

**Arno Holz**

# **PHANTASUS**

**A remarkable poem-cycle from  
fin de siècle Berlin**



**Translated and Introduced by C. D. Godwin  
With an Afterword by Robert Wohlleben**

<https://beyond-alexanderplatz.com>

## TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

### The Title:

Phantasos was a Greek deity, one of the three gods of dreams. He was the son of Hypnos the god of sleep (who was the twin of Thanatos, god of death). His brothers were Morpheus ('shape') and Phobetor ('terror'). In dreams he turns himself into earth, stones, water – whatever has no soul. (Morpheus simulates people, Phobetor animals.)

### The Text:

This volume includes all 100 poems in the 1st edition of *Phantasia* (Berlin: Sassenbach 1898-99), plus a selection from the much enlarged 2nd edition (Leipzig: Insel-Verlag 1916). In two cases, both the original poem and the longer 1916 version are included.

The German texts are in the public domain. All 1st edition Phantasia poems (but without the Middle Axis format) can be found at <https://www.projekt-gutenberg.org/holz/phantas/index.html> .

### Previous translations:

While some of these poems have been adapted in English to be sung as Lieder (see [www.lieder.net](http://www.lieder.net)) this is the first substantial translation of Arno Holz's poetic work into English. The only previous examples I have found are five items at <http://artsites.ucsc.edu/GDead/agdl/holz.html> by David Dodd (who edited a collection of Grateful Dead lyrics; the web page was last updated in 1999). The same items, de-formatted, are at <https://www.poemhunter.com/arno-holz/poems>.

### Acknowledgements

Robert Wohlleben is a leading Holz enthusiast and editor of a collection of poems by associates of Holz (nicknamed the "Regiment Sassenbach" after their publisher). He is also an experienced translator, with James Fenimore Cooper and 1980s SciFi under his belt. In addition to the Afterword, Robert kindly provided detailed critiques of my translations, including links to useful source materials. His blog at [www.fulgura.de](http://www.fulgura.de) offers (in German) a huge amount of material about Holz, his collaborators, and the social environment of fin de siècle Germany. I am most grateful for his input to this revised and corrected version.

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## INTRODUCTION

Why, the reader asks, should I bother with a book of verse by a German poet of whom I've never heard? And one who formats his poems in such an eccentric way? A half-hour's glance through the one hundred poems in Part One of this collection may already suggest an answer.

Perhaps your eye will skim over the shorter pieces, and be tempted at first to dismiss them as nothing much. Perhaps you'll linger over a longer piece, and smile, or frown, or feel slight irritation at too many unfamiliar cultural references. (Don't worry – the Endnotes are there to help.) Perhaps now and then you'll be tempted to read out loud, using the typography, punctuation and line breaks as cues, and you'll note how well the sense-units match your own natural phrasing and breathing.

So even your first quick skim may leave you with a sense that there's more to explore and enjoy in these deceptively simple poems. Here I aim to provide enough background to help you appreciate what was revolutionary about the first edition of the *Phantasmus* cycle, and how it relates both to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century literary movement dubbed 'Naturalism', and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century upheaval in the visual arts, theatre and literature labelled 'Expressionism'.

### A Philistine age

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, German literature was in a poor condition. Social, economic and political changes in the period before and after the founding of the German Empire in 1871 went largely ignored by a conservative, Philistine literary establishment, whose mental world was a pre-industrial idyll of rural and small-town life, often expressed in quasi-Wagnerian pseudo-Mediaeval novels and epics, and in a fossilised 'lofty' lyric style modelled on Classical forebears and fixated on Ancient Greece. For such writers, the aim of Art was Beauty, and 'real life' was too vulgar a topic for literature.<sup>1</sup>

The 'educated' readership in Germany was not extensive. The post-unification ruling class brought together Ruhr 'smokestack barons' with the landed 'cabbage Junkers' of East Prussia – neither faction had much time for literature. The large portions of the upper and middle classes employed in Prussian military and civil service (which included the staff of schools and universities) depended for their careers on conformity with the state ideology of obedience and submission to authority. The semi-educated bourgeoisie, as the century advanced, could find plenty

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<sup>1</sup> A review of German school texts in the 1950s (!) concluded that a visitor from space would assume that Germany was still "a purely agrarian country, a country of peasants and citizens who putter about in coddled domesticity, and who for centuries have known nothing of war, revolution, chaos." R Minder, 'Deutsche und Französische Lesebücher' (German and French readers), in A Döblin (ed): *Minotaurus: Dichtung unter der Hufen von Staat und Industrie* (Literature under the heel of state and industry), Wiesbaden, 1953, p.83.

of reading matter in periodicals and almanacs promoting wholesome thoughts amid tales of adventure, piety and romance. For the growing urban proletariat, the literati had almost nothing to offer.

It is sadly remarkable how few writers from Germany in the century between Napoleon's defeat in 1815 and the First World War are familiar to non-specialist Anglophone readers. While the preceding ages of Weimar Classicism (Goethe, Schiller) and Romanticism (Hölderlin, E.T.A. Hoffmann, Kleist, Schopenhauer) are still well represented in translations from mainstream English-language publishers, in later decades almost the only names to have a degree of international recognition today are those of the poet Heine, the playwright Büchner, the novelist Fontane, and the philosopher Nietzsche, with Thomas Mann's first great novel *Buddenbrooks* arriving towards the end of this period.<sup>2</sup> It is notable that Heine, Büchner and Nietzsche all spent much of their adult lives in exile outside Germany, as, later on, would Mann.

Arno Holz grew to adulthood in this dismaying cultural desert, and would devote his energies to revitalising the language and spirit of German literature in the face of a conservative critical establishment defending its cosy backward-looking world view.

### Arno Holz's life and career

Holz was born in 1863 in the sleepy little East Prussian town of Rastenburg, founded by Teutonic Knights in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. (It is now the small town of Kętrzyn in eastern Poland, not far from what used to be the Prussian Königsberg of Kant, and is now Russian Kaliningrad.) His father kept an apothecary's shop (see [16], [67] and [68])<sup>3</sup>, hence the family was of the middling non-landowning bourgeoisie.

In 1875 the family moved to Berlin. The timing was poor: the Gründerjahre – the Foundation Years of the unified Empire – had seen a period of speculative frenzy fuelled by massive war reparations from France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71; there now followed a crash that brought on two decades of recession.

His Gymnasium schooling no longer affordable, the 18 year old Holz became for a short time a journalist, and then decided to make his way as an independent writer, a course he maintained, with frequent financial stress, until his death in 1929. His first collection of verse entitled *Klinginsherz!* (Chime into the Heart, see [71]), published in 1883 when he was just 20, was in traditional lyric style; he soon disowned it. The much more substantial *Das Buch der Zeit: Lieder eines Modernen* (The Book of Time: Songs of a Modern) in 1886 posed a direct challenge to the literary establishment: 'you believe poesie is just spring nights and shimmering flowers ... you always sing one and the same melody!' (p.28) The establishment, however, largely ignored the upstart poet, and declined to engage seriously with his arguments.

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<sup>2</sup> Compare 19<sup>th</sup> century France: Hugo, Dumas père et fils, Balzac, Maupassant, Merimée, Stendhal, Flaubert, Zola, Baudelaire, Huysmans, Mallarmé, Verlaine, Rimbaud ... And the Russians: Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol, Turgenev, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Chekhov ...

<sup>3</sup> References in square brackets are to the individually numbered poems.



Spending some time in Paris, Holz discovered advocates of Naturalism in literature: Zola, the critic Hippolyte Taine, and Balzac, who in the Foreword to his novel-cycle the *Comédie humaine* stated his wish to present a ‘natural history of man’. Zola saw the novelist as one who is ‘an observer and experimenter’. Taine noted approvingly that the naturalist “dissects the octopus as readily as the elephant; he will as readily construct the doorman as the minister. For him, there is no garbage; (...) in his eyes a toad is worth as much as a butterfly.”<sup>4</sup> (cf. [III/17] and its Endnote.). Returning to Berlin, Holz delved into advances in biology, astronomy and other natural sciences now being popularised. As well as expanding his imaginative reach with a much vaster view of time and space, his reading led him to form the seductive conjecture that Art too could be subject to natural laws. In his 1892 essay *Die Kunst: Ihr Wesen und ihre Gesetze* (Art: its essence and its laws) he set out his formula for a ‘law of Art’: Art = Nature – X, where X denotes the imperfections of both the human artist and the available means of reproduction. Many prefer to change the minus sign to a plus: they glorify the Artist, not Nature. Alfred Döblin clarifies Holz’s achievement:

Here you see the truly revolutionary attitude of Arno Holz. With all our Art, Holz says, we still cannot place ourselves alongside the truth of a product of Nature. If we only salvage a dust-mote of true real Nature in the work of art, then we have completed an enormous task, and no artist can do more and nothing greater can he undertake.<sup>5</sup>

In the years around 1890 Holz collaborated with his friend Johannes Schlaf to extend to fiction and drama his ideas for renewing the language. They produced a trilogy of novellas (*Papa Hamlet*, 1889, fooling the critics for a while with their Nordic pseudonym Bjarne P Holmsen), and a play *Die Familie Selicke* (1890). Both works exemplified their new approach: to depict realities of daily life in the sounds and rhythms of ordinary speech, not excluding dialect and slang.<sup>6</sup>

### The *Phantasus* motif

Phantasos, son of Hypnos, god of sleep, is able in dreams to become earth, stones, water – whatever has no soul. He first appears in *Das Buch der Zeit*, which ends with a 13-part verse sequence titled *Phantasus*, depicting the starving poet in his urban slum attic, attentive to the crowded misery around him, but every night taking flight via poetry into memories and wild imaginings. He is the beloved of Aphrodite, the Prince of Samarkand, an eagle; his heart is the world’s heart, his Fatherland the whole of humanity. Starved into a pauper’s grave, the poet defiantly declares:

Already invisible processions draw near:  
The greatest spirits of antiquity,  
And over there with gentle wingbeats  
The genius of immortality!

<sup>4</sup> Quote from Taine’s essay ‘On Style’ in *The Living Age*, May 1, 1928, pp. 803-805.

<sup>5</sup> Alfred Döblin: ‘From the Old to a New Naturalism: Academy Lecture on Arno Holz’, *Das Tage-Buch* (1930).

<sup>6</sup> Holz and Schlaf also produced a comical illustrated volume of doggerel called *Der geschundene Pegasus* (Pegasus ill-used), in which they lampoon their own poetical lives in the style of Wilhelm Busch.

He later saw this *Ur-Phantasmus* sequence (written in his early 20s) as his ‘epitaph’. It is remarkable how many aspects of his next 40 years are prefigured here: unyielding commitment to creativity even in penury; motifs of Nature (trees, birds, flowers, rain...); dreams; childhood memories; the social milieu of Berlin; exotic lands; space and time on cosmic and evolutionary scales; lakes and oceans; distant island-mirages... and yes, occasional tinges of self-pity. The only motif prominent in the *Ur-Phantasmus* but almost missing from later versions is social concern for the life of the poor. (Possibly the rise by 1890 of the Social Democrats as the biggest vote-winners in Reichstag elections meant he could now let politicians speak for the underclass.)

### The first edition of *Phantasmus*

The 100 poems of the 1898-99 *Phantasmus* albums, appearing in full in Part One for the first time in English, are distillations, exquisitely cut gemstones, moments of perception, memory, imagination captured in words and phrases whose impact comes from their very naturalness and simplicity, from the discipline with which the poetic sensibility selects and shapes and sets out on the page in a format as important for the sound-images as the words themselves.

