desires); however, for most of them these feelings of fulfillment are fleeting, and they will return to Mizzi for their next fix.¹²² Her customers temporarily get what they want: Mizzi’s flawless beauty, and her perfected act of submissiveness. But just like the action in the theater, this act, too, bears limitations, and its consumers will be disillusioned after a temporary illusion. Each customer must return to his

¹²² Peter’s encounter with Mizzi seems to produce long-lasting inspiration, and thus, he represents an exemption as Mizzi serves as his muse, and not merely as a woman to used.

old, boring, depressing life. Even a man attempting to escape this structure (such as Neustätter) is doomed to fail. If a customer of Mizzi's turns into her longtime lover or spouse the magic ends since the man now has to accept the sum of Mizzi's components, and can no longer enjoy the one element of her exclusively—the version of herself she portrays to fulfill his longings and desires.

So it is with audience members: engaged in the reading of a novel, we can flee our realities, and employ our imaginations to visualize the words on the page inside our minds without facing the challenge of our mental images of these words clashing with someone else's conceptualization of. As a member of a theater audience, however, its various circumstances restrict us, e.g., the fact that characters, set, and props are prescribed in detail, and that we encounter the characters not in the sheltered space of our minds, but in a reality that defies conformity with our imagination. As theater goes we sense this disconnect since drama is based on our readerly understanding of how narrative normally functions: consumed in book form readers can establish intimate relationships with characters, since as readers we have the liberty to fully unfurl our imaginations when fleshing out the words on each page. While an author composes his characters based on his particular vision, designing and describing them with his pen or key strokes, it is impossible for that image to coincide with

that which his words conjure up inside a reader's mind.¹²³ Consequently, narratives in book form allow us to imagine not only our own character interpretations, but also lead us to believe in the existence of a direct connection between the author's mind and our own. As we engage in the reading of a narrative, we don't ponder the quality of our imagination, as we don't consciously choose between different versions of the same character, but rather automatically produce one interpretation of a character. As readers we believe that our version of a character must necessarily coincide with the author's intended version, a highly unlikely scenario. Our mind does not coincide with the author's, or with the supposed character's. Narratives, therefore, resemble something that they are not since they purport a direct link between two minds that cannot exist in that form since it is impossible to be part of the mind of another.

In his second play, too, Döblin includes musings about acting in the play within the play, a play for which Mizzi and other characters prepare. With Mizzi, however, there is yet another layer. Even outside her roles as sacred daughter, and as actress in the performances in the count's abode, Mizzi acts. After her desperate plea to Demeter, and her refusal of Clarisse's offer to help, Mizzi, upon noticing the accompanying men, assumes the role of an actress who is caught up

¹²³ These differences could be held accountable for the disappointment readers of bestselling novels often express after watching corresponding movies, and seeing the discrepancies between characters they concocted in their minds and those presented to them on screen.

in her act: "Ich bin so in meine Rolle vertieft. Schaut nur, hab gar niemand von Euch gesehen" (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 91). A brief conversation ensues in which a man compliments Mizzi: "Sie spielen Ihre Rolle vorzüglich, Comteß. Wir sind noch ganz perplex," and Clarisse explains that Mizzi has been practicing for tonight's performance, and that "Niemand kennt unsere Stücke vor der Aufführung, niemand, bis auf einen, der führt, und doch spielen [*sic*] wir alle mit" (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 92).¹²⁴ Clarisse implies that the play's plot is unbeknownst even to its actors, and that one person alone is familiar with the script. Clarisse hints, thus, at the play's godlike creator. Mizzi, pretending to be already caught up in her role as actress in the play within the play prior to its performance, shifts quickly from desperate, stifling helplessness to seductive coquetry; however, she is not engaged in the play within the play yet, or even with its preparations, but uses acting to explain her absentmindedness, and to veil her increasing despair.

¹²⁴ Trans.:

MIZZI: I am so engrossed in my role. Look I didn't see any of you coming

GENTLEMAN 1: You are playing your role most exquisite, Countess. We are still perplexed.

CLARISSE: It is the new piece which we will play tonight.

NEUSTÄTTER (*quietly*): Honey, when are you coming down? Every second counts.

MIZZI (*loud, hard*): Not soon, my friend. There is no hurry. - Don't you know our play / game?

...

CLARISSE (*to the first gentlemen*): No one knows our pieces / plays prior to the performance, no one, except for one who leads / directs, and yet we all play along.

FRÄULEIN: Oh, I imagine that to be neat.

CLARISSE: What use does playing theater have for us! Only one (thing (could be a person or a thing)) determines the tone, counterplay follows play, courtship, fight, conflict, – the others are enraptured –, defend themselves, tear open their mouth –. (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 91-2)

(Of course, this could also be a double meaning since playing theater could also imply to pretend to play in a play, which would be yet another layer removed from reality.)

NB! Döblin clusters words having to do with "reißen" in this passage.

While acting can work as a disguise in this way, Clarisse, who initially explains enthusiastically the theatrical enterprise in which the sacred daughters engage, ultimately points to its uselessness: “Was nützt uns das Theater spielen! Nur eins gibt den Ton, zu Spiel tritt Gegenspiel, Werben, Kampf, Konflikt, – die anderen werden hingerissen – , wehren sich, reißen den Mund auf – ” (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 92).¹²⁵ Sounding deflated and helpless she questions the power of a dramatic performance, and admits that the play on stage does not exist in a vacuum. A play, she argues, can only thrive when actors, directors, and spectators interact. While all it takes for a novel to unfold is one reader’s mind, a play requires a universe of cast, props, and audience. By its very nature a play cannot function in isolation.

¹²⁵ Döblin uses the verb “spielen” repeatedly, also for non-theatrical endeavors. Within a couple of lines from one another, we encounter these exchanges:

CLARISSE: Spielst du mit?

MIZZI: Ja, ich komme.

NEUSÄTTER: Du darfst heute nicht. (*Mizzi ist schon aufgesprungen.*)

MIZZI: – Da hast du mein Strumpfband, Liebster –.

NEUSTÄTTER: Wenn ich dich heut in den Armen eines anderen sehen muß – . Mizzi, du gehörst mir, bist meine Braut. Spiel nicht mit mir. (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 104)

Trans.:

CLARISSE: Will you participate in the play?

MIZZI: Yes, I’m coming.

NEUSÄTTER: You are not allowed to today. (*Mizzi already jumped up.*)

MIZZI: – There you can have my garter, darling –.

NEUSTÄTTER: If I have to see you tonight in the arms of another – . Mizzi, you belong to me, you are my bride. Don’t play with me. (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 104)

In the first instance, Clarisse inquires with Mizzi about her intention to participate in the play that is about to unfold. Shortly thereafter, Neustätter begs Mizzi not to play with him, and he claims her as an object, as his bride—as potential “Universalmöbelstück”.

“Die kompletteste Romansituation”¹²⁶

In his final play, too, Döblin poses questions about dramas and novels, and includes even fewer opportunities for spectators to dive into a fictional world. At this point, Döblin seems to have reached the point of clearly establishing the different, and thus potentially more influential, nature of drama over the novel. Referring to private matters as novel material *Unternehmer* addresses their meaninglessness:

UNTERNEHMER: ... wir arbeiten, wir können uns nicht mit Privatdingen aufhalten. ... Du hast diesen Mann vor mich gebracht, du sollst endlich sagen, was du willst. Hat er dich beleidigt, hat er dir deine Freiheit genommen?

LUCIE (*sehr leise, abgewendet*): Er – hat mich beleidigt, indem er – mir meine Freiheit gelassen hat.

GEORG: Sie ist eifersüchtig. Ich soll nicht ich sein, ich soll ihr Ehemann sein, das ist: ihr Schuhputzer.¹²⁷

LUCIE: Ich hasse dich.

¹²⁶ Döblin, *Die Ehe* 303

¹²⁷ Here, Döblin allows a male character to utter his malcontent about his potential usefulness to his wife, and thus, juxtaposes this conversation to that in *Comteß Mizzi* in which the male characters are discussing the usefulness of women in and outside of marriage, and describe the concept of the “Universalmöbel”.

UNTERNEHMER: Das sind Gespräche aus alten Romanen. Habt ihr nichts weiter zu tun? (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 301-2)¹²⁸

The way in which Georg and Unternehmer construct their argument leaves no space for Lucie to get the upper hand since both men refute the idea of a private life. Both claim that Lucie's perception of personal matters is invalid. While Georg accuses her of not adhering to their marriage agreement, Unternehmer argues that privacy, as a realm outside the factory, does not exist at all. A worker's choir confirms this notion: "... Du bist nicht da, wir sind nicht da, die toten Maschinen sind da, die toten Sachen sind da, und Krise und Expansion und Krieg," and thus points to the capitalist side effects: people don't matter to the point of nonexistence, but inanimate machines and things take over, and crisis, expansion, and war are ever present (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 301).¹²⁹ Unternehmer

¹²⁸ Trans.:

UNTERNEHMER: ... we work, we cannot waste our time with private matter. ... You brought this man to me, so tell me already what you want. Did he insult you, did he take away your freedom?

LUCIE (*very quiet, turned away*): He – insulted me because he – left me my freedom.

GEORG: She is jealous. I'm not supposed to be me, I am supposed to be her spouse, that is: her shoe shine.

LUCIE: I hate you.

UNTERNEHMER: These are conversations from old novels. Don't you have anything else to do? (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 301-2)

Just like Döblin portrays the materialistic struggle as one that concerns all classes, he also presents struggles men and women face. Not just Lucie, but Georg, too, feels that he has received a raw deal in their marriage.

¹²⁹ Trans.: "... You are not here, we are not here, dead machines are here, dead things are here, crisis and expansion and war" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 302).

subscribes to the choir's observation, and refuses to acknowledge the private realm, and, under that pretense, ignores Lucie's request for help.

Lucie, however, approaches him again, and this time implores him to help her, appealing to him as her father, and reminding him of her help to get Georg to join the company, she insists on his help if he acknowledges her as his daughter. Initially, Unternehmer resists her request, and instructs her to return into her house or to take a trip.¹³⁰ Lucie, however, persists, and the following humorous conversation ensues:

LUCIE: ... Komm heraus, Vater, laß dich doch ansehen. Sieh mich auch einmal an. Kann ich dir nicht einmal meine Hände geben? Du bist doch mein Vater.

UNTERNEHMER (*kommt aus dem Aufbau, sehr alt und klein, weißhaarig, gebückt*): Was willst du?

LUCIE: Gott sei Dank, daß du da bist.

UNTERNEHMER: Nun ja, was soll ich denn, Kind?

LUCIE: Ach hilf mir, Vater. Ich hasse den Mann so, er ist mir Gift, ich kann die Luft nicht mit ihm atmen. Wenn unsere Ehe so bleibt, lebe ich nicht mehr lange.

¹³⁰ The house represents the social role in which Lucie is trapped, and she continuously fights against convention, but ultimately to no avail since she succumbs to convention at the end of the play.

UNTERNEHMER: Ich bin kein Zauberer. Es gibt tausend Männer. Was hast du gegen diesen?

LUCIE: Ich – ich liebe ihn.

UNTERNEHMER: Gerade ihn?

LUCIE: Du versprichst mir, Vater, wenn ich es will, hältst du ihn nicht im Werk.

UNTERNEHMER: O ja.

LUCIE: Sag nicht o ja, willst du mir helfen?

UNTERNEHMER: Es ist die frechste Erpressung, es ist die kompletteste Romansituation. Von A bis Z ist unwahr, was du verlangst.

LUCIE: Ich kann nicht mehr so leben.

UNTERNEHMER: Ich werde dir helfen. Verflucht, ich werde dir helfen! Verflucht! Verflucht! (*Geht in das Gehäuse zurück, stöhnt:*) Man wage nicht, mich zu photographieren, man frage nicht, nach meinem Lebenslauf,

meine Zahlen sind meine Patente, die Krise, die Rückschläge. (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 303)¹³¹

After Unternehmer's initial refusal to address Lucie's personal concerns he emerges from his structure, and thus, briefly enters into the fictional realm—that of private matters—which previously he defied. Thus, he proves that he is not entirely resistant to personal ties, either. Yet, he still refuses to acknowledge the validity of Lucie's concerns, and repeats the notion that all things private belong into a fictional realm, arguing that his daughter's condition is the "most complete novel situation" and an extortion to boot. After expressing his intent to help his daughter he retreats immediately into his encasement, and returns to his view of

¹³¹ Trans.:

LUCIE: ... Come out, father, let me see you. Look at me for once, too. Can I give you my hands? You are after all my father.

UNTERNEHMER (*comes out of the super structure, very old and small, white hair, bent down*): What do you want?

LUCIE: Thank God that you are here.

UNTERNEHMER: Well, what do you want from me, child?

LUCIE: Oh help me, father. I hate this man so much, he is poison to me, I cannot breathe the air with him. If our marriage stays this way I will not live much longer.

UNTERNEHMER: I am not a magician. There are thousands of men. What's your problem with this one?

LUCIE: I – I love him .

UNTERNEHMER: Exactly him?

LUCIE: Promis me, father, that if I ask you to you will no longer keep him in your plant.

UNTERNEHMER: Oh yeah.

LUCIE: Don't say oh yeah, do you want to help me?

UNTERNEHMER: This is the most shameless blackmail, it is the utmost novelistic situation. From A to Z it is untrue what you demand.

LUCIE: I can no longer live like this.

UNTERNEHMER: I will help you. Damn it, I will help you! Damn it! Damn it! (*Returns into his encasement, sighs:*) Don't dare to photograph me, don't ask about life's events, my numbers are my patens, the crisis, the setbacks. (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 303)

Unternehmer's babbling slightly varies throughout the course of the play, but for the most part he repeats himself.

himself as an object, renouncing all personal or private matters. Repeatedly, Unternehmer emphasizes that Lucie's complaints belong to the novelistic realm, and thus, he underlines his strategy of banning all things private into a fictional realm. Ultimately, Unternehmer's help for her consists of sending Georg temporarily to a hospital. This scene provides evidence that the discrepancy between the drama and the novel was on Döblin's mind since he includes a character who likens all things personal to the fictional account contained in a novel.

In these three plays Döblin demonstrates that drama offers additional opportunities to treat dramatic and artistic, as well as social and narrative issues. In spite of his sparse dramatic production, his plays include treatments of drama as an art form. Döblin uses his plays to alert his readers and audience members to the objectification of people, and the power inanimate things can exert over people whether in form of religious icons, or all-governing currencies. While the props hijack the play inside Döblin's debut play *Lydia und Mäxchen*, revolt against all things human, and temporarily leave their two-dimensional spaces to destroy the poet's creation, the props in *Comteß Mizzi* remain in their typical position, and thus, don't move. Nevertheless, here, too, they assume a critical position in providing the weapon with which Mizzi finally escapes her objectification and reasserts herself. Into his final play, *Die Ehe*, Döblin scripts the

factory costume for Unternehmer which adds to the objectification of the business character who bears no name and is identified only by his professional label. Additionally, Döblin includes money as the all-governing principle into all elements of that play.

Pointing to the side effects of struggles over power and possession, he recognizes that traditional institutions, too, contribute to an uneven power balance. Using the example of marriage or its alternatives he highlights the disadvantage of one of the partners (typically the woman) regardless of class and economic situation. Whether referring to Princess Lydia, Comteß Mizzi, or Lucie, each of these characters represents systematic oppression. The various experiences of being married off, being spared marriage, and realizing that the only option (a conundrum in and of itself) is marriage ultimately yield the same result: each of these female characters finds herself at the mercy of men, and cannot escape the societal fabric that suppresses them.

In addition to treating these socially relevant issues Döblin also critically questions aesthetic ideas that underly different art forms, specifically the difference between texts to be performed versus those to be read. In *Die Ehe* he includes explicit scenes in which characters discuss the nature of the novel, and this play's prelude also treats the nature of the theatrical machine, exemplifying the poet's situation. In *Comteß Mizzi*, too, Döblin deals with various dramatic

layers, scripting a play within the play, and drawing comparisons between the jobs of actors and prostitutes. Here, he also includes the aesthetic conundrum of creating a character who represents perfected beauty while facing the reality of a real-life actress entering the stage.¹³² Already in his debut play he uses little self-restraint in pointing to these questions, and boisterously explores the author's role in creating his plays. Can words speak for themselves without the author? What happens once those words are released? Who controls what shape they assume? These are some of the questions of artistic control which I will explore in the second chapter of this dissertation.

¹³² This is a similar problem as that in Lessing's *Emilia Galotti*.

Chapter Two

Dramatic Theory II: The Idea of Artistic Control

“Diese hochgefährliche Dame war womöglich die erste Stückeschreiberin, die sich weigerte, Erklärungen anzubieten, wodurch sie den Zuschauern die hochgefährliche Freiheit lieferte, ihre eigenen Erklärungen zu finden – vielleicht die einzige Art der Zuschauerbeteiligung, die wirklich revolutionär ist; der Zuschauer hat die Chance, nicht Konsument des Wahren und Schönen zu sein, sondern Co-Autor.”¹³³

Before I begin my analysis of authorial control in Alfred Döblin’s plays, I would like to raise some considerations about the various levels of control plays contain in general, using Döblin’s first play as an example. Döblin’s debut play *Lydia und Mäxchen* raises questions about control, individuality, and the meaninglessness of language in conjunction with the institution of the theater. When talking about the meaninglessness of language I am referring to the ambiguity of language, its lack of specific meaning, and thus, its potential for harboring multiple meanings. A word holds no inherent specific meaning. While it may contain a concept, different interpretations produce different meanings. The concept of literality does not exist. While this holds true for prose as well, the

¹³³ Tabori 8.

issue is amplified in dramatic texts since there are additional modi, and thus, additional opportunities for (mis)interpretation.

Dramatic texts contain multiple modi, and thus, stand outside the realm of consistent control during their performance on stage. The textual basis of any drama functions similarly to that of a novel, since readers engage in reading the text, and direct and act their own performance thereof on their minds' stages.¹³⁴ During a performance, however, dramatic control has no single locus (as opposed to the words on a page in the actual text), and is not tied to a single force. Because of this a novel does not raise the question of control to the same extent, since author and reader do not meet – readers read the work in the absence of the author – there is no direct contact. This means that the author's intentions will not be confronted directly with the readers' expectations. By its very nature a play, however, raises these questions: Who or what in the theater is the decisive force? Is there only one locus of control? Audience members confront themselves with the forces at play, and are confronted with elements that exert control: the words and the author who wrote them (also true for prose), but also the director, and the actors, and potentially additional elements.

In *Lydia und Mäxchen* Döblin raises these questions aggressively, and expands the circle of agents by adding acting props into the mix. Let me attempt

¹³⁴ Benjamin Bennett argues that the colon that follows a character name can be substituted by verbs such as "says," "replies" etc.

to unravel the different levels of control: on one level there is the playwright Alfred Döblin who composes the play *Lydia und Mäxchen* with certain intentions and motivations in mind. Döblin, in his role as playwright, remains on the outside of the dramatic action.¹³⁵ Next, Döblin creates the character of the poet who, in turn, creates the play *Lydia und Mäxchen* that takes place within Döblin's play. In the poet figure Döblin provides an interpretation of a playwright. On another level, there are the actors performing the play on stage in the theater. This, however, is where the trouble begins as Döblin does not only include actual figures in *Lydia und Mäxchen*, but also imbues ghosts and objects with control and speech, and thus, challenges the whole notion of control. Who is responsible for wielding control in this play? Can this question be answered unanimously? In his debut play Döblin places the locus of control in the "Dingwelt," and demonstrates the failure of wielding control on multiple accounts: the play's creator, director, and actors all lack control. Neither interpreter of meaning successfully asserts himself. The actors take flight, the director tries to control the poet, and he attempts to reign in his creations—the specter actors who embody his words. Döblin emphasizes in his first play that even the creator of a text cannot maintain control over his own words once they have left his mind. In his

¹³⁵ This seems to function similarly to the novelist staying on the outside, since playwrights cannot attend all performances of each of their plays.

debut play Döblin raises prominent questions about the ambiguity of text in general, and dramatic text in particular.

While Döblin does not script a poet figure into his second play he populates it with artists from different areas, such as acting, writing, and sculpting. In *Comteß Mizzi* Döblin addresses a lack of artistic control since none of these artists can express their art in a way that serves both, their audience and themselves. Each functions based on externally imposed expectations, the most prominent of which is the title character. Mizzi, obeying her father's instructions, prostitutes herself, and thus, utilizes her art of acting as she pretends for each customer to be exactly that which he desires at the moment. Peter represents a poet without a purpose, who feels that the world around him has no need for him, and Xaver engages in the absurd endeavor of creating bread sculptures of little longevity. The artistic issues raised in *Comteß Mizzi* serve as a continuation of those Döblin initiated in *Lydia und Mäxchen*: The creator of a play may not hold power over his creation, but what about an actress? Is she in control of her act? How can sculptors and poets create art if their inspirations are curtailed, either by prescriptive employers or by a lack of audience?

While the character of the poet permeates Döblin's debut play, and different artists wrestle with the question of artistic control in his second play, Döblin treats the matter explicitly in the prelude to his final play, *Die Ehe*. The

prelude's sections portray the poet providing a plot summary of his latest play to his wife, followed by his anticipation of its performance. Next, we witness the poet's reaction to the performance, and his victorious outcry "Das ungeheure Erlebnis!" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 232).¹³⁶ For the remainder of the prelude Döblin portrays reactions from the audience, director, art critic, and workers—all of which demonstrate that the play is of little consequence. On the surface they all agree with the unworldly poet's faith in his creation, but realistically care little about it. The mothballed poet expresses the quandaries of a love triangle, and does not treat relevant topics in his play (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 232). Döblin intersperses criticisms of the play's superficiality throughout the prelude in the form of text and image.

Döblin's plays, from first to last, demonstrate the impossibility and undesirability of exerting artistic control. *Lydia und Mäxchen's* poet interprets his role as that of a mother giving birth. From his stance, he gives birth to the words on the page, and believes that this ensures his complete control over his artistic creation. The parenting parallel, however, continues; while the poet imbues his text with life he cannot maintain control over it. Just like parents who, in spite of creating their children, have to release them into the world, and do not remain in charge of them. Control, whether of children or words, remains rather limited.

¹³⁶ Trans.: "The extraordinary experience!" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 232).

“Talkin’ ‘bout A Revolution”: Rebellion in *Lydia und Mäxchen*¹³⁷

Dichter

Believing that the power of his words transcends realms, and that the written word transforms from its bodiless presence on the page into a physical form on stage, the poet in *Lydia und Mäxchen* recognizes that the objects lie outside his influence of power. Foreshadowing his play’s ultimate demise, the props’ initially covert actions unsettle him. Döblin thus encapsulates the question of a poet’s limitations on his creative power in *Lydia und Mäxchen*, and raises questions of control, communication, and interpretation. These reveal the complications in determining control within the theatrical framework since it is not always possible to determine if the events on stage are the result of unintended consequences, or, of the author’s, director’s, or actors’ intentions. The various forces involved in a play’s performance each impacts its course, and thus each holds some control; however, there is no unified locus of control for the entire play.

In his debut play *Lydia und Mäxchen* Döblin addresses the dire artistic situation on multiple levels: through the figure of the poet who nervously perambulates through the play, suspicious of the various elements that could harm his creation; the inanimate objects; the director; and even his own words.

¹³⁷ Tracy Chapman, *Tracy Chapman, “Talkin’ ‘bout a Revolution,”* 1988.

