THE THEME OF ALONENESS IN THE WORK OF
HANS ERICH NOSSACK
by
DAVID ANDREW ROPER
B.A., University of Sussex, 1969
M.A., McMaster University, 1970

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Department of

The University of British Columbia
2075 Wesbrook Place
Vancouver, Canada
V6T 1W5

Date 23 September 1976
Abstract

Wide divergence in the opinions expressed about Nossack’s work can be explained by the lack of comprehensive studies establishing the basis for a more objective and comprehensive understanding. This study, "werkimmanent" in its approach, examines the theme of aloneness as a key to Nossack’s work. The presence of aloneness in his work has been recognized, but usually misinterpreted as a negative, undesirable aspect of modern life. Though recognizing the dangers of aloneness and suffering occasionally a negative feeling of isolation, Nossack attaches to aloneness a positive value as an intrinsic part of the authentic human condition. Three types of aloneness are distinguished: personal aloneness, arising from the individual's isolation from personal relationships, socio-cultural aloneness, arising from a lack of relatedness to society and culture, and spiritual aloneness, arising from the individual's feeling of being lost in an incomprehensible and bewildering universe. Because of its positive value there is ultimately no attempted escape from the experience through any of the normal involvements and activities of life. Though there are certain eliminable determinants of aloneness in the repressive and collective twentieth century society, aloneness is an inherent part of the human condition. There is an ineffable, metaphysical realm of existence, beyond personal relationships, beyond society and culture, outside time and
place; this the individual can only experience and enter alone. As a private experience which cannot be shared, it is experienced by the individual in absolute solitariness. The individual's awareness and experience of this other, supremely valuable reality are the ultimate guarantors of his abiding personal, socio-cultural, and spiritual aloneness. But this imposed aloneness is intensified through the addition of a self-chosen dimension when, as a matter of policy in his attempt to cross over into the other reality, the individual frees himself from all the usual activities and involvements of life. No attempt is made to change society through reform or revolution, not simply because rebellion is futile, given the all-pervasive rule of the social Apparat, but because of the individual's over-riding metaphysical aspirations. Instead the individual camouflages himself by outward conformism, while leading a life of spiritual resistance and attempting to cross over into the other reality. The traditional love relationship cannot overcome the individual's aloneness because it is impossible, in love or any other personal relationship, to achieve spiritual closeness to another. Nossack formulates a new concept of love, which consists of respecting the fundamental otherness of the other person and of recognizing the other reality as the highest value. Precluding any attempt at personal involvement, it substitutes an indefinable metaphysical intimacy or closeness. Similarly, Nossack's "partisans" (camouflaged outsiders) are linked only by the common reality of aloneness, by a union in aloneness. Man's
spiritual aloneness persists because existence cannot be rationalized into a familiar world in which man can feel safe and at home. Transient and unreliable socio-cultural interpretations of reality and equally transient and unreliable personal myths about reality are both shattered when real reality breaks through. The writer's aloneness is central to Nossack's theory of writing. Through his writing the writer maintains himself against society and is engaged in a quest to cross over into the other reality. Writing is monologic, a dialogue with the self, though the hope persists that it will reach another, unknown outsider and establish a union in aloneness. Writing is found to be inadequate not only for communication about the other reality, but also for the writer's own purposes in his quest, so that writing is always tending to pass over into silence, though neither author nor protagonists are for long equal to dispensing with the inborn need for dialogue, if only with the self.
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Introduction

Since the end of the Second World War few writers have achieved a more extensive and creditable record of publication than Hans Erich Nossack. His works have been translated into English, French, Italian, Spanish, Swedish, Serbo-Croat, Czech, Hungarian, Polish, Rumanian, Afrikaans, and Japanese, and possibly other languages too. Yet to judge from his reception in German and English he is probably virtually unread in all of them. In more narrowly academic and intellectual circles his reception, though by no means broadly based, has been somewhat better and there must exist well over one hundred and fifty items of secondary literature relating to him, comprising reviews, articles, dissertations, and books, and dealing with philosophical as well as stylistic and aesthetic considerations. But there is a wide and fundamental divergence in the opinions and judgments expressed about Nossack, except perhaps for a general agreement that he is an important writer, and Nossack himself is cynically aware of this:


Certainly much of the literature says more about its author than about Nossack, and some has been of a nauseatingly moralizing and politically biased kind; but undeniably Nossack is an extremely difficult and paradoxical writer. Much of the disagreement can be explained in terms of a lack of longer, more comprehensive studies of Nossack's work and themes which aim at
finding keys to a more objective and comprehensive understanding of the author and his work. Realizing this, Christof Schmid made a start with his book *Monologische Kunst: Untersuchungen zum Werk von Hans Erich Nossack* which appeared in 1968, two years before Friedhelm F. Rickert's doctoral dissertation, "Hans Erich Nossack als Betrachter und Kritiker seiner Zeit," which takes as its focal point Nossack's concept of man as a spiritual being. Both works, avoiding subjective value judgments and essentially "werkimmanent" in their approach, are very valuable contributions. But what in my opinion is perhaps the most useful key to Nossack's work—the theme of aloneness in it—has so far gone unexamined.

The presence of dominant themes of loneliness and aloneness in Nossack's work has of course been recognized by various scholars, though only rarely have they been seen in the correct light. The usual pattern (and I think this could be cited as one of the few weaknesses of Rickert's otherwise admirable study) is to see loneliness and aloneness as negative phenomena, undesirable aspects of the individual's life in the twentieth century, which should be remedied as soon as possible. I believe this usual interpretation should be rejected. To this end, this study seeks to demonstrate the prevalence and significance of aloneness as a motivating force and theme in both Nossack's novels and short stories and in his essays, and thus to reveal it as a central experience in both Nossack's life and works. Beyond this, and although the dangers of the experience are recognized, it attempts to show that a positive value is attached by Nossack to aloneness, not because the experience is relished in a masochistic way, but because aloneness is an unavoidable part of the authentic human
condition and because any attempt to escape aloneness would entail a flight into inauthenticity. The title of this dissertation refers therefore to aloneness rather than loneliness precisely because a positive value is attached to the isolation of the individual from personal relationships, to his socio-cultural solitude arising from a lack of any feeling of relatedness to the patterns and values of society and culture, and to his feeling of lostness in an incomprehensible universe. Because the value attached to aloneness is positive, it will be seen to follow that, at least in the long run, no means are sought to escape from the experience through, for example, friendship, physical contact, love, marriage, family, social or political commitment, homeland, religion, nature, or reminiscence.

Chapter One attempts to distinguish between the concepts loneliness and aloneness, to arrive at a reasonably comprehensive definition of aloneness, and to place it in a broad historical perspective against the background of the nineteenth century so that in subsequent chapters the theme of aloneness in Nossack's work can be coordinated with the definition and framework of the concept established in this chapter.

Chapter Two traces in Nossack's essays his personal experience of aloneness and alienation and his reaction to them, both in terms of his personal aloneness in family and in personal relationships and in terms of his more general socio-cultural aloneness and alienation right up to the end of the Second World War. The destruction of the socio-cultural order in the war is discussed from the point of view of the heightened aloneness which resulted for Nossack, and this is pursued in
the discussion of *Nekyia* and *Interview mit dem Tode* in Chapter Three.

Chapter Four concentrates on the theoretical ideas of Nossack's view of the individual's life in a repressive, collective society and his existence in a bewildering reality as they are revealed in the essays, with appropriate illustration from fictional works.

The focus of Chapter Five shifts from socio-cultural aloneness to the theme of personal aloneness as illustrated by Nossack's presentation of the love relationship in *Spätestens im November* and other works. Nossack sees the traditional love relationship as incapable of overcoming the individual's aloneness because the individual is unable, either in a love relationship or any other personal relationship, to achieve spiritual closeness to any other person.

Chapters Six and Seven deal with several of Nossack's novels, *Spirale*, *Der jüngere Bruder*, *Nach dem Letzten Aufstand*, *Der Fall d'Arthez*, and *Die gestohlene Melodie*; they attempt an analysis and discussion of the general picture of human aloneness painted in these works and seek to show how Nossack presents aloneness as an unavoidable part of the authentic human condition.

Finally Chapter Eight is concerned with the aloneness of the writer in society and culture and Nossack's view of the element of aloneness inseparable from the creation of the human document which he believes authentic literature to be. It is argued in conclusion that language is found to be inadequate not just for communication, but for the writer's own purposes, so that his writing is always tending to pass over into silence.
Footnotes


CHAPTER 1

Definition and Historical Background

To be alone is to be solitary, to be by oneself, apart from or without any other person or thing. The word loneliness designates an emotion which is the usual response to the state of being alone. Both words, but especially loneliness, seem to have a negative aura and connote some kind of vacuum or lack which nevertheless can be filled to some extent, most obviously by contact with other human beings, though animals and inanimate objects such as books, letters, mementoes, and other personal possessions can fulfill the same function. The negative connotation of the terms is obviously the result of a common desire by man to overcome both the state of being alone and the accompanying feeling of loneliness, a desire so general that little comment or explanation seems to be called for.

The anthropologist sees man not exactly as a herd animal, but certainly as a gregarious, tribal animal possessed of a sociable nature and instincts. In comparison to other animals the young of the human species are physically dependent on their parents for a long time. And with regard to adults sexual pairing for reproduction and companionship seems in most cultures to be of a generally permanent nature; indeed, the family or tribal unit is an unavoidable consequence of man's biological heritage, of a prolonged process of child rearing. Given this group living aspect of human existence, it is a matter of common experience that for many people gregariousness and social intercourse are in themselves a form of total human fulfilment.
Yet in addition to these biologically determined needs another aspect of human existence seems to be equally compelling. This is man's need to be related to the external world in a way which transcends purely personal relationships, the need to be related to a broad socio-cultural pattern of ideas, values, and beliefs which produce in the individual a sense of belonging in a culture, in society, in the world, or in the universe. One may be apart from one's fellow men and therefore quite alone in a purely physical sense and still have this feeling of being at home in the world because one is a part of a community of belief which unites one with one's fellows and gives one an assurance of belonging in the world, because one's individual existence is confirmed and justified by a broad socio-cultural pattern of shared ideas, values, and beliefs.

There remains a third possibility. It is not only through being a part of society or culture that a man can have a sense of belonging, of relatedness to the world. A man might reject many or all aspects of his culture and society and yet still have a general attitude of affirmation toward both himself and his relation to the external world. He may hold views and beliefs that are not shared by his fellows and yet still feel that he has a place in some divine or naturally ordained scheme of things, still have an harmonious and reassuring feeling of being at home in the world because his existence in it is felt to be a natural and positive rather than a problematic or frightening phenomenon.

Three possible varieties of aloneness can therefore be distinguished. Man has a need for the companionship of his fellows,
to be related to them, to have contact with them both physically and emotionally; the absence of this can produce what may be called a state of personal aloneness. He also has a need to be related to the world in a way which transcends purely personal relationships and which gives him a sense of socio-cultural identity and belonging; the absence of such a relationship can produce what may be termed a state of socio-cultural aloneness. The third readily distinguishable variety of aloneness is a kind of ultimate spiritual aloneness, the sense of the individual man being lost in an alien world, which arises when the resources which the individual finds within himself and the nature of the world as he perceives it are not sufficient to establish an harmonious relationship between the two. The three terms--personal, socio-cultural, and spiritual--are somewhat arbitrary and make no pretense to complete exactitude; it is obvious, for example, that all personal relationships encompass a spiritual dimension and that the existence of a socio-cultural pattern of ideas and values implies the necessary existence of human intercourse. Nevertheless, the terms do denote three generally distinguishable types of aloneness and loneliness.

Though it would appear to be the natural desire of man to escape human aloneness and loneliness in all its forms, this would seem to be easier said than done. Aloneness lies dormant in the very means sought to overcome it: thus a human relationship is a relationship between two separate entities; and the concept of human society clearly implies an aggregate of individual members. A certain state of aloneness is inseparable from the human condition and can awareness of this can be awakened at any time.
It is a common human experience that one may be among people and yet be assailed by a feeling of complete isolation. This loneliness has its source in the existential isolation and solitude of man, in the very definition of what it is to be a human being. Despite all aspects of social intercourse every man in the deepest sanctuary of his spiritual and personal being is alone. Men are in varying degrees conscious of their existential solitude, of their existence as individual entities separate and different from other people and the entire external world, and from this arises the need to be related to other people and the external world. This need is felt all the more intensely insofar as man is aware, through his knowledge of transitoriness, of aging, sickness, and death, of how insignificantly small he is in relation to all others, to society, to the world, to the universe, to the infinite.

Since a seemingly negative aura surrounds the words aloneness and loneliness, it can be concluded that the conquest of loneliness, through relatedness to others, to society, to cultural beliefs and values, is generally regarded as a positive achievement, because it is an escape from that which man most fears: isolation. But do not social intercourse and society, insofar as they owe their origin to the human fear of loneliness, have a certain negative aspect? Are they not so much a direct need as an escape from aloneness? This is Schopenhauer's view:

Was nun andererseits die Menschen gesellig macht, ist ihre Unfähigkeit, die Einsamkeit und in dieser sich selbst zu ertragen. Innere Leere und Überdruss sind es, von denen sie sowohl in die Gesellschaft wie in die Fremde und auf Reisen getrieben werden. . . . Wie die Liebe zum Leben im Grunde nur Furcht vor dem Tode ist, so ist auch der Geselligkeitstrieb der
Menschen im Grunde kein direkter, beruht nämlich nicht auf Liebe zur Gesellschaft, sondern auf Furcht vor der Einsamkeit, indem es nicht sowohl die holdselige Gegenwart der andern ist, die gesucht, als vielmehr die Öde und Beklommenheit des Alleinseins, nebst der Monotonie des eigenen Bewusstseins, die geflohen wird; welcher zu entgehn man daher auch mit schlechter Gesellschaft vorliebt nimmt, imgleichen das Lüstige und den Zwang, den eine jede notwendig mit sich bringt, sich gefallen lässt. --Hat hingegen der Widerwille gegen dieses alles gesiegt und ist infolge davon die Gewohnheit der Einsamkeit und die Abhärtung gegen ihren unmittelbaren Eindruck eingetreten . . . dann kann man mit grösster Behaglichkeit immerfort allein sein, ohne sich nach Gesellschaft zu sehnen; eben weil das Bedürfnis derselben kein direktes ist und man andererseits sich jetzt an die wohltätigen Eigenschaften der Einsamkeit gewöhnt hat. 1

For Schopenhauer aloneness possesses the beneficial qualities of inner peace of mind and happiness: "Ein Hauptstudium der Jugend sollte sein, die Einsamkeit ertragen zu lernen; weil sie eine Quelle des Glückses, der Gemütsruhe ist."2

Schopenhauer represents that human type for whom social intercourse is largely, if not entirely, inadequate and for whom social intercourse itself can produce feelings of aloneness and loneliness:

So kommt es denn, dass, obwohl in dieser Welt gar vieles recht schlecht ist, doch das Schlechteste darin die Gesellschaft bleibt: so dass selbst Voltaire, der gesellige Franzose, hat sagen müssen: 'La terre est couverte de gens qui ne méritent pas qu'on leur parle.' 3

In Schopenhauer we find not a negative but an essentially positive evaluation of aloneness, and in our discussion of Nossack it is precisely with such a positive evaluation of aloneness that we will be concerned. The essential aloneness of Nossack and his characters is not to be seen negatively because, as with Schopenhauer, the drive toward aloneness is greater than
the rebellion against it.

We have seen thus far the gregarious group, tribal, or family-living aspect of human existence and the need of men for companionship and relatedness arising at least in part from a fear of loneliness. But we have also seen how a certain susceptibility to loneliness is built into man because aloneness is an inseparable part of the human condition, which, however, it is also possible to affirm and embrace. Thus the problem of aloneness and loneliness, whether these are viewed negatively or positively, is an encompassing aspect of human existence and as such intrudes into a number of intellectual disciplines: not only into literature, but also into psychology, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, and theology. Doubtless the problem has a varied and complex history in all of these fields. It is, however, neither necessary nor possible within the scope of this study to attempt to examine the main historical shifts of emphasis, to discuss, for example, the nature and consequence of universal religious belief and allegiance to the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages, the shattering in the Reformation of a unified and harmonious religious faith, and the progressive emergence of individualism and the liberation of the individual value system, which was fostered further by the Enlightenment. Yet to understand fully Nossack's treatment of the theme some historical perspective will be helpful, for, although he himself will be seen to be an outsider, this is not to deny that he has been deeply affected by the events and forces--social, political, intellectual, cultural--of his age; and in his work can be seen reflected certain facets of man's spiritual situation and the human condition in the
twentieth century and their antecedents in the nineteenth. Accordingly there follows a brief survey of the most obvious aspects of the socio-cultural situation of man from the beginning of the nineteenth century onward; necessarily simplified and generalised, it seeks to identify some of Nossack's mentors and the influences on him.

With the beginning of the nineteenth century certain conflicting trends essential to an understanding of Nossack become apparent. On the one hand, with the erosion of religion and the freeing of human reason in the Enlightenment, there are increasing individualism and subjectivism which make for increasing human aloneness. On the other hand, however, these are opposed by the ever increasing forces of collectivism arising largely from the consequences of the Industrial Revolution in the form of modern industry, technology, science, industrial mass society, modern political parties, and mass movements. While all these forces may well have represented a solution to the problem of loneliness for many of the gregarious and sociable, there were other human types (for example the Schopenhauer type) for whom social intercourse and gregariousness, still more the mass phenomena of modern society, were entirely inadequate. In face of the emergent collective forces of society individuals of this type became increasingly aware of the value of man's individual existence, and as the conflict between mass society and the individual became increasingly apparent it was only natural that they should withdraw more and more into themselves.

The forces of collectivism were also to be discerned in philosophy at the beginning of the nineteenth century in the
thought of Hegel, the last of the great classical philosophers to construct an intellectual system in which all aspects of individual and social life and of spiritual and material reality are taken up, made rational and harmonious, and justified, and in which one truth is provided for the world. Hegel's significance for the theme of aloneness is that he reintroduces harmony and relatedness into the life of the individual in society and the world and between spiritual and material reality. In his idealist system the boundaries of the spiritual and external worlds and the separation between the individual and his society are overcome because they have the same origin; this origin is spiritual because, as an idealist, Hegel maintains there can be no reality independent of mind; at the origin of all reality, whether mind or matter, there is thought, the "idea," a spiritual reality. The individual consciousness, society, and the world are all part of the dialectical, logical, necessary, and predetermined unfolding of the idea in the "Weltprozess." The separation between the individual and society is overcome and harmony and relatedness reestablished between them in Hegel's system, because the individual finds in the life, activities, institutions, and destiny of his society "... a concrete universal life akin to his own and appealing to it with which to incorporate himself. ... For Hegel... the separation of man and the world... can be healed because the ideal and the actual are reconciled in the life of a people which is a concrete universal to which the life of the individual can be assimilated and in which it is consummated..." The history of society and the world is the unfolding of the idea, of which the individual is a part, so that he
becomes identified and reconciled with his society and the world and consummated through them.

The consequent harmony and relatedness is, however, dependent on the individual's realization that society, the totality of a number of constituent parts, is greater than its parts. Hegel's belief that the State is supreme in human affairs and that the individual's supreme duty is to be a member of it led him to place great value on organization, close links between citizen and society, group loyalties, and collectivist principles, because only in this way could the individual align his spirit with the kindred but greater spirit of society and participate in the "Weltprozess." The liberty of the individual and individuality were not to interfere with the world process. History, as it had happened and was still happening, could not have happened differently and in Hegel's thought it became a vast force almost independent of human beings. The individualism and subjectivity of earlier German idealist philosophers is subordinated to a collective conception of human life and history. Thus, although Hegel overcomes philosophically the isolation of individual existence, he can do this only by assuming a collective view of things which suppresses individuality. In the closing pages of his novel Die gestohlene Melodie Nossack indicates that Hegel or Marx are the most appropriate sources for a slogan for "ein heutiges Kollektiv" and describes society, because of its collective aspects, as "ein menschenunwürdiges Ameisendasein." Clearly there is an ant-like aspect to Hegel's view of society with its emphasis on order and the subordination of the individual to a greater collective reality.
Hegel's collectivist system was attacked in the nineteenth century by Soren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche, both of whom affirmed individual existence against collectivist and ultimately totalitarian intellectual systems. For both, the separation between man and society, man and the world, is a definitive part of the human condition, and to abolish this separation through an absolute reconciliation of the two is to deny the very basis of personal existence. Insofar as both take the existence of the individual as their starting point they are existentialists and as such they cannot accept Hegel's solution for two main reasons. Firstly, history and society are the quantitative factual outcome of all the individual decisions of other people in the past and can have no a priori validity or authority for any particular existing individual unless that individual chooses to give them such. And secondly, human knowledge of the "Weltprozess" consists only of partial knowledge of the past and present; the future remains completely open, unknown, and unknowable.6

For Kierkegaard the absurdity of Hegel's position was apparent: only from a point outside of existence would it be possible to survey the totality of existence; from a point within the world process the individual need not deny the world process, but it is impossible for him to survey it. Accordingly, with Kierkegaard philosophy is no longer a system. The very titles of his works, Either - Or, Philosophical Fragments, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, Fear and Trembling, in themselves imply a negation of Hegel's rationalist intellectual system. Kierkegaard opposed objective system building as being
essentially a self-deceiving escape from the real problems of individual existence. The only true concern of philosophy was the thinker's personal existence. In contrast to Hegel, Kierkegaard spiritualized and internalized the individual; the individual can only be known from within, not from without; each individual is isolated and compelled to exist for himself; even a Christian civilization is in Kierkegaard's view, at least ideally, nothing more than a number of individual souls living by anguished personal decision in the Christian faith.

Kierkegaard was acutely aware of the contempt of his age for the individual man. Like Schopenhauer he saw that it was the fear of aloneness which drives man together in society:

Deep within every human being there still lives the anxiety over the possibility of being alone in the world, forgotten by God, overlooked among the millions and millions in this enormous household. One keeps this anxiety at a distance by looking at the many round about who are related to him as kin and friends, but the anxiety is still there, nevertheless, and one hardly dares think of how he would feel if all this were taken away. 7

But Kierkegaard himself was prepared to assume the burden of fear and aloneness, and rebuff Hegel at the same time:

The more the collective idea comes to dominate even the ordinary consciousness, the more forbidding seems the transition to becoming a particular existing human being instead of losing oneself in the all, and saying "we, our age, the nineteenth century". That it is a little thing merely to be a particular existing human being is not to be denied; but for this very reason it requires considerable resignation not to make light of it. For what does a mere individual count for? Our age knows only too well how little it is, but here also lies the specific immorality of the age. . . . a dissolute pantheistic contempt for the individual man. In the midst of all our exultation over the achievements of the age and the nineteenth century, there sounds a note of poorly conceived
contempt for the individual man; in the midst of the self-importance of the contemporary generation there is revealed a sense of despair over being human. Everything has to attach itself so as to be a part of some movement; men are determined to lose themselves in the totality of things, in world history, fascinated and deceived by a magic witchery; no one wants to be an individual human being. Hence perhaps the many attempts to continue to cling to Hegel, even by men who have reached an insight into the questionable character of his philosophy. It is a fear that if they were to become particular existing human beings they would vanish tracelessly, so that not even the daily press would be able to discover them, still less critical journals, to say nothing at all of speculative philosophers immersed in world-history. As particular human beings they fear that they will be doomed to a more isolated and forgotten existence than that of a man in the country; for if a man lets go of Hegel he will not even be in a position to have a letter addressed to him.

Though Kierkegaard is nowhere mentioned by Nossack as a direct influence, Kierkegaard's defence of the individual and his desire to liberate the individual from the collective tendencies of the nineteenth century are remarkably similar to Nossack's concern in the twentieth. In the same sense Nietzsche, too, is a forerunner of Nossack; he, too, rebelled against the mass tendencies of the time, against systems, categorizations, and dogmas, which he opposed to vitalism, life, and the reality of human experience and needs. Like Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard, he, too, was a solitary figure in his opposition to the materialistic culture and society of his day. He saw modern democracy as an insidiously levelling tendency and he indulged, like Kierkegaard, in humorous sniping at Hegel and the popularization of his philosophy of collectivization in the Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen. Hegel's justification of the necessity and universality of phenomena and the whole course of history until its
pinnacle in the Prussian state is seen as cynicism, arising from necessity, and compounded by the side-effects of Darwinism and contemporary biological thought which see human history not only as a continuation of that of plants and animals, but also as a kind of progression towards a necessary and ultimate goal, "die vollendete Natur." He condemns the Hegelian slogan of "die volle Hingabe der Persönlichkeit an den Weltprozess" as a phrase of this same cynicism, conformist, unthinking, and collective, which reduces man to the insignificance of an "Erdfloh." Against it he upholds the single individual: "Wenn man nur nicht ewig die Hyperbel aller Hyperbeln, das Wort: Welt, Welt, Welt hören müsste, da doch jeder, ehrlicherweise, nur von Mensch, Mensch, Mensch reden sollte!"

Apparent also in the *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen*, in addition to the rejection of the collective tendencies of the time, is Nietzsche's complete lack of socio-cultural relatedness to the Second Empire and his contempt for its smugness after the victory in the Franco-Prussian War. The victory is seen as a military, not as a cultural victory; German culture is overrun with "Bildungspilister," pompous and conceited in their pretensions to artistic sensibility and culture. Creative eunuchs themselves, these philistines rest on the cultural laurels of the past, in particular of German Classicism, overlooking completely the essential searching quality of the latter:

A sense of cultural decay, the feeling that culture and society are a kind of facade lacking any innate vitality of their own, even that society's ethical standards are questionable or fallacious--things that were to trouble Nossack in the early years of the twentieth century--these are clearly reflected in Nietzsche's early work over two generations before. The perpetual search of the German Classicists has to be continued, new values have to be sought and created. This led Nietzsche into his immense critique of morals and his call for the transvaluation of all values. The levelling tendencies of the time, the evolution of man to the similar, the ordinary, the average, the gregarious, the ignoble and communal ("ins Gemeine") had to be reversed by man's reassuming his individual responsibility and freedom. Nietzsche intentionally exploits the ambivalence of the German word "das Gemeine," referring to the communal and the social but also to the common, low, and ignoble. With the tremendous industrial and socio-economic upsurge of the latter part of the nineteenth century both seemed eminently possible. "Bürgerlicher Optimismus" saw the social ideal of a near-utopian society without poverty or privation as almost within its grasp. A permanently blissful society is somewhat dubious even as an ideal, but underlying Nietzsche's work is the real fear that it is possible, "that modern ideas and technical success . . . threatened to reduce mankind to a common level of green meadow gregariousness, contentment, ease, security, and bovine mediocrity." 

The same threat was perceived in Russia by Nossack's early mentor Dostoyevsky who doubted if such a utopia really corresponded to human needs and feelings; he was aware also of the
dangerous depersonalizing tendencies of the nineteenth century industrial society of masses and machines and total planning of all spheres of life by all-rationalizing ideologies and dogmas. Nossack refers to the portrait which Dostoyevsky gives in *The Possessed* of a functionary, of an early "apparatchik":

... in den Besessenen gibt uns Dostojewski die prophetische Karikatur eines Funktionärs. Dazu war eine genaue Kenntnis der vormarxistischen Tendenzen nötig, aber es geht Dostojewski im Grunde nicht um Politik ... sondern um Mitleid mit dem Menschen, der aus Mangel an Individualität einer Ideologie oder einem Dogma hörig wird und dadurch zum tragikomischen, abstrakten Wesen verzerrt wird, das man nicht einmal mehr schuldig nennen kann. Ein sehr aktuelles Problem ... 13

In *Letters from the Underworld* (1864) Dostoyevsky protests against the nineteenth century's naive and optimistic visions of the future and the rational ideologies on which they were based. He was nauseated by the materialist and positivist representation of the universe as a friction-free clockwork mechanism and irritated by the widespread and unquestioning acceptance of the ideas of utopian socialist thinkers such as Chernyshevsky, which he considered smug and facile. In *Letters from the Underworld* he attacks the Crystal Palace, the Victorian symbol of the man-made socialist or humanitarian utopia, on grounds similar to those used by Nossack in his critique of the modern social state, namely that man is a fickle creature who cannot be rationalized and who therefore could never live in any edifice based exclusively on reason. His anti-hero, the antithesis of the functionary in *The Possessed*, and a man after Nossack's own heart, proclaims that:

... always and everywhere ... man lives to act as he
likes, and not necessarily as reason and self-interest would have him do. Yes, he will even act straight against his own interests. . . . His own will, free and unfettered; his own untutored whims; his own fancies, sometimes amounting almost to a madness--here we have that . . . which enters into no classification, which forever consigns systems and theories to the devil. 14

Dostoyevsky then, like Nossack, realizes the inherent intractability of human existence that constantly defeats attempts to create the perfect social system and champions individual values against collective organization. In this he is at one with Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche, but in the age of the Industrial Revolution they were fighting very much against the stream of developments in industry, economics, technology, science, political thought, and social organization.

Before the Industrial Revolution most people were born, lived, worked, and died in small communities to which they had strong ties. Everything was on a small scale and there were no large impersonal institutions such as factories and tenements. Political and legal power lay, generally speaking, in the hands of visible local people; life was very much governed by communal traditions which had developed without conscious design over the centuries in response to human needs, so that people were not constricted by the super-organization of the modern industrial state.

With the Industrial Revolution the pattern changed drastically. There was an uprooting of village communities as men and their families sought jobs in factories in the cities. A widespread sense of alienation resulted as man was uprooted from his traditional physical and social environment and as the competitive
capitalist market system, backed by science and technology, gradually replaced traditional values with more artificial and less human ones. The capitalist system redefined man's labour, environment, and progressively even his culture as commodities which can be bought and sold for money. A second force, a combination of science and technology, asserted that all economic activity be carried on in the manner which is technically and scientifically most efficient. Thus there arose such typically modern phenomena as division of labour, mechanization, and mass production. Man himself was not a unique individual but a mere cog in the machine of production and consumption, or a social quotient, to use Nossack's phrase; monetary, technical, and organizational considerations ruled man, not his inner needs.

Thus the Industrial Revolution represented the victory of the impersonal forces of organization, planning, efficiency, economics, technology, science, and the collectivism of social and political organization. This very collectivism obviously possessed an appeal for those with pronounced social needs, who were able to participate in a social and political life of togetherness as they aligned themselves with new social classes and political parties. However, for artists and intellectuals with a pronounced sense of individuality the new collective tendencies and machine-rationality of the age were bound to be quite alien and could offer no satisfaction for their real individual needs.

Such individuals were repulsed by another, related idea that underlay much of the scientific and socio-economic thought of the age: the idea that man, far from controlling and determining, was
controlled and determined in three basic areas of his existence, in biology, in history and economics, and in the human mind; and that furthermore man had to be studied in collective terms. The theories of Darwin, Marx, and Freud are all based on deterministic and collective principles and as such had revolutionary implications for the concept of man held up to that time.

Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) replaced the concept of the fixity of species and the Genesis account of creation with the theory of evolution by natural selection to explain by causal determination the differences between species and the adaptation of each to its environment. Both the Christian religion and the humanistic view of man as an individually existing spiritual being suffered. The whole time scale of human history and man's entire position in the world and the universe were changed; man was no longer the lowest of the angels but the highest of the monkeys. Furthermore his specifically moral experience, previously thought to differentiate man from the animals, could be explained through evolution precisely in terms of the social instincts and herd mentality of animals, that is, in terms of collective realities. Darwin considered that this social instinct was the ground out of which man's moral sense arose, and the social instinct, according to Darwin's theory, arose primarily out of the need for self-protection and preservation of the species in face of a hostile enemy.

The more elevated humanistic view of man suffered from Darwinism, yet Nossack's comments on Darwinism reveal that it had precisely for this reason a great appeal to nineteenth century
bourgeois optimism and collective modern capitalism. Both received support from the Darwinian belief that life was a constant struggle in which the weak went under and the strong thrived and its confirmation of the positivist and materialist belief that things were getting better all the time. Nossack sees the first half of the nineteenth century as the "Zeit des beginnenden bürgerlichen Optimismus":

\[ \text{Das Kapital von Marx und . . . später Die Welträtsel von Haeckel gezeugt. Was wir technisch, sozial und wirtschaftlich erreicht haben, ist diesem bürgerlichen Nützlichkeitsdenken zu verdanken, dessen naive Kraft darin lag, dass ihm der Zweifel an sich selbst versagt war.} \]

Significantly, Nossack links Ernst Haeckel, Darwin's popularizer in Germany, with Marx. In Darwin Marx found confirmation of his emphasis on class conflict and the struggle between contradictory forces, the eventual outcome of which was predetermined. Marx believed that these contradictory forces operated essentially in the sphere of economic production. He retained Hegel's dialectical framework and like Hegel attributed primacy to collectivist rather than individual morality, morality being simply the morality of the ruling class and serving the interests of that class. Unlike Hegel he was a materialist, but he shared Hegel's collectivist outlook: he did not believe that ideas or actions of individuals could in the long run influence the course of world history, which was to be understood in terms of the operation of vast economic forces beyond individual control.

In his study of the human mind Freud, like the two earlier thinkers, was a determinist and through his interpretation of man's
mental life in terms of fixed, universal patterns he was, like them, a collectivist. Like them, he contributed to the despiritualization of man through his materialist, determinist, and collectivist interpretation of man's mental life. In particular he discovered that a great part of man's mental life takes place on an unconscious level and that in the unconscious there are drives, instincts, and repressed wishes beyond man's conscious, rational control, so that man's mind was often not even master in its own house.

All these new developments in the spheres of the new industrial society, biology, history and economics, and psychology were reflected in literature toward the end of the nineteenth century in the emergence of Naturalism. It was the result of the social developments accompanying the Industrial Revolution, an increased application of scientific methods, a growing interest in psychology, and an increased awareness of the extent to which biological, material, social, and economic factors determined human life—in short, a new awareness of the effects of heredity and environment.

In the works of the German Naturalists the power of the past and present (in the form of heredity and environment) over individuals is generally seen as decisive and in drama there is usually no attempt to apportion tragic guilt among the characters as in classical tragedy because in the main they do not possess the prerequisite power and freedom of will. As a result of the progressive despiritualization of man the characters of Naturalist drama lack what had always been regarded as a necessary dimension of human dignity. But society too is portrayed as having become
undignified and ugly and, whereas earlier classical dramas had illustrated the tragic transgression of immutable moral laws which sustained an essentially just society and world order, the clear thrust of Naturalist dramas is that society itself has become oppressive and inimical to the individual. A clear protest against an increasingly problematical society is to be seen in the Naturalist dramas of Gerhart Hauptmann which depict the disagreeable and even sordid nature of contemporary industrial society with its poverty, starvation, alcoholism, prostitution, slums, exploitation, and oppression. This increasingly problematical society in Hauptmann's works blocks man's entry into a higher, purer realm in opposition to the world of materialism and determinism. Hauptmann's belief in the dignity of man led him to realize the need not just for material improvement, but for a higher life in a spiritual or metaphysical sense.

This same need informs the German Expressionist movement which swept Germany in Nossack's formative years. (He was born in 1901.) The Expressionists—in contrast to the Naturalists—emphasized the supremacy of spirit over matter, and man was no longer, as in Naturalism, the mere product of his environment, whose life was determined by forces beyond his control. Man himself was capable of transforming the world according to the inner vision of his spirit and thus with the Expressionists there is a greater concern with self-expression than with exact portrayal of reality. Though there are themes of ugly aspects of modern civilization, of the city, of the machine, of the plight of the working class, these are portrayed not for their own sake but as symptoms of a
corrupt world order from which man has to break away in a quest for a higher form of life. In Expressionism the unity between man and his socio-cultural environment is once again severed. The conflict between the individual and the community is central to the Expressionist movement, as is a feeling of impending catastrophe and apocalypse. But though the unity between man and contemporary society and culture is severed, the ties between man and his fellow men are reaffirmed, for after the apocalypse there will be a moral regeneration of the whole human race and a new world, governed by love, will arise.

Consequently the idea of the ultimate personal, socio-cultural, and spiritual aloneness of man, central not only to Nossack's work but to modern existentialist philosophy and so much twentieth century literature, does not characterize the mainstream of Expressionism. Both Existentialism and Expressionism do however display the same characteristic inward turning which can be traced back in philosophy to Immanuel Kant and the German Idealist philosophies. In Kant's philosophy there is a retreat from certainty about the objective reality of the external world. He showed the dependence of our knowledge of the reality of the external world on the conditions of human perception: the external world is known only through sense data and the interpretation of these sense data in the human mind. Implicit in Kant is the idea that the external world is the construct of the human mind, that the only reality of which we can have direct knowledge is the subjective reality of our own minds, and thus one consequence of Kantian Idealist philosophy is to reaffirm subjectivity and
individualism against universal, collective systems, which is precisely what occurred during the nineteenth century in the work of Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Dostoyevsky. It happens also in the philosophical successors of the latter, in the modern existentialist philosophy of Jaspers, Heidegger, and Sartre who turn from the public, external world to the private world of their own consciousness. There is no continuity between the two worlds: the existentialist philosopher finds that he cannot be fully identified with his role in society, his actions, his past, or even his own body and character. In the depth of his inner being he is solitude and liberty, possibilities and choice.

The inward turn of philosophy is reflected in literature, in particular in the novel in the twentieth century. Wolfgang Kayser discerns a transition from the "traditional" novel of such writers as Cervantes, Henry Fielding, and Wieland. Their work shows an awareness of the ambiguity of language and reality, of the disparity between "Sein" and "Schein," and an obvious psychological interest in that the characters deceive themselves and distort reality with their illusions. But the authors themselves are able to distinguish the true nature of reality because they have a socio-cultural and intellectual orientation and so they are able to guide their characters along the path to achieving this knowledge themselves. In the twentieth century, however, Kayser sees a crisis of the novel:

Es besteht ein Misstrauen gegen den 'bisherigen' Roman, den 'konventionellen' Roman. Er erscheint nicht mehr als echt . . . als getreuer Ausdruck des heutigen Verhältnisses zum Dasein und Sein. Ihm ist . . . eine Sicherheit eigen, die nicht als gültig anerkannt werden
This lack of certainty in the twentieth century novel has been explained by David Daiches in terms of a transitional civilization. Earlier ages had what Daiches calls a "community of belief," a general standard of significance and common frame of reference for life. Earlier we spoke of man's need to be related to such a socio-cultural pattern of shared ideas, values, and beliefs, but history reveals certain periods when the community of belief disintegrates and a multiplicity of private worlds replaces the public world. Daiches thinks the decay of uniform belief in the twentieth century is to be explained in terms of the drying up of traditional sources of value, the shattering of the preconceptions of our fathers, along with the failure of new beliefs to emerge.

The result is that the individual is thrown back upon his own inner resources; in the novel the writer confines the world to the limits of an individual mind and assesses value solely in terms of that mind. The omniscient and omnipotent narrator of the traditional novel disappears along with the socio-cultural relatedness. Leon Edel has pointed out that the characteristic feature of twentieth century fiction is an inward turning to convey the flow of mental experience in the form of internal monologue and stream of consciousness. He credits Proust, Dorothy Richardson, and James Joyce with having created the modern psychological or
stream of consciousness novel between the years 1913 and 1915. All three turned from external to internal, subjective reality, all three sought to cope with inner problems and to record the inwardness of experience, all three were essentially autobiographical. We have, therefore, implicitly a protest against the idea that there is one valid interpretation of life represented by omniscient authorial intrusions and an assertion of the subjectivity of the individual.

Around 1915 Hans Erich Nossack started keeping a journal, the record of his inner, private world. Having indicated three varieties of aloneness and having placed the concept in some kind of historical perspective, the following chapters will examine how the definition of aloneness in its various forms applies to Nossack in his life and work and how he continues the nineteenth century conflict between the individual and the collective, the individual and society, the private and the public.

Starting with Nossack's earliest experiences within the parental home, the first scene and occasion of his aloneness, subsequent chapters will deal with the "gregarious" aspects of life, social intercourse, friendship, love, and personal relationships. Nossack's emotional reaction to his personal aloneness will be considered; although there is at times a negative feeling of isolation, implying the common human need for relationships, Nossack's general tendency is not to seek to escape aloneness or see it as a vacuum to be filled, but to accept it and give it a positive value as the mark of authenticity, an intrinsic part of his individuality. Nossack will be shown to be concerned not so much with the questionable nature of personal and social
relationships, as were Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard, but with demonstrating the virtual impossibility of achieving meaningful personal relationships in the traditional sense.

The extent of Nossack's need to be related socio-culturally will be considered in the light of his views on contemporary society. His awareness of the collective, impersonal tendencies of his age and of its anachronistic features prevents Nossack (and his main fictional characters) from achieving even the slightest Hegelian identification with society and its destiny. He condemns modern industrial society's collective tendencies which reduce man to a social quotient, commodity, or cog in a vast socio-economic machine. Nossack shares the characteristic Naturalist and Expressionist view of society as a system of conventional traditions and values which may once have been just and human but which have become antiquated and oppressive to the individual. Society, as in Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard, is generally seen as being motivated by a fear of aloneness, achieving a herd security only at the expense of repression of the individual and inauthenticity.

Of course a hostile socio-cultural environment and the consequent lack of socio-cultural relatedness does not mean that a need for a more ideal socio-cultural relatedness will not be felt. Such a need, though ill-defined, can be discerned in Nossack's writings, though it nowhere becomes a dominant theme. Rather Nossack displays the characteristic existentialist inward turning from the public world of personal relationships and society to the private, subjective world of the individual consciousness, the
world of solitude, liberty, and possibility. This inward turning is accompanied by an existentialist recognition of the impossibility of comprehending external reality or for that matter the internal reality of the mind. Objective system building and dogmatic interpretations of reality, whether they be Darwinian, Marxian, or Freudian, are rejected as a falsification of reality, in which the individual exists without any reliable orientation and therefore, ultimately, spiritually alone.

In contrast to Darwin, Marx, and Freud, who saw man as collectively controlled and determined either by his biological past, his socio-economic environment, or the chemistry of his brain, Nossack respiritualizes man and reality. He believes in an ineffable, metaphysical, but intensely real realm of existence beyond personal relationships, beyond society and culture, which constitutes for him the highest value in life. Nossack's characters long to experience and enter this realm, in the experience of which the individual is alone and which he can only enter alone; as opposed to the public world it is a dimension beyond all consensus of opinion. To experience this supremely valuable reality man must free himself from the fetters of his existence: the family, personal and love relationships, his past, and socio-cultural relatedness. The individual's awareness and experience of this realm are the ultimate guarantors of the abiding personal, socio-cultural, and spiritual aloneness of Nossack and his main characters.
Footnotes


2 Schopenhauer, p. 503.

3 Schopenhauer, p. 508.


6 Blackham, p. 151.


10 Nietzsche, p. 144.


12 Blackham, p. 54.

Footnotes (continued)


15 Hans Erich Nossack, *Die schwache Position der Literatur*, p. 56.


17 Kayser, p. 440.


Hans Erich Nossack was born in Hamburg on 30 January 1901, the son of a wealthy coffee merchant. Despite Herr Nossack's success in business the dominant force at home was his wife and the absence of open conflict in the marriage was only due to his submissiveness. Now it is a truism of modern psychology that parental environment and upbringing exert a powerful and lasting influence on any child; they are the first and perhaps dominant influences on his patterns of relating to others and his feelings of belonging and security. Nossack would certainly be the first to agree with Peter Pan's observation that mothers are very overrated persons because he and his brothers and sisters felt that they did not belong, that they had to defend themselves against their mother, as he explains in the essay "Privatbesitz. Durchgang verboten":

Doch meine Geschwister standen genauso wie ich in Opposition zur Alleinherrschaft der Mutter ... Sie war sicher eine imponierende Frau, doch von einer dämonischen Herrschaftsucht; alle ihre Freundinnen krochen vor ihr und wagten ihr nicht zu widersprechen. 1

Nossack's self-confessed anti-mother complex 2 is the basis for his later fascination with the mythological figure of Orestes. In the essay "Orest" he writes of the sense of danger he associated with her:

... wo sie als Angehörige eines matriarchalischen Gesellschaftssystems handelte und ihre mütterliche Autorität und Unangreifbarkeit dazu benutzte, ihre
Kinder zu domestizieren und diesem System zu unterwerfen, war sie in der Tat eine gefährliche Gegnerin. . . . Herrschsucht als Mutterliebe maskiert ist eine tödliche Gefahr für die Söhne. Und nicht nur für die Söhne, sondern für die Welt, da weibliche Herrschsucht ins Masslose überzugehen pflegt. (Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 30)

Here we see Nossack's tendency to view phenomena of society in terms of the matriarchy he had known in his own home, in contrast to the more common pattern, seen for example in many Expressionist plays of the same period, in which rebellion against tradition and society is symbolized by a rebellion of the son against the father.

Nossack's isolation in his battle against the suffocating maternal influence was increased by the desertion of his elder brother to the opposing side. In "Jahrgang 1901" (Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 122) Nossack says that, whereas he was possessed of a rebellious will against the parental and biological influence, his brother considered right and did everything his parents told him. In Nossack's view he did violence to himself; his mindless submissiveness made him pedantic and laughable. He was one of the basically decent but reactionary masses that Nossack despises; even his brother's "love" for him is not considered by Nossack to be a genuine expression of his feelings, but only an act of deference to the expected.

Nossack struggles for freedom from fetters that threaten his individuality. The first and greatest of these is the family, and he relates the experience of other intellectuals of his generation to his own revolt:

In diesem Sinne sind wir eine Generation von Abtrünnigen. Der niemals endende Loslösungskampf hat sogar unsern
This account may seem far-fetched, but it indicates the permanent traumatic effect of his childhood experiences in the family home. Any natural desire to belong and be loved, any fondness for family and home (elementary instincts in man's attempt to overcome aloneness) could never develop in view of the deep and lasting resentment he felt toward his domineering mother. Even as a child he was an outsider in his own house, and this fundamental experience of aloneness came from his awareness of himself as an individual but threatened entity. There was no sudden deprivation of love or security, no vacuum which could give rise to purely negative feelings of loneliness. In "Jahrgang 1901" Nossack describes his youth as "ganz unwirklich" rather than unhappy, and compares it to Balzac's Louis Lambert, a story "die das völlige Verlorensein des Kindes im Gehege bürgerlicher Ordnung darstellt. Die Erwachsenen geben vor, zu wissen, was Glück sei, und das Kind weiss bereits, dass ihr Glück nicht stimmt und dass sie sich etwas vormachen" ("Jahrgang 1901," Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 129).

The unreality was due not only to the circumstances of Nossack's home background but also to historical and socio-cultural developments during his childhood and adolescence, in particular the collapse of the prosperous and seemingly secure
world of the upper middle classes with the first World War:

... sie führten bis 1914 das grosse Leben ihrer Epoche; Abend für Abend glanzvolle Diners in ihren reichen Häusern, prächtige Opernauflührungen und viele kostspielige Reisen durch die Luxushotels Europas. Dieser grossbürgerliche Rahmen und die für selbstverständliche genommene Sicherheit brachen 1914 zusammen. Wir Jüngeren, die gleich in die Revolution und in die Inflation aller Werte hineingeboren wurden, können in keiner Weise beurteilen, wie der Zusammenbruch einer für absolut sicher gehaltenen Existenz auf unsere Väter wirkte. ("Privatbesitz. Durchgang verboten," Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 37)

The collapse of the hollow facade of society and culture is seen as the culmination of a process of socio-cultural decay:

1914 brach die bürgerliche Welt zusammen, und zwar von innen her, da sie nur noch hohle Fassade war. Die Kinder und Halbwüchsigen begriffen ... vermutlich besser als die Erwachsenen, die in ihren Gewohnheiten befangen waren, dass sich alles in einer makabren Kulisse bewegte, die nicht mehr zu den Tatsachen passte. Nicht einmal die Erwachsenen richteten sich nach den geheiligten Bräuchen, die man uns noch beizubringen trachtete. Woran sollten wir uns halten? 3

With the outbreak of the war in 1914 Nossack found that his education was constantly disrupted; a thorough education was just one of the values of which Nossack was deprived, according to "Jahrgang 1901" and "Warum ich nicht wie Hermann Broch schreibe."

In these years not only did the socio-cultural framework of the German "Bürger" collapse, but there was a disruption also of the means of instilling its values and modes of thought and of achieving "Bildung" in the sense of the formation of the personality and character of the young person until he is able to enter society as a useful member.

Nossack was deprived of still other values before he even had a chance to make them his own by what he calls the monetary and spiritual inflation of the time. In "Jahrgang 1901"
(Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 133) he records his shattering discovery that money has only a hypothetical value which can be invalidated at any time; traditional values of industry and thrift and the belief in the security of money and investments were no longer valid and his own ties to the world of material possessions were undermined.

The inflation of previously absolute moral values had an even greater effect on Nossack. He saw that in times of crisis the older generation did not practise what they preached. In "Jahrgang 1901" he mentions in particular black-market buying by respectable bourgeois parents and the feeling of shame which their actions caused them. In practice he saw the open flouting by adults of their own highly praised moral order. But the significant point is that it was never his own moral, social, or cultural order. Nossack was simply too young to have been deprived of moral, social, or cultural values which had been sanctified by his own belief in them; and thus, as we saw with respect to his first experience of human relationships, there was no vacuum caused by sudden deprivation which could produce purely negative feelings of loneliness. Not only can he not miss values which were never his own, but he proudly proclaims his inability to believe in "Ewigkeitswerte," which now appear comical, and proclaims that: "Eine Ordnung, die einmal negiert wurde, da die Umstände mächtiger waren, lässt sich nie wiederherstellen" (Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 134).

Yet precisely with regard to the negated moral order and the political and social collapse after 1918 Nossack's position of
socio-cultural aloneness was increased, for an attempt was made to resurrect the negated order. Within the ranks of his very own generation there was parting of the ways in the immediate post-war years:

Die einen—von den Studierenden bürgerlicher Herkunft die Überwiegende Mehrheit—bekannten sich zu dem, was vor dem Zusammenbruch war—die meisten aus Bequemlichkeit und Denkfaulheit, doch die Besten von ihnen wurden reaktionäre Revolutionäre. . . . Die anderen, ohne dass sie als Zwanzigjährige über besondere politische Einsichten verfügten, bejahten die Unruhe als das Neue und als das ihnen gemässe Lebenselement. Sie gerieten auf diese Weise, ob sie wollten oder nicht, unweigerlich nach links. (Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 135)

A young person of Nossack's family background might have been expected to tend towards the reactionary party, though with Nossack, so conscious of the failure of the old order, the opposite was the case. His upbringing was, however, the reason for his initial lack of contacts on the left with whom he could feel a bond of comradeship. His socio-cultural aloneness was further increased during this period by the fact that after the failure of the German revolutionary movements in the years 1918-19 it was the Right which gained dominance, formed successive governments during the Weimar Republic, and determined the restorative character of the period:

So gesehen ist alles, was nach 1918 passierte, restauratives Flickwerk und ressentimentgeladenes Nachklappen, und gerade darum so unmenschlich, weil es ein Nachklappen war. Faschismus und Zweiter Weltkrieg sind nicht denkbar ohne Dolchstosslegende. Wehleidige Rückerinnerung an hundert Jahre bürgerlichen Fortschritts spielt auch heute noch eine Rolle . . . (Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 131)

It has emerged that a general state of aloneness characterized Nossack's situation from the earliest years of childhood. He
lacked from the beginning any sense of rootedness in or affection for his parental environment, along with any feeling of social or cultural belonging. In both cases no vacuum was caused by sudden deprivation, so no craving for the conquest of loneliness arose. From the start he found himself on the outside in a kind of exile. But even so the first sudden awareness of aloneness can still be a frightening experience of insecurity, though ultimately the aloneness itself appears to have a positive aspect:

Wir waren Abtrünnige, ehe wir es selber wussten. Unter Exil soll hier das Heraustreten des Intellektuellen aus seiner ihm angeborenen, kleinen geschichtlichen Zeit in eine geistige Zeit verstanden sein. Das ist kein bewusster revolutionärer Akt, sondern geschieht dem jungen Menschen im Grunde gegen seinen Willen. Wäre er sich des ersten Schrittes bewusst, würde er ihn vermutlich nicht vollziehen können ... und ... vor dem Risiko zurückschrecken ... Eines Tages jedoch merkt man, dass man schon nicht mehr dazu gehört und bereits ausserhalb der angestammten Umgebung steht. nichts scheint mehr zu stimmen, was einem beigebracht wurde und den andern als Lebensregel gilt. Wehe dem, der sich zu lange umblickt. Man steht ohne Halt da und hat den sich als absolut sicher gebärdenden Institutionen nichts entgegenzusetzen als das Gefühl, in ihnen nicht mehr atmen zu können. Man kann sich nur auf eine Negation berufen, und das reicht als Kraftquelle nicht aus. ... Man muss schon einiges Glück haben und eine gewisse Zähigkeit im Standhalten besitzen, um den ersten Moment des Bewusstwerdens ohne allzu grosse Fehler zu bestehen. Erst sehr viel später, vielleicht erst nach der Erfahrung eines ganzen Lebens kommt man dazu, den Standpunkt ausserhalb des vegetativen Kreises, der sich für alleingültig hält, als eine Chance und Bevorzugung zu akzeptieren. (Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, pp. 123-24)

Elsewhere in the same essay this intellectual exile is seen under the aspect of not having a homeland: "Mir fehlt jedes Gefühl für das, was man Heimat nennt" (Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 121). To the themes of intellectual or spiritual exile and "Heimatslosigkeit" can be added the theme of historical rootlessness. Nossack spoke of the exiled intellectual's
existence in a spiritual time, as opposed to the little dimension of historical time, because the historical age in which he finds himself is something to be overcome, because it threatens his individuality:

Geschichtliche Ereignisse, denen er sich ausgesetzt sah, waren nichts als Hemmnisse, die ihn von seiner Richtung abbringen wollten, und seine Privatgeschichte ist kaum mehr als Widerstand gegen das, was dann hinterher Geschichte genannt wird. (Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 121)

To Nossack it seems that the intellectual's exile into a spiritual time dimension was more frequent and necessary in the first half of the twentieth century than in previous ages. The series of events which culminated in Fascism and war are for him sufficient justification of this spiritual exile from an archaic social and cultural structure: "Die nachfolgenden Ereignisse haben uns allerdings recht gegeben, denn alles, ja wirklich alles, was uns als Ewigkeitswerte und absolute Wahrheiten angepriesen wurde, hat dann im Ernstfall kläglich versagt und sich als das gezeigt, was wir mehr instinktiv vermuteten: als Überlebte Fassade" (Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 124).

This feeling of justification ultimately enables Nossack to see the exile of the intellectual as "Chance und Bevorzugung," as a positive rather than a negative state, even though the first awareness of aloneness produces feelings of fear and insecurity because it is an awareness not just of social and cultural isolation but of ultimate spiritual aloneness. The individual "steht ohne Halt da" in the world, so absolutely alone that if he had to take a first step into this exile he would be unable to do so. Instead, he suddenly finds himself on the outside and accepts
his aloneness because, as with Schopenhauer, his willingness to accept it is greater than the repugnance he feels for the alternatives which the conquest of loneliness would entail.

But how is it that a young person is able to withstand this highly endangered form of existence completely in opposition to the values and traditions of his origin, environment, and time? In "Der Weg nach draussen" (Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 19) the situation is shown to be complicated not just by the inexperience and vulnerability of the young person attempting to lead a life "als Fremdling in Unsicherheit und Alleinsein," but also by the fact that at every step he has to defend himself against his family's attempts to hold him back, to maintain the ties of blood and biology. The answer is that at an early age Nossack discovered through literature that there had always been a number of individuals who were born out of their time, who had attempted to exist outside of their society and the anonymous stream of history through a powerful assertion of their individuality; without these he would have been completely lost. At fourteen he encountered Hebbel's diaries in his father's library. He experienced the great attraction of Hebbel's personality and felt an inner compulsion to become a man like him because "ich wollte ihn nicht noch einsamer machen als er schon war" (Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 13).

At sixteen Nossack encountered August Strindberg through the Dream Play and later through The Road to Damascus. For Nossack he was "ein ganz gegenwärtiger Mensch, der plötzlich in mein Leben trat und ihm eine andere Richtung gab." Strindberg's
presentation of women as the dominant sex, often having the qualities of vampires, and the theme of the psychic murder, the annihilation of a weaker mind by a stronger, must have reminded Nossack of the state of affairs in his own home.

Other figures who were to become for Nossack living companions were Dostoyevsky, Balzac, and the Van Gogh of the Briefe an seinen Bruder Theo. In "Der Weg nach draussen" Nossack describes their works as being "allesamt kompromisslose Monologe" (Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 22), while in "Orest" he describes how Dostoyevsky and Balzac both stood outside the social and biological periphery and how in neither there is "ein Hinweis auf die mütterliche Herkunft" (Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 26).

The urgent need to overcome the maternal origin and influence explains Nossack's attraction to Ernst Barlach. In his "Bekenntnis zu Barlach" (Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 43) Nossack believes the search for the father-figure and God in the spiritual dimension of life is Barlach's basic theme, particularly in Der tote Tag. In the equation of the father image, not with tradition, discipline, and restriction, but with the spirit, freedom, and possibility Nossack saw mirrored his own experience; in contrast to his domineering mother he recalls the words of his father to his sons: "Das müsst ihr selber entscheiden" (Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 32), even when the decision they made was quite contrary to his own inclinations. In Der tote Tag Nossack saw the juxtaposition and conflict between the world of the mother and the world of the father, the theme of man's urge
to free himself from the trammels of his environment as symbolized by the "Mutterwelt," to pursue his search for the father, for the spiritual, for God, and to realize not his physical and material but his spiritual possibility. The struggle is often unsuccessful and tragic because, as we read in "Orest" (Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 30), the mother destroys the son's centrifugal spiritual possibilities and thus spiritually castrates him.