Holz defended himself against critics who claimed he either had ‘no rhythm’ or was trying to ‘impose one rhythm on everything’ with a small example using poem [11]:

Vor meinem Fenster  
singt ein Vogel.

Outside my window  
a bird is singing.

Still hör ich zu; mein Herz vergeht.

I stop and listen; my heart fades.

Er singt,  
was ich als Kind besass  
und dann — vergessen.

It sings  
what I possessed as a child  
and then – forgotten.

The critics, Holz says, want to parse the (German) metre as ∪—∪— (diDAH diDAH...) and assert that it might just as well be formatted as four lines, or two, or one. Not so, says Holz: the rhythm (3 =main stress, 1 = weak stress) should be

$$21\ 131\ /3131\ //\ 3213 - 1313\ //\ 13\ / 211313\ /13 - 131)^7$$

The English, of course, can hardly match this pattern exactly, but the principle is maintained: 211 31 / 13131 // 13121 - 133 / 13 / 1223 113 / 13 - 131. The rhythm is the phrasing of natural unforced speech.

What of the Middle Axis? Holz reports<sup>8</sup> that

I chose the at first glance somewhat unusual print format – lines of irregular length and invisible Middle Axis, which I had had in mind for several years (happily this has now become “modern”) – in order to indicate as accurately as possible the intended

<sup>7</sup> Holz: *Revolution der Lyrik* (Revolution in the Lyric) 1898, p.81.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p.29.

sound-image using typography as well. ... Alas, we have no better means at our disposal. The music must be made by whoever knows how to read such hieroglyphics.

As for the absence of rhymes, Holz declared that the first poet to rhyme “moon” with “June” was a genius; the thousandth, a cretin.

These poems are accessible to all (with the help, where needed, of notes on local cultural references). There is nothing here of the wilful exclusiveness and obscurity of the aesthetes gathered around Holz’s contemporary Stefan George.<sup>9</sup>

Holz returns again and again to certain themes and motifs: lake-mirrors, secluded gardens, forgotten castles, larks and sunshine, childhood memories, flights of fancy ... The common thread is the capturing of a moment in just as many words as are needed (but no more) to imprint an image and a mood on the reader. The urban environment of Berlin – heaving with new immigrants and a rising urban middle class – is caught in deft strokes. The anguish of the *Ur-Phantasia* poet is reflected too, in [64], [65], [79].

For a few years at this time Holz drew around him a small group of like-minded poets: the singing teacher Robert Reiß (1871-1925), the piano teacher and composer Georg Stolzenberg (1857-1941), Rolf Wolfgang Martens (1868-1928), and Reinhard Piper (1879-1953). All produced slim volumes of *Phantasia*-like verse between 1898 and 1903 with the same publisher as Holz, causing them to be dubbed the ‘Regiment Sassenbach’. Two poems [96 and [97] refer to them.<sup>10</sup>

Holz and the ‘Regiment’ were derided by the critical establishment as dilettantes, churning out childish verses that could all too easily be parodied. Once again, Holz’s efforts to reinvigorate a moribund tradition hit a brick wall. Yet within a decade a broader and more anarchic current of innovation would sweep through German culture: Expressionism, its artistic and cultural legacy still the subject of debate.<sup>11</sup>

## *Phantasia* 1916

Over the next decade Holz produced a volume of Baroque-flavoured verse (his only commercial success with poetry)<sup>12</sup> and several plays. But the true focus of his efforts became clear only in 1916, when the Insel-Verlag brought out an enormous 3-kilogram folio-sized 335 page monster titled – *Phantasia*. Whatever has happened? The little first-edition gems have proliferated into a jungle of dense **Fraktur** print (still on the Middle Axis), where one poem occupies 92 pages, another 63 pages, and one sentence takes up 144 lines! Here’s a breakdown of the contents –

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<sup>9</sup> The periodical edited by George between 1892 and 1919, *Blätter für die Kunst* (Pages for Art), declared on its front page that it was intended exclusively for a closed circle of readers.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Wohlleben, who in 2013 edited a combined volume of these poets, has more to say in his Afterword.

<sup>11</sup> Notably, few Expressionist writers followed Holz’s example. Alfred Döblin (whose linguistically innovative 1915 novel *The Three Leaps of Wang Lun* was ignored by his former comrades around the journal *Der Sturm*) lambasted the Expressionists for turning ‘words into mere sounds and noises, steer[ing] verbal art onto the cliff of music.’ *Berlin Börsen-Courier*, 24 December 1927.

<sup>12</sup> *Lieder auf einer alten Laute* (Songs on an old lute) 1903, expanded as *Dafnis: lyrisches Porträt aus dem 17. Jahrhundert* (Dafnis: lyrical portrait from the 17<sup>th</sup> century). 1904.

- 45 poems identical to the first edition,
- 28 slightly longer versions of first-edition poems,
- 17 much longer versions of first-edition poems (differing in some cases as embryo to grown elephant),
- 41 completely new poems (including some similar in style to the first edition; several are included in Part Two).

Part Two also contains some of the longer poems, to give a flavour of the changed style and the elaboration of motifs.

Holz continued to revise and expand *Phantasmus*. A mid-1920s edition of his works in ten volumes included seven separate volumes of *Phantasmus*. In the 1960s Collected Works, *Phantasmus* takes up over 1500 pages.

In an introduction to *Phantasmus* published in 1922, Holz re-emphasised the centrality of the *sound-picture*:<sup>13</sup>

That already today there are people who, with no prior study, are capable of turning even the most complicated pieces of *Phantasmus* – off the cuff, straight from the page – into well-formed colour-conjuring sounds, and who in consequence, while completely ignoring the smaller pieces which simply have no attraction for them, leap with joy and delight expressly onto the biggest pieces to root around and become enraptured in them ... for this I have indisputable evidence. For example, when I heard of a complete stranger who had hauled the *Giant-Phantasmus* through all the trenches and on quiet shell-free nights read aloud from it to his comrades, who told me of it, or of a young actor who in parallel manner visited the bluestocking salons of a distant province ...

These are, in distinction to musicians of tone, musicians of the word. They are few.<sup>14</sup>

## Holz's last years

When the Prussian Academy of Arts created a Section for Literature in 1926, Arno Holz was selected as one of the first members alongside mostly more conservative colleagues. This recognition came very late, and Holz was able to play little part in the Section's activities. But his death in 1929 brought an official eulogy from Alfred Döblin, who celebrated his courage, humanity, and lifelong dedication to the reinvigoration of the German language. Döblin summed up Holz's aims and achievement thus:

I have to ask, here where this artist and fighter lies, what was he fighting for and what was his capability. His role was, is and will be: to introduce into Germany a breach with a rotten and inauthentic tradition .... In this necessary battle and in his contribution to it he is a model, and a parallel phenomenon to those flag-bearers of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, of Lessing, the Enlightenment philosopher and guide. He initiated a breach with a hollow tradition and was the first and strongest in Germany to declare

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<sup>13</sup> Arno Holz: *Phantasmus. Zur Einführung* (Phantasmus: an introduction): Berlin 1922, p.40.

<sup>14</sup> *Phantasmus* reading circles persisted into the post-WW2 era. Tucked into my secondhand copy of the 1916 edition was a package of papers from a retired academic frustrated by the difficulties of locating other works by Holz which might be of help in preparing his readings. (I passed the package on to the Holz archive at the Berlin City Libraries.)

himself for the present day and the big city. He rose up against turbid imitation, second-hand things, against the hymnic, fake Orpheistic, against haughty esotericism, and although he had soon to be the most esoteric of all, it was here and among us that he was at his strongest. He stepped forward in opposition to the artificial language of Geibel<sup>15</sup> and George, and urged attention to the natural speech of the people and its melody. He had to be radical, for despite their hollowness those others remained strong in the face of every assault, because they were in league with Tradition and a bad moribund ideal of Education.<sup>16</sup>

I was led to Holz by Döblin's funeral oration – one unjustly neglected great German writer doing justice to another. If you have been interested enough to read this far, and to explore the poems that follow, then I invite you to visit my website to discover more about Döblin and the writers he admired:

<https://beyond-alexanderplatz.com>

*C D Godwin July 2020*

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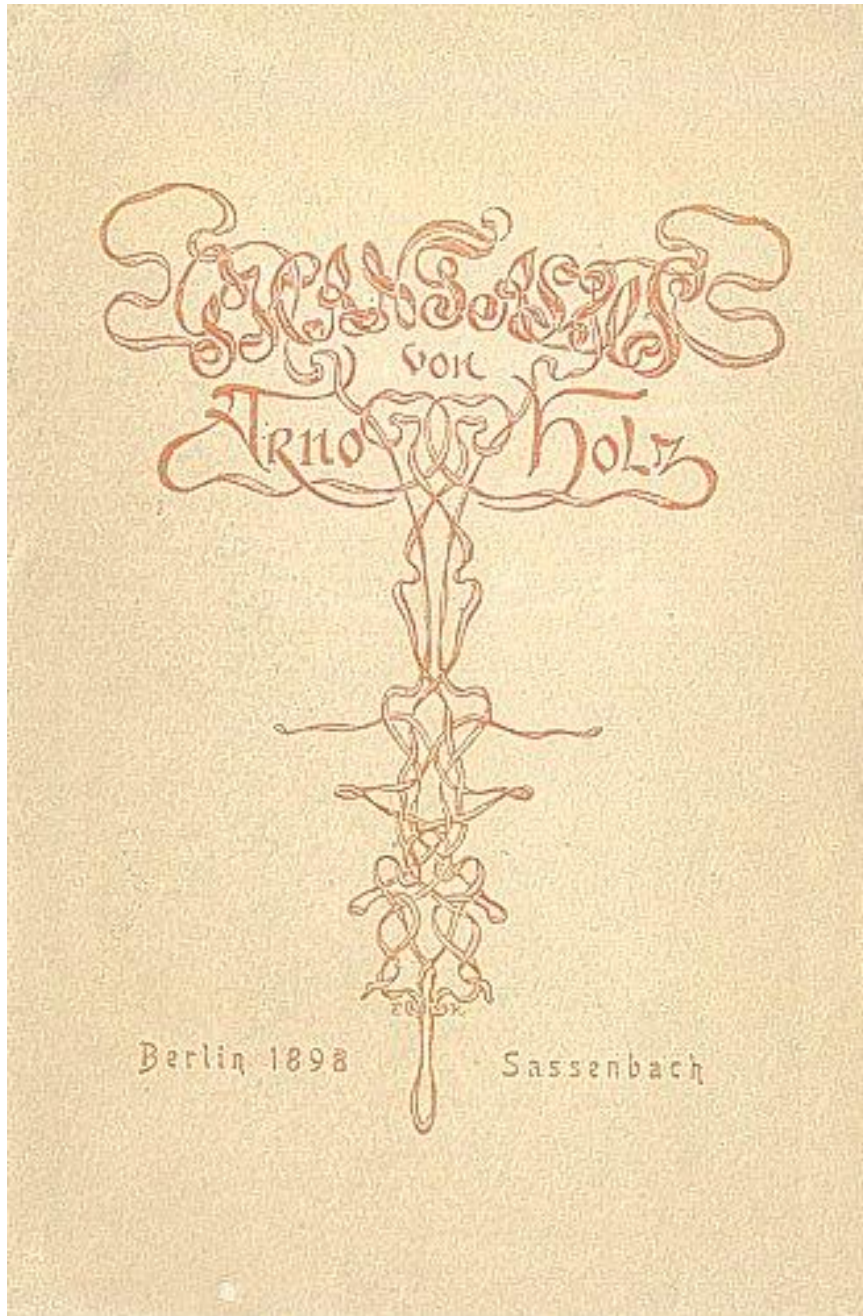
<sup>15</sup> Emanuel Geibel (1815-84): popular writer and lyricist.