Döblin's poet in *Lydia und Mäxchen* not only struggles with the audience's attention or lack thereof, but he also faces various agents who exert control such as actors, stage hands, (and props), who pry the power away from him. Neither the director nor the audience value his work. The director takes issue with the poet's approach to co-direct his play, and the audience leaves the theater unamused. Even the firemen who arrive to expunge the fire (caused by the Klabautermann) shush him and beg him to leave.¹³⁸

Döblin's poet, convinced that his dramatic text exerts the same level of control over an audience as a prose text over a reader, loses this faith as the play continues. Using the poet Döblin thus points to the impossibility of immediacy between dramatic text and audience in a dramatic production. While reading a prose text, the only distance between the artistic creation on the page and the readers' minds is the physical page itself, or so it seems. Diving into a prose text readers can forget their external realities and the creator of the characters between the covers, and enter a fictional reality, in which they live and identify with the characters. This, however, is also an illusion since readers' reading experiences, too, differ (not unlike audience members' experiences in a theatrical performance). Here too, different factors influence the quality of the reading experience, including location, levels of distraction(s), and focus, but

¹³⁸ Perhaps mirroring the reception of his own dramatic endeavors, Döblin presents a lack of appreciation for a dramatist's career since he, too, experienced the devaluation of his creative work when his mother disapproved of her son's literary career at this point in time.

nevertheless readers are often drawn into the world created by the author, and just as often emerge believing that they know exactly what the author's intentions were in composing the story, an illusion that cannot possibly hold true. This means that a novel, for instance, allows for the illusion of the possibility to enter the author's mind, but the access to this realm remains an illusion. Döblin's poet seems to have fallen victim to this notion as he, too, believes that his words hold the power to replicate the reading experience. His dramatic creation will not only come alive on stage, but will also exercise the same level of control as the printed black symbols on paper, and his words incarnate will hold the power to draw audience members in with the same level (or even an elevated level) of intimacy and immediacy as the prose text can with its readers. Thus, the poet believes that his drama is more powerful than prose work, and neglects the manifold forces that oppose this view: First, the audience attending a dramatic performance is physically further removed from the action than readers reading prose. Second, actors exercise control over their own actions, and prescribe a visual realization for the audience. The performance precludes audience members from concocting individual renderings of a character, so that they have to believe in the version of the character which the actor presents. Third, the director interprets and translates the dramatic text, and thus, exercises his artistic control, and adds an additional layer to the author's vision of the play. Fourth,

props and background, different on each stage in each production, alter the play's performance.

In *Lydia und Mäxchen* Döblin points to this element in particular by actively engaging the inanimate objects in his play. In animating them, he grants them control over the action in ways in which they conventionally have no access. This dramatic device adds another level of distance to the event: actors play conventionally inanimate objects, and bring them to life, but they too are only actors who in this case don't portray actual characters, but objects instead. Here Döblin imbues the props with a level of control that they lack in most conventional dramatic productions.

Requisiten

Döblin increasingly amplifies the props' voices as the play progresses: At the play's opening the props quietly converse about their fates, and move only incrementally. Suspicious that their acting up will cause trouble, the poet alarmingly realizes that he may be unable to control the props. His obvious nervousness regarding the mobile things does not win him the director's confidence, who, at the beginning of the play argues with the poet about the viability of continuing the performance. While the director argues against proceeding, the poet, convinced of his play's power, believes that the world he

created in the words on the page will come alive on the stage—with or without actors. In a prose text only the author's words unfold on the page at the reader's pace, and thus exert their control; however, a performance creates distance between text and audience. This new space between the words from within the dramatic text and their delivery on stage opens up room for different interpretations, errors, and diffusions. It is precisely this additional space to which Döblin draws our attention in *Lydia und Mäxchen*, in which he addresses the diffusion of control.

The poet's nervousness concerning the animate props may reveal his weakness: the poet did not create the props on stage. In the process of writing the play he most likely included the props in his stage directions, but in their intended form as providing ambience for the play, not as active participants in the play. These particular objects—chair, locker, candelabra, and hobgoblin—did not directly spring into existence from the poet's feather and inkwell, but rather emerged from the theater's prop room. The things may have already existed before the play's creation; therefore, the poet rightfully worries about their potential meddling in the play since he has no mastery over them. Since their physical presence is tightly interwoven with their labels—each prop exists as a thing itself in conjunction with the verbal label affixed to it—we don't consider things capable of assuming the power of speech. Props are typically acted upon,

or used for emphasis, but not in *Lydia und Mäxchen*. In their movement, thought, and speech, and their willful entrance into the acting space the props overstep boundaries that normally separate theirs from the human realm. Objects, themselves constructs of words, here assume the quality of speech, without being spoken for, and move and act independently, without being moved or acted upon; therefore, limiting the poet's sense of his almighty power over his creation.

Each of the four typically inanimate animate objects (three objects and a two-dimensional character from a painting) represents a different stage in the coming to life of objects. The locker, unable to cope with his entrance into consciousness, expresses his stifling fear and existential angst: "Ich komme mir so furchtbar unwahrscheinlich vor ... Mich macht alles wirr. Ich bin nur ein Spind und will meine Ruhe ... Das Leben ist ein Quatsch ... Hilfe – ich – will nicht – leben – (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 60).¹³⁹ Confused by his entrance into the human realm he wishes to return to the realm objects inhabit, where he can sit and be at peace. He denounces life as nonsense, and expresses his wish to die. The candelabra, on the other hand, represents another step en route to actively participating in the world. Beyond the stage of confusion the locker exhibits it is instantly drawn towards the materialistic world: "Weißt Du, ich hätte gern solche rosa Schuh mit Silberschnallen wie die Lydia. Meine sind ganz verstaubt und

¹³⁹ Trans.: "I feel so terribly improbable ... Everything confuses me. I am merely a locker and would like to have my quiet ... Life is nonsense ... Help – I – don't want to – live – (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 60).

eklig; sieh nur. Und die seidenen Strümpfe ... Es waren von hinten, von der Hacke her, zwei blaue Bänder, breit, aus Atlas" (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 59).¹⁴⁰

The candelabra is instantly taken with materialism, and expresses her desire for things she admires on one of the play's title characters. Comparing her footwear to that of Lydia she indicates she would like to have both Lydia's shoes and silk stockings. In coveting materialistic things, the candelabra assimilates to the human realm including to preconceived gender roles: The candelabra covets things which she perceives might boost her image. The chair displays a mindset that supersedes superficial materialistic wishes or existential angst, and instead concerns himself with philosophical questions concerning his position as an object within the human world. Initially, he believes the poet to be the liberator of inanimate objects.

The chair's initial faith in the poet's control over the dramatic production, and over the material world, slowly fades. After a period of reverence for the poet the chair engages with him verbally and physically, moving towards the poet and even touching him: "Der Dichter weiß nicht, was wir schaffen, daß wir leben. Er fürchtet uns, will uns unterdrücken" (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 60).¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Trans.: "Do you know, I would like to have such rose-colored shoes with silver buckles like Lydia. Mine are completely dusty and nasty; look here. And the silken stockings ... There were in the back, from the heel two blue ribbons, wide, made of silk" (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 59).

¹⁴¹ Trans.: "The poet does not know what we are doing, that we are alive. He is scared of us, wants to oppress us" (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 60).

Realizing the poet's impotence his position changes from initial trust to declaring war on the poet, and ultimately, on the human world. Uttering his rebellious cry "In tyrannos," his call to action indicates his desire to free himself from human oppression as represented by the poet (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 59). Thus, the chair echoes the poet's initial confidence in his creation and his own omnipotence, but adapts his stance as the play progresses, and declares war on everything human, including the poet. Ironically, his opposition to the human realm is also self-destructive since his exercising of contemplation and position taking are inherently human. He entered this realm the moment he assumed movement, human speech, and thought. If he were to succeed in his crusade against the human world, he would also jeopardize his existence.¹⁴² Or perhaps, Döblin intentionally blurs the lines between these realms. The chair, unwilling to quietly integrate into the human world and simply continue to subordinate himself to the order of things, instead rebels against the conventional course of the world, and expresses his desire to take action. Intending to overthrow the old order the chair seeks a reorganization and redistribution of power.

¹⁴² Interesting (though unrelated) quotation from the movie *Das Leben der Anderen*: "Irgendwann musst du Position beziehen, sonst bist du kein Mensch" (Hauser zu Dreyman). It relates to this situation, and underlines my point: the chair assumes a clear/strong position against the human world while it is exactly that that makes him human.

Klabautermann

What the chair only dreams about, and takes tentative action towards, the hobgoblin puts into action.¹⁴³ Taking the philosophical meanderings of the chair a significant step further, he steps out of his painting and kills the poet's specter actors. Thus, each of the four animate objects deals differently with the challenge of participating in the human world. Representing the final stage in this chain of events, and as the epitome of the objects' actions the hobgoblin leaves his two-dimensional existence and enters three-dimensionality as a three-dimensional figure; in doing so, he defies the laws of nature. As the only figure who actively fights against his categorization as object and the ensuing limitations, he refutes his existence as a flat figure in a painting, and instead of expressing fear, materialistic desires, or revolutionary ideas, the hobgoblin actively rebels against and terminates the poet's words when he strikes down the specter actors:

(Wie sie [Lydia] ihn [Max] umklammert, seine Hände ihre Kehle fassen, wirft der Klabautermann einen explodierenden Stein auf Max. Max wendet sich taumelnd um, wankt mit dem aufgerafften Schlachtschwert gegen den Klabautermann, stürzt aber auf halbem Weg tot nieder. Lydia nach eine Aufschrei ist starr stehen geblieben.)

¹⁴³ Döblin uses the term "Klabautermann," a term that typically describes a ship's kobold, and is a type of evil elf or spirit.

KLABAUTERMANN¹⁴⁴ Willst Du auch meine Pasteten kosten? Sie schmecken gut. (*Zweite Detonation; Lydia fällt nach ein paar Schritten neben Max.*)

DICHTER (*mit ausgestreckten Arm zum Klabautermann*) Du, – Du (*wirft sich vor der Leiter auf den Boden*).

KLABAUTERMANN (*breites Gelächter*) Schlappschwanz. (*Geht ruhig in seinen Rahmen zurück.*) (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 78)¹⁴⁵

In this second to last scene the hobgoblin exits the painting via a ladder, and first kills the specter actor playing Max followed by the one portraying Lydia. The poet, after a feeble verbal attempt to reprimand him (reminiscent to the way in which small children might get reprimanded “Du, du!”), throws himself a temper tantrum onto the floor in front of the ladder. After intervening in the dramatic production, and thus, in the human realm, and before returning into the picture, the hobgoblin calls the poet a “Schlappschwanz,” an expression that may

¹⁴⁴ NB! Döblin does not use a colon after the character’s name in *Lydia und Mäxchen*, and, when quoting longer conversation from this play, I do the same.

¹⁴⁵ Trans.:

(*As she [Lydia] clutches him [Max], his hands grasping her throat, the hobgoblin throws an exploding rock onto Max. Max turns around stumbling, staggers with the battle sword against the hobgoblin, but falls down dead half way. After a squeal Lydia stands stiff.*)

KLABAUTERMANN Would you also like to taste my pies? They taste good. (*Second detonation; Lydia falls after a couple steps next to Max.*)

DICHTER (*with stretched out arms towards the hobgoblin*) You, – You (*throws himself onto the floor in front of the ladder*).

KLABAUTERMANN (*bursting with laughter*) Pansy. (*Retreats quietly into his frame.*) (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 78)

refer to sexual impotence, but in this context definitely speaks to the lack of authorial control.

Ironically, the figure presumed to have least control exercises most control while the human actors in the play, who typically are endowed with control over the verbal and the object world, flee before the play's opening, and thus, are absent from the stage. In *Lydia und Mäxchen* Döblin turns each world on its head: the two- and three-dimensional worlds, the human world, the "Dingwelt," and the world of the theater. As if this were not enough to digest in this play, Döblin also scripts the "Mann im Monde" into this scene, who breaks the window pane, crouches on the window sill, and complains: "Morjen [*sic*]. Verfluchter Spektakel! Was macht ihr für einen Spektakel zu nachtschlafener Zeit" (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 78)!¹⁴⁶ With his entrance, the man in the moon introduces the outside world, the world typically not contained inside the theater, peaks in, and involves himself with the creative act on stage.

Elements believed to be in firm positions unhinge and reposition themselves in contrast to their conventional roles. The poet as creator of the play's reality has no control, although the characters and plot sprang from his imagination. His comparison of the creative process to that of giving birth yields a logical concept if we consider the fact that children, too—once the umbilical

¹⁴⁶ Trans.: "Morning. Damned racket! What kind of ruckus do you make at night sleeping time!" (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 78).

connection is severed—start leading lives of their own, and cannot be controlled by their parents. The poet's belief that he can somehow retain control over his creation demonstrates his alienation from the world. With his debut drama Döblin demonstrates the lack of control an author holds over his creation once the words leave his mind, and appear on paper. Contrary to the poet's belief his literary creations do not act in accordance with his intentions; however, he is still responsible for enlivening them. While the author is responsible for the words on the page, he lacks control over the things that arise from these words. Although he imbued them with his spirit their trajectory is beyond his control—a lesson the poet in *Lydia und Mäxchen* learns the hard way. While those in charge of crafting language may be able to smith the words, they are not in control of the things that arise from those words. Perhaps an author cannot convey his intentions to his readers or his audience since distance, obstruction of meaning, and interpretation render the conveyance of specific ideas from one mind to another impossible. A piece of art—whether a play, a novel, a poem, or a sculpture—exists in realms beyond its creator's control.

“Statues Made of Matchsticks”: Assertion and Control in *Comteß Mizzi*¹⁴⁷

In his second play Döblin successfully reveals the charade which prose employs. Authors of prose texts can pretend that they are in charge of their literary creation, and readers can pretend their interpretation of the text to be congruent with the author’s intended meaning. This is not the case for performances although the textual base is similar to that of a prose text. For instance, we can interpret a colon that follows a character’s name in a dramatic script as a placeholder for verbs such as “said,” “asked,” or “lamented,” enabling us to read a drama the same way in which we read a novel. When we do, we can imagine a character’s qualities, and continue to rely on our minds to create our own visualization—a creative luxury that the theater denies us. The performed play, therefore, reveals limitations of narrative art, that novels or dramas in print conceal. Döblin utilizes the dramatic form to uncover artistic limitations in general. Drama visualizes the breaking point that debunks the myth of the perceived synthesis between two minds, and in doing so refutes the idea that other art forms, such as novels, don’t contain such a breaking point.

In his second play Döblin establishes the notion that such a mental connection between reader and author does not exist – neither in written nor performed texts. While performance reveals this fallacy other art forms

¹⁴⁷ Bob Dylan: “Love Minus Zero/No Limit,” from *Bringing It all Back Home*, 1965.

potentially disguise it. These issues in *Comteß Mizzi* mirror the general predicament of drama. A performance operates in the space that opens up between actors and audience. Actors disperse visual cues, moods, and sounds to their audience, which receives them and feeds them back into the performance through their reactions. A performance thrives on the interplay between these two entities: actors and audience members. A joke not met with laughter does not function, for instance. In this way, a performance differs greatly from a written text. For instance, each time we encounter a stage performance of a previously read play, we experience the incongruence between a character image in our mind and that portrayed by an actor. While performances confront audience members with discrepancies between the imagined and the visible, this obstacle can be overcome by accepting the differing character portrayal, and moving on; however, actors, too, experience a split during performances, and this schism may be harder to bridge. Actors, attempting to portray a character, find themselves confronted with various forces tugging on them. They have to create a believable version of a character, someone that is not them, while being confined by their bodies and minds.

In practicing their arts of acting, writing, and sculpting Mizzi, Peter, and Xaver respectively experience such splits within themselves. Instead of practicing their art forms without limitations all three serve others in a rather perverted

sense. Not only do they neglect their own desires, wishes, and needs, but they also disregard the main tenets of their respective professions. Mizzi's acting is subject to her primary duty of submission. Instead of writing poetry, Peter assumes a role as national mourner. Xaver, instead of making long-lasting sculptures, creates bread sculptures for his employer, a wealthy man. In response to Peter's inquiry about the nature of his employment, Xaver replies: "Fest," a rather ironic answer considering the consistency of the medium which his employer prescribes to him (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 96). Because of the perversion of their tasks or the lack of audience each of these three artistic characters experiences a split that represents that of the actor on stage.

The fact that an actor on stage represents a character, while simultaneously remaining trapped within the confines of his body and mind creates a disconnect between character and audience on numerous levels. First, once an actor enters the stage, audience members can no longer envision the character he plays at their own discretion since visual and audio elements are now now prescribed, and thus, limited. For instance, perhaps a reader of *Comteß Mizzi* envisions Mizzi as sporting long, dark tresses, but as a spectator at a performance sees a blond actress with short hair embodying Mizzi, and feels the rupture between his interpretation of the words on the page and their interpretation as performed on stage. Second, the rift between the actor as person

and the actor as character leads to further complications. The actor—who is never character only—represents a substitute for the character, and, thus, remains trapped in a liminal space between two impossibilities: he can neither entirely become the character, and divest himself of his own humanity, nor can he entirely act as himself on stage.¹⁴⁸ In presenting Mizzi's predicament Döblin elucidates this conundrum. Her art demands of her to become temporarily that which the men in her life want her to be: object of desire, dutiful daughter, passionate lover, healer of withered souls, unparalleled beauty, and giver. Her conflicting roles exemplify the concepts of an actor split between person and character.

The Actress

The situation Mizzi's character experiences directly mirrors that of an actor: Döblin portrays Mizzi, who, torn between her own ideas and superimposed expectations, cannot sustain herself while simultaneously

¹⁴⁸ Film, on the other hand, exists more in a vacuum, as we don't gain insights into the space that is not part of the film, but nevertheless surrounds the set. Thus, theater is almost as if we were watching a film in the making. Film enables viewers more easily to identify with the characters. A film functions like a theatrical performance, but without the presence of the fourth wall. In that, a film functions more like a written (read) narrative, in which we as viewers are lured completely into the film's world, without seeing the actual barrier that exists there as well. Of course, here, too, it is obvious that the character, for instance, that of "Social Services" in Wes Anderson's *Moonrise Kingdom* is played by Tilda Swinton; thus, we encounter the actor / character split as we do in the theater; however, film is better equipped to conceal the border between the film's reality, and our own. Interestingly, Döblin increases this split in his 1920 film script *Die geweihten Töchter*, in which he writes that one actress is to play the character of mother and daughter (Döblin 357).

upholding her act. Mizzi's predominant roles and accompanying expectations exert strong oppositional and exclusive forces over Mizzi that surpass typical expectations of roles such as professional, spouse, friend, parent, or child. On the one hand, Mizzi is a sensuous being, who, young and vibrant as Döblin designs her, longs for permission to express herself. On the other hand, she suppresses her own desires and suspends her ideas to embody the most divine sacred daughter per her father's request. Her age, sensitivities, and desires are irreconcilable with the traits required of her to fulfill her job as noble prostitute. Mizzi's despair and fatalism indicate her loneliness and lack of support.¹⁴⁹ Her role as prostitute—and the fact that she functions as an object, owned by her father—prevent her from emotionally investing herself in others.¹⁵⁰ Thus, Mizzi mirrors the theatrical project: Her failure to reconcile different roles exemplifies the struggle an actor on stage faces during a performance. Both struggles manifest themselves between superimposed images or expectations, and inherent characteristics and drives. Mizzi's predicament—her reduction to functioning as a tool for others—also represents that of the actor on stage: Unlike the character in a prose piece or the published version of the drama, the actor on

¹⁴⁹ This scene reveals Neustätter's manipulating Mizzi, and his pressure on her to betray her father.

¹⁵⁰ Nevertheless, Mizzi is enamored with her father: "Oh mein Vater hat Recht. Restlos sich aufgeben! Niemand auf der Welt ist so voller Güte; er liegt auf dem Grunde aller Dinge wie ein weißes Licht" (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 93). Mizzi seems to think of him as god who, like a white light, is at the bottom of all things.

stage becomes an object, and in that more of a prop or tool, that merely aids in conveying a play's message. Thus, Döblin's treatment of an actor's reduction to an object in *Comteß Mizzi* juxtaposes that of the animated props in *Lydia und Mäxchen*.

Does the artistic (or here more specifically the dramatic) project, therefore, fail what it undertakes to do? I believe that Döblin's plays suggests that the theatrical project cannot succeed with certain limitations in place. A piece of art needs to be able to unfold freely, and should not be reigned in by external expectations imposed on the piece itself, or on its artist. To pose limitations and expectations demands the impossible, and perhaps unnatural of the artist. Because of externally imposed expectations Mizzi suspends her sense of self to fully serve the men who seek her services. The artist Mizzi quenches the desires of her clients, who constantly consume her, thus, producing an entirely unsustainable condition for Mizzi. While her customers might temporarily be re-encouraged, Mizzi loses herself in her giver role, filling whichever voids she perceives in them without addressing her own needs. Her father's perverted concept of her makes it impossible for Mizzi to balance her needs with his expectations.

A Fräulein, recognizing this predicament, questions the validity of Mizzi's claim to maintain emotional abstinence. She observes that Mizzi gets to know her

“friends” so well “daß Sie sie umwandeln, wie Sie sagen. Und sie selbst müssen dabei – kalt bleiben, unberührt im Herzen,” and argues “Das ist über die Kraft. Das ist – unnatürlich” (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 98).¹⁵¹ She considers Mizzi’s distance to her clients as unnatural, and accuses her: “Dann kennen Sie die rechte Liebe nicht. Oh nein. Sicher nicht. Die läßt nicht los, brennt, geht durch den Tod –” (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 98).¹⁵² The Fräulein juxtaposes the terms “kalt” und “brennt” in her discussion about love, and claims that if Mizzi indeed remains cold she cannot know true love, for true love burns even through death. With this she foreshadows Mizzi’s suicide since Mizzi’s body sports a “Brandmal unter der linken Brust,” literally a burn mark through which she stabs herself later (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 94). Within the context of the Fräulein’s remarks one might argue that Mizzi’s dutiful fulfillment of her father’s expectations leaves a mark on her. Rather than experiencing the fire of love from within her own heart her clients’ fire burns her. On another level, the Fräulein’s doubts address the credibility of acting, and suggest that to act is by definition unnatural. How can an actress authentically portray a person she is not, while at the same time remain true to herself? How can one person embody two people without “feeling

¹⁵¹ The phrase “kalt bleiben”—“to remain cold” could connect to McLuhan’s idea regarding cold and hot mediums (Styan).

¹⁵² “that you transform them as you say. And you yourself have to remain cold, untouched in your heart. ... That is beyond power. That is – unnatural” ... “Then you don’t know true love. Oh no. Certainly not. It doe walks through death –” (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 98).

the heat?" Impossible? From this perspective, the theatrical project is doomed to fail as it requires the actors to function with split personalities, an issue Döblin introduces as early as 1906, in his initial drama. It is not only Mizzi in performing her art as sacred daughter who has difficulty determining her purpose, but also Peter, the poet Döblin scripts into *Comteß Mizzi*, struggles with his understanding of himself, and his role as a poet.¹⁵³

The Poet

Peter, abiding by his principles lacks an audience for his art, and, without recipients, cannot practice his art.¹⁵⁴ Encountering Peter, one gets the impression that he is somewhat lost. As he reminisces about his former physical connection with Mizzi, and laments his age, Peter indicates that Mizzi was not merely satisfying his sexual desires, but that the two connected on a deeper level. Now Peter lacks a focus, an issue that becomes apparent when sculptor Xaver invites him to become a martyr: "Peter, willst ein Märtyrer [w]erden?" 'So gern.' ... 'Du wirst Märtyrer, Peter, trittst für deine Überzeugung ein.' 'Ja, welche hab ich

¹⁵³ Peter, the rock or cornerstone, could be seen as integral part, or perhaps falls into the same category as Mizzi – the person who has to remain cold (like stone).