Barlach was yet another figure existing outside of the anonymous stream of history. His works do not reflect historical events but revolve around timeless human issues. The sense of their being situated outside history in a spiritual or quasi-mystical realm and the absence of historical rootedness were things which Nossack had experienced as being true of his own life. It is the typical Expressionist idea of the dignity of man, but man stripped of all historical, social, cultural, and even personal variables. The idea is often condemned as a purely abstract concept without constructive force, and if this study were polemical in nature it would be hard not to regard it as self-delusion, a purely personal myth; but the idea is central to Nossack's image of man.

Hebbel, Strindberg, Dostoyevsky, Balzac, Van Gogh, and Barlach were, then, the companions of Nossack's youth who helped him to endure his aloneness by confirming and encouraging him on his journey along "der Weg nach draussen." In them he saw figures who in opposition to their origin, environment, and historical time were relentlessly following their own path against all the well-meaning and rational advice of friends and relations, even
against their own commonsense, material interests. They were real living companions: "Leute, die zu enttäuschen ich mich schäme und die es fertigbrachten, dass ich am nächsten Morgen mein Leben änderte oder mein Leben ertrug . . . " (Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 22).

The decisive break with milieu and family towards which Nossack's mentors, circumstances, and innate nature had been leading him occurred in 1921, when he was studying at the University of Jena. According to the essay "Jahrgang 1901" his feelings of isolation had been further increased in the student fraternity he had joined. Nossack was denied any satisfactory form of companionship with his fellow students and was driven further into a position of personal and socio-cultural aloneness because he realized the anachronistic nature of the student fraternities:

Die Studentenverbindungen waren damals, d. h. um 1920, schon völlig Überlebt, da die Standesordnung, für die sie geschaffen waren, nicht mehr existierte. Die Verbindungen verdankten ihr unzeitgemässes Scheinleben nur den restaurativen Wünschen der Alt-Herrenschaft. (Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 136)

Nossack resigned from the fraternity in 1921 when he realized how out of place he was there. His idealistic letter of resignation cost him the penalty of ostracism. The correctness of his step was confirmed and his distrust of such institutions increased when in 1933 he saw how the fraternities (which he had considered rejoining for tactical, anti-Nazi reasons) chose not to fight and fall for their principles, but instead were among the first to compromise with and be swallowed by National Socialism: "ein nachträglicher Beweis für die Hohlheit solcher Institutionen und für die Richtigkeit meines jugendlichen Instinkts" (Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 137).
Nossack's break with his family, recorded in "Privatbesitz. Durchgang verboten," was also a break with the falsity of his earlier life. In both his quitting of the fraternity and the break with the family his fear of aloneness was less than his fear of inauthenticity and loss of freedom. Indeed, he had been conditioned to the acceptance of aloneness from early childhood and consequently conventional social intercourse was never valued by him, since it did not correspond to any inner need. Nossack does appear to have a concept of true companionship and spiritual intercourse, as can be seen from his remarks on the spiritual mentors of his youth, but these seem to proceed from the encounter of similarly inclined natures existing in a spiritual realm or time dimension outside society and history in what appears to be a state of monologic aloneness.

In 1922 Nossack withdrew from university after vainly attempting to finance his studies himself. From then until 1933 two related influences were brought to bear on him. The first was that of Expressionism, and Nossack's attraction to this largely explains the second influence of these years: that of the Communist Party, which he joined in 1922.

In Expressionism he saw the revolutionary and liberating rejection of an outworn tradition in which he knew he had no part. Like the Expressionists, Nossack had been born at a time when the growing disintegration of pre-war society was becoming increasingly obvious and its beliefs and values increasingly dubious; they were born into "eine gesellschaftliche, politische und ökonomische Trümmerwüste." Lacking cultural unity, the period
could offer few opportunities for a sense of cultural rootedness. There was for Nossack no community of belief or system of values to relate to; at best there was a multiplicity of partial, inadequate, or false value systems. Nossack's and the Expressionists' awareness of this is shared by one of the major writers of the period, Hermann Broch, and forms the central theme of his novel trilogy Die Schlafwandler. Modern man at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century is experiencing the end of an historical cycle. The old system of values is no longer valid, but a new one has not yet arisen. There is a pronounced need to find a new system of values that will be valid in the twentieth century world, but meanwhile man is in a limbo of loneliness and despair, caught in the void between the old order and the "not yet" of the new. Broch said of his work: "Das Buch besteht aus einer Reihe von Geschichten, die alle das gleiche Thema abwandeln, nämlich die Rückverweisung des Menschen auf die Einsamkeit--eine Rückverweisung, die durch den Zerfall der Werte bedingt ist--und die Aufzeigung der neuen produktiven Kräfte, die aus der Einsamkeit entspringen, wenn sie tatsächlich manifest geworden ist." For Broch it is necessary for man to assume the full burden of his loneliness and despair and then carry it through to its end, where a new future may perhaps be born.

Nossack's work also shows "die Rückverweisung des Menschen auf die Einsamkeit," and here too there is the occasional reference to a new future community which it is hoped may come about after man has passed through a state of aloneness, though it will become evident that in Nossack's work aloneness is not really
a transitional, prerequisite stage, but rather the permanent, necessary state of the authentic individual. But Nossack, like Broch, sees a positive act in the break with outworn traditions and the acceptance of aloneness, the "personal" mode of existence: "Immer, wenn über Traditionsbruch gejammert wird, zeigt es sich, dass der sogenannte Traditionsbruch allerbeste Tradition ist, nämlich eine neue und zeitgemässe Art, nach der Wahrheit zu suchen, und . . . eine neue persönliche Art."  

But whether aloneness is a temporary or permanent state, in the work of both Broch and Nossack few men are willing to assume it: the majority seek to escape from aloneness and individual responsibility by creating scapegoats for the failure of their socio-cultural past. In particular Nossack shares Broch's awareness of how men indulge in a pathetic kind of Romanticism, a pitiful aping of the traditions of the past, whereby earthly, transient phenomena are elevated to the level of absolutes. Another point of comparison between the two writers is that the characters of both are sometimes disturbed by the intrusion of irrational elements into the unstable or disintegrating order of their worlds. Broch's authorial comment in Die Schlafwandler to the effect that "auf Unduldsamkeit und Unverständnis ist die Sicherheit des Lebens gegründet" gives an important insight into Nossack's view of reality. 

In 1927 Nossack wrote a short piece entitled "Gespräch vor der Katastrophe" which shares with Die Schlafwandler an acute awareness of the "Fassadenrealität" of men's everyday lives and with the Expressionists a premonition of impending catastrophe.
In a discussion between a young man, his wife, and his friend, one of the young men asks what, of all their present material and spiritual possessions, they would most like to survive the catastrophe and be preserved with them in their subsequent existence. The question is raised if it would be at all possible for individuals to survive such a catastrophe deprived of virtually all material and spiritual possessions. But it is pointed out that even now, before the catastrophe, there are individuals who live outside of society and for whom the world does not exist because they want to be alone for themselves:

Warum werden denn die grossen Liebespaare, die ein unglückliches Ende gefunden haben, mit heimlicher Sehnsucht verehrt? Damit geben wir ja zu, dass diese Fassungslosen etwas gefunden haben, was besser ist als das, was uns unsre gefasste Welt zu bieten vermag. Ja, und was ist denn das, was wir Fassung nennen? Ich sehe mir manchmal das Getriebe auf der Strasse an. Da gehen die Menschen umher, gekleidet, wie die Mode und die Jahreszeit es vorschreibt. Mit Bewegungen, wie sie sich gehören. Sie tanzen nicht, sie springen nicht, sie schreien nicht. Sie gehen ihrem Geschäft nach, sie glauben zu wissen, was sie wollen, und zu tun, was sie wollen. Alles ist in Ordnung. Sie streifen sich gegenseitig mit den Blicken nur ganz oberflächlich. Mehr, um nicht gegeneinanderzurrenzen, als um festzustellen, was für ein Mensch der Begegnende ist. Keiner von all den Hunderten, die zugleich auf der Strasse sind, denkt auch nur einen Augenblick daran, dass die andren genauso wie er selbst unter dieser Kleidung, dieser Sitte, diesen Höflichkeiten, kurz, hinter dieser Fassung nackt sind. Nicht nur körperlich nackt, sondern auch seelisch oder wie wir es nennen wollen. Dass dahinter die Wut und die Liebe und was sonst noch alles auf der Lauer liegt. Denn wenn nichts dahinter wäre, dann ließe nur unser Anzug umher. . . . Wenn man den Menschen auf diese Art zuschaut, muss man nicht staunen, dass sie den Unterschied zwischen ihrer Fassung und dem, was ihre Fassung verschweigen soll, auch nur eine Minute länger ertragen können. Ich weiss, sie denken nicht darüber nach, das ist ihre Rettung. Doch wenn die Spannung zu gross wird, dann ist die Naturkatastrophe da. Wie nun, wenn nicht einer oder zwei die Fassung verlieren, sondern mehrere? . . . Und wie, wenn nun die Mehrheit oder sogar alle die Fassung verlören? . . . wir würden leider sofort erkennen, dass all diese Dinge,
The fashions of dress, the conventions of behaviour, the "order" of life, the superficialities of human contact, all the socio-cultural structures of the world are revealed as a facade behind which men are spiritually naked and yet concealed from each other, behind which there is another, unordered kind of existence. The facade and its security are preserved by Broch's "Unduldsamkeit und Unverständniss," by the fact that people simply do not think honestly about the difference "zwischen ihrer Fassung und dem, was ihre Fassung verschweigen soll."

But if the tension between the two realms becomes too great the catastrophe is there; man finds himself in a world deprived of material and spiritual possessions, not only houses and cities, but age-old customs and laws, and can only survive by withdrawing into himself:

Man is reduced to an existential minimum as tradition, culture, conventions are lost, in fact thrown off as unnecessary
ballast. This sense of the uselessness and disintegration of his social and cultural heritage explains not only Nossack's attraction to Expressionism, but also his membership of the German Communist Party, which he joined in 1922. Since the traditions against which the Expressionists revolted were those of a bourgeois capitalist society, it is only natural that the future they sought to actualize tended to take the shape of a socialist or communist society. As Nossack records in "Jahrgang 1901," the Russian Revolution had a dramatic impact on his generation:

... die Russische Revolution von 1917 [war] eine Offenbarung für uns junge Menschen. Russland war ein Mythos, unser Mythos. Es war unsere Sache, die dort siegreich durchgeführt wurde. ... Kommunismus war für uns eine selbstverständliche menschliche Hilfsbereitschaft gegen die Unterdrückung durch erstarrte Formen, die uns die Bewegungsfreiheit nahmen. ... Wir kehrten der Vergangenheit den Rücken. Wir erwachten zum Bewusstsein unserer selbst in der Morgenröte der Russischen Revolution. (Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, pp. 146-47)

They saw in the Russian Revolution—if with a somewhat unpolitical vision—the dynamic liberating force corresponding to their own inner unrest which had caused them to turn their back on the past, and Nossack joined the KPD very much in the spirit of an "angry young man." In "Jahrgang 1901" he recalls the death of some workers in some shooting at a factory. He painted placards showing a dead worker and in the background smoke from a factory chimney formed the words: "Brüder, wo bleibt ihr?" (Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 148). Then around 1925 Nossack wrote a play entitled "Ilnin" which consisted of scenes from the Russian Revolution and which, with its optimism and climactic vision of human brotherhood, was as much expressionist as socialist:
Mein Stück schloss mit einer Art Apotheose und dem Lied "Brüder, zur Freiheit, zur Sonne." ... Ich entsinne mich allerdings nur eines einzigen Satzes, und zwar der Frage: "Wieso kann man verzweifeln?" (Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, pp. 149-50)

The difference in mood between this play of 1925 and the "Gespräch vor der Katastrophe" of 1927 is striking. In both there is a revolt against the traditional and conventional, but whereas in the play there is unlimited expansion in the apotheosis of human brotherhood, in the "Gespräch" there is equally unlimited contraction of the individual to his existential minimum. To a certain extent the difference reflects contradictory but related elements existing simultaneously in Nossack's mind: precisely his acute awareness of isolation leads to an urgent need for such a vision of human brotherhood beneath a warm and hospitable sun.

But Nossack's gradual disillusionment with Communism also plays a part. In "Jahrgang 1901" (Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 146) he refers to the hard lesson of experience that naive enthusiasm is always exploited by the tacticians, that progressive systematization of a movement brings increasing injustices. Nossack could never value ideology more than the truth, and admits that he and other "unpolitical communists" would have paid for their revolt against the ossification of ideology in post-revolutionary Russia with liquidation. In other words Nossack was soon disillusioned by the discrepancy between his own millenial hopes and the "Realpolitik" of the party-line, though even at the outset it is difficult to reconcile Nossack's predilections with the policies and views of the Communists. Heinrich Vormweg has described the consequences of Nossack's brief Communist interlude: "Übrig blieb
davon ein prinzipielles Misstrauen gegenüber aller Politik, die Meinung, dass Wesentliches nur in anderen Bereichen vorgehe, und ein verhaltenes, kompliziert-romantisches Elitebewusstsein."10

Thus when Nossack rejoined the party in 1930-33 it was purely for tactical reasons and with inner distance. He rejoined simply because the KPD was the only party big enough to prevent a Nazi takeover. But once again he was disenchanted when he found that some of his useful and important suggestions went unheeded because they went against the blinkered approach of party dogma (Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 151).

With the Nazi rise to power in January 1933 Nossack experienced a new kind of aloneness: the aloneness of every true individual in a totalitarian state. Nossack's reflections on the origins of Nazism stress "den im tiefsten Sinne des Wortes reaktionären Instinkt des Kleinbürgertums, besonders des deutschen Kleinbürgertums, das jede noch so verlogene Ordnung einer revolutionären Unruhe vorzieht" (Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 66). The masses of the people joined the party and submitted themselves to "Gleichschaltung" because they were "Mitläufer... 'unfähig zur Schuld', das Verächtlichste, was sich von einem Menschen sagen lässt."11 In historical perspective it is indeed quite apparent that the mass desertion from the ranks of one-time opponents cannot be attributed simply to the use of force. The success of Nazi economic policy, the disappearance of mass unemployment, and the promise of new security played an important part, as Nossack stresses in "Dies lebenlose Leben."

But above all National Socialism was an escape for the masses from the individual acceptance of aloneness, from the assumption
of personal responsibility, and from the honest contemplation of unpleasant facts, which for Nossack and Broch were a necessary precondition, if there was ever to be a new and better socio-cultural framework. National Socialism created scape-goats for the failure of the German socio-cultural past and for the loss of the 1914-18 war; it was a Romanticism in Broch's sense because it aped and exaggerated traditions and beliefs of the past and elevated earthly and transient phenomena to the level of absolutes. Hitler, like Nossack and Broch, knew that the individual felt anxiety in the face of isolation, and in the mass-meeting and in Nazi ideology the individual could overcome his isolation through a feeling of belonging to a greater racial community. For the Christian refuge of the past National Socialism substituted a racial refuge. And whereas in Germany especially Christianity was split into various sects, Nazism revived the dream of absolute unity in a national, racial religion.

It is significant that in the last Reichstag elections before Hitler came to power over half the German people voted for self-confessed totalitarian parties (the National Socialists and the Communists). These totalitarian parties could only gain widespread support because they responded to a common (though not universal) human longing for the conquest of isolation and the final resolution of all contradictions and conflicts in a state of total harmony. Nossack, with his emphasis on individual, spiritual values, was not subject to the appeal of these mass tendencies, but he realized the power of the primitive biological instincts which called the totalitarian state and its anachronistic ideology into existence:
Hakenkreuz, Volk, Rasse, Blut und Boden, Heimat und was dergleichen mehr, Begriffe, die vielleicht vor tausend Jahren Gültigkeit gehabt haben mögen, stimmten 1933 weder wissenschaftlich noch trafen sie für die praktischen Daseinsbedingungen des 20. Jahrhunderts zu. Trotzdem appellierte man damit sehr wirksam an ganz primitive biologische Instinkte.

Nossack saw Nazism as hostile not only to the individual but to spiritual values and to the intellectuals who upheld them. In a somewhat obscurantist anthropological argument of doubtful value Nossack sees the National Socialist state as a matriarchate which suppresses individual spiritual autonomy and emasculates man:

... eines darf mit Bestimmtheit über diese geheime Herrschaftsform gesagt werden: sie ist immer geistfeindlich. Was in ihr als Geist geduldet wird, ist nichts als Schmuckgegenstand, luxuriöse Spielerei und Freizeitunterhaltung. Und um gleich eine zweite Feststellung anzuschliessen: Epochen, die sich kraftmeierisch und soldatisch geben, sind alles andere als männliche Zeiten, wie das meistens geglaubt wird... Wann und wo auch immer die Welt sich von Uniform und Gleichschritt faszinieren lässt, kann man auf eine unterschwellige matriarchalische Tendenz schliessen. Durch Uniformierung wird der Mann zum biologisch brauchbaren Männchen umgeformt. ("Jahrgang 1901," Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 141)

Nossack's extremely negative view of modern society was largely conditioned by his experience of the Nazi State, for he must have realized that the totalitarian state is simply the ultimate development of a totalitarian trend and potential inherent in the structure of all modern industrial mass societies. In such societies distinctions between individual citizens, if carried beyond fairly narrow limits, are incompatible with commercial, industrial, and governmental efficiency. Individuals are lumped together to form efficient units for various purposes: for employment and industrial production, for elections to some central representative assembly, for taxation, education, health care, etc.
Important also is the indefinite extension of the sphere of State influence and action. Consequently once a party such as Hitler's gains control of the State machinery, it acquires almost limitless power and influence over every single member of society. This is especially true insofar as it gains control of the means of communication—the press, the radio, the loudspeaker—through which an entire society can be deprived of independent thought and indoctrinated. It is this subjection of the individual to collective arrangements and his reduction, as Nossack says, to a social quotient, which constitutes the central axis around which Nossack's critique of society revolves. On this basis Nossack's hostility to post-war society and his feeling of aloneness in it is just as great as it was towards Nazi society.

Given control of the State machinery, the Nazi dictatorship used a combination of propaganda and terrorism to maintain itself in power. Propaganda and ideology appealed at best to man's need for security and identity; at worst, to the herd mentality of the mob. The Nazi terror machine threatened the lonely individual with the punishment, agony, and even death he would have to face alone if he stepped out of line. In particular the Nazis sought to transform every citizen into a potential spy who could inform on his friends, neighbours, and relatives, so that organized opposition was discouraged because bonds between individuals were undermined. In "Dies lebenlose Leben" Nossack writes of the continued fear of denunciation, of how no-one could trust his neighbour, of how former friends and colleagues no longer knew each other on the street. In the totalitarian state everyone
is horribly alone.

Initially few people realized that the Nazis—as true totalitarians—would attempt to remould the mind of a whole nation in conformity to a single pattern from which any undesirable idea was excluded. Most people adapted fairly easily at first because the new rulers only seemed to require silent concurrence in public and let people believe that they could still lead private lives. But Nossack continues:

The party aimed at nothing short of omnipresence in an attempt to impose coordination even on the thoughts of the individual. This for Nossack was the most threatening aspect of Nazi Germany from the human standpoint. The inhumanities and the genocide as particular events can be prevented in the future; but not so the warping of the individual's consciousness:

Nossack's personal and socio-cultural aloneness during the Nazi era was accompanied by a feeling of absolute powerlessness.
Rebellion in Nossack's opinion was futile in face of a vast totalitarian terror machine and a paralysed population (Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 74) and so resistance had to take a spiritual form:

Nicht auf physische Widerstandskraft kam es an, sondern allein auf geistige. Nur durch Rückbesinnung auf uralte menschliche Normen vermochte der wehrlose Einzelne die Selbstachtung zu bewahren und damit den Punkt zu gewinnen, von dem aus es nur ein absolutes Nein zur Unmenschlichkeit gibt. (Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 64)

These words reflect the antithesis in Nossack's thought between the inhuman tyranny of mass movements on the one hand and the spiritual freedom of the lone individual on the other. But this inner, spiritual freedom must not reveal itself, for this would be to invite destruction. It must remain concealed as the clandestine spiritual resistance of the isolated individual camouflaged as a conforming member of society:

... die bewusste Tarnung gehört zu dem, was hier als Partisanendasein bezeichnet wurde. Es handelt sich dabei nicht so sehr um Selbstschutz der Person ... sondern um schmerzliche Einsicht in die Vergeblichkeit. Geist und Wahrheit wären verloren gewesen, wenn sie sich dem matriarchalischen Ameisenhaufen offen zum Kampf gestellt hätten, und sind es noch heute dem allgemeinen Funktionalismus gegenüber. Es war uns auferlegt, die Wahrheit für den Gegner unsichtbar zu machen, so dass sein Hass und seine Energien ins Leere verpufften. (Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, pp. 153-54)

Camouflage offered the only possibility of preserving the spirit from the mindless but powerful onslaught of the biological mass:

Wort Kultur hörte. Mit dem Slogan konnte er des frenetischen Beifalls des halbgebildeten Kleinbürgertums gewiss sein. Es ist immer wieder erschreckend, mit welchem abgründigen Instinkt eine nur biologische Intelligenz der Masse alle geistigen Resterscheinungen auswittert und verfolgt, wenn wir hier unter Geist der Einfachheit halber die Gabe selbständiger Entscheidung des menschlichen Individuums verstehen. (Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 63)

Nossack's awareness that the enemies of the Nazi State were spirit and individual judgement is paralleled even in post-war society by the common experience that ordinary people do not like abstract or surrealistic "problem art," which they see as a distortion. Ordinary people like their art easily understandable; they do not like it to question their basic assumptions about reality or their own existence; they do not like to feel alone in a strange, unordered world. But during the Nazi dictatorship to question openly the official assumptions about reality could be fatal.

Furthermore it is clear that even those writers who concerned themselves directly with the issues of the time were unable to influence the sorry course of events. There was a progressive defeat of intelligence and spiritual values in the face of a vertical "Völkerwanderung" in which mindless, barbaric elements rose to a position of supremacy and dominated all aspects of society and culture. These historical events were bound to accentuate Nossack's sense of the impossibility of realizing individual human values in the world of politics and public affairs. But this was accepted, and spiritual, human values were preserved inwardly behind the camouflage of the good Nazi citizen.

Conflicting feelings beset Nossack's double life of "Partisanendasein." In "Jahrgang 1901" he refers to "die jedem
Künstler eigene Spielernatur" which enabled him to play to perfection the part of the dedicated businessman. Yet a few sentences later he adds that he was subject to frequent depressions, "denn die Kluft zwischen Rolle und Person war allzu gross" (Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 153). And in "Dies lebenlose Leben" he writes that it was impossible for intellectuals to join the Nazi Party in the hope of influencing events for the better because this would have entailed a double role: "Dafür ist ein Intellektueller nicht geschaffen, denn die dauernde Lüge widerspricht seiner Veranlagung" (Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 53).

The tension between the conflicting poles of inner and outer reality, the ease and the difficulty, the pleasure and the torment of role-playing, is especially evident in two of the Gedichte, written during the Nazi era. They show also how the aloneness of the partisan is an inner, well concealed fact because he is by all appearances a dedicated member of Nazi society. In "Der Abfall" the partisan has distanced himself from his surface, social role and exists alone in a spiritual realm. Yet though he willingly accepts his aloneness, he is not able to abolish entirely his longing for an ideal companion with and for whom he would fight and fall. He would willingly have returned from his journey into the other, spiritual realm to the social and historical world if there had been but one such person who was prepared quite simply to swing a punch at Nazism, though it does not seem entirely reasonable or honest to expect someone else to do first what Nossack
will not do himself.

Sie sassen bei Tisch. Da ging ich heimlich fort. Nur meinen Namen ließ ich ihnen dort. Der sass auf meinem gewohnten Platz und sollte antworten; jedem, was er hören wollte. Denn das genügte wohl.

... ...

--Weitab ihrem Glücks
steh ich und höre sie nicht mehr.

... ...

Ja, hätte damals Einer nur von Allen, durch jähre Schau des Untergangs beschwert, sich aufgerichtet, um die Faust, bewehrt mit freudigem Trotz, ins Nichts zu ballen, wissend, doch dem Gesetz unversehrt treu, Einer--ja, ich wäre umgekehrt, mit ihm zu fallen.

Unsterblich Glück, wir wären Zwei gewesen so Eins, dass wir am Himmel jubelnd weiterfechten, ein schattenloses Sternbild in den Nächten des Zweifelns, o Gefährdeter, zu lesen, Gesetz, eindeutig, des Notwendigseins.

Doch da war Keiner, um sich zu bekennen und zu begeistern das vom Nichts umhauchte neu. Keiner!

... ...

Und ich war einer nur und war nur halb; es fehlte der, für den ich fallen wollte. 13

"Bereitschaft" is likewise about the partisan's aloneness in a totalitarian society:

Wieviel wohl mögen ausserhalb der Zeiten, wieviele Wesen so wie deins und meins, tief im Verstecke ihres aussren Seins wachen und warten und sich vorbereiten.


Ja, manchmal denk ich: Alle! Alle müssen so sein wie ich--wie kann man anders sein?--Und will schon rufen: Kommt, sie kam die Zeit!
Here again he desires to drop his camouflage and establish comradeship with others in a joint outburst against the Nazis because the tension between internal reality and external appearance is too great. Yet in a totalitarian state no-one can be trusted; the partisan must reckon with the fact that he may be entirely alone and his camouflage must not be betrayed. The negative pole of playing a role against his true nature accounted for Nossack's recurrent depressions during the Nazi period: they arose because the gulf between outer role and inner reality was too great to be sustained (Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, pp. 127-28). But then in July 1943 a world-shattering event destroyed the contemptible society in which Nossack had been compelled to exist and invalidated the socio-cultural past which had created it.
The destruction of Hamburg by Allied bombing raids in July 1943 confirmed and intensified Nossack's feeling of spiritual exile from history and society and his sense of existing in a greater spiritual time dimension. This explains perhaps why the destruction is not seen in an historical, political, or military context. The conflict between the Axis and Allied powers is viewed as irrelevant. The German state is "etwas völlig Nebensächliches . . . das an einem Schicksal, wie es Hamburg erlitt, weder schuld war noch in der Lage, etwas daran zu ändern." Though Nossack claims to be reporting experiences and thoughts shared by the mass of the population, he seems to ascribe to it his own feelings. In reality he speaks not as the representative of a people, but as a unique individual for whom the historical war is not the real cause of the destruction: "Eine viel tiefere Einsicht in die Dinge verbot uns, an einen Feind zu denken, der dies alles verursacht haben sollte; auch er war uns höchstens ein Werkzeug unkennbarer Mächte, die uns zu vernichten wünschten" (p. 42). The catastrophe is the work of inscrutable, fateful powers beyond human control. Man is faced with the terrible reality of an incomprehensible experience, "da es der Vernunft niemals möglich sein wird, das, was damals geschah, als Wirklichkeit zu begreifen" (pp. 7-8). No comfort can be taken in the knowledge of a naturally or divinely benevolent scheme of things; God's place is taken by unknowable forces of fate which wish to destroy man, and before which man is left to his own resources.
To begin with Nossack feels threatened with annihilation: "Für mich ging die Stadt als Ganzes unter, und meine Gefahr bestand darin, schauend und wissend durch Erleiden des Gesamtschicksals Überwältigt zu werden" (p. 7). The inhuman order of Nazi Hamburg was still an ordered environment from which he could be exiled and as such a reality in terms of which he could define himself, even if only negatively. But now even this is taken from him.

This negative feeling is soon at least partially replaced by a positive sense of liberation in that Nossack becomes aware of why he had hated the past and longed for its destruction. The premises and values by which man had lived in the past are accused. Man had been "der Sklave seiner Einrichtungen" (p. 41). Because of fear of aloneness and need for security all individual being and personal responsibility had been sacrificed to a mechanical facade of institutions, conventions, and ready-made opinions. People deceived themselves with a pretense of security in a stable institutional world of dependable material and spiritual possessions. Yet it was a strangely empty life because their personal being had no part in it; nothing had seemed so necessary and valuable that it was worth saving from an imminent catastrophe:

... wenn wir uns ernsthaft die Frage vorlegten, was wir über eine morgige Sintflut hinüberretten wollten, um es den Überlebenden zu erhalten, wo war dann etwas, das uns so notwendig schien, dass wir uns bis zum letzten Atemzuge dafür eingesetzt hätten? ... Was von all den Dingen, die wir gebrauchten, und die uns belasteten, war dann noch unser? (p. 18)

But after the catastrophe man is no longer the slave of his institutions because these have been destroyed by "eine höhere
Gewalt" (p. 44). He treats the State as irrelevant to his fate and by implication reassumes personal responsibility. Paradoxically the coming of an incomprehensible external Fate leads to man becoming responsible again for his own fate.

Nossack examines also and finally condemns man's attitude toward the beloved and irreplaceable material objects of the past which are now gone forever and can no longer comfort him:

Diese Dinge haben ihr Leben von uns, weil wir ihnen irgendwann einmal unsere Zuneigung zuwandten; sie sogen unsere Wärme in sich auf und hegten sie dankbar, um uns in armen Stunden wieder damit zu bereichern. Wir waren verantwortlich für sie, sie konnten nur mit uns sterben. Und nun standen sie auf der andern Seite des Abgrunds im Feuer und riefen bittend hinter uns her: Verlasst uns nicht! Wir wussten es, wir hörten es und wagten ihre Namen nicht zu nennen, weil uns das Mitleid dann zugrunde gerichtet hätte. Wir durften uns nicht einmal nach ihnen umsehen. (pp. 33-34)

Later (pp. 63-64) comes the realization that all these objects had an existence which was necessarily independent of the possessor, who never truly possessed them; the true relationship between objects and "owner" was like that between guest and host. There is also the implication that perhaps it is best that they are gone forever, because in the past people used them as a deceptive refuge from the true human condition and in consequence their entire way of life was false:

Oder war es doch falsch, so zu leben? Haben wir die Dinge missbraucht, um uns hinter ihnen vor den Unbildern der Wirklichkeit zu verbergen? Sie aber gingen, uns verteidigend, zugrunde, und wir stehen nun nackt und ohne täuschende Zuflucht da? (p. 64)

Nossack here takes up a theme of Christian and Oriental mysticism and modern existentialism: the distinction between what an individual is and what he has. All possessions are external to and independent of the individual, whose essence consists of
his consciousness of his existence as an entity separate from the world about him. Human existence consists of being, not of having, but the individual clings to external possessions because they shield him from an awareness of his aloneness in the world; their loss entails the existential "Angst" of aloneness. But by his anxious clinging—and Nossack realizes that he too was guilty of this—the individual reduces being to having, and elevates having to being, and becomes inauthentic because in the process the possessor becomes the possessed.

The same argument applies to man's spiritual possessions in the past. Before the catastrophe men anxiously clung to their institutionalized beliefs and values, considering them securely their own, but in so doing they became possessed by them. Men were inauthentic because they failed constantly to question their beliefs and values. Thus before the catastrophe in relation to both their material and spiritual possessions men had lived on the level of having; by becoming what they had, they reduced themselves to the status of things. In "Gespräch vor der Katastrophe" men were to detach themselves from possessions and become an existential minimum. But now the bombing of Hamburg does this. Countless thousands lose all material and spiritual possessions, everything which had seemed to them permanent and essential, and find themselves in a world which is the negation of their previous security: "Es begann eine maskenlose Zeit; die gewohnten Verkleidungen fielen von selber ab . . . Wir alle haben . . . erkennen müssen, dass die Gewichte, mit denen wir bisher gewogen hatten, nicht mehr stimmten" (p. 26).
Nossack records how no help could be expected from friends, neighbours, or relatives (p. 26), but in an ultimate sense the refugees are beyond the reach of help: "Sie brachten eine unheimliche Stille mit sich. . . . nur ihnen Hilfe anbieten zu wollen, schien eine zu laute Handlung" (p. 24). They are people who have been made painfully aware of the transience of all possessions and man's defencelessness in face of the destructive forces of fate. Help, sympathy, and any form of comfort such as music simply make man more aware of his helplessness: "gerade dieser Trost lässt uns fühlen, dass wir nackt und hilflos einer Macht ausgesetzt sind, die uns vernichten will " (pp. 15-16).

Even with the best will in the world the refugees cannot really be helped or their defencelessness dispelled with gifts of shelter, furniture, food, and clothes because they have left behind the world of having and live in a different world altogether. The destruction has been a dividing force of staggering proportions:

Und was erwarteten die Betroffenen, wenn sie alles, was man ihnen Gutes tat, beinahe nur deshalb anzunehmen schienen, um den Gebern gefällig zu sein? Der Instinkt der Helfenden wehrte sich dagegen; nicht nur, dass ihre Gabe dadurch entwertet wurde, es raubte ihnen auch alle Sicherheit und erweckte Zweifel in ihnen am eigenen Besitz.

So geschah es, dass Menschen, die in demselben Hause zusammenlebten und am gleichen Tische beieinandersassen, die Luft ganz verschiedener Welten atmeten. Sie versuchten sich die Hand zu geben und griffen vorbei. Wer war nun blind von ihnen? Sie redeten dieselbe Sprache, aber sie meinten mit ihren Worten ganz andere Wirklichkeiten. Wer war nun taub von ihnen? Es gibt auch heute noch keine Möglichkeiten, sich dies gegenseitig zu Übersetzen. (pp. 28-29)

Nossack himself became a refugee with the loss of his home, possessions, and manuscripts. The destruction of Hamburg symbolized for him the destruction of European civilization along with
its customs, values, and beliefs. Previously these had given man identity and security because they provided a stable "Menschenbild." Furthermore even the old categories of perceiving and describing the world are no longer valid; reality is incomprehensible; there is no longer an established and unified "Weltbild." With the loss of both "Menschenbild" and "Weltbild" man feels threatened by a reality which had previously only been hidden behind the socio-cultural facade. This other reality is perceived by the individual in a state of absolute aloneness; his perception is subjective in the extreme because there is no consensus of opinion about the realm that lies beyond the facade. Consequently there is no objectively valid reality, and the individual can no longer escape his aloneness by clinging to the invalidated values of the past. This loss of orientation through tradition and the impossibility of playing out life as before according to the false values of the past is crystallized in the words: "Wir haben keine Vergangenheit mehr" (p. 30).

Any attempt to restore the past would be regression in Nossack's view. In an essay he writes that he felt "dass jeder Versuch, eine verlorene Vergangenheit zu restaurieren, zu nichts als zu einem Plagiat oder zu einer durch ihre Hohlheit gefährlichen Fassade führen würde, und dass nur ein Dasein, das sich zu der schicksal­gegebenen Vergangenheitslosigkeit bekennt, aufrichtig und zeitgemäss wäre." Even memories of the past are irrelevant to the task of mastering the present experience, as indicated by the quotation from Dostoyevsky's *Aus einem Totenhaus* at the beginning of Der Untergang: "Im allgemeinen sprachen sie wenig über ihre
Vergangenheit, sie erzählten nicht gern und bemühten sich, wie es schien, nicht an das Frühere zu denken."

The absolute aloneness of man cast into an alien and incomprehensible world and his reduction to an existential minimum with the loss of his old identify is expressed by Nossack in the fairy-tale of the motherless man:

Es war einmal ein Mensch, den hatte keine Mutter geboren. Eine Faust stiess ihn nackt in die Welt hinein, und eine Stimme rief: Sieh zu, wie du weiterkommst. Da öffnete er die Augen und wusste nichts anzufangen mit dem, was ihn umgab. Und er wagte nicht, hinter sich zu blicken, denn hinter ihm war nichts als Feuer. (pp. 29-30)

In another fairy-tale sequence an Indian who alone survived of all his fellow tribesmen asks himself if he should become Orion. In an essay Nossack explains the meaning of the question: "Er hat die Tatsache seines Alleinseins akzeptiert, und das hat ihn verwandelt." The Indian symbolizes an aloneness which can persist even in a crowd of survivors: the aloneness of man in an incomprehensible and alien world. The passive suffering of this aloneness is not enough for Nossack: it is necessary to do as the Indian did, to acknowledge it as the true human condition: "Man muss bekennen oder vergessen ..." (p. 64).

Even in this acknowledgement Nossack is alone among those who prefer to forget. Around him he sees pathetic figures who, deprived of the security of their past, are possessed by crippling despondency. And then again Nossack is alone among those, ...

... die eine Vergangenheit haben, von der sie ihren Massstab für den morgigen Tag nehmen. ... Ach, welch eine vergebliche Anstrengung, ihr Ziel zu dem unserigen zu machen! Und so ist die Welt in zwei Teile geteilt, dazwischen liegt ein unsichtbarer Abgrund ... Die
Menschen diesseits und jenseits haben einander zu
hassen begonnen . . . (p. 30)

These subsequently flood back into Hamburg and are joined by
the lethargic survivors who become possessed of a new will to
recreate the past. Nossack is acutely aware that such attempts to
live life as before are only a facade: "Sie wissen, dass es nur
Schein ist. Sie glauben nicht daran. Die Kulisse fehlt, die
Illusion der Wirklichkeit" (p. 70). The sight of people cleaning
windows, gardening, drinking coffee on balconies, now seems unreal,
as if in a film. Nossack will never be able to return to this
world of habit and conventional security because he realizes that
it conceals another reality, real reality, or non-ordinary reality,
which has been revealed to him through the destruction of the old
categories of perceiving and classifying reality.

This other reality is tremendously rich in possibilities be­
cause it has not yet been reduced to rational categories and
devalued by familiarity and expectation. "Das kalte, geizig
trennende Fensterglas" (p. 36) of man's eyes has been shattered
and opened to an infinity of being. This new perception of reality
had begun for Nossack out on the heath during the night of the
first attack:

Zwei stammlose Kiefern hatten den friedlichen Bann
ihres Daseins durchbrochen und sich in schwarze Wölfe
verwandelt, die gierig nach der blutenden Mondsichel
sprangen, die vor ihnen aufging. Die Augen leuchteten
weiss und Geifer troff ihnen aus den gefletschten
Maulern. (p. 17)

Later, when Nossack enters the destroyed city, he loses all
sense of time and direction because the time-place continuum has
been destroyed. It is a strange, other-worldly landscape, "alles
Entirely silent, without movement and change; the temporal undressed and eternally become" (p. 48). It is an inexplicable reality:


Im Norden Finnlands gibt es vor Frost erstarrte Wälder. . . . Aber wer denkt dabei noch an Wald? Es ist nicht einmal das Gerippe eines Waldes. Gewiss, es ist etwas da, sogar mehr, als wenn es nur Gerippe wäre, aber was bedeuteten diese Zeichen und Runen? Vielleicht die unausdenkbare Umkehrung des Begriffes Wald? (pp. 45-46)

Before the catastrophe man had generally been unaware of this other indefinable realm of existence which lies behind the deceptive facade of conventional reality. Indeed the social world had as one of its main objectives to prevent any eruption into it of this other unordered but absolute realm. In particular the educational system is criticized:

Wieviel haben wir doch in der Schule gelernt, wie viele Bücher gelesen und Abbildungen bestaunt, aber hierüber hatte noch niemand berichtet. Gab es also doch noch unerforschte Weltteile? Ich sah in allen Augen dies aufmerksame, gespannte Suchen nach aussen und ein vergebliches Vergleichen nach innen. Dies Erwarten, dass sich irgendwo etwas zeigen würde, was das Rätsel löste, und das wir auf keinen Fall übersehen dürften. (pp. 46-47)

The rational, familiar world, constructed by public consent and language, in which man feels safe and at home, is annihilated. The individual is plunged into an awareness of the wondrous, a-rational existence of things which previously language, reason, and conventional descriptions of reality had concealed. In his experience of this non-ordinary reality the individual is
existentially isolated; community is no longer possible because his perception of it is of a purely private nature and he is unable to communicate with others about it. It is in fact beyond the reach of language and common consensus of opinion. Language is inadequate to describe this other reality because it is related at every level to public, conventional reality, whereas the other reality is private and non-ordinary. As Werner Oberle observes: "Das Wesentliche kann geahnt, höchstens erlebt werden, es entzieht sich—das wissen alle Mystiker—der Sprache." At best the other reality can only be hinted at where language fails or leaves off. Or an attempt can be made with the fairy-tale and surrealistic elements in Der Untergang. In both cases the inadequacy of reason must be recognized and we must recover the gift of wonder. The world in which man lives is not a closed, intelligible system and Nossack rejects reason as an absolute value: "Traurig ist nur der Verstand, weil er Flügel zu haben glaubt, und stürzt doch immer wieder ab" (p. 72).

Nossack's awareness of the inadequacy of language, his distrust of reason, and his perception of another dimension of reality and time has led to references to the "mystical" element in his work. In an interview Nossack himself says he would agree about the mystical trend as long as the word is not used in the traditional sense which entails a search for a "unio mystica." Significantly Nossack rejects the idea that he is a mystic who believes he can actually experience or unite with the timeless, unfathomable aspects of reality which exist behind existence as we know it. In Nossack the limits of individuality may be extended but are never transcended and consequently human aloneness is never
abolished.

In the Bienek interview Nossack again rejects the idea of a "unio mystica."

Mich interessiert brennend, was die Dinge wohl sein mögen, wenn sie nicht nur unser Objekt sind. Oder deutlicher ausgedrückt: was sind sie in ihrer Einsamkeit, was sind sie, bevor sie Mythos geworden sind, denn der Mythos ist doch nur eine Vorderseite, die sie uns zukehren, und die wir verbrauchen. . . . Ich habe manchmal das Gefühl, dass auf dieser uns nicht zugekehrten Seite der Wesen meine Heimat liegt. 21

Nossack's feeling that his home lies on the side of things which is turned away from us, the side of the timeless and unfathomable aspects of reality with which it is impossible to unite, guarantees human aloneness in that it cannot be mystically transcended.

Neither can human aloneness in the experience of an indefinable dimension of being be regarded as a transitional stage prior to the emergence of a new socio-cultural framework. The other realm of being, though frightening and bewildering, is desirable above all other things; Nossack loves it and yearns for it, as Walter Boelich observes in his afterword:

Seine Werke sind . . . Werke der Achtung und der Liebe. . . . Sie sind erfüllt von der Achtung des Fremden, nicht von seiner Ablehnung. Sie geben noch dem Fremdartigsten, Unerfahrbarsten Raum. (p. 84)

Certain remarks in Der Untergang admittedly imply that a new socio-cultural relatedness is sought, as for example when he proclaims: "Mit dem Augenblick, wo wir uns von den Trümmern unseres einstigen Heimes abwenden, beginnt der Weg, der Über den Untergang hinausgeführt" (p. 68). And in the next work, Nekyia, the need for the relatedness and orientation of a new socio-cultural order is
particularly noticeable. Yet looking back over Nossack's work to date it is clear that his awareness of another, supremely valuable realm of being precludes any progression to a new and improved socio-cultural order because it leads directly to a general state of personal, socio-cultural, and spiritual aloneness.

The dilemma of Nossack's early work arises from the incompatibility between the need for the relatedness and orientation of a new socio-cultural order and the desire for the other reality. The socio-cultural need is present, yet cannot be fulfilled because his real homeland lies on the side of things which is turned away from us. And every attempt to extend man's existential limits into this other infinitely desirable realm, every attempt to depart into it, even merely the awareness of it, lead invariably, as successive works show, to aloneness, as Boelich has observed:

Nossacks Wesen sind jeweils einzelne, die den Schritt hinüber wagen, die Grenze Überschreiten, ins Nicht-Versicherbare aufbrechen. Sie werden in schmerzhafte Isolierung getrieben, ausgestossen, aber sie legen Zeugnis ab von einer anderen Welt. 22

It is a mysteriously appealing world which beckons, yet it can be cold and hostile; removed from human and cultural contacts, the individual can be tormented by doubts about his identity and very existence; he can even freeze to death, in the cold of isolation, like the man in "Das Mal."

The more painful aspects of this aloneness tend to be at least partly concealed in Der Untergang by the euphoric feeling of total liberation from the prison of a hated, inauthentic past and a feeling of new life and possibility in a new beginning. It was "wie eine Erfüllung" (p. 43) because the destruction confirmed and
intensified Nossack's previous experience of living outside of historical time in a spiritual time dimension. The socio-cultural past has been destroyed: "wir haben keine Vergangenheit mehr" (p. 30). The corollary of this is proclaimed by Nossack: "Denn was wir gewonnen haben und was anders wurde, das ist: Wir sind gegenwärtig geworden. Wir haben uns aus der Zeit gelöst" (p. 71). The others, on the other side of the abyss, are still "eingezwängt zwischen dem Gestern und Morgen, ohne eine Sekunde Gegenwart" (p. 71).

The ending of Der Untergang shows that man is being offered the chance to exist outside the reassuring public reality of the past and outside historical time in a realm where man is alone. A burning building symbolizes the security of the past and the historical time dimension. Those who refuse to leave its deceptive security because they are afraid of the flames perish in the conflagration. Those who muster the courage to fight their way through the flames survive: "Dann waren wir hindurch. Einige sind dann auf der Strasse noch umgefallen. Wir konnten uns nicht um sie kümmern" (p. 73). But they survive, as these concluding words of Der Untergang show, as isolated individuals who can expect neither sympathy nor help from their fellows; they survive in a realm where it is not one for all and all for one, but each one for himself. No help can be given because they have broken through into a realm where no help is possible and where man is isolated; "Zeitgeschichte" has been left behind, and with it not only the possibility of socio-cultural relatedness, but also of significant human relationships.
Theodore Ziolkowski's *Dimensions of the Modern Novel*\(^{23}\) throws light on Nossack's view of the other, non-historical time dimension. Ziolkowski shows that in earlier ages man had been assured of meaning, duration, and rootedness. Up until the seventeenth century the order of God had guaranteed man's meaning and duration, whereas after the decline of general religious belief history and historical time, especially as expounded by such thinkers as Hegel, Marx, and Darwin, had provided the necessary order and values which transcended the individual and his aloneness. But toward the end of the nineteenth century, Ziolkowski argues, the world of history became so vast and complex that no unified order could possibly be read into or out of it. Consequently history was fragmented into a number of pluralistic value systems and the individual was cast back upon himself in his search for meaning, value, and duration. The time had come for Bergson and the modern existentialist philosophies which sought man's meaning not outside of man, but in his own individual existence and duration. Nossack is at one with Bergson in that both see man's becoming not as a necessarily predetermined process of being shaped by external forces, but as the act of shaping one's own existence and realizing one's possibilities. For Nossack all the external forces which could shape him from outside have been destroyed with the loss of the past, and can have no hold over him as long as he does not allow himself to fall victim again to the past and to the world of public and scientific time and thus become again "eingezwängt zwischen dem Gestern und Morgen, ohne eine Sekunde Gegenwart"; as long, in
other words, as he maintains himself in his aloneness and authenticity.

Authentic personal existence is for Nossack never simply what it is, but what it will be in the realization of its possibilities. It has no finality and totality of its own because it always has possibilities to realize, limits to extend. It is a world of "stirb und werde" and, unlike the past, which can be idolized or hated but not changed because it is wholly given, personal existence consists of possibility because the future is always open. The future and the present with which it begins are no longer dominated by or made dependent upon the claims and values of the past. A necessary consequence of this is that the "Menschenbild" of the past is destroyed. For Nossack man can no longer be regarded as a known quantity; there is no longer a ready-made definition of what man is. This relationship between the image of man and the concept of time has been expressed by Friedhelm F. Rickert:

Lebensauffassung und Zeitbegriff entsprechen sich so für den 'gegenwärtig' gewordenen Menschen: Leben ist Werden. Als immerdar Werdender steht er nicht mehr ausschliesslich im Banne einer schematischen Zeiteinteilung, hat er sich aus der abstrakten Zuständigkeit gelöst und der lebendigen Wirklichkeit zugewandt. Das bedeutet aber nicht die völlige Aufhebung der physikalisch messbaren Zeit zugunsten einer ausschliesslich subjektiv erfahrbaren, sondern vielmehr eine Relativierung der objektiven Zeit, die weiterhin eine Rolle im Bereich des Daseins spielt. Der Mensch ist eben nicht nur reines Wesen, sondern auch Organismus. Das Wesen transzendiert zwar das bloße Dasein; doch bleibt der Mensch der Zeitlichkeit unterworfen, auf die ihn auch der Tod verweist . . . 24

It is easy to discern here the source of a fundamental conflict in Nossack between subjective, private time on the one hand
and objective, public time on the other. In fact the conflict is presented by Nossack in fairy-tale form toward the end of Der Untergang, where men are seduced from under the watchful and anxious eye of Mother Time by "der Fremde." It is a Pied Piper motif of seduction from the historical and socio-cultural world, except that the seduced are not yet admitted entirely to the other desirable realm outside historical and social time, but exist in a kind of limbo:


This conflict between public and private time and, in a wider sense, between the public and private world, is seen by Ziolkowski as a central conflict in the modern consciousness, and to this extent Nossack is a typical figure. The conflict is, however, particularly bitter in Nossack's case because, although for him human duration in an eternal present is far more valuable than anything that exists in the realm of public time, he nevertheless lives in the modern age when public or objective time has become more essential than ever before in the organizing of society. Nossack will henceforth never return to the public,
objective world of socio-cultural relatedness. Liberated through becoming wholly present and deprived of any possibility of rootedness in a past, he will remain alone, incapable of giving or receiving help, like the survivors at the end of Der Untergang.
Footnotes


Footnotes (continued)


15 Der Untergang, Edition Suhrkamp, 19 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1967), p. 41. Subsequent references to this work will be given in the text.


19 See, for example, Heinz W. Puppe, "Nossack und der Nihilismus," German Quarterly, 37 (1964), 1-16. Werner Oberle also discusses this mystical element, and so too, at least implicitly, does Walter Boelich in his afterword.


21 Bienek, p. 77.


CHAPTER 3

Nekyia and Interview mit dem Tode

(i)

In Der Untergang man was plunged into aloneness; he was reduced to an existential minimum, deprived of his socio-cultural past, and exposed to a new dimension of reality and time. The destruction of a hateful past led, however, not only to a tremendous feeling of liberation and possibility but also to a feeling of disorientation and rootlessness. The same duality is to be observed in Nekyia. Here Nossack shows himself again to be a "Dichter der Beziehungslosigkeit und inneren Einsamkeit des modernen Menschen und seiner trostlosen Erfahrungen in unserer 'Trümmerwelt'." But at the end of the work there are hopes (albeit vague and inherently questionable) of a new socio-cultural identity and relatedness in the future period. First, however, the narrator goes back into the past, critically examines it, and then consciously affirms its loss.

The opening scene of Nekyia is a desolate, rain-drenched plain where the authentic (because conscious) survivor of a great catastrophe stands upright and alone amidst a group of other survivors who are described as lumps of clay. They sleep a deep, exhausted, animal-like sleep which symbolises their unconsciousness of their new situation and their inability to rise to its demands. Like them the narrator is nameless because his old identity, which was deeply rooted in the destroyed past, has been lost; but unlike them he is awake and aware, and thus to him these sleepers are people "die man nicht Menschen zu nennen wagt." His
situation is one not only of aloneness, but of painfully felt loneliness. Freedom from the past has reinstated primacy of the self, but has led to the individual's personal and socio-cultural isolation. Among the helpless sleepers there is no one to talk to about the liberating but also painful loss of the past to which he still feels closely tied, though it no longer exists. He is so alone and so lonely that he must create for himself a "thou," a "Gegenüber," by a sheer act of will, in the form of a "being" that he hopes and believes will one day exist:

Ich spreche auch nicht mit mir, wie ich das früher zu tun pflegte.


The narrator envisions the communication with this "being" as similar to talking to a friend or to a woman, but under conditions so intimate and almost magical that the very barriers of individuality are broken down, so that paradoxically he is virtually speaking to himself. Hermann Kasack describes this being as "dieses gleichsätzlich aus einer Adamsrippe erschaffene Du," which indicates the act of will by which the narrator overcomes his loneliness through an idealized state of absolute intimacy and communication with a future being. Thus what would otherwise be a monologue becomes a message sent out into the world in search of a hearer. The narrator himself indicates this when he quotes a verse:

Wozu ward eine Stimme uns verliehn,  
Wenn wir nicht auch am Abgrund singen? Wann ging eine Stimme je verloren dann? (p. 8)
Yet even these hopes concerning a possible future partner are immediately doubted as possible vestigial remnants of the past:

Doch gleich kommen die Zweifel, ob es sich nicht nur um ein Bild handelt, das aus der Erinnerung auftaucht, aus dem, was hinter mir liegt und was als endgültig verloren angesehen werden muss. (p. 9)

Everything is in doubt and, despite the possible future being, near-despair and aloneness set the key. Like *Der Untergang*, *Nekyia* is not a straightforward factual report because with the catastrophe everything has lost its clear contours and things are no longer objectively comprehensible. The narrator is in a fog of uncertainty; there is no clear path, and no-one to point out a path. Man is aimless and helpless because there are no longer any objectively binding guidelines. The old interpretation of the world has been destroyed along with society. "Real reality" has broken through, but from a human point of view it seems that a vacuum results: personally, socio-culturally, and spiritually the survivor is alone and lonely, cast back upon his naked individual existence; he is disoriented and rootless, beset by inner torments and fears.

But also there is the contrasting idea that he is standing on a threshold between the old and a new beginning, not just a personal beginning, but a new community. First, however, the narrator returns in his dream to the deserted city of the past, where he relives significant episodes of his earlier life which illustrate his personal situation in the past and the basis on which the catastrophe had been nurtured.

Nossack's concern in *Der Untergang* and *Nekyia* and also in other works with non-ordinary reality and the metaphysical
dimensions of experience have earned him the reputation of a surrealist who in *Nekyia* destroys the narrative conventions of place, time, and causality. The dream sequence which accounts for most of the work is entirely appropriate because the breakdown of conventional ways of looking at the world has allowed the breakthrough of another kind of reality in which nothing is any longer factually and objectively comprehensible, so that the world itself has become dream-like. Dreams themselves partake of a non-ordinary reality unbounded by objective and rational limitations and in which consciousness is unfettered by the limitations of time, place, and causality. In this respect the dream is appropriate to the theme which emerged in *Der Untergang*: that of the freeing of the individual from the absolute dominion of social and historical time and his release into a greater metaphysical time-dimension; to use a phrase of Kurt Vonnegut, the narrator has become "unstuck in time" because social and historical time has been smashed. With this the whole chronological basis of the traditional narrative is questioned:

Denn was ist eigentlich damit gesagt: Es liegt etwas hinter mir? Früher gab es nichts Zuverlässigeres als die Zeitrechnung. Es war alles genau eingeteilt und liess sich in Zahlen ausdrücken. Einer war dreissig Jahr alt und ein anderer hatte vor tausend Jahren gelebt. Die Rechnung stimmte wohl auch, aber die Voraussetzung ist nicht mehr die gleiche. Die Zeit ist zerbrochen. (p. 35)

As the narrator goes through the city everything is like an empty stage-set, dead and deserted. He is absolutely alone: "Meine einsamen Schritte hätten einen Widerhall an den leeren Hauswänden ergeben müssen. Aber das geschah nicht. Ich war das einzige Ohr, das mich hörte" (p. 12). He is so alone that he
even doubts his own continued existence, but knows that he cannot be dead for he does not have the company of other dead: "Denn so einsam, wie ich war, konnte nur ein Lebender sein" (p. 26).

A comprehensive critique and condemnation of the past is given; condemned is a society of institutions, conformism, and habit which suppressed individuality and personal values (though the vast majority consented willingly to this) and which lost control of its own destiny because it was impersonal. Although an intense aloneness was induced by the catastrophe, the narrator had still been essentially alone in the past and the catastrophe had simply intensified his past experience. Socio-cultural relatedness had been impossible for him because the socio-cultural world was an unreal facade. The official world of laws and security had attempted to banish everything that was really real and told people only what they wanted to hear: "Dass alles in Ordnung wäre" (p. 19). People had an obsession for the security of explanations because they were afraid of the unknown which lay beyond and threatened the reassuring but false socio-cultural reality: "Sie hatten Angst vor dem, was sie nicht berechnen konnten, und durch laute Sprichwörter versuchten sie sich über diese Unsicherheit hinwegzutäuschen. Besser wäre es gewesen, sie hätten sich nicht so sicher gefühlt" (p. 33). The socio-cultural world was one of appearance only and stood before imminent collapse:

Anstatt das Schicksal zu meistern, hat man es ängstlich ausgesperrt. Und der Mensch war der Gefangene seiner Angst, nicht das Schicksal. Das Nichtverbrauchte wuchs ausserhalb der Gitter der Gesetze, hinter denen die Menschen ein unehrliches Dasein ohne Wärme und Schönheit fristeten. Das Leere aber zieht das Seiende an, und die Scheinwelt steht vor dem Zusammenbruch. (pp. 87-88)
Life became institutionalized and people accepted the ready-made answers of their institutions because they were afraid of assuming responsibility for their own independent thought and judgment:

Man pflegte sich vor dieser Zeit nicht auf sein eigenes Urteil zu verlassen. Man hatte geeignete Leute dafür, die über alles berichten und eine Meinung aussprechen mussten, wie sie für die Mehrheit am geeignetsten erschien. Abends konnte man das plötzlich lesen, und wenn man vor dem Schlafengehen mit seinem Nachbarn sprach, stellte man fest, dass er das gleiche dachte. So war alles in Ordnung und beunruhigende Rätsel konnten nicht entstehen. (p. 47)

There had been a community of belief and socio-cultural relatedness in the past, but this was only a symptom of people's inauthenticity and self-deception.