<sup>16</sup> Alfred Döblin: 'In Celebration of Arno Holz'. *Die Literarische Welt* 45 (1929).

# PHANTASUS

First Edition

First Album (1898)



## CONTENTS OF FIRST ALBUM

- [1] Night. The sycamore outside
  - [2] Down Friedrichstrasse
  - [3] I am still in bed
- [4] Between ditches and grey hedges
  - [5] In the middle of the square
  - [6] In a far-off land!
  - [7] Lovely green soft grass
  - [8] From white clouds
  - [9] In a garden
- [10] I am the richest man in the world!
  - [11] Outside my window
  - [12] On the far-off isle of Nurapu
  - [13] Forgiven? You? By me?
  - [14] Away over the world
- [15] Behind branches of apple blossom
  - [16] Red roofs!
  - [17] Into a blaze of evening sky
  - [18] Between hills in the sunshine
  - [19] In the Tiergarten, on a bench
  - [20] Laughing down Victory Row
- [21] I should like to know every secret
  - [22] In my most radiant tulip-tree
  - [23] I lie between dark mirror walls
  - [24] Sea, sea, the sunniest sea
  - [25] Into my green forest of stone
  - [26] On a gilded flowership
- [27] Every night around my temple grove
  - [28] Corinth made me
  - [29] In an old park a little castle
  - [30] Music. Through the reeds

[31] In my black forest of yew  
[32] Around my lit-up castle  
[33] From a cornfield  
[34] Down in the village  
[35] I know  
[36] Then the light went out  
[37] I stepped into my room  
[38] A little house with a door that's green  
[39] Next morning Biela is ill  
[40] One last time  
[41] You went  
[42] Not a sound!  
[43] Awake suddenly  
[44] Out there the dune  
[45] Little summer-soaked gardens  
[46] I open a little gate  
[47] Over the bed, in a frame  
[48] On a silver-pointed star  
[49] I am a star  
[50] A sobbing yearning my Spring





[1]

Night.

The sycamore outside my window rustles,  
from its leaves dew sparkles onto grass,  
and my heart  
beats.

A dog ... barks ,... a twig ... snaps, - silent!

Silent!

You? ... You?

Ah, your hand! So cold, so cold!  
And ... your eyes ... dimmed!  
Dimmed!!

No, no! You must not see  
how my lips quiver,  
and not the tears I shed like a child around you -

You poor woman!

So by night,  
only by night do you dare,  
timidly,  
to leave your coffin?  
So that you can creep on tiptoe to me?

Poor woman!

Faded,  
the garlands that you wove,  
gone with the wind,  
the songs you sang,  
and your hair, your lovely hair,  
is clotted with  
earth.

Dead, dead, dead ...  
And your wings, your poor wings!

Cut without mercy  
down from the shimmering shoulders – ah don't *weep!*  
*Don't weep!*  
Here! Here! You must sit down by my side,  
at night, every night,  
until morning  
greys,  
until the sun  
shines,  
and the world,  
the clever world, again rolls indifferently across your grave ...

Hark!

The sycamore outside my window rustles,  
dew drips,  
and my heart  
beats.

Night... night... night.



[2]

Down Friedrichstrasse  
- street lamps at half-strength now,  
gloomy winter's day already dawning -  
I amble homeward.

Within me, slowly, an image rises.

A green expanse of meadows,  
a laughing spring sky,  
a white castle with white nymphs.

A huge chestnut tree out front  
reflecting its red flower-candles...  
in a limpid pool!

[3]

I am still in bed and have just drunk coffee.  
The fire in the stove is crackling nicely now.  
Through the window,  
filling the whole small room,  
snowlight.

I am reading.  
Huysmans. Là Bas.  
... Alors,  
en sa blanche splendeur,  
l'âme du Moyen Age rayonna dans cette salle...

Suddenly,  
somewhere deeper in the house,  
a canary.

The loveliest trills!

I let the book fall.

My eyes close on me,  
here I am here again, lying head in pillows --

[4]

Between ditches and grey hedges,  
coat collar up, hands in pockets,  
I saunter through the early March morning.

Dun grass, glinting puddles and black waste ground  
as far as I can see.

In between,  
deep into the middle of the white horizon  
as if frozen,  
a line of willows.

I stand still.

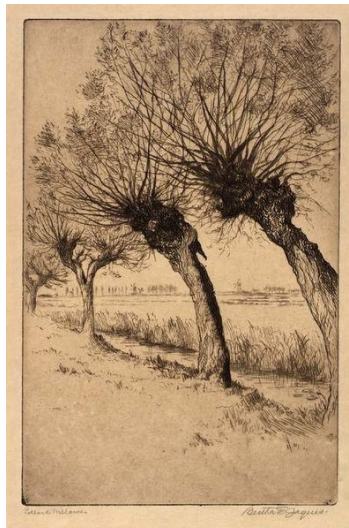
Nowhere a sound. Nowhere stirring yet.  
Only the air, the landscape.

And sunless, like the sky, is how I feel my heart!

Suddenly, a trill.

I stare into the clouds.

Overhead,  
jubilant,  
through light becoming ever brighter,  
the first lark!



[5]

In the middle of the square  
where children are shouting  
I stand still.

Young lads  
squabbling over a marble,  
a little girl playing with a hoop ...

Good Lord, spring!

And nothing, nothing had I noticed of it!

On every bush  
buds breaking out already!



[6]

In a far-off land!

On dark nights  
the oaks rustled mournfully there.  
Soft snowflakes covered my grave.

Now primroses are in bloom,  
the thrush is singing,  
and over green meadows, around the blue lake,  
the shepherd drives his sheep.

Little white clouds glide.

Oh sweet world!  
On your most dazzling star  
you saved a heart that loves you!

[7]

Lovely, green, soft grass.  
I lie in it.  
In among buttercups!

Above me,  
warm,  
the sky:  
a wide quivering white  
that slowly, very slowly, closes  
my eyes.

Wafting air ... a gentle buzzing.

Now I am far  
from every world,  
a soft redness fills me quite,  
and I feel clearly  
how the sun runs through my blood –  
long minutes.

All faded away. Now only me.

In bliss!

[8]

From white clouds  
a castle builds itself.

Lakes that mirror, blissful meadows,  
singing fountains of deepest emerald!

In its shimmering halls  
dwell  
the gods of old.

Even now,  
of an evening,  
when the sun sinks in purple,  
its gardens glow,  
my heart stirs before their miracles,  
and I stand ... a long while.

Yearning!

Then night draws near,  
the air darkens,  
the sea sparkles like quivering silver,  
and away across the whole world ...  
wafts a scent  
as if from roses!

[9]

In a garden  
beneath dark trees  
we await the springtime night.

No star is shining yet.

From a window,  
swelling,  
the sound of a violin ...

The laburnum gleams,  
the lilac spreads its scent,  
in our hearts – the moon is rising!



[10]

I am the richest man in the world!

My silver yachts  
sail on every sea.

Golden mansions glitter through my Japanese forests,  
in sky-high Alpine lakes are my castles mirrored,  
on a thousand islands my purple hanging gardens.

I hardly notice them.

Their snake-railings of twisted bronze  
I just pass by,  
above my diamond mines  
I let lambs graze!

The sun is shining,  
a bird is singing,  
I bend down  
and pluck a little meadow flower.

And suddenly I know: I am the poorest of beggars!

All my splendour is as nothing  
before this dewdrop  
sparkling in the sun.

[11]

Outside my window  
a bird is singing.

I stop and listen; my heart fades.

It sings  
what I possessed as a child  
and then – forgotten.

[12]

On the far-off isle of Nurapu  
blossoms the Bo tree.  
In its roots the sea sings,  
through its branches, stars sail!

On a long bough, my God: the Shepherdess and the – Chimneysweep?



The low dainty shoes, the golden hat,  
the black ladder, the shepherd's crook ...

Surely you two didn't find your way back?

Ah God, yes:  
when one is made of porcelain!

The little old room with the small mirror table,  
the ornate dresser of mahogany wood,  
the comforting blue-tiled stove!

Grandmother's tulips!

What times they were!

Here no cuckoo clock calls,  
here no scent from a pot of lavender,  
here the sea roars,  
here stars take flight.

And I sit, weeping bitterly!

[13]

Forgiven? You? By me?  
Long since.  
I had done so even before I knew.

But forget? Forget? ... Ah, if I only could!

Often  
out in the brightest sunshine,  
when I am happy and "thinking of nothing",  
suddenly,  
there,  
it squats before me, grey,  
... like a toad!

And it all, it all again seems stale to me. Stale and bleak.  
This whole life long.

And I am sad. Sad for you ... and me.

[14]

Away over the world, clouds float.  
Greenly through forests  
their light flows.

Heart, forget!

In silent sunshine  
weaves the most soothing magic,  
among nodding flowers a heap of consolation blooms.

Forget! Forget!

From a distant field, hark, a bird ...  
singing its song.

The song of joy!

Of joy.

[15]

Behind branches of apple blossom  
the Moon climbs high.

Tender tendrils,  
pale shadows  
from its beams lie jagged on the gravel.

A moth flits, soundless.

I stretch blissfully on silver grass  
and lie there  
heart in the sky!

[16]

Red roofs!  
From chimneys here and there, smoke,  
above, high, in the sunny air, now and then, doves.

It's afternoon.  
A hen cackles from Mohdricker's garden,  
the whole town smells of coffee.

I'm a small boy, eight years old  
lying, chin in both fists,  
flat on my tummy  
peeping down through the hatch.  
Below me, steep, the yard,  
behind me, thrown aside, a book.  
Franz Hoffmann. The Slave Hunters.

How quiet it is!

But over there in Knorr's gutter  
two sparrows are squabbling over a straw,  
a man is sawing,  
and in between, clearly from over by the church,  
with short pauses, rhythmic, hammering,  
Thiel the coppersmith.

When I look down  
I'm gazing straight onto Mother's flower shelf:

a pot of wallflowers, two pots of stocks, a geranium,  
and in among them, dainty in a little cigar box,  
a clump of mignonette.

And the scent? All the way up to me!

And the colours!  
Now! How the wind wafts over it all!  
The wonder, wonderful colours!

I shut my eyes. I can still see them.



[17]

Into a blaze of evening sky,  
out of dust and darkness  
the cathedral looms.

Bells ring out.

Little linden trees stand black,  
old people sit outside their doors.

The working day is done!

The alleys are silent.

The glow fades,  
in the sky  
softly  
the eternal stars come out.

[18]

Between hills in the sunshine  
the little town lies on the river.

From up here by my milestone I can see across all the roofs.

Smoke rises straight as a candle.

Through an elder bush in bloom  
I can clearly make out  
beneath the ancient verdigris dome  
the church clock.

Sky-blue face with white numbers.

Just three little clicks,  
and the whole population  
will sit down punctually for their dinner.

Twelve!

Today's Saturday, so everywhere it's pancakes.

Contented, I behead a thistle  
and wander on.

[19]

In the Tiergarten, on a bench, I sit and smoke,  
and am glad of the lovely morning sun.

In front of me, sparkling, the canal:  
it mirrors the sky, gently rocks both banks.

Over the bridge, at slow walk, a lieutenant, mounted.

Below him,  
among the dark floating crowns of chestnut trees  
corkscrewed upside down into the water  
– his collar sealing-wax red –  
his reflection.