¹⁵⁴ Interestingly, Döblin named the poet Peter, a derivative of the Greek word "rock." Perhaps he is the foundation of art that has meaning: poetry, onto which the artist can build his kingdom.

denn? Du hast deinen Esel, aber ich –.“ (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 97)¹⁵⁵. Peter, in response to Xaver’s coaxing, and defending his convictions expresses his lack thereof. Next, he references Xaver’s coat of arms—a donkey made of bread—as something tangible to believe in, and acknowledges his lack of a belief system.¹⁵⁶ Directionless, and without inspiration or purpose Peter, staying true to his humanist ideals, adopts the role of national mourner.

In the absence of a true artistic purpose he mourns the death of “Großfürst Wladimirowitsch.” In the course of a conversation involving Peter and Xaver, Peter explains:

PETER: (*mit einem Blick auf Mizzi*): – Du siehst mich in Schwarz gekleidet.

Ich habe – Landestrauer angelegt.

XAVER: Was hast du?

PETER: Der Großfürst Wladimirowitsch, der Sohn des seligen Dimitri und seiner Gemahlin Klementine, ist vorige Woche entschlafen.

XAVER: Den kanntest du doch garnicht.

¹⁵⁵ Trans.: “Peter, would you like to become a martyr?” “So much so.” ... “You will become a martyr, stand up for your convictions.” Yes, which ones do I have? You have your donkey, but I –.“ (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 97).

¹⁵⁶ Neustätter echoes the idea of the necessity to believe in something tangible, and laments that the count, too, lacks exactly that: “Er ist wahnsinnig. Er ist kein Mensch, ein Leichnam. Mit seinen ungezählten Reichtümern lebt er nur seinen Ideen“ (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 40).

PETER: Ich kannte ihn nicht. Aber denk mal, wenn ich ihn gekannt hätte.

Man muß auch die Möglichkeit erwägen. Das wäre für mich ein trauriger Fall, (*weinerlich*) ein sehr trauriger Fall.

XAVER: Der geht dich doch garnichts an.

PETER: Wie viele sterben, die mich garnichts angehen. In diesem Einen ehre ich symbolisch die andern. (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 95-6)¹⁵⁷

Ignoring the fact that he does not know the duke he mourns him nevertheless.¹⁵⁸

Peter, unlike other male characters in the play, reveals his humane and sensitive sides. Hypothesizing how sad his death would be had he known him, Peter justifies donning mourning garb. Additionally, he explains that in mourning this one unknown person he pays respect to all those who die, and whom he does not know. As a poet Peter respects life's major elements—love and death—and recognizes the significance of commemorating such events—a universal human desire. Peter mourns loss of life in general, even of those he does not know, and

¹⁵⁷ Trans.:

PETER: (*looking at Mizzi*): – You see me dressed in black. I have – donned national mourning.

XAVER: You did what?

PETER: The Grand Duke Wladimirowitsch, the son of the late Dimitri and his wife Klementine died last week.

XAVER: But you did not know him at all.

PETER: I did not know him. But think what would have happened had I known him. One also has to consider that possibility. That would be a sad case (*weepy*) a very sad case.

XAVER: He doesn't concern you at all.

PETER: How many die, who don't concern me. In this one I am honoring all the others symbolically. (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 95-6)

¹⁵⁸ BKB: "When you mourn, you always mourn for yourself." This statement might apply to Peter: perhaps he mourns for himself because of his lost love to Mizzi.

celebrates life and love in his actions and his poetry as his reminiscence about Mizzi demonstrates. Additionally, Peter's comment and outfit, too, anticipate Mizzi's death later in the play. Within the play's context Peter appears like a character from the past, and behaves unlike the men who visit Mizzi. Respecting two of life's most driving forces, death and love, Peter transcends the selfishness and dominance other male characters exhibit throughout the play.

Peter demonstrates a quality most male characters in the play either lack or don't express, that of love. As poet he possesses the capacity of love, thereby distinguishing himself from other men portrayed in the play who selfishly satisfy their desires, and who, without hesitation, take advantage of women. The count's prostitutes serve as substitutes for whatever is lacking: faith, love, or marital excitement.¹⁵⁹ After Peter's rhapsody on Mizzi's and his rapture, Clarisse shares a couple of lines with the surrounding characters, causing them to laugh. Peter, understanding the gravity of human emotion, exclaims: "Der Rausch ist eine ernste Sache, meine Herrn, Weh dem, der lästert" (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 94).¹⁶⁰ As poet he comprehends life and love differently, and displays a more sensitive side than other characters do. For instance, he writes a poem for the sacred daughters:

¹⁵⁹ The words prostitute and substitute both carry the same stem:

pro (in front) stitute (to cause to stand)

sub (in place of) stitute (to cause to stand)

(*American Heritage Dictionary*)

So, the prostitute is the person who stands in front of someone, offering himself/herself to another person (like something in a "Schaufenster").

¹⁶⁰ "Rausch" - Eros, Bacchus ...

“Erst seit ich Euch sah, Ihr Frommen und Süßen, / Wandle ich gerade, auf sicheren Füßen”¹⁶¹ (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 94).¹⁶² Peter’s poem reveals that his experience with the sacred daughters touched him on a deeper, perhaps transcendental level, and affected him more permanently than other men. Peter’s poem does not express short-lived bliss, but rather a steadying of his life’s course. Being with the sacred daughters, particularly with Mizzi, provides security and purpose for him. His poem expresses an epiphany, rather than a short-lived rapture. Peter values the sacred daughters on a deeper level than their typical clients. As poet he comprehends the importance of human connection that transcends the realm of physical transactions. Unlike most men in the count’s abode who vie for Mizzi’s attention, Peter’s comments express the gratitude he feels towards Mizzi for granting him such inspirational moments. Seeking connections with those around him he inquires with Xaver about his whereabouts. It becomes clear that Xaver, bound by a new job, does not visit with Mizzi and company frequently.

¹⁶¹ Trans.: “Only since I have seen you, you who are pious and sweet, / I am walking straight on safe feet.” (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 94)

¹⁶² Of course, the ecstasy Peter is referring to could also be drug induced since two men discuss a potential drug operation happening in the count’s abode, in scene eleven:

[1.HERR]: Du, warum sagst du mir denn davon kein Wort? Hier soll ein Laboratorium im Hause sein. Wo ist denn das?

[2.H]ERR: Ich habe auch nur was läuten hören.

1. HERR: Sie sollen mit Tieren, Hunden und Katzen, auch Menschen, die sonderbarsten Versuche machen. Mit chemischen Mittel[n], allerlei Combinationen [*sic*] in ekstatische Zustände versetzen (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 105).

Therefore, the count does not only seem to work with natural seductive forces, such as physical beauty, but possibly also creates “performance enhancing drugs.”

The Sculptor

Xaver experiences a similar perversion of his artistic fate to those of Mizzi and Peter.¹⁶³ Too old to engage physically with the sacred daughters, and gainfully employed by a “reichen Herrn,”¹⁶⁴ it is Xaver’s task to sculpt his employer’s visitors in bread—a potentially meaningless artistic endeavor for its creator since it deviates from a typical sculpting job, and does not readily correspond to the label “Bildhauer,” or sculptor (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 96). There is little longevity to his sculptures, and bread as his medium stands in stark contrast to the marble-like material of which the play’s most crucial prop, Demeter, which so prominently permeates the play, consists. The words sculptor or “Bildhauer” do not call to mind the medium of bread, but rather that of wood, metal, stone, or clay since the concept of sculpting evokes the idea of longevity and permanence. The type of sculpting, however, in which Xaver engages cannot last, as Peter points out: “In Brot? Das zerbröckelt doch rasch” (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 96). Xaver’s practice of pouring water over these bread sculptures to keep them from crumbling alters each slice of art, causing the bread to become soggy, expand, and lose shape. His employer demands that Xaver practice his art in the same way as Mizzi’s father demands of Mizzi. Both men in charge request

¹⁶³ The name Xaver means “bright house.”

¹⁶⁴ Trans.: “a rich gentleman”

impossible tasks: Mizzi is supposed to act without investing herself, and Xaver to sculpt without an appropriate medium.

Xaver's artistic creation aligns with Mizzi's work in another aspect.

Xaver's manipulation of bread and water is reminiscent of the eucharistic ritual of transubstantiation of bread and wine into flesh and blood. Mizzi, too, references the crux of Catholic mass, as she explains the predicament of her clients: "Wie es ruft! Das schmutzige Gesicht hebt! Und auf eure Verwandlung wartet" (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 94)! Their art references sacred elements (the count, too, speaks of "Weihe" in regards to the experience his sacred daughters provide), but it fulfills neither one of them. This void also informs Xaver's thinking. The superficial and vain nature of this sculptures—of his employer's guests in bread—does not require a great level of skill. Xaver expresses a theory of life that is similar to that of Peter's mourning idea in that it is a broad stroke application. While Peter wants to respect all in mourning one, Xaver believes that nothing is the crux of life. In his conversation with Peter and the sacred daughters, Xaver reveals his rumination on life, resulting in this philosophy:

XAVER: Ich hab es heraus, worauf es im Leben ankommt.

MIZZI: Nämlich?

XAVER: Auf nichts.

MIZZI: Ach.

XAVER: Auf garnichts. (*Zu P[eter]*) Was du auch tust, mein Freund, es ist richtig.

PETER: Jawohl, es ist richtig.

MIZZI: Bist wirklich bequem geworden, Xaver.

XAVER: Es ist bequemer, alles falsch zu finden, zu bereuen, besser machen zu wollen. – Also alles richtig finden.

CLARISSE: Ja, das hat manchmal seine Schwierigkeit.

XAVER: Ich habe viel um mich gesehen. Ich habe Weltverbesserer, Reue, Entrüstung, Betrug, Jammer und Jubel gesehen. – Ich mahne. Ich warne. Kein Streit, keine Hoffnung! Vom Standpunkt der Ewigkeit ist alles nur Tatsache. Das andere ist Hochmut, Eitelkeit, Größenwahn. (*Döblin, Comteß Mizzi 96*)¹⁶⁵

Similarly to Peter's universal mourning for everyone's sake, Xaver applies his ideological brush stroke rather broadly in exclaiming that nothing depends on

¹⁶⁵ Trans.:

XAVER: I have figured out what is important in life.

MIZZI: And?

XAVER: Nothing.

MIZZI: Alas.

XAVER: Absolutely nothing. (*To P[eter]*) Whatever you do, my friend, it is right.

PETER: Yes indeed, it is right.

MIZZI: You really have become complacent, Xaver.

XAVER: It is much more comfortable to consider everything as wrong, to regret to do things better. – Therefore, just find everything right.

CLARISSE: Yes, that is sometimes difficult.

XAVER: I have seen much around me. I have seen do-gooders, regret, indignation, deception, sorrow and joy. – I admonish. I warn. No fight, no hope! From the viewpoint of eternity everything is merely fact. Everything else is arrogance, vanity, megalomania. (*Döblin, Comteß Mizzi 96*)

anything in life. In response to Mizzi's accusation that his stance is a cop-out, Xaver counters that the opposite—finding everything wrong, regretting things, and trying to do better—demonstrates complacency since it takes more effort to deem things acceptable. Conclusively, Xaver advises his friends with this rather perplexing motto: "From the viewpoint of eternity everything is merely fact," and explains that the rest is only arrogance and megalomania (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 96). Döblin highlights the typical human tendency to whine and complain about circumstances and situations, and provides a stoic counter example in Xaver. As a sculptor, whose task has been reduced to sculpt bread, he gains insights into the self-aggrandizing proclivity of human nature. Expressing his understanding indicates his resistance to the situation, and aligns him with Peter and Mizzi in their rebellion against the established system. Using Mizzi, Peter, and Xaver Döblin elucidates the problematic aspects of superimposed restrictions on various art forms, such as acting, writing, and sculpting.

“Requisiten sind nicht erlaubt”: Artistic Limitations and Constraints in *Die Ehe*¹⁶⁶

Restrictions and Prescriptions

In his final play, *Die Ehe*, Döblin writes extensive stage directions unlike for any of his other plays. Whereas props played an important role in his previous plays, here Döblin prescribes: “Bühne ist ein einfaches Podium, keinerlei Dekoration, kein Requisit,” and a few lines below he emphasizes his instructions: “Requisiten sind nicht erlaubt. Wo sie unvermeidlich sind – Stuhl, Bank –, muß jegliche naturalistische Absicht unterbleiben” (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 226). Döblin places creative restrictions on the production of *Die Ehe*. In addition to prohibiting the use of (naturalistic) props, Döblin prescribes a narrator to permeate the play. While his stage directions are restrictive, he nevertheless provides four structural options for a performance. The play’s three main scenes depict “the young marriage,” “the large family,” and “the bourgeoisie family,” and the prelude also depicts a marriage—that of the poet and his wife. In contrast to the rest of his play, the play within the prelude covers the superficial plot of a love triangle, and thus, treats a subject that is entirely removed from the dire economic circumstances of the time.

¹⁶⁶ Döblin 226

The poet's wife—who speaks the first words on stage—immediately differentiates herself from other wives: “Ich habe das Glück, die Frau dieses einzigartigen Mannes zu sein. Ich habe nicht nur wie andere Frauen für seine äußere Ordnung zu sorgen, für seine Kleidung, seine Wäsche, seine Korrespondenz, — ich habe vor allem die Ruhe und Abgeschlossenheit zu schaffen, deren diese zarte Seele bedarf” (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 227-8). She continues to provide details as to what her job as the author's wife (a job she takes seriously) entails.¹⁶⁷ She believes herself to be absolutely imperative for her husband's success. Her creation and maintenance of an atmosphere favorable to the creative mind, enables her husband to conceive of and record his artistic works. She feels responsible for his artistic creations. This wife holds great power over her husband, keeping him in the remote corners of their house, away from telephone and newspaper (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 228). As a result his artistic creations, too, are far removed from reality. Here, the poet becomes the object since his sole purpose is to fulfill his role of creator of plays.

¹⁶⁷ The poet's wife elaborates on her tasks to promote her husband's success: “Obwohl sein Ruhm nicht unbestritten ist, weiß ich, wer er ist und was wir ihm alle schulden. Hier liegen Teppiche, damit ihn kein Schritt stört. Die Türen unserer Zimmer sind gepolstert. Hierher langt kein Telefon, ich halte die Zeitungen von ihm fern” (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 113). In other words, this artist exists hidden away from the actual world. He cannot even hear his own steps, let alone the sounds of the outside world. He does not speak on the telephone, thus, hears no other voices besides his own and that of his wife, who also withholds newspapers from her husband. This “Dichter” is kept in a cage like Rilke's *Panther* or like a person locked up in a psychiatric hospital.

Döblin treats questions of artistic control throughout his dramatic career, and excavates various loci of control in his plays. While his debut play features the typical inanimate realm as a potential locus of control that counters the creative locus of control, his second play presents the lack of control on the one hand, and the stifling restrictive nature of control on the other. The act that results from the interplay of forces impacting an actor yields success, but only when the audience willingly participates. On the content level Döblin portrays artists who, because of the restrictions and confinements they experience, cannot fully exercise their arts. In the prelude of his final play the poet that Döblin depicts further demonstrates the lack of control he as the artist holds. This artist, intent on creating art for entertainment, maintains no control. He is neither in control over the creative process, nor over the conditions surrounding him. His wife keeps him locked away to prevent the adulteration of his thoughts through outside influences.

Ironically, while Döblin portrays the defeat of this poet's endeavors, Döblin himself includes numerous restrictions and prescriptions addressed at potential directors in the stage directions preceding the play. And yet, as the critical reviews from the performances of *Die Ehe* reveal, Döblin holds no power over the reception and interpretation of his final play, and ultimately, has to deal with its ban. In the few performances of *Die Ehe*, prior to its ban, the order of the

scenes were: *Die junge Ehe*, *Die bürgerliche Ehe*, und *Die große Familie*, while the written text follows the following order of scenes: *Die junge Ehe*, *Die große Familie*, and *Die bürgerliche Familie*. In his pre-play directions Döblin provides options for how to perform the play on stage.

Prelude

To elucidate Döblin's use of the prelude in *Die Ehe* I will briefly outline its structure. The play's prelude consists of nine sequences which depict the following: (1) the poet explains his latest play's plot to his wife; (2) the poet excitedly announces that his play has been well received and will be performed (the thought of its success and ensuing applause causing his wife a headache); (3) the poet and his wife's post performance reaction; (4) the poet, deluded as Döblin scripts him, thanks the audience from atop the stage; (5) a couple in the coat check exemplifies the audience's reaction, and indicates the play's lack of consequence; (6) the director's negative reaction to the play—he considers the play a "Schmarren;" (7) the theater critic's lack of motivation to review the play; (8) two workers¹⁶⁸ cleaning up the stage to create space "für wat [*sic*] Richtiges;" and the narrator (one of the workers), after announcing his viewpoint of the

¹⁶⁸ Döblin, harkening back to his first play names one of the two "Max" (*Die Ehe* 235).

world, readies Döblin's audience for the actual play—a play of substance and consequence (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 235).

While the poet believes in the power of his play—in his play as a moving experience with the power to change the audience's lives—all other characters surrounding the poet demonstrate the opposite. His wife, while initially supportive, complains about the prospect of the applause and the headache it causes her, as soon the poet announces his play's acceptance at the theater. The next two scenes demonstrate his blindness to the play's actual effects: His reaction to the play's performance and his entering the stage to thank the audience reveal his lack of understanding. For the remaining four scenes of the prelude Döblin portrays the criticism of various outside sources, beginning with a couple in the coat check. While the woman indicates that she almost liked the play as well as a movie in the cinema, the man has already moved on to thinking about sport. Their brief and superficial mention of the play demonstrates its lack of impact. The couple's reaction represents that of the audience, and indicates that the play is not memorable for longer than moving from the theater to the coat check. Next, the director, attempting to dictate a letter that contains praise for this "Schmarren" reveals his disgust about the play (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 233). The critic, following the director's example, is also trying hard to produce a positive

review, but admits that he has no interest in the matter. His sole motivation for completing the review is his pay, and the prospect of taking a summer vacation.

In addition to these critical character voices Döblin includes textual versions of this type of criticism throughout the prelude. The first sequence of the prelude begins with the Text "Ruhe! Der große Meister dichtet für die feinen Leute" which, while defining the poet's intended audience, it also indicates those he excludes, such as the working class (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 227). Döblin continuously intersperses such texts throughout the prelude. While the poet summarizes the play's plot for his wife, texts interject: "Wovon aber leben diese Menschen? Was arbeiten sie? ... Wovon aber leben diese Menschen? Es scheinen lauter Bankiers zu sein" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 228). While these texts imply the superficiality of the characters' problems, the poet's wife comments on the play's depth. As the poet explains that the husband and his lover create a new home the text believes to have its questions answered: "Aha, Bankiers! Sie kaufen sich eine Villa. Sie haben viel Zeit für ihre Liebesgeschichten" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 229). When the poet explains that another woman intends to take away the man the text exclaims: "Überfütterung! Masterscheinungen. Man soll die Bande auf halbe Kost setzen," and indicates the decadent nature of the characters' problems (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 229). These characters don't concern themselves with existential issues, but rather with superficialities. As the play's conclusion draws near, culminating in a

recognition scene between husband and wife, the text reads: "Rührei mit Schinken, große Portion eine Mark zwanzig," and thus, draws attention to fundamental issues such as hunger instead of lofty ones like love. Towards the conclusion of this first scene Döblin directs the inclusion of music played from an LP: "Ja, das macht der Müßiggang und das viele Geld, daß man seinen Kopf für 'ne saure Gurke hält. Man schmeißt ihn in den Rinnstein, er trudelt um die Welt. Ja, das macht der der Müßiggang und das viele Geld" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 230). *Die Ehe* contains elements such as text, song, chorus, narrator, and dance throughout, but for the purpose of elucidating the prelude I will stick with the texts for now.

If we follow the examples of these textual displays from this first sequence, they direct our attention to the crux of each scene. For instance, "Das Stück ist angenommen. ... Der Erfolg. ... Das Stück ist aus. ... Der Dichter soll wieder eingemottet werden. ... Das ungeheure Erlebnis? Die wahre Wirkung des Stückes" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 231-3). While still addressing questions of artistic control Döblin also raises explicit questions of artistic relevance. What is the purpose of a play? Should a drama merely entertain its audience, or affect social change? While Döblin's earlier plays contain such issues implicitly, they culminate in his final play, and appear explicitly. Since the bulk of *Die Ehe* deals with social injustice Döblin's stance on this issue is clear: drama has a more significant role than merely to entertain, a position he juxtaposes in the prelude

and in his depiction of the poet therein. If the poet is kept away from the world, albeit to grant him peace and quiet to think and write, his compositions are rendered useless.

Real World Reactions

Döblin demonstrates this throughout the prelude in a couple of ways: one, he provides a glimpse of the audience's reaction, and two, he depicts workers who eagerly sweep the play's remnants off stage to make way for a play of greater importance—Döblin's play. Although audience members are moved to tears, the experience only leads to a cathartic "emotional cleansing" without side or long term after effects. Eager to leave the theater in a hurry, audience members treat coat check personnel rudely. Into this scene Döblin scripts a couple, whose attempt to communicate about the play fails, and gets smothered by more relevant concerns:

SIE: Du Schatz, heut war es aber wunderschön. Beinah wie im Kino.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹ In his radio play *Der Doppelgänger* Friedrich Dürrenmatt also includes a commentary on the Kino in *Der Doppelgänger*, when the "Regisseur remarks: "Zwei Morde in zehn Minuten. Wie im Kino. Sie machen Fortschritte" (31). An intriguing remark, considering that we are dealing with a "Hörspiel," not a visual representation.

ER: Nu mal los, Kind, ick muß die Rennberichte haben, was hat denn nu Schmeling eigentlich mit Bülow abgemacht, Donnerwetter, erst zehn, wir kommen noch zurecht nach dem Sportpalast. Auto, Auto!¹⁷⁰

SIE: Herrlich, das ist lieb von dir. (*Die Ehe* 233)

During this short dialogue, the woman reveals that she seeks spectacle and entertainment when going to the theater, and the man has already erased the play from his mind, and instead worries about the boxing score. Döblin demonstrates how the man and the woman talk entirely past one another, neither understanding the other, and although they just shared the same experience, they find themselves incapable of communicating about it. Furthermore, the play was for the “feinen Leute,” but the man concerns himself with entertainment for all classes—sport, particularly boxing. His comment points to the audience’s desire for political relevance, a desire that the play cannot quench. The “Sportpalast” reference indicates two things: first, as a venue for political speeches the “Sportpalast” was frequented by the NSDAP as well as by the KPD, and second, as a sport venue for popular sports, such as hockey and boxing the “Sportpalast” is a gathering place for members of all classes, and not exclusively for the “feinen Leute” (like the theater).

¹⁷⁰ Another indication of the position of the woman is the fact that the man addresses her as child.