The false relationship of people in the past both to their personal reality and to the reality of the world about them is condemned. They did not recognise the deep mystery of their personal reality:

Es ist seltsam, die meisten Menschen fühlten sich im fahlen Widerschein ihres Wesens heimischer als in dem, was sie wirklich waren. . . . Was aber zwang sie denn, ihr Dunkel zu verneinen? (p. 14)

Nor did they perceive the mysterious otherness of the things about them:

Eines Tages wird man darüber belehrt, dass dies eine höchst un gerechte Art der Betrachtung ist, und dass die andern Dinge auch ein Eigenleben führen, das sich unserer Wahrnehmung entzieht. Das hat natürlich eine Erschütterung zur Folge. Man ist aus seinem eingebildeten Mittelpunkt vertrieben. Man wagt nicht mehr zu sagen: Das ist so und so. (pp. 112-13)

The world is not what its surface appearance and our descriptions of it would indicate. Real reality lies beyond such appearances in a "Jenseits" which cannot be accommodated by the
socio-cultural "Diesseits," which is accordingly devalued, and perhaps even rejected entirely in favour of the other realm; this would seem to be the significance of the invitation to joint suicide (as an attempt to break through to the other realm) which is made to the narrator by his "brother":

Manchmal geschah es beim Tagesgrauen, dass er ans Fenster trat und ins Ungewisse hinausblickte. Dann drehte er sich jäh um, und seine Augen leuchteten gläubig und vor Lust: "Komm, lass uns zusammen sterben." Ich gebe zu, dass er mich beinahe Überredet hätte. (p. 83)

The invitation to suicide is made by a character who is distinctly idealised in the work. The invitation is significantly not to live together, but to die together; a self sufficient relationship between two individuals is not enough; there is something more desirable in a sphere beyond that of close personal relationships.

Personal aloneness was a pronounced feature of the narrator's life before the catastrophe. He was filled with a feeling of radical "otherness" which manifested itself in his day-to-day encounters with his fellow citizens:

But even with friends the narrator was still unable to establish real contact, and this gives rise to the question of the extent to which close personal relationships are even possible. His failure to establish contact was apparently due not to the inadequacy of his attempts but to the inherent impossibility of doing so:

Auch wenn ich mit guten Bekannten zusammen gewesen war und verliess sie, machte ich es mir . . . zum Vorwurf, sie im Stich gelassen zu haben. Sie sitzen vielleicht noch beieinander und denken: Eben sass er noch bei uns. Warum hinterliess er uns gar nichts? Es ist ja, als ob er nicht dagewesen wäre. Oder auch umgekehrt . . . kommt es ihnen so vor, als wären sie selber plötzlich gestorben und bereits von mir vergessen. Es hätte auch kaum etwas genützt, wenn ich zurück gegangen wäre, um ihnen . . . zu sagen, dass sie sich irrten und dass ich ernsthafter versuchte, mich in sie hineinzudenken, als sie in mich. (p. 27)

All human relationships are beset by the inescapable superficiality of role-playing, sometimes conscious, sometimes unconscious, but always present to give a quality of unreality to the relationships and to social behaviour in general. As an outsider in the past, the narrator was aware of this unreality, and this alone caused his survival of the catastrophe:

. . . ich selber pflegte mich nicht mit dem Namen anzureden, den die anderen gebrauchten, wenn sie etwas von mir wollten. Und noch weniger konnte ich wissen, dass ich einzig der Tatsache mein Leben verdanke, so locker mit meinem Namen und meinem Bild verbunden zu sein, dass sie mich nicht nachzuziehen vermochten, als sie zugrunde gingen. (pp. 28-29)

The looseness of the narrator's connexion with his social role can be seen during the dinner party in his dream, where he is the only participant aware of the unreality of the behaviour which they play-acted:
als wären wir Kinder gewesen, die sich den Anschein gaben, Erwachsene zu sein. Wir wären echter gewesen, wenn wir irgendwo mit Puppen oder Versteck gespielt hätten. Stattdessen hatten wir es uns in den Kopf gesetzt, Erwachsene zu spielen und nahmen die Rollen sehr wichtig. Damit man uns glaubte, übertrieben wir das, was uns an dem Benehmen Erwachsener typisch zu sein schien. (p. 34)

The narrator's socio-cultural and personal aloneness in the past had apparently caused a certain loneliness, since he had sought for the idealized figure of one with whom he could communicate in a state of complete intimacy:


The search was of course futile because the other person was not necessarily any more than a non-existent ideal; the ontological argument by which the external existence of the other is proved by the existence in the thinker's mind of a mental notion of the other is unsound, because one can conceive in one's mind notions of all kinds of beings without this imposing any constraint on the outer world.

The narrator's personal aloneness thus persisted, but it was not absolutely complete and an important qualification must be made concerning it, because we are told that there was always someone there to lead him if he was willing to be led: "Immer war jemand da, der mich führte, und dann war es der rechte Weg" (p. 76). He was guided by the figures of the father, the brother, the "Meister," the teacher, and the ancestor or judge. It is
difficult to say, within the context of Nekyia, to what extent these are internalized, idealized figures, and to what extent they exist in the external world; the distinction between inner and external worlds is in fact confused in Nekyia. All that can be said is that the father is not the biological father, the brother not the biological brother, etc. The titles in fact are somewhat arbitrary, but they are very real figures in that they exerted a profound influence on the narrator's life.

In the light of Nossack's autobiographical essays, however, they seem to be the redeeming figures in the spiritual world of literature who accompanied Nossack along "der Weg nach draussen." For example in the "Bekenntnis zu Barlach" Barlach is acknowledged by Nossack as his spiritual father, and in "Warum ich nicht wie Hermann Broch schreibe" Strindberg is described as his teacher. As with the great exemplary figures in literature who existed in a spiritual realm outside society and history, so too there is associated with the symbolic figures in Nekyia a distinct element of aloneness because they exist outside the socio-cultural reality and its community of belief. The teacher, for example, through his very existence undermines the security of the socio-cultural reality: "Vor seinem klaren durchdringenden Blick hielten die meisten Dinge, derer man ganz sicher zu sein glaubte, nicht stand. Sie verschwanden einfach und deshalb war zunächst eine eiskalte Leere um ihn" (p. 77).

As for the younger brother, his parents had died whilst he was still a baby and he was raised by relatives. His unhappy experience of prying into his personal life in the foster home is given as the reason for his instability and transient life (pp. 82-83).
He became a scoffer concerning the family unit of human existence, and his inability to conform led to his being thrown out of the home and left to fend for himself in a hostile world. At Christmas he had been invited to church with his foster mother and brothers and sisters; but afterwards, when the others went to make merry at home, he was excluded by the foster mother and left alone again: "Ich nahm auch das Wort Mutter undwarf es hin und trat mit den Flüssenauf, dass es mir kllrend für immer zersprang" (pp. 122-23).

In Nekyia an omen foretells the catastrophe and signifies the breakthrough of the other realm of reality and time. Two gigantic, mysterious birds circle the clock-tower of the town hall and then disappear in the direction whence they had come. The occurrence shatters the socio-cultural unity of the prevailing world view and in particular the premises on which its science had been founded, because people are unable to reach a consensus about the objective appearance of the birds. No two reports are the same. In addition it takes place outside of public, objective time:

Es stand nicht einmal fest, wie lange das Ganze gedauert hatte. Alle meinten, eine Ewigkeit den Atem angehalten zu haben, doch in Wirklichkeit war die Uhr kaum vorgerückt. Es fehlte, wenn man nachrechnete, auch nicht eine einzige Minute, weder in der Tageseinteilung der einzelnen Menschen, noch im Fahrplan der Verkehrsmittel. (p. 43)

The other reality always leads to the aloneness of the individual, since there is by definition no common ground for communication or agreement about it. Thus despite the busy traffic around him at the time of the birds' appearance the narrator reports: "Plötzlich aber war das alles nicht mehr. Man fühlte sich ganz allein auf der Welt" (p. 44).
The significance of the birds' threat to the socio-cultural unity is elaborated on as follows:

Entweder diese . . . Vögel waren wirklich da, und . . . das würde bedeuten dass Dinge möglich sind, die unseres Wissens nicht möglich sein dürften. Mit anderen Worten: Es würde sich dann nicht um Dinge handeln, über die wir lediglich jetzt noch nicht klar sehen, die wir aber zweifellos bei fortschreitender Wissenschaft morgen oder übermorgen erforscht haben werden, sondern um Unbekanntes, das überhaupt niemals zur Berechnung stand noch stehen wird. Und wie diese Vögel kann es jederzeit über unser Dasein hereinbrechen, uns aber bleibt nur übrig zuzugeben, dass unser Wissen gleich Null und völlig unnütz ist. Oder aber: Diese Vögel waren gar nicht da, alle Menschen aber bildeten sich ein, sie gesehen zu haben. In der Wirkung kommt es beinahe auf das gleiche hinaus . . . Es würde nämlich bedeuten, dass wir uns weder auf uns selbst noch auf das, was uns umgibt, ich meine auf das, was wir mit der Kraft unseres Verständes erschaffen und zu beherrschen glauben, verlassen dürfen . . . (pp. 60-61)

The human mind is not able to comprehend either its own reality or that of the world about it; both are threatening and thus man is not only socio-culturally alone, but alone in the universe in the absolute spiritual sense: there is nothing to which he can cling, not even the perceptions of his own mind.

The omen foretells in particular the end of the "friend," an aspect of the narrator's mind who symbolizes rationality and intellectual clarity which repress fear of the unknown and deny the other realm of being:

... er lebte ... wie in einer sehr zerbrechlichen, gläsernen Hülle. Immer war alles hell und klar und ordentlich. Aber das Licht schien nicht ausser, und daher glaubten alle, die innerhalb lebten, wenn sie an die Hülle stiessen, dass es kein Ausserhalb gäbe, und freuten sich, die Welt überblicken zu können. (p. 66)

The friend has built a deceptively secure home in the world from which the other realm has been banished. He is at home in the conventional social world of certainty about what is real
and unreal, and is in fact the representative of society, from which he is unable to cut himself off: "Wieviel Herdeninstinkt doch in mir ist" (p. 99). As an aspect of the narrator's self he is an inimical, limiting factor because his world of clarity excludes the darkness and mystery of real reality.

With the death of the friend the narrator loses all rational orientation in place and time:


Unconsciousness conveniently rescues the narrator from complete aloneness in another, timeless realm of existence which is disorganized and frightening but ultimate and in this sense desirable. The problem which now arises, and which makes Nekyia such a perplexing work, is that of reconciling the existence of this other dimension of being with the profoundly felt need for a new socio-cultural relatedness in the historical world. Since the appearance of the birds and the death of the "friend" the narrator is by implication freed from the presumptious rationality which had corrupted the past, but he has been plunged into another dimension of existence from which no obvious path leads back or forward or out into the socio-historical world where the community
of the future can alone be realized. Nossack is faced with a dilemma, and the devices he employs to deal with it, starting with the very convenient unconsciousness, are not convincing.

In the last third of the work the narrator journeys through lonely and desolate regions to his "real" mother in a prelude to a new beginning: "es war immer wie vor Tagesanbruch" (p. 123). He recognizes his mother, who retells the Clytemnestra, Agamemnon, and Orestes myth in a new version from the mother's point of view, which shows the mother was justified in her act and her husband in the wrong because he reduced her to a means to an end. The narrator now undergoes a spiritual regeneration. He is reconciled with his mother and the maternal bond is restored (though it is not clear what this really signifies, just as the meaning of the "Mutterfeindschaft" is obscure) and he is made aware of the grief of existence which had been denied in the past.

Nekyia is the only work in which the mother figure is seen in a favourable light. Admittedly the contemptible mothers in other works, in which it is necessary to sever the maternal bond, are biological mothers, whereas the mother in Nekyia is a spiritual or metaphysical reality. But it is still difficult to see what such a mother figure could represent other than a benevolent scheme of things in reality. And the mysterious birds, the death of the "friend," and the fall of the narrator into a timeless, bewildering dimension of being had established that there is no such comforting scheme of things which assures man of orientation in the world.
The apparent theoretical intention of this part of the work has been discussed by Friedhelm F. Rickert. Through the archetypal and mythical happening the narrator discovers eternal truths: that the personal is interconnected with the mythical, the present with the past, and that the myth gives a timeless background and superhistorical meaning to historical events. He comes to see his personal fate as the repetition of a mythical, archetypal happening. Thus, just when he thought he was lost, he is saved, because he becomes aware of a transcendence of his personal historical fate in superhistorical, mythical, eternal time, and through this he finds himself again.

But all this conveniently overlooks the central issue. What is necessary is not so much to explain the historical reality of the war in terms of a timeless, superhistorical reality, but to find a way back into the historical reality, the world of socio-cultural relatedness, from an entirely different dimension of existence altogether. It is impossible to see how the mythical happening does this.

Indeed the mythical happening does not even explain in any way the historical reality of 1939-45. Not just the relation of the myth to the historical reality, but also the narrator's acknowledgment of guilt for the past and for the war through his denial of the mother and the hope of a new community in the future all appear confused, questionable, or self-contradictory. The correlations between the mythical happening and the Second World War are not clear except in the superficial sense that both entailed the destruction and alienation of men. But this throws
no light on the causes of the conflict. War existed prior to the Clytemnestra and Agamemnon incident; the result of war, not the causes, is illustrated by the myth; the return to the mother is a return to a war situation and its aftermath. Consequently neither the myth nor the narrator's confession of guilt in denying the mother can do anything to avert war in the future or make possible a better future community.

The past is not understood in Nekyia and indeed cannot be understood because the appearance of the birds and the death of rationality with the "friend" illustrated the inability of the human mind to recognize reality. Only a greater or lesser degree of confusion can result, as is indicated by the narrator himself:

"... wie dürfte ich nach dem, was geschehen war und in der Lage, in der ich mich befand, behaupten, dass ich Über die rechte Urteilskraft verfügten? Vielleicht dachte ich noch so, wie ich es von gestern her gewohnt war, und nicht so, wie es dem gegenwärtigen Zustand angemessen war. (p. 15)

And after the death of the "friend," the symbol of rationality, the narrator is forcibly uprooted from his past, from the socio-cultural reality, and from the entire public time dimension. Significantly he does not comprehend and decide to leave his past. Subsequently in the narration of the myth no explanation is given of the events of the twentieth century and the causes of the war in political, economical, and sociological terms, that is, in terms of the socio-historical world to which the narrator must return before a better socio-cultural order can emerge.

Yet Nekyia closes with a hopeful vision of precisely such a better human community. There is the happy vision of the birth of a child who will bring a new future and thereby create a past also.
This has to be earned by refusing to relapse into the former way of life and by waiting for the new in silence and suffering: "Ach, lange noch werden wir wachen und schweigen müssen, bis wir uns das verdienen" (p. 154). Nevertheless the vision of the child's birth indicates that the present situation is meant to be only a transitional stage, not a final, hopeless situation. Until then the narrator resolves to stand in silence, with his back to the city of the past, and watch that no-one returns there and thus regresses to the false ways of the past; if he is successful in this task, he will come to be known as "der Hirte" (p. 152). The narrator suspects that someone will try to return to the past and be in this way the instigator of new suffering. But this pessimistic thought is largely dispelled by the joyous vision (pp. 153-54) of the child's birth and the new future which people accept rather than hankering after the past. A choir of the symbolic figures of life who are always around men, if they know how to perceive them, raises a song of praise, while the hills and trees move and nod in time to the music.

A great deal of optimism is apparent here about a new socio-cultural order which will overcome man's aloneness, but it seems comical and unconvincing. There exists considerable doubt about the extent to which the new socio-cultural order implied in the vision (though in the vaguest of terms) is realizable. Watching and waiting in silence may be an appropriate stance in many departments of life, but hardly in the creation of new societies. Indeed it is stressed that the new socio-cultural order is not to be created, but simply given, as a reward for the silent watching
and waiting, without any other human effort. The earlier theme of the narrator's being uprooted from time, history, and society, and his being plunged into a bewildering but absolute realm outside of these, is not only not reconciled with the better future community, but left completely ignored; no attempt is made to find a path from the one to the other. The idea of the new community, though it reflects a very real need of the narrator, is a purely abstract concept, devoid of any real substance, and this explains the vague and unconvincing manner in which it is presented.

It is also unclear by what process the narrator's fellow survivors, the sleeping lumps of clay, will become awakened to the task of "wachen und schweigen," and eventually become the model citizens of a better world. They will certainly be awakened, but to quite a different task. Nossack's unfounded optimism at the end of Nekyia will soon give way to disillusionment when it emerges that the mass of people are not interested in a radical rejection of the past and in fundamental change. The traumatic upheavals of the time will soon be forgotten in the mad rush as people rebuild the world according to the invalidated norms of the past and excel themselves in the creation of the "Wirtschaftswundergesellschaft."

The narrator's resolve to prevent people from returning to the city of the past will prove futile, as in fact it had been from the start. The masses will flood back into the city and recreate a socio-cultural unity of a sort, but it will be one in which the narrator has no part. The reconstructed city of modern
civilization will still be for him, like the city of the past, only an empty stage-set, a facade. Henceforth Nossack will not speak, as in Der Untergang and Nekyia, on behalf of others, as their representative or shepherd, but for himself alone. Furthermore, having been essentially alone in the past, and having been plunged by the catastrophe into a state of absolute aloneness in a realm outside of time and conventional reality, which he has successfully withstood, he has been well trained in living without personal and socio-cultural relatedness and in the braving of aloneness:

Ich selber brauche diese Menschen nicht. Nachdem ich allein durch die Stadt gegangen und wiedergekommen bin, weiss ich, dass ich ganz gut auf einer verödeten Erde leben kann, ohne an dem Alleinsein zugrunde zu gehen. . . . Aber diese Leute um mich her werden mich höchstens stören . . . (p. 48)
An awareness of the path which post-war German society would take first appears in "Klonz" in Interview mit dem Tode, which appeared one year after Nekyia in 1948. At the time of its appearance the aftermath of the war was still very much in evidence, and the ten component stories, which include and often intermingle "factual" reports, "fictitious" and even "surrealistic" and "magical" happenings, and interpretations and elaborations of old myths, have the common background of the destruction of a city and civilization. Old values and beliefs should not be resurrected because they belong to an invalidated and justly destroyed socio-cultural unity:

... vor allem müssen wir uns der grossen Worte hüten. Ich meine, vor den Worten, die einmal einen grossen Klang hatten. Viele gebrauchen sie noch ... Aber es ist nur eine Erinnerung in ihrem Ohr. Indem sie sie weitergeben, versuchen sie, sich selber daran aufrecht zu halten. Wehe ihnen, wenn sie merken, dass es nur ein Rückschauen in eine verlorene Vergangenheit ist. Und wehe uns, wenn wir uns danach richten wollten. 7

Yet Nossack has nothing to put in place of the destroyed community of belief. The traumatic destruction of the image of the world and of man leads to an acute socio-cultural and spiritual aloneness. The catastrophe has destroyed all the certainties of man's personal existence along with the certainties of the external existence about him; his condition is one of basic uncertainty: "hier ist nichts so greifbar und wirklich, dass einer sagen könnte: so ist es! Oder: so wollen sie es! Vor allem sind diese Wesen ihrer selbst nicht sicher ... Keiner würde von sich sagen: Das bin ich, und damit erledigt. Wir
wissen, dass es noch viele Möglichkeiten und Gefahren gibt, die uns zu etwas ganz anderem machen können, als wir jetzt zu sein scheinen" (p. 7, p. 96).

Again there are both negative and positive aspects to the socio-cultural and spiritual aloneness. There is a general disorientation and anxiety, and frequently a longing for these to be overcome. Yet at the same time there is the awareness that man has been liberated from the social and cultural falsity of the past, that the primacy of self has been reinstated, and that man is experiencing an ultimate kind of reality which previously had been hidden behind conventional reality.

This other non-ordinary, at times magical reality is related to the reality of the dream, the fairy-tale, and childhood existence. Man in general, however, has lost the innocence of perception which children have of the magical quality of existence. The Martian spy in "Bericht eines fremden Wesens Über die Menschen" reports that: "diesen Wesen ist die Fähigkeit des glaubigen Staunens versagt" (p. 7), but he points out that they once possessed it, as can be seen from the ruins of their ancient works. The ability of believing wonder has been traded for clarity and rationality, which dispel fear of the unknown and make man feel secure in the world but also blind him to the magic and mystery of reality. The ruins of the ancient works to which the Martian refers would therefore certainly include fairy-tales, and in "Das Märchenbuch" Nossack says that of all his lost books the one he misses most is a collection of Indian folk tales. He refers in particular to the story of the Indian warrior who alone survived the destruction of his village and all its inhabitants. He sits
down at the edge of the sea, sighs, and asks himself: "Was soll ich nun machen? Soll ich Orion werden?" (p. 140). His situation is seen by Nossack as representative of the situation of the lonely man of the time, but beyond this of the man who accepts his aloneness, and therefore in a sense overcomes it.

The mixture of mystery and bewilderment, socio-cultural and spiritual aloneness, and the shattering aloneness which arises from the deaths of loved ones in the blazing inferno of the bombing raids is particularly striking in "Dorothea." Mathes, only nineteen years old, has lost all his relatives; his parents, his sister, and his grandmother all perished. He comes across a young woman whom he looks after, and this is good for him, because it gives some purpose to his existence. But at night he cannot at first tell her about his loss and grief so that she can help him bear it: his words are choked by sobs. And when finally he is able to tell her, it is doubtful whether words are able to convey the enormity of what happened, or whether such grief can be reduced by being shared with another. Everyone, it seems, is alone with his own fear and grief. The narrator in Nekyia had told us that despite the honesty of his account there were still things too terrible for him to relate. In "Dorothea" it seems that a primeval, animal-like scream is the only honest response to the horror and anxiety of the human condition, though it is too unsettling to emit it:

Auch in uns ist dieser Schrei. Es ist sehr schwer, ihn immer wieder hinabzuwürgen. Wenn wir ihn hinausliessen, würde es nur den Erfolg haben, dass die andern Menschen sagten: Nun wollen wir auch schreien. Das wäre das Ende. Und weil wir das wissen, halten wir jedem schnell die Hand vor den Mund und versuchen ihn abzulenken. (p. 21)
Similarly in "Klonz" there is the necessity of putting on a brave front to hide real fears, even when all around people are dying, because of the instinctual realization that to show fear would release a general paroxysm of fear in others (p. 172).

"Dorothea" illustrates the socio-cultural and spiritual aloneness of man lost in the uncertain realm revealed by the catastrophe, a realm the narrator had experienced before in dreams, and now, after the catastrophe, in waking life, lost without anyone to save him or point the way. As in Der Untergang and Nekyia the time-place continuum and its limitations has apparently been shattered, though the uncertainty is so great that even this is uncertain:

"Dorothea" illustrates the shattered borders by mysteriously linking several seemingly separate threads: Dorothea and her experience with Mathes, Dorothea's inexplicable resemblance to a Carl Hofer portrait, the narrator's uncanny links with Dorothea and Mathes, and an early Nossack poem. Something seems to link all these together, but nothing certain can be established; the narrator can only hypothesise that at times of great upheavals people's thoughts become autonomous and cross over the shattered barriers of time and place, and there mix and interact together. But this is only hypothesis, a product of reason, and reason must be renounced in favour of a child-like believing wonder which
accepts inexplicable metaphysical realities behind visible and tangible things:

Es ist nicht gut, Dinge erklären zu wollen, die sich mit dem Verstande nicht erklären lassen. Es ist aber ebenso falsch, ihre Wirklichkeit nur deshalb zu verneinen, weil sie sich mit dem Verstande nicht erklären lassen. Denn da sie eine Wirkung haben und Spuren hinterlassen, müssen sie auch eine Wirklichkeit haben. Am besten ist, man lässt diese Dinge mit schweigendem Staunen bestehen. (p. 59)

Nossack himself, however, is unable to rest content with his self-recommended acceptance of ultimate uncertainty: "Dorothea" also contains the hope that one day there will be a transcendental frame of reference--symbolized by the idea of a future God--by which all this mystery will be understood. No chorals arise, as in past ages, from the ruins and wing their way to God; and when the narrator asks: "Ist niemand mehr da, zu dem wir schreien könnten?" (p. 12), it is clear that the answer is no. But sometime in the future, when the present has been mastered, there may be a new God, a new transcendental frame of reference. After hearing the Dorothea story the narrator's companion comments: "Eines Tages, nicht heute, werden wir über all dies mit Gott reden müssen. Aber nicht jetzt, es ist noch zu früh dafür. Wir müssen es erst überstehen" (p. 25). The narrator agrees:

Es wird nichts Übrig bleiben, wir werden eines Tages über all dies mit Gott sprechen müssen.
Aber nicht heute. Heute müssen wir versuchen, noch einmal ohne Gott einzuschlafen.
Und morgen ist es hoffentlich nicht zu spät dazu. (p. 61)

The above remarks at the end of "Dorothea" are comparable to the hopes at the end of Nekyia for a new socio-cultural order in the future and are equally vague and questionable. In both there is an understandable human wish for a new orientation to overcome
uncertainty, but it is an illogical wish because reality has been shown to be inexplicable and incalculable and vastly superior to any provisional orientation in it. The orientation of an ultimate standpoint from which reality can be understood is impossible.

In "Klonz" Nossack turns away from the hopeful visions of a better socio-cultural future, contained in *Nekyia* and to a lesser and still vaguer extent in "Dorothea," and shows an anticipatory awareness of the path that actual social and economic developments will take. In the sphere of the hard facts of day-to-day living Nossack's encounter with Klonz destroys entirely the hopeful if insubstantial vision of a better community at the end of *Nekyia* and the aspirations which are reflected in "Klonz" itself:


The above is of course an idealized vision, a distortion and not a factual description of the past. From *Der Untergang* we know that the past was a hated past, and from *Nekyia* that the "mother" figure had been denied, and that the narrator had searched in vain for a real friend. A more accurate picture of the past is given only a few pages later: "In einem Krieg geboren, im anderen Krieg verbraucht, und dazwischen nur eine abgehetzte Pause, was soll uns noch an dieses Leben fesseln" (p. 173).

But the essential point is that Nossack and his fellows are disappointed in their attempt to create the future according to their idealized vision (p. 170). The utopia will not be realized.
In Der Untergang and even more so in Nekyia, despite assertions that he was speaking as a representative, describing an event which had affected people in the same way, it was obvious that Nossack was writing about highly personal experiences. His reaction to the catastrophe is not typical but rather highly individual. The Martian spy reports "dass all ihre Gewohnheiten ... in Trümmern liegen. Doch das vermögen sie nicht einzusehen" (p. 8). Nossack's insight that the old world no longer exists is not shared, and consequently the majority feel no need to change their personal or social existence. It is not that they refuse to live by what they have recognized as right, but that they have not shared--be it from weakness, fear, or inability--the same insight as Nossack, and thus it is only consistent that they live as if nothing has altered and continue to pursue security and material riches. But for Nossack their way of life is phantasmagorical because it does not relate to his awareness of the other reality. His alienation from them is absolute because the gulf between those who live in the old world and those with an insight into the new situation and the other reality is unbridgeable.

Peter Prochnik has correctly written about Nossack's disillusionment with socio-economic developments and the mindless materialism of his contemporaries:

But the real question at issue is whether it would have been possible to realize Nossack's insubstantial utopian vision of a new world. As we have seen, this would not appear to be the case. The ideal itself is so insubstantial that discussion of it is impossible. But it is difficult to see how the social masses, whom Nossack had already condemned both before and after the war as a mindless, materialistic herd, could suddenly become model citizens of a new society. Furthermore, *Nekyia* showed how no path leads forward to a socio-cultural or spiritual reorientation, since the catastrophe plunged man into a non-ordinary and ultimate reality outside of society and socio-historical time. In this other reality man is disoriented and alone, but he is at least authentic in that he has been liberated from all reassuring but essentially self-deceiving notions that a permanent orientation within reality is possible, no matter how much he subjectively feels the need for such an orientation.

In actuality the question of to what extent Nossack's utopian socio-cultural aspirations are realizable does not arise because it emerges that Klonz, a character in Nossack's pre-war play *Die Hauptprobe* and a completely contemptible "Spiessbürger," had not perished in the catastrophe, as Nossack had hoped, but had survived and is now flourishing more than ever before:

Es muss Wesen geben, die bei dem Untergang nicht nur nicht untergingen, sondern ihn Überlebten, als wäre es nichts, und sogar an Gewichtigkeit zugenommen haben. Und gerade solche Wesen, die schon vorher sehr schwer zu ertragen waren. . . . Dass . . . nur diese Wesen . . . übrigblieben und mit ihrer Unzerstörbarkeit prahlen, das ist entsetzlicher als der Untergang der Welt. (pp. 170-71)

The dream of a better world is extinguished: even if it were realizable it is not going to become reality because the Klonz
type constitutes the vast majority of people, who continue to pursue materialism and security. Nossack cannot change this world, which will continue to be an alien environment for him.

In future Nossack can only strive to maintain his own inner, spiritual existence and his awareness of the other reality, living within but not as a part of the contemptible world of a herd-like social existence. He will accept his aloneness because he has no points of contact with the majority Klönz type. The story shows how completely different and irreconcilable the two worlds are and how communication between them is impossible. The Klönz type lacks completely the spiritual and metaphysical dimension of Nossack. They exist only on the surface level of life, the level of material and biological needs, which is insufficient for Nossack. Furthermore they hate and seek to destroy the spiritual and metaphysical existence of Nossack. Nossack knows that man does not live by the spirit alone, but Klönz's existence is entirely devoid of spirit and therefore of value. Nossack does not deny what is commonly regarded as "reality"; he only wonders how some people "es fertigbringen, nur auf der Seite der Tatsachen zu leben, als gäbe es nichts anderes" (p. 192). He sees the practical necessities of life only as a means to the end of spiritual existence, whereas for Klönz the practical aspect of life is an end in itself. Such people are less than men and for Nossack the worst thing of all is "dass die Karikatur des Menschen dies Nichts mit Betriebsamkeit erfüllt; dass sich ein gefrässiges Zerrbild aufbläht und alles Echte erstickt; dass der Spiessbürger ewiger ist als der Mensch. Wie soll man das ertragen?" (p. 193).
The temptation of oblivion beckons, but suicide is rejected because the narrator, despite his aloneness, does have a "Gegenüber." This time it is not a future being created by an act of will, as in Nekyia, but a real human being (Kleist) who 150 years previously had killed himself in the happy knowledge that never again would he have to deal with Klonz. Kleist is accused of an hour of weakness and of having put others in danger for his own happiness. Nossack resolves not to do the same to the person who lives 150 years after him and who looks back and asks how people endured at that time: "Ich stehe in der Mitte zwischen dem, der vor mir war, und dem, der nach mir kommt" (p. 178). This one individual in the future is also a "Gegenüber" to whom Nossack feels he has a duty to continue to live, even if it means living the isolated life of an outsider: "Um der Verführung dieses Glücks zu entgehen, musste ich das Leben eines Ausgestossenen führen. . . . Darüber ward ich weiter an den Rand des Daseins gedrängt" (p. 177).

There is a second reason why suicide is not committed, even though society is seen as irredeemably hostile. There is in man's mind the idea that his awareness of the other realm of reality is a positive element and that somehow a meaningful personal existence is possible if it is somehow related to this other reality. Around him Nossack sees people looking at the ruins and listening "angespannt ins Nichts," as if asking themselves the question: "Irgendwie muss es doch gehen?" (p. 170). And in winter there is the sight of the snow-covered ruins: "Es ist zwar furchtbar, doch immerhin . . ." (p. 170). Then there is his recollection of having once stood before a plant and having felt that he had almost
understood the duality of existence: the visible, conventional reality of the growth above the ground and the invisible but equally real growth below; he now wonders "ob hier vielleicht ein Weg ist" (p. 199). Nossack affirms that such a duality runs through all of existence; it is very hard to define in words, but seems to be the duality between the material and the spiritual and metaphysical worlds:

On the other side, in the greater spiritual and metaphysical world, things are better; there exists there the ideal of a worthy human existence; it is not a society, because it is specifically stated that it exists beyond the social order, but it is a place of honest and tolerant relationships between individuals who have the freedom to be individuals:
sich gelten und freuen sich, dass das Verschiedene sich gleicht. (pp. 182-83)

This social ideal finds no counterpart in the materialism and competitiveness of post-war society. The narrator resolves to live on alone in an alien and worthless social environment while preserving an awareness of the other, supremely valuable realm of existence; this is characteristic of all Nossack's later work. In contrast to the ending of Nekyia, there is in "Klonz" and subsequent works no substantial hope for a better society in the future. There is instead the realization—which in fact had always been there before—that man is not a social being and that society is controlled by the Klonz type; the stress is now on how to preserve the spiritual existence of the individual in an uncompromisingly and irredeemably hostile society.
Footnotes


2 Nekyia: Bericht eines Überlebenden (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1961), p. 22. Subsequent references to this work will be given in the text.


7 "Klonz," Interview mit dem Tode (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1966), p. 198. Subsequent references to the stories in this collection will be given in the text.

The alienation of the authentic individual from society is a central theme in Nossack's essays and provides the theoretical basis of the portrayal of society and the individual's life in it in the stories and novels. Written since the Second World War, the essays must be seen against the background of the destruction of Hamburg, which for Nossack was a confirmation that the destroyed social order was false and obscured another more ultimate dimension of reality and time. The destroyed order had been a restorative facade since the end of the First World War, though even before this Nossack had felt the splendid life-style of the Wilhelmine middle classes to be a kind of unreal play-acting. For Nossack, then, there is no longer a generally accepted socio-cultural framework to enable the easy encounter of individuals on common ground and thus facilitate the development of deep relationships between them. But significantly the sense of the unreality or superficial reality of society dates from before 1914. Consequently socio-cultural aloneness cannot be attributed solely to the two World Wars.

It is only appropriate to ask—especially in view of the confused groping toward a new socio-cultural unity in Nekyia—if, according to Nossack's ideas, there ever was or ever could be a socio-cultural order which could be embraced by individuals. In other words is the socio-cultural aloneness of the individual a
twentieth century phenomenon or an abiding part of the human condition? The answer can be found in the definitions which Nossack gives of society on the one hand and the individual human being on the other. It emerges repeatedly that man cannot be defined sociologically or ideologically as a member of society or even as a known quantity. Man is "eine inkommensurable Größe . . . die sich für die Statistik nicht verwenden lässt."¹ He can be defined only as "ein Wesen . . . dem die einzigartige Gabe verliehen ist, Zwiesprache mit sich selber zu halten" ("Der Mensch in der heutigen Literatur," Die schwache Position der Literatur, p. 62). The emphasis is on the monologic quality of human existence, on self-encounter, and on the "Auseinandersetzung" of each man with his own situation. Furthermore the exclamation in Der Untergang that: "Wir haben keine Vergangenheit mehr. . . . Wir sind gegenwärtig geworden. Wir haben uns aus der Zeit gelöst"² is elaborated upon in the essays: a true person lives, inwardly, an extra-historical existence in a spiritual time. This is not making a virtue of necessity but recognizing what is a necessary virtue of human authenticity.

If man is associated by Nossack with individuality and "Gegenwärtigkeit," society is characterized by the attributes "mass" and "past." Thus the two are irreconcilable and socio-cultural alienation is an intrinsic part of the human condition, rather than a twentieth century phenomenon. At most the conflict between individual and society is particularly acute in the twentieth century because modern industrial society is more obviously a "mass" society than was the case in the pre-industrial
era. But like all societies it is an artificial construct, based implicitly or explicitly on certain events, decisions, theories, or assumptions which are rooted in past experience. By contrast the experience and problems of the individual are present (not sociologically or historically conditioned) and uniquely individual. Society must ignore or suppress them because they threaten the conditions of its existence.

Nossack's criticism of society is fundamental and therefore he is not concerned with the more specific but superficial form of "social criticism" which seeks to abolish particular social problems. In the essay "Ist unsere Literatur arbeiterfremd?" Nossack argues that in Western Europe at least the classless society has more or less been achieved and that the exploitation of one class by another is a thing of the past; the division of society into hostile camps of employers and workers, capitalists and socialists is outdated because both employers and employees are the unfree and exploited functionaries of a vast, impersonal apparatus:

Der Unternehmer, der sich frei nennt, ist weder frei noch ist er der wirkliche Arbeitgeber. Er ist, ohne sich dessen bewusst zu sein, Funktionär und damit selber Arbeitnehmer. Der eigentliche Arbeitgeber ist ein Abstraktum: der Staat, die Wirtschaft, die Konjunktur, das Unternehmen . . .

The conflict between individual and society must have existed in all periods, only in the twentieth century it is more acute due to the enormous industrial and technical progress of the period and the accompanying developments in social organization. Historically these developments were unavoidable; but what troubles Nossack is the way all institutions claim an absolute value and
thereby devalue the individual:

Der Künstler bestreitet Wert und Notwendigkeit der Wissenschaft ebenso wenig wie den von Staat, Gesellschaftsordnung, Moral, Ideologie und Religion. Für ihn sind das alles Phänomene des menschlichen Daseins... was er bestreitet ist die tödliche Neigung zum Absolutheitsanspruch aller Institutionen. ("Die schwache Position der Literatur," Die schwache Position der Literatur, p. 17)

Nossack's hostility is therefore directed not at a particular social system but at an insidious tendency inherent in all systems: "Er bekämpft nicht ein bestimmtes System und nicht die soziale Gemeinschaft an sich, sondern die absolute Systematisierung, die aus ihm einen auswechselbaren Gebrauchsgegenstand machen will" ("Der Mensch in der heutigen Literatur," Die schwache Position der Literatur, p. 80). For Nossack the most urgent of today's tasks is to preserve the individual in face of the socialization and collectivization of all areas of life. Both Nossack and his main characters are not so much rebels as outsiders who do not wish to let themselves be used and consumed as "social quotients." They are not active protestors because experience has taught Nossack to distrust these:

... wer protestiert, will von unten nach oben, er will also dasselbe wie das, wogegen er protestiert. Für uns aber gibt es kein Unten und Oben, für uns gibt es nur ein Ausserhalb. Revolutionen können uns nichts nützen. 4

As the world approaches two hundred years of revolutions, Nossack knows that revolutions undertaken in the name of liberty and justice have frequently brought only terror and tyranny; he knows that political leaders do not love men, that with their craving for power and their recognition only of relationships based on power, they will inevitably make instruments of men.
Given this basic futility of revolutions, Nossack's characters are outsiders who reject all ideologies and defend the freedom of the human spirit, in contrast to the mass of their contemporaries who are again the slaves of their institutions.

Although rebellion is discounted, these intellectual partisans are at least temporarily involved in some form of positive action on those occasions when the individual man is threatened. In "Wir Intellektuelle" Nossack writes: "Wir sind niemals an Staat, Gesellschaftsordnung, Partei um ihrer selbst willen engagiert, sondern nur mittelbar durch unser Engagement an den Menschen, der in diesem Staat oder in dieser Gesellschaftsordnung zu leben hat." But being the representatives of spirit they must by definition, in Nossack's own personal ideology, lack any egotistical interest in "Macht, Erfolg und Einfluss"; they never play a leading role and withdraw as soon as the goal is attained and the movement crystallizes into a party.

The intellectual can thus never have any lasting influence on political and social organization, and in fact withdraws from a successful party at precisely the point when his presence in it would seem to be all the more necessary, leaving society to be ruled by inhuman ideologists and power-seekers. Significantly there is nowhere in Nossack's work any awareness that concerted but informed and responsible political action might result in a society based on a constitution which would not impose a single doctrinaire view of life, but which would serve as the basis of a society of people of fundamentally differing opinions and lifestyles and which, with the maximum possible provisions for human
and institutional change, would allow all to develop their potentialities to the fullest extent possible; a constitution which, though it originated in the past, would be as far as possible related to the present and open to the future. Since Nossack sees society as a necessary phenomenon of human existence, such an endeavour to achieve the best possible society would be worthwhile. Its absence in Nossack's work can only be explained in terms of his awareness of a greater and more valuable dimension of reality beyond the historical and social world with which it cannot be reconciled. His essays are in fact full of denigrations of the historical and social world.

This deeply ingrained apolitical streak in Nossack marks him off from the Sartrian brand of modern existentialism, though Nossack and Sartre do have much in common. Both are concerned with individual human existence which cannot be encompassed in a system and both see man as a free, undetermined consciousness with unlimited potential. Central to the philosophy of both is a view of the human consciousness caught in an alien because ultimately incomprehensible world (though with Nossack there is no preoccupation with the question why the individual or for that matter anything exists and why there is not just nothingness). For both, God is dead and thus there can be no divine or transcendental system of values. And for neither can there be a preordained system of secular morality. For both Sartre and Nossack existence precedes essence (though Nossack does not use Sartre's philosophical terminology) in that man is not created to serve some definite purpose and exists before he can be defined. And with regard to
man's possibilities both believe that man has complete freedom of choice—an anti-materialist and anti-determinist doctrine fundamental to existentialism. In the work of both writers it is apparent, however, that most men, instead of assuming their freedom and individuality, tend to conceal their situation from themselves by accepting conventional social values as absolute; in Sartre's works they wallow in a wilful unconsciousness or semi-consciousness which he calls "la mauvaise foi." For both Sartre and Nossack there is often a deliberate limitation of other people's freedom and autonomy: we seek confirmation of ourselves by urging others into certain roles so that we can use them as stable reflectors of ourselves. The authentic individual must avoid this and exercise his freedom in such a way that he respects not only his own potentialities and individuality, but those of others too. And finally both Sartre and Nossack realize the extent of men's alienation from freedom, individuality, and dignity amid the depersonalization and growing mechanization of modern society. Whereas Nossack sees the average man as a social quotient, it is apparent in Sartre's work that many men apprehend themselves as inter-changeable with any of their neighbours and in this sense lose their individuality.

But whereas both writers, as existentialists, start from the subjective, in Sartre there is an attempted move away from subjectivity to social and political commitment—a move prompted at least in part by his experience of the Second World War. The crucial question, of course, is to what extent it is possible to strike the happy medium, as Sartre attempts to do, between the
existentialist, Kierkegaardian tradition of the subjectivity and specificity of human existence and the Hegelian tradition of the concrete man in his objective political and social reality. With regard to his conversion to Marxism, Sartre seems to see in dialectical materialism, if not an absolute truth, at least a valid way of explaining historical events; he writes that "nous étions convaincus en même temps que le matérialisme historique fournissait la seule interprétation valable de l'histoire et que l'existentialisme restait la seule approche concrète de la réalité." Since, however, the basis of Marxism is materialistic determinism, which sees man as a puppet of large-scale economic forces, while that of Sartre's existentialist philosophy is the freedom of the individual, there is an irreconcilable difference between the two; for Marx freedom can mean no more than compliance with historical necessity, which is quite different from the meaning either Sartre or Nossack attaches to the term.

Nossack parts company with Sartre at the point where Sartre, as a result of the war, attempts to make his unsmooth transition from the subjective to commitment to action in the social and historical world in order to prevent such inhumanities in the future. Nossack, however, and likewise as a result of the war, as Der Untergang and Nekyia record, became wholly present ("gegenwärzig") and "aus der Zeit gelöst," inwardly freed from the concerns and limitations of historical time and of the social and political world. In his work there is no belief in commitment to organized political action; for Nossack this does not produce dignity and freedom for man, but rather necessitates organization and
doctrine, the very things shown to be an unreal facade in *Der Untergang*. Nossack is also clearly aware that the individual has very little place either in a Marxist party or in the Marxist interpretation of history. In this respect Nossack and Sartre are completely opposed in their attitude toward doctrine and history. As Rickert has pointed out, Sartre's complex philosophical system, his existential psychoanalysis, and his pragmatic humanism are in contradiction to Nossack's conscious endeavour not to become identified with any specific philosophical or ideological system. Similarly with history, Sartre proceeds from the question: "Comment peut-on se faire homme dans, par et pour l'histoire?" whereas Nossack's starting point is how man can preserve himself as an individual in spite of the historical and social situation in which he finds himself.

All this means that political commitment cannot offer Nossack a way out of the subjectivity and isolation of individual existence as it does for Sartre. As "Ist unsere Literatur arbeiterfremd?" shows, Nossack is unable to share Sartre's recognition of the class struggle as a vehicle for dialectical change and thus align himself in solidarity with the working class against the bourgeoisie for the simple reason that he considers the classless society to have been achieved, and all men, employers and employees alike, to be but functionaries of a vast collective "Apparat."
A key concept in Nossack's critique of modern society is that it is an "Apparat." It is a response to the realities of industrialization and technology, and within it organization and bureaucracy, which are really only applications of technology to social institutions, dictate to an ever increasing extent the way in which individuals should live their lives, with the logic of smooth functioning taking precedence over all other values. Society is implicitly regarded as the real reality because it is rational and based on the function of machinery. What is considered phantasmagorical is the subjective individual, who must be subordinated to giant Kafkaesque bureaucracies, institutions, and industrial corporations within which decisions are made by "experts," carefully insulated from the feelings of individuals. Since the individual must subordinate his existence to some such reality larger than himself, the belief arises that the individual has no existence apart from his role in society. Nossack points out the confusion of the concepts "human" and "social":

Das Soziale ist immer nur ein Mittel gewesen, um dem Menschen zu dienen . . . Nun hat es sich aber in den letzten Jahrzehnten ergeben, dass das Mittel zum Zweck geworden ist. Das Soziale hat sich verselbständigt und masst sich die Macht an, den Menschen . . . als statistischen Quotient in einer . . . gut funktionierenden Apparatur zu behandeln. . . . der Mensch fühlt sich in ihr unbefriedigt, sein Instinkt sagt ihm, dass er daran zugrunde gehen kann. . . . Ein lenkbarer Ameisenhaufen ist ein unmenschlicher Zustand, auch wenn theoretisch damit die vollkommenste soziale Gerechtigkeit erreicht wäre. ("Rede in Neu-Delhi," Die schwache Position der Literatur, p. 89)

The conflict between individual and society existed in earlier periods, but never so acutely as in the twentieth century:
"Das Problem ist . . . weit schwieriger geworden, da die Welt inzwischen weit mehr durchfunktionalisiert und daher die Verlassenhheit des einzelnen weit grösser ist" ("Jahrgang 1901," Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 125). In the twentieth century the plight of the isolated individual is all the greater: "Jeder allein zermalmt zwischen Konzernen und Konformismen . . . gelähmt von der mahlenden Gleichgültigkeit des Funktionellen . . . jeder allein ein verlorenes Wesen."  

An important twentieth century development is the virtually unlimited extension of the sphere of state involvement and influence. Individuals are left with no protected area of individual sovereignty beyond the interference of the state. The forces behind the state, rather than being evil, are impersonal and indifferent to man's needs, but tend to have the same consequences as a system specifically designed for the purpose of destroying individuals. Thus Nossack attacks the "Apparat": a mindless, impersonal, but immensely powerful machine which pursues its own inhuman logic, completely out of touch with human values, and completely out of control. He discerns a widespread Orwellian feeling of powerlessness to effect change among individuals; he refers to; "die Übermächtige Situation einerseits und das Gefühl der Unfähigkeit, ihr sich als Einzelerentgegenzustellen andererseits" (Über den Einsatz," Die schwache Position der Literatur, pp. 48-49).

It is a fact of mechanical life that any machine becomes obsolete in time. But even when obsolete, society resists change and is strongly conservative because things go most smoothly when the status quo is maintained and new, troublesome elements avoided.
The social machine must operate with as little friction as possible: "Auf das reibungslose Funktionieren arbeiten alle Systeme hin . . ." ("Der Mensch in der heutigen Literatur," *Die schwache Position der Literatur*, p. 69). Society cannot allow any significant part of its structure or world view to be challenged without feeling that its entire reality is threatened. For this reason it rejects real pluralism and diversity and becomes repressive. Lip service is paid to the religious and humanistic doctrine of the absolute worth of each individual, but it is not to be applied in reality because the Apparat has no room for the variety of human nuances. Nossack realizes that the individual cannot hope to establish a link between himself and society when society has less and less place for everything the individual represents:


For Nossack this tendency to reduction and organization, though apparently peaceful in contrast to open conflict, is actually violent. Implicit in Nossack is the idea that all imposed order is violent in that it demands an unnatural compliance, either by persuasion or repression. He believes that all social systems are convinced that they are right and all others are wrong; any society, if it wishes to persist, has to consider itself the only possible reality, otherwise it feels itself revealed as an inhuman abstraction. This is Nossack's concept
of "Rechthaberei," whereby the Apparat forces its truth on the individual as a substitute for his own internal truth. But in doing so it cuts man off from the sources of his personal being, the only reality by which he can really live.

Those who succumb to the Apparat live a robot life as mere social quotients, roles, or functions. The self within them is killed and they become the lifeless inmates of a machine world. This is discussed in the essay "Dies lebenlose Leben." The title refers to the years of National Socialist dictatorship, but Nossack shows its relevance to post-war society: "Ist heute im Zeitalter totalitärer Apparatur ... die Möglichkeit gegeben, den geschichtslosen Alltag der Masse durch Propaganda, falsche Informierung und Angst so zu verfälschen, dass alle natürlichen und menschlichen Instinkte gelähmt und Unmenschlichkeiten fatalistisch hingenommen werden?" ("Dies lebenlose Leben," Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 82). Nossack answers yes. He sees in fact in post-war society a far greater danger than the direct censorship of dictators; in it man is reduced to the puppet and toy of behavioural scientists, whose actions are but reactions to given stimuli on account of "die schleichende ... Funktionalisierung des Daseins, durch die wir uns zu Organismen machen lassen, die auf das jeweils Gegebene in vorausberechenbarer Weise reagieren" ("Das Alltagsdasein von Büchern," Die schwache Position der Literatur, p. 108).

In "Die dichterische Substanz im Menschen" Nossack gives an account of the false information and functionalization which permeate life in a mass, welfare society and suppress individual
human consciousness and values, so that even this society's leisure time activities are collective, anaesthetic measures:

The vast majority, because of their deep-rooted need for security and relatedness, readily assent to the loss of their freedom and individuality in exchange for the collective security and sedatives offered by the Apparat. But Nossack finds that such an assured existence can hardly be called life; at best it is boring, an unsuitable human environment:

When an individual reveals himself not to be the slave of his institutions or is suspected of being a subversive, he is put under surveillance and a supposedly exhaustive file compiled on him.
In Nach dem Letzten Aufstand the government authorities seek to fathom the nature and motivation of the narrator. In Der Fall d'Arthez secret service files exist on numerous characters and, as in the earlier novel, are frequently compiled with the aid of bugging devices. The investigations in these works aim to establish whether the subject is a "good citizen" of "good character." To this end it is sought to establish not simply if the subject has broken the law at any time or rebelled against the legally constituted authority of the State, but also, in a much wider and unspecific sense, whether he has ever deviated from "social norms," whether he has ever been "unsociable," whether he has ever shown himself to be emotionally or intellectually unstable, and whether he has commended himself to his superiors at various stages in his life and in the various institutions through which he has passed. Quite apart from the morality of such prying into an individual's private life, Nossack is concerned to show that even when compiled with scientific objectivity a file does not equal a person, and that it is impossible to reduce a unique individual with all his limitless possibilities and mystery to a number of facts on paper.

Nossack's work contains examples of characters who would easily emerge from such an investigation as "good citizens" of "good character." But they are characters only in the strictly technical sense of the term; their lives are an open book, but all the pages are blank. Such people, who constitute the vast majority of modern society, might be described as social or institutional man, and Nossack constantly stresses their ant-like existence.
They do not think or act freely or independently. They are orthodox followers of tradition; they conform to social norms which they regard as absolute. They have no spiritual aspirations, but seek only to satisfy their basic physical needs. They are the new men of mass industrial society: men suitable for operating machines and working within organizations and fulfilling a function. Nossack sees them as artificially streamlined creatures from whom all spirituality, irrationality, and complexity have been removed. They have aspirations only in terms of exterior, social goals, such as promotion and social advancement, not in terms of inner, personal values. They also look to institutions to provide personal security in the form of wages, retirement benefits, and tenure. For Nossack they are living corpses: "Solche lebendigen Toten laufen zu Tausenden in der Welt umher. Sie sind sehr ordentlich und auch sehr tücktig in konventionellen Berufen, aber doch nur als Funktionsträger eines konformistischen Systems, farblos und blutarm" ("Orest," Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 30). Everything that makes them feel their own reality is institutionalized and exterior to themselves. Without their career, without their function, they would be non-persons, because they have no sense of their own individuality to fall back upon.

The outstanding examples in Nossack's work are the appropriately named Blanck in Spätestens in November and Stolling in Der jüngere Bruder. Through them Nossack reveals that the man with the best chance of climbing to the top of the executive ladder is the man of servile character. Whilst the big bosses Helldegen,
Gütze, and Breckwaldt pay lip-service to creativity, initiative, dynamism, and leadership, in actuality they promote men like Blanck and Stolling who are dedicated and industrious but also submissive and characterless. Nossack writes in Der jüngere Bruder that such people seem to be the universal product of large corporations, existing in London, New York, Moscow, and Tokyo. Yes-men, who do as they are told without question, there is scarcely any task that they would not carry out satisfactorily, including the supervision of an execution of doubtful legality. Nossack shows how this type, be it the Nazi functionary or the corporate flunkey, disclaims personal responsibility for what his organization or society does, refuses to think or act independently, and unthinkingly accepts the premises of society.

Individuality for such people in such a society is expressed only in terms of a rat-race to the top of the social ladder where, with the attainment of material comfort and security, human bliss will be achieved. But Nossack's conviction is that the ladder of social success leads into nothingness, that the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow is really a can of garbage:

In der Tat wird man die Not unserer Zeit nicht in einem Arbeiterhaushalt gewahr, sondern sofort und unmittelbar, wenn man die Wohnung eines Mannes von höherer Stellung betritt. ... erschrickt man über die völlige Substanzlosigkeit des Klischees, über den Mangel an persönlicher Atmosphäre, über die fadenscheinige Modernität, über die ausgelaerte Sprache, mit der über alles mitgeredet wird, weil es nichts Eigenes mehr zu sagen gibt ... 10

Clearly the personal situation of Nossack and other authentic individuals in such a society must be one of aloneness—not just socio-cultural aloneness arising from rejection of such a society, but also personal aloneness arising from alienation from
its members. It is impossible to have a meaningful dialogue with Blanck or Stolling, or their bosses Helldegen, Götze, and Breckwaldt. All are so deeply entrenched in their roles that they cannot imagine any other human possibilities; their view of the world is so absolutely limited that they are impervious to new ideas altogether. They will continue to live and think in established ruts for the rest of their lives. What might seem to be the freest class in society is in fact the least free, but they have no real desire for freedom.

Nossack depicts the genesis of this human type both in his essays and his fictional works. Beginning with childhood the individual learns that in order to please his parents and those in authority he must avoid being different and force his individuality into the rigid mould of "good character" prescribed by the Apparat and enforced in the first instance through the family. The family is seen as a brutal tool for the destruction of the young individual and it launches an all-out assault upon his emergent self. It teaches the child to become the kind of person society wants, instead of the kind of person the child is or would like to be. The scope of individual thinking and decision and the range of possibilities before the child are progressively narrowed; he is stripped of his innocence and openness of perception, his imagination, his dreams, his personal uniqueness, his spontaneity of feeling and action. The child must give up not only much of what he already is, but also all the as yet undiscovered possibilities within him and thus murder a part of himself before it can even be born. In particular the solitude, privacy, and silence which
are natural and necessary for individual development are whenever possible denied the young person. No parents want an introverted, solitary child, whereas the "well-adjusted," sociable child is everyone's favourite.

The family's role is complemented by the educational system right up to the highest levels. Of the young individual Nossack says that "die Lehrer in der Schule mühen sich, ein nützliches Glied der Gesellschaft aus ihm zu machen." In the school, as in the family, children learn how to become useful members of society by copying their elders' behaviour patterns, values, and life goals. In Die gestohlene Melodie an old school teacher realizes that the purpose of education is to deprive youngsters of their hopes of a happier existence: "den Kindern all dies Zeug beizubringen, damit sie nur ja nicht auf die Idee kommen, glücklich sein zu wollen." In Der Fall d'Arthez a professor admits that he is the purveyor of "fix und fertige Begriffe für die Studenten." To compensate for the loss of individuality the young person is taught by both family and school to make a substitute self which will gain the maximum approval and rewards from society and generally get along better than the self that might have been. In other words he is schooled in role-playing: he must learn to behave, dress, and talk in an accepted way. This is the process we see at work in "Der Schlagsahnebaiser." It is significant that the youngster in the story sees the process as a threat to his individuality. Not only is he repelled by the false politeness and conventions of his elders, which are a matter of course to them,
but alien to him, but he feels that he is being secretly observed to make sure that he plays his role correctly. Even older people can still have this sense of society as an all-pervading menace; for example, Marie in Das kennt man feels that the whole structure of society is a vast plot directed against her in implacable hostility.

Of particular significance for the concept of role-playing is the accepted belief in the Apparat that the individual should fit himself into a function that is needed by society and feel it his duty to sacrifice his own wishes and feelings for his job or career. If he does this he is praised by society as being "selfless," a word which Nossack feels betrays more than is intended: "... Selbstlosigkeit. Welch ein Wort! Die Leute ahnen nicht, was sie damit verraten... Selbstmord ist ehrlicher."15

These "selfless" people or living dead virtually become their occupations or roles. Blanck's individuality is provided by his aftershave. In "Frühling"16 a teacher and travelling representative are satirically and surreallyistically represented as their suits, and in the play Ein Sonderfall the two interchangeable representatives of the lottery organization are constantly referred to as "the blue suits," and later by Paul as "diese blauen Geschwüre des Nichts,"17 indistinguishable from each other except that again one stinks of aftershave. But as Diana realizes, these are the types who get on best in the world. Nossack would agree with Gottfried Benn that for modern man continuity of personality is provided by the suits; the only real changes turn out to be changes of
clothing. This is a sad comment on the consumer society, in which even human identity—in the form of "images"—is purchased, while people's minds become practically invisible, and what is more, wholly filled with other people's ideas.