A cuckoo  
calls.





[20]

Laughing down Victory Row  
a girls' boarding school comes marching.

By thunder aren't they chic!

Teetering greenblue iridescent shot-silk parasols,  
long butter-yellow Swedish gloves,  
velvet blouses billowing silver-grey, red tulips flaming through.

Three young lieutenants twirl their moustaches.

Monocles.

The cavalcade is having fun.

Fifty brown beach shoes pitter-pattering,  
twenty-five tinkling charm bracelets.

To the left,  
in behind them,  
glaring coal-black,  
their Dragon.

Drat!

As the sun casts golden whorls through the trees ...

Ah, so what!

And I grab the prettiest, who offers no resistance, about the waist,  
- the whole company scatters shrieking,  
whoo, the old mother hen falls swooning -  
and I call out:

Girls, off with your girdles, and dance naked between swords!

[21]

I should like to know every secret!

All the stars with rolling seas I create by my hand.

Into my dreams  
worlds insert themselves  
and I delight in the smallest nest  
that in summer a pair of swallows  
builds in my eaves.

The slightest chirping coming from it  
moves my heart!

[22]

In my most radiant tulip-tree  
a thousand blossoms!

A sweet voice sings:

“Blue mother-of-pearl wings,  
lily pad for a wedding bed,  
a tiny little princess!

No one knows me.

No one knows  
where my house is.

Seven rainbow bridges  
glimmer to it through my garden.

When the sun shines into your soul,  
come visit me.

You hear?”

Rigid,  
made of twisting snakes,  
the tree stands.

A gust of wind shakes it,  
the blossoms sway like dancing flames.

[23]

I lie between dark mirror-walls.

Green glimmering sea-stars,  
eyes that bulge,  
a huge ray opens its mouth wide.

One touch and they light up!

Through a red wall of coral a silver moonfish glides!

I lie and smoke my water-pipe.

[24]

Sea, sea, the sunniest sea, as far as you can see!

Away over the rolling waves, whooping, a thousand tritons.

On their shoulders,  
shell upright,  
up high,  
a woman.  
Her nakedness  
in the sun.

Below her,  
dripping,  
dazzling mother-of-pearl walls lofting ever and again,  
fat, sturdy, besotted,  
like toads,  
seven slithery old mer-fogies.

*Those faces! That moaning! And the snorting!!*

Then,  
suddenly,  
raging out of the deep,  
Neptune.

His beard  
flashes.



“Rascals!”

And splishsplash his trident whacks the seven scaredycats on their bald heads!

They roar!

Then, swiftly,  
here a few paws still, there a belly –  
they’re gone.

The beauty  
smiles.

Neptune  
makes a bow:

“Madame?”

[25]

Into my green forest of stone  
moonlight shines.

In its light  
a pale woman sits and sings:

Of a sunny lake,  
of blue flowers,  
of a child calling "Mother".

Wearily  
her hand drops to her knee,  
in her silent harp  
the Moon gleams.

[26]

On a gilded flowership  
with masts of ebony and purple sails  
we set off into open sea.

Behind us,  
among waterlilies,  
the Moon ripples.

A thousand coloured paper lanterns glimmer on silken strings.

Wine circulates in round bowls.

Sound of lutes.

Out of the far south  
a flowery island appears ...

The isle - of oblivion!

[27]

Every night around my temple grove,  
seventy bronze cows keep watch.

A thousand coloured stone lamps glimmer.

On a throne of red lacquer  
I sit in the Holy of Holies.

Above me,  
through the sandalwood roofbeams,  
in a chiselled-out square,  
are stars.

I squint.

Were I now to stand,  
my ivory shoulders would shatter the roof to pieces,  
and the egg-round diamond at my forehead  
would crash into the Moon.

The fat priests can snore on undisturbed.

I shan't stand up.

I sit with legs tucked under me  
and gaze at my navel.

It's a bleeding ruby  
in a bare belly of gold.

[28]

Corinth made me, I saw the sea.

A thousand years  
beneath rubble and temple ruins  
I lay in black earth.

Among red thistles in the evening glow, goats browsed,  
over my flowery grave shepherds tootled.

A thousand years I lay dead.

Today the sun's shining, the sky's laughing, I'm alive!

In the old park  
I stand, my white marble naked.

Onto my shoulders  
through jagged foliage  
trembling speckles fall.

My eyes,  
wide open,  
stare at green water.

In broad overhanging chestnut leaves  
is mirrored, twitching,  
its light.





[29]

In an old park a little castle.

A summer sky shines over its mossy roof,  
seven avenues of yew, run wild,  
meet at its gate.

I hold a hand up to peer through a window.

Nothing.

Then,  
glinting,  
a gold frame,  
hazy colours,  
now,  
distinctly:

Wallpaper strewn with roses,  
a blue divan:  
a naked lady feeding a cockatoo!



[30]

Music.

Through the reeds the Behemoth is gawking,  
seven naked archangels conceal me with their swords.

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord!

The world blurs,  
my silver cloud-beard floods across the sky.

I snore.

A pod of swimming whales around Spitsbergen,  
a waving palm-tree frond on Zanzibar,  
a gnat in Surinam, cleaning its wings ...

What's this?

A young girl fin de siècle  
- black stockings, yellow silk bodice and lilac knickers,  
at her back the sparkling little tassel -  
hup, into my lap!

The music falls silent,  
the Behemoth grunts,  
their radiant snake-swords blazing like torches,  
the archangels  
loom near.

What cheek!

The delightful chit is tickling me with a peacock feather.

You ... daddikins ... like a bonbon?

Emmy!!

[31]

In my black forest of yew  
a fairytale bird sings –  
the whole night!

Flowers gleam.

Under stars that mirror themselves,  
my boat drifts on.

My dreaming hands  
dip into floating waterlilies.

Below,  
silent, the deeps.

The shore far away! The song ...

[32]

Around my bright-lit castle, cypresses sway.

I don't hear them. I feel them.

All my lamps will go out,  
the last notes of the violin fade,  
through the window  
in my dimming gaze  
the Moon is mirrored.

[33]

From a cornfield  
slanting to the lake  
the linden tree rose tall.

Past it on the narrow footpath  
every afternoon to the bathing ground in July heat,  
us boys.

The blue sky, the thousand yellow flowers, the hum of bees!

And always  
when the others were already long down there -  
- their laughter and shouts resounding from the water -  
I stood.

And saw the sky  
and heard the bees  
and inhaled the scent.

[34]

Down in the village  
behind the churchyard wall  
the miller is asleep.

The mill lies quiet.

Ladybirds creep on its ramshackle timbers,  
high overhead a cuckoo passes.

... cuckoo ... cuckoo ...

Up the steep path through the corn children are coming,  
they laugh, chatter, stuff grass through the cracks.

One of them peeps in.

... cuckoo ...

In there:  
sunbeams and butterflies!

[35]

I know.

Often

it was just a laugh, a squeeze of your hand,  
or a wisp of hair, just a wisp of hair  
that the wind lifted from your neck,  
and all my blood  
was at once in ferment,  
and all my heart  
beat out to you.

To have you, have you,  
at last just once to have you,  
all and naked, all and naked!

And today,  
for the first time,  
down by the noontime glittering lake,  
I saw you like this.

All and naked, all and naked!

And my heart  
stood still.

For joy, for joy.

And the world was no more,  
nothing, nothing, nothing,

there was only sun, only the sun now -

you were so lovely!

[36]

Then the light went out,  
and through the silence  
only the beating of your heart ...

Bliss!

In the garden an early bird trilled,  
dew dripped from a thousand blades of grass,  
the whole sky spread in roses.

“My love!” “My love!”  
And again kiss upon kiss.

What more can the world now offer us!

[37]

I stepped into my room.

The windows were wide open,  
outside  
the sun was shining.

How marvellous,  
roses?  
A whole bunch!  
White, yellow and deep red ...

Ah, how they smelled! How good the feeling!

And I put the vase down again on my desk.

There it stands and gleams now,  
and into everything I write its lovely light falls.

My love! My sweet!

[38]

A little house with a door that's green  
and hearts in the window shutters!

At evening,  
beneath the silver poplars  
we sit with our little boys.

"Mother, mother, the Moon's broken!"

The littlest one too takes a peep.

"Biela!  
Are you a maybug?"

"Yeth."

[39]

Next morning Biela is ill.  
Poor Biela!  
He sits content in bed, munching cake.

His brother  
is playing.

"Hey - Mother?  
My bear is ill too!"

Really?  
What's wrong with him then?

"Um, maybe a butterfly bit him?"



[40]

One last time  
before we go to bed,  
to our boys!

The Moon is shining into both cribs.

Biela's still hugging the doll,  
around his brother's neck the pearl necklace ...

Softly,  
on tiptoe,  
we feel the way to our room.

[41]

You went.

The leaves ... fall.

The valley sinks into blue twilight.

I stare into the rising mist ...

There,  
once more, in the distance,  
your scarf waving.

Hello! Hello!

I stretch my arms out yearning ...

Gone.

From the silver poplars starlings scream into the sunset.

[42]

Not a sound!  
Only the poplars whispering ...

The old pond before me black as ink,  
around me, above me, on every side,  
on bat-wings,  
the night,  
and lingering just up there,  
between the two black willow stumps  
that rear like dragons in the dark,  
slack, pale, on its last gasp  
still one final streak of sulphur.

On it, sharp, a silhouette: a faun, blowing on his flute.

I can see his fingers clearly.  
They're all so daintily splayed,  
even the two pinkies, extending upwards most coquettishly.  
The graceful little pipe slanting in between  
floats almost vertical across the left shoulder.  
I can see the right one too.  
But not the head. That's missing. It's rolled off down.  
It's lain a hundred years already  
down in the pond.

Splash! - ? A frog.

It startled me.

The streak up there fades,  
I sense the ripples spreading on the water,  
and the age-old bench of stone on which I sit  
suddenly with its chill sends shudders up to my neck.

... ?

No. Nothing. Just the poplars.

[43]

Awake suddenly  
from a deep sleep  
- it's all still dark, I lie there -  
it forms in me, slowly, a verse.

Above the stars ...

Above the stars ...

Above the stars there hangs a harp.

Blissful is the night, it sings.  
Sings, so that hearts beat fast and tripping!

From the strings suns come dripping.

Above the stars there hangs a harp,  
blissful is the night, it sings!

Eyes closed, teeth clenched,  
I try not to sob!

[44]

Out there the dune.

The house solitary,  
monotonous  
at the window,  
rain.

Behind me,  
tick tock,  
a clock,  
my forehead  
against the pane.

Nothing.

All over.

Grey the sky,  
grey the sea  
and grey  
the heart.

[45]

Little sun-soaked gardens  
with colourful pavilions, pumpkins and chives.

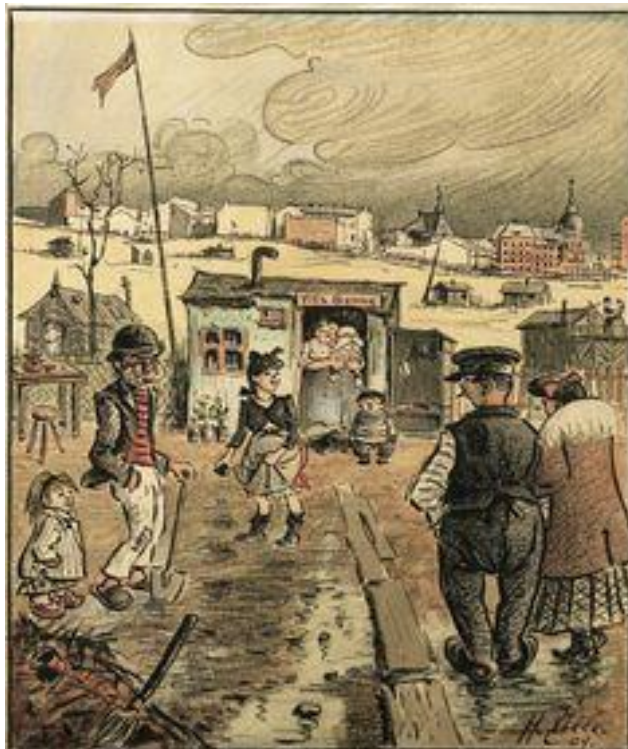
Dew still sparkling.