Up to this point in the prelude, the two sides—enthusiasm and negativity—remain separate, but finally, the two worlds, that of the blinded poet and that of the critical public, clash. Two workers enter the stage to clean it up for that which matters, the actual play. The poet, interrupting these two and attempting to thwart their cleaning efforts, reminds them of the “incredible experience” he granted the audience. The workers, deaf to his complaint and explanation, resume their clean-up work, leading the poet to protest: “Was machen Sie hier? Was haben Sie hier zu suchen, Sie, Kerl? ... Ich bin der Dichter dieses Stücks. Es war ein ungeheures Erlebnis. ... Ich habe den Menschen ihre Seele gezeigt, mein Stück ist ein Kunstwerk, das verstehen sie nicht” (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 235).

Attempting to clarify the value of his play to the workers the poet assures them of his relevance and importance as author of the play. He believes that, for audience members, his play successfully holds up a mirror to their souls, but his attempts to convince the workers are to no avail. They explain:

Staubsauger her, Max, runter von der Bühne, alles mit Mann und Maus.
 ... Hat ja alles keinen Zweck, wat soll uns det hier, mal Luft machen, raus mit euch. ... Regen Sie sich man nicht auf, Herr, wir können Sie hier nicht brauchen, wir brauchen Platz für wat Richtiges. ... Wat ungeheures Erlebnis. (*Drängelt ihn weg.*) ... Wolln wir auch nicht, können keine Kunstwerke brauchen, im Krieg, im Krieg gibts keine Kunstwerke. ...

Sagen Sie. Wer im Fett sitzt, sagt Frieden. Ist nicht Frieden. Und weil Sie
 det nicht wissen, Herr, sage ich Ihnen, hier weg! Bühne frei. (Döblin, *Die
 Ehe* 235)

With these words and a drum roll the workers sweep the poet and his set off
 stage, expressing their hunger for drama that addresses real problems. While the
 poet intends for his work to reach the classy people (who left the theater
 unimpressed), it is the workers who are the first characters to criticize the play
 openly, and to confront him about the meaninglessness of his artistic creation.
 The intended audience spends little time thinking about the play (which also
 does not contain a lot to ponder), and the working class takes issue with the
 play's lack of depth and gravity. The workers hold the mirror up to the poet and
 demonstrate to him that he lives and composes far removed from their reality,
 and that his play contains little substance.

While the audience's reaction demonstrates the lack of consequence of the
 prelude's poet's play, in a stroke of genius Döblin differentiates himself from this
 poet. Already in the play's stage directions he states the moral of his play. While
 the final word of the play within the prelude may be "Wasserstoffperoxid," and
 those of scene three may be "Wandschirme und Verschwiegenheit," Döblin's
 final play holds a message of consequence: "Das Stück demonstriert: die heutige
 Wirtschaft wirkt zerstörend und auflösend auf die alte Ehe und Familie, vermag

aber von sich aus die menschlichen Beziehungen nicht neu zu regeln und neu zu ordnen, ihr sind diese menschlichen Beziehungen gleichgiltig [sic]" (*Die Ehe* 226). Döblin's answer to the questions of artistic control embedded in his plays seems to be that it is a playwright's duty to portray socially critical situations, draw attention to them, and, ultimately to affect change.

Ironically, it is precisely the politicization of artistic subject matter that prompted the ban of *Die Ehe* after a few performances (Schuster 324). While some of his critics interpret Döblin's final play as an attack on art in general, I believe that Döblin neither attacks art nor drama, but rather criticizes inconsequential drama, that is drama without political relevance. The fact that he wraps his social critique in a dramatic form confirms his faith in drama. Additionally, his various ways of expressing his social critique, for instance in form of "Bildtexte," songs, dance, and film, demonstrate his belief in art. Rather than turn against literature and art, he turns against art that is removed from the world (Schuster 324). Döblin's plays contain evidence that art, if remote from the crucial matters of the world, is irrelevant, and that true art confronts us with important questions—questions of social justice and of control.

Döblin's plays demonstrate that artistic control is not only impossible, but also unnecessary since it is detrimental to artistic creations. Limitations and restrictions cannot yield great art, only pieces of little consequence. While his

dramatic oeuvre spans a couple of decades, and each of his plays treats different subject matters, they share Döblin's engagement with the question of artistic control. For instance, in *Lydia und Mäxchen* the poet tries to control everything about the dramatization of his words, just to have this approach blow up in his face (almost quite literally if I dare say). The hobgoblin destroys his specter actors with fire stones, and the poet is almost washed off the stage by the fire department. In *Comteß Mizzi* the count exerts his control over his daughter, and (as revealed in additional texts) previously over her mother. Mizzi, Peter, and Xaver represent examples of artistic repression and its stifling results. In *Die Ehe* Döblin juxtaposes the superficial play written by a poet from a controlled environment, and his own play that contains political matters. Perhaps Xaver best represents a workable artistic philosophy concerning the questions of artistic control in Döblin's plays: acceptance of one's predicament and acknowledgement of the counterproductive nature of self-aggrandizement. This combination may be what an artist needs in order to affect social and political change.

Chapter Three

Dramatic Theory III: The Marxist Allegory

“Der Mensch lebt von Brot und Büchern. Darum bitte ich Sie. Nein, ich bitte Sie um überhaupt nichts: ‘Lesen Sie gefälligst!’”¹⁷¹

In this third and final chapter I draw connections between the previous two chapters, and analyze the plays in conjunction with Marx and Engels’ theory of the alienation of labor, and the resulting commodification of people. While I looked at the objectification of characters and the animation of objects in the first chapter, I addressed questions of artistic control and purpose in the second chapter. In this chapter I will deal with Marxist theory and how it pertains to these three Döblin plays. Each of these plays includes references to Marx and Engels’ *Communist Manifesto*, which reveal the characters’ driving forces. While in *Lydia und Mäxchen* the poet’s words exceed its creator, *Comteß Mizzi* demonstrates the lack of sustainability for people who, because of the restrictions of their work, function in a machine-like manner. *Die Ehe* contains the most direct

¹⁷¹ Peter Handke, Berliner Ensemble website, 29 June 2016.

condemnation of a society that functions according to capitalist rules, and from which no one in particular benefits, not even those in power.

For instance, *Lydia und Mäxchen* addresses a rebellion of words and props against people, whom the poet as creator of the underlying text represents, and which demonstrates Marx and Engels' prediction of a revolutionary uprising. The poet, as artistic creator of the play performed within the play, believes he is in control, and thus, I align him with the bourgeoisie in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. His creation, which he believes to be subordinate to him, rebels against him, rises to power, and overthrows his position. The different elements in Marx and Engels' text, bourgeoisie, proletariat, a driving force, and an unexpected element align with elements in *Lydia und Mäxchen*: While the poet—equivalent to the bourgeoisie—believes himself to be in control of the dramatic production, the props—like the proletariat—plan their uprising. The specter actors constitute the driving force here since they spring into existence from the poet's words, and transform into a thing of their own. Although both, words and money, sprang from their inventors' minds they assume a life of their own. The unexpected element here is the hobgoblin.

Comteß Mizzi exhibits Döblin's criticism of the treatment of women, an element that he addresses in other texts, and that mirrors some of Marx and Engels' points. The count represents a driving force, control masked by desire,

who exerts his control over the sacred daughters. His own daughter, performing as one of them, after submitting to her father's wishes, rebels by committing suicide and thus, exits the system. In addition to Mizzi, who functions as an actress, Döblin scripts a sculptor and a poet into this play, and each demonstrates a different way of dealing with artistic restrictions, or even obsolescence.

Lastly, *Die Ehe* treats social injustices in each of its three scenes. For instance, the first scene deals with the restrictions paragraph 218 places on women, while the second scene addresses the problematic nature of "Wohnungsgeld" and "Dringlichkeitsscheine" for its recipients. The third scene addresses gender inequalities even among the bourgeoisie. As part of this group, Döblin presents us with Unternehmer, who believes he controls his subordinates. While those who work for him depend on him, and he reaps the monetary fruits of their labor, Döblin demonstrates that Unternehmer, too, does not hold actual power, and that money prevails as the driving force. Beginning with *Lydia und Mäxchen* I will explore how these three plays align with aspects of Marx's *Manifesto*.

“Ein Gespenst geht um in Europa”: Lydia and “Marxchen”

Grave Diggers

In spite of his power to create things, *Lydia und Mäxchen's* poet cannot control his creation's actions. The poet, comparing his creative process to that of giving birth, believes himself to be in control of the play and its performance. Over the course of the play he painfully realizes that production elements impact the play's textual basis. In *Lydia und Mäxchen* numerous components don't function as anticipated: the actors who are cast to play the protagonists flee the theater, the props rebel against those in power, and the poet's words cease to follow his instructions. The typical control that those in power possess over the powerless shifts since Döblin's play contains no single locus of control. Even objects, typically at the mercy of people, refuse to remain in the position of merely receiving action.

Because of this upheaval of the usual power structure it is important to view *Lydia und Mäxchen* through the lens of Marx and Engels' *Manifesto*. The play's props parallel Marx and Engels' proletarians. Neither props nor proletarians holds power, or can control their fate. Those in charge of the play, e.g., poet, actors and stage crew, parallel the bourgeoisie; both parties prescribe the navigable parameters for their subordinates. Neither prop nor proletarian initially holds agency and both can only act within their prescribed functions.

Reduced to tools, both lead unhappy and unfulfilled lives. Those in power further their riches at the expense of their subjects who remain unable to procure health and respect for themselves. While the two communist authors consider the inevitable rebellion, Döblin realizes it in this play.

Marx and Engels consider this rebellion an unintended, but inevitable consequence of a system that benefits the few and suppresses the many. This concept of unintended consequences which accompany systematic structure of oppression emerges in Döblin's play and in the *Manifesto*. Discussing unintended consequences Marx and Engels argue:

Mit der Entwicklung der großen Industrie wird also der unter den Füßen der Bourgeoisie die Grundlage selbst hinweggezogen, worauf sie produziert und die Produkte sich aneignet. Sie produziert vor allem ihren eigenen Totengräber. Ihr Untergang und der Sieg des Proletariats sind gleich unvermeidlich. (Marx/Engels 53-54)

The authors predict that the development of big industry will remove the bourgeoisie's foundation. The conditions they created will turn on them and will ultimately destroy them so that the bourgeoisie, above, all produces its own "grave diggers." Marx and Engels, convinced that the demise of the current proletariat will ensue, believe that a proletarian victory which will create a new order is inevitable. In this play Döblin mirrors Marx and Engels' prediction that

those who endure the impositions of the powerful and the resulting conditions, the props, the words, and the hobgoblin, will ultimately rise up against their oppressors and destroy them.

For instance, the poet loses the control he believes he holds over a variety of agents. No longer adhering to their roles, first the original actors abandon their post prior to the play's opening, and succumb to their fear of the developments on stage, which is the appearance of the specter actors. The poet interprets their materialization from his words initially as positive, believing that his incarnate words will perfect the play's performance until they, too, cease to follow his instructions. But the specter actors are not the only ones to upset the hierarchy since even the stage directions, which the props embody, rebel against him. Hubristically attempting to increase his fame, the poet believes that he continues to control his creation, when—as the stand ins for the proletarians (people reduced to tools)—the props erupt in revolution. No longer content to merely function as tools, and after an initial ambiguity about whether or not the poet has their best interest in mind, the props decide to fight against all things human.

Döblin's choice of the props as revolutionary elements, and thus as representation of the proletariat, allows insights into the treatment of the proletariat as objects instead of people. Props and proletarians demonstrate both types of characteristics—those of humans and objects—diametrically opposed to

each other. While members of the proletariat in the repetitive nature of their labor demonstrate machine-like, and thus object-like, qualities, the props, designed to function inanimately if moved at human will, exhibit human elements. Along with Marx and Engels' prediction about the proletarians, the props resist their reduction to thing-like qualities and imposed classifications, and resolve to revolt.

Prop Rebels

The revolt in *Lydia und Mäxchen* happens on numerous levels. First, the three props—chair, locker, and candelabra—depart from their typical roles as furniture and ambience elements, and actively engage with the human world as described in chapter one. Second, the specter actors as the poet's incarnate words, after initially performing the dramatic script, turn on their creator and play as they please. Third, the hobgoblin, who is yet another step removed from the remaining props, emerges from his painting and kills the specter actors, leading to utter chaos. All three elements lead to the poet's disillusionment. His initial position of power and his view of himself as a god-like creator deteriorates progressively, and he experiences the destruction of his creation, and therefore, his understanding of the theatrical world. Each subsequent infraction intensifies the overthrow of the status quo. From the actions of the chatty props over the

brief bliss of the specter actors' perfect rendition of the script to the two-dimensional hobgoblin the play undergoes a significant revolutionary transformation. Objects and words assume power and agency and displace those who were originally in charge.

The development in *Lydia und Mäxchen* parallels Marx and Engels' prediction about the bourgeoisie losing its foundation since the poet's creation turns against him and acts counter to his intentions. Thus, the poet, too, loses the foundational belief in his artistic process and suffers from unintended consequences. As producer of the actors' lines he believes he holds power over them. Realizing that his words resume a life of their own, the poet initially rejoices since he feels he has reached the highest form of his artistic creation. Full of hubris, he strives to divinely orchestrate his creations. This belief, however, dissipates once the specter actors no longer subscribe to the poet's ideas. Ultimately, they cause a revolt that culminates in the hobgoblin's attack on the poet's creation: Destroying the specter actors, and verbally attacking the poet as "Schlappschwanz," the hobgoblin exerts actual power. At the end of the play, the rebellious props, the specter actors, and the two-dimensional hobgoblin completely reverse the initial power structure.

The rebellion of the props in *Lydia und Mäxchen* represents the loss of control of those typically in charge of artistic creation, or, shall we say

production?¹⁷² In order to rebel against their inanimate and oppressed predicament the things assume movement and speech, and take on lives of their own. The initially inanimate props verbally consider a potential revolution against the poet and all things human. Starting to move around on stage they bump into the poet, and interfere with the play. Their behavior unsettles the play, and thus, the established theatrical structure, and removes the poet's power. Döblin's rebellious objects fulfill Marx and Engels' prediction about inevitable collapse of social premises:

Die Produktivkräfte, die ihr [der Gesellschaft] zur Verfügung stehen, dienen nicht mehr zur Beförderung der bürgerlichen Eigentumsverhältnisse; im Gegenteil, sie sind zu gewaltig für diese Verhältnisse geworden, sie werden von ihnen gehemmt, und sobald sie dies Hemmnis überwinden bringen sie die ganze bürgerliche Gesellschaft in Unordnung, gefährden sie die Existenz des bürgerlichen Eigentums.

(45)

Explaining that the productive forces no longer aid in sustaining the bourgeois ownership structure, Marx and Engels indicate that these forces have become too powerful for the bourgeoisie to control. They indicate that the capitalist structure no longer supports the ownership structure, but rather that the system has

¹⁷² Production seems to be the more fitting term since it applies to both the dramatic production of a play performance and to the Marxist term "means of production."

become too powerful to be regulated. Once the proletariat breaks loose from its superimposed tethers and barriers disorder, chaos, and disarray ensue for the bourgeoisie, and will endanger their property. This prediction holds true for *Lydia und Mäxchen*.

As the props overcome their barrier—that which divides the inanimate world of objects from the animate world of humans—they transform from lifeless props upon which humans typically act into animate and active things. Suddenly, they too, create disorder in the theater and on stage. Like Marx and Engels' prediction for the communist revolution, the "Dingwelt's" revolution has magnificent implications as well. It upsets the established "ownership structure." The poet's initial trust in his creation—that his words will perform his play as he conceived of it— and in his power—that the props will listen to his shushing them—turns into the director's mistrust that accompanies this power delegation. The poet, initially not only willing but even excited about his words' assuming power in the form of specter actors, realizes that their exercise of power disables his own power.. The hobgoblin calls attention to the poet's impotence when he kills his creation, and, towards the play's conclusion, even the man in the moon peeks through the window from the outside and inquires about the source of the uproar. At this point the poet's worst fears have become reality.

Specter Actors

The director's fear about the poet's words as the play's primary agents aligns with the sentiment Marx and Engels express in the *Manifesto* opening sentence: "Ein Gespenst geht um in Europa – das Gespenst des Kommunismus" (35). Marx and Engels capture the bourgeois fear of the proletariat's communist movement. Döblin mirrors Marx and Engels' use of specters as embodiments of that which is feared. In this case the director and ultimately the poet (similarly to the bourgeoisie) fear the liberated and enlivened words they believed they could control. For instance, at the play's opening the theater director anxiously attempts to convince the poet to cancel the performance because the actors who are supposed to play Lydia and Mäxchen have left the stage, and in their place are two specter actors. After the actors flee the theater, the props start to philosophize, and specters take over the stage. That is, they are acting out the play, and the poet believes that they will act out his play in accordance with his intentions. Here the poet's words represent the workers that normally perform specific functions, but suddenly assume minds of their own, and rebel against their prescribed role. Both parties' lack of insight and understanding, the bourgeoisie in the *Manifesto*, and the poet and director's

in *Lydia und Mäxchen*, fuel their fear of the unknown.¹⁷³ The liberated forces' threat, whether proletarians or words, to turn the status quo upside down fills capitalist bourgeoisie and those in control of the theater's "means of production" with fear of losing control and power.

And indeed, in Döblin's play the specters initially adhere to the script, but eventually hijack the play, causing the poet's loss of control over his creation. In the play's penultimate scene all revolutionary forces combine into complete mayhem on stage. In the previous scene the specters playing Lydia and Mäxchen begin to deviate from the script. The poet, trying to salvage the performance of his play, intervenes, and turning prompter, reminds them of their original lines. The specters resist his corrections, and express their anger against him: "Einen Haß spüre ich doch auf diesen Possenreißer; wie ein betrunkenener Tagelöhner greint er" (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 75).¹⁷⁴ After assaulting the poet verbally, and aligning him with the proletariat Max also injures him with his sword. As

¹⁷³ Within this framework Döblin aligns his poet, who produces and uses his artistic creations, with the bourgeoisie, and thereby, counter to authors in France, who support the proletariat: "In Ländern wie in Frankreich, wo die Bauernklasse weit mehr als die Hälfte der Bevölkerung ausmacht, war es natürlich, dass Schriftsteller, die für das Proletariat gegen die Bourgeoisie auftraten, an ihre Kritik des Bourgeoisregimes den kleinbürgerlichen und kleinbäuerlichen Maßstab anlegten und die Partei der Arbeiter vom Standpunkt des Kleinbürgertums ergriffen" (Marx/Engels 70). Döblin's poet, making advances to the ruling class represents the bourgeois fears, and thus, is not part of the proletarians.

¹⁷⁴ Trans.: "I feel a strong hatred for this buffoon; he whines like a drunk day-worker" (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 75).

the poet flees, the candelabra and the chair aid the specters in running the poet off, and they join the play's performance.

As Lydia and Mäxchen proceed with their version of the play, the chair and the candelabra interfere. For instance, the chair steals Lydia's sash, and ties it onto the candelabra. Döblin's stage directions increase the chaos: "Die Sachen bewegen sich von hier ab mit immer größerer zuckender Unruhe und Freiheit" (*Lydia und Mäxchen* 76). The director announces his plan to call the fire department, and the poet predicts that it will be over soon. At this moment, the hobgoblin exits his painting holding brimstones. Alarmed by this event, the poet calls for a revolver, and the director plans to equip the theater personnel with weapons in order to end this debacle. At this point the stage directions read: "Lichter, Kerzen laufen umher. Alle Sachen bewegen sich neben- und gegeneinander. Das Tohuwabohu auf der Bühne ist groß" (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 77).¹⁷⁵ The chair utters his final call to arms:

Auf Freunde! Steckt alles in Brand! Laßt Kartätschen dröhnen. Wir gründen ein neues Königtum. (*Er kippt das Spind um, schleppt es hinter sich her*) Ich kehre zum Menschenfressertum zurück, hö[r]st Du, Du

¹⁷⁵ Trans.: "Lights, candles are running around. All things move alongside and against each other. The chaos on stage is big" (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 77).

Jammergreis, Du Naftaquelle ... Von der Bühne herunter, in den

Zuschauerraum. Los auf das Publikum. (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 78)¹⁷⁶

In finally leaving behind the prop room, and with it their typical roles as set furniture, the props finalize their transformation. As active participants they enter first the stage, and then the auditorium. While they break down the barrier between the animate and inanimate realms, the moon after breaking the window panes, inquires about the ruckus from the windowsill. As soon as this final spectator joins the play Lydia and Mäxchen's showdown begins. While Mäxchen attempts to strangle Lydia, the hobgoblin kills first Max then Lydia with his brimstones, and, after calling the poet a "Schlappschwanz," retreats into his picture frame.

Thus, order is restored, or so it seems. The poet approaches the dead specter actors, "*er beugt sich über sie. Nach einer kleinen Weile rauschen die weißen Gespenster auf und verschwinden durch die Decke. Nur der Dichter ist auf der Bühne. Die Sachen sind starr und steif*" (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 79).¹⁷⁷ A fireman joins the poet on stage inquiring about the location of the fire, and the director returns with a revolver—both arrive too late. Addressing them as his "Kinderchen," the

¹⁷⁶ Trans.: "Let's go friends! Set everything in fire! Let the grape shot roar. Let's found a new kingdom. (*He tips over the locker, and drags it behind*) I am returning to cannibalism, do you hear your sorry sob, you kerosene source ... Off the stage, into the audience. Charge towards the spectators" (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 78).

¹⁷⁷ Trans.: "he [the poet] leans over them [the dead specter actors]. After a little while the white ghosts swoosh up and disappear through the ceiling. Only the poet is on stage. The things are rigid and stiff" (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 79).

poet invites the props to sing something for the play's conclusion, but to no avail. The events on stage seem to revert to a state of normalcy, but the play's initial hierarchy with the primary locus of control within the hands of the few remains out of kilter. The poet spends the rest of the play accusing the audience, the props, and the specter actors. His wish for his words to transcend the realm of the possible turn into a nightmare in which he was left without control. Although different parties collaborate and interact to put on a performance, director (and in this case, poet) typically hold executive power. At the end of this play, however, props and specter actors assume agency and control, rebel against these sources of power, and upset the initial order, events that particularly grieve the poet. The poet, after all other elements desert him on stage, turns to the audience: "Ah die Lumpen im Parkett. Das war ein Fraß für sie: Geilheit, Grausamkeit und Geschrei," and addresses the titillating amusement it derived from this performance (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 79).¹⁷⁸

The audience, undoubtedly either part of the bourgeoisie or "Kleinbürger" since proletarians would lack time, money, and energy to visit the theater, leaves the theater unimpressed. The poet attempts to underline his point: "Teufel sinds, die hier geschmaust haben, wie ihr, grinsende blöde Dämonen, die grinsen wie

¹⁷⁸ Trans.: "Ah the lumpen in the parquet. That was a feast for them: lechery, cruelty and clamor" (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 79).

ihr, über jedes Reine" (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 79).¹⁷⁹ In spite of the poet's wrath, the audience recognizes his lack of power, and, not taking the performance of the Marxist prediction of the inevitable revolt against their class seriously, they simply leave the theater, simultaneously entertained and superficially critical of the production. The play's topic of an existential struggle for existence is lost on them. Without much consideration for the play they simply utter a formula for potential criticism: "Alle finden das Stück reizend, bis auf zwei Stellen, nämlich erstens –, zweitens – Schade, daß selbst den schönsten Sachen solche Mängel anhaften" (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 80).¹⁸⁰ Neither taking the play's message seriously nor relating it their own lives and social circumstances they exit the theater. Their lack of recognition of the chaos that occurred on stage emphasizes the poet's helpless position. Although the original order ultimately seems to be restored, the poet recognizes the revolutionary potential of those elements of which he thought he controlled. The poet, thus, having surrendered his hubristic position, is one step ahead of the audience, and Döblin's play, therefore, includes a glimpse into a potential revolution, and criticizes the aloofness and ignorance of those who believe themselves to be in power.