In this respect Nossack is acutely aware of how vast and powerful in modern society is the apparatus for the manipulation of consciousness. All the mass media, the press, radio, and television, all catering for special interests, all drastically selective and restrictive in their presentation, insist on a particular picture of reality. A multi-billion dollar advertising industry again schemes to present a certain picture of reality in order to influence people's wants; in "Dies lebenlose Leben" Nossack asks that we consider "wieviel faschistische Verachtung des Menschen als rücksichtsloses verbrauchbares Material in unsern heutigen Werbemethoden liegt" (Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 71). And then the government, and not only in totalitarian states, makes further direct efforts to influence consciousness, most obviously through the compulsory educational system and the employment of teachers of whom Nossack says: "Sie sind nicht dazu da, die Wahrheit zu erzählen, sondern das Erlaubte und was man für zutraglich hält."18 False consciousness abounds in modern society, a consciousness imposed by the Apparat for its own purposes. Of all the human qualities which are reduced, repressed, and distorted in modern society, consciousness, "Geist," for Nossack the most precious of all, suffers the most. Instead of seeing their lives as a steady growth of consciousness, the vast majority of men see it diminished, so that childhood and youth are
the only times of life when it is still relatively unadulterated.

In particular Nossack criticizes the mass culture created by the Apparat. Culture has been reduced to the grossly commercial, and what cannot make a profit is not purveyed. He condemns the many illustrated magazines with their single-minded concern with sex and violence. In *Der jüngere Bruder* and *Das kennt man* and other novels it seems that the Apparat, through the medium of the cinema, provides substitutes for the heroic life in the form of cowboy and gangster films, shoot-outs, and virile romantic heroes. Nossack's critique of contemporary society and its culture reflects the same insight as that of Herbert Marcuse in *One-Dimensional Man*: ¹⁹ that the State is able to purvey enough happiness, titillation, and gratification to keep people oblivious of their loss of freedom through the medium of popular culture and entertainment, sex, leisure-time activities, and even some spectacular but essentially harmless dissent, protest, and radical culture.

Such are the main influences which Nossack discerns working on social or institutional man, the inauthentic man who is inwardly dead, and whose consciousness is false because imposed or distorted from outside. In contrast Nossack sees authentic existence in terms of the individual man who holds dialogues with himself. The individual, not society, is the primary reality, and no violence must be done to him. He must not be subordinated to any social system; he must not be made a social quotient or an instrumental being. A striking feature of authentic existence is therefore liberation: it comes into being the moment an individual
frees himself from unthinking acceptance of the imperatives of society and the false consciousness it imposes.

For Nossack this is not excessive subjectivity or selfishness, but a simple recognition that human life is found in the first instance as individual units, not as institutions, which invariably do violence to individuals. It is an attempt to find genuine personal values in a world whose official values are false, and it is an assertion of the absolute worth of every human being. Instead of everyone being measured by given standards, what is unique in each self is to be valued and developed. In particular the spiritual element of man's nature that was passed by in the rush of material and technological development must be preserved.

For Nossack a central question is how man is to lead an authentic existence in a mass, technological society. Given the fundamental basis of liberation underlying authentic existence, it might be thought that the individual would attempt not only to work out his own philosophy, but also, in a manner not unlike that of the liberated hippy, to create his own life style. This is the ideal case, in which the point of departure is the self alone, and the free, unhampered development of the self the ultimate value:

Wir alle haben ein geheimes Wissen in uns von dem, was wir sein müssten und sein könnten, wenn wir uns nicht ... vom Wege hätten abbringen lassen. Diese uns eingeborene Idee von uns ist das Gesetz und die Kraft, die uns trotz aller Einflüsse und Verfälschungen immer wieder in eine bestimmte Richtung wachsen lässt. Wir vergessen es nur meistens und vermeiden es sogar bewusst, uns an dieser ursprünglichen Idee zu messen, da es fast unerträglich ist. 20

Of course a world in which human life is completely without external influences--seen by Nossack as falsifications--which modify the development of the individual is hardly conceivable,
though the idea does indicate the fervour of Nossack's commitment to subjectivity. However, in "Töte deinen Feind" Nossack describes an imaginary society based on the maxim "Töte deinen Feind, sonst tötet er dich!" (p. 11). The enemy is defined as "das, was einem Menschen das Weiterexistieren unmöglich macht. . . Der Akzent liegt nämlich auf dem Willen, Mensch zu bleiben" (pp. 12-13). The society's aim is to reduce to a minimum the restrictions placed on any one member by the other members of the society. Significantly there are indications that this society is not an advanced, mass industrial society, but rather what would be regarded as an under-developed country; Nossack seems to be indicating that in the earlier stages of civilization the situation of the individual is freer and that he is capable of far more fulfilment. The word for sacrifice does not exist in this society's language. In practice bloody confrontations are avoided by not openly broadcasting opinions and dogmas, which are seen as a frequent cause of wars in other parts of the world; and by choosing, where necessary, to pass by on the other side of the street. But the principle itself, that of the sanctity of the self and the need to ensure its unimpeded development, is regarded as valid and has been literally carried out by certain figures in the past: "Die Philosophen erklären uns, diese Männer hätten sich zur absoluten Einsamkeit durchgerungen, darin beruhe eben ihre Vorbildlichkeit" (p. 14).

The value of this society's maxim, even as a utopian ideal, is of course open to question on the grounds that any society entails a readiness on the part of individuals not to do and not
to say things that otherwise they might want to do or say. In fact this is precisely the modification we see taking place in this society, where an attempt is made to reconcile the ultimate self-interest, sanctity, and freedom of the individual with that of his fellows. From this point of view society consists just as much in what men do not do and in what men are not. In other words the existence and progress of civilization depend on the readiness of people to curb the expression of pure subjectivity and to develop a more self-controlled attitude about what they do, and how, and when, and where they do it.

The curbing of subjectivity and the development of a self-controlled attitude is precisely what is to be observed in Nossack's work, though for quite different reasons. Nossack advocates the above not as the result of a careful weighing out of the opposing claims of individual and society or because unrepressed individuality is anti-social, but because society is anti-individual and a menace against which the individual can only protect himself by camouflaging himself and practising "Partisanendasein." Nossack believes that as soon as an individual attempts to preserve his authentic self and assumes the responsibility of shaping his own fate, he enters into conflict with society. But he seems to be deeply afraid of any such open conflict, and "Partisanendasein" is a method of avoiding it and preserving human values in secret, internally.

Nossack's fear of a mass society's persecution of the independent spiritual individual is at times almost paranoid. He first practised "Partisanendasein" during the Nazi tyranny, when its
necessity was quite obvious, but even in post-war Germany he believes that

... dieselben kleinbürgerlichen Unzufriedenheiten jederzeit wieder zu einem politischen Mordinstrument umgeschmiedet werden können.

Nicht die atomare Vernichtung ist die Gefahr, sondern der abgründige Hass der Halbgebildeten gegen Geist und Vernunft. (Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 69, pp. 144-45)

He considers his outsiders to be in extreme danger since they have to be rooted out if the system is to function:

Ohne den gesellschaftlichen Apparat auskommen zu wollen, bedeutet ja eine Negierung des Apparats, und das kann sich kein Apparat gefallen lassen.

Anders ist es nicht zu erklären, warum man auch heute noch die im Verhältnis zu den Milliarden geringfügige Schar partisanenhafter Menschen mit größter Lautstärke als Asoziale, Anarchisten, Nihilisten oder was auch immer verleumdet. (Die schwache Position der Literatur, p. 12, p. 80)

Particularly hated is the asocial spirit's indifference to the actuality of the social and historical world:

Was den Hass der Machthaber und jedes funktionalisierten Staatsbürgers erregt, ist, dass es ausser dem behördlich genehmigten Ja und Nein noch einen dritten Standpunkt gibt, aus dessen Perspektive der Absolutheitsanspruch des jeweiligen Ja oder Nein recht blässlich wirkt. Was auf keinen Fall geduldet werden kann, ist Distanz zur Aktualität. 22

"Partisanendasein" is meant to deliver the individual from the menace of the Apparat. Retreat into an inner, spiritual realm is the only possible response for him, given the omnipresent rule of the Apparat and the impossibility of revolution against it:

Gegen Gesellschaftsordnungen und Diktaturen gab es die Möglichkeit der Revolution, die selbst, wenn sie scheiterte, noch sinnvoll war. Gegen die Diktatur des Apparates ist eine Rebellion im geschichtlichen Sinne nicht mehr möglich, da Revolten vorher einkalkuliert sind
und sofort in gelenkte Demonstrationen umgefälscht werden. Es wird ein bereitsgewollter und errechneter Systemwechsel an der Maschinerie vorgenommen, doch der Apparat bleibt Apparat. In dieser heutigen erst ganz unmenschlichen Situation bleibt dem Menschen nur eines, wenn er seine Substanz dem Zugriff der Maschinerie entziehen will: Tarnung durch äusserlich korrektes Befolgen der vom Apparat jeweils vorgeschriebenen Verhaltensweisen und Rückzug ins Exil des Verstummens.

The great paradox in Nossack's work is that although his characters are radically different from their fellow citizens and inwardly have no desire to conform in a society which they reject, they must conceal this by outwardly appearing to be conformists. They must consciously play a role, though roles are repugnant to them. There is a great gulf between inward reality and outward behaviour because they can only escape the threat of destruction by the Apparat and continue in spiritual resistance by adopting a disguise.

Nossack's fear of what society might do to the outsider who reveals himself exhibits, as mentioned above, almost an element of paranoia. This is confirmed if we consider the many instances in the novels (too numerous and in themselves too insignificant to itemize here) in which his characters are intensely concerned to conceal their outsider status from the world. Marcel Reich-Ranicki refers to a childhood skating accident which left Nossack with a slight permanent disability:

Es versteht sich, dass eine derartige körperliche Benachteiligung den Betroffenen, zumal in der Jugend, in eine Sonderstellung drängen muss. Ein Gefühl der Isolation, tatsächliche oder eingebildete Vereinsamung und meist auch Verderbtheit sind--in kleinerem oder grösserem Mass--zwangsläufig Folgeerscheinungen. . . . Indes darf der Kritiker . . . feststellen, dass im Mittelpunkt der Romane und Erzählungen Nossacks . . . meist Sonderlinge, jedenfalls aber einsame und
verbitterte Menschen stehen, die sich in irgendeinem Sinne ausgeschlossen fühlen. 24

Reich-Ranicki over-states the possible causal relationship between a physical disability and a feeling of isolation when he sees the one as a necessary consequence of the other. Alienation and isolation can clearly exist without physical disability, and many disabled people are not alienated or embittered. Furthermore there exists in Nossack's work a series of reasons for aloneness unconnected with physical disability. Yet it would perhaps be wrong to dismiss Reich-Ranicki's theory entirely, for there still remains to be explained Nossack's at times paranoid concern not about being different, but about the urgent necessity of concealing this fact from the world—a necessity for which the reasons seem to be exaggerated or at times even non-existent.

The obvious profound aloneness of Nossack's partisans is however beyond speculation. Because of their camouflage their aloneness is not a physical aloneness, for by all appearances they may be model citizens, but an inner, well-concealed secret. It has to be concealed because aloneness is not tolerated by society, but precisely for this reason Nossack believes it must contain a positive force:


The revolutionary force in aloneness can be an important weapon against the ever increasing collectivization and
dehumanization of society. In "Es ist schade um die Menschen" Nossack writes about the present age's constant supply of often unwanted ready-made ideologies which attempt to make men forget their hunger for truth and about the resultant threat to individuals "denen man die Freiheit des Alleinseins nehmen möchte, da diese Freiheit sich von der perfektionistischen Abstraktion nicht einplanen lässt." The freedom of aloneness must be preserved because of its intractability to planning and collectivization. Only the person who feels himself to be an outsider and silently withdraws into aloneness is genuinely free of the lures of the Apparat and the imposed consciousness of the mass media, advertising, education, and all the other pressures on the mind. Only in solitude and silence is one alive in a society which is essentially dead. Only in carefully concealed aloneness can man be himself and continue to find himself.

However Nossack seems to believe that "Partisanendasein" promises something beyond aloneness and the finding of self. There is the very slight, undefined hope of a better future for mankind, the vague but unmistakable allusion to a new humanity and community. In "Der Mensch in der heutigen Literatur" Nossack expresses his belief that future centuries will see "diese aus der Abstraktion ausbrechenden und sich ins Ungewisse vortastenden Einzelgänger" as "die ersten Pfadfinder zu einer neuen Menschlichkeit" (Die schwache Position der Literatur, p. 80). In "Übersetzen und Übersetzt werden" it seems that "Partisanendasein" might itself help to bring down the old structures: this is the great hope "dass durch die absolute Trennung von Apparat und Menschlichem
die Maschine ins Leere hinein funktioniert, sich durch Zwecklosigkeit heiss lauft und auf absurde Weise selbst vernichtet. Ein ungeheures Wagnis, aber wann ware Menschliches kein Wagnis gewesen?" 26

Similarly in "Stimme und Verstummen" Nossack writes of the passive anarchy of the man who abides by whatever social conventions are currently prescribed for him: "Daran sind bekanntlich schon Diktaturen gescheitert . . . Apparat und Organisation wurden plötzlich absurd, da sie ohne Widerstand ins Leere hineinfunktionierten." 27

Regrettably but typically, no examples are given. And finally in "Ist Poesie lehrbar?" Nossack writes "dass die Intellektuellen der ganzen Welt von der Hoffnung leben, dass ihre nichtorganisierte Übernation eines Tages eine Heimat schaffen wird, die nicht nur für wehrüchtige und zeugungsfähige Ameisenhaufen bewohnbar ist. Eine Utopie vielleicht, aber eine Utopie, an der wir festhalten müssen, wenn wir uns nicht selber aufgeben wollen." 28

"Partisanendasein" is of course not presented as a ready formula or even as a long-term strategy for a better society; it is always seen predominantly as a personal, defensive response to an inhuman situation. And even on those occasions when Nossack waxes vaguely optimistic about the possibility of a better communal future, it is obvious that he cannot conceal his doubts about "Partisanendasein" bringing it about. These doubts are fully justified. The reader naturally assumes that outward conformism to the Apparat will sustain and not undermine it. Many revolutionaries are better at destruction than construction, and are unable to effect the transition from negative to positive; but Nossack is unable even to explain convincingly the negative,
destructive, part of the task, the necessary preliminary to the realization of a new socio-cultural order.

Furthermore with regard to the better socio-cultural order that is hoped for, there are inner contradictions in Nossack's thinking of which he appears to be unaware. For instance he equates social and political systems with power, which he opposes to "Geist," his highest value: "Wir haben vor allem nie den Ehrgeiz gespürt, Macht zu haben oder an ihr teilzunehmen, da Macht ohne System nicht denkbar ist und jede Systematisierung den Beginn eines Rückschritts bedeutet" ("Jahrgang 1901," *Pseudoautobiographische Glossen*, p. 155). Now this may very well be true, but in the absence of any system or structure, the new socio-cultural order could be nothing but a wild chaos. Similarly, when Nossack writes that "Die Intellektuellen meiner Generation empfinden die Institutionalisierung einer Idee als Verrat an der Idee" ("Jahrgang 1901," *Pseudoautobiographische Glossen*, p. 140), the reader not only doubts the crass generalization but also wonders how ideas can ever become reality without being betrayed. In short, what possible reality can be ascribed to this longed-for homeland or community of the future if it can have neither system nor structure and if the idea of it is betrayed the moment it is transposed into reality? Surely it can be regarded only as a muddled, self-contradictory abstraction, reflecting a real but subsidiary and intermittent need felt by Nossack and, beyond this, his inability to realize what is and is not possible. Nossack's hopes for a new utopian society, observed in *Nekyia* and now in the essays, re-emerge periodically and ever more vaguely in the novels
and stories; but they are never realized; they remain essentially unreal because they are without substance. We are left with individual human beings, all without socio-cultural or personal relatedness, all alone. Their aloneness is real and understandable; the millenial hopes for community are phantasmagorical. Gerhard Baumgaertel has well expressed the essence of the situation:

Es scheint, dass Einsamkeit und Vereinzelung nicht mehr nur Vorstufe sondern selber der Ort sind, an dem die Bewahrung des Menschseins geleistet wird . . . Es geht also um die Selbstfindung und Realisierung des Menschen, während er in einer Welt der Entmenschlichung, nicht nur im Kriege sondern erst recht im organisierten Leben der Wohlstands­zivilisation, allein steht. 29
The essays contain no formal discussion of the other realm of reality and time so evident in Der Untergang and Nekyia which exists beyond the socio-cultural facade and which is so closely associated with the theme of aloneness. This other dimension is in fact beyond discussion. Nevertheless the essays do contribute to an understanding of Nossack's view of reality, his related critique of society, and the theme of aloneness in his work.

Nossack is intrigued by man's attempts to make sense of the world which surrounds him. His belief is that reality cannot be rationalized, as in the classical philosophies and ideologies, and that it is an ontological mystery, absolutely incomprehensible. Nossack questions the great prestige of contemporary science. In "Stimme und Verstummen" he cautions against its predictions. He points out how meteorologists had believed that space satellites would enable them to forecast weather with far greater accuracy. But reality confounded man's rationalist hopes: the satellites revealed how complex things really were and the forecasts became even more indefinite than before.

Nossack is aware, however, of a new modest readiness in certain branches of modern science to reckon with the indefinite, a new awareness that scientific hypotheses are only temporary in face of the inexhaustible meanings of reality, which cannot be ultimately defined:

meine laienhafte Frage: 'Was ist das nun eigentlich, Elektrizität?' . . . begann der Physiker seine Auskunft mit dem Satz: 'Man nimmt heute allgemein an.' Das ist vorbildlich. Keine Definition, sondern eine Arbeitshypothese. Denn wer von uns will bestimmen was man morgen allgemein annimmt? 31

Evident here is Nossack's fascination with the rivalry between the real world and the preconceptions we form of it. In "Die Fuge wozu?" he proclaims that "Jeder sogenannte Standpunkt erweist sich sofort als Täuschung . . . "32 Throughout history the world has been differently interpreted in different places and at different times. There have been different philosophies, values, customs, gods, and heavens; there have been different views of time, space, and man. And our twentieth century, western, scientific world is no less a transient cultural construct.

Because the world cannot be rationalized into a cosy, familiar system in which man will feel safe and at home, his position, potentially and ultimately, is one of aloneness, not just of socio-cultural aloneness, but also of ultimate spiritual aloneness, and potentially of personal aloneness too, in view of the difficulty of communicating with others about his subjective perception of reality. This aloneness in its various forms can result, as in Der Untergang and Nekyia, in a painful existential anguish; but even these early works reveal that there can also be a feeling of liberation and delight at the inexhaustibility of the world's secrets.

Nossack sees the world as a "Fluss ohne Ufer," the source and direction of which are unknown. Man devises all kinds of vehicles to traverse it: "Ein kirchliches Floss zum Beispiel. Oder ein wohlaufgepumptes moralisches Schlauchboot. Oder ein schnittiges,
Usthetisches Schifflein, nach anerkannten Kunstprinzipien konstruiert" ("Die Fuge wozu?" p. 35). But there is always a danger of rapids and the sinking of the craft. The rapids can be an elemental occurrence, such as the war and destruction of Hamburg, which destroys the crust of civilization, so that the individual is cast back upon himself in isolation: "Kollektive Vorschriften helfen dabei nicht; jeder muss, wenn er die Katastrophe bestehen will, persönlich und ganz auf sich gestellt, damit fertig werden" ("Die Fuge wozu?" p. 33). Or the rapids and the resultant "Untergang" may be a purely personal affair: "eine einzige schlaflose Nacht genügt" ("Die Fuge wozu?" p. 34). It can be brought on by a chance word, a chance encounter, a seemingly insignificant event or thought, but again the individual is isolated as real reality breaks through the facade of a collective world view. Werner Oberle describes the results:

... plötzlich steht die Frage da: Was ist denn Leben? Alle Sicherheiten sind auf einem Schlag weggefallen, das Gewohnte und Vertraute ist fremd, es ist 'wie ein Aufwachen im Waisenhaus'. Man ist ausgetreten, ausgebrochen, abtrünnig geworden, man ist nicht mehr der, der man eben noch gewesen ist. Der alte Name passt nicht mehr auf einen, die Rufe der andern erreichen einen nicht mehr. Wie ein Regenvorhang, wie dichter Schneefall hängt es zwischen den andern und dem plötzlich aussen Stehenden. Er ist allein. 33

For Nossack the real reality which breaks through gives joy and hope because the individual is not stuck with a stultifying closed world view. But it is also threatening, since once a person is deprived of the collectively sanctioned myths of society, it is hard for him to find his way around a strange world. He feels disoriented; his balance is gone; it is the most shattering moment of his life. Neither can he achieve a purely personal orientation
in the world. He has to contend with the fact that his view of reality is unavoidably a personal myth. He can know reality only as a personal and temporary construct of ideas relating to the part he is able to experience, but he knows that there is always a dimension one step beyond this. Because reality cannot be envisioned as a whole, we cannot control it; it can always take us by surprise; it is "das Nicht-Versicherbare."

The other realm of reality relates not only to the external world, but also to the internal reality of the individual. Obviously the two are interrelated: man exists in the world, but the world is known only in man's mind. Just as Nossack takes an open view of the world, he takes an open view of man. He posits the liberty of the human mind. His authentic characters assume their freedom. They refuse to be bound by obsolete or irrelevant social values, and refuse to see the world in terms of ready-made ideologies. They undertake to work out for themselves, as far as possible, the meaning of their lives and the nature of reality. But because of their freedom and possibilities, they are always in question, always potentially more or other than what they are;

Yet in addition to the liberty and freedom of thought of the human mind there is also a passive quality about many of Nossack's characters, whereby their state of mind is profoundly altered without any action on their part in a sudden, unexpected, and apparently illogical way. Nossack sees this as a characteristic of his own life:

Es hat in meinem Leben ein paar mal plötzliche Umbrüche gegeben, sozusagen von Minute zu Minute und ohne dass ich vorher selber etwas davon ahnte. Ausserlich gesehen war es jedesmal ein Überraschender Bruch mit den bisherigen
Gewohnheiten und ein Verlassen der sicheren Umgebung und immer eine Verschlechterung der wirtschaftlichen Situation. Ich rede deshalb so ungern davon, weil es beschämend ist, zugeben zu müssen, dass man unter irgendeinem Zwang handeln musste. 34

The sudden process of radical alienation which befalls Mönchen on the bridge in Heidelberg in Spätestens im November is perhaps the most outstanding fictional reflection of Nossack's autobiographical confession. The experience of Nossack's characters can be compared with the view of man in Freud's psychological system with its basis of material determinism: for both writer and psychologist man is often not the master in his own house; but whereas in Freud's system man can be the puppet of uncontrollable drives, a vent for impersonal sexual energy, Nossack's characters suffer the unwilled intimation of a greater metaphysical reality.

Whether human reality is changed either as a result of an active choice or of passive metaphysical intimations, the implications for the individual's relationship to the world of social and political commitment and the world of personal relationships remain the same. Nossack's characters cannot establish themselves in decisions and commitments, whether they be social, political, or personal, because they are unable to pretend to an invariability of thought and sentiment which it is not in their power to create. They cannot commit themselves to a future when they cannot give guarantees for themselves in the future. They cannot tie themselves to a past commitment, when the past has been invalidated by later experience. They must remain open to the unknown and unknowable future states of their self. Constancy, reliability,
and self-determination are unobtainable, except at the price of inauthenticity.

Man's condition cannot be defined because it is not given once and for all. It is constantly in question, because man is a possibility, and his choices and acts are never final. Nossack agrees with Sartre that existence precedes essence, and that there are no absolute standards by which man can be defined. The only absolutes are the freedom and possibilities of man and it is necessary to preserve these over and against the social and historical preoccupations of the age:


In the historico-materialistic view of man Nossack sees an attempt to reduce and functionalize man, to make him part of the collective Apparat, and to bind him to the past: "Ein Menschenbild gibt es nur in historischer Sicht. Immer wenn man die Gegenwart an einer historischen Größe misst, vergewaltigt man die Gegenwart und macht sich eines reaktionären Verhaltens schuldig."35 To escape the bonds of the past Nossack reformulates the word "religio" as "proligio" ("Proligio," Die schwache Position der Literatur, pp. 165-175), by which he denotes the rich possibilities in the future in contrast to an ossified, museum-like existence tied to the past. And in the essay "Die dichterische Substanz im Menschen" he proclaims: "Seien wir Europäer, Menschen, denen das Dasein kein Zweck ist, sondern eine Möglichkeit des Wachsens Über
Nossack, then, presents an open view of man just as he presents an open view of the world. He rebels against rationalistic and collective views of either. Both are realities in question, mysteries, and possibilities. Both are always other than and more than anything that can be said about them. Neither can be controlled because neither can be fully understood. Both can take us by surprise. In both there is another side to the part we know and understand, and which is "das Nicht-Versicherbare."

Already in *Der Untergang* and *Nekyia* it was evident that Nossack yearned for another dimension of reality and time which seduced man from the socio-cultural world. The extent to which he transfers value to this other dimension becomes increasingly apparent in subsequent works, so that the social and historical world is correspondingly devalued. His characters seek to escape all the limitations of the world: social and political obligations, the ensnaring prison-like web of the past, the bonds of the family, the milieu, day-to-day routines, and human relationships. Everything that is customarily thought of as being "reality," both public and private, is regarded as a facade which conceals the other supremely valuable reality. Nossack's characters are not social or political rebels but metaphysical radicals who rebel against the normal conditions of human existence in order to break through to another reality.

In some works (eg. "Am Ufer" and *Der Neugierige*) the limitation or border is physically present and there is an actual or projected plunge into the vast unknown of the world. But as Michael S. Batt's has pointed out, freedom from bonds is "not
necessarily obtainable only through active flight; there is also a passive way by which the situation is comprehended and an inner state of reserve maintained by remaining uninvolved in the negative aspects of existence in order to preserve the awareness of what is positive and prepare for the 'Aufbruch ins Unversichbare.'"  

Nossack's partisans choose this second way: they play a role in the world only to conceal their knowledge of the other side because they are afraid that if they reveal themselves as outsiders who do not play society's game, society will destroy them as alien elements. A second reason for concealment emerges more in the stories and novels: they do not wish to unsettle those around them who have no knowledge of the other realm by exposing them to the great isolation, vulnerability, and disorientation entailed in the experience of it:

Um aber die wirkliche Wirklichkeit erleben zu können, muss man die Fassaden und Abstraktionen, hinter denen sie sich verkrochen hat, durchbrechen. Und wer das tut, ist natürlich schutzlos . . . und er ist sehr allein. Und da er sehr allein ist und auf alle gewohnten Hilfsmittel und Massstäbe verzichtet hat ausser denen, die er gebieterisch in sich selbst findet, ist er auch allen Irrtümern und der Gefahr von Grenzüberschreitungen ausgesetzt. 38

Nossack's main characters do not feel that they have the right to recommend to others the path they have taken. It leads directly out of all the certainties, comforts, and reassuring relationships of life, and there is no return from it to the securities of society and community. The woman in "Viktoria" speaks for many of Nossack's characters: "Ich habe nämlich Angst, dass man es merkt. . . . Es wäre Unrecht gegen die andern, wenn ich es merken liesse." 39
The other dimension of reality is frequently associated in Nossack's work with cold, frost, snow, and vast polar wastes, which are symbolic of man's solitude in the "Grenzland" to the other side. It is in fact a matter of common experience that the very thought of being detached from everything that is familiar and from every other person is likely to send a shiver down one's back. Nossack is concerned to show how easy it is for a man to freeze to death in such a realm, a fate which literally befalls a polar explorer and "Grenzüberschreiter" in "Das Mal." But what frightens Nossack far more than the dangers of the cold and isolation, which are but necessary consequences of the quest for something of supreme value, is the thought of remaining trapped forever in the same old life and of being consumed by it.

Nossack is very much a Romantic. His longing is not a specifically formulated desire for some definite goal, but rather a mystical or religious aspiration, at the same time vague and intense, which manifests itself in a sense of affinity with the absolute and which is accompanied by a deep disgust with the world as it is and a dissatisfaction with every specific form of happiness the world has to offer. The world is always seen as blocking man's entry into a greater realm. Everything that offers to save man from his isolation in the limbo of his existence between the repugnant and the infinitely desirable, between this world and some other metaphysical realm, is seen as a snare to be avoided. Not only the great but false objectivities of a collective, depersonalized world have to be eschewed, but the simple and apparently innocent pleasures of ball-games and sex. Especially in the later novels there is an ascetic approach to life in
which virtually no preoccupation is allowed because this would necessarily hinder or prevent man's awareness of the other realm and his preparation for the "Aufbruch ins Nicht-Versicherbare." Nossack's characters thus endure an aloneness which must rarely be equalled and surely never excelled anywhere in the whole range of modern literature.
Given the alienation of the individual from society, it is now clear why the world of nature, traditionally regarded as the opposite of the artificial, conventional, and repressive world of society, and as offering an alternative lifestyle to it, offers no solution to this alienation in Nossack's case. A "Zurück zur Natur" cannot offer Nossack any sense of relatedness or belonging because the natural world is just one of the limitations to be overcome because it stands between man and the other dimension of existence.

The overcoming of nature is facilitated in that Nossack believes that in the modern world men are already alienated from the natural environment ("Natur--ein unerhörter Luxus," "Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 111). In "Ist Poesie lehrbar?" he explains that the lack of contemporary folk songs is due to the fact that in the Western world no people feels that it is united with the land; the natural landscape is now the business of the tourist and camera industries.

Nossack realizes that the vast majority of men in the Western world live in large cities, and thus can no longer feel at one with the natural environment. Nor is it desirable to regain this feeling as far as Nossack is concerned. During his own sojourn in rural Bavaria he came to the realization that the slogan "Blut und Boden" should really be "Schweiss und Boden." Man in an agricultural society is reduced to a routine of physically healthy but boring physical toil, which Nossack, the intellectual representative of "Geist," must reject: "Darum zog ich wieder in den

Life in a big city is equated with aloneness and yet it is not an aloneness to be overcome, but an appropriate form of existence. Nossack cites with approval Camus's opposition of city to society and his belief that because only the large modern city offers the solitude necessary to combat the ills of social living it must be embraced: "Als Heilmittel gegen das Leben in der Gesellschaft: die Gross-stadt. Sie ist für alle Zukunft die einzige benutzbare Wüste" ("Jahrgang 1901," Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 140). And in the Bienek interview he speaks of his ideal dream: "ein möbiliertes Zimmer in einer Gross-stadt, ohne eigenen Besitz und ganz anonym." He sees the rapid growth of Hamburg in recent years into a large, impersonal city as a thing to be welcomed: "Schon jetzt kann man dort anonym leben und sterben, was den Hamburgern früher unerlaubt schien, und so besteht Aussicht, dass Hamburg für unsereinen das werden wird, was man Heimat nennen kann." Nossack's view contrasts with those views which constitute the mainstream of modern sociology and social psychology. Vance Packard in his book A Nation of Strangers attacks the highly mobile, anonymous populations of large cities, which frequently live in high rise apartments which structurally encourage loneliness, anonymity, and rootlessness:

Rootlessness seems clearly to be associated with a decline in companionship, a decline in satisfying group activities, a decline in mutual trust, and a decline in psychological security. It encourages a shallowness in personal relationships and a relative indifference to
community problems. It produces a loss in one's sense of personal well-being along with an increase in both personal and social malaise. And it contributes to a personal sense of powerlessness and insignificance. 43

Nossack's view is diametrically opposed to this. He sees nothing to censure in his own high mobility and embraces the rootlessness and anonymity of big modern cities, with their exclusion of companionship, "satisfying group activities," a closely woven net of personal relationships, and involvement in "community problems." What produces for Packard "a loss ... of personal well-being" is seen by Nossack as an appropriate form of existence: "Einsamkeit." For Nossack companionship, group activities, deep personal relationships, community problems, and all the rest are all phenomena of the reality of this side, whereas for him value and meaning lie in another dimension of existence altogether.

For this same reason Nossack has fundamental doubts even about life in small towns, villages, and rural communities which for Packard are ideal social units in that they promote togetherness and social relationships. In discussing small town life in Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, Nossack writes of the youthful characters' possibilities and aspirations, and in particular of what seems to be their vague awareness of another, greater dimension of existence. These youngsters are still "unberührt von dem animalischen Dasein, in dem sich ihre Umgebung genügt, noch bewahrt sie eine Frage, von der sie nicht wissen, woher sie ihnen kommt, die Frage: 'Ist das alles? Sind das wir?' davor, sich ganz an ihre kleinen Liebesgeschichten zu verlieren."44

For Nossack, man, whether in the big city, the small town, or in the natural environment, is always an outsider, the only being
with the ability to negate himself and nature which created him.

He is

Ein Wesen ohne die biologische Bescheidenheit und Selbstverständlichkeit der Tiere und Pflanzen. Ein Wesen, das in einer lebensgefährlichen Weise nicht damit zufrieden ist, geboren zu werden, sich zu ernähren und fortzupflanzen, um dann stillschweigend zu sterben wie alle anderen Kreaturen. ("Proligio," Die schwache Position der Literatur, p. 171)

Man's dissatisfaction with a purely biological function and fate is well presented in the novel Nach dem Letzten Aufstand, where a young man is faced with a choice between fleeing into the wilds of nature or staying to live out another fate which will necessarily culminate in death. He rejects the flight into nature because he does not wish to be reduced to the purely biological level of fending only for the preservation of his bodily existence:

Ich wäre gezwungen gewesen, das Leben eines reissenden Tieres zu führen, nur um meine Erhaltung besorgt. . . . Mancher Jüngling würde wohl diesen Weg ins Unerlaubte lieber gewählt haben. . . . ich wollte . . . kein Tier werden. 45

This young man is an example of what Nossack sees as a centrifugal tendency in man, directing him out, away from nature, and condemning and elevating him to the rank of an outsider: "Die Natur hat ihn sozusagen als Aussenseiter gedacht. Welch ein faszinierendes Experiment!" ("Proligio," Die schwache Position der Literatur, p. 171). Any return to nature is to be resisted as a regression to one's origin. The fish in Der Neugierige returns to his natural origin in the depths of the sea and finds, to his horror, only a repulsively functional "Magensack," whose mouth is also its anus. And the narrator in "Klonz" perceives the danger of a relapse to an earlier natural state: "Auch gibt es noch manche Tiere und Pflanzen, die unser Auge beleidigen, weil sie sich nackt
und böse geben und uns an einen Zustand erinnern, in den wir zurückfallen können, wenn wir nicht wachsam sind.\textsuperscript{46} Nature threatens to bind man to his origin; for Nossack it is just another of the limitations which have to be overcome because they stand between man and the other dimension of existence.

The basic situation of Nossack's characters with regard to nature on the one hand and Western civilization on the other is particularly clearly revealed in the novel \textit{Der jüngere Bruder}. Stefan Schneider, the son of a surgeon and son-in-law of a rich industrialist, the product of a sophisticated domestic and socio-cultural environment, feels at home neither in this environment nor in the natural world of the Indians of South America, where he spends years exploring for oil. At most he experiences vague, vestigial feelings for this primeval world. Despite the sensitive depth of the wonderful nature description, with the moon and the sleeping Indians, he knows it is a world to which he no longer belongs and cannot belong without making an anachronism of himself:

Aber das sind Reste von Erinnerungen, vielleicht sind es schöne Reste, um die es einem leidtut, aber wer sein Leben nach ihnen einrichten will, kommt mir wie meine Schwiegermutter vor, die alte Möbel und Spiegel und Uhren und dergleichen mehr aus der Barockzeit sammelt ... und sehr stolz ist, wenn sie sagen kann: 'Sie sind ganz echt, nichts ist daran restauriert.' Auch an dem Mond war nichts restauriert, auch an dem Schlaf der Indianer nicht, gewiss, aber wir gehören nicht mehr dazu.

Vestigial recollections of nature cannot conceal man's separation from it. But Schneider is no more interested in restoring the link to the natural world than he is in establishing a relationship to the socio-cultural world of Western Europe, because he is attracted to another form of existence altogether:
Ich habe immer nach dem gesucht, was nachher kommt, nach diesen Gefühlen, nach dem Schlaf der Indianer, nach der Kultur . . . nach der Technik und nach der Religion, denn . . . keine romantischen Gefühle helfen uns, dies Dasein zu bestehen. Ich fühle mich zu denen hingezogen, die ausserhalb leben, in dem Nachher, in dieser Leere . . . und wenn ich einen von ihnen straucheln sehe, so traure ich um ihn, aber es macht mich nicht zweifeln an dem Nachher, auch dann nicht, wenn ich nicht dazugehören sollte.

Schneider leads an unappeased existence in the limbo between existence in this world and some other metaphysical realm. His life in the Brazilian wilderness is no answer to this dilemma and he again affirms the fact of his not belonging to the natural world. Indeed man has never really been a part of nature, and only this fact has given him the possibility of becoming a man, a being as separate from nature as he is from the levelling and de-personalizing machine of society and the cretinism of social existence:

Es war mir von vorneherein klar, dass Brasilien nur eine Notlösung für mich wäre . . . Es gibt dort Berufe, die man mit Neid betrachtet, zum Beispiel Chinchillajünger in den Anden, ein verbotener Beruf, aber dazu muss man geboren sein und darf nicht als Sohn eines Chirurgen oder als Schwiegersohn eines Generaldirektors beginnen. . . . es wäre auch nur eine Maskerade wie alles, was als Natur und natürlich gepriesen wird und was uns verlockt, wenn wir der Aufgabe des Menschseins müde sind; denn wir sind nicht mehr Natur und natürlich . . . wir sind vermutlich niemals ganz Natur gewesen wie Pflanzen und Tiere, sonst würden wir nicht die Möglichkeit haben, Menschen zu sein. Wo aber die Natur als Heil gepredigt wird, von weichherzigen Romantikern oder von hysterischen Diktatoren, von erwerbstüchtigen Ärzten oder von lüsternen Weibern, da gedeiht der Kretinismus unseres sozialen Daseins. Mit den hormonal aufgeputschten Resten unserer Herkunft wird ein ertragreicher Durchschnitt gezüchtet; es geht um Produktion und Konsum, und dazu muss der Mensch auf einen Zustand noch unterhalb der Natur reduziert werden. 47
Footnotes

1 "Proligo," Die schwache Position der Literatur: Reden und Aufsätze, Edition Suhrkamp, 156 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1966), p. 156. Subsequent references to the essays in this collection will be given in the text.


4 "Unveröffentlichter Brief eines Schriftstellers an seine Romanfigur," Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, Edition Suhrkamp, 445 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1971), p. 162. Subsequent references to the essays in this collection will be given in the text.


12 Die gestohlene Melodie (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972), p. 237.

13 Der Fall d'Arthez (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1968), p. 229.

14 "Der Schlagsahnebaiser," Begegnung Im Vorraum: Erzählungen (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1963).


20 "Publikum und Dichter," p. 49.


"Übersetzen und Übersetzt werden," p. 15.


"Ist Poesie lehrbar?" p. 280.


"Ist Poesie lehrbar?" Die Welt, 10 February 1968.


40 "Ist Poesie lehrbar?" p. 301.

41 Bienek.


CHAPTER 5

Spätestens im November and the new concept of love

Spätestens im November (1955) is the first work to make clear that just as Nossack's authentic individual experiences alienation from society, so too he is unable to achieve a close spiritual relationship with another individual. The novel deals with a love relationship, but this idea of the impossibility of achieving spiritual closeness with another person applies to all personal relationships.

Marianne Helldegen, the wife of a rich industrialist, meets the writer Berthold Möncken at a reception after the awarding to him of a literary prize. They are attracted to each other and leave the same evening to start a new life together. They spend a short idyllic interlude in the country but suddenly and inexplicably become estranged, and after they settle in a small town, where Berthold devotes himself to the writing of a new play, the estrangement grows. Marianne returns to her husband, but several months later the first performance of Berthold's play is given in Marianne's city. Berthold comes to the house, they leave together, but are killed minutes later when their car crashes.

The publisher's introduction to an edition of the novel comments that the story portrays "das Thema der Kontaktlosigkeit unserer Zeit." This has set the tone for a number of superficial and misleading judgements on the novel. Franz Lennartz describes the work as a "Roman ... der Unerfüllbarkeit der Liebe des Menschen unserer Zeit." Karl Heinz Kramberg sees the novel as
portraying "die leidige Isolation des Menschen dieser Zeit in der Gesellschaft."³ Paul Hühnerfeld maintains that "Nossack glaubt nicht, dass es in den alten Formen europäischer Gesellschaftsordnung noch Liebe und Brüderschaft, ja, echte Gefühle für einander geben kann."⁴ Such a view appeals to Marxist critics. Christa Wolf writes: "Nossack hat in diesem Buch die ihn umgebende bürgerliche Welt nach der etwa in ihr schlummernden echten Lebensmöglichkeit für den Menschen abgeklopft und gefunden, dass in diesem System weder für sinnvolle Arbeit noch für Liebe, noch für ein ehrliches, vernünftiges Miteinanderleben der Menschen Raum bleibt."⁵ Gerhard Dahne writes of Nossack's despair "Uber die von ihm erlebten unmenschlichen gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse" and maintains: "In der realen Welt . . . gibt es fast ausschliesslich nur Platz für entfremdete und entleerte Individuen . . . ." He believes that there exists "unter den bestehenden gesellschaftlichen Bedingungen keine Hoffnung auf Glück und erfüllte irdische Liebe."⁶ Günther Cwojdrak writes that "Spätestens im November weist scheinbar nach, dass eine echte Lebenserfüllung nicht mehr möglich sei," but points out "dass die scheinbar allgemeinmenschlichen Probleme seiner Figuren ganz spezifische Probleme der verfallenden spätbürgerlichen Gesellschaft sind."⁷

These critics are responding to the obvious fact that Spätestens im November portrays estrangement and "Kontaktlosigkeit" to an astonishing degree. At every turn the novel shows the breakup of human relationships. This is seen most fully in the case of Marianne and Berthold, but we see also the inability of other characters to enter into meaningful and lasting relationships.
Old Helldegen had been left by his wife, and his son is left by his. Müncken has been left by his wife, while Marianne before her marriage to Max Helldegen had had a hopelessly impossible affair with a married man. The picture presented is so unqualified that Cesare Cases has correctly referred to Nossack's "Gesetz der Unmöglichkeit menschlicher Beziehungen." But it should be realized that there are two distinct categories under which the operation of this law may be subsumed.

The first of these categories may be termed the conditional category, and the second the unconditional. In the first the "law of the impossibility of human relationships" is dependent on certain social, economic, and cultural structures in a given society. But in the second, unconditional category the law operates because human relationships are impossible irrespective of the particular type of social or economic system; they are impossible because aloneness is an absolute, not a conditional and changeable part of the human condition. The publisher of the novel, along with critics Lennartz, Kramberg, Hühnerfeld, Wolf, Dahne, and Cwojdrak are correct in their awareness of the concrete social, economic, and cultural determinants of alienation and "Kontaktlosigkeit" in West German society, which can be changed by reform or revolution, but they ignore the other category in which the individual's aloneness is absolute, not conditional, a stable norm of authentic existence at all times and in all places. In his novel Nossack is not simply showing us instances of aloneness on the assumption that, given different circumstances, they could be avoided, but rather he is showing us that personal aloneness is
an absolute of human existence which cannot be overcome, even with the best will in the world, by love or anything else.

The first category of human aloneness has been dealt with by Carl Otto Enderstein in his dissertation "Sozialkritik in Werken deutscher Nachkriegsautoren" in which Spätestens im November is dealt with in the chapter "Kontaktarmut und Entfremdung in der Gegenwartsgesellschaft." The main reason why a close spiritual relationship is so impossible in the modern world is the materialistic rat-race particularly evident in the "Wirtschaftswunder" society; it leaves little time for love or any other human feelings and values. In modern industrial society man simply has too many demands made on his time and attention by the struggle for existence. He simply cannot be distracted from the task in hand by the complexities of personal relationships and thus inevitably and largely unconsciously becomes superficial and mechanical in his relationships with others. This explains the great gulf between Marianne and her husband Max, who unwittingly provides an accurate commentary on it:

. . . wir können es uns einfach nicht leisten, uns ablenken zu lassen. Die Helldegen-Werke . . . beschäftigen schon heute dreitausend Leute. . . . Sie werden sicher begreifen, dass einen auch zu Haus die Sorgen nicht loslassen. Es steht zu viel auf dem Spiel, als dass unsereiner sich noch ernsthaft mit andern Problemen befassen könnte . . . (pp. 47-48)

How such a crammed, unfree life prohibits deep and lasting relationships with others and inevitably leads to estrangement between people is only too evident. In her farewell letter old Helldegen's wife had written that she felt infinitely sorry for him because he was not really living, despite his ever-increasing material success. And not only does Max not have time for, to
use Enderstein's phrase, "Teilnahmne am Dasein des anderen," but he uses his glamorous wife as an object to promote the interests of his company. Indeed the fact that he uses her is the only link between them.

Marianne is left alone not only during the day, but also frequently in the evenings and whenever Max is away on business. Her situation is not simply one of aloneness, but of painfully felt loneliness: "Man braucht doch einen Menschen, mit dem man reden kann" (p. 53). This need is hopelessly incapable of being fulfilled by the boring cocktail party circuit and her contempt for the artificial platitudes and play-acting of "socialising," which only intensifies her aloneness, is evident from the beginning. She feels an acute need for genuine relationships and communication. Her adultery is at least in part an attempt to escape from her loneliness and a response to her needs for contact, which she believes she can find in a new life with Berthold.

But after a short idyllic interlude Marianne finds not a close spiritual relationship, but a greater loneliness than before. Enderstein makes the crucial mistake of subsuming this new loneliness and the causal law which produces it under the conditional category. In doing so he sees Möncken only as an "artsy" Helldegen and overlooks not only the many obvious differences between the two but also the point in time and circumstances in which the estrangement between the lovers and Marianne's new loneliness arise. Enderstein's false interpretation invites refutation:

... auch Möncken, nach einer kurzen Pause sich einer neuen literarischen Arbeit hingebend, darf seine
According to Enderstein it is only the time-consuming rat-race for material advancement which prevents a close spiritual relationship between two individuals. Yet in the novel it is quite clear that the estrangement occurs before Berthold's renewed literary preoccupation, which in any case still allows him to spend hours each day with Marianne. The absurdity of Enderstein's interpretation is evident from the way in which he presents Berthold as a shabby little materialist, a prostitute to the expectations of critics and public. If Möncken's motivation is materialistic, it is strange that he should choose the profession of writer; Nossack knows, as his essays reveal, that almost any other job promises a faster and greater accumulation of wealth.

It is not merely the materialism of modern social living which stands between two individuals. Nossack's concern is to illustrate the abiding nature of aloneness even for those who break out of a bleak social environment and its false and
superficial human relationships; to show that it is an uncondi-
tional part of the human condition, constituting an unbridgeable
gulf between the self and others, which cannot be changed by social
or economic restructuring of the world. This ultimate aloneness
is closely linked to the individual's awareness of the other
metaphysical reality. And whereas true love cannot exist in the
materialistic world because of its total preoccupation with
economic and social factors, it is rendered both more difficult and
less important for those with an awareness of the other reality
because of the uniquely idiosyncratic nature of their awareness of
it and because it is seen as supremely valuable, and as such more
important than their love, or for that matter any other personal
relationship.

From the very start Nossack makes clear that *Spätestens im
November* is not just another banal love story. Marianne perceives
the otherness of Berthold, the fact of his not belonging. As she
watches Berthold on the podium she realizes that it is only a
social facade, whereas "er selber stehe schon abseits, weit, weit
weg" (p. 10). Berthold perceives a similar quality of otherness
in Marianne: "Irgend etwas dieser Art ist es, etwas Seltenes.
Man merkt es gleich, wenn man Sie unter anderen Leuten sieht"
(p. 17). Although both are so out of place, they are compelled to
act out their expected parts at the cocktail party and endure the
artificial mannerisms and false laughter. Berthold feels as if he
has wandered onto a film set where he does not belong. Their first
meeting, rather than being a case of love at first sight, is like
the elemental encounter of two planets in the great void:
Er versank auch sofort alles hinter mir. . . .
so . . . schwebte und wehte nun auch alles andere, was
um uns herum war, wie Nebelwolken auf und ab und
streifte uns kaum, und nur da, wo wir waren, konnte
man fest stehen. . . .
Wir standen auch sicher nicht lange da, so etwas
meint man nur. Für uns war es eine Ewigkeit. Wenn
sie vorbei ist, sehnt man sich immer danach zurück,
niehts genügt einem mehr. Aber die Welt weiss nichts
davon.
. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Und wie allein wir waren. Ganz ausserhalb und
allein. Mich fror. (pp. 12-13)

They have an other-worldly but infinitely desirable experience
outside of the public, objective time dimension and beyond the
cognizance of the social world altogether. Nossack is careful to
avoid any suggestion that it can be explained in terms of sexual
attraction. In the taxi which takes them away, Marianne is glad
that Berthold does not put his arm around her; she does not want
the traditional romantic and sexual relationship: "Dann wäre er
so gewesen, wie alle Männer sind, und ich war doch gerade
deswegen mit ihm fortgefahren, weil er anders war" (p. 16). Sub-
sequently we are told that Berthold seemed to be afraid of being
touched by Marianne and during the first two weeks there is no
sexual contact between them.

Marianne senses her only possibility of self-development and
fulfilment in the experience of another, higher form of existence;
she breaks with her present, dreary and now completely unbearable
existence not simply because she desires the companionship and
affection of Berthold, but because she longs for this other
reality:

Es konnte jeden Augenblick Schluss sein, und dann blieb
nur die Erinnerung an . . . an eine andere Möglichkeit,
die versäumt wurde . . . so etwas bleibt bei einem, bis
man daran zugrunde geht, und es macht alles, was noch
hinterher kommt, zu gleichgültigem Ersatz.
As they enter her luxurious home, Marianne realizes how all the valuable possessions and furnishings are suddenly worthless and false; everything is like a stage-set. Like Berthold she rejects the materialism of society because she has an awareness of another realm of existence from which the cold draught comes which makes her shiver at the cocktail party, in the taxi, and now in her luxurious centrally heated home. Both wish to preserve this awareness, which makes them outsiders in society, as something infinitely superior to involvement in the material and materialistic world. They are strongly drawn to each other, but their problem is to reconcile their individual awareness of this other realm with their mutual love. It proves insurmountable because what is most important is not their love, but their desire to experience the other form of existence.

The problem arises on their arrival at Marianne's house. Berthold hesitates before entering: "Sehen Sie doch ein, was soll ich hier!" (p. 18). The gulf between their separate awareness now separates them, but does not deter Marianne from her determination to leave, because what matters is not keeping Berthold, but experiencing the other reality:

The other reality is related to the idea of happiness, and one of Berthold's poems is about this:

Dass wir vom Glücke träumen und es kennen und doch nicht haben, das ist unser Unglück. (p. 64)

But though Marianne agrees, she does not know of what happiness Berthold dreams; she knows only their shared unhappiness, while their happiness is the object of a purely individual yearning. And as they travel away into their new life, it is not their togetherness but their separation which is stressed: "Er blickte vor sich hin, er dachte an irgend etwas andres, nicht an mich. Er hatte vergessen, wo er war und dass ich neben ihm sass" (p. 40).

For two weeks Marianne and Berthold do however share happiness in the little border village of Ludwigshof in an idyllic country setting which is the perfect location for a perfect love relationship, unhampered by social and financial obstacles. Yet it is not their love which is stressed, though Marianne does say that their love for one another was understood, but their shared experience of another form of existence altogether:

... sogar mehr als Glück, wenn es so etwas gibt.... Es war eine völlige Abwesenheit, keine Vergangenheit und keine Zukunft. (p. 64)

Ich sollte besser gar nicht davon sprechen, da ich es falsch erzähle und falsch verstanden werde.... Es gibt so vieles, für das es an Worten fehlt, und gerade das ist das Wirkliche. Es ist da, bestimmt, doch man muss selber dabeigewesen sein, mitteilen lässt es sich nicht. Die Leute bekommen nur eine falsche Vorstellung. (p. 75)

Ach, es lässt sich nicht darüber reden. (p. 75)

Niemand wird es glauben, man wird es als Einbildung belächeln; sobald man davon spricht, ist es, als ob es nie gewesen sei, und doch lässt es sich nicht vergessen und
hat mich mehr gewandelt als alles, was ich sonst erlebte. Es hat mich unfähig zu irgendeiner anderen Freude gemacht. (p. 77)

Man kann es nicht wollen, es ist nur ein Augenblick, der mehr ist als das ganze Leben; man kann nur darauf warten. (p. 80)

Like an ultimate mystical state it cannot be talked about, it is beyond the cognizance of the public world, and it is outside of the public and objective time dimension. The experience is given to them as if by grace and is due to no action on their part. Berthold's true face is back again, the face which is present when all the other faces of social and personal role-playing are absent, and which usually can only be seen for a rare, brief instant in the transition between all these other false faces (p. 76). Given the presence of a person's true face, there would seem to be the possibility of a completely intimate relationship without pretence and falsity between himself and another. But in the case of Marianne and Berthold there is the further idea of the attainment of a unique mystical union of souls without parallel in Nossack's work. Berthold spends indeterminate lengths of time staring in wonder into Marianne's eyes, the windows of her soul, and Marianne sees only his face:

... ich wollte nur dies Gesicht und das Staunen. ... ich wollte ihm gleichen und manchmal schien es mir auch so. Wenn er lächelte, musste ich lächeln ... Es war wie in einem Spiegel; nein, nicht wie in einem Spiegel, nicht das Glas dazwischen. Es war wie ein einziges Gesicht, das lächelte. (p. 81)

The experience is taken from them just as suddenly and inexplicably as it was given. It begins to rain incessantly, washing the fourteen happy days in which they experienced the other state of being back over the frontier, back to the other side whence they
had come. Marianne and Berthold have been allowed, as if by grace, to transcend the isolation of their individuality and fulfil themselves, each in and through the other, in the shared experience of another state of being. When the grace is taken away, all frenzied attempts to transcend individuality and to reachieve the other state are futile: it cannot be wished into being, at most it can only be waited for. So Marianne and Berthold are again isolated; their love for one another is itself insufficient to bridge the gulf between their separate individualities and create a close spiritual relationship or to procure for them again the supremely valuable experience of the other state.

Although the circumstances and occasion of the lover's estrangement are plain, it is precisely in this respect that the novel has been misinterpreted, and not just by Enderstein. Christa Wolf misreads the text when she writes: "Man kann heute nicht lange glücklich sein: Möncken und Marianne sind machtlos dagegen, dass der Alltag mit unerklärlicher Gewalt sie wieder auseinanderreisst."\(^{11}\) It is not the demands of every-day life in a capitalist society which tear them apart. The estrangement cannot be ascribed to the specific problems of decaying late-bourgeois society\(^ {12}\) precisely because it occurs before the lover's return to the socio-cultural world. Only after this initial estrangement do they return to society in the town of D., where Berthold starts work on a new play.

In this connexion it should be stressed that Berthold's writing is the result and not the cause of aloneness. A number of critics besides Enderstein have ascribed the estrangement of the lovers to Berthold's preoccupation with his writing,
overlooking the fact that the estrangement comes first. Marcel Reich-Ranicki\textsuperscript{13} thinks that Berthold attaches more importance to literature than to Marianne, for whom he has no time, just as Max had no time for her. Brian Keith-Smith would have us believe that "Both industrialist and writer are too preoccupied with their own struggles for self-expression to care for the spiritual welfare of Marianne. Love is seen free . . . from any illusions of its overwhelming power to set right the ruthless self-centredness of people with specific aims in life."\textsuperscript{14} Luc Estang compounds the confusion: "Aber das wahre Motiv für ihre Rückkehr in den Schoss der Familie ist, dass Marianne sich vernachlässigt fühlt, weil ihr Liebhaber zu viel Zeit und Kraft seinem Werk zuwendet."\textsuperscript{15} Even Michael Batts, the only critic to have paid any attention to the metaphysical awareness of the lovers and the difficulty of reconciling their love relationship with it, is inclined at one point to attribute their failure to achieve a harmonious state to the intrusion of materialistic motives, to their becoming infected by worldly attitudes; he argues that Berthold takes himself and his writing too seriously, and that Marianne becomes possessive. Now whether or not these claims are true (and I think both are at most half-truths), the essential point is that the fall from grace, the end of the close spiritual relationship or union, and the ever-increasing estrangement all come before Berthold's writing and Marianne's possible possessiveness, which are therefore not causes but symptoms of the estrangement, a sign that the gulf of their aloneness has not been bridged for long. Berthold had believed that Marianne could overcome his aloneness and free him of the need to write; he had told her: "nun brauche
er nicht mehr zu schreiben, da er mich habe" (p. 89). So when he begins to write again, this is a sign that the attempt has failed.

The correctness of this view is confirmed if we examine the circumstances under which Berthold first began to write and the meaning of writing for him. He began to write after a shattering experience while standing one night on a bridge in Heidelberg:


Deprived of the collectively sanctioned myths of society, he is disorientated in an incomprehensible world. He had run to women so as not to lose hold on reality completely. But it was too late for the security of a biological, animal-like refuge: the women noticed his radical alienation from the conventional, reassuring beliefs about what reality is and his resultant unsuit edness to social and practical life.