Behind the near horizon-line of houses, towers soar.

Through the constant din of new construction,  
now and then,  
factories whistle,  
bells chime out.

A sparrow perches on a hop-pole.

I lean against an old wire fence  
and watch as over a bed of asters  
two cabbage whites bob and flutter.



[46]

I open a little gate.

The March Victims.

Across the path, through leaf-mould, blackbirds hop,  
around weathered crosses in the sunlight, glistening threads play.

In a corner  
- ivy blinking, I bend down -  
on a stone, roses lie.

Wispy weeds, grey moss and dewdrops.

The old lettering is hard to read now.

Only with difficulty can I decipher:

“... An ... un ... known ... man.”



[47]

Over the bed, in a frame, the myrtle wreath.  
Years ago  
at the window the sewing machine once stood;  
a canary sang.

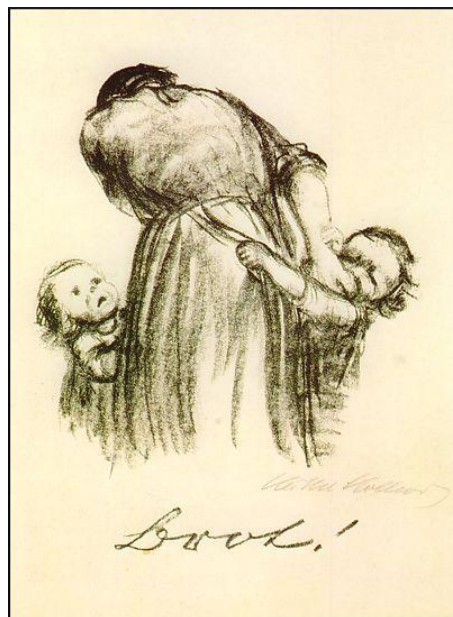
Now  
it's all different!

At evening  
when the lamp glows red,  
strange gentlemen come to the little room;  
old, young, as the case may be.

Dear Lord - life!

Just sometimes,  
when the rain outside whips against the roofs,  
at night,  
no one still awake,  
the woman sits and weeps ...

The dead husband! The poor children!



[48]

On a silver-pointed star  
I sit and I laugh – a little child.

Birds and flowers are my friends,  
blond angels play with me.

Down there Father's grieving,  
down there Mother's sobbing.  
I sit and weave a garland of cowslips – the keys to Heaven.

Father dear! Mother dear!  
Don't cry!

Look:

here flowers are growing,  
lamb are leaping,  
and on every shiny point  
hangs a candy heart!

[49]

I am a star. I shine.

Pale with tears  
you lift your face to me;  
your hands  
weep.

"Comfort me!"

I shine.

All my rays  
vibrate into your heart.



[50]

A sobbing yearning my Spring,  
a heated struggle my Summer –  
what will my Autumn be?

Late sheaves of gold?

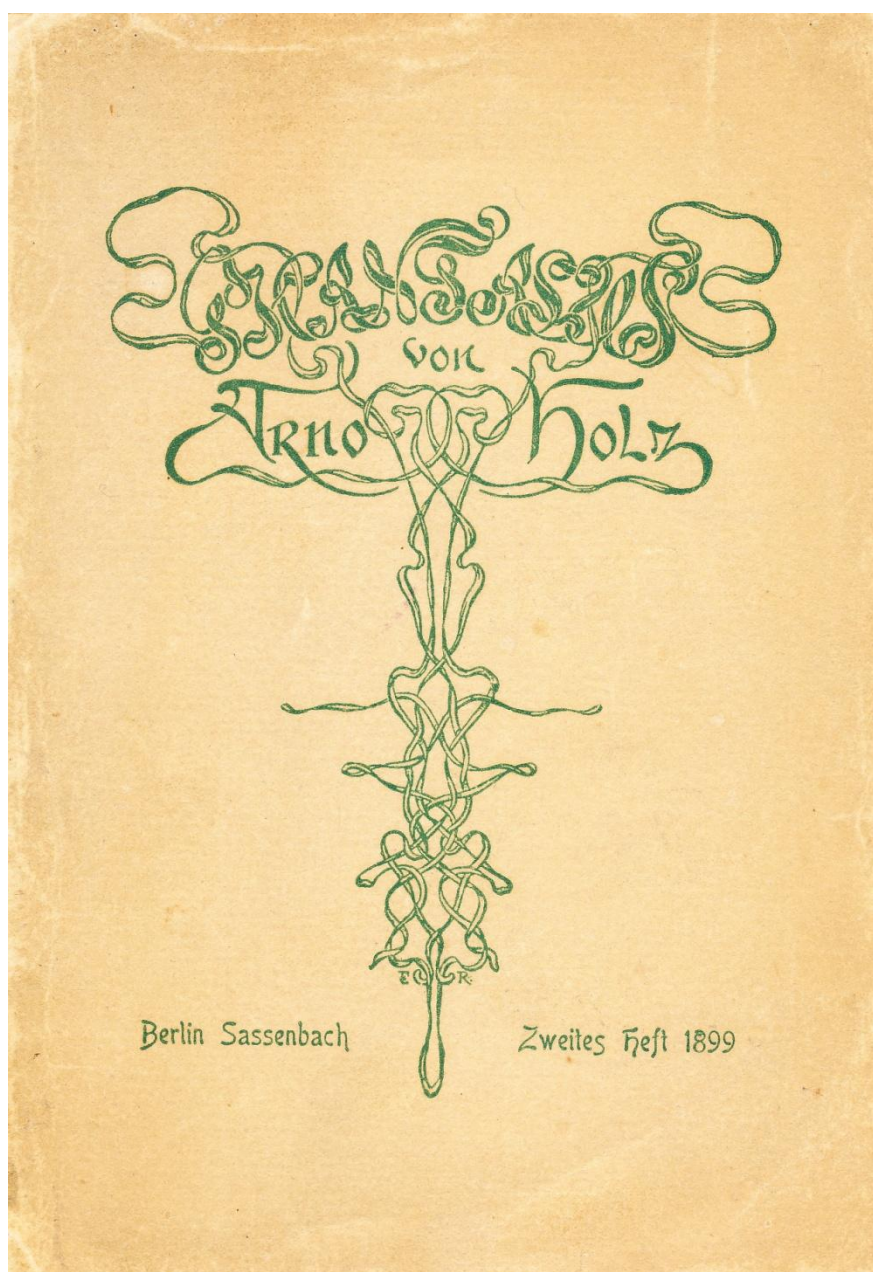
A sea of fog?

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# PHANTASUS

First Edition

Second Album (1899)



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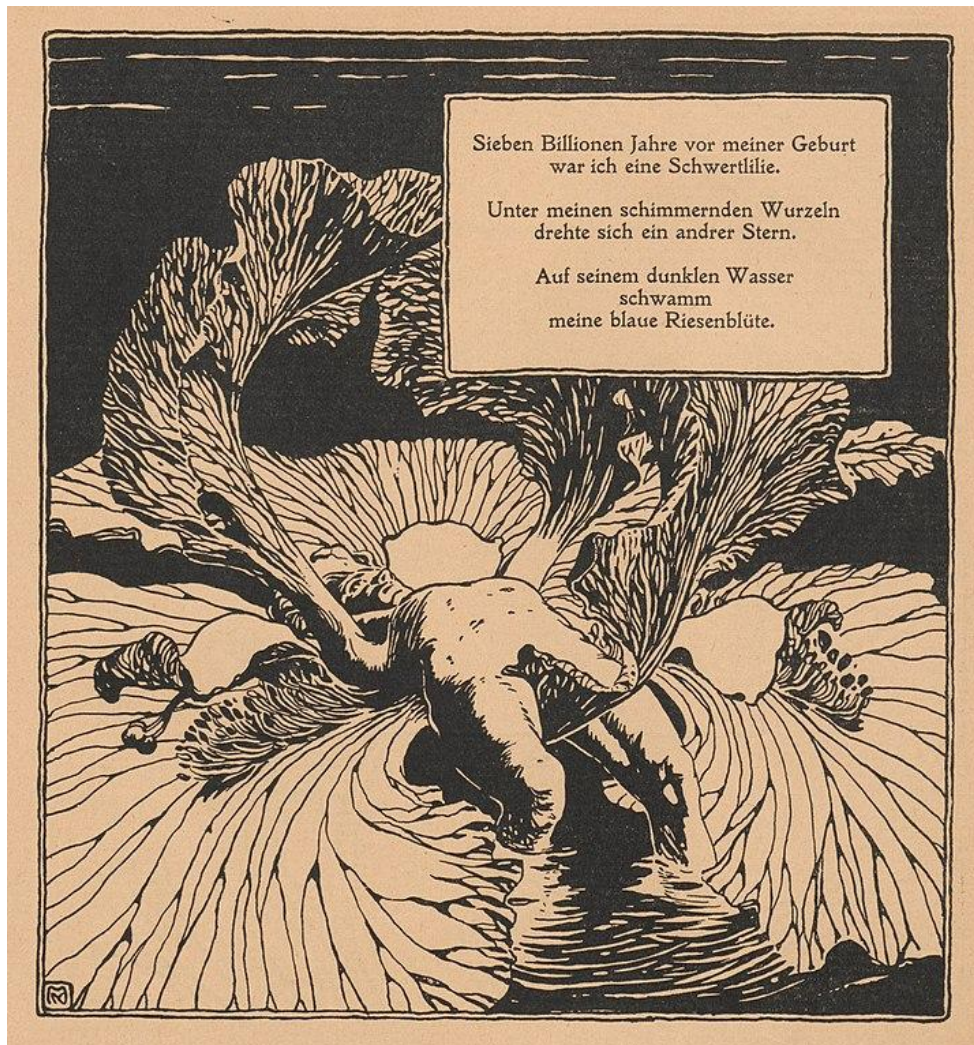


[51]

Seven billion years before my birth  
I was a sword-lily.

My roots  
sucked themselves  
around a star.

On its dark waters,  
floating,  
my giant blue flowers.



[52]

Somewhere in Indo-China or thereabouts,  
I must have sometime already been alive somehow.

A tiny percentage portion of me  
was part to blame for Gautama Buddha being there one time,  
and even today, at night, in dreams,  
when I can't keep such a good eye on it,  
it drinks palm wine from rhinoceros horns

[53]

For three whole days  
a rain of peach blossoms fell into the river Fu.

The girls dived out of their yellow silken garments, and sang.

They waded into the water, splashed, screamed  
and tickled the swans.

The prettiest,  
smiling,  
both arms behind her head,  
let the current carry her.

Red,  
like a cloak of flames,  
her hair floated about her,  
two little drops pearling still on her breasts.

Leda lay no more naked.

The bright waves rocked her onto my floating island.

Oh!

Black billy-goat body, donkey belly, an old thick-pelted beast with horns!