¹⁷⁹ Trans.: "They are devils who have feasted here, like you, grinning stupid demons, that smile like you, about everything pure" (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 79).

¹⁸⁰ Trans.: "Everyone considers the piece charming, except for two parts, namely first –, second – Too bad that even the most beautiful things have such flaws" (Döblin, *Lydia und Mäxchen* 80).

Although the specter actors have vanished and the props returned to their initial inanimate state, the poet realizes his impotence and lack of control.

Regarding this element of control or lack thereof, Marx and Engels state: “Die bürgerlichen Eigentumsverhältnisse, die moderne bürgerliche Gesellschaft, die so gewaltige Produktions- und Verkehrsmittel hervorgezaubert hat, gleicht dem Hexenmeister, der die unterirdischen Gewalten nicht mehr zu beherrschen vermag, die er heraufbeschwor” (44). The poet, as an example of the bourgeoisie, creates a dramatic production (quite literally on the page and on the stage), and loses all control over his creation and the system within which it functions, and of which he thought he was in control. While the poet, tolerated and perhaps supported by society, may hold artistic license over his creations, he is not in control as his actors flee and his incarnate words themselves turn against him. He, as creator, cannot regain control. Döblin, as creator of *Lydia und Mäxchen*, was tempted to exert his authorial control over the play and supplied a prologue for his debut play upon Herwarth Walden’s request:

Meine Damen, meine Herren, Sie verkennen die Situation völlig. Es handelt sich hier nicht um eine Theaterbelustigung, sondern um eine Enthüllung von der weittragendsten Bedeutung, um eine offizielle Richtigstellung vager, in ganz Deutschland verbreiteter Gerüchte. Daß ich

von der Bühne aus spreche, rechtfertigt sich durch die größere Resonanz dieses Podiums.¹⁸¹ (Meyer 95)

Later, however, Döblin revoked his permission to publish this prologue prefacing the drama, and consequently it has neither been part of a published nor a performed version of *Lydia und Mäxchen*. Döblin must have recognized the irony of offering an explanation about the mode of theater since his debut play criticizes a poet or director's urge to control the production, instead of letting it unfold freely. His prologue explains that his reason for speaking from the large podium of stage was to reach a wider audience, and thereby points to the potential drama holds for revealing the breaking point of texts, and for producing art of consequence.

“Lebend, gemalt, Holz oder Stein?”: Aufgabe and Adaptation in *Comteß Mizzi*¹⁸²

Artists as Commodities

Not unlike *Lydia und Mäxchen*, *Comteß Mizzi* portrays the artistic failure of the theatrical project (and thus, of art in general) if controlled and used for specific purposes. Döblin's second play demonstrates the fate of artists who are

¹⁸¹ Trans.: “Ladies, gentlemen, you are misjudging the situation entirely. This is not about theatrical entertainment, but rather a revelation of the utmost meaning, about a correction of vague rumors spread all throughout Germany. My speaking of from the stage is justified by the bigger resonance of this podium” (Meyer 95).

¹⁸² Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 90

unable to perform freely. Some of the artists in this play work under specific or ridiculous restrictions and cannot uphold the act. Döblin exemplifies the split between externally imposed expectations and internal visions of the play and its characters in his debut play, and his second play supports this interpretation: The count's project of educating sacred daughters who continuously offer their services in a self-sacrificial manner fails since they cannot simultaneously live as themselves. Döblin's play suggests that such a concept of art is untenable. This play elucidates that art cannot merely function in an entertaining role, offering escape for its consumers, but that its success derives from its free unfolding or the artist's realization of his or her own concept.¹⁸³ The art forms in *Comteß Mizzi* operate on the performance level, and are neither static nor unambiguous. Since Mizzi continuously exercises her role—her "Aufgabe"¹⁸⁴—as prostitute, her art exists in constant flux since she performs various roles depending on her clients' wishes. Thus, Mizzi is rather evanescent. Lost in these roles, she cannot be herself, and thus, she loses her sense of self. While nourishing the selves of others

¹⁸³ When asked about his artistic conception Werner Herzog answered: "Ideas come to me with vehemence. They come into my head like robbers/intruders into my kitchen at night" (Virginia Film Festival, 2016). Herzog points to the concept of art which Döblin supports: the artist encounters his ideas instead of creating them. Ideas come to him, he may practically realize their theoretical aspects, but those he doesn't construct. To an artist who operates like this the ideas are like the words in *Lydia & Mäxchen*; however, the poet in Döblin's play initially does not comprehend that.

¹⁸⁴ The word "Aufgabe" also implies the giving up oneself. Here, Mizzi gives up herself for the benefit of her clients. Her role ("Aufgabe") is precisely that, a giving up to function for the benefit of others.

she wanes into despair. Men consume particular aspects of her during her repeated performances for them. Like each performance of a play each interaction between Mizzi and her clients differs. Mizzi merely exists in the many versions of herself, and, while each encounter differs, she repeatedly performs versions of the same. But Mizzi is not the only artist in the play who experiences abuse (in the sense of an abnormal use) of her artistic tendencies.

Two additional artists, Xaver the sculptor and Peter the poet, deal with unusual requests or the lack of any demand for their work. With Xaver's sculptures Döblin includes the ludicrous idea of bread as artistic medium in *Comteß Mizzi*. Xaver, sculpting in bread, engages in an art form that produces an unfinished, changeable product. Döblin, in his portrayal of Xaver's work entirely contradicts the prevalent idea of sculptures, and their longevity. Sculptures, usually constructed to endure, here refute that idea. Xaver's employer prescribes bread, a material that is not only entirely consumable, but which will—even if not consumed—deteriorate, and disappear. In addition to prescribing the medium Xaver's employer also determines the model: Xaver is to sculpt each person his employer encounters throughout the day in bread—also each a version of the same. Marx's criticism of the repetition of production that lead to the mechanization of humans (in the sense of man turning into machine) applies

both to Xaver's and Mizzi's work, leading, at least in Mizzi's case, to her sense of the "alienation of labor."

And even Peter, the poet, unable to flee into the alternate worlds of his previously composed poems, finds little concrete meaning in his work at all. Although Peter's predicament differs from Xaver and Mizzi's, he too, represents an aspect of Marx's theory: the tool that has become obsolete and can be discarded. For instance, while Xaver discusses his work Peter expresses his concern about his lack of meaningful employment. Peter neither works on projects nor does he hold a firm conviction. In his lack of conviction Peter even envies the donkey Xaver wears as part of his employer's crest. Peter, Xaver, and Mizzi exemplify what happens in a capitalist society in which they function simply as commodities. Although they act as producers of their labor, their clients are only interested in the resulting product, and thus, reduce them to commodities.

In *Comteß Mizzi* Döblin thus aligns his criticism of his artistic characters' predicament with Marx and Engels' description of the proletariat situation:

... die nur so lange leben, als sie Arbeit finden, und die nur so lange Arbeit finden, als ihre Arbeit das Kapital vermehrt. Diese Arbeiter, die sich stückweise verkaufen müssen, sind eine Ware wie jeder andere Handelsartikel und daher gleichmäßig allen Wechselfällen der

Konkurrenz, allen Schwankungen des Marktes ausgesetzt. (Marx/Engels 45-6)

The authors acknowledge the reduction of a worker's worth, and thus of his life, distilling it to his work only. They argue that a worker only lives as long as he finds work, and only finds work as long as he increases the capital. Marx and Engels acknowledge that workers sell themselves in a piecemeal fashion, and that, in doing so, transform into the commodity themselves, the worth of which depends on competition, and on all other market forces. This is true also for Mizzi, Xaver, and Peter. Peter has already lost his artistic motivations and inspirations, and, as a sensitive human being, has reduced his role to that of national mourner. While this might be an admirable role idealistically, it serves no function, and its meaninglessness implies Peter's lack of worth. Peter no longer contributes to increasing the capital, and as such has become economically useless.

Xaver no longer experiences artistic freedom and creativity in his employment to perform meaningless commissioned bread work for his rich employer. Xaver indeed sells his art slice by slice, and, as long as his employer remains entertained, at least has a secure job. Although Xaver himself does not openly complain about his situation, he too, in selling his art sells himself. Along

with Mizzi selling herself man by man for a price, all three artists which Döblin depicts in *Comteß Mizzi* fall into the category of workers turned commodities.

All three artists become commodities themselves, products which those who call on them for their services consume in the process of prying from them all they can give. While the three share this predicament, there are also some differences. Peter, for instance, indicating that the sacred daughters inspired him has no purpose, and thus, cannot produce anything meaningful, but only utilizes the sensitive side of himself. He, therefore, represents the discarded artist since his society lacks the need for a poetic humanist. In a society that values all that is tangible and usable there is no need for his poetry. Thus Marx and Engels explain the phenomenon that people are only as good as the products they produce as a side-effect of industrialization. Peter no longer holds economical value. Xaver, on the other hand, gets to produce art, but within the limitations his employer prescribes. His wealthy employer does not allow Xaver to express his art freely. In this his fate is similar to Mizzi's. In her case the count prescribes the ways in which she uses her gifts and talents (beauty and acting). The count and his enterprise, responsible for Mizzi's objectification, will become our focus of discussion since Mizzi, as the play's protagonist, takes the most extreme measures.

Pimps in Power

To elucidate the count's entrepreneurial aspirations I will briefly detour to Döblin's 1920 film script *Die geweihten Töchter*, which, although written over a decade after this play, provides insights into this aspect of *Comteß Mizzi*. In spite of the temporal difference *Die geweihten Töchter* can serve as contextualization for *Comteß Mizzi*. Written as a narrative text without dialogue, the play includes an explanatory "Vorbemerkung." In addition to discussing the count's passion and love for the beautiful Jolente—the equivalent to *Comteß Mizzi's* Siddi—Döblin also provides the count's backstory. After being rejected by Jolente, the count rapes and impregnates her. Following the birth of their daughter Mizzi, "Jolente windet Blumen um den Dolch, den sie aus dem Kleid zieht. Legt sich auf das Sofa, ersticht sich," a scene which Döblin describes in a matter of fact manner (Döblin, *Die geweihten Töchter* 348).¹⁸⁵ If we draw the parallel between Siddi (Mizzi's mother in *Comteß Mizzi*) and Jolente (another version of Mizzi's mother in this film script), it becomes clear that the count is not only responsible for Mizzi's but also for Siddi's death. Both characters, disgraced and unhappy, commit suicide.

The film script also illuminates the count's motivation for establishing the cult of the sacred daughters, since Döblin scripts the count's crime—the rape of

¹⁸⁵ "Jolente winds flowers around the dagger she pulls out of her dress. Lies down on the couch, stabs herself" (Döblin, *Die geweihten Töchter* 348).

Jolente—as a crime of passion, an idea he visualizes in images that show the count’s heart on fire whenever he sees Jolente. The count’s objective in establishing the cult results from his wish to create an enterprise that removes the arbitrariness of passion, a concept Wilhelm, one of the count's minions, describes in the fourth scene in *Comteß Mizzi*:

Aber es handelt sich hier um einen Sieg des Menschen über die Natur. Sie werden – ich kenne Sie zwar nicht, aber ich nehme an, daß Sie ein Mensch sind, – Sie werden doch nicht leugnen, daß wir in puncto Liebe fast alle den Anschluß versäumen, daß wir herunterschlucken, was uns der Zufall in den Mund steckt, daß wir verbogen, unsicher, kurz Autodidakten sind. Hier graben wir der blödsinnigen Prostitution, dem Inbegriff des Zufalls, das Wasser ab. Hier aber finden Sie Auswahl, Verständnis, Routine, Sättigung, ja Weihe –.“ (Döblin 39)¹⁸⁶

Wilhelm explains that the sacred daughters operate according to higher principles than that of “dull” prostitution, which he labels the quintessence of coincidence, and, thus, remove the coincidental element from the endeavor. Here, men find selection, understanding, routine, satiety, and even consecration

¹⁸⁶ Trans.: “But this is about the victory of man over nature. You will – I don’t know you, but I assume you are human, – you won’t deny that almost all of us miss the connection in regards to love, that we swallow, what coincidence throws into the mouth, that we are bent, in short that we are autodidacts. Here we are putting a stop to nonsensical prostitution, the quintessence of coincidence. Here on the other hand you find selection, understanding, routine, satisfaction, yes consecration –“ (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 88).

(Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 88). In his enterprise, the count aims to omit the destructive force of blind passion, a factor that leads to the suicide of his adored Jolente. This justification for the cult of sacred daughters implies the count's belief in his not being responsible for harming Jolente, but that he had no choice because of his inflamed and diseased heart, an image Döblin visualizes by connecting the two characters with a chain. The count, claiming that his blind passion left him without choice and that he had no control in this matter, rebels against this: "Diese Krankheit, diese Tollwut der Menschen heile ich" (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 100)¹⁸⁷. Making it his mission to heal people from the chains of blind passion, he claims to provide men with alternatives to committing comparable crimes, and, in doing so, drives women to suicide. How noble of him.

While the count claims that his endeavor serves the good of his fellow (hu)man, it is clear that his entrepreneurial approach to physical love feeds right into the alienation of labor as the count as a powerful man oppresses women, and turns them into purchasable commodities. *Comteß Mizzi* demonstrates the existence of different layers of corruption. For instance, not even the priest, while initially resisting the concept of the sacred daughters, can resist their physical attraction. His endeavor to shut down the count's brothel fails. Additionally, in

¹⁸⁷ Trans.: "This disease, this human rabies I heal" (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 100).

the film script the count gains insights into the workings of the fox-devil, a devil he considers responsible for igniting passion between different parties.¹⁸⁸ In the film version, the count witnesses the devil's deeds, and intends to establish a bulwark against this type of sin, but fails, just as he fails in *Comteß Mizzi*.¹⁸⁹ Not unlike the poet in *Lydia und Mäxchen* or Unternehmer in *Die Ehe*, the count, too, is unable to retain control. The notion of control remains an illusion here, too, since the count does not achieve the goals which he claims to achieve. He neither controls the men frequenting his establishment, and instead charges them for the

¹⁸⁸ "Eine Tanzdiele.

Einige Paare tanzen. Hinter einer Säule tritt ein Fuchsteufel hervor, bewegt sich frei unter den Gästen. Setzt sich neben eine einzelne Dame, die ihn offenbar nicht sieht, streicht ihr die Haare glatt, zieht ihr den Rock höher, so daß die Kniee frei werden, drückt ihr den Brustausschnitt tiefer. Betrachtet sein Werk, faßt sie bei den Händen, führt sie an einem Tisch mit Herren vorbei, winkt einem Herrn, der aufsteht, einige Schritte hinter das Mädchen geht, das sich lächelnd umblickt. Fuchsteufel demonstriert sie sich gegenseitig, stellt sie vorteilhaft lüstern voreinander, demonstriert ihre Arme, ihren Nacken, umfaßt anhebend ihren Busen, wippt ihren Rock, dreht sie um sich. Ihn [zeigt] er durch eine einzige elegante Handbewegung, stellt sich hinter den Herrn, über seine Schulter lockend wegblickend. Mädchen und Herr tanzen langsam; wie sie vorn sind, zieht der Teufel seinen und ihren Arm, so daß sie sich ganz eng umschlingen, drückt seinen Kopf zum Kuß an ihre Schulter. Geht sich applaudierend davon.

Teufel sitzt an einem Tisch, beobachtet, geht zur Kapelle, nimmt den Taktstock vom Flügel, dirigiert. Alle Paare tanzen langsamer, stehen, drücken sich aneinander, küssen sich; die an den Tischen tasten mit den Augen und Händen nacheinander. Wie der Teufel den Stock hinlegt, sehen sich die Paare beschämt, verwirrt an; manche Mädchen laufen weg von ihrem Tisch. Der Teufel hält sich lachend und springend den Bauch" (Döblin 349).

Döblin inserts scenes like this one throughout the scrip to emphasize the arbitrariness of passion that the count experienced with Jolente, and into which he now gains insights:

"Der Freund des Grafen mit seinem Fräulein kommt übermütig herangesprungen, der Teufel weicht ihnen aus. Als der Graf hinter ihnen kommt, wird der Teufel aufmerksam ernst, steht, geht, gebückt zwischen Tischen hinter seine Säule, beobachtet die drei. Sie sitzen, trinken für sich. Teufel geht nach kurzer Weile hinter der Säule hervor, aber jetzt immer vorsichtig, den Grafen im Auge behaltend" (Döblin, *Die geweihten Töchter* 349-50).

The count, now capable of seeing and assessing the devil, can with his special gift help others to avoid falling into the devil's traps.

¹⁸⁹ A fundamental difference between the two versions is the fact that nuns make up the foundation of the sacred daughters in the film script. In this version the sacred daughters show their customers that they are sinners, and prevent them from sinning.

satisfaction of their urges, nor can he successfully reign in his own desires as he is as attracted to Mizzi as he was to her mother.¹⁹⁰ Rather than alleviating a problem he creates an entirely new one, supporting the notion of men using women as products, and instructing women to engage in the repetitive undertaking of pleasing their customers. The women the count employs as sacred daughters, therefore, continuously experience an alienation of labor. Reduced to individual body parts such as lips and hands the sacred daughters embody Marx's concept of alienation of labor. The count expects them to function in a particular way without regarding them in their totality. As persons consisting of the sum of all their components, Mizzi and the others have no relevance.

"Women as Production Instruments"

For instance, for his project to rent out women who perfectly serve the needs of any men to his customers, the count combines three different processes: selection, education, and, ultimately oppression. First, the count selects beautiful candidates to become sacred daughters. Next, he provides education and training that equips them with the tools of "all the sweet and tender things that have been stockpiled in the magazine of love over millennia" (Döblin, *Comteß*

¹⁹⁰ And even the count does not seem to be entirely resilient against the devil's temptation attempts as he fences in his rooms, to shoo away the devil, who keeps taunting him.

Mizzi 86).¹⁹¹ Lastly, he prohibits his sacred daughters from engaging in personal relationships, expecting them to straddle the split between intensely focusing on their clients' needs while exercising utter self-control over their own, and being controlled by the the count. Mizzi, embodying the complete reduction to functioning as a tool, represents the paramount example of the objectification of the sacred daughters in particular, and that of women in general. For the count and his clients this system works well. Marx and Engels acknowledge that this is an aspect of bourgeois society:

Die Weibergemeinschaft ist ein Verhältnis, was ganz der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft angehört und heutzutage in der Prostitution vollständig besteht. Die Prostitution beruht aber auf dem Privateigentum und fällt mit ihm. Die kommunistische Organisation also, statt die Weibergemeinschaft einzuführen, hebt sie vielmehr auf. (106)

While opponents to their ideas argue that communism would create prostitution, Marx and Engels recognize that it already abounds as an integral part of bourgeois society. They argue that prostitution would vanish in a communist society with the disappearance of private property, and, that as long as people suffer from being reduced to objects, women will be used as tools.

¹⁹¹ Originally: "Das sind junge Mädchen, – schöne Frauen, die wir erziehen, (*leiser*) die wir beladen mit allem, was sich süßes und zärtliches in den Magazinen der Liebe seit Jahrtausenden aufgestapelt hat ..." (Döblin 86).

Marx and Engels' rather lengthy discussion of the transformation of the role of women in a communist society sheds light on the same issues Döblin addresses. Marx and Engels address the bourgeoisie's accusation: "Aber ihr Kommunisten wollt die Weibergemeinschaft einführen," by offering their interpretation of the role of women from the bourgeois standpoint:

Der Bourgeois sieht in seiner Frau ein bloßes Produktionsinstrument. Er hört, dass die Produktionsinstrumente gemeinschaftlich ausgebeutet werden sollen, und kann sich natürlich nichts anderes denken, als dass das Los der Gemeinschaftlichkeit die Weiber gleichfalls treffen wird.

(60-1)

Retorting the anticipated accusations from the bourgeoisie about the introduction of prostitution, they explain that the bourgeoisie regard women merely as instruments of production. The bourgeoisie, upon encountering the notion of a communal use of instruments, assume that this applies to women as well. This section fits well here since Lucie in *Die Ehe*, too, suffers a lack of personal encounters. Devoid of a mother, sister, or girlfriend, and thus, lacking social support structures, Lucie repeatedly seeks private communications with the men in her life, but to no avail. Her father's reduction of Lucie to her biological sex necessitates her marriage to Georg. And Georg, while agreeing to marry Lucie, reduces her to their marriage agreement, and fails to understand her complaints

about his womanizing. Lucie, too, demonstrates symptoms of regarding people as something less than people, and viewing them more as instruments. She, too, uses people to address her specific needs. For instance, she fails to comprehend her boyfriend's whining about her choice of a different spouse: "Er liebt mich, und darum soll ich ihm treu sein!" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 286). Her exasperation at Bobby's idea demonstrates that she, too, functions like the men who treat her as a means to an end, and, in a way, Lucie falls into the same trap as Unternehmer does.

While Unternehmer submits to money as the driving force, Lucie submits to the capitalist idea of emotional disconnect in spite of herself. Although the play provides evidence of her wish for different relationships, she also reduces people to their usefulness to her. For instance, when she needs a man she marries Georg who just happens to show up at her party by chance. Lucie's economic role, however, remains only a supporting role. Her father uses her to acquire a successor for his plant, and Georg uses her to acquire that well-paying position of junior boss, and ultimately and predictably, to become boss of the plant. So in *Die Ehe* Döblin echoes the same criticism Marx and Engels express, and who intend to remedy this inequality: "Er [der Bourgeois] ahnt nicht, dass es sich eben darum handelt, die Stellung der Weiber als bloßer Produktionsinstrumente aufzuheben" (61). This idea mirrors that which Döblin promotes throughout his

plays. In *Lydia und Mäxchen* it is Lydia who addresses the injustices she experiences at the hands of her uncle and her father. These men use her potential to expand their geographical and political spheres of influence. Mizzi's function in *Comteß Mizzi* is truly that of an instrument since men use her body, a transaction for which her father receives money. And Lucie, who initially held some power of her own, loses this control over herself in marriage, and she, too, becomes part of the economy of women. Georg, as a member of the bourgeoisie, does not need to seek out prostitutes, but can use his power to engage openly in extramarital relationships with women.

Marx and Engels mock the moral consternation of the bourgeoisie about the supposed official communist communities of women: "Übrigens ist nichts lächerlicher als das hochmoralische Entsetzen unsrer Bourgeois über die angebliche offizielle Weibergemeinschaft der Kommunisten. Die Kommunisten brauchen die Weibergemeinschaft nicht einzuführen, sie hat fast immer existiert," and, after explaining that these always existed, launch into an accusation themselves: "Unsere Bourgeois, nicht zufrieden damit, dass ihnen die Weiber und Töchter ihrer Proletarier zur Verfügung stehen, von der offiziellen Prostitution gar nicht zu sprechen, finden ein Hauptvergnügen darin, ihre Ehefrauen wechselseitig zu verführen" (61). This passage contains various elements Döblin incorporates into his plays. Female characters in these three

plays have little agency, and the defenses to which they resort are typically passive. Lydia faints, the candelabra does not enter the existential discussion that the chair ignites, and, while the chair cries for rebellion he criticizes the locker's whimpering and expressing his existential fears, he does not criticize the candelabra's materialistic desires. On the contrary, he procures some of the things she wants for her (and thus, ironically, feeds into the traditional gender role divide of female as passive receiver and male as provider). Female characters in *Die Ehe*, although they play a more active role in seeking solutions for themselves and their families (where applicable), face the issue of gender and class disparity. Characters in the first and second scenes, kept down by the bourgeoisie, don't receive empathy and understanding from other women. Lucie's and Georg's situation applies on the level that they seduce people as they please.