The only hold Berthold could find was writing: "Nur das Schreiben hat mich gerettet" (p. 87). His work, a dialogue with himself, is his only companion in aloneness. But precisely because of his solitary awareness of the other realm, because he is an outsider of no practical use in society, there can be no doubt that Nossack sees him as a superior human type to Max, the successful industrialist, materialist, and social cipher: "Ich brauchte den absoluten Gegentyp zum bürgerlich-matriarchalischen Typ, den zentrifugalen Typ." 17
The centrifugal type is of course not immune to the biological yearning for the warmth and security of female companionship; Berthold admits he has the same yearnings and glands as others, and he has asked various women to marry him:

Natürlich wäre es schief gegangen, aber ... ich hatte sonst niemand, ich wollte jemand haben, zu dem ich immer wieder zurückkehren konnte ... Nur dass ich heute etwas klüger geworden bin und weiß, dass es nicht geht. ... Ich kam mir manchmal so verloren vor, damals; man muss das erst gewohnt werden, später lacht man darüber und versucht es gar nicht erst. '(p. 85)

Ich eigne mich wohl nicht dafür... und ich will niemand stören; besser man bleibt allein. (p. 40)

Berthold has come to realize that it is futile to seek to escape aloneness and that it is simply a question of becoming accustomed to it. He has come to affirm the impossibility of leading the same conventional life as others or of entering into a close spiritual relationship with another. The attraction of the simple, unproblematic everyday life of the majority, though often succumbed to in moments of tiredness (p. 86), is constantly over-ridden by his solitary awareness of the other, superior realm of being, and by the idea that those who live the conventional life are missing out on all that is really valuable: "begreifen kann ich es nicht, wie ihnen das ausreicht" (p. 86). For Berthold value lies in another realm of existence altogether. He is so incapable of self-realization or happiness in this world that he wants to be a volunteer on the first space flight to the moon. The traditional romantic relationship is part of the "Diesseits" and can confer no additional value on it; neither can personal relationships, which Berthold avoids:

Ich habe es verlernt zu reden, wahrscheinlich werde ich
What is worth living for is not love or personal relationships, but the hope of another, ultimate but indefinable kind of existence: "Ich habe masslose Wünsche . . . Deshalb probiere ich es gar nicht erst mit dem Üblichen; es reicht nicht aus; es hat alles zu wenig Wirklichkeit" (p. 119).

Marianne, by contrast, has a desire and need for human companionship and communication and is a far "warmer" figure. Though she shares Berthold's metaphysical yearning, it is not as overwhelming in her own case, and she would settle for a good deal less than a metaphysical state and union of souls, namely for a little human warmth and an indication that she is wanted and needed. But since Berthold's desires are directed exclusively at the other reality, he cannot give her these. Marianne finds that he has no ability to love, or need for love, either in the sense of a close spiritual relationship or of wanting, needing, and cherishing the companionship of another person:


Max, for all his faults, did at least need her, if only to use her as a mother, wife, and public relations act. But Berthold neither needs nor uses Marianne, who feels completely superfluous and inadequate: "Ich fühle nur, dass ich nicht ausreiche, deshalb
quält er sich mit seiner Arbeit und schiebt mich beiseite" (p. 83). This feeling is intensified by what Marianne feels to be Berthold's evasion: "ehe man sich's versah, war er einem entwischt und ganz fern . . . man merkte, dass man ganz allein war und dass das die Absicht war" (pp. 71-72). From Berthold's point of view, however, it is not a matter of evasion, but rather of the incommunicability of his ineffable awareness of the other realm: "Du musst nicht denken, dass ich Geheimnisse vor dir habe . . . Ich kann nur nicht darüber reden . . ." (p. 124).

Because Marianne feels so impossibly lonely and superfluous with Berthold she begins to contemplate returning home. Her inner struggle arises from her difficulty in accepting aloneness, both for herself and for Berthold. She realizes that Berthold does not need her, or anyone else, but paradoxically is afraid of seeing him alone, and feels that to leave him would be a betrayal:

Denn wenn ich irgendwohin gehörte, dann gehörte ich zu ihm. Denn er stand genau so da, wie damals . . . bei der Preisverteilung . . . so allein, dass man es nicht aushalten konnte. (p. 119)

Yet there exists in her mind the contrary idea of the necessity of accepting and respecting aloneness, though it is not so pronounced as with Berthold. She is vaguely aware that a person is alone in his perception of the other reality and that this aloneness is a frightening but intrinsic aspect of the experience which must be respected:

Ich brauche nur daran zu denken, wie er auf jener Brücke stand, in Heidelberg . . . Ich sehe, wie er dort steht, allein, und begreife alles, ohne dass ich es in Worte bringen kann. Ich möchte zu ihm hinlaufen und alles gutmachen. Und dann hält mich etwas zurück, alles zögert in mir; denn vielleicht ist gerade das Hinlaufen das Gefährliche. (p. 84)
Marianne is aware too of the falsity of their present relationship which hides their alienation behind a surface routine of role-playing and togetherness, of eating and sleeping and living together, so that by contrast her loneliness is intensified. She sees how separation would be a salvation:

"... wenn mir nun ... Berthold weggeweht wird, nachts vielleicht, wenn ich schlafe, oder wenn ich ausgehe, weil ich ihn bei seiner Arbeit allein lassen will, ja, und er weht mit seiner Arbeit weg, ich aber nach der andern Seite, langsam, es nützt nichts, die Arme auszustrecken, um rufen darf man nicht ... eine Strafe, die die Leute so schlimm finden, wäre eine Erlösung. (p. 65)"

Separation and aloneness would be a salvation from the torment of their existence together and from the danger of Berthold feeling obligated to stay with her if she appears to be unable to live without him. Even though they love each other, such an obligated life is an obstacle to something which matters more than love:

"... nun weiss ich, dass es falsch von mir war, mit ihm hierher zu fahren; ich hätte ihn allein fahren lassen müssen, wir hätten uns gleich trennen sollen, ganz gleich, wie schwer es mir geworden wäre. Er darf sich nicht gebunden fühlen, dabei kommt nur Unglück heraus. (p. 90)

"... das wäre noch gefährlicher, würden wir uns auch lieben. (p. 121)"

Both attracted and repelled by the thought of aloneness, Marianne finally returns to her old life with Max, where she acts out her life in the social world as a matter of surface appearance only. But several months later Berthold arrives at the house to take Marianne away and again start a new life with her. He announces that writing books is "kein Beruf für einen Mann" (p. 185), that he is happy "dass ich endlich darüber hinweg bin" (p. 185), and that he will take a decent, financially secure, eight-hour day occupation which will leave him with more time for Marianne: "Es
wird alles ganz anders sein. . . . Wir haben jetzt doch Zeit . . . " (p. 189).

The lovers' death in the car crash makes the novel's ending equivocal. Though both feel happy to be together and that they belong together, it is doubtful whether this is anymore than a momentary state to be terminated by a repetition of their previous estrangement. Contrary claims made by Berthold which promise the permanent reattainment of a close spiritual relationship appear unconsidered and dubious. For example, he wrongly ascribes their estrangement to a lack of time. His claim that he is finished with writing is doubtful in the light of his earlier admission that only writing had saved him and that it is an intrinsic part of his existence. And for a man with limitless wishes and a distaste for the ordinary aspects of life, his opting for the security of an eight-hour day seems highly unlikely. In short, nothing suggests they are more likely to succeed the second time than the first in effecting a permanent reconciliation of their individual awarenesses of the other infinitely desirable existence to which they both aspire and in rendering it compatible with their love relationship. An alternative interpretation of the work, however, is that their death itself signifies the reestablishment of their position, their joint reattainment of the other state of being. But on the basis of the factual evidence in the novel, as opposed to conjecture about the possible nature of this death, it would seem that unlike Dante's Francesca and Paolo (the characters in Berthold's new play), death marks not the consummation or apotheosis of their love, but simply its end. Indeed this is confirmed by the little we learn about the world beyond the grave from where Marianne narrates her
story: nothing indicates she is united there with Berthold, as are Francesca and Paolo in the Inferno, and this is again confirmed by the sad, lonely tone of her account. The overwhelming impression is that death finally rids each one of the other, a view shared by Henri Plard: "les amants ne sont pas réunis à jamais dans la mort, comme ceux de Dante, mais enfin débarrassés l'un de l'autre."
Spätestens im November illustrates the inability of two people to achieve spiritual closeness in a love relationship and in addition makes clear that what is worth living for is not love, or the attempt to achieve spiritual closeness, but another kind of existence altogether of which the individual has a unique, esoteric awareness which excludes a close spiritual relationship. Other works likewise show that the attainment of a close spiritual relationship with another cannot be man's purpose in life and go on to formulate a new concept of love based upon the impossibility of close spiritual relationships because of the individual's private awareness of the other altogether more valuable reality which it is his supreme goal to attain, but which he can attain, if at all, only alone. The picture of human aloneness in these other works is unequivocal and uncompromising, because unlike Spätestens im November they contain no instance of a transcendence of individuality and a union of souls in a shared experience of the other state of being; in them the other reality is always seen as a dividing factor, leading directly into aloneness, which is embraced.

The loose bundle of ideas which makes up the traditional concept of love is repeatedly shown to be questionable. It is shown not just that love is insufficient as a uniting force, but that it is an obstacle to something more valuable. The theme appears as early as Nekyia. Love is seen simply as something people are taught to do by the example of their elders; it is simply part of social role-playing:

Ich vermute, wir spielten sogar Liebe, weil wir meinten, es gehöre dazu. Ich ... habe ... den Verdacht, dass
The social convention of love is perhaps indulged in readily by the individual (whether because of libidinous desire or psychological fear of aloneness is not specified), but at the expense of impeding his personal growth. Each person has to develop; each person has a path to follow, but it can only be travelled alone. However people often seek to escape the isolation of their journey through the illusion that another person is the object of their quest. Thus the narrator says of his relationship to the woman in the story:

Ich wage nicht zu behaupten, dass wir uns liebten. Ich vermute eher, dass wir uns beide mit andern Zielen auf den Weg gemacht hatten. . . . doch zufällig sahen wir uns und glaubten, dass wir es wären, nach denen wir gesucht hätten. (Nekyia, p. 93)

In "Mehr darf man nicht davon verraten," published in 1952, three years before Spätestens im November, the new concept of love already begins to emerge. Real love is an understanding for the centrifugal force in the individual which drives him on in a solitary search for an ultimate possibility referred to as "the angel." To this is contrasted the traditional idea of love with its emphasis on sexual factors and, beyond the merging and union of bodies, also the idea of the close relating of souls. There is a condemnation of "der kleinen körperlichen Anhänglichkeit . . . die man Liebe zu nennen pflegt."20 This is the type of love practised not by men, but by "die Männchen, die sich an sie [women] schmiegen
und das Liebe nennen." These are unequal to the cold of authentic existence on the outside; they either never depart from or regress to the warm, secure, biological centre of life. Berthold himself had spoken of the aloneness he felt in his younger years and his need to have someone to return to when necessary: "ich hatte sonst niemand, ich wollte jemand haben, zu dem ich immer wieder zurückkehren konnte" (Spätestens im November, p. 85). But in "Mehr darf man nicht davon verraten" Nossack expresses contempt for

Diese betriebsamen Halbwesen, die zurück wollen, da es ihnen draussen zu kalt ist, und die zurück müssen, da sie nicht fähig sind, die ihnen gegebene Richtung selbständig weiterzugehen. . . . Und das soll das Glück der Frauen ausmachen? Ach, überlassen wir es getrost den Filmen und den Psychoanalytikern, die Welt als ein Bordell mit einigem sentimentalen und moralischen Zierrat zu sehen. . . . Denn die Natur will nicht den Beischlaf, wie uns die Gesundheitsapostel vorpredigen, sondern den Engel. Und darum blicken die Frauen voller Hoffnung den erbarmungslosen Suchern nach, die sich von ihnen abwenden. ("Mehr darf man nicht davon verraten," p. 82)

Here all the concern of the modern age to overcome contact deprivation, all the recommendations of a full, uninhibited sex life as a prerequisite of mental and physical health, all this is turned upside down and inside out by Nossack. Man must overcome the temptations of "love" and sex and leave female companionship behind and exist alone, on the outside, in the cold, in search of his ultimate possibility in another dimension entirely.

Similarly Nossack's solitary fish in Der Neugierige (1955) feels his life to be a search for something indefinable. His first experience of sex—a full scale sex orgy—at first leads him, as if by a largely unconscious mental somersault, to assume that this orgy was itself the object of his search because, having once arrived, he was free from the uncertainties and frustration arising from his questing self:
The fish discovers, however, that these orgies of love never quite enable him to empty himself of himself; there always remains some part of himself which is searching and unsatisfied (p. 37). The fish must learn to affirm this part of himself which cannot be extinguished or united with the other in love, and a few pages later we see a new affirmation of the power of this self and a new Strindbergian view of the females as vampires:

Wir forchten uns, dass sie sich an unserer Kraft masteten, als wenn wir die selbstverstandlichste Speise ware und nur dazu da, um sie zu erhalten. Je mehr wir uns verausgaben, um so hungriger wurden sie, diese nimmersattigen Wesen, und ihre Liebe schien nur ein Vorwand, der uns dazu reizen sollte, uns an sie zu vertun. (p. 40)

One of the most concise and complete presentations of the new metaphysical concept of love is to be found in the short story "Begegnung im Vorraum." Here we are told of "die ungeheuerlichste Liebeserklá rung" made by E., a friend of the narrator, to an unknown woman he meets in a crowded bar. E. and the woman meet in the narrow hallway and the woman speaks the astounding words: "Ich habe vorhin zugehört . . . Du gefällst mir." The naked authenticity of the encounter derives also from its physical circumstances: "Zwei Gestalten, völlig isoliert von allem wegen der entsetzlich schattenlosen Helligkeit des Raumes" ("Begegnung im Vorraum," p. 12). They are the only occupants of a "Bannkreis" (p. 13), the absolute stillness of which is impenetrable. The initial words and the almost magical situation in which they are spoken are strikingly similar
to Marianne and Berthold's first meeting in *Spätestens im November.*

But this is the only point of resemblance, as the subsequent development shows. No attempt is made to reconcile the awareness of another, supremely valuable, metaphysical type of existence with a traditional love relationship; the latter is seen as an unqualified obstacle to something greater and more valuable with which it cannot be reconciled and in face of which it will fail, as E.'s reply shows:

Madame, lassen Sie uns bitte nicht auf die unmenschliche Weise miteinander verkehren, die man Liebe nennt. Das haben wir seit vielen Jahrtausenden getan, und es hat uns immer wieder zu Fall gebracht, obwohl wir zum Aufrechtstehen geschaffen sind.

Wollen wir nicht das Wunder, dass wir uns trotz allem zu dieser späten Stunde noch einmal begegnen, anders zu benutzen versuchen als bisher, damit die Welt über unser erneutes Versagen nicht ganz in Verzweiflung gerät?

Sie haben, Madame, etwas gesehen, was ich nicht bin, aber was ich sein könnte und darum sein müsste. Ich habe keinen Namen dafür, ich vermag es nicht wahrzunehmen, und das macht mein Leben unruhig und unsicher; denn ich weiss, dass es manchmal da ist und dass es eben da war. Es huschte über den Spiegel, und ich spürte es an der Sehnsucht, die in mir wach wurde, mich in das Bild zu verwandeln. Ihre Augen sind klarer und nehmen es zuweilen wirklich wahr. Das gibt mir wieder Hoffnung, das zu werden, was Sie wollen.


The old ideal of love with its constant failures is rejected and there is an affirmation of the existential possibilities within the individual and of the other, ineffable, metaphysical
existence for which no sacrifice is too great and which causes a repugnance for everything relative and conditional.

The narrator's immediate reaction is to feel sorry for the woman and the isolation she is left in; he asks how E. can speak like that to a strange woman. E.'s reply is significant: "Fremd? . . . Na, hör mal, weniger fremd kann man sich wohl nicht sein" (p. 15). Here for the first time is Nossack's paradoxical idea that even given the facts of physical separation and aloneness an inexplicable metaphysical intimacy is still possible.

The narrator seems to be unaware of this unfathomable intimacy and when narrating the event much later he still finds his friend's attraction to the ideal and ultimate unrealistic and questionable, especially in view of the isolation it causes the woman and the vacuum she is left in (pp. 6-7). Yet the narrator and E. have more in common than the above would suggest. The narrator remarks that "... Verwandtschaft ist wohl das ungeeigneteste Verhältnis, um einen anderen zu beurteilen. Man tritt von vornherein ohne Abstand an ihn heran und billigt ihm gar nicht erst die Freiheit zu, anders zu sein, als man ihn haben will" (p. 6). Without doing violence either to the text or Nossack's own views, the above could be justifiably rephrased to read: "a relationship is the most inappropriate condition for relating to another because one has no distance from the other and does not permit him the freedom to be different from how one wants to have him." In his reply to the woman E. had clearly claimed this freedom for himself: the freedom to become what he could and therefore should become; and to do this he must avoid the premature ossification of role-playing which is inseparable from any relationship.
But in choosing this freedom for himself, E. was also choosing for the woman: he chose not to foist her off with all that was relative and conditional in himself, with a role which was not himself, still less what he could be. Though he makes his claim in his own name, it nevertheless implies his own deep respect for the woman, for whom the merely conditional is not good enough. And this respect and concern for the other is also a characteristic of the narrator who tells us that he calls himself E.'s friend because "ich zuweilen besorgter um ihn bin als um mich. Das scheint mir ein ganz guter Mass-stab für Freundschaft zu sein" (p. 6). Respect and concern for the other, in both friendship and in love, are but the corollary of respect and concern for the self, not just the given or achieved self, but the other self which is still to become, and which can become only in aloneness, free of the prison of roles.

A solitary existence, though authentic, does not of course necessarily free the outsider from physiologically conditioned sexual needs. In the short story "Der Nachruf" the narrator passes the infamous Herbertstrasse in Hamburg, forbidden to minors and blocked off from the public view of moral passersby, "Wie bei einer Bedürfnisanstalt." But from a physiologically conditioned need to cohabitation or the institution of marriage is, as Arndt knows, a big step. As he travels through the streets of Hamburg with Ruth, he reflects on his relationship with her. Both are divorced; he has known her for ten or twelve years, and finds it pleasant that he can be with her without needing to talk; they often do not see each other for months, though without feeling less close; both know that marriage or cohabitation would not work:
Es hat natürlich Momente gegeben, da dachte ich, dass es schön wäre, mit ihr verheiratet zu sein. Oder sagen wir, ganz mit ihr zusammenzuleben. Doch es wäre nichts dabei herausgekommen. ... Auch jetzt kommen solche Momente noch zuweilen ... Lächerlich, ja. Diese knabenhafte Sehnsucht hört wohl niemals auf. (pp. 191-92)

Ruth, like Arndt, is a person who cannot become reconciled to and normalized by the false conventions of life. She is driven by greater appetites than those of sex, and, like Arndt, by greater yearnings than the wish for the security of marriage:

Sie ist keine Frau zum Heiraten, das passt nicht zu ihr. Sie hat es auch wohl schon probiert, genau so wie ich, aber es dauert nicht lange. Sie ist viel zu hungrig, als dass sie durch so etwas wie Ehe satt werden könnten. ... Dafür ist sie eine Frau, mit der man Pferde stehlen kann, wenn einem danach zumute ist. ... Ich weiss nicht, wie man so ein Verhältnis nennen soll. Es ist auch eine Art Treue darin. (p. 192)

The loyalty to which Arndt refers again implies the existence, despite aloneness, of some form of bond or union in aloneness, which is the maximum of relatedness possible. Arndt can only describe it as follows:

Wir sind wie zwei Holzstückchen, die den gleichen Strom hinabschwimmen. In derselben Richtung aber nicht zusammen, sondern weit getrennt und jedes auf seiner Seite. ... Nur an den Stromschnellen werden wir zusammengetrieben, ganz nah manchmal. Doch gleich hinterher, vielleicht durch die Gewalt des Zusammenstosses, treibt es uns wieder auseinander. Im ruhigen Wasser schwimmen wir dann wieder allein. Wir tun auch nichts dagegen. (pp. 192-93)

The rightness of their not seeking to escape their aloneness is underlined toward the end of "Der Nachruf" by Küster, who explains to Ruth what happens

Wenn man mit jemandem zusammen sein will, weil man glaubt, nicht mehr allein sein zu können. ... Der andere ... schläft ... neben Ihnen im Bett. ... Und es ist nicht seine Schuld, wenn wir nicht einschlafen könnten. Wir haben zwar gedacht, dass er uns dazu verhelfen würde, aber es ist nicht gelungen. Vielleicht ist es auch besser, dass er schläft. Man braucht dann nicht zu schauspielern und
so zu tun, als ob es gelungen wäre. Man kann dann allein damit fertig werden. (p. 235)

The argument here comes full circle. An individual has been cast into aloneness and spiritually unsettled by an awareness of another, greater realm of existence and a resultant spiritual yearning. She seeks to escape the aloneness and the yearning by means of a romantic involvement and sexual relationship. But the attempt fails; her awareness of and yearning for the other reality remain and she is still awake while her companion sleeps. She is thus alone again, both inwardly and outwardly; but this frees her from the constraint of playing a false role and enables her once again to assume her aloneness and to attempt to cope with her situation by herself, which is the only way it can be dealt with.

The new concept of love is again presented by Nossack in two of the Sechs Etüden (1964). In "Töte deinen Feind" the inhabitants of the land which lives by the commandment "Kill thine enemy" have a different but clearly more respectful attitude toward their wives which enhances the institution of marriage because wives are not regarded as property or as known quantities, since their essential otherness is respected:

... dass wir uns Tag und Nacht... bewusst sind, jederzeit als natürlicher Feind von unsern Frauen getötet werden zu können, wenn wir uns gehen lassen und sie als auswechselbares Besitztum behandeln, lässt sie uns schöner erscheinen. Die Achtung vor unsern potentiellen Mörderinnen, oder anders ausgedrückt, die Distanz dem Fremden gegenüber, dünkt uns geradezu eine Garantie für den Frieden zu sein. Eine wirksamere Garantie... als das, was in Ihrem... Lande mit dem Begriff Liebe von den Menschen verlangt wird. 24

This unconditional respect for the unknown and unknowable and potentially possible in every individual necessarily excludes a close spiritual relationship. But paradoxically one is at the
same time closer to the other person's true, unfalsified self, which exists behind the false surface facade of role-playing, so that there can be the kind of metaphysical intimacy or union in aloneness referred to earlier. Marianne in *Spätestens im November* had experienced this: from the moment she accepted the aloneness of herself and of Berthold and left him, she felt, despite their physical and spiritual separation, in a way closer to him than before: "Ich hatte immer das Gefühl, dass er gar nicht weit weg von mir sei, nur im nächsten Zimmer oder nur um die nächste Strassenecke, und dass ich nur seinen Namen zu rufen brauchte" (*Spätestens im November*, p. 130).

The idea recurs in "Viktoria." As in "Töte deinen Feind" an individual must not be reduced to the level of an object by being treated as property, as a role, or as a known or knowable quantity. The "Distanz dem Fremden gegenüber" must be preserved so that there can be a plenitude of freedom and possibility. But because the husband contents himself with listening to his wife's flute-playing from the room next door, because he does not seek a physical or spiritual relationship with her into which the superficial facade of roles and role-playing would inevitably intrude, he is, paradoxically, all the closer to her real, unfalsified self:

Footnotes

1 Spätestens im November (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1963). Subsequent references will be given in the text.


5 Christa Wolf, "'Freiheit' oder Auflösung der Persönlichkeit?" Über Hans Erich Nossack, p. 102.


10 See the excellent discussion by Michael S. Batts, "Tristan and Isolde in Modern Literature: L'éternel retour," Seminar, 5 (Fall 1969), 89-90.


15 Luc Estang, "Spätestens im November;" Über Hans Erich Nossack, p. 98.

16 Batts. p. 90.


19 Nekyia: Bericht eines Überlebenden (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1951), p. 34. The next reference will be given in the text.

20 "Mehr darf man nicht davon verraten," Fünf Fenster: Jahrbuch der Freien Akademie der Künste in Hamburg (Hamburg, 1952), p. 82. The next references will be given in the text.

21 Der Neugierige (München: Albert Langen - Georg Müller Verlag, 1955), p. 38. Subsequent references will be given in the text.

22 "Begegnung im Vorraum," Begegnung im Vorraum: Erzählungen (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1963), p. 11. Subsequent references will be given in the text.

23 "Der Nachruf," Begegnung im Vorraum, p. 195. Subsequent references will be given in the text.

24 "Töte deinen Feind," Sechs Erzähl (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1964), p. 49. The next reference will be given in the text.
CHAPTER 6

Spirale

(i)

Ein Ereignis hat einen Mann schlaflos gemacht. Er müht sich, sein Leben zurück und zuende zu denken; mit verteilten Rollen hält er über sich Gericht, klagt sich an, verteidigt sich und versucht, sich zu begnadigen, um endlich Ruhe zu finden. Doch immer, wenn die Spirale seiner Gedanken in den Schlaf absinken will, stösst sie an andere Bruchstücke seines Lebens und wird von neuem in das unerbittliche Zwielsicht der Schlaflosigkeit hochgerissen. 1

The prologue of Spirale illustrates how human life cannot be reduced to a rational and unified closed system; no ultimate purpose or order can be read into it or out of it. We are reminded of Nossack's observation concerning his own life: "Ich sehe keine Logik in meinem Lebenslauf, ich sehe nur Situationen. Alles ist für mich . . . ungewiss . . . ." 2 Unable to make ultimate sense of its existence, the human mind can comprehend only fragments of life and present only a series of incomplete situations or "Spiralen." Reality as a whole--not just the subjective reality of the human consciousness, but also the external reality of the world--is baffling, so that man is disoriented and thus ultimately spiritually alone in the world.

The title and structure of the work associate a spiral configuration with man's thought about reality, because this thought does not cohere to form the closed circle of a totally known reality. The circle of thought never quite closes, so that there is formed a never ending spiral plunging on into the vast unknown of the self and of reality. The ultimate spiritual bewilderment and aloneness of man is unavoidable because an overview of reality and thus a reliable orientation in the world cannot be achieved. Outside of
a small, reasonably illuminated area all is darkness and unknown, and even this small lighted area can be darkened by the intrusion of what lies beyond. New aspects of the self and of the world are constantly coming to light in the individual spirals and putting everything in question. There is much reason for fear and malaise, yet also much ground for hope: existence is "open," and the possibilities of man and the world are unending. The only constant is the questing, questioning self, though even the very substance of this self is constantly changing; several selves ("mit verteilten Rollen") in fact replace the unified, cohesive personality because for Nossack man is not constituted as a known quantity or as an established personality.

The recurring theme in the individual spirals is the attempted crossing or transcending of borders or limitations. In each of the five stories a character yearns to cross over into another realm of existence and to this end seeks to extricate himself from the limitations of his present life. These include the family, the natural, biological origin, the social milieu with its stifling conventions and "normal," "common sense" views of life, personal relationships, and one's personal past. As Nossack himself indicated in the Bienek interview, 3 a central theme in his work is that of the "Grenzüberschreitung," and no work illustrates this better than Spirale. It shows in particular how the individual's awareness of what lies beyond the border and his attempts to cross over inevitably lead to his personal, socio-cultural, and spiritual aloneness. He who is aware of the other reality and he who crosses over, if not into the other realm itself, at least into a kind of "Zwischenreich," is isolated by his inability to
communicate with the social world because his uniquely individual perception of the other reality is not capable of common consensus and cannot be described in the public convention of language.
In "Am Ufer" the man is an adolescent on the verge of adulthood (he is eighteen), yet still closely tied to his childhood existence. He is attempting to maintain himself against a stifling and hostile domestic environment and realize his existential possibilities. He illustrates Nossack's belief that an attempt is made, especially by the mother, spiritually to castrate the child and reduce him to a social function. Nossack rejects the family absolutely; nowhere is it seen to possess any redeeming merit. It is a closed, restrictive world inimical to Nossack's "open" view of man and the world. It is the first and perhaps most intense stage of the social "Gleichschaltung" demanded by the Apparat.

Nossack believes that children have not yet been reduced to conventional roles fulfilling some exterior purpose. Their possibilities have not been whittled away and their perception of the world has not yet been stripped of wonder and awe; they live in a magical world which has not yet been reduced to an impoverished construct of reason. Children have not yet been placed in mental straitjackets; though younger than adults, they actually have a broader range of experiences, references, and insights because their consciousness has not yet been channelled into set ways of looking at the world and because they are still free of prejudices, idées fixes, and conditioned reflexes.

The child's world is very much like the world of the fairy-tale--magical and wondrous--and the two are often found in close association in Nossack's work. In Spätestens im November Marianne
as a child is sung a fairy-tale lullaby by an old washer-woman whose home is itself like something out of a fairy-tale, with its open hearth and cosiness; completely different from her parents' home, it has an irresistible attraction for her. Marianne's mother tries to keep her away from this other world. Later in life Marianne sings the lullaby to her young son, but it is still forbidden and can only happen when they are alone, in secret isolation from the rest of life. Max considers such things inappropriate for a future industrialist.

Grown-ups have been deprived of this other world along with their personal possibilities and now seek also to deprive their children of these by "educating" them. Growing up is a matter of learned routine, an act; it is not a matter of bringing forth what is latent, but of instilling set patterns of thought and behaviour. All capacities for change are denied beyond this point, because individuals are encouraged or forced to achieve a state of personal, social, and economic stability as soon as possible and then stay the same for the rest of their lives.

Family dining, when the children are of necessity exposed to their parents, plays an important part in the process. Sociologists have argued that the old-fashioned family circle meal enables the family to share in a communal experience and largely unconsciously build up a sense of togetherness. Unfortunately Nossack's youngsters are more likely to get acid indigestion. Meal times in Nossack's work are not times of fellowship or occasions on which human relationships are nurtured, because parents refuse to respect the individuality of their children or their aspirations. They berate them for imaginary past and present wrongs in an assault
unmitigated by even the slightest display of love. Berthold Müncken in *Spätestens im November* speaks of such an occasion:

> Einmal kam ich in den Ferien nach Haus ... Ich hatte mich wirklich gefreut nach Haus zu kommen ... Aber beim ersten Mittagessen sagte meine Mutter: Komisch, wenn wir allein sind, ist alles so gemütlich, und kaum dass Berthold wieder hier ist, gibt es Streit. Wir hatten aber gar nicht gestritten, ich schwöre es dir. (p. 87)

Marianne is told by her mother that she will come to no good (p. 31). In the second spiral Schneider observes his mother at table and wonders at her great capacity for hurting and the satisfaction it gives her. Schnudelbart in the play *Die Hauptprobe* expresses the basic situation of Nossack's children:

> Denn ob ich spreche oder schweige, ob ich Dies tu, ob das, hier bin oder fern, Immer ist es falsch.
> Bin ich nicht geraten, wie du dir's gedacht? 5

The portrait of the family in contemporary literature is grim, but nowhere grimmer than in Nossack's work. Yet he attacks not the modern, mobile, high-speed family, but the traditional, rooted, family-circle kind of family. Nossack condemns it (though without suggesting anything in its place) because he believes that parents in general, particularly mothers, do not value their children as unique human beings and see them, though perhaps not consciously, as possessions to be moulded according to their own values, which are largely determined by social norms. They cannot unbend, listen, and understand. They can only hurt and alienate their children and seek to destroy their world by "educating" them to become adults like themselves. But the children can think of no more repugnant fate than to become like people who seem to be missing out on all that life should really be. Marianne's account of her
parents in *Spätestens im November* is typical:

... sie lebten so, wie es sein muss. Etwas andres kam gar nicht für sie in Frage. ... Aber nicht weil sie so glücklich ... waren ... Sie waren auch nicht unglücklich, ich weiss nicht, was sie waren; es war alles so tot und gleichmässig, heute wie gestern und morgen wieder so und immer so weiter. ... alles wurde gleich Gewohnheit und in den Schrank gehängt. ... alles nur Vorschrift und langweilig. Sie wussten es nicht anders; sie wussten so wenig davon, dass sie gar nicht unglücklich werden konnten, das war ganz unmöglich, sie waren im Recht. ... Mehr wollen sie nicht, das genügt ihnen zum Leben. (pp. 63-64)

In "Am Ufer" as in other works the children instinctively sense the hostile parental intentions which masquerade as education and upbringing and respond by withdrawing whenever possible from the parental sphere of influence into splendid isolation.

The youngster and his sister escape from the house down to the river, where they cannot be seen from the house: "Es war, als wenn man uns vergessen hätte, so schön war es" (p. 39). At night they talk together under the sheets in their own little clandestine hide-out within the adult world. They realize the danger of talking about their thoughts and feelings and therefore play a role. They are faced with the same urgent task as the authentic individual in later life: to defend themselves in a hostile social milieu against something which is being forced on them from outside. Similarly in *Spätestens im November* Marianne as a child withdraws to the staircase in the hall where she cannot be seen (p. 37). When compelled to be with her parents, she hides her real feelings and denies them the pleasure of seeing her cry when her dog is run over. Berthold likewise adopts camouflage, though not completely successfully: "Ich gab mir auch Mühe, ihnen gefällig zu sein, ich wollte nicht auffallen, aber sie merkten es doch"
Neither can camouflage rid Marianne of an almost physical nausea which overcomes her in the inescapable presence of her parents at table (p. 31). Camouflage within the family is however only a temporary measure. As soon as possible Nossack's young people leave to start a new life on their own, away from the stifling home environment, just as did Nossack himself.

Such escape is absolutely necessary for Nossack's authentic characters not only because of the constraint placed on them in the home, but because however pleasant the home might be (though it never is), it is still their natural origin which must be transcended. Nossack's anti-mother complex exists not simply because mothers are so often such despicable creatures, but also because the child's relationship to his mother is the strongest of all natural bonds or limitations and as such the most important one to overcome. Only by severing it can he render himself open to his own future possibilities and the other reality. But the biological bond is so strong that few are able to sever it:

Alle Menschen sind einmal vom Mittelpunkt losgestürmt, um sich zu befreien. . . . Bis sie an den Kreis gelangten, den die Reichweite der Schnur gestattet. Die prähistorische Nabelschnur. . . . Die meisten fallen hintenüber . . . Wenn sie wieder zu sich kommen, sind sie geähmt . . . der Schmerz war zu gross. Sie kriechen auf allen vieren in den Kreis zurück und richten sich da häuslich ein. Sie werden gute Männchen, ein wenig langweilig und subaltern, doch immer brauchbar. (p. 86)

The destructive power of the family is illustrated in that Nossack's protagonists frequently have older brothers (just as did Nossack himself) who were spiritually castrated by the family and made into complete conformists (for example Heinrich Schneider and Fritz Breckwaldt in *Der jüngere Bruder* and Schneider's brother in "Die Schalttafel"). They have succumbed to the family, whereas
their younger brothers have managed to escape. The danger of destruction is greatest in childhood and adolescence, but it is present throughout life; both Stefan Schneider in *Der jüngere Bruder* and d'Arthez in *Der Fall d'Arthez* maintain a careful distance between themselves and their families right through their adult lives; like the fish in *Der Neugierige* they are wary of going back to their origin and being swallowed up.

Nossack does not assent to the usual view that the family is in decline. In Nossack's work the family survives very well in the modern world. Its ubiquity is due either to the coercion of social pressures (convention, tax-allowance, and shot-gun) or to simple popularity because so many people have an inborn need for each other. But for Nossack's protagonists it can arouse no feelings of loyalty or affection because they see it as a threat to hamstring the individual. They choose aloneness in youth and in later life rather than merge their individuality and potentiality with the collective. They choose to have no mother, in marked contrast to the search for the mother in *Nekyia*, and this aloneness is both elevating and sad:

> Und wieder sag ich mir vorm Schlafengehen:  
> Ist das so wichtig? Nach der Mutter plärrn  
> Ist Kinderart. --Gott hatte keine Mutter.  
> Drum lasst uns sein wie Er!  
> Dann kommt die Nacht, es fällt ein Blütenblatt  
> Langsam von Ast zu Ast, unter dem Himmel  
> Sucht eines Vogels Ruf nach dem Gefährten.  
> Dann spricht man: Armer Gott! 6

"Am Ufer" shows very well how for the child his present existence is not an end in itself. Though closer to the other reality than adults, he wants to be closer still and yearns to cross over to the other side, to another, infinitely desirable
reality which is physically present in the shape of the symbolic other bank of the river. The youngster has to defend his aspirations against his mother's designs for him and those of his mother's brother, the blackmarketeer Struck. He realizes in terror that the adults associate his sexual maturity with a job and usefulness. But all this is not only irrelevant but inimical to his main concern in life: to reach the forbidden bank, where, though he does not know what he will find, he senses his only possibility. The other danger lies not in trying to cross over, but in staying on the bank where he is, trapped forever in the same old life.

The adolescent tells of his wish to cross over to a young waitress with whom he is spending the night after having made love to her. His account is one long monologue. Nellie is a sympathetic character, but it is uncertain to what extent real communication is established between the two. After a long, arduous day it is not surprising that Nellie seems to be on the verge of sleep, and her silence could simply signify exhaustion. Or it could signify incomprehension of what she is hearing. A third possibility is that she knows she is listening to a monologue about the other, ineffable dimension of existence and that to ask questions about it would be both inappropriate and pointless.

The sexual encounter is clearly unimportant to the adolescent; it is associated with the organic part of man, the least important part because man is first and foremost a spiritual being with a yearning for another kind of existence which is the source of all value. A sexual experience means a return to one's origin, yet the
most important thing is to overcome one's origin in search of the other existence. Copulation leaves the adolescent unimpressed; he rejects the reduction of man either to a social or biological function. At the end of the story he is concerned only to reconcile his desire for the other reality and his plans to swim across the river with his affection for Nellie. Heinz W. Puppe writes that their relationship degenerates at the end into a series of subjunctives and qualifications and presents this as another instance of the abiding nature of human isolation in Nossack's work. This is true, but it should also be realized that the adolescent is attempting, perhaps still unconsciously at this stage, to maintain his relationship with Nellie in a union in aloneness; there is a vague but discernible groping toward the new concept of love, the idea of love without possession or even physical or spiritual closeness. He tells Nellie that when he gets to the other side he will think of her:

In "Die Schalttafel" the adolescent is now twenty-one and on a sudden, unforeseen, and irresistible impulse has just withdrawn from his student fraternity. In his letter of resignation he had denounced the anachronistic principles of an anachronistic class which were embodied in the fraternity, but the real reason for his quitting was a sudden, intense awareness of how little he was a part of it all and a desire for freedom. He has been sent to Coventry by his former comrades and has become a factory worker; but he is distrusted by his fellow workers and assailed by an acute sense of isolation, ostracism, and befuddlement:


He is visited by a former fraternity colleague called Schneider from whom he hears a very strange and puzzling story. As a child Schneider had become aware that an attempt was being made to "murder" him by making him, like all the other people around him, accept conventional values and goals. The murder is a process of spiritual "Gleichschaltung" which deprives people of their individuality and future possibilities and makes them part of the herd. In his father he saw an instance of a person who had been murdered in such a way and realized that he too would become a victim if he felt sympathy for those who led such an existence. Schneider sees sympathy as a "Lähmungsgift" (p. 78) and gratitude as a net and "Mordwaffe" (p. 80). He became all the more aware of the mortal danger he was in because he was able to observe his brother being
slowly murdered in this way. At night they used to have intimate conversations about the brother's personal and unconventional plans for the future, but gradually the brother showed an increasing reluctance to talk about these plans, which he postponed until after the attainment of the socially approved goals of "Abitur" and career.

Schneider believed his brother was murdered because he revealed himself and that to avoid the same fate he would have to appear as a conformist without desires of his own. To aid him in his plan Schneider devised a "Schalttafelsystem" based on the idea that the common denominator of all people is that they need to have their existence confirmed by others occupying themselves with them or being dependent on them:

.. . eins darf man auf keinen Fall tun: sich unabhängig und gleichgültig gegen sie zeigen. . . . Das ist offenbar das einzige wirkliche Verbrechen, das man gegen sie begehen kann. Der, der so dumm ist, es zu begehen, wird sich sofort einer geschlossenen Front gegenüber sehen. Man wird ihn mit allen Mitteln auszurotten trachten, unerbittlich . . . (pp. 90-91)

Schneider's attitude to the social masses, which comprises feelings of both fear and superiority, exhibits the element of paranoia to be found not only in other novels and stories but also in the essays. To avoid the confrontation he so fears Schneider's "Schalttafelsystem" prescribes the roles he must play in his relations with others in order to lead an anonymous life in the masses which will give him the inner freedom to pursue his own path unhindered and finally cross over into the other realm of existence:
Denn wenn man ausreisst, zieht sich die Schlinge zu; dann wird man gewürgt und hat keine Kraft mehr. Daher muss man mitten unter ihnen leben bleiben, so als ob man wie sie wäre. Man muss es dazu bringen, dass die Schlinge locker auf den Schultern liegt. Eines Tages ist es dann so weit, dass man unbemerkt aus der Schlinge schlüpfen kann. Sie glauben nämlich, man sässe noch darin. Es ist aber nur das Bild, das sie sich von einem gemacht haben. Das reden sie mit unserem Namen an und sind ganz damit zufrieden. Sie wissen nicht, wie weit man schon fort ist.

What this other form of existence is, which he hopes one day to experience, Schneider cannot say (p. 108). Though beyond words, it is however infinitely desirable and Schneider says he will kill himself if he cannot attain it. As will become increasingly apparent, no sacrifice is too great for this other reality, and nothing must hinder his preparedness to experience it. Here is the source of the asceticism so apparent in Nossack's work, a puritanism modified only by the need for camouflage, as for instance in the area of sexual relations:

Ich zwang mich dazu. Ich hatte den Ekel vor der intestinalen Wühlerei zu überwinden, vor dieser Betätigung mit Organen, die schon durch ihr Aussehen verraten, dass sie Relikte aus dem Paläozoikum sind. Indem ich mich an das Funktionelle gewöhnte, gelang es mir, mich von der Abscheu zu befreien, die ein Mann dagegen empfindet, sich dort wieder aufzulösen zu sollen, woher er kommt. Nichts Funktionelles ist schön, es ist allenfalls notwendig. (pp. 104-105)

Besides being part of his disguise, sexuality for Schneider is at most a vestigial physiological need. Likewise marriage and a home, though he plans to use these as part of his disguise, are ultimately to be left behind:

Was soll unsereiner mit einem Heim anfangen? Nennen wir das Ding doch beim richtigen Namen: ein warmer Kofen für die Männchen, nichts weiter. Eine bewundernswerte Erfindung der Frauen. Fruchtbare Verwesung im brutwarmen Kofen. Ich würde meinen grössten Fehler machen,
wenn ich . . . nicht . . . heirate. Denn nur ein Verheirateter ist für die anderen völlig im Kollektiv aufgegangen. (pp. 106-07)

Schneider even disposes of humanity: it is tied to the past, ensnared inescapably in a purely material existence: "Mann kann sie schon jetzt als eine Überwundene Erdschicht betrachten. Als eine Kalkablagerung" (p. 94). Schneider is devoid of any need for personal or socio-cultural relatedness and is not troubled by his aloneness:

. . . weil unsereiner ja gerade umgekehrt darauf aus ist, keinem mit seinen Eigenheiten zur Last zu fallen und es ganz unnötig zu machen, dass man sich mit einem beschäftigt.

Lästig ist nur der kollektive Zeitvertreib, ich meine das, was man Geselligkeit nennt. Das mitzumachen, strengt mich über die Massen an, da es schon gar zu Überflüssig ist. Zweifellos liegt dafür ein physiologisches Bedürfnis bei den Leuten vor, das mir bereits fehlt . . . (p. 91, p. 94)

Schneider in fact sees the whole of social intercourse and its conversations about politics, sport, books, current events, and so forth only as an attempt by people to escape the isolation of the self by making an external connexion:

. . . das ist nur ein Vorwand, um sich selbst zu entfliehen und irgendwo Anschluss zu finden. Indem ich vorgebe, auch eine Meinung zu haben, helfe ich ihnen dazu, vor sich selbst in eine Meinung auszuweichen. (p. 92)

The critical literature has in general taken a negative view of Schneider, but this seems only partly justified. Obviously Schneider has too much faith in the infallibility of his system. He denies or ignores the unknown in life and believes that his life can be programmed in advance:

Dann hat es nur so viel Macht, wie ich ihm zubillige. (pp. 67-68)

... Ausserhalb unserer wird es bald keine Gefahr und kein Abenteuer geben. ... Ich wüsste nicht, wie man heute noch an der Aussenwelt scheitern könnte. ... ich habe den Plan für meine nächsten zehn bis fünfzehn Jahre bis ins einzelne festgelegt. ... Nichts, kein Mensch, keine wirtschaftliche, politische oder atmosphärische Veränderung wird mich daran hindern können, diesen Plan durchzuführen. (pp. 74-75)

... Kein Roman, keine überraschende Entwicklung, kein Schicksal. Alles ist von mir bestimmt, und es wird so kommen, wie ich es vorbestimmt habe. (pp. 100-01)

This is clearly fallacious, for Schneider himself admits that the young man's quitting of the fraternity was a surprise: "eine zunächst nicht übersehbarer Erweiterung des Unbekannten. ... Das bringt mir meine ganze Schalttafel durcheinander" (p. 68).

He concludes that his system needs reconstructing, but first he seeks to discover the rational motive which led the young man (whom he mistakenly believes to be a kindred spirit) suddenly to drop his disguise and quit the fraternity. Not just Schneider's assessment of the young man is wrong, but also his entire view of reality. He cannot or will not see that his entire system is based on the false supposition that reality can be rationally comprehended, planned, and predicted. He stands condemned because of his blind, obsessive belief in his system's ability to orientate him in the world. Though Schneider accepts and embraces his personal and socio-cultural aloneness, he does not accept because he does not recognize the ultimate spiritual aloneness of man lost in an incomprehensible world without any reliable orientation whatever.

Both the young man and much of the critical literature are repelled by the way Schneider's life is so completely governed by
role-playing, by the way he does violence to his life by forcing it into a rigid mould, a planned path very similar to the one the mother and Struck had in mind for the adolescent in "Am Ufer."
Both adolescent and young man feel threatened by such a planned life and the latter wonders if Schneider's system is not merely "eine Art Selbstmord" (p. 65), whereby Schneider himself does the job he had sought to prevent being done on him. Schneider himself is aware of the danger of his inner self being consumed by the need to expend so much energy on the intricate details of his rôle-playing: "Es besteht sogar die Gefahr, dass die Maske sich bis aufs Mark durchfrisst, und dass ich, während ich den Gestorbenen spiele, eines Tages wirklich gestorben bin" (p. 101).

But precisely in this respect the story is essentially and deliciously ambiguous. For all the repugnance and threat of destruction the young man feels in Schneider's presence, he is not able to rid himself of a feeling of shame, confusion, and inferiority (p. 109) and years later Schneider is for him "ein Gegenüber . . . mit dem ich mich auseinanderzusetzen hatte" (p. 58). Despite his faults and mistakes the young man cannot write Schneider off as the victim of a neurotic obsession. For the first time in his life he is meeting someone who has effected an existential "Grenzüberschreitung," someone who has crossed over and left conventional reality behind:

Ich war eben noch nie einem Menschen begegnet, der die Grenze überschritten hatte. Denn ich selber, den er für einen solchen Grenzüberschreiter hielt, war nur ein wenig aus der Bahn getauemelt auf der Suche nach mir selbst. Von dieser Grenze und von der Möglichkeit, sie zu Überschreiten, ahnte ich nicht einmal etwas. Ich konnte daher auch nicht wissen, dass alles, was man jenseits denkt und von dorther spricht, ganz anders klingt. Es sind die gleichen
Vokabeln, aber der Hauch der Wüste oder der Polarlandschaft oder wie es auch dort drüben aussehen mag, und allein schon die Tatsache, dass jemand von draussen her spricht, und noch dazu mit dieser bohrenden Selbstverständlichkeit, --dies alles gibt den alltäglichsten Worten eine so gefährliche und das Gewohnte vernichtende Bedeutung. Es ist kein Wunder, dass der im Herkömmlichen Befangene instinktiv davor zurückschreckt und den Sprechenden lieber für verrückt erklärt, als etwas von ihm anzunehmen. (p. 77)

This positive evaluation of Schneider is confirmed by Nossack's tribute to Peter Suhrkamp, whom he sees as a man who has crossed over and who is therefore alone; to convey this idea he again uses polar imagery:

Das hinreissende, leicht irisierende Blau der Augen war bei Suhrkamp kaum mehr als der Strahlungsreflex einer schützenden, allerdings einzigartigen spiegelfähigen Oberfläche, nicht wirklicher und nicht greifbarer als die Farbenpracht des Nordlichts in einer einsamen Polarnacht, die dem staunenden Betrachter sowohl die eigene Verlassenheit zum Bewusstsein bringt als auch die erarmungslose Vereinzelung dessen, der die Faszination ausübt.

... ein Mann, der bewusst seine Herkunft verlassen und die Peripherie konsequent überschritten hat, um jenseits, im sogenannten Nichts, Neuland zu gewinnen. Einem solchen Mann kann man nicht helfen, er erwartet auch keine Hilfe; man kann ihm nur nachfolgen. ... Ich sah und sehe ihn etwa hundert Meter vor mir jenseits der Grenze im Niemandsland stehen, mir den Rücken zuwendend, eine einsame Figur im Leeren mit dem Blick ins Leere ... jemand ... der auf die gewohnten Sicherheiten verzichtet. 8

Suhrkamp is admired, but the same must apply to Schneider, despite his mistakes and faults. This is confirmed by Nossack's remark in "Die dichterische Substanz im Menschen" that whoever breaks through to real reality is alone and endangered and therefore prone to errors:

Aber das schadet nichts. Ich glaube, dass auch Irrtümer, wenn sie nur ehrlich bis zu Ende erlitten werden, positiv zu werten sind; positiver jedenfalls als ein mattes Ausweichen vor dem Risiko, einen Irrtum zu begehen. 9
There can be no doubt that Schneider must be seen in a positive light as one of Nossack's "Grenzüberschreiter." An intensely negative assessment of Schneider such as Rickert gives us when he points out that "Sein grenzenloser Egoismus, seine völliche Ich-bezogenheit, die nur noch das eigene Wohl kennt, ist die alleinige Triebfeder seines Erkennens, Wertens und Handelns" would still be factually correct, but the facts would have a positive value. Similarly the inhuman coldness and iciness which the young man associates with Schneider (p. 73) and which Schneider himself refers to (p. 88) are but a sign that he has crossed over and is alone. Above all a positive evaluation must be given to this unavoidable and recurrently stressed aloneness of him who has crossed over, if not into the other dimension itself, at least into a "Grenzbereich":

Er blickte mich zwar an, aber im Grunde redete er schon gar nicht mehr zu mir. Es war mehr ein Selbstgespräch . . . (p. 75)

... in Wirklichkeit hatte er längst vergessen, dass ich es war, zu dem er sprach . . . er selber war sein Gegenüber . . . und ich nichts als ein zufälliges Medium. (p. 92)

Ich wagte nicht, ihm etwas nachzurufen. Wie darf man jemandem etwas nachrufen, für den man schon nicht mehr existiert? Denn Schneider hatte bereits umgeschaltet, auf Nachhausegehen oder was weiß ich. Jedenfalls hatte er mich völlich ausgeschaltet. (p. 112)

For someone who has crossed over, there can be no relatedness or dialogue, but only monologue. Schneider asks for an explanation of the young man's action, but is unreceptive to it when it is given. But precisely because, like Suhrkamp, he is beyond help, he illustrates Berthold Müncken's claim that the most positive thing a person can achieve is to make it impossible for anyone to
help him (*Spätestens im November*, p. 120). Schneider's alone-
ness, as that of a person who has left conventional reality
behind, is a positive achievement.
Carl Otto Enderstein maintained that in *Spätestens im November* human aloneness was simply the result of social and economic structures. He interprets "Unmögliche Beweisaufnahme" in the same way: "In beiden . . . Werken . . . war die Beziehungslosigkeit unter den Menschen in erster Linie das Resultat eines gnadenlosen Existenzkampfes als auch das Kennzeichen einer in Überlieferten Konventionen steckengebliebenen Gesellschaft." Since aloneness is seen as the result of factors which can be changed, it can be overcome. Enderstein equates "das Nicht-Versicherbare" with the realm of feeling and emotion which is suppressed in modern society, and believes that the "Aufbruch ins Nicht-Versicherbare" is presented by Nossack as the answer to human aloneness: "Um dieser Leere in den menschlichen Beziehungen zu entgehen, muss man zu einer anderen Welt aufbrechen, Grenzen zu neuen, noch nie betretenen Bereichen überschreiten, wo das Dasein einen sinnvolleren Gehalt haben wird als in dem Leben voller Konventionen und muffiger Tradition." But a truer view of the work reveals, as with *Spätestens im November*, that aloneness is an intrinsic part of the human condition and that "das Nicht-Versicherbare" is not the solution to aloneness, but its cause.

"Unmögliche Beweisaufnahme" takes the form of a court inquiry into the disappearance of an insurance agent's wife. Years before, in late adolescence, the usual attempt was made to assimilate them into society, but despite all the pressure on them to become socially normalized, they found that they could not fit into their
milieu. The girl had married a prosperous farmer, but experienced a profound alienation from the life-style and values of her milieu which culminated in nausea and death-wishes. The young man (the "accused" in the work) suffered a similar metaphysical sickness after he had taken a mundane job and fallen into a mundane routine. It suddenly befell him when he was celebrating with a group of fellow employees of which he genuinely considered himself to be a member until his sudden and irrevocable alienation from them:

Die anderen griffen zu, auch ich wollte zugreifen, da... Es ist sehr schwer zu erzählen... Ich hatte plötzlich keinen Hunger mehr. Oder: ich hatte noch Hunger, aber es war mir unmöglich zu essen. Es würgte mich etwas und ich begann zu schwitzen... Sie dachten, ich hatte zu rasch getrunken, aber das war es nicht. Ich wusste zum ersten Mal, dass ich nicht zu ihnen gehörte. Vielleicht hoffte ich auch noch, dass morgen alles anders sein würde, denn ich beneidete die anderen. Ich wäre gern Angestellter geblieben, mein Leben lang, doch es war mir nicht gegönnt... Es kam so weit, dass es mir weh tat, wenn mir jemand die Hand gab.... Sie waren wie durch eine Glasscheibe von mir getrennt. Nein, nicht wie eine Glasscheibe, denn dann hätten sie mir ja nicht die Hand geben können. Es war wie ein luftleerer Zwischenraum. Ich trug ihn wie eine unsichtbare Hülle überall mit mir... (pp. 293)

In their married life together the couple conceal their radical otherness by living in the most conventional and anonymous circumstances. Their alienation from society arises from their awareness of the other dimension of reality which is both attractive and threatening and from which they are separated only by a razor-sharp line:

... sein Leben sei immer gleichmäßig gefährdet gewesen, zu jeder Minute. (p. 119)

Eine Sicherheit gebe es in Wirklichkeit nicht. (p. 121)
Man befinde sich plötzlich darin, das heisst, man erkenne plötzlich, dass man sich darin befinde und dass man sich schon immer darin befunden habe, und dass das 'Nicht-Versicherbare' überall sei, wo man selber sich aufhalte oder aufzuhalten versuche, hier im Gerichtssaal ebenso wie in einer festgemauerten Zelle oder wie im Freien, ganz gleich, und man wundere sich nur noch, dass man vorher versucht habe, es abzuleugnen. (p. 217)

The accused believes that one day he will be able in some unspecified way to cross over into this other realm entirely, and until that time he seeks to maintain himself in a constant state of preparedness for the "Aufbruch ins Nicht-Versicherbare." He lives out his life as a passive but tense and endangered process of waiting out an indeterminate period:


Es ist eine Chance, nichts weiter, Vielleicht die einzige Chance. (p. 231, p. 237)

Unlike the active journey of the fish into the other realm in Der Neugierige, the accused prepares himself for his "Aufbruch ins Nicht-Versicherbare" simply by holding himself open to the other realm and waiting for it to come to him as if by a kind of grace; it cannot be experienced or entered at will. An absolute openness is required which can only be achieved by extricating oneself from all the fetters of the world, all personal and social concerns and obligations, all amusements, distractions, interests, and activities, all involvement in what is customarily thought to be human reality. From the normal human point of view it is the most austere existence imaginable, the very negation of all that is customarily regarded as valuable or even as life in Western European civilization. It is so incredibly bleak, cold, and repelling that not surprisingly many critics have
condemned it as completely negative, but for Nossack it is authentic and true:

Die Wahrheit ist eintönig ... Sie ist so eintönig, dass es den Leuten unerträglich scheint, sie für die Wahrheit zu halten. ... Alle kennen sie; sie weichen nur vor ihr in kurzweilige Unwahrheiten aus. (p. 184)

Among the "kurzweilige Unwahrheiten" singled out for special mention are children; the accused and his wife have agreed to have none:

Kinder seien eine Bindung nach rückwärts. ... das sei eben das Natürliche. ... Ein Anscliciessen an die Natur, weil es wohl nicht anders gehe. Eine Art Rückfall. (p. 145)

... es war uns nicht möglich, Kinder in die Welt zu setzen, um einen Ausweis zu haben, eine Art Bürgerbrief mit der Devise: Auf uns kommt es nicht an! (p. 175)

The couple exclude children from their camouflage because they see them as a natural bond to the past and also because they do not wish to divest themselves of their own ultimate and sole responsibility for their existence by subscribing to what might be called "the consumer theory of children," whereby children are used as a kind of adult toy or pastime to fill the vacancy of their parents' lives.