Her long eyelashes closed,  
crowding about the white wobbly knees, bobbing  
narcissi ...

She opened her eyes. I wouldn't leave her. She begged: Don't tickle, OK?

Sweet man!

Ten tender rosy pink fingers  
clawed  
besotted in my tangled pelt.

Ow! Minx! You bit me! Is that my thanks?

She giggled.

She found my mossy bed not unpleasant,  
my long goat-beard impressed her,  
the temperature, even at night, is just now quite exquisite,  
and so she thinks to spend a little time with me.

[54]

Over the peak of Fuji-no-yama  
on wings of fire,  
the grey dragon Kiyomati soars.

The Moon turns pale,  
the stars all go blind.

I seize my bow of ebony wood,  
tense the springy bamboo lath  
and load a silver arrow.

I take aim.

Nose first  
he tumbles into Lake Baikal,  
his left hind toe crushes Dhaulagiri.

The Earth greening, its seeds sprouting,  
all the women once again give birth!



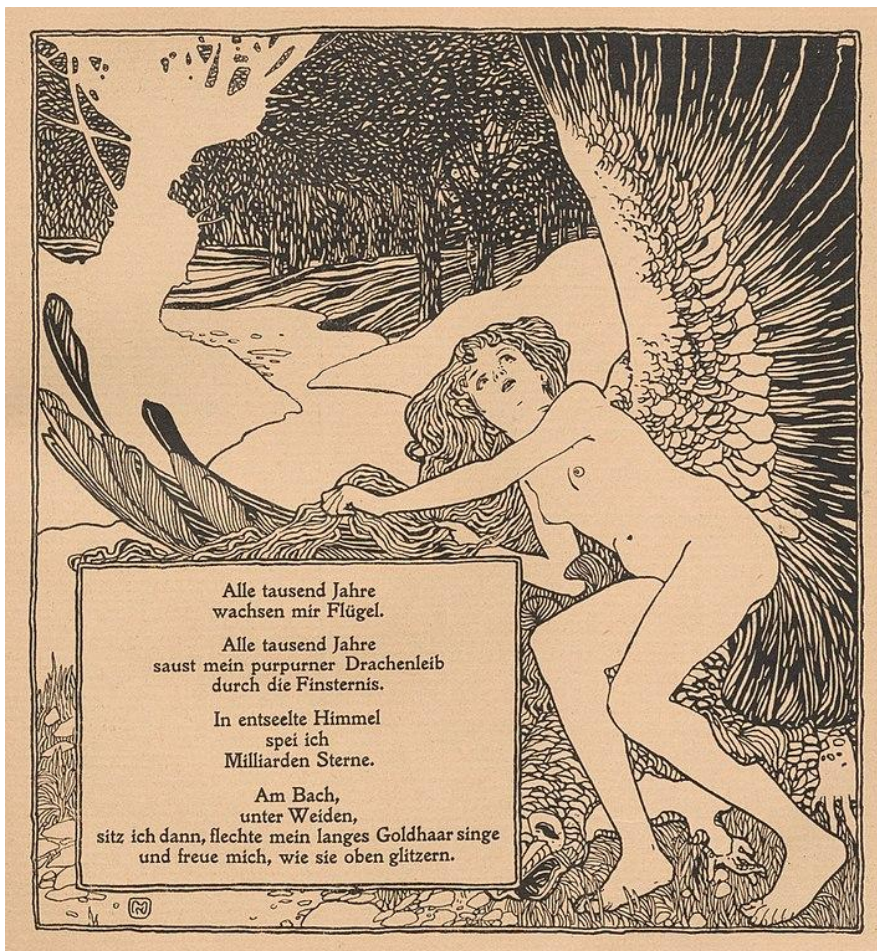
[55]

Every thousand years  
I grow wings.

Every thousand years  
my purple dragon body whooshes  
through the dark.

Into the lifeless heavens  
I spit  
a myriad stars!

By the brook,  
beneath willows,  
I sit then, plait my long golden hair, sing,  
and am glad to see them shining up there.



[56]

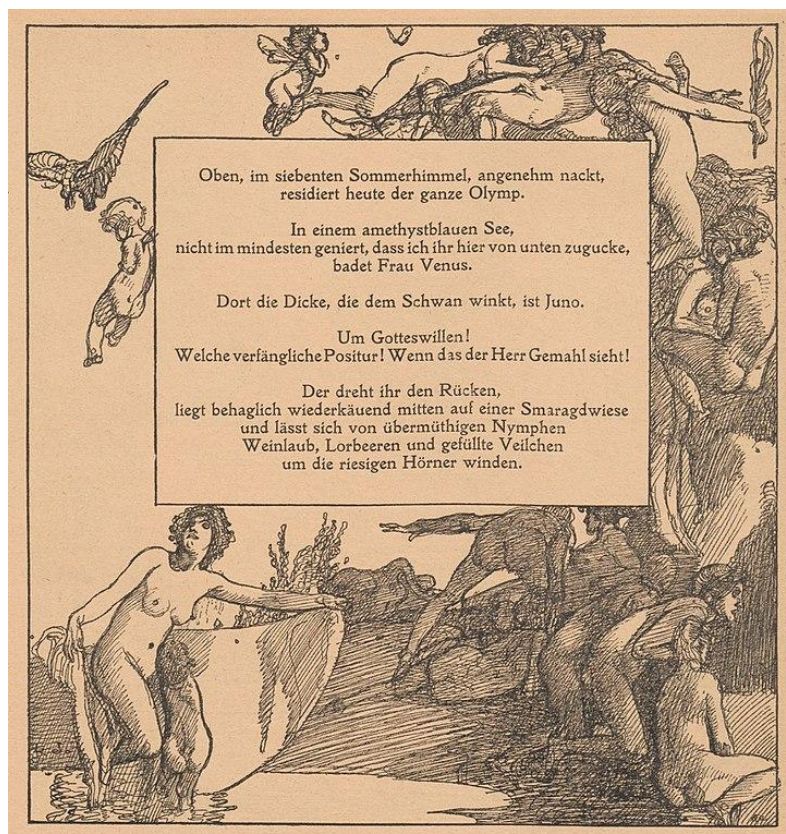
Up there in the seventh summer heaven, pleasantly naked,  
the whole of Olympus is in residence today.

In a lake of amethyst blue  
not in the least embarrassed that I'm peeping up at her,  
Madam Venus is bathing.

The fat one there, beckoning to the swan, is Juno.

For goodness' sake!  
What an unseemly posture! If her husband could see her now!

He has turned his back on her,  
lies content, ruminating in the middle of an emerald meadow,  
and lets wanton nymphs  
weave laurels, vine leaves and stuffed violets  
around his giant horns.



[57]

Beneath white summer clouds –  
Flowers and grasses swaying, I'm so wonderfully tired.

From a world that's vanished, the Golden Oriole calls,  
in my dream  
poppies blaze, a cornfield ripples.

Through huge coral forests  
I sink down ever deeper.

Sea-stars trundle into me, and ancient crowns.

My green daughters,  
seaweed in their hair  
dance.

I am the flood, I am the darkness.

Bells!

Through the dangling branches of a little copse of birch  
flickers a sky of gold.

[58]

The sun sank.

I waited. How long ...

Out of sight,  
like choked-back sobs,  
the murmuring of the river beneath the willows.

Through the dark, at my side, I grope for the red flowers.

They're faded.

You've forgotten me!



[59]

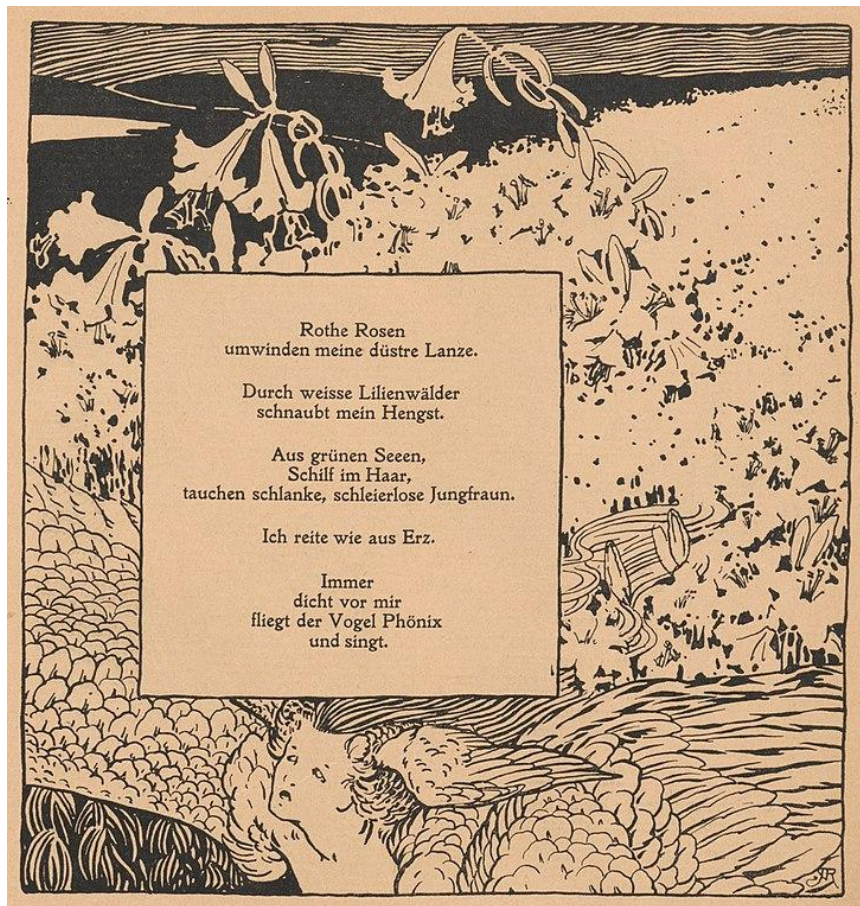
Red roses  
wind themselves about my sombre lance.

My steed snorts  
through white lily forests.

From green lakes,  
seaweed in their hair,  
slim unveiled virgins emerge.

I ride as if cast in bronze.

Always,  
close ahead of me,  
the bird Phoenix flies  
and sings.



[60]

Horizon a ring of flame:  
no sail!

Lamenting,  
the loveliest woman  
wrings  
her white hands.

Nothing but crashing wave-mountains,  
flashing dolphins,  
and in the distance sea-folk blow on conchs.

The sun burns, surf hisses below,  
the monster,  
paws outstretched,  
the seven tongues lolling from his mouth,  
lies on his back and sleeps.

Once,  
twice now,  
the tail curls,  
twitches,  
coils again and then slowly rolls back to the cliffs.

Seaweed and jellies creep up over him.

[61]

Purple citron forests  
bloom around blue seas.

Silken sails  
speed  
my dragon ship.

Firmly  
into the green spume  
my fist presses the tiller,  
not an eyelash twitches.

To you! To you!

Beneath the mirror of my golden armour  
from which the sun streams out,  
my heart  
is beating.

[62]

The lamp is lit.

From every wall  
the dark books all around me stay silent.

A little fly, still frisky,  
strays into the pool of yellow light.

It pauses, bobs, and dabs its proboscis at the word

Inferno.

[63]

Stop listening behind things. Don't over-speculate. Stop searching for yourself.

You *are* not!

You are the blue curl of smoke that dissipates from your cigar,  
the drop that pinged just now on the windowsill outside,  
the soft crackle of song that your lamp sings through the silence.