And, regardless of the count's intentions of providing a marriage and prostitution alternative, the execution of it fails since Mizzi clearly functions as prostitute. Perhaps he believes that the replacement of the label from prostitute to sacred daughter improves the overall conditions. And he may be correct. Perhaps the men frequenting the count's brothel feel better about themselves if they seek out sacred daughters instead of prostitutes; however, the application of a new and improved label fails to alter the foundations of that trade. Regarding prostitution Marx and Engels explain: "Es versteht sich übrigens von selbst, dass

mit Aufhebung der jetzigen Produktionsverhältnisse auch die aus ihnen hervorgehende Weibergemeinschaft, d.h. die offizielle und nichtoffizielle Prostitution, verschwindet" (61). They predict that prostitution in any of its embodiments will no longer be part of a communist society since a makeover of societal structures would entail a fundamental change in production principles.

Döblin also demonstrates Marx and Engels' point about the bourgeois' entertainment of seducing each others' wives in the play within the prelude of *Die Ehe*. The poet's play in the prelude treats a love triangle, in which the man vacillates between a blonde and a brunette. Marx and Engels accuse the bourgeois marriage as a hypocritical institution in their claim: "Die bürgerliche Ehe ist in Wirklichkeit die Gemeinschaft der Ehefrauen. Man könnte höchstens den Kommunisten vorwerfen, dass sie an Stelle einer heuchlerisch versteckten eine offizielle, offenherzige Weibergemeinschaft einführen wollten" (61). In this quotation the two authors, acknowledging the male dominance that can prevail in marriages at the beginning of the twentieth century, identify solidarity among women as the only element of community in a society in which women are reduced to serve the needs of those in power. Mizzi, too, struggles to accept the concept of the reduction of herself to that of an aesthetically pleasing object. Through her clients' veneration of her as an abstract, yet tangible, concept of beauty, and her father's simultaneous exertion of control over her, she

experiences the curtailment of her artistic expression. The count expects her to perform her art form in a vacuum, and turns Mizzi into a statue-like being. In a sense Mizzi is the Demeter statue in the flesh. The count teaches her to hold still and endure her veneration, like Demeter, without allowing her to express her human nature.

Considering the education of the sacred daughters imperative, the count believes he provides a beneficial educational service. In addressing the bourgeois fear that the communist revolution will compromise education Marx and Engels argue: "Die Bildung, deren Verlust er bedauert, ist für die enorme Mehrzahl die Heranbildung zur Maschine," explaining that the education that may disappear in the revolutionary process is that which turns the masses into machines (Marx/Engels 59). As such the authors don't consider it a loss, explaining that the type of education the bourgeoisie lament oppresses the majority of the people. This notion applies to Mizzi as she has been taught to serve men without regarding her own emotions, needs, or feelings. Mizzi indeed was "ausgebildet" as she is the example of a "bildschönen" woman. Suffering from the expectations laid upon her she ultimately commits suicide. Furthermore, it is precisely the count's privilege and power which cause Mizzi's predicament in the first place. Earlier in his life his entitlement, in his view, justified his rape of her mother Siddi, and

now his enslavement of his daughter. Unable to rebel in any other way against the count, Mizzi resolves her dilemma in the most dramatic way.

In her suicide she rebels against her father's request to remain a constant blank screen onto which men project their various desires. Unlocking the emotional capacities within others, she denies herself emotional investment in any of the men, let alone a partner of her choosing.¹⁹² Mizzi has little agency as most of the play's male characters exert their power over her. When she first enters the stage "*zuletzt, allein; streng, stilisiert einfach*",¹⁹³ and prior to any lines she utters, Döblin includes her speechlessness in the stage directions: "MIZZI: (*langsam nach dem linken Vordergrund zu, bewegt die Lippen und Hände.*)" (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 91).¹⁹⁴ Speechless, holding no words, she also holds no power. In the twelfth scene, on the contrary, Mizzi enters the stage naked, and having liberated herself from her clothes, also has slipped out of the roles the count and Neustätter imposed on her. Some characters comment: "Nackt. Sie ist ganz

¹⁹² In Berlin Alexanderplatz, Döblin points to the fact that people act in real-life circumstances. Zannovich acts, pretending to be nobility, and thus, procuring funds from believers.supporters: "They go to the theater and hear a lot of cooked-up things that are agreeable to them, and they pay for it. They could pay for it, too, couldn't they, if the agreeable things happened to them in the afternoon, or in the morning, and they themselves could play a part in them" (BA 19-20). Those giving money also participate in the act. Perhaps this means that real life is the only act that works. In real life people willingly overlook the split between reality and act.

¹⁹³ Trans.: "lastly, alone; stern, stylized simple"

¹⁹⁴ Trans.: "MIZZI: (*slowly moving towards the lefthand front corner, moves lips and hands*)" (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 91).

nackt" (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 107).¹⁹⁵ As Neustätter tries to get her out of the room, she replies: "Hast du keine Peitsche für mich? Kein Messer, um mich zu zerfleischen? Soll ich dir deine Füße küssen? Bestie! Ich bin dir nichts, mein Vater ist dir nichts, deine Sklavin muß ich sein. (*Langgezogen:*) ich bereue –" (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 108).¹⁹⁶ Here, she asserts her own will, goes against Neustätter's wish to possess her, and even advises another prostitute: "Lauf Haserl, lauf, was du kannst" (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 108).¹⁹⁷ Mizzi, ready to exit her situation advises her compatriot to do the same.

Finally, in scene thirteen, Mizzi expresses her wish to abandon all body parts that have touched Neustätter, and utters numerous suppressed fears and dislikes in her last monologue, resulting in:¹⁹⁸

Nichts sehen, nichts hören! Weg! (*sucht im Zimmer*) Kein Revolver, kein Revolver. Der Dolch (*zerschlägt den Kasten, hört Schritte*) Oh nicht so bald.
– Ich will nicht, – ich mag noch nicht. – Hier durch das Brandzeichen

¹⁹⁵ Trans.: "Naked. She is entirely naked." (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 107).

¹⁹⁶ Trans.: "Don't you have a whip for me? A knife with which to mangle me? Shall I kiss your feet? Beast! I am nothing to you, my father is nothing to you, I have to be your slave. (*Extended:*) I regret –" (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 108).

¹⁹⁷ Trans.: "Run, rabbit, run what you can" (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 108).

¹⁹⁸ Here, Mizzi is reminiscent of Lady Macbeth, who, after realizing her complicity in upsetting the divine order, also addresses contributing body parts, and attempts to wash the blood of her hands.

hindurch. – Bitte, noch einen einzigen, winzigen Augenblick. (*Ersticht sich*).¹⁹⁹ (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 109-10)²⁰⁰

In this scene, the last one in which we encounter Mizzi, she has liberated herself from her clothes and roles, and her act of self-assertion culminates in her suicide. Thus, she defies the notion of being an owned object. In her first and final scenes Döblin depicts her alone, and emphasizes her lips and her hands, albeit in an entirely different manner. Upon her initial appearance on stage, she silently, almost pantomime-like moves her lips and hands. In her final scene she expresses disgust for the same body parts: both, hands and lips, touched Neustätter, and are also responsible for her betrayal of her father, since she entered a verbal pact with Neustätter (using her lips), and hand-wrote a letter to solidify suspicions against her father. By stripping her body of the clothes

¹⁹⁹ Trans.: “See nothing, hear nothing! Away! (*searches in the room*) No revolver, no revolver. The dagger (*breaks the case, hears steps*) Oh not so soon. – I don’t want to, – I don’t want to yet. – Here through the birthmark. – Please, only one more, tiny moment (*Stabs herself.*)” (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 109-10).

²⁰⁰ MIZZI (*allein; es ist dunkler wieder im Saal*): Das muß weg. Das seinen Mund geküßt, das hat ihn umarmt, das hat den Brief geschrieben. Alles weg. Alles weg. Weg. (*Seufzt laut und eigentümlich; steht in bekümmertem Haltung da*) Immer, wenn ich einen Bissen im Mund habe, kommen die Fräulein unter meinem Bett hervor und schnappen ihn mir weg. Weg doch, geht doch weg. Ich geb Euch ja schon, alles, was ihr wollt; ja, ich kann die nicht leiden mit dem dicken Kopf, ich will die nicht sehen (*weint*). Hu die greulichen Augen, die Haare, die zotteligen; es ist eine Wolf, hu, hu –. (*Steht wieder still, streicht sich die Stirn*) Ach mein Kopf. – Sie werden gleich heraufkommen, mein Papchen holen. Nichts sehen, nichts hören! Weg! (*sucht im Zimmer*) Kein Revolver, kein Revolver. Der Dolch (*zerschlägt den Kasten, hört Schritte*) Oh nicht so bald. – Ich will nicht, – ich mag noch nicht. – Hier durch das Brandzeichen hindurch. – Bitte, noch einen einzigen winzigen Augenblick. (*Ersticht sich*) (Döblin, *Comteß Mizzi* 109-10).

demonstrative of her trade and committing suicide, Mizzi revolts against all male impositions and oppressions, and finally asserts herself.

“Champagne and Reefer”: Excess and Dearth in *Die Ehe*²⁰¹

Kaltgestellte Kunstwerke

Döblin’s fifth and final play *Die Ehe* contains more overt criticism of those in power. While *Lydia und Mäxchen* and *Comteß Mizzi* include critical elements beneath the surface, this play contains outright accusations of questionable social circumstances. One does not have to dig deep to find Döblin’s denouncement of the government’s dealings with those less favorable. Each of the play’s three scenes, depicting the young marriage, the big family, and the bourgeois marriage, addresses the issues and difficulties members of various social groups face. Regarding the dramaturgical aspects this play represents his tribute to the concept of epic theater. Although Döblin frequented a discussion group on literary topics such as the epic theater with Bertolt Brecht and Erwin Piscator, upon completion of his final play, the two accused him of plagiarizing from their materials(Schoeller 335).²⁰² In his realization of epic theater methods Döblin uses “Brechungen” to elucidate social injustices, for instance, by providing clear

²⁰¹ Muddy Waters, *King Bee*, “Champagne and Reefer,” 1981. (Also, *The Devil Makes Three, Redemption & Ruin*, “Champagne and Reefer,” 2016.

²⁰² Prior to Döblin’s completion of *Die Ehe*, both Brecht and Piscator expressed their debt to Döblin in regards to the epic theater.

instructions for the director: “Musik und Projektionsbild sind obligatorisch für das Stück. Requisiten sind nicht erlaubt. Wo sie unvermeidlich sind —Stuhl, Bank—, muß jegliche naturalistische Absicht unterbleiben;” thus, indicating a minimalist and non-naturalist approach to props, while insisting on a non-conventional and perhaps disruptive usage of music, images and text, and film (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 226).²⁰³ Döblin’s explicit instructions call for a minimalist use of props while he also seeks to employ innovative methods such as screen and projector, images and film, and characters singing and reciting text, instead of merely speaking.²⁰⁴ Furthermore, he instructs actors to act in front of the screen on which text and images are projected throughout the play. He returns to the ancient concept of a chorus, but employs it differently using a chorus-like narrator to guide the audience through the play.

Instead of only including subtle criticisms, Döblin unambiguously proclaims and defines the play’s message in the instructional preamble:²⁰⁵

²⁰³ Trans.: “Music and projection image are obligatory for this play. Props are prohibited. Where they are unavoidable —chair, bench—, any kind of naturalistic concept has to be omitted” (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 226).

²⁰⁴ “Bühne ist ein einfaches Podium, keinerlei Dekoration, kein Requisit. Den Hintergrund bildet die Leinwand, auf die Stehbilder und Texte projiziert werden. Die Spieler sitzen, stehen oder agieren vor der Projektionswand. Es findet of im Text angezeichneter Übergang aus der Sprache in Gesang statt, und zwar manchmal, zu liedartigen Stücken, häufiger zu bloßen Rezitativen mit musikalischer Untermalung. Der Sprecher geht durch alle Szenen. Er verhält sich chorartig, stellt die menschlich-sachliche Beziehung der Zuhörer mit den Vorgängen her, urteilt und zieht Resultate” (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 226).

²⁰⁵ This is the only instructional text of such length and detail in one of Döblin’s plays.

Das Stück demonstriert: die heutige Wirtschaft wirkt zerstörend und auflösend auf die alte Ehe und Familie, vermag aber von sich aus die menschlichen Beziehungen nicht neu zu regeln und neu zu ordnen, ihr sind diese menschlichen Beziehungen gleichgiltig [sic]. (*Die Ehe*226)²⁰⁶

This initial commentary, as well as the play's content, portrays money as the world's driving agent that operates detached from its owners. Döblin characterizes money as a "Tischler," and thus, as an active and acting entity: "Familien zerschlagen, Menschen zerblasen wie Späne, — das kann das Geld, der Tischler, dieser große Hobler!" (*Die Ehe* 282).²⁰⁷ Döblin depicts money as a powerful entity which impacts people.²⁰⁸ Although the play deals with various societal elements, the role of money permeates the plot.

For instance, the play's prelude, too, contains particularly intriguing points about money in relation to art, culture, and the artist.²⁰⁹ The prelude's nine tableaux constitute a "Vorspiel" in the truest sense of the word as it depicts the process of a play's genesis. Döblin presents his audience with a "Dichter," in the

²⁰⁶ Trans.: "The play demonstrates: today's economy has a destructive and disintegrating effect on the old marriage and family, but cannot regulate and reorganize the human relationships on its own, it is indifferent to these human relationships" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 226).

²⁰⁷ Trans.: "Families shattered, people blown apart like shavings, — that's what money can do, the carpenter, this big planer!" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 282).

²⁰⁸ Döblin's view of the economy as a self-powered and agent, who holds no concern for people is reminiscent of Jack London and Stephen Crane's depiction of nature, for instance in *To Build a Fire* or *The Open Boat* respectively.

²⁰⁹ As indicated by its subtitle "Drei Szenen und ein Vorspiel" the play's prelude has a prominent role in exercising social criticism.

process of conceiving a creative work, and opens the prelude with this projection:

“Der große Meister dichtet für die feinen Leute” (*Die Ehe* 227).²¹⁰ This title,

displayed on the aforementioned screen, informs the audience instantaneously of

two things: it situates the poet as the “great master” above the rest of society, and

conveys the play’s (that within the play) intended audience, “die feinen Leute.”

Not proletarians, nor the poor, but the refined class will view his art.

Immediately, Döblin reveals his criticism of inconsequential art: This artist, a

figure removed from life, has no concept of the outside world. The prelude

criticizes the idea of art and life as two separate spheres since it portrays both—

the piece of art and its artist—as removed from life. This portrayal opposes

Döblin’s idea not only of art’s task to represent life, but also of creating art for all

²¹⁰ Trans.: “The grand master composes for the fine people” (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 227).

people, not just the upper crust, and most importantly, of creating art of consequence.²¹¹

Döblin's artistic viewpoint, which he expressed in 1929, echoes that which he presents in his plays as well. This concept of art—art demoted to the role of producing finished objects created merely for admiration—according to Döblin is not only undesirable, but also ineffective. Döblin sees the role of artists not in creating aesthetically pleasing objects, but rather in creating that which can fully engage in life's chaos and messiness. In 1929, related to this subject matter, Alfred Döblin wrote:

Es ist eine Beleidigung der Kunst, [...] zu sagen, sie sei heilig, und die Kunstwerke kaltzustellen, indem man behauptet, der Staat müsse zu ihnen stillhalten. [...] 'Die Kunst ist heilig' bedeutet aber praktisch nichts

²¹¹ In his 1928 essay *Der Bau des epischen Werks* Döblin explains the artist's position within society: "Der Künstler ist ein lebendiger Mensch, Glied eines Staates, eines Volkes, einer Klasse, und er darf es beanspruchen, daß seine Ansichten ebenso ernst genommen werden wie die anderer Leute. 'Die Kunst ist heilig' bedeutet aber praktisch nichts weiter als: der Künstler ist ein Idiot, man lasse ihn ruhig reden. Man will uns Freiheit der Produktion verschaffen, aber die Freiheit, die man im Auge hat, ist die des Paragraphen 51. Nur in den liberalistischen Staaten, die sich dem Handel, der Bank und der Industrie, dem Kapital und dem Militär verschrieben haben, konnte der Hohn aufkommen: 'die Kunst ist frei', nämlich sie ist ganz harmlos, die Herren und Damen Künstler können ja schreiben und malen was sie wollen; wir lassen es in Leder binden, lesen es uns durch oder hängen es an die Wand, darunter rauchen wir Zigaretten, die Bilder sind eventuell auch im Kunsthandel brauchbar. Daß man so frech mit der Kunst umspringt, daran ist sie selbst schuld, denn ihre meisten Vertreter verdienen schon lange nicht mehr den Namen von Künstlern. Diese Künstler sind ja zufrieden mit der literarisch-ästhetischen Rolle, die sie spielen, besser: mit dem Halsbändchen und der Schlummerrolle, die man unseren lieben Schoßhündchen gegeben hat, und ihre Produkte rechtfertigen größtenteils auch sonst diese Art der Behandlung" (247). Döblin's agenda seems to be to revolutionize art and to stop catering what the high society expects. He wants to create art for the masses, and he wants his art to produce actual effects.

weiter als: der Künstler ist ein Idiot, man lasse ihn ruhig reden. Man will uns Freiheit der Produktion verschaffen, aber die Freiheit, die man im Auge hat, ist die des Paragraphen 51.²¹² [...] Wir wollen ernst genommen sein. Wir wollen wirken, und darum haben wir – ein Recht auf Strafe.

(Meyer 325-6)²¹³

In this quotation Döblin addresses the insult to art to claim that it is sacred. He argues that asking of the government not to react to art results in the sidelining of art. He argues that the notion “art is sacred” represents the equivalent to labeling the artist an idiot who can continue to blather since that which he has to say is of no consequence. He goes so far as to say that the freedom granted to artists is that reserved for the insane, along the lines of granting an artist a fool’s license. Döblin, insulted by this viewpoint of art, disagrees, and thus, portrays the type of artist that produces inconsequential art in a negative light.

The prelude’s poet, for example, perfectly represents an artist that produces art of little consequence. Conversations between the poet and his wife provide insights into their superficiality. The couple’s climactic exclamation of the secret concluding word, the “heimliche

²¹² §51: Unzurechnungsfähigkeit (mental incapacity)

²¹³ Trans.: “It is an insult to art, [...] to say that it is holy and to sideline it by claiming that the state should not react to them. [...] ‘Art is holy’ means practically nothing but: the artist is an idiot, he can continue to talk. We are supposed to receive freedom of production, but the freedom that is considered is that of paragraph 51. [...] We want to be taken serious and because of that we have a right to punishment” (Meyer 325-6).

Schlußwort"—"Wasserstoffsuperoxyd"—absurdly underlines the play's and the artist's superficiality. The poet regards hydrogen peroxide as a solution to his characters' problems. Throughout the prelude's opening episode Döblin interrupts the superficial sequences between the poet and his wife repeatedly with commentary:

Wovon aber leben diese Menschen? Es scheinen lauter Bankiers zu sein.
 ... Aha, Bankiers! Sie kaufen sich eine Villa. Sie haben viel Zeit für ihre
 Liebesgeschichten. ... Überfütterung! Masterscheinungen. Man soll die
 Bande auf halbe Kost setzen. ... Rührei mit Schinken, große Portion eine
 Mark zwanzig. (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 228-30)²¹⁴

This interspersed commentary foreshadows that the main parts of *Die Ehe* will address relevant social problems since they pose existential questions. The commentator, realizing that the characters in the prelude are unconcerned about significant questions, and concludes that they have to be bankers. People with money who, because of their excessive means, can afford to buy villas and have time to worry about their affairs.

The prelude's poet is unable to compose a play of real-life consequence since he does not participate in life outside his room. His wife keeps him away

²¹⁴ Trans.: "But from what do these people live? It seems they are a bunch of bankers. ... Oh, bankers! They buy themselves a villa. They have a lot of time for their love stories. ... Overfeeding! Fattening symptoms. One should cut the gang's diet in half. ... Scrambled eggs with ham, big portion one mark and twenty" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 228-30).

from all worldly “distractions,” and the play contains the line “Der Dichter soll wieder eingemottet werden” (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 232).²¹⁵ The moth-balled poet only emerges to celebrate premiers, and otherwise does not participate in social events. His wife locks him up and stores him away from all potential distractions. The workers, concluding the prelude, represent Döblin’s stance since they attempt to sweep the superficial poet off the stage, and demand drama of social consequence. These two workers ultimately confront the poet, defy the superficial prelude play about the love triangle, and create a harsh contrast with reality: “Wolln wir auch nicht, können keine Kunstwerke brauchen, im Krieg gibts keine Kunstwerke” (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 235).²¹⁶ The workers express their opinion that lofty artistic performances during times of war are useless. The author, however, has no understanding for this argument as he contradicts: “Wo ist Krieg, es ist Frieden” (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 235). While the syntax of the first half of the sentence implies that he is posing a question, the lack of a question mark, and his defying phrase “es ist Frieden” overrule any doubts he may have harbored briefly. Döblin, however, gives the tableau’s final word to the worker, who not only corrects the author and points out that war or peace have no actual effect on

²¹⁵ Trans.: “The poet is supposed to be mothballed again” (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 232).

²¹⁶ Trans.: “We don’t want to either, have no need for pieces of art work, there are no pieces of art in war” (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 235).

the rich, but also (and perhaps more importantly) shoos the author off stage, exclaiming with an accompanying drum roll: “Bühne frei” (*Die Ehe* 235).

His call to clear the stage and to ready it for what is to follow can be interpreted in a couple of ways: first, the worker could request an empty stage for the image and narrator immediately to follow, or, for the first scene, and thus, for *Die Ehe* as a socially critical play which the worker supports. The first case scenario implies the notion of the working class as producers of art and not some lofty world removed artist. The short ninth tableau could, therefore, portray the worker’s artistic and critical performance, which opens with this image:

“Marschierende Soldaten, Krieg. Zugleich Trommeln, Schüsse, Angriffssignale” (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 235).^{217 218} The fact that the narrator, whom

²¹⁷ Trans.: “Marching soldiers, war. Simultaneously drums, shots, attack signals” (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 235).

²¹⁸ The “marschierende Soldaten” are an image for the workers, as the narrator (who played the role as worker thus far) asserts: “Das ist der Krieg, den man sieht, den man hört. Das ist der Krieg, den wir alle kennen. Er wird mit Soldaten geführt und mit Offizieren, Generälen. Die Soldaten sind alle bepackt mit Tornistern, Gasmasken, Stahlhelmen, mit Handgranaten, Seitengewehren, haben alle eine Uniform an, Kanonen sind bei, Maschinengewehre, Minenwerfer und dann Flieger. Überall, wo die gehen, kennt man sie und sieht man sie. Aber es gibt noch einen Krieg, den keiner sieht und keiner hört. Der hat keine Uniformen und Tornister, marschiert nicht die breiten Straßen. Ist überall im Land. In dem Krieg schlagen sich nicht bloß die Männer, auch die Frauen und die Kinder, und müssen leiden, wenn die Kugel kommt” (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 235-6).