Similarly the couple free themselves from the past and hold themselves open to the other reality by suppressing memories of the past and by the destruction of all correspondence:

Man dürfe sich niemals umschauen; man müsse sofort eine schalldichte Zone zwischen sich und jedem Gestern legen; denn keiner sei so stark, dass er sich nicht nach einer Stimme, die ihn von der Vergangenheit her erreiche, umzuwenden verlockt fühle, und wer das tue, stolpere, komme vom Wege ab und sei wohl meistens verloren. "Denn unsere Vergangenheit ist grausam und mächtiger als der Trieb zur Fortbewegung." (p. 140)

The couple's aloneness is not overcome by the fact that they are kindred spirits, sharing an agreement about "das Elend des
Alltags" and an awareness of the other reality. When the accused hears his wife weeping in the next room, there is nothing he can do to help or comfort her because her weeping has no specific alterable cause:

Ích spreche . . . nicht von einem Weinen, das einen Grund hat und das geweint wird, damit jemand es hört. Ich spreche von dem Weinen über die Vorläufigkeit, die durch kein tröstendes Streicheln und durch keine Versicherungen weniger vorläufig gemacht wird. (p. 189)

Likewise the couple's shared awareness of "das Nicht-Versicherbare" is not a unifying factor; such an awareness is never a unifying but always a dividing force for those who have it, and the quality of loneliness is closely associated with them:

Die, die sich dessen bewusst wären, seien wohl nicht zahlreich . . . sie eigneten sich nicht für eine Partei. . . . Sie unterschieden sich wohl sehr von allen anderen. . . . Man erkenne sie daran, dass man sich in ihrer Gegenwart einsam fühlle. (pp. 240-41)

The prosecution asks why these people do not talk with each other about their experiences of "das Nicht-Versicherbare" and so overcome their aloneness. But the public convention of language, deeply rooted in the time-place continuum, is inadequate to discuss the other realm, which lies outside of the time-place continuum and beyond common consensus of opinion. Accordingly the accused replies that it is impossible: "Die Sprache sei Schweigen" (p. 241).

Concerning the couple's inability to overcome their isolation Heinz W. Puppe has observed that nowhere in Nossack's work is there what the theologian Helmut Thielicke has called a "Vision des Nächsten":

Die Frau ist aber ihrem Mann verschwunden, eben weil die "Vision des Nächsten" nicht zustande kam. Der Mensch in der Romanwelt Nossacks ist in den Monolog gedrängt, und

Puppe's insight shows how aloneness cannot be overcome by any changes in the socio-economic structure of society or by any efforts, however sincere, to achieve greater "intimacy" with one's partner. And it is confirmed by the accused himself, who declares that man only begins where psychiatry, or for that matter any other explanatory system of human existence and behaviour, leaves off: "Der Mensch fängt überhaupt erst dort an, wo sie [Psychiatrie] nicht hinkommt" (p. 274). The accused often is unable to explain his own, apparently unmotivated actions and thoughts, and beyond this it is clear that all relationships between individuals must necessarily entail a falsity or superficiality because they are based, not on the direct encounter of inner realities, but on the unavoidable superficialities of role-playing.

The accused attempts to avoid any such false relationship with his wife. There can be no "Vision des Nächsten," but he has a "vision" of an "other" who is of necessity distant and unknowable. This "vision" seeks to encompass the metaphysical essence of individual human existence. He refuses to see her as a role, a "wife," a creature of flesh and blood, the object of carnal passions: "Wir haben uns . . . von Anfang an der Ummenschlichkeit
geschäft. . . . der körperlichen" (p. 152). But what to the accused is a positive aspect of their relationship seems very much like cruel antipathy to the court, the representative of conventional values, and he has to defend his wife against the court's belief that she felt lonely simply because a man did not sleep with her: "Ich würde meine Frau gegen den kränkenden Verdacht in Schutz nehmen, dass sie sich vernachlässigt gefühlt habe. Oder gegen die Unterstellung, dass eine Frau sich nur dann beschäftigt, getröstet und bestätigt wisse, wenn ein Mann genötigt sei, sich ihres Körpers zu bedienen" (pp. 207-08).

The court is of the conventional view that physical love is a union of bodies and souls: "wir sehen in der körperlichen Liebe keine Entfremdung, sondern eine Vereinigung" (p. 209). The accused believes that physical love leads on the contrary to a painful alienation:

teuer erkauft . . . mit Kummer und Entfremdung . . .
Haben Sie . . . schon einmal ein Menschenpaar am Morgen beobachtet? Dies Verlorensein, das sie durch Betriebsamkeit schamhaft voreinander zu verbergen trachten? Rasch zum Rasieren! Rasch zum Frühstück-Machen! Rasch ins Geschäft, zum Einkaufen" (p. 208)

Physical intimacy is insufficient to overcome for long and in fact intensifies the fundamental separation of one person from another. Quite contrary to Enderstein's views, the busy activity of life is not the cause of this alienation but a means of concealing it. Sleep or insomniac states, when the activity of life is absent, are therefore a time when aloneness reasserts itself:

. . . . gerade im Schlaf sei man oft erschreckend und bis zur völligen Unsichtbarkeit weit voneinander entfernt, trotz der Nähe, und man sei ganz wehrlos dagegen . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
Und wie... wenn neben einem einer wach liegt und sieht dies alles mit an und hört den Schrei oder das Wimmern? Was nützt es ihm zu sagen: dies ist nur ein Traum, dies sind nur Sekunden. Denn er weiss, es ist ein Leben, an dem er nicht teilnimmt, und er kommt sich verraten vor und ganz entwertet, weil er nicht daran teilnehmen kann. Und selbst wenn er es nicht merken sollte, so wird er es am nächsten Morgen merken können; denn dem erwachten Träumer haftet ein fremdartiger Geruch an oder auch ein Glanz, der seinen Umriss noch verwischt. Wie soll man den verbergen? Man versucht ihn abzuwaschen, man eilt zum Rasieren, man kleidet sich an, man richtet das Frühstück in der Küche, aber es ist Lüge; der Verrat ist geschehen und die Zuverlässigkeit nicht mehr glaubhaft. Alles ist nur Vorwand, alles nur Aufschub. (p. 216, pp. 248-49)

If any criticism can be made of the accused and his wife it is not that for some culpable reason they cannot reach a close spiritual relationship, but rather that they do not entirely accept and affirm without any pretence the fact of their aloneness. Their whole way of life, all the tenuous threads that connect them, are self-deceiving pretences, pretexts, or, as the accused says, "Vorwände," to maintain some kind of hold on each other and on the familiar world. Because they know the world, like their own selves, to be at bottom uncertain, they feel threatened and seek to hide their fear and insecurity behind absurd pretexts. For example, the wife constantly telephones her husband at work to ask him to make unnecessary purchases on his way home. These telephone calls seem to be a means of at least partially counteracting feelings of isolation and insecurity through ascertaining that the other person is still there. In short their married life together was a series of self-deceiving pretexts which served to maintain a precarious connexion between the accused and his wife, and as such it was a kind of delaying action against the "Aufbruch ins
"Nicht-Versicherbare" and the premature collapse of the structure of their existence (p. 127).

Even the many hours the accused spent waiting every night, and which were said earlier to represent a state of complete openness to experience of the other dimension, appear in the retrospective light of the accused's self-criticism (p. 249), and notwithstanding earlier assertions (nothing in "Unmögliche Beweisaufnahme" is so certain as to be unchallengeable), as a suspect attempt to ward off the desirable but threatening "Aufbruch ins Nicht-Versicherbare."

The delaying action to avoid an acceptance of absolute aloneness ultimately fails with the sudden and unexpected departure one night of his wife. In a fairy-tale like sequence which expresses the metaphysical rather than the rationally definable aspects of the occurrence, the accused follows her out into a snow-storm on what finally seems to be the "Aufbruch ins Nicht-Versicherbare." The accused himself had always intended to embark on the "Aufbruch ins Nicht-Versicherbare" alone, leaving his wife behind. It would seem that he had always considered her in some way a hindrance, perhaps because he had always thought her a weaker person, and as such not to be exposed to the desirable but also threatening other dimension. But now it suddenly seems that his wife is the stronger. An unforeseen and inexplicable development undermines the whole basis and intention of the man's previous way of life by showing it to be illusory: the accused is uprooted from the normality and role-playing of his earlier way of life with which, it would seem, he had become so obsessed as to become its prisoner.
The reason for the wife's sudden departure and even the meaning of it are anything but clear, and this in itself illustrates the extent of the gulf between them. At one point the accused conjectures that his wife left him because she was afraid of freezing to death in her life with him; or that she went away because she thought she was in his way (p. 179). Later he ponders the idea that she could not stand the waiting for the other reality (p. 216) or that "sie es nicht mehr aushalten konnte" (p. 250). He later says that his own reprehensible weakness and sophisticated delays and hesitations may have caused her to feel guilty, to feel that she was in his way (p. 259). But the final insight at which the accused arrives is that his wife may in fact have felt that it was he who was in her way: "Der Grund sei doch klar: weil sie sonst verloren gewesen wäre. . . . Sie hat jetzt eine Chance . . ." (p. 291).

The accused follows his wife into the snow. They do not talk; they no longer need the trivial and irrelevant talk of the past: "Wir hatten die Kopfschmerzenwelt der Worte hinter uns gelassen" (p. 313). This is not a breakdown of verbal communication, but a voluntary giving up of talk as a flight from loneliness or as a medication against it. It is not to be seen negatively, but positively: "Das war nicht mein Verdienst, sondern das meiner Frau . . . der Schnee war eine grosse Gnade, küh1 und weich und leise und einsam" (p. 313). The thick, heavy, silent snow flakes are symbolic of the ultimate degree of isolation of people who, though closely related on a mundane, day-to-day basis, are unable ever really to communicate with each other. It is not
an affliction of modern man, as Enderstein would have us believe, for the snows have been falling since eternity:

Es schneit doch schon ewig und es schneit immer noch. Dicke weisse Flocken. Auch zwischen uns hier schneit es. Wir reden und reden, die Worte kommen nirgendwo an; deshalb erfrieren sie und fallen endlich als friedlicher Schnee zu Boden. . . . Es schneit zwischen Menschen, die an einem Tisch sitzen und Uber das weisse Tischtuch hin miteinander reden wollen. Der eine fragt, ob die Suppe schmeckt, und der auf der anderen Seite des Tisches antwortet: Ja, sie schmeckt vorzüglich. . . . Und dann kommt das Fleisch. . . . und währenddessen sprechen die Menschen Uber den Schlachter, was er gesagt hat, und Uber die Fleischpreise. Und was in der Zeitung steht. Und dass die und die Bekannten es so und so machten, und dass sie wohl Uber ihre Verhältnisse lebten, aber sie genossen ihr Leben, und wenn wieder ein Krieg käme, dann hätten sie wenigstens etwas von ihrem Leben gehabt und brauchten sich keine Vorwürfe zu machen. Und die Gesundheit sei das Wichtigste, und ohne Ende so weiter, sieben Jahre lang, ewig. Worte! Worte! Und unauflhörlich schneit es. Immer dichter die Schneeflocken! Man wird schwindelig davon, man schliesst die Augen. Sie sehen sich schon längst nicht mehr, sie hören sich schon längst nicht mehr, aber sie stehen nicht auf, um um den Tisch herumzugehen zueinander, sie reden weiter in den Schnee hinein, jeder auf seiner Seite, Worte, Worte. Der Schnee will ihnen Einsamkeit schenken, doch sie nehmen das Geschenk nicht an. Bis sie ersticken. (pp. 314-15)

In the image of the people getting up and going around the table to each other is implied the possibility of an overcoming of aloneness. Yet this does not happen either in "Unmögliche Beweisaufnahme" or elsewhere in Nossack's work. We can conclude with justification that the image represents for Nossack only an idealized but insubstantial vision, an unrealizable possibility, because at most only the "person," the mask, the role, or the psychological function could go around the table, and only on such a superficial, false level could communication be established. We are thus left with the impossibility of meaningful communication and the image of aloneness as a gift which should
be accepted.

What is necessary in "Unmögliche Beweisaufnahme" is not an attempt at better communication, but rather to accept the fact and the gift of one's aloneness, to renounce any form of security, and to accept uncertainty, insecurity, and one's ultimate spiritual aloneness in the world. The accused fails on all counts. He hesitates to cross over completely and looks back to the relative security and normality of his past life: "ich war nicht reif für dies Glück. Ich . . . war . . . zu feige. . . . um ganz auf die Versicherungen zu verzichten" (p. 314). And having lost his wife from sight, he is even now unable or unwilling to accept the fact of their complete aloneness because he calls out to her: "Habe ich mich der Einsamkeit unwürdig gezeigt? Habe ich Verrat geübt an meiner einzigen Möglichkeit?" (p. 316).

The woman, however, does not look back, renounces all security, and assumes her aloneness, rather than calling out when she finds herself alone. She has crossed over into another realm and into an absolute aloneness symbolized by her disappearance; she has comprehended her ultimate possibility in aloneness and has now perhaps a chance; for this reason the accused considers it both wrong and pointless to look for her:

Denn sie wolle doch nicht gefunden werden. . . . Sie sei fortgegangen, in den Schnee . . . Und es sei ihr Wille gewesen. Und wahrscheinlich befinde sie sich jenseits . . . des Schnees. . . . Ich werde mir Mühe geben, nichts zu unternehmen. (pp. 303-04)

The theme of aloneness and the impossibility of communication between individuals in "Unmögliche Beweisaufnahme" exists not only on the level of the relationship between the accused and
his wife, but also in terms of the relationship between the accused and the court, and, by implication, between the author and reader. In each case the primary cause is the other reality which cuts people off from society and from each other because it is the object of a purely private awareness about which no consensus is available. The insufficiency of words as a means of communication between people is demonstrated. Furthermore, neither the court, nor the reader, nor the accused himself is able to reach, through the medium of words or rational thought, a satisfactory understanding of what has happened. Rational interpretations and explanations cannot be made of reality, which encompasses also the other metaphysical realm of "das Nicht-Versicherbare," and hence an ineffable duality runs through the whole of existence.

The court consistently believes that the accused is wilfully concealing something, but the latter can only plead that the fault is that of language's insufficiency to bridge the duality of existence:

Das liege an der Sprache und nicht daran, weil es etwas zu verheimlichen gebe. Er spreche so offen, wie es ihm möglich sei, und er glaube, offener zu sprechen als die meisten Menschen. . . . Aber trotzdem lasse sich das meiste nicht aussprechen; man solle es auch besser gar nicht versuchen, denn Worte lenkten nur ab. (p. 213)

The defence counsel similarly pleads that situations beyond logic cannot be logically reconstructed, that metaphysical realities cannot be explained in physical words (pp. 269-70). The two opposed realms of reality have no points of contact. The one realm is that of rational, objective, public reality, the other is that of the "Nicht-Versicherbare," a realm of private and
esoteric experience and of the unknown and inexplicable. During the course of the hearing the accused's attempts to establish links between the two worlds lead only to an accentuation of the gulf between them. He uses everyday words and expressions, but they no longer have their usual meanings because they refer to the other reality. The accused and the court may use the same words, but since they have different meanings they prove different results. There is no common ground to serve as a basis for agreement and communication. Those on one side of this unbridgeable gulf cannot communicate with those on the other; words are insufficient, and there is no other means.

The novel shows that there is a masking or concealment of reality, but not due to human intention: "es sei alles sehr verschleiert, aber nicht bewusst. Auch das Gericht werde diesen Schleier nicht heben können" (p. 157). The reasons for this lie not only in the nature of reality and in the insufficiency of words, but in the human mind itself, in particular in its inability to recollect and thus comprehend the reality of the past and achieve some kind of reliable orientation in time. The court asks what the accused meant by a certain remark in a letter to his wife, but he can no longer say: "Eine solche Ausserung ist wie ein Grashalm, den man am Wegrand abreisst und in den Mund steckt. Oder wie eine Nahrung, die man einem anderen reicht, der Hunger hat. Wer kann sich nach einer Minute noch daran erinnern?" (p. 156). The past is elusive; once gone, its reality is gone forever. What remains, can only be known relative to one's present situation, feelings, and thoughts. In other words the past can actually change with the present, and for this reason
the court is largely successful in implanting in the accused's mind the suggestion that he has done his wife in and the accused, to his horror, realizes that this suggestion can easily become reality (p. 269).

In view of the fundamental uncertainty about the past and about reality, the accused's testimony is full of constant retractions and qualifications, such as "es könne selbstverständlich auch ganz anders gewesen, so genau lasse es sich nicht sagen" (p. 216) and "Doch wie gesagt, das alles brauche nicht zu stimmen" (pp. 216-17). We are reminded of the narrator's observation in "Die Schalttafel" that "Das Gedächtnis ist eine Art Mutterleib für das Bild" and his reference to "die Zeit mit all ihren Verfälschungen" (p. 58). Nowhere in the novel is there anything of any significance which is tangible or logically self-evident which can be held on to. There are only questions, doubts, and possibilities. What happened cannot be understood; the attempt to find meaning in the events or give meaning to them fails. A spirit of radical doubt and malaise consequently moves the accused and it seems that he would willingly consent to the judgment of any court which could remove these, though perhaps only in an inauthentic moment of weariness:

Ich habe nach einem solchen Gericht gesucht; es wäre eine grosse Erlösung für mich gewesen, verurteilt zu werden, ich hätte dann wieder ruhiger schlafen können. Aber immer, wenn ich ein solches Gericht gefunden zu haben glaubte und voller Vertrauen den Saal betrat, um mich zu unterwerfen, wurde mir die entsetzlich demütigende Enttäuschung zuteil, dass der Stuhl des Richters unbesetzt war und dass ich selber diesen Platz einnehmen musste, um Über mich Recht zu sprechen. Wer ist dem gewachsen? (p. 177)
Unable to find such a court, he is left to sit himself in judgment on his life in absolute solitariness. He feels a personal need constantly to review his life and to acknowledge the ultimate uncertainty of existence, past, present, and future. No judgment can be final; all judgments are provisional, and uncertainty, disorientation, and an ultimate spiritual aloneness are the only certainties of life.
Footnotes

1. *Spirale: Roman einer schlaflosen Nacht* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1956), p. 7. Subsequent page references will be given in the text.


Footnotes (continued)

13 A good account of this is given by Gerhard Friedrich, "Mensch und Wirklichkeit im Werk Hans Erich Nossacks," Deutschunterricht, 15, No. 3 (1963), 48-58.

CHAPTER 7

Der jüngere Bruder, Nach dem Letzten Aufstand,
Der Fall d'Arthez (i)

This chapter examines how the theme of aloneness as so far examined continues to be presented (there is, it will emerge, no real development in the experience of aloneness) in three of Nossack's most substantial novels to date.

In Der jüngere Bruder Stefan Schneider's experience of aloneness begins as usual in the hostile environment of the parental home in the early years of the century in Jena. Stefan felt that an attempt was being made by his mother to liquidate him as an individual: "Meine Mutter hat mich wie üblich früh auslöschen wollen . . ."¹ Not only Stefan but also his brothers and sisters felt their individuality and possibilities threatened by their domineering mother and instinctively adopted the camouflage of suppressing their true feelings.

Like others of Nossack's children, Stefan had an awareness of the other dimension of existence which always leads directly into aloneness. He is confronted with the impossibility of communicating with others about this other, essentially private, incommunicable reality:

Dass es zwei Arten zu sprechen gibt, war mir seit meiner Jugend bekannt . . . Zwei Sprachen, die unübersetzbar sind . . . denn es handelt sich in beiden Sprachen um die gleichen Vokabeln, nur dass sie in einem völlig anderen Sinne gebraucht werden. Man soll auch gar nicht erst versuchen, diesen Sinn zu übersetzen, denn es gelingt doch nicht. Gibt man sich dagegen die Mühe, die Vokabeln nach dem Sinn der anderen zu verwenden, dann geht alles glatt und reibungslos vor sich . . . während umgekehrt, wenn
The easiest way to get through life is to operate on the surface, conventional level of appearance. And at the age of sixteen Stefan chose, to spite his mother, "den weit mörderischen Weg der Tarnung" (p. 341) as the only possible means of ensuring his survival in face of her:

Stefan became a chameleon-like being, concealing and denying the dream within him; yet he lived in fear that his pent-up feelings would burst out and on the day of his legal majority he left his parents' home forever.

Subsequently Schneider continues with his camouflage in the wider world of society. He ascends the ladder of social success, "jedoch so sehr ins Leere, dass meine letzte Substanz aufgezehrt zu werden drohte" (p. 102). Yet he continues to act out a part in the theatre of life, particularly in the bourgeois capitalist milieu, and even marries a rich, superficial woman, Susanne Gütze, as an incidental part of his camouflage. Schneider is, in short, a man "der sich aller Phrasen politischer, sozialer, familiärer und religiöser Art bedient, die in seinem Zeitalter
im Schwange sind, ohne auch nur einen Augenblick zu vergessen, dass es eben nur Phrasen sind, die die Wahrheit verheimlichen sollen" (p. 94).

Schneider's camouflaged position becomes untenable in the long run, however. Despite a certain skill and delight in role-playing, he finds that people nevertheless detect his inner distance and otherness (pp. 94-95). And also the gulf between internal reality and external appearance gradually becomes too great and painful for Schneider himself. Everyday actions, previously only boring and tiresome, now become unbearable, physically nauseating, and cause dizziness and trembling. To rescue himself from an increasingly dangerous and impossible situation Schneider seeks refuge in Brazil, where for nine years he explores for oil. But as an educated European, a surgeon's son, and a successful engineer, he can have no part in the primeval, natural world of the South American Indians, and he is personally and socio-culturally as alone there as in Europe.

In 1949 he returns to Europe, to a society of which he had never been a part and which in his absence had destroyed itself. The novel stresses the death and decay of Western society and culture. In an area adjoining the Hamburg docks are countless church bells which, dismounted during the war, had narrowly escaped melting down. The weird sight of the bells, like a plantation or burial ground, is a powerful symbol for the failure, destruction, and collapse of Western Christian civilization. The bells are defunct, and no longer ring out the time of day or call believers to worship. But just as significant is the fact that these bells will soon be returned to their churches of origin,
that people will still go to church and continue to play "christliches Abendland," and that religion will be supported by the establishment as a counter-weight to the war's legacy of anarchy and nihilism (pp. 12-13). The enormity of the hypocrisy is illustrated by Schneider's own funeral at the end of the novel, where the pastor praises "die christliche Gesinnung des Verstorbenen" (p. 385) and the congregation sings "Ein feste Burg." Nossack unmasks the pretensions:

In Europa haben sie ihre Vergangenheit verloren, sie brauchen sie nur noch, um sich selbst zu bemitleiden, aber das will niemand wahrhaben; die Gewohnheit ist stärker. Sie hätten eine Handvoll ehrwürdiger Altherrenphrasen fallen lassen müssen, die noch immer fortwucherten und immer neue Krebsgeschwüre bildeten, was man für natürliche Zeugungskraft ausgab.

. . . aber die Zeit lag in den letzten Zügen und hielt sich nur noch künstlich durch Erinnerungen aus zweitausend Jahren Vergangenheit am Leben. (p. 105, p. 121)

But this insight is not generally shared; a successful attempt is being made to rebuild the past and restore its unreality. People act as if nothing has happened; not even a general catastrophe can make them change.

Schneider's aloneness is depicted within the milieu of the West German capitalist entrepreneur class. This class is represented by Generaldirektor Gütze and his lieutenant Stolling, but above all by the obnoxious self-made businessman Fritz Breckwaldt, through whom all the vulgar materialism of the "Wirtschaftswunder" society and the hollowness behind its boastful pretences are exposed. Fritz's whole life revolves around his work and excludes the growth of any close personal relationships, even with his family. There are days when he never sees
his children. They and their mother, who complains of Fritz's preoccupation with his work, will probably suffer from what the social psychologist would call contact deprivation. Fritz is profoundly unsettled to discover that his younger brother Arno is a writer; literature represents a spiritual and metaphysical sphere which he seeks to deny by dismissing literature as the creation of weaklings unequal to "real life." By contrast his wife is fascinated with Arno's work. Fritz complains: "Mir ist, als rede sie eine fremde Sprache" (p. 179). His wife feels that Fritz himself is speaking another language: "Ich verstehe dich wirklich nicht mehr, Fritz" (p. 181). Clearly there is little communication and much alienation between the two, and a flight from home and husband into adultery in search of human contact is clearly foreseeable for Fritz's wife, just as was the case with Marianne in Spütestens im November.

The contrast between the two Breckwaldt brothers corresponds to that between Schneider and his own brother Heinrich. Heinrich is a man who has succumbed entirely to the fetters of the family and its stagnant biological inertia. Schneider condemns him as an unthinking conformist, still tied to his mother's apron-strings, whose existence is sterile and moribund: a perfect example of the power of the family to destroy.

Schneider's rejection of his family is linked with his rejection of its bourgeois cultural tradition, specifically Weimar Classicism. As a boy Heinrich had maintained that they were "auf der Strasse nach Weimar," implying an elevated spiritual direction, calling, or obligation (p. 79). But "die Strasse nach Weimar" is
not seriously believed in by those who advocate it. For Heinrich, a perfect example of Sartrian bad-faith, its spiritual and cultural pretensions had been a self-deceiving device "um sich eine Richtung zu geben, in welche er vor Tatsachen, die ihn bedrängten, ausweichen könnte, ohne im Ernst daran zu glauben, dass er dass jemals fertigbringen würde" (p. 81). Schneider links the failings and faults of his family with those of German Classicism, the entire Western European bourgeois cultural tradition, and the catastrophe of 1939-45; he condemns

... diese Arroganz ... dieser Anspruch, Bildung, Kultur, Idealismus, Pietät und was es sonst noch alles gibt, zu repräsentieren. Der ganze Erdteil hat sich durch solche Phrasen zugrunde gerichtet ... (p. 129)

Stefan Schneider is a man completely without any significant human relationships and completely devoid of any sense of relatedness to a living socio-cultural tradition. A sentence from a novel by Arno Breckwaldt--"ganz ohne Landschaft, ohne Hintergrund" (p. 264)--suggests itself to him as the perfect expression of the absolute aloneness of his spiritual biography. Significantly there is a complete absence of any attempt on Schneider's part to escape from this aloneness. He lacks any need or desire for human contact and has never attempted to communicate with another about himself "da man ... weit ungestörter durchs Leben kommt, wenn man die anderen reden lässt" (p. 66). Schneider justifies this lack of contact and communication by means of comparisons with the animal world and the primitive world of the South American Indians:

(Wo gibt es das in der Tierwelt, dass ein Tier dem anderen von sich erzählt? Das andere Tier würde das redende vermutlich vor Misstrauen beissen. Auch die
Indianer . . . klagen nie: sobald einer von ihnen mit sich selbst beschäftigt ist, zieht er sich zurück.)
So liess sich auch zu meiner Entschuldigung anbringen, dass ich mich in mein abgelegenes Pensionszimmer zurückgezogen habe und mich mit dieser Niederschrift beschäftige, um andern Leuten nicht durch unerwünschtes Reden zur Last zu fallen. (p. 66)

The fact that Schneider is writing down an account of his experiences means that the question of the reader presents itself. Yet he has already confessed his lack of any need for communication, and this puts his writing in question:


Schneider's situation is one of profound aloneness, yet with no feelings of loneliness to be overcome. To describe his situation he draws a comparison from the theatre: on the stage the actors are playing their parts, and in front of them the audience is deeply involved in the contrived reality of the play; but viewed from the side, from an oblique angle, can be seen in the wings behind the set a man in white overalls, who is not part of the unity of the play, of actors and audience, and who should not be seen, because this would disrupt the play's illusory reality (pp. 69-70).

The comparison from the theatre is apt, for the centrality of role-playing in Nossack's work has been noted. All his characters live more or less as roles. But whereas the vast majority are unconscious role-players, there exists a small number (like Schneider) who are highly conscious of their role-playing; they know that the true self lies unknown and unknowable behind the
surface role. In "Unmögliche Beweisaufnahme" it was proclaimed that man only begins where psychiatry leaves off. Likewise man only begins where personal relationships cannot reach because they operate on a surface level of psychological mechanisms and roles which constitute a necessary and unavoidable facade behind which man's true, inner being lies forever hidden.

Role-playing not only stands as an impenetrable screen between individuals, but can also lead to one person's denying the freedom of another by not granting him the freedom to be other than what, on the surface level of the role, he appears to be. Because of the continual pressure on the individual to live up to the expectations of his fellows by continuing to play his role, there exists a danger that he will actually become the role. On principle Schneider regards every meeting with another as the last and thus, even if they are to meet again, eliminates him from his life:

Man kann neue Entscheidungen treffen, man braucht nicht anzuknüpfen an etwas, das nicht mehr gilt. Die Trügheit unserer Erinnerungen macht uns unfrei, wir lähmen einander dadurch unsere Entwicklung. Dass wir uns zu oft umschauen und mit einer Sicherheit von gestern liebäugeln, in die wir notfalls heimkehren könnten, hemmt uns voranzukommen. (p. 144)

Carlos Heller, the "younger brother" for whom Schneider vainly searches, is one character who appears not to play a role. For this reason he is a strange, disconcerting figure who unmasks the pretences of rôle-playing and who cannot fit into the social world. He impresses and unsettles those who meet him: Susanne after meeting him falls from her balcony, having apparently lost her balance. A symbol of false bourgeois personal and social
security, her fate shows that even those who identify themselves absolutely with their role, and forget what lies behind it, can suddenly be reminded that their existence is but a "Rollenfassade" and plunged into a state of imbalance. Carlos is the embodiment of the mystery, indefinability, unique individuality, and absolute inviolacy which lie behind all roles. He defies any label and evades subjection to any category. Schneider sees in him the symbol of his own true self and its possibilities, undefiled by all the role-playing, camouflage, and compromises of his life. His unsuccessful search for Carlos is a search for at least one ideal form of relationship, yet it would seem unlikely that this could be found with Carlos in that he is not associated, as might be expected, given the absence of the screen of role-playing, with frank, honest, and deep personal relationships, but with aloneness and inviolacy. Susanne met Carlos, but simply did not know how to relate to him or what to do with him (p. 51). Schneider experiences the same problem:

> Was wollte ich eigentlich von diesem Carlos Heller? ... Ich könnte ihm Geld geben und eine Stellung verschaffen; ich könnte ihn auch bei mir leben lassen, aber was dann? (p. 320)

Even given complete authenticity, a "relationship" with another person is somehow superfluous or irrelevant to the real problem of human existence. After giving up his search for his younger brother, Schneider is left with "Aporée." A sometime "Künstlerlokal," whose original conception became outdated and which was deserted by the artists and occupied by merchants and businessmen, "Aporée" is also an anagram for Europe, in fact Europe spelt in reverse. An invention of Arno Breckwaldt, the word
expresses for him the cultural and psychological state of post-war Europe in which people continue to play "christliches Abendland" as if nothing has happened, and he used it in his symbolic novel "Flucht nach Aporee":

... denn alles, was man hier zu sein vorgab und noch vorgibt, ist nichts als ein Spiegelbild der Vergangenheit, mit dem man sich in Ermangelung eines eigenen Bildes modisch aufstutzt, wer aber sich täuschen lässt und die Erscheinung als Wirklichkeit sehnsüchtig berühren möchte, der fasst an das kalte, tote Spiegelglas, eine unfruchtbare Fläche, die ich in meinem Buch... "Flucht nach Aporee"... als einen durch physikalische Katastrophen zerstörten, verkrusteten und giftigen Erdteil zu schildern versuchte, in dem einige Menschen aus Grauen vor ihrer nur noch mechanischen Zeugungsfähigkeit zugrunde zu gehen vörzehen:

... sie gehen in Aporee in ihren Erinnerungen zugrunde, denen sie nicht zu entfliehen vermögen. So kommt es zu Totgeburten, Selbstmord und anderen Verzweiflungsakten, ein neues Geschlecht aber kann von solchen Leuten nicht erzeugt werden, es ist nur ein letzter Akt, der sich mit unerbittlicher Konsequenz vollzieht. (pp. 367-68, p. 217)

The impossibility of this people producing a new race to found a new socio-cultural future is in direct contrast to the image at the end of Nekyia, where a child, who would bring a new future, could still be born. What at the end of Nekyia was a transitional phase is in Der jüngere Bruder a last act. Yet despair does not quite have the last word. "Flucht nach Aporee" is preceded by a motto from Swedenborg:

Die unter ihnen, für die man auf Erlösung hoffen kann, werden an verwüsteten Stellen ausgesetzt, die nur ein Bild von Trostlosigkeit bieten; und man lässt sie da zurück, bis ihre Trauer darüber, sich dort zu befinden, sie auf die Höhe der Verzweiflung gebracht hat, weil das die einzige Art sein dürfte; das Böse und Falsche, das sie beherrscht, zu meistern. (p. 217)

Schneider agrees:

... die verüdeten Stellen finden sich überall zwischen den Menschen, vielleicht heute mehr als früher... man sollte die verwüsteten Stellen, von denen Swedenborg
spricht, und die für den, der in ihnen zu leben aushält, die einzige, aber auch wirklich die einzige Hoffnung auf Erlösung bieten, dort aufsuchen, wo sie sind. (p. 218)

Salvation can be hoped for from the absolute despair of those who occupy the desolated places of existence. It is not clear by what process this salvation might come about, just as the salvation itself remains an abstract, insubstantial concept. It is clear, however, that the salvation is purely individual and not a general salvation of society. There is no social or political programme or interest because the individuals in question are yearning not for a better social order, but for something which, whatever it might be, lies outside of any possible society and beyond everything that is normally thought of as human happiness:

... ich glaube, dass ... zukunftsgläubige Menschen, die ihre eigene Spur suchen, heute nur noch in großen Städten umgehen, gekleidet wie alle, vielleicht beamtet und verheiratet, Wähler sogar und Steuerzahler und zuweilen Stammtischgeher, getarnt als Spiesser und Pedanten, um zu verbergen, dass sie längst das standesamtliche Weib und die Kinder und das Standesamt selbst verlassen haben, und das für sie das Suchen da beginnt, wo es für alle mit einem "happy end" schliesst, eine unsichtbare Vorhut des Menschen. (p. 339)

The motivation and goal of this advance guard is individual, not communal. Aloneness is inseparable from the idea of "Aporée," of the desolated places of existence, and of the solitary people who live in them, seeking their "own path" toward a private goal. The names of the seekers in Der jüngere Bruder are Margot Slisser, Max Restmann, and Arno and Gerda Breckwaldt. They are all peripheral figures in society, either explicitly through their bohemian social situation, or inwardly through their inner distance from society.
Margot Slisser is a night-club singer and whore. Max Restmann, the painter, is another bohemian figure. He shares Schneider's awareness of the "two languages" and is described as "ein wortkarger, verschlossener Mensch" (p. 69), conscious of the inability of language and thought itself to grasp reality: "Schon das Nachdenken macht die Dinge verkehrt und erst das Reden" (p. 244). He is happy that as a painter he does not need to talk and is untroubled by the problems of verbal expression and communication (p. 69). Instead he is able to lose himself in the lonely spiritual depths of his work (p. 223).

Restmann affirms his personal and socio-cultural aloneness: "Die anderen haben ihre Landschaft und ihren Hintergrund und sollen das auch gern behalten . . ." (p. 265). Margot Slisser appears to be the person he "knows best" or is "closest to," yet these terms are unsatisfactory in that his relationship with her illustrates a Scylla and Charybdis of aloneness. Every individual, behind the external role, is mystery and shadow; yet as long as one does not know the person very well, know them, that is, only as the superficial role facade, the unknowable mystery and shadow and its various shades allows one to guess the other person's true, inner nature. On the other hand "getting to know" another person means only getting to know him or her on the surface level of the role facade, a level of complete clarity and bareness, which however completely obscures the shadow and mystery of the other person behind. Paradoxically, then, one can know another person best when one maintains a distance from him or her. Restmann is led to reflect on this
when he finds that he and Slisser are talking about things which interest neither of them:


Arno and Gerda Breckwaldt are not bohemian fringe elements in society; both have socially useful jobs, yet they are still inwardly outsiders in society. And despite his camouflage Arno's otherness shines through and makes him immediately recognizable among the social masses:

Er gehörte nämlich nicht zu dem Gedränge, das fiel gleich auf, er glich einem fremden Vogel, der ... unter eine Schar aufgeregter Spatzen geraten ist und sich über ihr betriebsames Getue wundert und ein wenig belästigt fühlt, da es seiner Art nicht entspricht, sich wie sie zu benehmen ... die Spatzen Beachten ihn nämlich nicht und lassen ... einen winzigen Raum um ihn frei, als ob sie aus Instinkt vermeiden wollen, ihn zu berühren. Vor allem, glaube ich, war es das Lächeln Arno Breckwaldts, das ihn von den anderen, die schnatternd aus der Bank kamen, absonderte. ... es war ein entschuldigendes Lächeln, wie es sich unbewusst auf unsern Gesichtern zeigt, wenn wir in eine uns ganz fremde Umgebung geraten und nicht unangenehm oder störend auffallen möchten. (p. 150)

Arno cannot become reconciled to conventional values and everyday life because of his awareness of that other supremely valuable reality. His entire life stands under the sign of a possible "Aufbruch" into this realm. He sees personal belongings, even books, as fetters which could prevent such a departure by depriving him of his freedom of movement and interfering with his readiness to depart (p. 194).
Deprived of the experience of the other realm, Arno is confined to the "verwüstete Stellen" of existence. Though he is married to Gerda, the aloneness of each is not altered by their marriage. The "desolated places" can only be braved and withstood alone; the company of another only increases the sorrow and despair:

... da sie zu zweit waren, werden sie die Öde sehr viel stärker gefühlt haben. ... Und wie war es bei Tisch, als sie sich gegenübersassen? Das alles ist furchtbar, da es keine Hilfe gibt, ausser durch Ablenkung, und gerade Ablenkung ist das Gift, das wir fliehen müssen, wenn wir die verwüsteten Stellen Swedenborgs bestehen wollen. Ich habe Ablenkung immer als eine genehmigte Form des Selbstmordes angesehen. (p. 218)

These ideas of the individual's aloneness in desolation and the danger of indulging in any form of distraction merge in the novel with a presentation of the new concept of love in the case of Schneider's relationship to Gerda. They spend much time together and have long conversations; this creates a certain bond between them and they look forward to their meetings. Yet Schneider soon comes to distrust this as a matter of habit which will distract them from the real business of human existence: "Es ist sehr seltsam, wie rasch und unvermeidlich man Gewohnheiten anheimfällt: es gleicht einem schmerzlosen Absterben oder dem erlösenden Absinken eines ermatteten Schwimmers ins Meer" (p. 313). Traditional love, with its natural, physical aspects, is rejected by both of them as a vestigial instinct, tried and found wanting countless times, though still possessed of power to tempt (p. 299, p. 310). Schneider knows the longing for the warmth and tenderness of a
woman and the need for an outlet for sexual energy. To be a man entails such desires and needs, but man is driven by greater, metaphysical appetities, so that even in the very act of fulfilling the sexual need a realization of the absurdity of the situation forces itself upon him: "Oder wenn ihm mit einer Frau zusammen und auf ihrem Bauch schwimmend der Gedanke käme: Was für ein Geschäft und wessen Geschäft betreibe ich hier eigentlich?" (p. 340).

By contrast the new concept of love consists of recognizing and respecting the absolute otherness of the other person behind their superficial rôle or "persona" and of maintaining an awareness of the other, metaphysical dimension of existence, which can only be experienced or entered alone, as the highest value in life. In a similar way to Restmann's experience with Slisser, Schneider admits that he knows too little about Gerda to describe her in his account because, paradoxically, he has occupied himself too much with her and knows her (that is, the superficial "Rollenfassade") too well, so that behind the bareness and nakedness of the exterior all else is unknown and unknowable:

Ich weiss zu wenig von ihr, so seltsam das klingen mag, da ich mich mehr mit ihr beschäftigt habe als mit den anderen . . . Aber was ich über sie dachte oder denke, ist nicht massgebend und dürfte ihr nicht gerecht werden. . . . ich bin immer nur allein mit ihr gewesen und war sozusagen beteiligt, darum wird nie genau zu unterscheiden sein, ob das, was ich von ihr sage, wirklich für sie zutrifft, oder ob es sich nicht vielmehr um mich handelt, wenn ich von ihr spreche, sie aber steht ausserhalb und ist eine völlig andere. (p. 290)

Schneider is all the more reluctant to describe Gerda because he knows that she saw in him something that he is not:
So weiss ich . . . dass Gerda Breckwaldt in mir etwas ganz anderes gesehen hat, als ich mir zu sein einbilde und als ich zu sein gewohnt bin . . . dass sie mich, wenn wir zusammenwaren, gleichsam dazu zwang, mich nach einer Person, die etwa hinter mir stand, umzusehen, die ich jedoch nie zu entdecken vermochte, auch vor mir oder zwischen uns nicht . . . (p. 296)

The great paradox of the new concept of love is that closeness in love or any other personal relationship can only be attained through accepting and affirming aloneness. Schneider and Gerda's conversation comes to be about quite indifferent things, for they become accustomed to evading each other, "einander auszuweichen" (p. 311), to "Ausweichen in Nebensächliches" (p. 314). Only by such verbal evasion can they be their own true selves behind their role facade; only by consciously not seeking to make contact or communicate can they preserve the purity of the self liberated from the fetters and falsifications of role-playing and consequently become close to Carlos Heller, the symbol of the pure self. Schneider expresses this insight:

. . . das wir . . . Carlos Heller einmal ganz nahe gewesen waren, als wir uns noch auswichen . . . und dass wir jetzt, da wir uns wieder zum Ausweichen bekannten, wenn es auch ein wenig weh tat, ihm wieder näher kamen, ja, so nahe, dass er neben oder bei oder zwischen uns zu stehen schien, so nahe, dass ich ihn beinahe hätte berühren mögen und des Gefühls teilhaftig war, ihn nun nicht mehr suchen zu brauchen. Ich war Gerda Breckwaldt so dankbar dafür, dass ich es ihr fast gesagt hätte, aber damit hätte ich meinen jüngeren Bruder von neuem und diesmal vielleicht für alle Zeiten verraten und vertrieben. (p. 335)

The key to the ideal is aloneness: the recognition and cherishing of one's own aloneness, and respect for the aloneness of others and their essential otherness. Schneider tentatively defines the new concept of love:
Vermutlich besteht das, was Liebe genannt wird, wenn wir von dem Missbrauch, der mit dem Wort getrieben wird, absehen, darin, dass wir die absolute Fremdheit des anderen ahnen und als ein Geheimnis, das uns nicht zugänglich ist und durch Unterwerfung für den Eigenbedarf jede Realität verlieren würde, achten. (pp. 333-34)

To seek to come close to another person is to use him for one's own purposes and this is to destroy his true reality. To maintain a distance from him is, paradoxically, to be closest to his true self. Accordingly in the closing pages of the novel, when Gerda visits Schneider shortly before his projected departure to Brazil, he praises

... dies ferne, fremde Vertrautsein, diese grosse Zärtlichkeit, die das absolut Unvereinbare versöhnt! ... Wie soll man dem anderen dafür nicht dankbar sein? Dafür, dass man seiner nicht mehr bedarf. Dafür, dass man ihn nicht mehr durch seine Unruhe zu zerstören braucht. (p. 356)

Schneider unambiguously affirms his aloneness and links it with the idea of the desolated places of existence and of the solitary people who live in them, yearning for and seeking a purely private goal beyond all worldly fulfilment and happiness in an aloneness which only goes unnoticed because it is with them at all times:

Ich möchte auch aus ihrem Dasein verschwinden wie aus dem meiner Familie und dem von Susanne, sogar ohne Foto auf dem Schreibtisch oder auf dem Tischchen neben der Couch, ohne Bild und so völlig wie eben mein 'jüngerer Bruder', den ich nicht gefunden habe. ... Kein Wunder, dass ich in dieser Situation an die Erfindung Arno Breckwaldts denken muss, an das Land 'Aporée', das auf dem Globus nicht eingezeichnet ist und dass es Überall gibt, in Hamburg und in Apolda, in meinem Pensionszimmer und im Hamsa-Theater, ... in den Büroräumen der Superior Oil und mitten in der Hauptverkehrszeit auf dem Rathausmarkt, und das vielleicht nur deshalb so schwer zu finden ist, weil man es selber mit sich bringt, und uns nur selten durch die Wirkung auf andere wie durch ein Spiegelbild bewusst wird, dass wir bereits in dieser herrlichen Einsamkeit leben. (p. 298)
Nach dem Letzten Aufstand resembles Der jüngere Bruder by also having as a central theme socio-cultural aloneness against a background of socio-cultural decay, collapse, and restoration. But it also resembles the earlier novel in that even outside of the socio-cultural framework personal aloneness is again shown to be a basic experience of the characters.

The aloneness of Alois Mörtl, the narrator and central character, begins as usual in the family home with a sudden, unexpected awareness of the other reality which leads directly into aloneness, "wie das Aufwachen in einem Waisenhaus," as he is alienated from personal relationships and socio-cultural relatedness. Mörtl experiences his family and conventional values as a threat to deprive him of this other reality by reducing him to a possessed object, but he manages to extricate himself and subsequently leads an anonymous, solitary life with a travelling circus. He himself outlines the extent of his personal aloneness:


After Mörtl's return to his homeland a central theme is his socio-cultural aloneness. The imaginary country of the novel has a religion in which every year a youth is chosen for nine months to play the part of the "God." But at the end of this
time his heart is ceremoniously ripped from his chest by the high-priest and head of government, the "Oberste der Diener," and he ascends, supposedly, to immortality. In the distant past this had been a living religion, but now it is dead. It has become an ossified, anachronistic custom, farcical hocus-pocus. Nossack means it to be representative of all religions and cultures which lose touch with human reality, so that there is no longer any life to sustain them, in the absence of which they are ready for collapse: "seit lângerem gab es in der Welt das Gefühl, dass etwas nicht stimme. Es herrschte ein allgemeines Unbehagen . . . So brüchig waren schon alle Gewohnheiten, dass sie einfach von den Menschen abfielen wie eine lângst Uber-wundene Mode" (p. 148, p. 194).

Before the ultimate collapse, however, in the period of socio-cultural decline, the religious traditions are the means by which a sinister totalitarian bureaucracy suppresses the people. All the usual paraphernalia of dictatorial regimes are employed: spies, informers, interrogations, secret files, liquidations, hidden microphones and cameras; all are used on the contemptuous assumption that human life is less important than bureaucratic expediency. Nossack intends his imaginary totalitarian regime to be representative of all such regimes and of the propaganda and pressure brought to bear at all times on the individual in them.

Mörtsl is chosen to act as the "Begleiter des Gottes," but his God is different from previous Gods in that he refuses to be used as the puppet figurehead of a totalitarian state and seeks
to make the absurd ritual genuine again by filling it with his whole being (p. 149). The "Oberste der Diener," the Supreme Servant, feels sure that the God is just as cynical and disbelieving as he and that inwardly he must be afraid of death and want to be saved. The constant struggle between them is one between the inner, private, secret, and mysterious world of the individual and the sterile rationality of a power-hungry bureaucrat who cannot tolerate being denied access to this other world: "Hätte der Oberste der Diener eine kleine Blösse entdeckt, wäre er in das Alleinsein eingebrochen und alles wäre zunichte geworden" (p. 197).

The God, Mörtl his companion, and Achuni his female "playmate" share a profound socio-cultural aloneness and also the aloneness of all true individuals in a totalitarian state: "Wir ... wussten, dass wir beobachtet wurden, und das machte uns so einsam" (p. 142). Yet even on a strictly personal level close spiritual relationships between these three characters are impossible. The passage of time towards the God's death is marked by the path of Sirius across the night sky. "Blau und hart vor Einsamkeit" (p. 228), the star is a symbol of the God's own inescapable aloneness not just before the advance of death but in the midst of life itself. He is himself like a stellar reality, beyond the reach of human thought or sympathy, and yet at the same time he is a representative figure, presenting an image of themselves to "die ganz Einsamen aller Zeiten" (p. 194) and an example of their own possibilities in accepting their aloneness, which is inescapable, whether death comes at
the end of nine months or after a hundred times nine months, because everyone has to live out his fate alone:

Auch wenn man nur daran denkt, erschrickt man vor so viel Einsamkeit. Man möchte in die Knie sinken, weil man nicht helfen kann. . . . Wir wussten nur, dass wir allein waren. (p. 141)

Aloneness in fact offers the God the best chance of mastering the distress and suffering which cannot be shared and alleviated by another:


For a long time the God refuses to have a female "playmate," as tradition dictates, and differs in this respect from previous Gods who chose female companionship as a means of evading the ultimate truth about their situation. And when he finally does agree to choose a playmate it is only to conform outwardly so that he will be left alone. He chooses Achuni, a young, naive, light-hearted girl, at a pompous ceremony because she is the only one to have preserved her individuality in an atrophying socio-cultural environment and who is still able to see through the facade and scoff at taboos. Subsequently Achuni falls very much in love with the young man, her existence comes to revolve around him, and she wants to hold on to him. Their relationship has a touching naivete, but nothing more; a deeper relationship which would transcend aloneness cannot be established, as Heinz Puppe has rightly pointed out:

Auch in Nach dem Letzten Aufstand ist der Mensch ein Monolog; das Mädchen Achuni und der "Gott" werden in eine flüchtige Einheit gebracht, aber der "Gott" muss
Mörtl likewise has at first difficulty in accepting the dreadful aloneness of another, though he accepts and affirms his own. He wants at first to help and save the youth, but gradually comes to realize that he had thought of the matter only from his own point of view, that the youth does not wish to escape, that the help and company he can give him is on only the most superficial of levels, that the youth would be exactly what he is without him, and would far rather be without any companion at all, so as not to involve another in his fate (p. 194, pp. 154-55, p. 252). He comes to realize that the comfort and sympathy he seeks to extend to the God only torment the God because they are only a means of escaping his own sadness: "Man stört nur die Einsamkeit, wenn man weint" (p. 252).

Similarly Mörtl comes to see that the playing of music is a device to escape aloneness and the ultimate truths about oneself:

... die Leute wollen Musik haben, um ihre Angst zu vergessen; sie fühlen sich dann nicht so allein und brauchen die Gedanken nicht zu Ende zu denken, auf die sie keine Antwort wissen. ... Ich wusste, dass man Musik immer dann für nütig hielt, wenn man das Nachdenken für gefährlich hielt. Man bediente sich ihrer als ein Mittel, um die Gemeinschaft zu erhalten.

Aber auch ich habe es erst lernen müssen, dass ich ihm mit meiner dummen Musik nur wehtat, da sie ihn nicht allein ließ. (pp. 184-85, p. 187)

The ultimate thoughts about oneself are opposed to the idea of community, which can only be created and preserved artificially. The God condemns music as a lie (p. 139) because it is a dishonest distraction from aloneness. Mörtl eventually stops
playing music and restores the God unhindered to his aloneness. He recognizes the God's aloneness and increasingly comes to love the God for it. He recognizes in particular that the God's aloneness is so essential that no meaningful statement can be made about the God's condition beyond an acknowledgment of his otherness:


The love which Mörtl feels for the God, love, that is, in the sense of Nossack's new concept of love, which precludes the possibility of any close spiritual relationship, is the direct opposite of possession, which is all the power-craving Supreme Servant is capable of (he wishes to acquire the youth as a homosexual plaything). Yet Mörtl has to acknowledge that he himself, in his desire to rescue the God and relate to him, had come dangerously close to being no better than the Supreme Servant:

Ich wollte ... den Gott für mich retten ... Ich wollte nur etwas für mich, ein Bild für mich ganz allein ... das ich liebkosen konnte, um nicht so einsam zu sein. An den Gott dachte ich nicht. Das war mein Fehler. (p. 190)

The dual theme of personal and socio-cultural aloneness is continued in that part of the novel which deals with the period after the overthrow of the Supreme Servant's regime, referred to in history books as "der Letzte Aufstand." This "Last Uprising" is seen as a once and for all event which has led people from the night of superstition into the day-light of reason which alone guarantees freedom and security. The novel shows that all this is propaganda and hocus pocus, and as such
directly comparable to the state of affairs before the "Last Uprising." The new era of rationality has led not to freedom but to an atrophying functionalization of life, directly comparable to the coldly calculating rationality, expediency, and functionalization of the earlier period. In such a highly functionalized life people themselves become functions, cheated of some higher and more valuable life, and yet deceived of this fact by the coldly rational calculations and propaganda of society, just as was the case before the revolution (pp. 139-40).

In particular the Christian religion is seen as a deception directly comparable to the religion before the uprising. Everyone is automatically considered "a Christian," but Christianity's customs and beliefs are a mindlessly accepted convention of behaviour devoid of any real personal belief (p. 336) and completely unrelated to the lives people really lead:

... sie [haben] dort Gewohnheiten ... die gar nicht zu ihrem Leben passen. ... Ihre Kirchen nennen sie Gotteshäuser. ... Aber es fällt einem sofort auf, dass kein Gott darin wohnt ... Und was ... ganz unverständlich ist, die Christen wissen auch, dass in dem Gotteshaus kein Gott wohnt. Sie tun nur so, das ist eine stillschweigende Vereinbarung ... Nachher gehen sie zu ihrem Mittagessen. (pp. 339-40)

The main point of comparison between the societies before and after the revolution is that both are artificial and repressive structures; even after the so-called Last Uprising individuals continue to be held in low esteem and unscrupulously eliminated (p. 188). The two societies are equally bad and differ only superficially. The reason for the similarity reflects Nossack's personal view of revolutions: so-called "last uprisings" will never succeed because the rebels are only
seeking the same thing as they are trying to overthrow: power.

Mörtl is therefore equally out of place in both societies. He works as a night-porter in Munich because this role ensures for him the maximum possible anonymity and makes minimal demands in the way of social role-playing. He describes his life as "ein natürlicher Zustand des Wartens" (p. 146). But waiting for what? In Der jüngere Bruder there was the idea of living out a purposely bleak and ascetic life very much like that of Mörtl in the hope always of an undefined but clearly individual salvation. Those who lived such a life had a feeling of relatedness or union with each other only through their common aloneness. In Nach dem Letzten Aufstand Mörtl takes comfort in thinking of the solitary individual who is always suffering and being sacrificed in a repressive society:

Die Bräuche ändern sich, doch immer wird jemand da sein, der dafür geopfert wird und eine Nacht lang ganz allein die Hammerschläge und Nadelstiche ertragen muss. . . . Man muss an diesen einen denken, das genügt. (p. 212)

And later Mörtl thinks of all the others who lead solitary lives of clandestine spiritual resistance within society, outwardly indistinguishable because they are camouflaged as conforming members of society; his belief in their existence gives him hope (p. 346). This hope is subsequently reinforced and extended when he thinks of all those who realized the futility of the revolutions they fought for, and who withdrew from society and even, in their despair, from life itself:

Morgen oder Übermorgen, in hundert oder in tausend Jahren, wenn es wieder einen Letzten Aufstand gibt, wird einer fragen: Warum gingen diese da abseits? Er wird es sich fragen, wenn er sich nachts entkleidet, denn dann reichen die neuen Vokabeln, für die er tagsüber

Here aloneness would not seem to have the last word. It is implied that ultimately there might arise a better world through increasing numbers of people accepting the futility of revolutions and withdrawing from the social and political world. The reader, however, is unable to form any conception of this process by which a new society might come about, whereas it is only too clear that better societies are not formed by people opting out of socio-political involvement, however valid their justification in this might be.

Thus although on one extremely abstract and abstruse level aloneness does not have the last word, on every other level it does. Indeed the novel itself specifically states that whatever happens in the historical time dimension cannot embrace that other, metaphysical reality which is again associated, just as it was in Der Untergang, with a timeless, esoteric dimension. The novel speaks of "das Gefühl oder die Ahnung einer Zeit oder Nicht-Zeit oder ... auch Gegenwart, die es neben unserer zählbaren Zeit gibt, und die niemals historisch werden kann. Sie wahrzunehmen scheint nicht in unserem Belieben zu stehen, sondern von Zufall oder ... von Gnade abhängen" (p. 21).

This other realm, as always in Nossack's works, is of the highest value and renders the social and historical world forever worthless and the individual who has an awareness of it forever alone, because if it can never become historical, it can
never become part of a community of belief.

Aloneness remains the central theme of Nach dem Letzten Aufstand, and there is no authentic way to escape it. Much of the novel consists of miniature vignettes and full-scale portraits of aloneness, often cast in monological form or as extended surrealistic or dream sequences. Such is the account of the "gnädige Frau," formerly the young girl Achuni and now a famous actress. She tells of an Empress in ancient times who was converted to Christianity and who had to hide her devotional objects under the marital bed because her husband had forbidden Christianity as contrary to his own doctrinaire views. As so often in Nossack, the marital bed (or for that matter the premarital or extramarital bed), though conventionally associated with intimacy, is in fact despite surface appearance the scene and occasion of the greatest separation between individuals. The Empress's experience of aloneness in bed leads the gnädige Frau to reflect on her own previous relationship with the youth who was the God: the intimacy of romance and sexual intercourse is surface appearance only; only years later does she realize that she and the God had never been one, as she had naively thought, but always inwardly alone, and that this was necessarily so:

... ich glaubte ... er schließt und lauschte im Schlaf dem Klopfe meines Herzens und dem Rauschen meines Blutes; denn sein Ohr lag ja an der Haut meines Bauches und es gab nichts anderes für ihn zu hören, glaubte ich. Na und? ... Er schließt nicht, das wissen Sie doch selbst, und es ist kein Grund zu heulen. Jedenfalls schließt er nicht so fest, dass seine eigenen Gedanken nicht weit davon liefen und in der Welt umhergespazierten, man weiß nicht wohin und weiß nicht wozu und kann es nicht hindern, selbst wenn es einem bedenklich scheint.