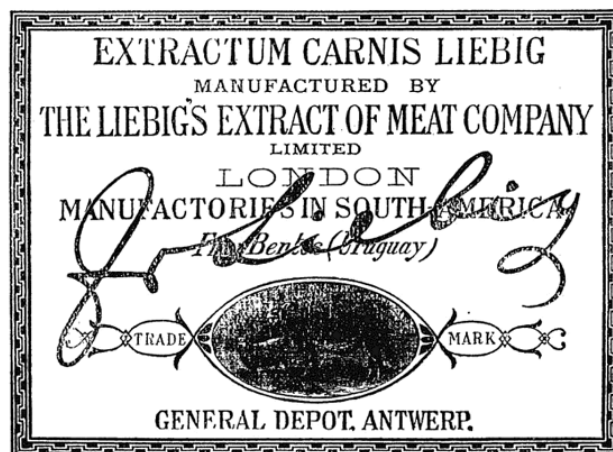
[64]

Around a red glowing pillar of iron rising to the sky  
speckled with sharp glass shards and shearing-blades,  
invisible chains drag me up and down.

Slowly, by jerks, and thoroughly.

I moan, groan, gurgle, roar: Hosanna!

In seven times seven eternities,  
when the shards are worn down and the blades can do no more,  
the pillar will stand there black;  
below,  
in the round stinking slough surrounding it,  
my brain, my liver, my blood, all the gore will lie curdled,  
and I,  
"chastened",  
a transfigured Liebig tin made blessed,  
will, blubbing,  
with my last remaining little knucklebone  
knock at the gates of Paradise!





[65]

Lord, my Lord, Thou art so lordly!

All the world's gods are false gods.

Save only Thee!

My lips praise Thee.

Thou art merciful and just. Thou art compassionate!

I do not fear Thee such that my skin crawls,  
am not horrified by Thy laws.

Thy thoughts are so deep!

Thou windest the crank  
that pulps me against this pillar,  
by Thee the shards, the razorblades were whetted,  
Thou art all-bountiful ...

Look!

On wings  
that shimmer like silver and gold,  
in white garments,  
roses in their hair,  
swirling  
around this burning twitching flesh,  
are all Thine angels.

Singing, jubilant,  
in a myriad goblets  
they collect my tears of joy!

Halleluia!

[66]

Thank God!

The front door's shut, no more visitors can come.

I open a packet of Blue Beehive  
and fill the long pipe.

The rain is so nice.

Wrapped in my dressing gown,  
along past the wallpaper,  
off now on wonderful trips to ancient lands.

Everything sinks away!

From a small calm meadow brook of heavenly blue  
reflecting the colours of flowers and clouds,  
I land up in a little town.

The wispy grasses on the ruinous wall around it still gleam,  
every little turning weathervane  
tells me a story.

[67]

In our old apothecary shop  
with its many stairs and attics  
were lots of chimneys.

Under one of them you could stand right beneath it  
and look up in broad daylight to see stars.

Sometimes it was all dark.

Then you couldn't see a thing, and only felt big fat heavy raindrops  
splash icy cold on your cheeks.

But the best was when shortly before Christmas,  
early in the morning,  
when the whole house smelled of marzipan hearts,  
right below the little peephole-square up there,  
you discovered on the ground a little pointed heap of snow.

It gleamed just like a pastrycook's hat!

[68]

I lie in the old herb loft and "rum'nate".

The dear Lord is the pastrycook Knorr.  
He has a white hat  
and in his window are lots of cordial bottles.  
When the sun shines you can see right through them.  
Then the cakes behind sometimes look yellow, sometimes red and maybe even blue.

The Devil is the chimneysweep Killkant.  
He has a top hat and no socks. His feet are a scandal.  
When he walks past the dear Lord's cordial bottles  
his eyes roll up.

Then they look all white!

When you're dead,  
they shovel you six feet under and stick a wreath on your tummy.

Yes.  
And when Christmas comes around again,  
Mother will bake Jew-rings.

Ah, Jew-rings!

You can never have enough of those. There's nothing nicer in the whole world.

[69]

The Moon  
peeps into the chimneys on the roofs.

The sycamore  
behind the old sacristy  
lights up.

The whole little town lies as if silvered!

[70]

You read that the Duke of Devonshire spends 100,000 pounds every year,  
and envy him his jasper palaces.

Fool!

See the brown green-speckled cotton cloth on your old newspaper-lady's hump,  
listen through the window to what the swallows twitter at their young,  
savour the honey fragrance of the wild thistles you brought home,  
soak yourself in sun!

Every second that you live showers treasures on you.



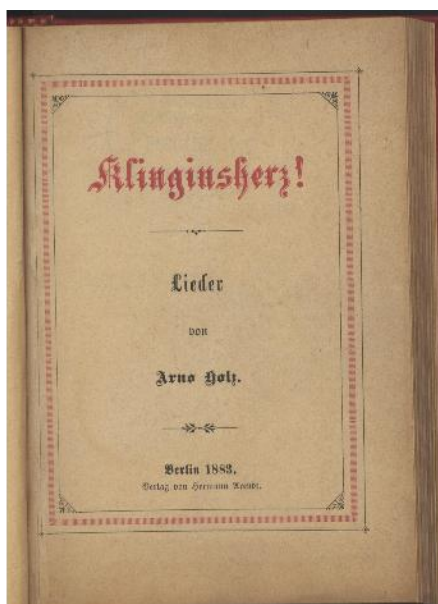
[71]

On a desk,  
by a green-curtained window where the sun is shining in,  
between two biscuit-ware busts, on the right "Art", on the left "Science",  
in a marbled cardboard cover that I myself glued on  
lie my first poems.

Before them,  
in his Luther-chair,  
in a red plush dressing gown, unshaven, fingers at his huge bow-tie,  
my dear old fatherly friend Herr Fiebig.

"Klinginsherz!"

My first work - my first critic.



I sit there.

Above the little Venus desk set of cuivre poli  
three alabaster Graces as paperweights,  
behind them in gold-tooled de luxe bindings, titles enticing as ever,  
*Miracles of Procreation, Love and Marriage, The Human and his Sex,*  
and above them - between the paired Swiss landscapes - almost lifesize,  
the bathing oil-print nymph:  
a dazzling breast, a towel slipping, a blushing smile,  
thighs as from a butcher's shop!

My harassed eyes peer anxiously about.

What will he say?

His thumb, wet now, is at the last page already!

An empty parrot-cage, a bookcase, Ariadne on Naxos,  
in an oval alfenide bowl on top of it, the master of the house's visiting card:  
"Editor of the *Herzblättchen*, magazine for newlyweds!"

Keep going! The ceiling! There too!

Amid violets, roses and forget-me-nots,  
on an ink-bottle,  
a plump flesh-coloured Cupid,  
who, as butterflies play around him, is inscribing in a book with a peacock quill:  
"Life without love is like a rose without scent!"

And I can feel it:  
I'm blushing down to my toes!

[72]

Plump yellow buttercups!

The lawn's gleaming, the gods are shiny.

A naked Venus inspects her knee, stone Hercules strums the lyre.

Waters tumble, clouds speed by,  
the world's full of sun.

Spring!

In my heart  
there dreams the image of a young girl  
with opened lips and laughing eyes.

[73]

Such a little fin-de-siècle shrimp playing lawn tennis!

Red wavy Madonna-parting,  
light-blue blouse of merveilleux-silk,  
and in the flea-coloured belt a little bunch of violets  
that smell of American cigarettes.

Around her left silken ankle  
when she parries the white ball  
a little gold chain tinkles.

Fireworks in the evening.

A squeeze into the darkest possible corner,  
so she leans against your chest, flirting,  
to watch as the stars explode.

Ah!

A five-minute kiss and no whalebone at all.

[74]

I show you the Moon through a springtime tree.

Every blossom, every little leaf  
stands out from its gleam.

Every blossom, every little leaf  
shimmers.

Both arms  
you fling around my neck!



[75]

The little kid in me,  
that chases after every sunbeam and every butterfly,  
that has forget-me-not eyes and hopefully won't die before my death,  
now still finds delight in Ludwig Richter.

Granddad loves Walter Scott.

For my little snooze  
on Sundays,  
when for lunch it was cotelettes à la mode Nelson,  
carp in beer, or perhaps even a whole goose,  
I lie on the respectable old blue green-striped sofa,  
over it on yellowed old-time wallpaper hangs an engraving by Chodowiecki,  
and on my Vertiko,  
between two bunches of quake-grass,  
a shiny porcelain cow parades, painted with bright flowers,  
and is milked while I snore.

Anyway!

None of that holds me back.

In the evening  
at the Redoute,  
right under the middle-most chandelier,  
I am a thorough European.

A promenading very appetising advertisement for a sausage shop  
in addition to the brilliants in her ears is actually also wearing a body-stocking.

With splayed fingers I lift my glove,  
manoeuvre it skilfully within five millimetres of the black shiny taffeta nose,  
smile,  
and let go of it.

It stays stuck there.

“Well, me little champagne-cork! How much you got?”

[76]

On its jolly Halleluia lawn  
my joyful heart tolerates no shadows.

Ruddy laughing Rubens saints  
dance cancan with nude Viennese washer-girls.

Beneath almost breaking liver-sausage trees,  
Corregio kisses Io.

No one is embarrassed.

Goethe, the rascal, spreads himself aslant fat Vulpius' lap.

Little tykes with wings shout Cheers,  
Jobst Sackmann, my favourite, *setzt n lütt'n Kümmel Aquavit drup!*

[77]

He can't stand any twittering of birds.

The so-called natural sounds of nightingales and larks  
are odious to him.

His brain  
is lined throughout with cotton wool.

In the middle of it  
squats a little rococo Venus  
peeing from silver  
into a golden chamberpot.

[78]

In the house where coloured wall-lamps shine,  
gleaming from the same bookshelf  
as George Ohnet, Stinde and Dante:  
Schiller and Goethe,  
both sharing the same plaster wreath!

In the house where coloured wall-lamps shine,  
on the same Wedgwood wallpaper, over the same rococo screen,  
between Klinger and Hokusai:  
Anton von Werner.

In the house where coloured wall-lamps shine,  
the same slender hands play at the same ebony grand  
with the same charm and chic  
both Frédéric François Chopin and Ludolf Waldmann.

In the house where coloured wall-lamps shine,  
sitting on dainty gilded stools  
one drinks Chablis, Pilsner and champagne,  
and comes peu à peu to Nietzsche,  
with dancing to finish off.

Delighted I kiss the hostess' hand,  
disappoint an elderly clean-shaven gentleman  
wearing cotton gloves and half-stockings  
with a 1 Mark tip,  
and vanish.

[79]

Down a black smouldering spiral walk  
stinking of pitch torches.

Green howling meer-toms  
with claws of iron and ringed tails  
are shoving, pulling, tugging, biting me  
to stand before the malignant old men.

Who squat, straw crowns on their skulls, blinking.

Their long vulture necks stretch out,  
their frog mouths leak slobber.

You puked on our stalagmite chairs! You laughed at the welts on our backsides!  
You failed to worship our excrement!

Already the executioner, a mandril, has raised his giant smoothing-iron slug.

It's red hot!

The creatures roar, the iron hisses,  
red bursting bloodlight blows up the cave!

Pestilential rabble!!

I stamp, barge, foam, scream, beat furiously about me.

Are stars crashing together,  
is the world collapsing?

On my bedside rug,  
in little puddles  
among the blue glinting shards of my carafe,  
the morning sun sparkles.

[80]

Into the Grunewald  
since five this morning  
Berlin has spat its special trains.

Over the bridge from Halensee,  
past Spandau, Schmargendorf, past Pichelsberg,  
from every side,  
among drumming gymnast-parades, among charabancs-with-music,  
along the shimmering Havel,  
pushbikes have kilometered.