Trans.:

“That is the war which you see and hear. That is the war which we all know. It is conducted with soldiers, officers, generals. The soldiers all carry knapsacks, gas masks, steel helmets, with hand grenades, bayonets, they all wear uniforms, canons are along, mortars and then planes. Everywhere they go, we know them and we see them. But there is another war, which no one sees and no one hears. It doesn’t have uniforms and knapsacks, and doesn’t march in the broad streets. It’s everywhere in the country. In this war, not only men fight, also women and children have to suffer when the bullet strikes” (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 235-6).

Döblin in the initial instructions also designates as the play's chorus, appears here for the first time indicates that something else is about to begin. In this initial appearance the narrator (with the additional note "bisher Arbeiter") identifies the war image as the visible war, and elaborates on its horrors such as gas and grenades, but then explains that there is also an invisible war, of which no one hears or sees, but which impacts everyone: men, women, children.

Additionally, he identifies its weapon of mass destruction as follows: "Die Kugel, wie heißt sie, Flinte, Schrapnell, Granate? Sie heißt: kein Geld, keine Arbeit, keine Löhnung. Und weiter: Geld, viel Geld und doch Erbitterung, Verwahrlosung, kein Ziel, keine Gemeinschaft" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 236).²¹⁹ The narrator identifies the bifurcated weapon in the social war as money and its ambiguous nature. Lack of money and its consequences (hunger, poverty, despair) offers the less surprising interpretation, but the worker also points to the abundance of money as problematic since it entails bitterness, neglect, no goal, and no community, all of which Döblin addresses in *Die Ehe*. Further, he foreshadows the effect of this weapon, money: "Die Kugel trifft die Körper und die Seelen. Sie wirft auch den um, der sich lange sicher glaubt" (Döblin, *Die Ehe*

²¹⁹ Trans.: "The bullet, what is it called, musket, shrapnel, grenade? It is called: no money, no work, no pay. And further: money, a lot of money and nevertheless bitterness, neglect, no goal, no community" (Döblin 236).

236).²²⁰ ²²¹ And indeed, throughout the play characters experience physical and psychological perils: hunger, sickness, death, aimlessness and dependency.

Incorporated in this dramaturgy is the point that artists need to rise from the ranks of the working man—artists not from outside the world, but those engaged with the world. This would remove theater from its lofty position that merely caters to society's top members. Instead it can function as a theater that initiates change.²²² From the rather superficial play content of the prelude Döblin delves into the serious subject matters in his three main scenes: addressing the lawlessness of abortion, and the housing shortage for the poor. Perhaps on a

²²⁰ Trans.: "The bullet hits the bodies and the souls. It also throws over those who have long believed to be secure" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 236).

²²¹ Bild: Marschierende Soldaten, Krieg. Zugleich Trommeln, Schüsse, Angriffssignale. Sprecher (bisher Arbeiter): Das ist der Krieg, den man sieht, den man hört. Das ist der Krieg, den wir alle kennen. Er wird mit Soldaten geführt und mit Offizieren, Generälen. Die Soldaten sind alle bepackt mit Tornistern, Gasmasken, Stahlhelmen, mit Handgranaten, Seitengewehren, haben alle eine Uniform an, Kanonen sind bei, Maschinengewehre, Minenwerfer und dann Flieger. Überall, wo die gehen, kann man sie und sieht man sie. Aber es gibt noch einen Krieg, den keiner sieht und keiner hört. Der hat kein Uniformen und Tornister, marschier nicht die breiten Straßen. Ist überall im Land. In dem Krieg schlagen sich nicht bloß die Männer, auch die Frauen und Kinder, und müssen leiden, wenn die Kugel kommt. Die Kugel, wie heißt sie, Flinte, Schrapnell, Granate? Sie heißt: kein Geld, keine Arbeit, keine Löhnung. Und weiter: Geld, viel Geld und doch Erbitterung, Verwahrlosung, kein Ziel, keine Gemeinschaft. Die Kugel trifft die Körper und die Seelen. Sie wirft auch den um der sich lange sicher glaubt.

Vom Krieg in unserm Land!
 Berichte vom Kriegsschauplatz!
 Sehen und erkennen! Wissen und verändern!
 Text: Wissen und Verändern! (Döblin 235-6)

²²² In 1930, Döblin writes about the position of literature within society: "Warum konnte die Arbeiterbewegung den literarischen Naturalismus nicht am Leben erhalten? Gegenfrage: wer ist Literaturabnehmer in Deutschland? Antwort: Das gehobene Bürgertum. Warum nur das gehobene Bürgertum? Antwort: weil es das Bildungsmonopol hat. Es kann als notorisch unterstellt werden, daß die gesamte höhere deutsche Literatur für noch nicht zehn bis zwanzig Prozent des deutschen Volkes geschrieben wird" (Steinbach 66). Döblin expresses his malcontent with this situation in his literary and his theoretical writings.

more surprising note he also deals with the rich bourgeoisie, and the problem of their abundance of money which he implies early on.

The first scene, titled "The Young Marriage," portrays the dilemmas young women of little means face. The protagonist struggles with her unintended pregnancy. Her husband loses his job and her mother instructs her to wait with having children until later. At this point the young couple still lives with her parents. All warnings, however, come too late. Once she reveals her predicament to her husband, he indicates that her unplanned pregnancy is a woman's problem, and thus, denies his responsibility. The fear of her family and the consequences of having a baby in her current circumstances, lead her to seek solutions elsewhere. First, she visits a doctor, and implores him to help her find a job, or a place to live, and finally asks him to abort the baby. Referring to the law he refuses to do so. The young woman complains about the government prohibiting abortions without providing sufficient assistance for child care. Next, she approaches a charitable organization, where she feels misunderstood in more than one way. An employee there offers her the option of joining a house in which she can work a little, give birth to her child, and suckle another woman's baby. The young woman decides to stay with her husband, and instead inquires about financial assistance to help pay for an apartment, a request that results in an accusation of promiscuity and the neglected responsibilities.

Realizing that she will not receive financial or housing support, the young woman visits a pharmacist, whose advertisement for a special powder lures her in. Happily taking a high price from this poor woman in need, the pharmacist instructs her on how to take the powder, and in doing so simply prolongs her agony without solving her problem. Finally, still without any support, understanding, or potential solution, the young woman visits an old lady who performs abortions. Taking the last of her money, the old woman performs the abortion. The young woman does not survive the procedure. The old woman fetches the young husband, who, in despair, calls for the doctor. The scene ends with a call for political action, and repeatedly, the screen displays “Wissen und verändern,” which is also one of Döblin’s book titles.

In the second scene, Döblin broadens the issue to include more people, presenting his audience with the trials of poor families. In the center of this scene appears the family of a gardener, who, too sick to work, lives with his family of eight in terrible living arrangements. Although the family’s “Dringlichkeitsschein” theoretically entitles them to a larger apartment, they never get one. Döblin points to the systematic flaw of a government that distributes such documents, but fails to implement its own regulations by resting the deciding power with the landlords. Potential landlords, keeping their own best interests in mind, don’t consider the poor, and instead rent to people with

the means to pay for rent. During this scene, we follow the family, as they lose their baby. The father threatens the government agency with violence, and demands suitable living arrangements for his family. The officer in charge, unwilling to assume responsibility and to explore the question of guilt, excuses the father's behavior, but also justifies his own lack of action: "Da tun Sie uns Unrecht, lieber Mann, denn daran, was hier geschieht und nicht geschieht, sind wir nicht schuld dran. Wir haben Gesetze, Verfügungen, Erlasse, Ausführungsbestimmungen, was können wir machen?," announcing that it is not his fault since he only follows the law (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 264).²²³

After the father's death, a lady from a private club visits the widow and her children, much to her own excitement and, initially, the widow's too. Expecting her needs to be addressed, and hoping that the family will finally receive a suitable apartment, the widow is overjoyed. The lady, however, disappoints this last hope since her solution, rather than providing an apartment, consists of removing the young widow's children, and placing them in an orphanage, where, she claims, they will receive excellent shelter and provision. The lady cannot comprehend the widow's refusal of her offer. Offended and lacking an understanding as to why the widow does not consider this a viable solution, the lady leaves saying: "... diese Leute haben kein Verständnis für

²²³ Trans.: "You are doing us injustice, dear man, because that which happens here or doesn't, is not our fault. We have laws, ordinances, edicts, regulatory statutes, what can we do?" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 264).

unser Mitleid!" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 270).²²⁴ Expecting understanding from the widow for her expression of empathy, the well-meaning woman is offended when her expectation is disappointed. Marx and Engels discuss this issue in their *Manifesto*: "Die Bourgeoisie stellt sich die Welt, worin sie herrscht, natürlich als die beste Welt vor," a quotation that perfectly encapsulates the woman's idea that the best solution for the poor family's children consists of their separation from their parents (76).²²⁵ She believes that she can solve every family members' problem, leaving the parents without their children and placing the kids into an orphanage. The mother's vehement opposition to her plan offends the lady since she—along the lines of the above quotation—believes that her interpretation of the situation is the only viable one that produces a positive outcome. Döblin sarcastically and poignantly reveals her motivation of confirming her view of herself as a good person.²²⁶ This situation is only topped by her annoyance when the young mother asks her if she would give up her children, or, if her apartment is bigger.

The lady, as a member of the "haves," fails to relate to the tribulations of the "have-nots." A speculator sums it up: "Der Staat schützt den Besitz und

²²⁴ "... these people have no sympathy for our empathy!" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 270).

²²⁵ In my edition, a footnote refers to Leibniz' idea of the best of all possible worlds.

²²⁶ This scene reminds me of Herman Melville's *Bartleby, The Scrivener*, in which Bartleby's employer concerns himself with collecting "morsels for his soul."

damit auch die Besitzlosigkeit. Er kann schließlich nur jedem garantieren, was er hat: wer was hat, dem sichert er das, – wer nichts hat, dem sichert er das. Das ist Gerechtigkeit“ (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 265).²²⁷ The question of justice and the criticism of the law recurs throughout the play. According to the speculator, the law serves the rich exclusively since it protects their properties and possessions. Just as it secures the possessions for their owners, it also secures the lack of possessions of those less fortunate, those who don't own anything. In other words, the law protects the status quo. The speculator offers an absurd answer to deal with people's suffering: culture. He proposes consumption of culture as the antidote—another self-ironic stab from Döblin his own métier—and packages this critique in form of a play. Thus, the form is itself a cultural element which, first, is accessible only to certain classes, and, second, is ineffective too, a shortcoming he points out at the play's beginning.

Once the remaining children are in an orphanage and the mother is in an infirmary the older daughter escapes with her brother, finds her mother, and hopes to start over. In the meantime, however, the mother, in utter despair loses her mind, and no longer sees a place for herself and her children in society. No longer trusting in prevalent social structures and the help people can provide,

²²⁷ Trans.: “The government protects the possession of property and along with that also “propertylessness.” After all, it can only guarantee each that which he has: it protects the property of those who own something, – it protects the “propertylessness” of those who don't anything. That is justice” (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 265).

she takes her two remaining children and sets out to live in the woods, believing that nature harbors the only place for the poor. Her daughter, deeming her mother's behavior suspicious, fearfully wonders if she plans to kill the two. Her seeking help from a boy scout results in a policeman assessing the situation. He informs the mother that she cannot stay with her children in the woods since human law regulates even nature: "es ist auch gar nicht erlaubt, hier zu übernachten, darüber hat die Feldpolizei zu bestimmen" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 281).²²⁸ The scene ends with the narrator's recitation of a song—"Geld regiert die Welt"—and the analogy that money is the carpenter and people are nothing but the wood shavings, the waste product.

In conjunction with the role of money, Döblin transmits his criticism of art reserved for the upper class throughout the play: In the seventh tableau of the second scene, two speculators discuss the (in their eyes overrated) needs of the poor in conjunction with culture. Talking about the poor, the second speculator argues:

... sind gar keine richtigen Menschen. Das denkt nur an Brot, an Essen und Trinken, und daß die Wohnung noch ein bißchen größer sein muß. Als wenn das das Leben wäre. Als wenn unsere Kultur nichts wäre, als hätte Goethe nicht gelebt und allen zugerufen: Edel sei der Mensch,

²²⁸ Trans.: "it is forbidden to spend the night here, the field police make that judgement" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 281).

hilfreich und gut.²²⁹ Edel! Kennen Sie “Freude schöner Götterfunken”?

(Döblin, *Die Ehe* 265)²³⁰

Ironically, this speculator quotes Goethe’s “Noble be man, helpful, and good,” yet, has no concept of this statement’s meaning and implications beyond its theoretical existence. The speculator’s recitation sounds ridiculous after declaring that those concerned with food and shelter are nonhuman, and he lacks the capacity to truly ponder the concepts of helpfulness and goodness. And it gets even better as the second speculator explains: “Beethoven. Ich sage, das müßten die Leute anhören. Die Mondscheinsonate von Beethoven, das gibt ein Bild von der großen Harmonie der Welt” (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 265).²³¹ As if the family in the second scene could take a bite out of the “Mondscheinsonate,” the speculators present the problem as one of simply countering poverty with art. In their view engaging with great artistic creations yields harmony and contentedness, even if basic needs such as food and shelter are not met.

²²⁹ Döblin’s speculator quotes part of the first stanza of Goethe’s “Das Göttliche”: “Edel sei der Mensch, / Hilfreich und gut! / Denn das allein / Unterscheidet ihn / Von allen Wesen, / Die wir kennen.”

²³⁰ Trans.: “... aren’t even real people. Only thinks of bread, eating and drinking, and that the apartment has to be a little bigger. As if that were life. As if our culture were nothing, as if Goethe hadn’t lived and called out to all: Be noble, helpful and good. Noble! Do you know ‘Ode to Joy’?” (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 265).

²³¹ Trans.: “Beethoven. I say, that’s what the people should listen to. Beethoven’s Moonlight Sonata, that provides a picture of the big harmony of the world” (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 265).

This speculator scene demonstrates another instance of art's abuse as a tool since neither Goethe nor Beethoven composed their lines intending to feed them to the poor. But once outside of the artist's mind, his creation can be abused even for such purposes as keeping the small small. This discussion harkens back to the play's prelude, in which the author's mere function seems to be to create art for diversion, distraction, and entertainment. Döblin's understanding of art as a critical lens through which he examines society contrasts the prelude's author's statement "Ich habe den Menschen ihre Seele gezeigt," and presents it as highly ironic since the repercussions of the play within the prelude concern merely a love triangle, and not matters of life and death (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 235). Similarly, the speculators can easily discuss lofty Goethe quotations or magnificent Beethoven sonatas while disregarding the needs of the poor. After this distressing subject matter, let's briefly turn to the more entertaining aspects of art, and distract ourselves with the play's interlude.

Interlude

An interlude separates the first and second scenes, and it portrays social injustices in three tableaux: the first one portraying the celebration in honor of a successful race horse, the second revisits the subject of laws protecting both abundance and scarcity of possessions, and the third portrays the figure justice,

who, after witnessing the world's disparity and injustices, runs away. The first tableau presents the audience with an image of excess. In its description of a post-horse-race celebration in a fine restaurant it depicts not only the indulgence of the owners of the successful horse, but also the winning horse itself, and its exclusive treatment:

Seht, das Pferd ist hereingeführt, ein edles Pferd. Ein Kellner muß hier eine große silberne Schüssel nehmen, die sie mit Hafer füllen und dem Pferd zum Fressen vorhalten. Er bekommt dafür zehn Mark. ... Hier trägt ein anderer Kellner einen Silberkübel herbei, er gießt drei Flaschen Sekt hinein und hält sie dem Pferde hin. Der Kellner bekommt dafür zehn Mark. ... Dies sind die Pferdeäpfel, die das edle Roß beim Verlassen des Bankettsaals hat fallen lassen und die wir für die Nachwelt so aufbewahrt haben. (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 256)²³²

The horse receives food and alcohol from silver buckets, and its excrement is preserved for posterity. Each waiter receives ten mark for performing his duties of catering to the horse. Keep in mind that this tableau directly follows the episode of the first scene, in which the young wife pays ten mark—all the money she had left—for a botched abortion that ultimately kills her. However, we do not

²³² Trans.: "Behold, the horse is led in, a noble horse. A waiter has to take a large silver bowl, fill it with oats, and hold it for the horse to feed. He receives ten mark. ... Another waiter brings a silver bucket, pours three bottles champagne into it, and holds it for the horse. The waiter receives ten mark for this. ... These are the horse droppings that the horse dropped when leaving the banquet room and which we preserved for posterity" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 256).

have to return to the first scene in order to see these injustices. Just in case we forgot about the trials presented in scene one, Döblin immediately juxtaposes the account of the absurdly excessive celebration with the following image:

Hier sind die Häuser und das Bergwerk, aus denen der Lord Simpson seine Gelder bezieht, in denen sich Menschen schwer plagen müssen, um das Geld zusammenzubringen, von dem er Bankette und Champagner für ein Pferd bezahlt. Bild. Hier sind die Maulschellen, die wir ihm für seine Tierfreundschaft erteilen. (*Die Ehe* 256)²³³

In spite of its light tone the content sharply contrasts with the celebration. On the one hand, luxury abounds to the extent that its owners, unable to spend it all, waste money on absurdities such as champagne for a horse and the preservation of its droppings. On the other hand, those who work enable the mine's owner to afford his luxuries and nonsenses while the workers lack the means to support their families. This juxtaposition between those that work and those who collect the rewards emphasizes the criticism towards a system that legally supports the notion of social discrepancies.

The second tableau continues this line of thought and addresses the issue of serfdom. Although this concept no longer exists, a text informs the audience

²³³ Trans.: "Here are the houses and the mine from which Lord Simpson gets his money, and in which people work hard to gather the money from which he pays for banquets and champagne for a horse. Image: Here is the slap in the face which we give to him for his animal friendliness" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 256).

that a baron receives compensation “dafür, daß die Leibeigenschaft abgeschafft ist in Preußen,” and elucidates this absurdity:

Dem [Freiherrn] zahlt der Preußische Staat noch heute eine Rente, weil seine Ureltern einst Standesherrn waren und zur Zeit der Leibeigenschaft zahlreiche Untertanen besaßen. Die Leibeigenschaft ist abgeschafft, der Anspruch des Freiherrn auf Weiterbezug der Rente jedoch ist vom obersten deutschen Gericht bestätigt. (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 257)²³⁴

The state, complicit in social injustices pays pensions to a person whose ancestors owned serfs. This young man, although never having owned serfs himself, receives recompense for the inconvenience of being prohibited from owning people.

These two examples of injustice culminate in this interlude’s third and last tableau, which portrays a war widow who, irritated by Justice’s apparent blindness, summons an eye doctor to cure Justice of her impeded vision.²³⁵ The eye doctor, however, assesses the situation as follows: “Sie ist nicht blind, sie

²³⁴ Trans.: “The Prussian state still pays a pension to him [the baron] because his great-grandparents (“Ureltern” literally translates into “first parents,” and thus, removes them even further from the current baron) once were princes/ counts who owned countless serfs at the time of serfdom. Serfdom has been abolished, but the demand of the baron to continue to receive this pension has been confirmed by German supreme court” (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 257).

²³⁵ Many injustices portrayed in Döblin’s play have to do with the condition of woman as (by-)product of society, embodying no role but that of wife; and thus, defined only through someone else.

trägt nur eine Binde, die man versäumt hat ihr abzunehmen," upon which he removes her blindfold, and the audience beholds the following report:

"Seltsames Verhalten der Frau Justitia. Sie sieht, was ringsum ist und was geschieht, und läuft und läuft davon" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 257).²³⁶ Justice runs, and, increasingly accelerating as she observes the circumstances surrounding her, ultimately runs away. She happens upon the Finnish world champion runner, who, initially ahead of Justitia, decides to race her. Justitia, however, picks up speed and outruns the champion. The interlude ends with the exclamation: "Der Weltrekord liegt jetzt bei ihr!" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 258).²³⁷ While personification of justice dashes away, manmade laws that protect the rich remain, and this tableau reminds us of the discussion between two speculators in the second scene. In their discussion about the two-fold function of the law to protect possessions and the lack thereof, Döblin poignantly illuminates the flip side of laws that protect the rich since the same laws also keep the poor from prospering. With state-protected and promoted opportunism rather than social justice, it is no surprise that characters of means attempt to secure and advance their own interests.

While disadvantaging the poor, the State continuously advantages the rich. But

²³⁶ Trans.: "She is not blind, she's just wearing a blindfold, which has been neglected to take off," upon which he removes her blindfold, and the audience beholds the following report: "Peculiar behavior of the woman Justitia. She sees what's happening around her, and runs and runs away" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 257).

²³⁷ "The world record is now hers!" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 258).

Döblin does not leave this element, the enrichment of the rich and its consequences, unexplored.

Presenting his audience with a bourgeois family in the third and final scene of the play Döblin outlines the negative aspects of those who have money and means, and who appear to be in power. Here Döblin reveals at great length that even women of a high social class underlie societal restrictions. The well-off characters are men, a trend Döblin maintains from his previous plays. Even Lucie, a well-educated woman from a well-to-do family, has no say in her own future. Her father, *Unternehmer*, deaf to her wish to take over his company because of her sex, argues that only a man can lead the company, and therefore, instructs Lucie to marry, whether she likes it or not. Although *Unternehmer* appears to be the one in charge, and, as a man, a vessel for power, Döblin depicts him as a well-oiled machine, devoid of human features, a notion that the absence of a first name supports: *“Der Unternehmer ist ein Aufbau oder Projektion, Schornstein auf einem Kopf, Schreibmaschine und Telefondrähte aus den Händen, eine Fabrikfront als Brust, die Augen viereckige helle Fenster”* (*Die Ehe* 282).²³⁸ In addition to his looks, representing not those a man or a father but a factory, *Unternehmer* also emphasizes that he is nothing but the numbers that constitute his business:

²³⁸ Trans.: “The industrialist is a structure or projection, chimney on a head, typewriter and telephone wires coming out of his hands, a factory facade as chest, the eyes square, bright windows” (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 282).

Ich habe Fabriken, Aktien, das ist alles, was ich habe, und mehr bin ich nicht. ... Jedes Frühjahr und Herbst gebe ich meinen Leib in die Behandlung von Ärzten, sie schicken mich in Bäder, damit ich wieder stehe, wie ich stand. ... Man wage nicht, mich zu photographieren; wer meine Photographie will, nehme meine Werke auf. Man frage nicht nach meinem Lebenslauf, meine Zahlen – die Daten meiner Patente, die Krisen, die Rückschläge. Mehr bin ich nicht. (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 283)²³⁹

Unternehmer denies himself any human qualities, and argues that he is nothing but the numbers and data that constitutes his business. The tantamount proof of his detachedness from all things human is his description of his body as an object he can hand over to a team of medical doctors. Explaining his semi-annual repair ritual he mentions “my body,” rather than saying “I.” Unternehmer refuses to engage in personal matters, and treats himself as an object not a person. Another factor that contributes to this portrayal is the absence of his wife, Lucie’s mother. While this entire play grapples to a large extent with the predicament of women, and although Lucie must have one, her mother does not appear throughout the entire scene.

²³⁹ Trans.: “I have factories, stock, that is everything that I have, and I am nothing more. ... Each spring and fall I turn my body over to treatment from doctors, they send me into baths so that I stand again how I used to stand. ... Don’t dare to photograph me; he who wants my photograph, should snap my plants. Don’t inquire about my life’s events, my numbers – the date of my patens, the crises, the setbacks. I am nothing more than that” (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 283).