...
Er will nicht, dass sie jemals etwas davon erfährt . . . Sie soll nicht wissen, dass er die Zeit ihres Schlafes benutzt hat, um allein zu sein. (p. 79, p. 224)

The theme of aloneness in Nach dem Letzten Aufstand as elsewhere in Nossack's work manifests itself particularly in the incommunicability of what is most important in a person's experience, so that he or she is unable to form a close spiritual relationship with others. This emerges in the conversation between the gnädige Frau and the Empress, for they are talking of that other dimension of human experience which is incommunicable:

Ja, eigentlich sollten die Christin und ich nun die Unterhaltung abbrechen. Es ist ja alles gesagt, beinahe auch das, was sich nicht sagen lässt oder was man nur sagen darf, wenn man allein in seinem Zimmer ist. (p. 78)

In a similar way the gnädige Frau is faced with the same difficulty of communication with her colleagues and acquaintances in the theatrical world about things which are intensely real in her own experience, but completely incommunicable, not because they are particularly profound, but rather because they are too obvious: "Es ist schwer, den rechten Ausdruck dafür zu finden. Es sind so selbstverständliche Dinge, darum fehlt es einem an Worten" (p. 62).

The incommunicability of what is most meaningful in a person's experience and the resultant aloneness of that person is related to the idea of "stuttering." A person stutters because words are insufficient for what he wishes to say; but in actuality he should not even attempt communication because there is no-one there to understand in any case: "Wenn man allein ist,
stottert man doch nicht. Wozu denn erst die Qual der Mitteilung, wenn niemand da ist, der es versteht?" (p. 70).

In the light of this it is worthwhile to look at the relationship between the gnädige Frau and Mörtl, who meet at first by chance and then regularly at night in Mörtl's office during a Munich appearance of the actress. Despite difference in age and social status they are two of those kindred spirits whose relationship Nossack does not present in terms of conventional acquaintanceship or friendship: "Wir begrüßten uns nicht wie Leute, die sich lange nicht gesehen haben, und fragten nicht: Wieso? und: Wie geht's? Mit dergleichen hielten wir uns nicht auf" (p. 40). Mörtl refers to "das Gemeinsame" (p. 34) which they share and finds that she is the only person he can speak to at all openly; yet he is hesitant to do so because he feels that his problems are his own individual problems with which he should not burden another (p. 305). It is in fact very difficult to say anything at all of substance about their relationship because what is important and essential to each exists outside and independent of their relationship, which is not regarded as self-sufficient. The essence of personal existence and everything that gives the individual human life value cannot be communicated, so that the otherness of the other person is both insurmountable and precious.

The final component of Nach dem Letzten Aufstand which is significant for the theme of aloneness is the life story of the young man who is present at the nocturnal meetings of Mörtl and the gnädige Frau. Again aloneness begins with the family and
school, the first tools with which society destroys the individual, and from the very beginning the young man and his childhood friend Albert feel alienated from the milieu (p. 104). Yet even childhood existence is monologic and in retrospect the young man speaks of Albert's "Bedürfnis, jemanden zu haben, mit dem er 'seine' Sprache sprechen konnte. Ich werde kaum mehr gewesen sein als sein Echo, an dem er sein Dasein feststellte" (p. 108).

Like all Nossack's children the two boys sense that the way the adults about them live their lives, and the way they are being educated to live their own, is not really life at all, but a worthless substitute, impoverished through functionalization (p. 105). They have their own vision of what life should be, but the social world of "order," though artificial and in this sense unreal, offers too much resistance. They therefore learn to camouflage themselves against attacks from the social world and conceal their knowledge of another existence inwardly (p. 108). This other existence to which they aspire is opposed both to the social and natural worlds. Sex and marriage are rejected as social and natural functions and as a betrayal of the other life beyond society and nature (p. 112). To marry a woman would be a deception (p. 115) about all that is truly valuable in life, whereas authenticity consists in leaving women to yearn tearfully for the other, higher form of existence (p. 116).

Life as an outsider and an ascetic life-style in which the individual avoids involvement in the negative aspects of existence while preserving an awareness of what is valuable are
ideals which go unquestioned in Nossack's work. But Nach dem Letzten Aufstand shows that they are not easy to adhere to. Sometime in early manhood the young man succumbs to the pressures of society and is assimilated by it. He marries, takes a mundane job, and falls into a largely preplanned type of existence.

But one evening his wife remarks "Das ist doch kein Leben" (p. 82) and all of life is suddenly and unexpectedly put in question because he knows that she is right. A seemingly stable existence is undermined and another dimension of reality asserts itself. Shortly afterwards the couple separate: life, whatever it is, whatever can give it value, cannot be sought by two people together; it is an individual matter, and the couple separate with the feeling of being completely superfluous to each other.

Shortly after the departure of his wife the young man is further unsettled when he sights his childhood friend Albert, whom he had long thought dead, crossing the Leopoldstrasse in Munich like an angel. In Der jüngere Bruder Carlos Heller was described as an angel and the quality he shares with Albert is that of shattering the facades and pretences of a functionalized society so that the other side breaks through. The angel figure is most obviously not a part of the social order but part of the other reality, and Werner Welzig has correctly observed that "Der Engel ist der extreme Aussenseiter, den Nossack gestaltet." In Nach dem Letzten Aufstand the angel undermines the false claims of society after the Last Uprising. His appearance before the young man and the shattering effect it has on him show
that the rationalistic claim of guaranteed security is a dishonest pretence because inexplicable and troubling things still happen. Irrational forces still exist despite the all-planning Apparat and there is another realm of reality, an awareness of which, as in the case of the young man, casts the individual into a state of painfully felt aloneness where he is beyond the help of any other person; this demonstrated persistence of human aloneness is in direct contradiction to the claims of a collective society which maintains "es gäbe keine Verlassenheit mehr" (p. 194).

Human isolation persists in fact to such an extent that the young man is beyond the help even of other outsiders such as Mörtl and the gnädige Frau who likewise share an awareness of the other reality and whose outsider status and esoteric knowledge constitutes "das Gemeinsame" (p. 34) which the young man notices. Since his experience with the angel the young man is now himself one of these outsiders who are united only in their aloneness. They exist in a spiritual or metaphysical realm where each is beyond the help of any other. Mörtl realizes that the young man is seeking out his company because he is finding it difficult to bear his aloneness and for that reason intentionally tries to avoid the frequent company of the young man, who must live out his own life in aloneness and helplessness:

Er konnte es wohl nicht länger allein aushalten. Er wird es lernen müssen. Wir alle haben es lernen müssen. (p. 35)

Ich will nicht, dass er sich an mich hängt und meint, ich wisse besser Bescheid. (p. 57)

Denn wozu über etwas reden, das man weiss. Es genügt,
dass man es weiss, und anderen ist nicht damit gedient. Es verwirrt sie nur. Sie müssen mit dem auskommen, was sie wissen. . . . Damit musste er allein fertig werden. (pp. 120-21)

[der junge Mann] den sein Engel in unsere Hilflosigkeit hinübergestossen hatte. Das weckte schmerzliche Fragen, denn wieder einmal mussten wir jemand allein mit sich fertig werden lassen. (pp. 305-06)
In Der Fall d'Arthez (1968) Nossack uses the term "Exterritorialität" to characterize the existence of the two main characters, Ernst Nasemann, alias d'Arthez, a world famous pantomime, and Ludwig Lembke, formerly the successful novelist Louis Lambert, and now an assistant librarian in the Frankfurt University Library. Both are typical Nossack "partisans" who play a role in society so as outwardly to conform, but inwardly to live in silent and unseen resistance to society, a camouflaged "Exterritorialität." Of d'Arthez we are told that his aloneness was not caused in the first place by his experience in his family or in society, but that he was "exterritorial geboren," an inexplicable experiment of nature. Nossack is fascinated with that form of aloneness which is not caused by any specific conditions which can be eliminated and which is therefore in-escapable.

Der Fall d'Arthez is directly comparable to Der jüngere Bruder and Nach dem Letzten Aufstand in that an actor's performance on the stage and his behaviour in life are equated. Theatre and social life both consist of playing roles. D'Arthez uses his skill at role-playing to conceal his outsider status but also to attack and undermine the system by mimicking and slightly exaggerating its conventions and behaviour patterns. But the point which the novel makes is that the pantomime's roles, though exaggerated and "unreal," are precisely for this reason appropriate, because the whole of society and culture has become unreal and exaggerated because anachronistic:
Freilich ist zu bedenken, dass die hysterische Zeit sich damals darin gefiel, völlig antiquierte Rollen zu spielen und sich durch Lautstärke an Phrasen zu berauschen, die schon seit hundert Jahren oder mehr keine Gültigkeit mehr hatten. Das hiess ja geradezu die Katastrophe und Selbstvernichtung herausfordern.

(p. 102)

The catastrophe of the Second World War and the collapse of a false, anachronistic, and decaying socio-cultural order was only followed by its restoration, and d'Arthez and Lambert find socio-cultural identity impossible in the restorative society. Yet neither make constructive suggestions for a better socio-cultural order and in fact are uninterested in finding an acceptable path from their exterritorial existence back into the socio-cultural world. Lambert sums up both their attitudes to society:

Es ist ja ganz schön, ein Gesetz oder ein Verbot oder eine Moral zu erfinden ... Ich habe auch nichts dagegen, es bringt etwas Ordnung in den Stall, wenigstens vorläufig, und ich richte mich ja auch selber danach. Aber es reicht doch nicht aus, für unsereinen wenigstens nicht. Das ist doch nicht mehr als ein Anzug, den ich trage, um nicht aufzufallen und nicht mit der Polizei in Konflikt zu geraten ... (p. 120)

Just as in Nach dem Letzten Aufstand a moribund society was sustained by the machinery of a police state, so too in Der Fall d'Arthez the West German security service searches for subversive, dissenting, or rebellious elements in an attempt to shore up an unstable society. D'Arthez and Lambert come under suspicion of being members of a dangerous international subversive organization. They have named themselves after two figures in the works of the French novelist Honoré de Balzac, having seen in Balzac's original d'Arthez a peripheral figure.
... die immer nur dann erwähnt wurde, wenn es dem Autor nötig erschien, der politischen, kommerziellen, gesellschaftlichen und literarischen Betriebsamkeit gleichsam das intellektuelle Gewissen Frankreichs entgegenzusetzen, das sich den marktschreierischen Tagesmoden verweigerte und die allgemeine Geschäftsmacherei jener Tage ablehnte. Heute würde man solche Leute ohne zu zögern Nihilisten nennen, eben weil sie, und gerade deswegen, die gültigen und Erfolg versprechenden Tendenzen, Parolen und Klischees, sei es auch nur dadurch, dass sie sich schweigend abseits halten, kritisieren und in Frage stellen. (p. 83)

Er hat sich damals nicht auf den Betrieb eingelassen, er hielt sich abseits, arbeitete, wartete, und schwieg ... aber da er sich abseits hielt und schwieg, konnte man ihn nicht mit den Zähnen packen. Ein grosses Ärgernis. Genau wie heute. (p. 318)

... d'Arthez [ist] unser Vorbild geblieben für die geduldig arbeitende, geheime intellektuelle Opposition. Ein Vorbild darin, sich von keiner falschen Aktualität vom Ziel abbringen zu lassen. (pp. 79-80)

These ideas are contradictory in that the concepts, on the one hand, of standing silently apart from the mainstream of society and, on the other, of being a "secret" intellectual opposition are mutually exclusive. But even more implausibly Nossack's novel would have the reader believe that the institutions of society, particularly the security service, feel threatened by a secret organization supposedly based on these muddled ideas and scrupulously avoiding any involvement in current issues or politics. It is impossible to conceive how any society could feel seriously threatened by exterritoriality or a camouflaged partisan type of existence. The exterritorial individual who distances himself from topical events and issues can be conveniently ignored; he is not troublesome or opposition in any real sense. Likewise the exterritorial figure who camouflages his exterritoriality by conforming can also be
ignored. Glatschke, the security service man, is correct when he says that in neither case can the police do very much about it. But they do not need to: counter measures are not necessary because there is nothing to counter.

Nossack's improbable and unjustified claims about the effects of his extraterritorial characters on social institutions must be understood in terms of his old and recurrent hope that a worthless socio-cultural order can somehow be made to collapse and that something better, though undefined, will rise to take its place. Yet it is inconceivable what form of society could possibly encompass that other dimension of reality which is beyond the public world and outside of public time, and which is alone of value. Just as no links between these two worlds could be established in early works such as Der Untergang, Nekyia, and Interview mit dem Tode, so too there is an unbridgeable gulf between the two worlds in Der Fall d'Arthez. It is not fear of a socially responsible existence which moves d'Arthez, or even an insight that all revolutions, given the all-pervasive Apparat, are bound to fail, but a yearning for an ultimate kind of existence that cannot be realized in the social and historical world, whose worthlessness is thus absolute and irredeemable.

On another level, however, Der Fall d'Arthez reveals that Nossack does in fact know that extraterritoriality and a partisan-type existence is not troublesome to society. Nossack has written of his novel: "der Roman [steht] unter dem Motto des Verses aus dem 87. Psalm: inter mortuos liber--dieses liber im Sinn des (schon von der Vulgata fehlübersetzten) Originals
verstanden, wo das Wort nicht eigentlich 'frei' bedeutet, sondern vielmehr so etwas wie 'nutzloses Strandgut'.^ D'Arthez and Lambert are inwardly free in a world of living dead, but their existence in this world is of no value or use, whereas they are denied the other existence for which they yearn. The short story-cum-appendix "Weiterungen," supposedly written by Lambert, shows that he and d'Arthez thought of themselves as intellectuals who have even been robbed of the ability to die straightforwardly like other men, so that they find themselves confined to an intrinsically worthless existence. Summoned by computer card to the "Weltweite Planungsinstitut" in order to be "negated," Lambert goes at the wrong time. He cannot be allowed to pass through the barrier of death, his card must be reprogrammed, and this will take an indeterminate length of time; in the meantime he returns to the world of society to wait.

The recent novel Die gestohlene Melodie contains a similar motif. A young man is excluded from a realm which lies on the other bank of a river. It is not clear whether the other side is that of death, as in "Weiterungen," or the side of "das Nicht-Versicherbare." It is a realm that one gets to by a process of "Weggehen," which seems to be another term for "Aufbruch," and this is a thing which can only be undertaken alone. Though the young man is accompanied along the "Ausfallstrasse" to the river by many others who are likewise in the process of "Weggehen," it is clearly stressed that the other side can only be entered alone, and that each one of them proceeds in absolute solitariness. They leave their houses "ganz vereinzelt" (p. 166) and
very quietly so that no-one will notice they are leaving; they
do not look back, and no-one waves them good-bye. And despite
their large numbers: "Sie nahmen keine Notiz voneinander, so
als ob jeder für sich allein dort ging... Es redete auch
niemand" (pp. 157-68). The distinction between inner and outer
worlds again seems to be confused: for example, no sound of
footsteps can be heard from the large throng, and a photograph
taken by the young man turns out black, as if never exposed.
And the other bank of the river, though located geographically
near the city of Frankfurt, is presented as a strange, other-
worldly sphere, hidden by mist (p. 169). The young man is
prevented from passing over by a police-state bureaucracy because
he does not have a summons. Like d'Arthez and Lambert he is
prevented from crossing over into another kind of existence and
condemned to existence in society; they all exist in a spiritual
and metaphysical no-man's land, for they are no more a part of
society than they are of the other realm. The young man speaks
for them all when he describes his situation as being in quaran-
tine:

Dass ich nun in Quarantäne bin, darüber will ich nicht
klagen, man gewöhnt sich daran ... Es geht die Menschen
nichts an, es ist sozusagen meine Angelegenheit, die
Hauptsache, dass niemand es merkt. (p. 179)

Although the other realm is denied them, there is no bet-
rayal of it. Neither the young man nor Passavent (another
character) is seduced by the "Diesseits," which they see as a
superficial pretence concealing another, more important reality:

... die beiden ... lebten in einer andren Welt. Was
für uns Tatsachen sind, hielten sie für einen Vorwand
... oder für ein Täuschungsmanöver, ja, für einen Ablenkungsversuch von dem, was hinter den Tatsachen vor sich geht. ... sie [nahmen] das Aktuelle nur als Vorwand ... um Wichtigeres damit zu verschleiern. (p. 195)

Again this is true of Lambert and d'Arthez; they do not betray the other reality by taking recourse to whatever distractions and pleasures the world has to offer. Both live that immensely bleak and ascetic existence remarked upon in previous novels. D'Arthez's day-to-day existence is striking in the absolute tedium of its completely uneventful and uninteresting routine (p. 37).

Devoid of any significant involvement in life, the lives of the two men are also devoid of any significant human relationships. The young narrator finds Lambert an attractive and understanding figure, but he realizes at the same time that Lambert does not need such relationships and would never miss him: "Lambert vermisste niemand, man konnte, ohne ihn zu enttäuschen, einfach aus seinem Blickfeld verschwinden, gewiss" (p. 197). It is true that both Lambert and d'Arthez had been married, until Lambert's wife committed suicide and d'Arthez's divorced him when he was interned by the Nazis. But both marriages were not only profoundly unhappy but so improbable that the reader is inclined to believe that Nossack marries his characters only so that they can become widowed or divorced, so that the picture of human aloneness can be painted in the blackest possible colour.

Lambert only associates with the Frankfurt whores; he sees in them peripheral figures in society, a female counterpart to
his own camouflaged outsider status. Though prostitutes are renowned for role-playing, materialism, and self-interest, it is all so out in the open that only in their company do reasonably authentic human relationships seem possible and only in their company does Lambert feel at ease: "Alles vernünftige, nüchterne Menschen, ohne Illusionen und auf ihren Vorteil bedacht. Unsereiner atmet in der unromantischen Atmosphäre geradezu auf . . . " (p. 278).

D'Arthez's life provides a clear illustration of Nossack's new concept of love. Whilst at drama school he had apparently fallen in love with a fellow student, but, like Münck in Spätestens im November, he has an "unmarriageable" quality about him. His young flame, now much older, says "An dem war nichts zu verführen" (p. 101) and maintains that this is the most complimentary thing that can be said of a man:

Schön, man ärgert sich natürlich über ihn, das ist klar, weil man ihn nicht in die Finger bekommt wie all die andern Kerle, aber gerade deshalb, das ist doch etwas, man versucht es gar nicht erst mit den bekannten Mützchen, man lässt den Burschen so wie er ist und Hut ab! (p. 111)

The actress is described by the narrator as "ein ebenbürtiger Partner" (p. 108) for d'Arthez, though not in "love" or in bed. They are partners only in aloneness, about which they must have no illusions:

Mit deinem Papa beriecht man sich besser nur so von Zeit zu Zeit. Das ist sogar ganz nützlich, damit man sich nicht zu viel einbildet. Aber dann sagt man: Aha, so ist das also, und bleibt wieder für sich. (p. 263)

The most real things in any individual's experience cannot be communicated to another, but it is precisely this essential
otherness that constitutes the very basis of respect between individuals; the novel makes clear "dass es nur die Dinge sind, die man sich nicht anvertrauen und an die man darum nicht rühren darf, um deretwillen Mann und Frau sich gegenseitig achten" (p. 252).

No attempt is made to preserve this respect for the otherness of the other within the framework of marriage or any other socio-sexual relationship. It is hardly a new idea that one cannot see inside the mind of another, but one can respect what one is able to know and remain aware that there is another, more important part of the other person which can never be known but which must still be respected. Der Fall d'Arthez makes clear, however, that there exists too great a danger in marriage of forcing the other into a relationship that is incommensurate with his inner reality or even of reducing him to a set role, so that one in effect kills him. The actress admits to d'Arthez's daughter, Edith, that she and d'Arthez would never have married: "Sicher hätten wir uns umgebracht, es wäre nur darauf angekommen, wer schneller damit gewesen wäre" (pp. 262-63).

Apart from the danger of death through role ossification marriage is discounted because the persona or mask of the other person, which is all one can know, is seen as worthless. The ageing actress looks like a cynical old witch, but how she looks or acts on the surface in a relationship is not her real reality. Her real, unknowable reality is when she is alone: "In solchen Augenblicken fragte man sich voller Schrecken und
Mitleid, wie diese Frau wohl war und was sie dachte, wenn sie allein in ihrem ungemütlichen Zimmer war" (p. 265).

Lambert finds it necessary to tell the narrator, a member of the security service, that the file he is compiling on d'Arthez will be of very little substance as far as d'Arthez himself is concerned, and that the only human reality he can know and with which he therefore should concern himself is his own (p. 280). To illustrate this he relates one of d'Arthez's acts in front of a mirror:


Der Fall d'Arthez can be compared to Nach dem Letzten Aufstand and both are comparable to Uwe Johnson's Mutmassungen über Jakob in that all these works show that the "facts" about an individual of the kind that constitute a secret service file have nothing to do with the individual. Biography and public image do not render a person's reality comprehensible. State systems of investigation are shown not only as abstract and immoral, but also as patently inadequate. The individuality
of a person is not only infinitely complex but also hopelessly elusive. Neither the investigator nor the reader can hope to come to a satisfactory understanding of the characters involved.

True human reality is completely interior and exists as a monologue; it is beyond the reach of others and irrelevant to them. From this stems the marked reluctance of d'Arthez and Lambert to influence or advise others, in particular the younger generation (p. 40). D'Arthez says of his refusal to influence his daughter in making a break with her family:

Das ist nun zum Glück eines der Probleme, die jeder allein lösen muss, auf die Gefahr hin, dabei vor die Hunde zu gehen. Man kann ihm hinterher helfen, wenn er sich etwas einsam vorkommt, weil er sich vom Ameisenhaufen entfernt hat und noch nicht gewohnt ist, ohne den Familienmief zu leben, doch die Entscheidung muss er selber treffen . . . Wie willst du beweisen, dass wir es richtig gemacht haben? (p. 55)

The monologic quality of the existence of d'Arthez and Lambert is illustrated in particular by their inability to communicate their awareness of the other, ineffable, metaphysical reality. Lambert stands alone at his window at night, looking out over the vast, sleeping expanse of Frankfurt, and talks only to his tailor's dummy, the symbol of his absolute aloneness, his lack of any other "Gegenüber":

Even in the most out and out monologues in Nossack's work there is always the vestigial hope that the words will in effect become a message which will make contact with someone who will understand, perhaps more through what is not said than through what is said, and that there will be established a union in aloneness. In Der Fall d'Arthez the young narrator is one such person who is receptive to Lambert's monologic nocturnal thoughts:

... die Gedanken ... sind nicht darauf aus, gehört zu werden, das ist ihnen gleichgültig, aber man kann ihnen begegnen. Waisenkinder, die nur das zu denken gelernt haben, was man ihnen im Waisenhaus beigebracht hat, begegnen ihnen vielleicht, weil sie sich gerade langweilen, und ganz unmerklich verändert sich die Welt. (p. 164)

The novel details how the narrator is gradually won over to aloneness and exterritoriality and how he thereby escapes the fate of being functionalized in the restorative age. His job in the Security Service offers him no real security or comradeship for he is completely on his own in a dog-eat-dog professional rat-race (pp. 17-18). Yet he had unthinkingly accepted this way of life as a necessary order just as he had always accepted the pattern of existence around him as a scheme of things which prescribed his own behaviour, so that everything ran smoothly (p. 217). Only after his meeting with Lambert and his learning about d'Arthez does the narrator begin to question all this. His attraction to these exterritorial figures grows and he is gradually uprooted from the order and at least relative security of his earlier life and won over to exterritoriality and aloneness.
The narrator admires the way d'Arthez refrains from advising and influencing others and respects their individuality and otherness (p. 217). But for this same reason he becomes ashamed of his own prying into the lives of others (p. 170, p. 291) and of his attempt to transpose the mystery of an individual into the false rationality of a file. When Glatschke attempts to exploit his relationship with Edith he protests that this is his private life, but discovers that in the modern state there can be no inviolate interior sanctuaries:


The young man immediately resigns his job. Along with his job he loses his fiancée, who was engaged not to an individual, but to a young Security Service man with good prospects for advancement. But he also loses far more. He experiences his own personal "Untergang" as he is deprived of all that had hitherto been secure and plunged into an uncertain and fluid world beyond conventional boundaries; he describes it as "ein Ausgelöschtwerden" (p. 203). He realizes in particular the extent of his isolation among his "friends":

Und wen sollte er um Rat fragen? Da gab es Kollegen und Bekannte in Menge, alles nette Leute, mit denen man einen Sonntagsausflug machen oder abends bei einem Glas Bier zusammensitzen konnte und dann unterhielt man sich mit ihnen Über das, worüber alle Welt sich gerade unterhielt, Über Politik und Über Sport, Über Vorgesetzte und Gehaltsfragen, Über ein Kinostück und Über Mädchen ... Aber es gab nicht einen Menschen, dem man sich anvertraut hätte, nein, das ging nicht,
denn die guten Bekannten hätten einen Verständnislos angesehen... Was gab es da viel um Rat zu fragen, es war ja alles in bester Ordnung; man hatte sein Examen und seinen Doktor gemacht, man hatte eine gute Staatsstellung und sichere Aussichten, man war siebenundzwanzig und brauchte nur noch zu heiraten, was denn sonst? Da war doch überhaupt nichts zu entscheiden, und da alle es taten und für das Richtige hielten, war man von vornherein im Unrecht, wenn man daran zweifelte und etwas Besonderes wollte. (pp. 170-71)

Having crossed over into his own exterritorial existence, the narrator is hardly equal to the demands of the new life. Uprooted from his former life, a new outsider without identity, and intensely aware of the unreality of social role-playing and conventions, he finds himself unable to emulate Lambert by playing a social role behind which he might search for his true identity. Like Stefan Schneider he leaves for a primitive wilderness area where he will work as an "Entwicklungshelfer."

Significantly the narrator breaks off his incipient traditional love relationship with Edith; he trades it in for Nossack's new concept of love and a union in aloneness. He rejects the temptation of staying with Edith and starting an affair; he rejects the dangerous illusion of, as Lambert says, "eine Frau glücklich machen zu müssen" (p. 95). Lambert entirely approves of the narrator having left Edith and having decided for aloneness: "Dass Sie mittags von ihr weggelaufen sind, ist in Ordnung. Daran muss sich eine Frau gewöhnen, je früher um so besser" (p. 282). And though the narrator admits that he "nur zu oft Sehnsucht empfunden hat, sich Edith anzuvertrauen" (p. 261), that at the railway station he almost jumped into her arms crying "Warum bleibe ich nicht einfach bei
and that subsequently on his way to Africa he is seized with regret about not having done this, he also realizes that to have acted on these natural impulses would have been a mistake:

Denn was hatte der Berichterstatter Edith schon anzuvertrauen? Nichts! Es wäre doch ein Betrug an ihr gewesen, und eines Tages hätte sie den Betrug gemerkt und die Unzufriedenheit der Welt wäre vermehrt worden. (p. 261)

It was in fact the narrator himself who, after hearing from the old actress about her relationship with d'Arthez, seems to have concluded "dass es nur die Dinge sind, die man sich nicht anvertrauen und an die man darum nicht rühren darf, um deretwillen Mann und Frau sich gegenseitig achten" (p. 262). And the narrator's face assumed a shocked expression when on the same occasion the old actress said that if married to d'Arthez it would only have been a question of who killed the other first. This seems to have marked the demise of another youthful illusion of the narrator's and when Edith says goodbye to him at the station a profound respect for her absolute otherness is all that is left of his relationship to her:

Denn man kann nicht wissen, wie es ist und was sie denkt, wenn der Zug abgefahren ist und sie allein nach Haus geht. . . . Was bleibt, ist, was sie denkt, wenn sie dann allein nach Haus geht, auch wenn man nicht weiss, was sie denkt. (p. 151)

The narrator experiences, in addition to personal and socio-cultural aloneness, also a spiritual aloneness, a feeling of being lost in a bewildering and incomprehensible world. He is at a loss to explain how he got into this situation of dis-orientation (p. 196), but comes to see that questions about
motivation and direction in human experience are not really meaningful:

Haben solche Fragen irgendeinen Sinn? Denn wenn man den Berichterstatter dreissig Jahre später fragen würde: Was hat Sie damals veranlasst, Ihre vorgezeichnete Bahn ... plötzlich abzubrechen? ... gäbe es keine befriedigende Antwort darauf. Offenbar ändern sich auch die Motive, die im Augenblick der Handlung so eindeutig schienen, im Laufe der Zeit, eine für den Juristen sehr unbefriedigende Bemerkung. Aus einem Fehler, falls es ein Fehler war, wird eine positive Entscheidung oder auch umgekehrt. (pp. 99-100)

To the individual looking back in the light of later experience motivation appears to change, so that there exists no satisfactory explanation for past events and no satisfactory understanding of oneself in terms of past experience. To accept the past as inexplicable means that one loses one's past in the sense of one's orientation and sense of security in a continuum of time. But what is necessary in Der Fall d'Arthez is not to concern oneself with meaningless questions about the past, but to free oneself of the past; the restrictions of the past, of the family, of personal relationships, of profession, milieu, and accepted social norms must be left behind and one must break out to new frontiers in search of one's identity and existential possibilities. It seems that d'Arthez and Lambert never talk about the past (p. 147), and the narrator himself, on his way to Africa in search of his identity and existential possibilities, asks: "Denn wie kann man 'Ich' sagen, wenn man sich umschauen muss?" (p. 155).

The lesson that it is always the past that prevents self-realization is taught to the narrator by a man he meets by chance in the Frankfurt railway station, a man whom he has never
met before and whom most likely he will never see again.

Though he is dressed as a clergyman and is by profession a professor of theology, this is only his disguise. He accuses the "Gastarbeiter" in the station of being quite without phantasy, which he defines as

\[ \text{Die Wahrnehmung dessen, was für nicht möglich gilt} \ldots \text{Was die da und uns alle an dieser Wahrnehmung hindert, ist immer unsere Vergangenheit} \ldots \text{Oder die passive Intelligenz der Natur} \ldots \text{Fix und fertige Begriffe.} \] (pp. 228-29)

This, them, is all that remains to counteract aloneness: union in aloneness with others who are also alone in their perception of another reality. It is not much, but it consoles the narrator:

\[ \text{Er lacht vor sich hin, weil ihm einfällt, dass es eine Art Vergangenheit ist, mit einem Manne beim Würstchenessen im Hauptbahnhof gesprochen zu haben, der seine Soutane eine Uniform nennt. Ja, und} \ldots \text{Über Wahrnehmung und dergleichen gesprochen zu haben. Natürlich, es ist nicht viel und man kann sich kaum daran halten: Ein Winken mit der Hand vom Bahnsteig her, ein Winken, das alle Begriffe wieder fortscheucht.} \] (p. 230)

The union in aloneness of partisans is a recurrent motif in all the novels with which this chapter has dealt. It can exist quite independently of the physical meeting of those concerned. In Der Fall d'Arthez the narrator never in fact meets d'Arthez. Intimacy exists only in respecting the otherness of the other person, in what Stefan Schneider called "dies ferne fremde Vertrautsein" (Der jüngere Bruder, p. 356).

Union in aloneness recurs in the recent novel Die gestohlene Melodie. Passavent recognizes at once the otherness of the young man and the fact that he is "in quarantine." Like the
clergyman in Der Fall d'Arthez Passavent dispenses with all conventionally polite formalities of address and uses the German "Du-form." Though they are proud of theiraloneness and otherness "in der Fremde" (Die gestohlene Melodie, p. 153), by which is meant the social and historical world, it is necessary to conceal this fact from society:

Du bist nicht schwer zu erkennen, Enkel. Das muss unbedingt anders werden, denn es bringt nur Unruhe.

... er ermahnte den Andren, der ja noch neu war, du darfst dich nie zu zweit mit einem von uns sehen lassen, einen allein beachtet niemand, dazu sind sie viel zu beschäftigt, aber wenn wir zu zweit sind, dann stört sie etwas und sie werden ärgerlich. Sie merken, dass wir nur in Quarantäne hier sind und schimpfen: Warum reden die da nicht wie wir? Dass man solche lästigen Ausländer bei uns duldet! Und das darf nicht sein, wir wollen sie ja nicht stören. (p. 155)

The enforced physical aloneness referred to here is not a burden or torment since no special advantages accrue from the physical togetherness of "die unsrigen." They cannot for instance "help" each other in any way (except for superficial, physical help); those who have crossed over into the limbo of a no-man's land or "Zwischenreich" type of existence are isolated and beyond help. It is sufficient simply to know that the others exist and that there is a union in aloneness with them. This idea is expressed very clearly in Das kennt man, when Marie expects one of "die unsrigen" to send help for his friend who is in distress:

'Wollen Sie nicht lieber Ihre Leute rufen?', doch er sagte: 'Das dürfen wir nicht, das ist verboten. ...' Ich sagte ... Ich dachte nur, Sie hätten Macht. Und wenn Sie sich mit Ihren Leuten zusammentun, haben Sie sicher mehr Macht ...' Doch er sagte: 'Ach, Macht! Was nützt denn Macht? Und zusammentun darf man sich erst recht nicht, das ist schon ganz und gar verboten.
Es wird gehofft, dass wir allein damit fertig werden. . . Wenn wir um Hilfe schreien, wäre das eine grosse Enttäuschung. Vielleicht müssen sie gerade selbst allein mit etwas fertig werden und geben sich Mühe, und wir stören sie dabei.'

But though physically apart and unable to help each other because the situations with which they are confronted are uniquely individual spiritual or metaphysical problems of existence, it is important to maintain a union in aloneness; an ineffable, invisible bond between those who are alone must not be severed:


The idea of union in aloneness, independent of physical meeting or actual communication, provides the conclusion of Die gestohlene Melodie. While sitting in the Café Kranzler in Berlin, Passavent is joined by "einer von uns" (p. 245). This young man had to emigrate during the war and has returned to discover "dass von seinem Berlin nicht einmal mehr eine gebrechliche Kulisse stand, die ihm seinen Traum weiterzträumen erlaubt hätte, und dass der ehrwürdige Begriff Heimat nur noch ein Schlagwort der Fremdenindustrie ist" (pp. 245-46). He cannot yet accept the fact of his "Heimatlosigkeit" (p. 246), of his expulsion from "Zeitgeschichte" (p. 246), and is naively considering den Plan eines Ordens . . . all derer . . . die . . . aus der Wellblechbaracke der Zeitgeschichte herausgestossen . . . wurden. In die Zeitgeschichte
gibt es keine Rückkehr, aber der, der mir in dem Café Kranzler seinen Plan unterbreitete, wollte sich damit nicht abfinden. Er litt noch darunter, für die Zeitgeschichte überflüssig zu sein. (p. 246)

In the early works Der Untergang and Nekyia and recurrently but less obviously and far less hopefully in later works, the individual was faced with the task of finding a way back into "Zeitgeschichte," to a new and better socio-cultural unity, from the greater realm outside of the public and historical world into which he found himself cast and in which he found himself alone. Passavent significantly and finally rejects the possibility of finding such a path: "In die Zeitgeschichte gibt es keine Rückkehr." But he rejects also the plan of an order of those who find themselves isolated on the outside: "was wäre denn ein Orden andres als auch nur ein Kollektiv?" (p. 247). He rejects the order and the proposed slogan ("Inter mortuos liber") as unnecessary because those concerned can recognize each other without; both would be a pointless and self-defeating uniform:

"Sollen wir, die nicht auffallen dürfen, etwa eine Uniform tragen, damit jeder sich an uns vergreifen kann?" (p. 247). Passavent translates the Latin as "'Selbst unter Toten nicht sozialisierbar', womit zum mindesten die positiven Möglichkeiten eines Überlebens der Zeitgeschichte angedeutet währen" (p. 247). But to make a slogan of this for a collective order would be a betrayal:

"... Verrat vor allem an dem einzigen, was uns gemeinsam ist: der Einsamkeit" (p. 247).

These people are alone in the socio-cultural world, yet they are also alone among each other; their aloneness is the only common reality which links them. These ideas are further
illustrated by the story the young man tells to Passavent about a professor at a North German university who is also "einer von uns" (p. 245). Though he plays the role of professor so as to camouflage himself, he feels that his students and society at large hate him because they sense his otherness and this hatred threatens to poison his "Alleinsein" (p. 248). Passavent writes to the professor to say that such hatred has emanated from the "menschenunwürdiges Ameisendasein" (p. 248) of society down through the centuries. The reason lies in the mentality of the herd, who are fearful of becoming individuals existing outside of society and history:

Was uns da als Hass entgegenschlägt . . . ist doch nur eine neurotische Ausflucht vor . . . der entsetzlichen Ratlosigkeit, in die ein Bewusstwerden der Vergeblichkeit aller noch so schönen Gesellschaftsordnungen sie stossen würde. Vergessen wir doch nie, dass die jungen Menschen nichts von Ihnen wollen, als dass Sie ihnen eine Rolle beibringen, mit der sie ihre kleine Aktualität erfolgreich bestehen können, eine Rolle, die sie von der Freiheit erlöst, ohne Rolle zu existieren. Wie sollten sie sich nicht in die Mystik des Zerstörrens flüchten, wenn Sie Ihre Studenten wittern lassen, dass alles nur Rolle ist, auch Ihr Dozent-Sein, und dass noch so handfeste Lehrsätze und eine noch so utopische Kostümierung nichts an dem Problem des einzelnen ändert. Denn das instinktive Wittern des Provisorischen aller noch so schönen Gesellschaftsordnungen ist auch dem Stupidesten eigen . . . (pp. 248-49)

Aloneness must be accepted and affirmed, but it is necessary to remain aware of the existence of other disguised partisans, present and future, because there is always such an individual there who will one day free himself and cross over into the realm beyond history and society, a realm in which he will be alone because it is not a common reality shared by others, but only a possibility of his reality alone:
Denken wir doch vor allem an den einen, den es immer gibt, auch in Ihrem Hörsaal ... der nicht dafür geschaffen ist, sich in seiner Zeitgeschichte zu etablieren, und der, weil er das für ein Versagen hält, sich eines Tages in das stürzen will, was ihm alle Kollektive der Welt mit seltener Einmütigkeit als das Nichts gepredigt haben. Für ihn steht doch unser Freund aus dem 87. Psalm seit zweieinhalbtausend Jahren da und mit ihm alle, die es auf sich genommen haben, das Antlitz des Menschen vor der Verzerrung durch ihre Zeitgeschichte zu bewahren. Jenseits der Aktualitäten beginnt ja erst die Wirklichkeit, wird der eine aus Ihrem Hörsaal dann freudig ausrufen, wenn er die, die dort stehen, wahrnimmt, denn er hat den Glauben an brauchbare Schlagworte noch nicht abgelegt. Nein, junger Mann, nur die Möglichkeit deiner Wirklichkeit, doch immerhin eine Möglichkeit. Wir dürfen uns ja nicht als Wegweiser anbieten, aber wenn jemand, der fremd in der Stadt ist, uns nach einer Strasse fragt, können wir ihm manchmal seine Richtung angeben, nicht mehr. ... Das alles wissen Sie genausogut wie ich, darum werde ich diesen Brief nicht abschicken. Es genügt, ihn geschrieben zu haben, für Sie genügt es und für mich. (pp. 249-50)
Footnotes

1. Der jüngere Bruder (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1958), p. 72. Subsequent references to this work will be given in the text.


3. Nach dem Letzten Aufstand: Ein Bericht (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1961), p. 87. Subsequent references to this work will be given in the text.


6. Der Fall d'Arthez (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1968), p. 284. Subsequent references to this work will be given in the text.

7. "Zu meinem Roman Der Fall d'Arthez," Dichten und Trachten, 30 (1968), 18.

8. Die gestohlene Melodie (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972), pp. 159-80. Subsequent references to this novel will be given in the text.

9. Das kennt man (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1964), p. 162. The next reference to this novel will be given in the text.
CHAPTER 8
The Aloneness of the Writer

(i)

The aloneness of the writer is central to Nossack’s loosely formulated theory of writing. The writer, insofar as he is an authentic individual, stands as a solitary figure outside of the repressive social Apparat, and his works are primarily a means by which he maintains himself as an individually existing human being who finds himself in inevitable and irreconcilable opposition to society. Nossack’s essays show that conflict between the individual and society existed in previous ages, but that in the twentieth century it has become more intense because of the ever-increasing collectivization and functionalization of society and the absence of any living cultural tradition. There is now no common meeting ground on which an encounter between writer and public can take place and writing is essentially a monologue:


Collectivization and functionalization has extended even to society’s culture, so that even in the "cultural" world Nossack finds himself an outsider. The problem began long ago and increased over the years as culture became ever more humanistic, social, and psychological instead of metaphysical,
spiritual, and magical. The end result in the twentieth century is a culture whose main characteristics are that it can be bought and sold and consumed like anything else, that it achieves popularity by the ease with which it may be consumed, and that it serves the purpose of the Apparat. The function of culture and especially of literature should be to raise the consciousness of the individual, but the Apparat's culture, whether it be newspapers, magazines, literature, radio, television, or sport, numbs the individual's consciousness. Unrestrained by individual values, the forces of the Apparat have created a culture profoundly hostile to the individual. It is claustrophobic and anxiety-creating because the horizons of life are all walled in; there are no open roads for the spirit to travel.

Nossack condemns most of contemporary literature in the essay "Freizeitliteratur" (Die schwache Position der Literatur, pp. 135-64). It is a mere entertainment, whereas serious literature arises from inner necessity and is explorative. Much "Freizeitliteratur" is the product of a "l'art pour l'art" attitude and seeks to achieve stylistic excellence through the application of formal aesthetic theories and considerations; it makes the fundamental mistake of assuming that there exist for literature certain objective prescriptions of right and wrong, good and bad. For Nossack, as an existentialist, there exist neither in literature nor in life objective, ready-made guidelines for individual thought, behaviour, or expression. As he explains in "Publikum und Dichter," all theories about human
experience inevitably come post factum; there is thus an unbridgeable gulf between the two, and theory, which is tied to the past, cannot prescribe the activity of the writer or criticize him stylistically. Nossack expresses his own view through Stefan Schneider in *Der jüngere Bruder*:

... ich habe in der Zeitung eine Besprechung über eines von Breckwaldts Büchern gelesen, in der nur von Stil, Prosa, Aufbau des Buches und von der Absicht des Verfassers die Rede war ... aber mir ... reicht dieser Standpunkt nicht aus, denn dann müsste das alles ja erlernbar und errechenbar sein, und unter den Umständen würde ich die Technik der Kunst vorziehen. Ich glaube aber nicht, dass man eine intime Aussage erlernen und errechnen kann, und darum scheint es mir besser, sie schweigend zu akzeptieren und sich dadurch ihrer würdig zu zeigen, ja selbst dann zu schweigen, wenn man einen Fehler entdeckt zu haben glaubt, weil dieser Fehler vielleicht zur Aussage gehört und gar kein Fehler ist, sondern etwas Notwendiges.

"Literaturwissenschaft," according to the essay "Publikum und Dichter," is almost invariably tainted with historicism in the way it sees the problems of the writer as historically conditioned. But for Nossack the authentic writer, though he exists in history and society, is not defined by them; with part of his being he exists outside of them and his work bears witness to his struggle to maintain himself against them and to extend his existential limitations. Unlike "Freizeitliteratur" his work is not aimed at the masses, but rather challenges all the assumptions about reality that the masses have made or let be made for them.

Nossack himself stands out as a symbol of personal liberty and aloneness in a society of collective, functionalized beliefs and pleasures. He affirms the possible experiences and other dimensions of reality that are denied or banished by the
Apparat and he upholds spiritual adventure, danger, imagination, and the irrational and metaphysical which he finds so lacking in contemporary life. He uses writing as an instrument of personal liberation and his work reflects his assumption of personal responsibility and the resultant break with society: "Künstler sein ist doch an sich schon etwas Abwegiges, insofern nämlich, als der Künstler nicht innerhalb der herrschenden Ordnung steht, sondern ausserhalb."  

If the struggle to maintain the individual against society is one front of Nossack's war as a writer, the second is the struggle to extend the individual's existential limitations and to cross over into another reality. An intense curiosity about what lies beyond provides the title of one work, Der Neugierige, and the key to all the rest. And yet, as the latter work shows, nothing more can be done than to establish the beginning of an infinitely long road. The pretension of any definitive completeness in the individual's quest for self-realization in the other metaphysical realm would be self-delusion. No matter how far the road is travelled there is always a beyond. Even though the individual is transported into a realm of absolute aloneness far beyond the conventional boundaries of self and of ordinary reality, there is no hope of arriving at a permanent position. The writer himself needs to possess an extraordinary measure of fortitude to withstand the existence produced by his unquenchable drives:

Sie stossen bis zum Rande der Welt durch und stellen sich im voraus die Frage: Ja, und was nun? Eine Frage, die alle Realität entwertet . . . Ein gewagtes
The aloneness of the writer is an abiding theme in Nossack's novels and stories; his writers and artists are isolated figures who not only stand outside of the socio-cultural order but who are deprived, because of their ceaseless quest for another, supremely valuable reality of which they have a purely private awareness, of the comfort and self-sufficiency of the traditional love relationship. This was the case with Berthold Möncken in Spätestens im November, and another instance is to be found in "Der Jüngling aus dem Meer" in Interview mit dem Tode. Hanna's love relationship with a pianist is breaking up because for the pianist value does not lie in the love relationship but in another dimension which he is trying to attain through his art:

Ja, wie er da am Flügel sass, dachte er gar nicht an mich. So angespannt war er mit seiner Sache beschäftigt . . . Er braucht mich nämlich gar nicht. . . . wie er da am Flügel sass, war ich gar nicht für ihn auf der Welt. Im Gegenteil, ich hätte ihn nur gestört. 6

This experience of aloneness is shattering for Hanna, who has a pronounced need for the companionship of another person with whom she could talk about her own awareness of something greater than the everyday concerns of existence (Interview mit dem Tode, p. 160). However she comes to accept both her friend's aloneness and her own. She decides to leave him: "ich muss sehen, wie ich allein damit zurecht komme. . . . Denn schliesslich ist es ja wirklich nicht seine Sache" (Interview mit dem Tode, p. 160). Whether artist or otherwise, the awareness of another
kind of existence renders the individual alone; though the aloneness may at first be painful, it must nevertheless be accepted for it is a prerequisite for attaining this other kind of existence. Consequently Hanna realizes that now the pianist is alone he has a chance (Interview mit dem Tode, p. 160).

As we saw from Der Untergang on, the other reality is a subjective experience, incapable of common consensus of opinion: man is alone in his experience of it. There is in fact no one "reality": reality is constituted differently in different consciousnesses and in different states of the same consciousness. Because standpoints are necessarily subjective, Nossack's preference is for the first person narrative form as opposed to the third person narrative which implies a detached standpoint outside of the characters and events. Some works in fact do not have a single narrative point of view but a number of different, first person narrative voices, each expressing a different subjective reality. The concept of the omniscient, self-assured narrator is impossible for Nossack: there can be no objective overview over a comprehensible reality. The searching of the main characters is that of the author too.

For these reasons Nossack is never sure whether his experiences have any relevance outside of his own personal sphere. But the problem does not torment him precisely because writing is concerned with a purely singular self-realization; it is not meant to be relevant outside of the writer's personal sphere of
experience, and for this reason Nossack often refuses to make things easy for the reader. Literature for Nossack is a monologue and as such it reflects the human condition because he defines man as "ein Wesen, dem die einzigartige Gabe verliehen ist, Zwiesprache mit sich selber zu halten" ("Der Mensch in der heutigen Literatur," *Die schwache Position der Literatur*, p. 62).

In the same essay he argues that not only his own but many famous books had fulfilled their purpose once they had been written down and did not require publication (*Die schwache Position der Literatur*, p. 65). In *Nach dem Letzten Aufstand* it is constantly stressed that the writer had not thought of publication, that the account was not written with the aim of being read, and that the writing of it alone was necessary and self-sufficient:

> Der Verfasser hat nie an eine Veröffentlichung gedacht . . .
> . . . es handelt sich um einen Monolog, der auch dann gehalten wäre, wenn es keinen Zuhörer gegeben hätte. Der Bericht ist nicht auf das Gelesenwerden angewiesen.
> . . . Die Aufzeichnungen haben mit dem Niederschreiben vollkommen ihren Zweck erfüllt. 7

These remarks hold true of Nossack himself (though it will emerge that he never entirely gives up the hope of being heard and understood by some other outsider). He stresses "dass ich nicht für das Publikum schreibe und auch ohne Publikum schreiben würde" ("Kleine Ansprache," *Die schwache Position der Literatur*, p. 87). Writing is not a means of communication with others but a means of self-defence, self-confrontation, and self-realization of an individual over and against a repressive mass society.
and its many insidious forms of untruth. The monologue, the
dialogue with the self, is praised by Nossack, in words which
clearly imply that there is not one, single reality that is
valid for everyone, as the perfect expression of human alone­
ness in which lies human greatness and also hope:

Wir brauchen uns keinem Pessimismus hinzugeben. Meine
Hoffnung gründet sich auf den monologischen Charakter
der heutigen Literatur. Ich sehe darin einen Versuch,
das gesprochene oder geschriebene Wort wieder zu
vermenschlichen, indem es für den, der es spricht,
verbindlich wird, für ihn allein. In dem Verzicht
auf Wahrheiten, die sich für den Tagesbedarf verwenden
lassen, sehe ich ein Bemühen um die eigene Wahrheit
... Den Funktionalisten passt das nicht, und sie
nennen es Kontaktaermut. Lassen wir uns nicht dadurch
beirren. ... Die eigene Wahrheit ist im heutigen
Weltzustand die einzige Wirklichkeit. Sich zu ihr zu
bekennen, ist eine revolutionäre Tat. Was von der
Literatur unserer Tage übrigbleiben wird, kann nur
Monolog sein. Weil der Monolog genau der Situation
des im Dickicht abstrakter Wahrheiten verlorenen Menschen
entspricht. Aber ist das nicht immer so gewesen?
Ist nicht alles, was über die Zeiten hinweg lebendig
an unser Ohr dringt, Monolog? Sollte die Grösse des
Menschen in seiner Einsamkeit liegen? ("So lebte er
hin ... Rede auf Georg Büchner, Die schwache
Position der Literatur, pp. 60-61)

If man's greatness lies in his aloneness, this aloneness is
not to be condemned as contact deprivation. Nossack is concerned
to reveal such phrases as a means to destroy aloneness and
enslave the individual to the Apparat: "Da fragt keiner erst:
Kontakt mit wem? Und wie? Und wofür?" In "Die schwache
Position der Literatur" Nossack exposes the Apparat's attempt to
destroy the writer's aloneness and subjectivity so that the in­
dividual can be used and consumed like all else: "Man wirft ihm
... Ichbesessenheit vor, doch der Vorwurf ist oberflächlich.
Auch der Vorwurf der Teilnahmslosigkeit am Tagesgeschehen und
der Kontaktaermut. Das Instrument will sich vor fremden
Witterungseinflüssen schützen, und das vielgelästerte Ich ist nichts weiter als Material, das aus andern Verbindungen gelöst werden muss, um es für die Situation verbrauchen zu können" (Die schwache Position der Literatur, pp. 20-21). Another warning about the attempt to make man into a tool is given in the essay "Das Verhältnis der Literatur zu Recht und Gerechtigkeit": "Es wird so viel über Identitätsverlust geredet ... In der Tat wird damit an dem wirklichen Problem vorbeigeredet. Denn mit was möchten wir denn gern identisch sein? Das wird verschwiegen und stattdessen werden uns durch Informierung und Reklame Künstliche Bilder vorgehalten, mit denen wir identisch werden sollen. ... Wir sollen uns noch für Menschen halten, sind aber nur noch brauchbares Material für den Apparat." And finally in the Bienek interview Nossack indicates with regard to the monologic nature of contemporary literature that we should not be fooled by talk of contact deprivation: "Vielleicht ist es immer so gewesen. Aber durch das Geschrei von Kontaktarmut und dergleichen dürfen wir uns nicht beirren lassen."

In the light of the above, the sad thing about so much Nossack criticism is that so many scholars have indeed been misled by talk of contact deprivation. Whenever they have come across an instance—and there are many—of loneliness, of aloneness, of a communication gap, or of a lack of contact or identity in Nossack's work, they have immediately and mistakenly assumed that something negative was being portrayed, which could and should be avoided, whereas in fact precisely the
opposite is the case. They have failed to heed Nossack's explicit assertion that authentic human existence is a monologue and that "die Grösse des Menschen" is to be found "in seiner Einsamkeit."
Yet although authentic writing, like authentic existence, is a monologue, Nossack nevertheless, and somewhat paradoxically, never relinquishes the hope that his words will reach other unknown outsiders in society, present or future. In "Kleine Ansprache," where he says that the modern writer speaks without a public or a "Gegenüber" into the void, he adds immediately that he does so:

Immer noch mit der Hoffnung und in dem Glauben sogar, denn sonst würde er schweigen müssen, dass sein Wort das Ohr eines einzelnen erreicht, der irgendwo und irgendwann im Getümmel des Kollektivs auf einen brüderlichen Zuruf wartet. Die Hoffnung ist oft schwer aufrechtzuhalten. (Die schwache Position der Literatur, p. 85)

The idea is again expressed in the essay "Proligio":


Elsewhere Nossack defines writing as "ein Verständigungsmittel mit denen . . . die wie wir irgendwo in der Welt ein Partisanendasein führen, eine Art Geheimsender, der die Welt hinter den offiziellen Kulissen nach dem Menschen abtastet." And he defines his own work as a translator in almost identical terms because his translations are "ein Nachrichtenmittel vom Menschen zum Menschen, eine Art Geheimsender, durch den menschliche Partisanen in der ganzen Welt sich gegenseitig Nachricht von ihrer gefährdeten Existenz geben, fast ohne Hoffnung.
gehört zu werden . . .''

These ideas are of course partially contradictory in that Nossack recognizes the existence of works written without thought of publication and even destroyed by their authors, so that they were absolute monologues. But the hope that there might possibly be a "Gegenüber" constantly recurs in Nossack's work, despite his previous exclusion of such a person from the process of writing. Even so writing itself remains a subjective process and is not primarily a means of communication. Nossack believes "dass es Menschen gibt und immer geben wird, die darauf warten, dass jemand sich zu sich selbst bekennt und es ihnen dadurch erleichtert, sich ihrerseits zu sich zu bekennen" ("Rede in Neu-Delhi," Die schwache Position der Literatur, p. 92). Only by assuming his aloneness absolutely can the writer hope to reach any other person:


The basis of Nossack's hope that he will be heard is provided by his own experience in youth and later life; when finding himself alone in family, society, and culture, he had looked around to find that others, writers and artists, had shared the same lot. He could hear their voices reaching him down through the years, the centuries, and the millenia, so that literature became for him a living encounter of minds, a
never-ending discussion of timeless human problems outside of historical time in a spiritual realm. He sees these figures as his true, spiritual "family." He speaks of his "very intimate friends" Kleist and Pavese, his spiritual "father" Barlach, his "elder brother" Max Beckmann, his "younger brother" Albert Camus, and Theo van Gogh.

These figures constitute a community existing outside of historical time and Nossack speaks of his "verpflichtendes Gefühl der Staatsangehörigkeit der Literatur gegenüber... der Literatur als Über- und anti-nationale, und a-historische Nation" ("Übersetzen und Übersetzt werden," p. 9). They exist in a vastly superior timeless spiritual reality as opposed to "die kleine jahreszeitliche Realität der historischen Gegenwart" ("Das Alltagsdasein von Büchern," Die schwache Position der Literatur, p. 101) and use writing as "die einzige intime Verständigungsmöglichkeit außerhalb der historischen Zeit" ("Mein Gedicht," Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 61). In particular they use writing as a means of communication about the struggle of every individual to maintain and realize himself over and against his society; and because the struggle is a common one, despite superficial trappings of time and place, the reader is freed from a narrow feeling of isolation ("Übersetzen und Übersetzt werden," p. 16). This feeling of comradeship with other writers is described with fascinating imagery in the essay "Publikum und Dichter":

Ich meine damit dies selbstverständliche und verpflichtende Gemeinschaftsgefühl des Dichters zu sämtlichen Dichtern und sämtlicher Dichtung, die es
je gegeben hat, die es gibt und die es einmal geben wird. Denn für den Dichter sind das keine historischen oder zukünftigen Namen, sondern lebendige gleichzeitige Wesen. Meister und Jünger, denen er an die Seite zu treten und zu helfen sich bemüht. . . . In unserer heutigen Situation sehen wir die Einzeln dieser Gemeinschaft nicht wie früher als Mittelpunkt innerhalb der Menschheit, um die sich Gruppen bilden, sondern wir sehen sie auf dem Aussenkreis stehen, wie Wächter auf dem Wall. Mit dem Blick nach aussen ins Nichts oder in das, was wir Heutigen das Nichts nennen; aufmerksam dies Nichts beobachtend, damit es nicht durch den Wall eindringe, und die Stimme erhebend, wenn diese Gefahr sich zeigt. Und welche gefährliche Lockung ist dies Nichts? Zuweilen stösst einer der Wächter vor, um neues Land zu gewinnen; manchmal in subtropische Gegenden, wo man verfaulen und am Fieber verbrennen kann; manchmal in arktische Gebiete, wo man der Gefahr des Erfrierens ausgesetzt ist. . . . Doch . . . welcher Gewinn für alle, wenn eine solche Expedition gelingt! . . . Der Gewinn des anderen ist auch mein Gewinn, mit dem ich weiterarbeiten kann, und vor allem ist sein Scheitern auch mein Scheitern. ("Publikum und Dickter," p. 49)

Though these very real notions of the community of writers exist in Nossack's thought, it is important to remain aware of the abiding element of aloneness that Nossack sees in the authentic human condition. In this respect Nossack's above use of military and geographical imagery to convey the dangers of a quest which, at least in principle, could be a joint expedition into some empirical, objective reality, is unhelpful and misleading because in his creative writing the quest is always spiritual or metaphysical and purely individual (except in certain obviously symbolic or metaphorical cases). Nossack's relationship to the community of writers is essentially a union in aloneness. The writer, it will be recalled, must write as if there were not a single reader in the world so that his words may then reach the ear of some person who is alone. This is a willing acceptance of aloneness, a rejection of conscious attempts
at communication, and a defence and justification of monologic writing. Such monologues can paradoxically become conversations, but beyond the conversation just as before lies alone-ness, as Nossack's speech at the funeral of Joachim Moras shows:


Furthermore Nossack tells us that behind all the writers of his spiritual family there lies concealed the figure of Orestes, who did not resort to "Rückflucht ins Kollektiv aus Angst vor dem Alleinsein. Verrat an sich selbst und eine schmerzliche Niederlage für die Menschheit" ("Orest," Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 29). The most striking feature of Orestes, as seen through Nossack's eyes, is that he is inviolate in his aloneness:


It does not come to a handshake; if it did, there would be no pressure: "Das wäre eine unerlaubte Vertraulichkeit"
Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 27). The essential and ultimate aloneness of others must be respected.

The location of positive instances of man's aloneness in Nossack's essays confirms that when similar ideas occur in the novels and stories they have to be seen in a positive light and not as critical studies of modern man's contact deprivation, even though they may seem very cold and repelling. Thus Nossack's commemorative pronouncement on Peter Suhrkamp contains praise which conventionally would not seem like praise at all and which is in fact extremely reminiscent of what is usually regarded as negative criticism of Schneider in "Die Schalttafel":

... ein Meister in der Kunst des Ausweichens ... Suhrkamp faszinierte und wollte faszinieren, aber wehe dem armen Sterblichen, der für Wärme hielt, was wie Wärme aussah und für Wärme gehalten werden sollte--ihm wären die Fingerspitzen erfrorren. Das hinreissende, leicht irisierende Blau der Augen war bei Suhrkamp kaum mehr als der Strahlungsreflex einer schützenden, allerdings einzigartigen spiegelfähigen Oberfläche, nicht wirklicher und nicht greifbarer als die Farbenpracht des Nordlichts in einer einsamen Polarnacht, die dem staunenden Betrachter sowohl die eigene Verlassenheit zum Bewusstsein bringt als auch die erbarmungslose Vereinzelung dessen, der die Faszination ausübt. 14

Like Schneider in "Die Schalttafel" the individual who has left behind the security of conventional reality and entered a "Grenzbereich" to another kind of reality is without any "Gegenüber", dialogue with Suhrkamp is impossible and replaced by silence: "wie er zu schweigen verstand und wie man mit ihm gemeinsam schweigen konnte!" ("In memoriam," p. 55). Intimacy with such a man is impossible, and so too is help:
Und doch bin ich nie mit ihm intim geworden, wie man es nennt. .......von meiner Seite wenigstens, verbot es mir die instinktive Scheu, einen Nihilisten durch einen unzeitigen Anruf zu stören und zu gefährden. 

... Ein Nihilist ist ein Mann, der bewusst seine Herkunft verlassen und die Peripherie konsequent überschritten hat, um jenseits, im sogenannten Nichts, Neuland zu gewinnen. Einem solchen Mann kann man nicht helfen, er erwartet such keine Hilfe; man kann ihm nur nachfolgen. ... Ich sah und sehe ihn etwa hundert Meter vor mir jenseits der Grenze im Niemandsland stehen, mir den Rücken zuwendend, eine einsame Figur im Leeren mit dem Blick ins Leere

... ("In memoriam," pp. 55-56)

Essentially the same ideas recur in the early piece "Mehr darf man nicht davon verraten," in which a small number of writers and artists, united only in their aloneness, are engaged in a solitary quest, through their work, for the realization of their existential possibilities. Since their goal is completely individual, they cannot be helped towards it by any other person in any way:

Können Sie ihm die Führte zeigen? Können Sie ihm den Engel verschaffen? Ach, den Engel muss jeder allein finden. Wie wollen Sie ihm also helfen? 15

"Mehr darf man nicht davon verraten" is particularly significant in that it portrays these solitary searchers as having an intimate but rationally inexplicable knowledge of each other:

Diese Männer kennen sich selten persönlich .... Aber sie wissen voneinander .... Was auch einer von ihnen unternimmt .... die anderen erfahren es sofort, und es ist, als wäre es ihre eigene Handlung, oder als hätten sie ein gemeinsames Gehirn. Man stecke sie hinter Gefängnismauern, sie werden trotzdem alles voneinander wissen. Presse und Rundfunk hinken um Jahrzehnte hinterher; dies einzigartige Kommunikationsmittel ist von der Technik nicht auszubeuten. ("Mehr darf man nicht davon verraten," p. 79)
This uncanny means of communication is like a form of extra-sensory perception and is met with elsewhere in Nossack's work. There is the uncanny knowledge that the narrator and Dorothea have of each other in "Dorothea"; Marianne's awareness of Berthold's approach in Spätestens im November and the wife's knowledge of the accused's approach in "Unmögliche Beweisaufnahme"; Carlos Heller's vision of a mortally ill Stefan Schneider in Der jüngere Bruder; and Mörtl's awareness of the gnädige Frau's approach in Nach dem Letzten Aufstand. In Der Fall d'Arthez there is Lambert's immediate knowledge of the murder of his security service shadow and of the identity of the murderer. And in Die gestohlene Melodie there are at least three instances of one character having an inexplicable and seemingly supernatural recognition or knowledge of another. These instances of Nossack's characters' incredible psychic powers are unsatisfying because they have no real context: they occur without obvious cause and without subsequent comment; the reader, who wants more information, is denied this and remains emotionally and intellectually unconvinced.

The reader is of course free to speculate: that perhaps the individual who assumes absolutely his aloneness becomes attuned to unknown cosmic forces; that the absolute separation from society and culture reestablishes a link with forces which are suppressed in the highly sophisticated and rationalized modern technological society. Stefan Schneider observes in the Brazilian wilderness that the South American Indians place a great deal of reliance on instinct and premonition and that
these are often confirmed by actual events. He is unable to offer a rational explanation of their apparent faculty of extra-sensory perception, but remarks that they seemingly place little reliance on their eyes. The Indians seem to be in touch with realities or forces behind the surface appearance of the visible world; and although the Indians are close to nature in a way that Nossack's heroes are not, the common feature of both is that they stand outside of the rationalized civilization of Western Europe.

Yet this is only speculation, and the bald assertion of specific facts concerning extra-sensory perception in "Mehr darf man nicht davon verraten!" invites an equally bald response: does Nossack himself possess this faculty which links him with other outsider figures, or does he know people who do? If the answer is no, a certain magical element of relatedness to others is removed from those isolated figures who share a union in aloneness. Yet in a very important sense this would not matter; neither would it matter if there did not even exist this union in aloneness of a community of writers, past, present, and future. At the end of the essay "Publikum und Dichter" Nossack rejects the existence of such a community as the original and essential motive of writing ("Publikum und Dichter," p. 49). It presumes, he says, too much knowledge of the world; it presumes that the youngster will have access to a well-stocked library in his home. Nossack finds himself faced again with the fundamental question of the audience to which the writer directs his thoughts. Essentially it is a religious
question, he says, and earlier ages would have answered the question with God. But today this reply can no longer be used honestly; a valid answer for today must be sought in the self: "Wir müssen sie in uns suchen" ("Publikum und Dichter," p. 49). Nossack's answer is the inner vision of one's existential possibility, the inborn idea of the ideal self, a dream of absolute subjectivity:

Wir alle haben ein geheimes Wissen in uns von dem, was wir sein müssten und sein könnten, wenn wir uns nicht von der Zeit verbiegen und vom Wege hätten abbringen lassen. Diese uns eingeborene Idee von uns ist das Gesetz und die Kraft, die uns trotz aller Einflüsse und Verfälschungen immer wieder in eine bestimmte Richtung wachsen lässt. ("Publikum und Dichter," p. 49)
Even though dedicated to subjectivity, Nossack as a writer is still "engaged." His engagement is in the individual and the individual's aloneness. His engagement does not mean that he is able to advise people how they should live their lives: "die Regeln ändern sich mit der Zeit und mit dem Menschen" ("Die schwache Position der Literatur," Die schwache Position der Literatur, p. 18). The world and our life in the world defy every attempt at definitive categorisation; it is of the very essence of life that it lends itself to many different interpretations. The problem of what is real or right cannot be solved theoretically, but has to be lived out by each individual. Nossack's engagement as a writer is based on the recognition that there are no absolute answers, and in "Ist Poesie lehrbar?" he proclaims: "Was die Poesie tut, ist: in Frage stellen."17

Nossack's questioning, independently minded writing which attacks dogmas and systems is all the more necessary today because of the ever-increasing dictatorship of the Apparat. For Nossack such a literature offers one of the few obvious ways of individual salvation in face of the dogmatists of all types throughout the world who subject truth to parties and collectives ("Jahrgang 1901," Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 130). Nossack's writing is engaged and revolutionary because it fights for the individual man against his degradation to a social quotient:
Literatur ist deshalb revolutionär, weil sie immer für das Lebendige gegen das Institutionelle eintritt. Immer für die Gegenwart gegen die Vergangenheit. Immer für das Suchen nach Wahrheit gegen dogmatisierten Besitz der Wahrheit, immer für die Frage gegen die gebrauchsfertige Antwort. Immer für den Menschen gegen seine Degradierung zum sozialen Quotienten.

Durch dies ihr selbstverständliches Engagement, und nur dadurch, wirkt Literatur auch politisch revolutionär . . . (Die schwache Position der Literatur, p. 23)

The engaged and revolutionary aspect of literature arises, however, almost as a by-product of the individual's private struggle to maintain himself against the society of his time; of writers of the past Nossack says: "Sie wollten nämlich nicht ihrer Zeit die Wahrheit sagen--das ergab sich allenfalls nebenbei--, sondern sie sprachen und schrieben, weil das das einzige Mittel für sie war, sich gegen ihre Zeit und deren Moden und gesellschaftliche Umstände zu erhalten." But precisely because their works were subjective creations their voice remained alive through the ages so that others can still hear them and are forced to respond:

... auf dies Stellungnehmen-Müssen allein kommt es an; auf diese innerliche Entscheidung, die wir immer wieder treffen müssen, ganz mit uns allein . . .

Nehmen Sie daher Bücher und die Äusserungen der Dichter als Wegweiser zu sich selbst. Als Aufforderung, dann und wann allein mit sich selbst zu sein. Als Anhalt und Vergleich mit den schöpferischen Möglichkeiten, die in Ihnen sind. 19

The freedom of aloneness is not readily granted to the individual by the Apparat because it cannot easily be planned into or exploited by the abstract system. For this reason aloneness cannot be valued too highly nor, in contrast to the usual popular culture and the mass media, can the importance
of reading be over-estimated, because when reading one is alone:


. . . Wie soll ein junger Mensch in dem Lärm der perfektionistischen Apparatur sonst den Anruf vernehmen, der ihn ermutigt, der eigenen Bestimmung zu folgen, wenn nicht durch das Alleinsein mit einem Buch oder mit dessen Autor? 20

Through being alone with a book the individual is able to distance himself from the false self which has been imposed on him by society and affirm his personal identity. But he also affirms his existential possibility in the future. We have seen how Nossack believes that this possibility can only be realized through transcending limitations and breaking through to another reality which can only be experienced and entered alone. In choosing for himself, Nossack affirms the value of his choice; he affirms the crossing over of limitations, the terror and ecstasy of living beyond one's natural, psychic, and existential means, of deliberately seeking out, in life and in literature, the extremes of existence so as to keep himself alive while the mass of society, the living dead, go to the secure, biological centre, the refuge of the herd. In making this choice and in accepting the ultimate aloneness it entails, Nossack is not prescribing for others; but his subjective judgment does ask for a personal response from others and they, if they choose, can likewise follow their own solitary path in quest of another, private reality.
Writing, even Nossack's monologic variety, is at least potentially about communication. The word "communicate" is related to the words "common" and "communal," and it means to make common, to share, and by implication to establish a relationship or to found a community. The quality of a personal relationship is largely defined by the degree of communication, but in a bigger sense we could define the rise of societies as the rise of communication, the improvement of the ways of sharing that which it is worthwhile to share; as with a personal relationship, it is obvious that the quality of any culture will depend on what there is to share and on how well it is shared. From the start, however, Nossack displays a deep distrust of language as a means of communication. The early poem "Das Wort" shows how people attempting to become close to each other through words are separated because of the subjective associations which words inevitably have for them:

Wo weilte es, eh es von mir gesprochen, das Wort? In welchem stillen Garten blühte die Blume, eh am Beet ich niederkniete und zum Geschenk sie für dich abgebrochen?

Und dann, wenn es mit meinem Sinn beschwert manchmal nicht ohne Mühe zu dir flieht, wer weiss denn, was ihm unterwegs geschieht von mir zu dir, eh du das Wort gehört?


Vielleicht entfloh es uns sekundenlang in seine Heimat und ward wieder Klang. Und diese eine ist's, die wir verstehn.
The subjective meanings which words have for individuals are, however, only one aspect of a wider problem. Language, the tool of the writer, is itself inadequate to express or probe reality, particularly its other, metaphysical dimension. The writer is isolated by a language which is inadequate as a means of expression and communication. Its limitations arise basically from the fact that it is a part of public, conventional reality and is inextricably linked with the past because it has developed through the centuries. For these reasons it actually acts as a barrier to the writer's search for the other reality. By its very nature language is a public consensus of opinion and part of the time-place dimension, whereas the other reality is the object of a private, esoteric awareness and is outside of time and place.

The misunderstandings which arise when language, with its emphasis on reason and publicly verifiable knowledge, is used to refer to the other reality are most apparent in "Unmögliche Beweisaufnahme." Language here does not clarify reality, but confuses and hides it; it is not a medium of communication but the medium through which misunderstandings come about. At best words can only express what has already been experienced and is known, and even in this they often fail. But when used to describe the other reality they fail miserably. The dilemma of the accused and of Nossack as a writer are the same: how does one express the inexpressible in a completely inadequate and inappropriate medium? How can one possibly communicate, given language's inability to verbalize and make public
essentially non-verbal, private, and ineffable realities?

Nossack's solution is to accept language as an unavoidable metaphysical misfortune and to use it as best he can to indicate the other reality, if only at the point where words fail or leave off, or in the spaces between words. He uses a great deal of conversation in his works, often of the nature of fairly complex philosophical or metaphysical arguments, because he himself as an individual and as a writer hesitates to make a definite statement or to come to a definite conclusion because he knows that nothing is definite in life. In these dialogues it is usually wrong to seek to establish with which point of view Nossack identifies, simply because the conversational form allows him to put forward many different views without committing himself to any.

At other times Nossack finds the answer to the inadequacy of language not in what is said, but in what is not said, or what is withheld, or what is circumscribed. Alois Mörbtn is praised in Nach dem Letzten Aufstand because of what he does not say: "vor allem verstand er zu schweigen" (p. 11). His account ends with the words: "Das ist alles!" (p. 356); what follows is a silent monologue, "Schweigen," and "Verschweigen." And in Der Fall d'Arthez we are told that "Wir brauchen NachrichtenÜbermittler, die den Mund zu halten wissen."22

On yet other occasions the answer to the inadequacy of language lies in what is indicated by the use of metaphors, symbols, and chiffres, such as the other shore in "Am Ufer" and Die gestohlene Melodie, though some works, such as Das kennt
man and *Die gestohlene Melodie*, become annoyingly cryptic and obscure because of the complexity of the devices used to indicate the other reality. And finally another technique which Nossack uses is to have his characters say that what they are trying to say is beyond formulation in language, or to have them retract what they have said previously as hopelessly inadequate; or to have them or himself use words or phrases which leave things in the air and do not exclude other possibilities.

Nossack's successive works attempt to say better what he has said before and to extend his existential frontier in quest of the other reality; in this way each completed work becomes "yesterday's footprint" (*Jahrgang 1901*, *Pseudoautobiographische Glossen*, p. 127). But yesterday's footsteps do not really reveal a direction in which the writer has gone on, in that a crossing over into the other reality is, with only one or two exceptions, denied to Nossack's characters; they do succeed in transcending many conventional limitations but their attempted break-through to the other side is not successful and they are left in the limbo of a "Grenzland" or "Zwischenreich."

Language comes to be seen in Nossack's work not only as a pathetically inadequate means of communication but as a hopelessly inadequate medium in which to conduct a quest for the other reality. Consequently language and the written work constantly tend to pass over into silence. Faced with a quasi-mystical realization that what is valuable and essential cannot be expressed in words, there is a tormented struggle underlying
Nossack's work: the choice between writing and silence. Alois Mörzl, a great exponent of silence, despair of words almost entirely:

(Nach dem Letzten Aufstand, p. 55)

Nossack's silence presents a positive counterpoint to the inhuman, stultifying roar and bustle of a hostile age, and at the same time his silence shows respect for himself, for others, and for the world by affirming that there is a reality larger and less intelligible than ourselves and that not everything can be said. Characters like Passavent and Sprieder in Die gestohlene Melodie spend hours together but rarely talk. It is an unusual but restful experience in Western society, which does not know the social or religious silence of some other cultures. But precisely because silence is so rare in our culture it can also seem unnatural and even terrifying. In the essay "Publikum und Dichter" Nossack refers to the inborn biological need of man "uns auszusprechen" (p. 47), because otherwise he would suffocate in his silence.

Nossack, as an author, has obviously on the whole decided for writing, though his writing can be seen as a framework for his silence or as a prelude to it. But it is also a necessary balance to his silence. Silence may have not just a soft, sweet lure, but positive advantages, but words, for all their disadvantages and inadequacy, can still be important. A silence
which is too easily resorted to makes a fertile breeding ground for substanceless beliefs. The problem with meditating in silence, without translating the thoughts into words, is that the thoughts are never defined or tested. The mind may become filled with intimations of metaphysical realms, of supernatural messengers and angels, and of the cosmic togetherness of loners, but ultimately it can be a cluttered, useless philosophy, and also untrue. The search for truth and reality requires words and some degree of formulation to sort the chaff from the corn. Stefan Schneider tells us that as an engineer he discovered that by putting his thoughts down on paper and presenting the facts as objectively as possible he often discovered what was really important, and he applies this principle to his search for Carlos Heller. Not talking, even not conducting a dialogue with oneself, but especially not talking to another, means that there is no self-examination or criticism, which can be teachers of truths as deep as those got from silent contemplation. Filtered through language many thoughts which had seemed so profound and mystical shrink, but they shrink to their true proportions, because the fallacies are filtered out. There are of course true thoughts and realities which will not go through the filter of language; it is also a truth that not everything can be said; but the attempt should at least be made and when it fails respect for what cannot be said will be all the greater. Nossack, who writes and then falls silent, or who contains silence within the framework of language, is therefore for the most part absolved of the more
serious of the above charges; but as monologist, who sees truth as a monologue or as a dialogue with oneself, his thought is at least in principle not exposed to the strictures of another person's criticism.

A jewel of an essay because it so well expresses the parry and thrust of the tortured and unresolved struggle between language and silence is "Nachmittägliche Zwischenbemerkung."

It opens with the tormenting realization of the inadequacy and futility of language as a means of expression, and even more so as a means of communication:


Silence presents itself as a completely genuine form of expression unfalsified by the endeavour to be understood.

Nossack muses that writing is only a means of giving expression to silence: "In der Tat, so scheint es zu sein: Wir reden, dichten, malen, musizieren und beten, um unserem Schweigen Ausdruck zu verleihen. Oder um es zu verwirklichen" (Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 165).
But immediately there arises the tormenting doubt that writing is a means of escaping silence, that it is a search for something outside of himself, an involvement with the past and memories of the past which deters him from his true direction:


It is not in a relationship with others or with the outside world that one can achieve self-knowledge and self-realization, but even he who cuts himself off from any external connexion and exists in an ultimatealoneness is not free from the danger of error and self-deception precisely because he is alone:

Lustgefühle der Einsamkeit. (Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 166)

Perhaps for this reason the essay points to the interior monologue or dialogue with the self as a basic necessity of human existence: "Ist nicht schon die Tatsache, dass wir Selbstgespräche führen wie dies, ein Beweis dafür, dass wir es nicht fertigbringen, ohne ein auch nur gedachtes Gegenüber auszukommen?" (Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 166). But even this is now seen as a depressing, shameful admission of weakness and failure, and the essay ends with the idea that human aloneness, for all its possible dangers, should be accepted alone with the silence which is the ultimate goal of man's nature and direction:

Ein niederdrückendes Eingeständnis! Es bringt uns das männliche Versagen zum Bewusstsein . . . Denn zweifellos, wenn wir die Anlage und Richtung des Mannes zu Ende denken, so ist sie nicht auf Geschwätz, nicht auf Betriebsamkeit und nicht auf die gepriesene Erhaltung des Daseins hin gewollt, sondern auf ein Wachsen ins Schweigen. Aber . . . (Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, p. 166)

In his speech at Jahnn's grave Nossack sees silence, both before and after death, as man's homeland. Elsewhere he sees monologic writing as a prelude to silence:


The claims made here for the beneficial results of silence seem far-fetched, but silence could still be justified on the
grounds that however little it can do, it can still do more than writing, which is questioned for reasons in addition to those already seen. In other words there are other recommenda-
tions for silence to be found in Nossack's work.

In "Die schwache Position der Literatur" Nossack writes about the weak position of writers in modern society in compa-
rison to scientists, businessmen, technologists, etc. This is due largely to a hostility to art which has always characteri-
zed the scientific attitude and which reaches its apogee in Freud's theories about art and the artist; there is the implicit and often unconscious assumption that the artist is subject to some sentimental or subjective weakness from which scientists--robust, objective fellows who deal with 'reality'--are free. The logical extension of this is that art is a distortion of reality and an incitement against reason. Stefan Schneider is aware of this weak position of art and is puzzled by the way in which artists reveal themselves so intimately, thereby exposing themselves to ridicule or suspicions of weakness and sickness (Der junge Bruder, p. 308).

Secondly there is a general feeling of powerlessness on the part of the writer to influence contemporary events. Nossack shows how the writer can be tormented by the feeling that his faculty of independent thought has been made a part of the Apparat's calculations, thus rendering it futile. For example in Spätestens im November Berthold Müncken and other writers protest at the way in which human values are destroyed in the rat-race of modern industrial society. For doing this,
Müncken is rewarded with a literary prize by the industrialists, who no doubt profit from the tax-deductability and advertising value of the prize; it is a farcical situation. Arno Breckwaldt realizes this and is tormented by it:

Denn ob Bücher geschrieben und gedruckt werden ... das ändert nichts in der Welt. ... Manchmal habe ich das Gefühl, dass es ein Verbrechen von uns ist, wenn wir noch Bücher schreiben und nach der Wahrheit suchen. Wir sollten ganz damit aufhören und euch in die Irre laufen lassen. In Washington und Moskau lacht man sich ins Faustchen und selbst die wichtigen Provinzkonks in Bonn reiben sich doch nur die Hände, weil sie mit Demokratie und Pressefreiheit prahlen können, wenn sie uns Bücher schreiben lassen. Wir helfen ihnen, selbst wenn wir gegen sie protestieren, so sehr, dass sie uns sogar mit Preisen unterstützen. Wir dienen ihnen als Gewissensentlastung, als Beichtzettel, den sie vorweisen können, um dann mit frischen Kräften an ihr Werk zu gehen. Ja, wirklich, wir sollten euch ganz im Stich lassen ... (Der jüngere Bruder, pp. 207-08)

Arno himself would like to give up writing, but confesses he is too weak for silence (p. 208). His justification of his continued writing is very weak:

Ich würde es lieber heute als morgen aufgeben ... wenn ich nur etwas anderes wüsste, das mich beschäftigt und noch mehr von diesem Elend ablenkt, als das Schreiben.

... . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

Ich schreibe nicht, ich schreibe, obwohl ich weiss, dass es keinen Sinn hat und keinen anderen Zweck, als mich über eine weitere Nacht hinwegzubringen. (Der jüngere Bruder, p. 207, p. 209)

A final criticism of writing and recommendation for silence is contained in Nossack's work without having yet been commented on. It seems that the writer, even in his endeavour to express the inexpressible and to break through to another kind of reality, is himself seen as a psychological function, a phenomenon in the reality of this side which has to be
transcended. This is the significance of one of Lambert's jottings in *Der Fall d'Arthez* in which he disassociates himself from his writing and from himself as a writer by referring to himself in the third person, by standing outside of himself and observing himself from outside (*Der Fall d'Arthez*, p. 159).

The idea is developed even more clearly in the recent novel *Die gestohlene Melodie*. In society and in his life at home in the presence of his wife old Passavent maintains a role facade which he refers to as "Mister Ich." But significantly "Mister Ich" is also the term used to refer to Passavent the writer, the author of the journal known as "Die Ephemeriden," even in the most private, intimate moments of solitude. The person as function, mechanism, and role becomes extended even to the private, inner sphere, the sphere which lies behind the mask of social man, but which is now in its turn revealed as a facade. It seems that human personality acts as a barrier to a greater reality. Though the writer writes to maintain the independent spiritual life and to preserve individuality, in these later works his writing, his independent spiritual life, and his individuality are all regarded as a barrier to another, greater reality beyond, to which silence suggests itself as a response.

The value and validity of silence is established in Nossack's work because of what it does and because of what it is. Silence is or represents a metaphysical, mystical reality and an attitude to this other reality before which man is alone. Man comes from silence and goes into silence, and in his speeches...
at the graves of Hans Henny Jahnn and Joachim Moras Nossack equates silence and stillness with man's "Heimat." Likewise in the poem "Stille" the poet says that he came from "müterliche Stille," a realm outside of the public, objective time dimension, a realm which silences "Den raschen Zeigerschlag der Zeit." It is a realm which compels listening; it is described as "heilige Stille, Urklang . . . des Raumes," as the "Wiegenlied der Worte," as a paradisaical realm which man has left or lost:

Auch ich ein Wort von dir gewiegt verliess,
zu laut! zu laut!, verlor ein Paradies.
Am Brunnen meiner Seele lausch ich bang.
(Gedichte, p. 28)

Silence is a mystical, metaphysical realm from which man has been banished. Man is too loud, he has not the ability to be silent and to listen. Living in banishment from this other reality, a perpetual sadness underlies man's existence and is described in an esoteric passage in Nekyia:

Warum denn beginnen wir gleich bei der Geburt kläglich nach Liebe und Tod zu schreien und vertreiben dadurch die Erinnerung und die Worte, die davon zu verkünden wüssten. Denn die Worte dieses anderen Lebens erschrecken, wenn sie uns schreien hören. Sie gehen zum Strande hinunter, dort drehen sie sich noch einmal um und warten, ob wir uns nicht beruhigen. Das Meer bespült schon ihre Füsse; sie schaudern zuerst ein wenig; dann gehen sie vorsichtig weiter, und plötzlich werfen sie sich hinein in die Stille, diesen Urklang des Raumes, wo ihre Heimat ist, die auch die unsrige war. Uns aber bleiben nur die leeren Muscheln der Worte. Selten in leisen Stunden legen wir unser Ohr daran und hören die Stille rauschen. Dann seufzen wir und wissen nicht warum. 24

The experience of another kind of reality is the recurrent and for the most part unfulfilled yearning of all Nossack's
protagonists. In Der Neugierige a fish leaves the water and plunges on adventurously into the new, unknown realm of land. But the journey is metaphorical or symbolic, and even such an arduous real-life journey would appear easy to Nossack's other protagonists. The other realm of reality to which they aspire is not an empirical, objective place in the material world but a spiritual or metaphysical reality which can only be experienced and entered by each one of them alone. The problem in successive works is finding a way to this other reality; there is no obvious way, and meanwhile Nossack's protagonists seek to preserve a perpetual state of awareness of this other reality in which they wait for it to come to them, as if by grace. It is an austere existence led by the protagonists in "Unmögliche Beweisaufnahme," Der jüngere Bruder, Nach dem Letzten Aufstand, Der Fall d'Arthez, and Die gestohlene Melodie. Some of them spend some of their time writing, but all of them spend a great deal of time sitting, standing, waiting, looking out of windows, engaged in no activity except what seems to be a silent meditation and preparedness. Not only in these cases is there no active search for the other reality, but even the monologic quest of writing and the dialogue with the self is given up as futile, most obviously in Die gestohlene Melodie. I would suggest that at that point where writing is given up there has arisen a realization of the futility of words and rational thought, a realization that language and thought are not just a means of searching for and attempting to break through to the other reality but also, and
perhaps unconsciously, a means of maintaining the status quo of the individual's concept of reality and consequently a barrier between him and the other reality. I would suggest, finally, that the anthropologist Carlos Castaneda, when writing of the initiation of a young, rational man into another, separate, magical reality of the Mexican Indians, says much about Nossack's protagonists when they leave off not only attempts at communication with others but the internal dialogue with the self, with a "gedachtes Gegenüber," and increase their aloneness by adding silence to it:

You think and talk too much. You must stop talking to yourself. . . . You talk to yourself too much. You're not unique at that. Every one of us does that. We carry on an internal talk. Think about it. . . . I'll tell you what we talk to ourselves about. We talk about our world. In fact we maintain our world with our internal talk. . . . Whenever we finish talking to ourselves the world is always as it should be. We renew it, we kindle it with life, we uphold it with our internal talk. Not only that, but we also choose our paths as we talk to ourselves. Thus we repeat the same choices over and over until the day we die, because we keep on repeating the same internal talk over and over until the day we die.

A warrior is aware of this and strives to stop his talking. . . . you must use your ears to take some of the burden from your eyes. We have been using our eyes to judge the world since the time we were born. We talk to others and to ourselves mainly about what we see. A warrior is aware of that and listens to the world; he listens to the sounds of the world. . . . A warrior is aware that the world will change as soon as he stops talking to himself . . . and he must be prepared for that monumental jolt. . . . The world is such-and-such or so-and-so only because we tell ourselves that that is the way it is. If we stop telling ourselves the world is so-and-so, the world will stop being so-and-so.
Footnotes

1 "Kleine Ansprache," Die schwache Position der Literatur: Reden und Aufsätze, Edition Suhrkamp, 156 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1966), pp. 84-85. Subsequent references to the essays in this collection will be given in the text.

2 "Publikum und Dichter," Neues Hamburg: Zeugnisse zum Wiederaufbau der Hansestadt, V, ed. Erich Lüt (Hamburg, 1950), 42. Subsequent references to this essay will be given in the text.

3 Der jüngere Bruder (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1958), pp. 307-08. Subsequent references to this work will be given in the text.

4 Horst Bienek, "Versuch, die Grenzen zu erweitern," Deutsche Zeitung, 16-17 June 1962, p. 18. Subsequent references to this interview will be given in the text.

5 "Der Dichter als biologisches Phänomen," Die Neue Zeitung, 1 August 1951.

6 "Der Jüngling aus dem Meer," Interview mit dem Tode (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1966), p. 159. Subsequent references to this work will be given in the text.

7 Nach dem Letzten Aufstand (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1951), p. 8, p. 10, p. 22. Subsequent references to this novel will be given in the text.

8 "Natascha bleibt, der Historie zum Trotz: Kann man heute noch historische Romane schreiben?" Die Welt, 1 November 1969.


10 "Jahrgang 1901," Pseudoautobiographische Glossen, Edition Suhrkamp, 445 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1971), p. 147. Subsequent references to the essays in this collection will be given in the text.
11 "Übersetzen und Übersetzt werden," Übersetzen: Vorträge und Beiträge vom Internationalen Kongress literarischer Übersetzer in Hamburg 1965, ed. Rolf Italiaander (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum Verlag, 1965), p. 15. Subsequent references to this essay will be given in the text.


14 "In memoriam," In memoriam Peter Suhrkamp, ed. Siegfried Unseld (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1959), pp. 53-54. Subsequent references will be given in the text.

15 "Mehr darf man nicht davon verraten," Fünf Fenster: Jahrbuch der Freien Akademie der Künste in Hamburg (Hamburg, 1952), p. 80. Subsequent references will be given in the text.

16 Die gestohlene Melodie (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972), p. 59, p. 91, p. 108. Subsequent references to this novel will be given in the text.


18 "Schwierigkeiten, heute die Wahrheit zu schreiben," Eine Frage und einundzwanzig Antworten, ed. Heinz Friedrich (München, 1964), p. 137. The next reference to this essay will be given in the text.


21 "Das Wort," Gedichte (Hamburg: Wolfgang Krüger Verlag, 1947), p. 30. Subsequent references to this volume of poems will be given in the text.
22 Der Fall d'Arthez (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1968), pp. 87-90. The next reference will be given in the text.


24 Nekyia (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1961), p. 129.

Conclusion

Aloneness is a central and dominant experience in Nossack's work. It can be subsumed under the three distinct categories of personal aloneness, arising from an absence of relatedness to fellow men, of socio-cultural aloneness, resulting from a lack of relatedness to the patterns of life and belief of a society, and finally of the spiritual aloneness of an individual lost in a bewildering universe. In Nossack's work aloneness is not seen in the conventional, negative way as a vacuum which can be filled through relationships with other human beings or through rootedness in a socio-cultural framework of shared values and beliefs. Rather aloneness is seen as a definitive part of the authentic human condition. Conversely, human society, insofar as it owes its origin to the human fear of isolation, has for Nossack an inherently negative aspect. Nossack and his main fictional characters do at times experience such a fear themselves, but in the long run the drive towards aloneness is always greater than the rebellion against it because of the positive evaluation it is accorded.

Nossack, born in 1901, was born into a situation which was very much the legacy of the previous century in that it was deeply affected by a conflict which had developed during it between individual and society. The collective forces associated with the emergence of mass industrial society were opposed by the existentialist thought of Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Dostoyevsky, and Nietzsche and later of Jaspers,
Heidegger, Sartre, and ultimately of Nossack himself. The conflict resulted, to a large extent, in the severance of the unity between man his socio-cultural environment, and in philosophy and literature this resulted in an inward turning to interior monologue and an affirmation of the subjective reality of the mind as the only reality of which we can have direct knowledge, along with a retreat from certainty about the objective reality of the external world.

These features are to be observed in Nossack himself. He continues the nineteenth century conflict between the individual and the collective, the individual and society, the private and the public. However, not just the historical background but also Nossack's personal experience of aloneness throws a great deal of light on its treatment in his fiction. With respect to personal relationships, any natural desire for affection, any desire to belong, or feeling that he belonged, any fondness for family and home were never given a chance to develop because of his need to defend himself against a suffocating maternal, biological influence. Because from the very beginning there was no vacuum caused by a sudden deprivation of love or security, no purely negative feelings of loneliness could arise. Similarly with regard to Nossack's socio-cultural aloneness he had from the very beginning a sense of the unreality of Wilhelmine society as a hollow and decaying facade. He had therefore no opportunity for a sense of socio-cultural belonging. There was no sudden deprivation which could produce purely negative feelings of loneliness.
A general state of aloneness characterized Nossack's formative years. From the beginning he found himself on the outside, in a spiritual dimension, in intellectual exile from the concerns of his historical age. It was a realm where spirit rules supreme over matter and where man is not the mere product of his environment whose life is determined by forces beyond his control; in contrast to Darwin, Marx, and Freud, whose materialist teachings saw man as collectively controlled and determined, Nossack respirtualizes man and gives him back freedom of the will and spiritual dignity. He sees in fact the historical and social reality as a hindrance to his individual direction.

The Nazi take-over and dictatorship confirmed Nossack's sense of the failure of society and culture. He became convinced of the reactionary instincts of the masses of society, of their opportunism, materialism, and longing for security. He saw Nazism as an escape for the masses from anxiety in the face of human isolation through Nazi ideology and the feeling of belonging to a greater racial community. These primitive biological instincts and their collective tendencies were implacably directed against individual spiritual values; faced with the impossibility of rebellion and a resultant sense of powerlessness and vulnerability, Nossack saw how resistance had to be an inner, spiritual resistance camouflaged by outward conformism which he calls "Partisanendasein." Despite apparent membership in society, the partisan leads a solitary existence in an inner, spiritual realm.
The positive value which Nossack gives to human aloneness and man's alienation from society as an inseparable part of the human condition tends to be obscured in the early works Der Untergang, Nekyia, and Interview mit dem Tode. The destruction of Hamburg symbolized for Nossack the destruction of a contemptible European socio-cultural order in which man had handed over to his social institutions the responsibility for his existence and in which he had in fact become the slave of these institutions. With the destruction of the socio-cultural order man reassumes personal responsibility for his existence and this seems to hold the promise of a better socio-cultural order in the future which will overcome the disorientation induced by the destruction. The visionary ending of Nekyia in particular holds the hope of a better community in the future and a new socio-cultural relatedness. In Nekyia Nossack speaks as a "shepherd" with a definite sense of mission to prepare the way for this new socio-cultural order.

The hope of Nekyia remains unfulfilled not just because of the inertia of Nossack's fellow men, who prefer to recreate a failed socio-cultural past. The deeper reason is that the destruction of society and conventional categories of perceiving and classifying reality revealed to Nossack more clearly than ever before a non-ordinary, ultimate, and supremely valuable reality which lies outside of any possible socio-cultural order, outside in fact of the time-place continuum. This other reality is experienced by the individual in a state of complete isolation because there is no common ground for
communication and agreement with others. It is beyond the pale of language and common consensus of opinion. The problem in Nekyia is to find a way from the experience of this other reality, which renders man alone, back to a new socio-cultural relatedness, for which a very real need is felt. This problem proves insurmountable. Nossack is aware that the socio-cultural world conceals the other reality by creating a rational, familiar world in which man has the illusion of being safe, and yet he desires to experience this other reality above all other things. By definition no links can be forged between the two worlds; the other reality is therefore the ultimate guarantor of the abiding and inescapable personal, socio-cultural, and spiritual aloneness of Nossack.

This fact is obscured by the contemptible nature of the materialistic society which in actuality is recreated in the post-war world. The deceiving illusion is created that Nossack is experiencing alienation only from this specific society because of its restorative and materialistic nature. To counteract this illusion, and especially in the light of the confused groping for a new socio-cultural relatedness and orientation in Nekyia which gives substance to it, Chapter Four sought to show that the alienation between man and society is seen by Nossack as a definitive part of the human condition. As an existentialist he takes as his starting point the existence of the individual human being which he places in polarity to social structures and ideologies, which all ultimately become autonomous and make instrumental social quotients of men.
Nossack is not, however, concerned with social reform or revolution; not primarily because the rule of the social Apparat is all-pervasive and even revolution will not change the instrumental status of men, but because of his seduction from the social and historical world by the other reality. Since the two are irreconcilable, political involvement cannot offer Nossack a way out of the subjectivity and isolation of human existence.

Socio-cultural aloneness is not solely a twentieth century phenomenon. The necessary alienation between the authentic man and society can be seen from Nossack's definition of man not as a social being but as a being who holds dialogues with himself; his existence is monologic. And since his desires and nature are not rational, they constantly defeat attempts to create the perfect social system through collective organization. Essentially man is an individual, unique, spiritual being who lives an extra-historical existence in a spiritual time-dimension.

Apart from being a biological and economic necessity of human existence, Nossack sees society as being motivated by a psychological fear of aloneness and a deep-rooted need for collective security and relatedness; it is a flight from the authentic human condition; it achieves a collective herd security only at the expense of the repression of the individual. In his novels he attacks it for breaking down the distinction between the private life of the individual and the sphere of State involvement and concern, so that the individual is left with no inviolate area of privacy and sovereignty. He
attacks the way modern social man's mind is stuffed with the ideas and values of the Apparat through the mass media and education. And he exposes the part the family unit of social living plays in the destruction of the child's individuality and his social normalization.

For Nossack man's identity is not to be sought in a social context but in the singularity and individuality of human existence, in its spiritual and metaphysical dimensions and not in social involvement and commitment; in short, man's identity and greatness lie in man's aloneness. This has naturally brought him into conflict with Marxist critics. He has been criticized for a lack of realism and "schrankenloser Subjektivismus."\(^1\) Günther Cwojdrak writes: "Nossack sucht den Menschen an sich, losgelöst von allen historischen und gesellschaftlichen Bestimmungen; aber er kann nicht finden, was es nicht gibt. Dem irrealen Ziel entspricht die irrealen Methode: Nossack setzt den 'Menschen' der Gesellschaft, dem Leben, der Natur entgegen...".\(^2\) Similarly Christa Wolf writes: "Man kann es fast tragisch nennen, dass solche ehrlichen Sucher wie Nossack die Rettung des 'Menschlichen' auf einem Wege suchen müssen, auf dem es mit grösster Sicherheit verlorengeht: In der absoluten, teils selbstgewählten, teils aufgezwungenen Isolierung, die unter allen Umständen zur Verarmung, zur Entleerung, zur Auflösung der menschlichen Persönlichkeit führen muss, da ihr doch nur eine Vielfalt aktiver menschlicher Beziehungen inneren Reichtum und echte Entwicklung gewährleisten."\(^3\)

This study has not sought to adjudicate in the conflict between
these two opposed views of man's nature, but rather simply to establish the fact that underlying Nossack's work there is an exalted vision of man free and alone. Man, Nossack maintains, is not part of a machine, not a social quotient, not a robot, not a being meant to slave all his days or to be made instrumental to or slaughtered for "sacred" causes, not a creature to be controlled, functionalized, and anaesthetized. Of all the many thinkers who have thought about the meaning of human life, none can come closer than Nossack to valuing individual human existence in all its singularity for its own sake. Almost always men have lived subject to the dictates of some social structure, political ideology, or religious view of life. Nossack seeks freedom from all of these and declares that the existence of the individual human being is prior to all of them; he refuses to obscure man's singularity or simplify his complexity; he says that what is meaningful and endures is no more or less than the aloneness of human existence. Nossack is faced with the question of how to preserve such authentic existence in the alien sphere of a collective and repressive society. Given the basis of liberation, the individual does not, as might be expected, adopt his own new lifestyle in the manner of the traditional social rebel. Instead most of Nossack's protagonists curb the expression of pure subjectivity. They are what he calls partisans who lead a camouflaged existence in society in which they seek to maintain themselves in inner spiritual resistance against it
whilst at the same time maintaining an awareness of the other reality into which they hope to cross over. Their life is in effect a camouflaged state of aloneness, whereby it is an inner, well-kept secret. They lead such an existence for a dual reason. Firstly, in an at times almost paranoid way they feel that society does not tolerate outsiders who do not play by society's rules and who question the premises on which society is based; they see society as a menace and fear the consequences of revealing themselves. And secondly they do not wish to undermine the security, even if it is a false security, of those about them by involving them in their awareness of another, unsettling reality.

In Nossack's novels there is evident an increasing concern for the private world of the individual and his earlier sense of mission, the concern for a better society in the future for all men, appear to fade. It is true that there were detected in the novels certain very rare, vague, and insubstantial expressions of hope for a new socio-cultural order at some uncertain point in the future, the hope that "Partisanendasein" holds the promise of something beyond aloneness and the finding of self because it might cause the Apparat to collapse and lead to a better future for mankind. This hope was seen to be the expression of the real but subsidiary and increasingly rare and less pronounced need felt by Nossack for socio-cultural relatedness. Yet even such vague, insubstantial hopes were beset by doubts and in the forefront of the novels was a number of individuals pursuing their own private
reality. The shift in emphasis occurs, as stated before, not only because of Nossack's disillusionment with the essentially restorative nature of post-war society. This alone would not explain why there is no socio-political involvement to change society. The deeper reason for the shift of focus from the fate of society at large to the purely personal reality of the individual is usually overlooked in the secondary literature and is rooted, as we have seen, in Nossack's realization of the impossibility of reconciling his early desire for a better socio-cultural order with his awareness of and yearning for an infinite, cosmic experience out of space and time which devalues the socio-cultural world. Just as no links could be established between these two worlds in the early works Der Untergang, Nekyia, and Interview mit dem Tode, so too there remains an unbridgeable gulf in the later novels; and this gulf is affirmed most definitely in the recent novel Die gestohlene Melodie.

Ingeborg Goessl\(^4\) sees this other reality which renders the individual alone not only as a private but as an interior world, having its origins in the depths of the soul, so that each person can only enter it alone, and as a place where in consequence man is isolated from mankind. Goessl is wrong to see it purely in terms of an interior reality; in Der Untergang Nossack states specifically that the miserly dividing and divisive window of man's eyes had been shattered, and Goessl is wrong to repair it by reinstating the distinction between interior and exterior worlds. A truer view shows that man's
aloneness is a consequence of the fact that no fellow man can give him consensus on his awareness of the other reality, which is therefore perceived in a state of complete solitude. It is precisely this capacity or incapacity for common consensus which distinguishes the other reality from the socio-cultural reality. But as we saw in Der Untergang even the component elements of the public, socio-cultural reality can lose their capacity for common consensus and thus undermine the certainty that it is anything more than a certain interpretation of reality, which is always more or other than anything which can be said about it.

In both essays and novels Nossack is fascinated with man's futile attempts to make sense of the reality which surrounds him and which is incomprehensible. Existence cannot be rationalized into a cozy, familiar world in which man can feel safe and at home. Similarly with time, it was shown to be an important theme in both "Unmögliche Beweisaufnahme" and Der Fall D'Arthez that the individual can have no satisfactory understanding of himself in terms of his past experience and therefore no orientation in time since the past appears to change in the light of later experience. There is no reliable orientation either in space or in time. There are only very transient and unreliable socio-cultural interpretations of reality and equally transient and unreliable personal myths about reality. Both are shattered when real reality breaks through, so that the individual's situation is one of ultimate spiritual aloneness.
The novels illustrate again and again the necessary aloneness of him who is aware of the other reality and attempts to cross over into it. There can be no objective guidelines or help or companionship for the "Grenzüberschreiter." His quest can only be a private, solitary quest because the other reality is not a common reality. Nossack's protagonists experience varying degrees of difficulty in accepting this aloneness because some are more governed by the natural human need for human contact and relatedness. But in all cases it must be accepted as an intrinsic part of their experience of and quest for something of supreme value, even though the dangers in a realm of absolute solitude are only too evident and can even be fatal: "Man kann in eine Einöde geraten, 'ganz ohne Landschaft, ohne Hintergrund' und ganz ohne Gegenüber, Reicht die eigene Wärme dafür aus oder kommt es zum Erfrieren?"

The aloneness of Nossack's protagonists arises not only from the solitary nature of their awareness and quest, however, but also from the fact that since the other reality is of supreme value nothing must be allowed to interfere with the possible experience of it. This explains the dominant elements of asceticism and nihilism to be found in the novels. The individual must not be consumed by the external irrelevancies of conventional life but must hold himself completely open to the possible experience of the other metaphysical reality. He must leave behind or act out on the level of surface appearance only, while preserving an inner freedom and distance, all the activities and involvements of life, in other words all the
limitations and fetters of the world. Starting with the mother figure, who is rejected not just as a primary agent of social conditioning, but as a tie to the natural, biological world, these go on to include day-to-day activities and routines, worldly pleasures, amusements, and leisure-time pursuits such as football and the cinema, the personal involvements of friendship, physical and romantic love, marriage, social and political obligations, the restrictions of environment and nature, knowledge, science, and the past and memories of the past, in fact all human experience in the time-place dimension. All these are seen by Nossack as obstacles to the attainment of the other reality. The isolation of his protagonists from human contact and community is thus not solely imposed by their solitary awareness of the other reality but is partly self-chosen as a matter of policy in their attempt to cross over into it. But though they detach and distinguish themselves either inwardly or outwardly from the rest of society, they are almost invariably unable to cross over (the woman in "Unmögliche Beweisaufnahme," Berthold and Marianne in Spätestens im November, and Albert in Nach dem Letzten Aufstand are possible exceptions). They exist in limbo, in a metaphysical or spiritual no-man's land; as the recent novel Die gestohlene Melodie makes explicit, they exist in quarantine.

The theme of personal aloneness was traced throughout Nossack's work and everywhere the impossibility of any form of spiritual closeness to another person was central to it. Chapter Five and subsequent chapters examined this with
particular reference to love relationships. It was shown that much of the critical literature has been wrong to see personal aloneness purely as a twentieth century phenomenon. It is true that specific conditions in modern society do make for estrangement between people. But personal aloneness is an intrinsic part of the authentic human condition at all times and in all places because of the individual's private, incommunicable awareness of the other reality. *Spättestens im November* illustrates the inability of two people to achieve a close spiritual relationship in a love relationship and in addition makes clear that what is worth living for is not love, or the attempt to achieve a close spiritual relationship, but another kind of existence altogether of which the individual has a private awareness which makes a close spiritual relationship impossible. After *Spättestens im November* no attempt is made to enter into a close spiritual relationship with another person because the impossibility of this has been recognized and accepted. In subsequent works the traditional concept of love is attacked and a new concept of love is formulated, based on the impossibility of achieving spiritual closeness to another, given a person's private awareness of another, supremely valuable kind of existence which it is his goal to attain, but which he can attain only alone.

The traditional concept of love is questioned on several grounds. Firstly, love is insufficient as a uniting force given the individual's awareness of the other reality. Secondly, the traditional love relationship, whether it arises through
physiologically conditioned libidinous desires and needs or through psychological fear of aloneness, acts as an obstacle to man in his quest for the other, supremely valuable reality. Man must leave the pretexts, temptations, and fetters of sex and love behind and assume the aloneness of his quest for another kind of existence entirely. Thirdly, the idea of social and personal roles was seen to be relevant to the theme of aloneness in Nossack's work and to his critique of the traditional concept of love. Although both partners may willingly cast off the conventional falsities of the social roles prescribed for them by the Apparat, which severely restrict personal expression and communication and create an artificiality in human relationships, they can still only know each other on a superficial level. They can know each other only as "persons," a word which derives from the Greek "persona," the name given to the mask in the Roman theatre, and which underlines the unavoidable superficiality of all human contact in Nossack's work. An individual is not the same as his persona or "Rollenfassade," which is all another person can know of him. Behind the impenetrable external role facade of personality and psychology he is unknowable and inviolate. It is impossible for two souls to make contact. One cannot communicate one's inner reality to another person or know another person's inner reality; this kind of openness and nakedness before another is simply not possible.

By way of contrast to the traditional concept, Nossack's new concept of love consists of recognizing and respecting the
fundamental otherness of the other person behind the persona and of maintaining an awareness of the other reality which can only be experienced and entered alone as the highest value in life. The new concept of love precludes any attempt at involvement with another person because this could only be a relationship with his worthless role and would ensnare him in the fetters of role-playing and personal involvement and thus impede him in his quest for the other reality and the realization of his existential possibilities. In the informal formulation of his new concept of love Nossack reiterates Rilke's belief that we human beings know—we are born knowing—how to clutch and that what we must learn is how to let go. We may feel the need to touch other people, even to grasp them, but to do this is to lose them, to destroy them by reducing them to a role and knowing them only in falsified form as a role. A traditional kind of love relationship is therefore the most inappropriate way to relate to another person because the facade of roles necessarily stands between two people. If, however, one consciously refrains from seeking to make contact with the other person and preserves a "Distanz dem Fremden gegenüber," one thereby avoids the intrusion of the falsifying facade of roles so that, paradoxically, one is closer to the true, unfalsified self of the other. Paradoxically, then, one can know another person best when one maintains a distance from him or her; one can achieve an indefinable metaphysical intimacy or closeness, what Stefan Schneider called "dies ferne, fremde Vertrautsein."
There thus exists, despite aloneness, a relationship or union in aloneness which is the maximum of relatedness possible and all that remains to counteract aloneness. This idea of the union in aloneness, independent of physical meeting or communication, of those who are alone was seen to be recurrent in the novels and applied not only to male-female relationships but to all of Nossack's partisans in general. In *Die gestohlene Melodie* it was made explicit that aloneness is the only common reality which links these people.

In Chapter Eight the aloneness of the writer was seen to be central to Nossack's loosely formulated theory of writing. Through his works the writer maintains himself against a repressive socio-cultural environment, with which, like any authentic individual, he is in inevitable and irreconcilable conflict. In the absence of a living socio-cultural tradition there is no community of belief, no common meeting ground for an encounter of the writer with a public. Indeed, given the functionalization and collectivization of society there is no longer a public in the sense of a number of individuals. Writing is for this reason monologic, a dialogue with the self; there is no "Gegenüber." But the deeper reason for the writer's aloneness and the monologic nature of his writing is his incommunicable awareness of the other reality and his solitary quest to cross over into it. His aloneness is not due to any specific, alterable socio-cultural conditions.

Though writing is monologic and the writer speaks without a "Gegenüber," Nossack nevertheless never relinquishes the hope
that his words will reach and be understood by some other unknown outsider in society and that there will be established a union in aloneness, though writing still remains by nature a subjective process and creation which is not intended primarily to be read. Nossack's hope is based on his own discovery in the timeless, spiritual world of literature of other solitary figures existing outside of their historical time and society who confirmed him in his own existence and freed him from a narrow feeling of isolation because he felt a union in aloneness with them. They gave him a sense of superhistorical spiritual community and the idea of the dignity and worth of man, but man stripped of all historical, social, and cultural variables, man naked and absolute. However, these real notions of the community of writers must not obscure the abiding element of aloneness that Nossack sees in the authentic human condition. It was found possible only to speak of a union in aloneness of writers because their quest for the other reality cannot be a joint expedition since it is not a quest for an empirical, objective reality. Their quest must be pursued in absolute solitariness because it is a quest for a metaphysical and purely private reality. Aloneness is the ultimate truth and business of the authentic human condition.

Nossack sees language as inadequate to describe the other reality and thus futile as a means of communication because it is part of the sociocultural reality in the time-place dimension, whereas the other reality is outside of time and place and incapable of common consensus of opinion. He comes
to see silence as a natural response to this other reality and language not as a means of searching, but as a barrier in the quest for it. The writer's aloneness is increased as eventually not just communication but even the dialogue with the self is given up because language is hopelessly bogged down in the public, conventional reality. Furthermore, the writer is himself seen as a psychological function or mechanism, a phenomenon in the reality of this side which acts as a barrier to the other reality. Silence is the only appropriate response to this other reality before which man is alone, which he can only enter alone, and which compels his listening and waiting in silence and maintaining a state of complete openness and preparedness for it in the absence of any other obvious way to it. For these reasons Nossack's monologic writing is always tending to pass over into silence, though few of Nossack's characters and even Nossack himself as a writer are for long equal to enduring silence and dispensing with the natural, inborn need for dialogue, if only with a "gedachtes Gegenüber."

This study has demonstrated that the experience of personal, socio-cultural, and spiritual aloneness has always been of major and in fact dominant significance in Nossack's work from the very beginning. The theme is in fact central in Nossack's first published words after the Second World War in which he writes of man's aloneness in the "Grenzsituation":

Wir müssen gehen wie am Rand der Welt
und ihres Spiegelbilds in andern Zeiten,
nicht träumend, sondern wach nach beiden Seiten,
einsamen Weg, wo keine Hand uns hält. 6
Though the experience is of such long standing in Nossack's work there has been no essential change in his attitude towards it. The Gedichte do, it is true, contain poems like "Kleist's Totenmaske" and "Rief da ein Mann?" which are about commitment to one's brother and the human obligation to help him. In themselves these early poems contain sentiments which are not to be found in the later work. It should not be forgotten, however, that they were written during the Nazi dictatorship and the help referred to is help in the struggle against a totalitarian society, that is against a specific aspect of the social and historical world. This idea of the duty to help one's brother does not contradict the later theme of the impossibility of helping another person in his solitary quest for the other, metaphysical, private reality. Furthermore, the experience of aloneness in its three distinct elements is quite evident in the very earliest work, including the Gedichte. One can speak of a development in Nossack's attitude to the experience only in terms of an intensification of the experience with the giving up of his socio-cultural hopes after Nekyia and the recognition of the futility of seeking spiritual closeness to another person after Spütestens im November. Successive works and in particular the closing pages of the recent novel Die gestohlene Melodie reveal a fascination with the solitary figure of man in all his aloneness, but even in Nossack's earliest published work, in the poem "Saturn" in the Gedichte of 1947, there is a fascination with man's ultimate, planetary solitude as deep and intense as anything to be found
in the subsequent fiction. This poem, in its buoyant, jubilant paean to the aloneness of human existence, gives an indication of the ultimate, religious value which Nossack attaches to aloneness and therefore of the central significance of the theme throughout his work:

Was war ich einst? Gleich dir ein Teil der Herde.
Mich lösend von dem Rande meines Wesens
sank ich in mich. O Wonne des Genesens!
Ich werde dicht! Gewicht! Ich wache, werde.

Ich warte auf den, der mich zu finden weiss.
Ich blühe, glühe. Doch ich weiss zu warten.

Selten begegne ich einem, der mir gleicht.
Wir grüssen uns, umkreisen unsre Blüse--
blaugrün erstrahlt die Welt von Zweier Größe,
bis unser Weg sich auseinanderzweigt.

O Einsamkeit, du Heimat wie Kristall!
Licht, das wir hegen gegen alles Trübe!
Quell unserer Kraft du, Lied unsern Liebe!
Dich singend ziehn wir durch das All.
Footnotes


7 Hans Erich Nossack, Gedichte, p. 22.
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The list of Nossack's books is confined in the main to their first printing. Similarly the lists of Nossack's other publications and of the secondary literature, though at time of compilation they represented to my knowledge the most extensive existing bibliography, make no pretence of completeness.

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