Woman enough herself, however, Lucie represents a liberated woman with business sense, and her own ambitions. She wishes to assume ownership of her father's business and remain unmarried, a request, however, her father denies. Upon Unternehmer's question about his daughter's plans, she replies: "Ich werde in dein Werk eintreten, Vater. Was mir Spaß macht, werde ich mir unverändert gönnen" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 284).²⁴⁰ After expressing enthusiasm over her intention, the following conversation ensues:

UNTERNEHMER: Daß du in meine Fabrik willst, freut mich. Eine Frau ist gut, aber ein Mann ist besser.

LUCIE: Warum ist er besser?

UNTERNEHMER: Weil er zuverlässiger ist. Ich möchte, daß du heiratest.

LUCIE: Du hast mich bisher immer frei herumlaufen lassen, ich habe dich nicht gestört.

UNTERNEHMER: Ich brauche einen Mann, der mich ersetzt.

LUCIE: Ich bin aber nicht für die Ehe. Warum packst du mir den alten Unsinn auf.

²⁴⁰ Trans.: "I will enter your plant, father. I will continue to grant myself that which brings enjoyment" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 284).

UNTERNEHMER: Die Ehe ist notwendig. Wie du sie führst, geht mich nichts an. (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 284-5)²⁴¹

Ultimately, Lucie succumbs to her father's wish, and exclaims: "Ich werde die Lächerlichkeit begehen und heiraten" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 285).²⁴² And marry she does. Shortly into the marriage Lucie complains to her father about her husband's state of affairs (quite literally), but ultimately the couple patches things up, with the help of "Wandschirme" and "Verschwiegenheit."

Using Lucie, this scene's protagonist, as an example, Döblin confirms his claims about money as the "golden calf" that holds power over people including the wealthy. Money exerts its power to the point of destruction. Neither the poor nor the rich are safe from its agency. Much as the poet's words in *Lydia und Mäxchen* assume power and prevent the poet and director from exerting their power, this principle prevails here as well. Someone's creation assumes power over its creator. Money, assumed to function as the force that equips its owner with power, instead becomes a power itself, takes charge, and rules over its

²⁴¹ Trans.:

UNTERNEHMER: That you want to join my factory makes me happy. A woman is good, but a man is better.

LUCIE: Why is he better?

UNTERNEHMER: Because he is more reliable. I want you to marry.

LUCIE: You have thus far allowed me to roam freely, and I have not disturbed you.

UNTERNEHMER: I need a man who replaces me.

LUCIE: But I am not in favor of marriage (or could also mean not made for marriage). Why are you imposing this old nonsense on me.

UNTERNEHMER: Marriage is necessary. How you lead it is non of my concern. (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 284-5)

²⁴² Trans.: "I will commit the ludicrousness and get married" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 285).

owners. Those believed to be in charge become its subordinates. For instance, Lucie's social position and familial wealth do not empower her. Her father's refusal of her leading the company forces her to subordinate herself to a husband, Georg.²⁴³ While this may imply the power her father holds, it is clear from the beginning of the scene that he, too, underlies the powers that be. He functions as a tool, and makes no decisions himself. Money takes over, ruling characters' circumstances. They no longer use it to achieve their means, but they become its tools. For instance, if it wasn't for the capital invested in the company Lucie would not have married at all, and fallen victim to Georg's philandering.²⁴⁴ In this scene Döblin does not depict the power of the rich, but rather their impotence when faced with the power money holds over them. In *Die Ehe* money assumes an active role: it transitions from an object people use to an agent exerting power over people, rich and poor alike.

It is money that functions as an agent here, turning people into props that merely serve as backgrounds on its stage. For instance, Unternehmer merely

²⁴³ Döblin's choice of name for these two characters prescribe their roles for them, too. Georg, as someone who toils the soil, enters the business which will turn him into another Unternehmer. His work will be his focus, and will become that which will take him over. Lucie, on the other hand, is enlightened enough to know what she wants. She knows that she doesn't want to submit to a husband. Ironically, her knowledge does not protect her from her fate of leading a marriage behind screens and silence.

²⁴⁴ While a critic claims that Lucie is not depicted realistically, and argues that she does not have to care about the perception of her I disagree with this argument as this may be entirely different for her as a woman as opposed to Georg. As a man Georg doesn't have a reputation to lose (he can openly carry on affairs) while Lucie as a woman might be regarded as a harlot. Döblin addresses the gender differences extensively in his plays (Schuster 322).

represents his plant, and not a person at all. He is depicted alone behind his desk and without an interest in interactions and personal matters. Throughout the play he hardly displays any human qualities since Döblin scripts his looks and lines in accordance with those of an object: impersonal and repetitive. The only exception to his presentation as factory occurs when Lucie requests his help in her marriage matters. After resisting he eventually emerges from his superstructure, his "Überbau," and agrees to help his daughter, but only after she appeals to his paternal ties with her. While the previous two scenes present us with poor characters who suffer under the oppression of the rich and the powerful, this scene depicts characters that turn into things which are under the yoke of tools and machines. In this way *Die Ehe* connects both to *Lydia und Mäxchen* and *Comteß Mizzi*. The poet in *Lydia und Mäxchen* and the regulated artists in *Comteß Mizzi* are of little consequence, and not in charge of their art. Similarly, *Unternehmer* lacks the power with which, one believes, his money would endow him. Thus, the play not only portrays the perils of those in need of money, but also the travesties of those who possess it, and whose lives money governs.

“And It’s All Vanity”²⁴⁵

While the rich experience material advantages and shape society, they are not immune from turning into working machines themselves, as Unternehmer and Georg demonstrate.²⁴⁶ During the final scene’s ultimate episode Döblin leads his audience into the “Sumpf der Gesellschaft,” where the narrator reveals horrendous spousal relationships (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 316).²⁴⁷ The narrator also discovers the ever-present Unternehmer in this swamp. The fact that he permeates every episode in this scene renders him a god-like figure as the narrator confirms in his address of Unternehmer: “Hoher Herr, hoher Herr! Was

²⁴⁵ Cake, *B-Sides & Rarities*, “Thrills,” 2007, originally Ecclesiastes 2:1-11.

²⁴⁶ Unternehmer has no name, only this label throughout the entire scene. Georg at least does not lose his name, yet.

²⁴⁷ One exchange in society’s swamp reveals interpersonal emotions (or the lack thereof):

SPRECHER: ...Wer seid ihr? Wer bist du?

MANN: Ich habe meine Sorgen.

SPRECHER: Wie stehst du zu ihr?

MANN: Zu wem?

SPRECHER: Zu ihr, deiner Frau?

MANN: Pah, zu meiner Frau.

SPRECHER: Wie stehst du zu ihr?

MANN: Ich habe meine Sorgen. Sie hat ihre Wohnung, ihre Kinder, ihr Auskommen, was braucht eine Frau mehr?

SPRECHER (*zur Frau*): Wie stehst du zu ihm?

FRAU: Er? Geht mich der Mann an. Der Trottel. Wann seh ich ihn denn? Läuft ins Geschäft, an die Börse. SPRECHER: Möchtest du mehr von ihm haben?

FRAU: Von dem, Gott bewahre. Ich bin froh, wenn ich ihn nicht sehe. Was soll ich von dem? Kann sich rumtreiben, soll sich Weiber nehmen so viel er will.

SPRECHER: Warum gehst du nicht von ihm?

FRAU: Könnt ihm passen. Ich werd mich bloßstellen seinetwegen vor der ganzen Welt. (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 316)

Marriage here only holds a societal function if any at all. The husband busies himself with work, while the wife raises children and keeps the house. In this case, it is not a mere division of labor, but the couple has no interest (anymore) in each other. Worse, they are appalled by one another, but remain married. In regards to the utterance “Gott bewahre,” the god in this scene – Unternehmer – indeed prevents the wife from seeing more of her husband.

sagt der hohe Herr dazu? Das sind deine Menschen," (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 317).²⁴⁸

Attempting to appeal to his sense of moral responsibility the narrator intervenes:

UNTERNEHMER: Wer spricht?

SPRECHER: Ich habe Lebende und Tote aus deinem Reich hinter mir.

UNTERNEHMER: Ich befasse mich nicht mit Privatsachen.

SPRECHER: Womit befaßt du dich?

UNTERNEHMER: Geld zu machen.

SPRECHER: Zu welchem Zweck.

UNTERNEHMER: Um Geld zu machen.

SPRECHER: Warum das?

UNTERNEHMER: Um Geld zu machen.²⁴⁹

SPRECHER: Und um die Menschen verkommen zu lassen!

²⁴⁸ Trans.: "High Lord, high Lord! What does the high lord say to this? These are your people" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 317).

²⁴⁹ In Brecht's *Mahagonny*, money, too, plays a pivotal role. The city's founders identify the shortage of money as the biggest crime, and at the beginning of the ensuing scene the audience receives note that no one (audience members included) would willingly pay Paul's debt even if witnessing his execution may be somewhat uncomfortable. Brecht asserts that the corruption in Mahagonny – exemplified in a juxtaposed previous trial – is part of the justice system in general (64). Before Paul Ackermann is tried, Brecht present the trial of Toby Higgins, who is "angeklagt des vorsätzlichen Mordes / Zwecks Erprobung eines alten Revolvers" (64). Following "Dreieinigkeitsmoses'" explanation of the reason for the trial "[u]m die Gerechtigkeit sprechen zu hören" is this description: "Der Angeklagte hat durch Aufheben seiner Finger zu verstehen gegeben, wieviel Bestechung er zu zahlen bereit ist. Auf die gleiche Weise hat die Begbick sein Angebot immer höher getrieben," thus, the audience learns of the option to escape this court's justice (65).

UNTERNEHMER: Ich kann die Gesellschaft brauchen wie sie ist. (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 317)²⁵⁰

This one-sided conversation might as well involve a broken record not a character, since Unternehmer only musters one answer. The narrator points out that the people belong to Unternehmer. While he presents the situation as one of responsibility towards those who depend on their superior, Unternehmer regards the people in this morass as objects to be possessed. While the narrator attempts to tease out the reasons for Unternehmer's actions, Unternehmer only has one answer: to make money. He himself can no longer provide any other reason explaining his actions besides the monetary motivation that enslaves him. Without remembering why, he still knows how to do what he does. The narrator refuses to surrender his argument:

SPRECHER: Hoher Herr, hoher Herr! Deine Menschen!

UNTERNEHMER (*sehr laut*): Sag deine Gedichte woanders auf.

SPRECHER: Sumpf und Verwahrlosung, Mord und Lug und Betrug!

²⁵⁰ Trans.:

UNTERNEHMER: Who's speaking?

SPRECHER: The alive and dead from your realm are here with me.

UNTERNEHMER: I don't deal with private matters.

SPRECHER: What are you dealing with?

UNTERNEHMER: To make money.

SPRECHER: To what end?

UNTERNEHMER: To make money.

SPRECHER: Why?

UNTERNEHMER: To make money.

SPRECHER: And to abandon the people!

UNTERNEHMER: I can use society as it is. (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 317)

UNTERNEHMER: Arbeitet, arbeitet, meine Kinder. Für Romane ist keine Zeit.

SPRECHER: Zertretene Familien, erschlagene Menschen. Das sind Romane? (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 318)²⁵¹

The narrator attempts to convince Unternehmer that issues he considers fiction represent real-life problems for actual people, but to no avail. The narrator fails to convince Unternehmer, who continues to crack his whip and animate his subordinates (his “children”) to work. Ironically, Unternehmer no longer even furthers his own benefits, let alone displays any favorable attributes or advances that which is “noble and good.” He is neither content nor happy and turns into a tool for money. Money is no longer a means to an end, but an end in itself. Money operates like a virus that infests a host, intent on replicating itself while sucking out the life of its host. While regarded as a god-like figure, opportunistic Unternehmer claims to benefit from the society he perpetuates, but he is

²⁵¹ Trans.:

SPRECHER: High lord, high lord! Your people!

UNTERNEHMER (*very loud*): Recite your poems somewhere else.

SPRECHER: Morass and neglect, murder and lies and fraud!

UNTERNEHMER: Work, work, my children. There is no time for novels.

SPRECHER: Trampled families, battered people. Those are novels? (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 318)

entangled too deeply and no longer makes his own decisions.²⁵² Thus, Unternehmer's existence is of no consequence, an idea to which Döblin repeatedly returns throughout the course of this play.

Considering the inconsequential nature of humans, for instance, the speaker at the beginning of the first scene, "Die junge Ehe," comments on the circularity and finiteness of life in the micro- as well as macrocosms: "Es bewegt sich alles. Der Mensch wird geboren, lebt, wächst, altert, stirbt. ... Die Menschenvölker bilden sich, Staaten wachsen, gehen zugrunde" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 236-7).²⁵³ The world and the people within remain constantly in flux, and merely are part of the circle of life. Once they die, new ones are born. This cycle, applied

²⁵² Although he does not appear to be happy or content with his life. Brecht mocks the money-power dichotomy in *Mahagonny* with Paul's discovery of the "Gesetze der menschlichen Glückseligkeit." While the city's inhabitants fearfully anticipate their demise, Paul argues that the approaching hurricane, about to destroy the city, creates conditions, in which everything should be allowed: "Drum fordere ich euch auf / Tuet alles heut nacht, was verboten ist. / Wenn der Hurrikan kommt, der macht es auch so! / Singt also zum Beispiel, weil es verboten ist" (Brecht 41). After the hurricane miraculously circumvents Mahagonny, the city's new motto becomes "Du darfst" (Brecht 43). Thus, Paul discovers the "Gesetze der menschlichen Glückseligkeit" (35). In a long litany Paul explicates the nature of man, arguing that peace and unity do not exist in the world, and comparing man to natural disaster: "Und gerade so [wie ein Hurrikan] ist der Mensch: / Er muß zerstören, was da ist. / Wozu braucht's da einen Hurrikan? / Was ist der Taifun an Schrecken / Gegen den Menschen, wenn er seinen Spaß haben will? ... am schlimmsten ist der Mensch" (Brecht 36-37). Boldly he declares: "Es ist nichts verboten!," and he urges his friends to take all the money they can get (Brecht 37). Paul concludes his tirade with the following justification: "Im Interesse der Ordnung / Zum Besten des Staates / Für die Zukunft der Menschheit / Zu deinem eigenen Wohlbefinden / Darfst du" (39)! Brecht's opera closes with the line "Können uns und euch und niemand helfen" – an end that confronts the audience with the inescapability of life's deep entanglement in a capitalist society (Brecht 80). *Mahagonny* only holds an illusion of an escape, not the real thing. This final decree, however, differs greatly from Döblin's final lines: "Freunde, liebe Freunde, seid unverzagt, einmal für uns der Morgen tagt, einmal kommt Brot und Freiheit und Licht für uns und jedes Menschengesicht" (Döblin 319).

²⁵³ Trans.: "Everything moves. Man is born, lives, grows, ages, dies. ... Peoples develop, states grow, wither" (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 236-7).

to individual people, peoples, or the world in general, repeats itself endlessly, rendering each individual cycle meaningless. Döblin, too, comes full circle, and returns to this idea at the end of this play. As the narrator regards the “Sumpf der Gesellschaft,” the play concludes with the following loudspeaker message: “Es bewegt sich alles, die Wahrheit ist kein ewiges Gesetz. Wer nicht zur eigenen Wahrheit durchdringt, der lebt nicht, hat nicht gelebt, ist nicht geboren” (Döblin, *Die Ehe* 319).²⁵⁴ This message suggests a lack of an ultimate truth, and a constantly fluid world in which man needs to struggle continuously to reach an understanding, and not to cease questioning the circumstances. Like Unternehmer, those who fail to approach their lives critically, and to discover their own truths, have not lived or even been born. At this point Döblin returns to the previously laid out moral of his play.

A character like Unternehmer may have started his endeavors in search for more money, but even he has lost himself along the way in his quest of material acquisition. He no longer operates for the sake of making money, he is not alive, doesn't live, and might as well not have been born. He fell into the trap, and has become a tool for money-making, but is no longer someone in control. Unternehmer lost his own truth, and can no longer communicate intelligibly about his reasons for continuing to make money without fulfilling

²⁵⁴ Trans.: “Everything moves, truth is no eternal law. The one who doesn't strive to unearth his own truth doesn't live, has not lived, has not been born” (Brecht 319).

himself. Despite the ironically and absurdly administered social criticisms, Döblin's play ends with these lines, chanted by a "Schlußchor": "Freunde, liebe Freunde, seid unverzagt, einmal für uns der Morgen tagt, einmal kommt Brot und Freiheit und Licht für uns und jedes Menschengesicht," a surprisingly hopeful prophecy after all the gloomy injustices portrayed throughout the play (*Die Ehe* 319).²⁵⁵ A glimmer of hope remains.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁵ Trans.: "Friends, dear friends, don't dismay, once morning will come for us, once there will be bread and freedom and light for us and for every human face" (Döblin 319).

²⁵⁶ Compare to the final line of Georg Heym's "Berlin I": "Auf allen Köpfen lag des Lichtes Traume." The end holds hope for everyone.

Conclusion

The study of his plays, which bookend the most prominent part of his pre-exile career, elucidates the breadth and depth of Döblin's literary achievements, and demonstrates his treatment of dramatic and social questions. In these plays Döblin addresses questions of artistic control and social injustices, believing that the stage provided him with a larger audience than the printed page, and thus, increased the exposure of his texts.²⁵⁷ While his plays investigate dramatic matters they also pose questions concerning the importance of the object world and its implications for people, the objectification of people, and the social oppression of people through the automation of labor.

In a playful manner, Döblin depicts the uprising of inanimate props, which represent the passive working class, in *Lydia und Mäxchen*. Entertained, we watch the three main props express their various notions about their entry into the human world. The candelabra's materialism demonstrates the human notion to allow one's oppression for the sake of monetary and materialistic acquisitions. The locker, terrified by the idea that it is now an agent in the world and no longer

²⁵⁷ Not sure he was correct on this point since his plays remained either unperformed, or were performed only for a limited time.

merely a recipient of actions, mirrors human existentialist fears. The chair undergoes a stark learning curve. Starting out as a naive figure who believes in the poet's benevolence, he transforms into a rebel who wants to tear down all that is human. But the flat hobgoblin who kills the specter actors outperforms the parade of animate things. With the revolutionary props Döblin hurls his audience into a grotesque spectacle in this play. While it contains revolutionary elements, this play treats the subject of an uprising by the oppressed against those in charge in a rather playful manner. Although the play concludes with a disillusioned poet and vanishing specter actors, not much harm has been done. Döblin's poet has to face the realization that although he may hold the power to create words on the page, he does not have the power to determine their actions. Even the obnoxious hobgoblin, who aided the poet in reaching this conclusion, calmly climbs back into his picture.

In his second play he reverses the concept of prop animation and confronts us with characters who are used like objects. Here, the main prop, the Demeter statue, remains silent, but, functioning as the important provider of Mizzi's suicide weapon, facilitates the elimination of the play's protagonist. Mizzi's oppression and reduction to a pleasure tool for men causes difficulties for her acting, and thus, demonstrates simultaneously the demands to which actors expose themselves. Looking at *Comteß Mizzi* through various lenses reveals

several of Döblin's concerns. First, that of the objectification of people, particularly that of women. Second, the potentially necessary lack of a focused locus of artistic control, and finally, the consequences of treating people as providers of services which transform the individual into a commodity. In this play Mizzi's greatest act of assertion coincides with her death. *Comteß Mizzi*, then, ends on a different note since the main character, although recognizing her predicament, could find no other solution than to take her own life.

In his final play, *Die Ehe*, Döblin explicitly denounces social injustices, and calls for an uprising against capitalism by all of those affected. He animates the working class to revolt against the bourgeoisie to end this oppressive social situation, and demonstrates this Marxist observation in this play: "... das Aufhören des Zustandes, in dem die Bedürfnisse der einen auf Kosten der anderen befriedigt werden, die gänzliche Vernichtung der Klassen und ihrer Gegensätze ..." (Marx and Engels 105). Just like Marx and Engels' discussion of the destruction of the class system, which rests on the exploitation of some for the benefit of others, Döblin repeatedly and explicitly calls for action throughout his play. At the same time, however, Döblin also depicts the bourgeois plight of answering to money. While Döblin reveals the powerlessness of the bourgeoisie who serve money and treat it as their golden calf, he argues that they will not be of help in a potential revolution since they have lost their agency, and handed

over control to money. That is, their mere reason for existing may be to accumulate money, and while that is also a form of enslavement, they don't intend to free themselves since their mission is to accumulate money.

My discussion of people and things in the first chapter unfolds naturally into a discussion of authorial control. If objects that we believe to be inanimate and passive assume power, and people lose their agency and become commodities, then where is the locus of control? Who holds power and over what? Is it desirable to control artistic creations? Drawing on examples from these three plays I conclude that each exhibits Döblin's viewpoints of the importance of unencumbered artistic creation, free from regulations and restrictions. Not even the artist may hold all the power over his creation, but as long as he is free to express that which comes to him there will be great art. This part of my argument culminates in scrutinizing whether or not capitalism hampers artistic production. Looking at these questions through a Marxist lens reveals the viewpoint represented in Döblin's plays as one of capitalism hindering artistic production, and reducing the artist himself to a purchasable commodity.

While these plays are spread over twenty-five years, and while they may not appear to have a common theme at first glance, each of Döblin's plays does, in fact, contain a critique of the dehumanizing elements of the capitalist system.

Each play treats the oppression of the many by the few in power, and a system that disadvantages the workers, while benefiting the rich. Döblin, however, puts another spin on it by demonstrating that the system takes such deep roots; that not even those who believe themselves to be in power are truly in power, but rather are at the system's mercy. The props and words in *Lydia und Mäxchen* rebel against their classification as things of little or no consequence and as stand-ins for the oppressed while Mizzi in *Comteß Mizzi* is a prisoner of the system, and a servant to men. The count, as Mizzi's oppressor, blames his deeds on his compulsion, and, because of that functions similarly to Unternehmer who, too, has fallen victim to his furtherance of his own ends. All three artists, Mizzi, Xaver, and Peter, are (ab)used for their labor, and, in the process, turn into purchasable products. While Döblin intensifies his capitalist critique throughout the course of his dramas, his debut play already includes a firm critique of the exploitation of art for the benefit of the bourgeois. Culminating in *Die Ehe*, Döblin portrays characters who suffer at the hands of those in control. Unable to find jobs or housing in a system that causes disease, decay, and mental mayhem, even Lucie as bourgeois representative suffers, and fails to find happiness in the capitalist system which members of her class rule.

Exploring these plays elucidates Döblin's thoughts and provides a more comprehensive understanding of his oeuvre. As in his more well-known texts,

Döblin raises significant questions in his plays, too. For instance, each of these plays addresses issues of social disparity, and presents them in various ways, both humorously and tragically. Speaking from the stage Döblin applies different approaches, initially presenting a grotesque, expressionist drama. Next, he packages his criticism inside an exotic play that contains a lot of entertaining and amusing elements, but which ends in the protagonist's suicide. His final play loses some of the initial levity, and attacks prevalent power structures more directly. Here, Döblin confines his humorous outbursts to the prelude, interlude, and the third scene. Additionally, Döblin incorporated dramatic musings into all three of these plays that pose important artistic questions about control and power. Investigating Döblin's plays not only contributes to a more complete picture of the author and his texts, but also reveals their significance as independent texts full of complexities and controversial subject matter. I conclude and concur with Günter Grass: "Wer sich selbst genügt, sei vor Döblin gewarnt" (Meyer 521).²⁵⁸ But, should you find that you are not adequate I invite you to engage in the complex world Alfred Döblin's.

²⁵⁸ Trans.: "If you consider yourself adequate, be warned of Döblin" (Meyer 521).

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