“Pankow, Pankow, Pankow, Kille, Kille” “Rixdorfer” “Crowdswayer Waltz”  
“The Timber Auction!”

Now it’s night.

And still  
from the “Tortured Dog”  
the hurdy-gurdy screeches in rebellion.

Behind the embankment, into the shadowy shrubs,  
disappear  
a lit cigar, a Whitsun dress.

Luna: smiles.

Among discarded lunch wrappers and eggshells  
they seek the Blue Flower!



[81]

Into the grey green  
giant trunks fade.

From ancient branches  
dangle  
long beards of moss.

Somewhere ... hammering ... a woodpecker.

Is the wolf coming? Does the magical plant Verbena grow here?

On her white palfrey,  
smiling,  
towards my beating heart,  
will the princess come riding?

*Nothing.*

Like black primeval toads,  
motionless,  
junipers crouch by the path.

Here and there,  
venomous red,  
fly agarics shimmer.

[82]

Three little streets  
with houses so small they're from a toy box  
open onto the silent marketplace.

The old fountain splashes by the little church,  
the limes spread fragrance.

This is the whole little town.

But out there,  
where larks are singing in the deeps of a blue sky,  
the lake twinkles, and cornfields ripple.

Everything is like a dream to me.

Should I stay? Should I move on?

The fountain splashes ... the limes spread fragrance.

[83]

Behind high walls  
behind me  
lies a Paradise.

Green glossy gooseberry bushes,  
a hut of straw  
and trees with sweet yellow cherries.

No one knows of it.

A little maybug  
clanders up a stalk,  
whoops, down into golden yellow buttercups.

Daisies lean in ready to help,  
pansies make stepmother-frowns.

Forgotten,  
the flowerbeds glow!

[84]

The old place! The old roofs!

Out from the dark limes, there  
the tower!

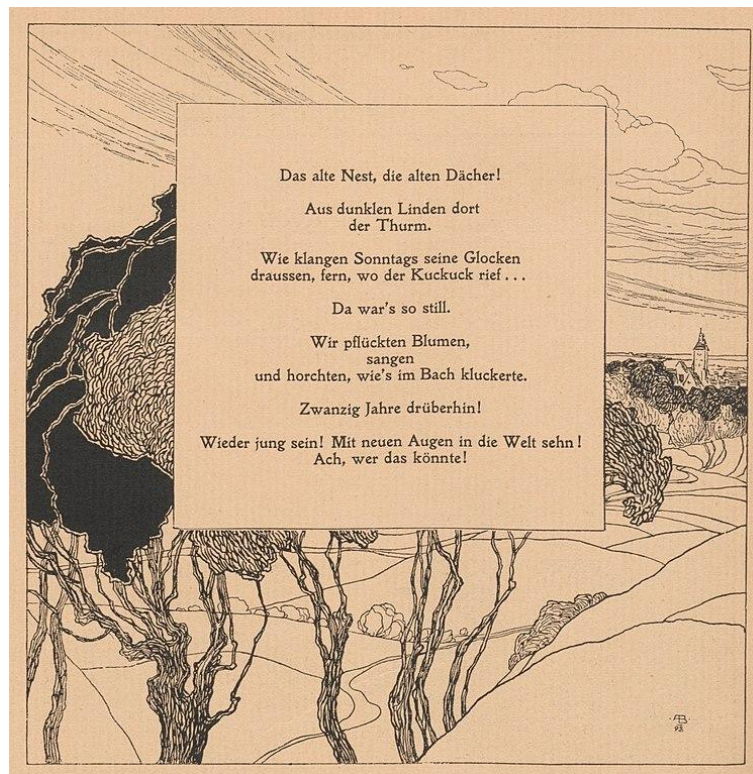
How its bells rang out on Sundays,  
far out to where the cuckoo called ...

It was so quiet then.

We picked flowers,  
sang,  
and listened to the chuckling brook.

Twenty years flown by!

To be young again! To look out over the world through new eyes!  
Ah, who could do that!





[85]

Even now  
through the broiling summer  
larks are singing.

My dazzling scythe  
hisses through the corn.

In a red headscarf  
behind me  
my wife busily gathers up the haulms.

With bare little legs  
and little brown fists clutching flowers,  
there lies, laughing and kicking:  
our joy.

[86]

Grandma in her armchair has fallen asleep.

From the window  
through the white net curtains  
bags of hyacinths blaze.

In her little tarlatan pinafore at the old piano,  
little Lina, as always the good girl, sits and keeps playing.

A music made of sunny dust notes!

[87]

Out of a grey sky  
the sun stabs.

Clouds chasing, a dazzling blue!

The wind attacks the green grass, silver willows brace themselves.

Suddenly – calm.

On a young alder tree  
twinkling drops are swaying!

[88]

Over firs and pale birches the evening heaps up red clouds.

Now my heart is this lake.

One more time, flashing, a wing strokes it.

Gently,  
darkening it goes to sleep.

[89]

Purple fishes  
swim through my dark water,  
white lotus flowers  
bloom.

Always new temple garlands  
piled around me by the pious.

Millions of lips thirst for me.

Slowly,  
every century one drop higher,  
my flood  
surges.

Over bright porphyry stairs I wash around green columns.

A thousand cupolas  
glitter from my grounds!

[90]

For seven septillion years  
I counted milestones along the Milky Way's rim.

They were never-ending.

For myriads of eons  
I was lost in the miracle of a single tiny dewdrop.

New ones forever revealed themselves.

My heart quaked!

Into moss, blissfully,  
I laid myself down, and became soil.

Now brambles straggle  
over me,  
on a rocking blackthorn branch  
a robin twitters.

From my breast  
a merry spring gushes,  
from my skull  
flowers grow.

[91]

Behind the boards that nail up the world  
sits a frog with golden eyes.

Pity!

If it were me sitting over there  
I'd be a king's son.

Gardens of blooming rose bushes  
would twinkle,  
fountains splash,  
a princess would rock me in her white arms ...

There, look, a knothole.

I squint through it.

A green meadow with rhinanthus weeds,  
geese,  
Schnips the dog  
and with him snubnosed Trine,  
who, her condition already interesting -  
sniffing her drippy nose chews bread-and-lard!

[92]

On brown parched foliage around the Tiergarten lakes  
the November sun is shining.

With little iridescent heads of enchanted green  
ducks warm themselves in it.

In quiet  
blue water with clouds,  
black trees grow upside down.

[93]

Beneath dark driving November clouds  
the heath grows dark.

Bent over  
at the path's edge  
you sit and stare  
at your withered hands.

Are you still alive?

Martyred  
in the thornbush,  
one last little leaf shivers!

On a mountain made of sugar-candy  
beneath a juniper tree in flower  
my little gingerbread house shines out.

Its little windows are gold paper,  
cotton wool rises from its chimney.

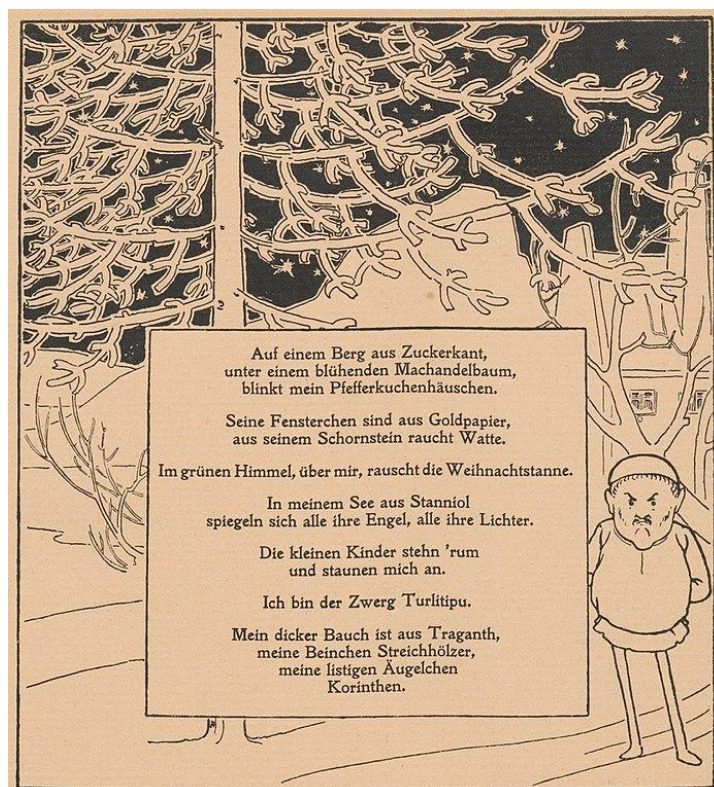
In the green sky above me the Christmas tree rustles.

In my silver paper pond  
all its angels, all its lights are mirrored!

The little children stand around,  
stare at me, astonished.

I am the dwarf Turlitipu.

My fat belly is of tragacanth gum,  
my little legs are matches,  
my small cunning eyes  
currants.



[95]

Twelve!

Through the curtains onto the Christmas tree  
the Moon is shining in.

All the little angels glitter.

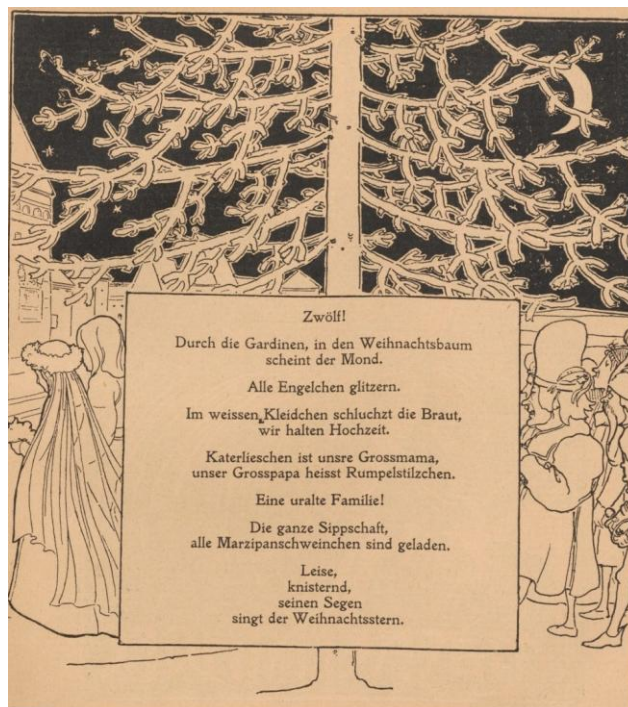
The bride sobs in her little white dress –  
we're having a wedding.

Our grandma is Katerlieschen,  
our grandpa is called Rumpelstiltskin.

Such an old family!

The whole clan,  
all the little marzipan pigs have been invited.

Softly,  
crackling,  
the Christmas star  
sings its blessing.





[96]

Into my attic room,  
one floor above the sky,  
they all come.

People who love Goya and Utamaro,  
rare, totally offbeat eccentric types and nutcases  
who rate Palestrina higher than Pietro Mascagni,  
old gentlemen who secretly, when violets bloom again in March,  
in the street slip sweets to snotnosed urchins,  
and young people who sell books  
and on Sundays, in their leisure time, strike the dear Lord dead.

The Master, the Meester, the Maestro, the Maestrino and the Maestrillo.

The Maestrillo, as ever, is the first.

He shrugs snow from his shoulders,  
removes his gloves, unwinds his scarf,  
his wet galoshes he leaves outside on the steps beside the flue.

Then we sit  
around our little red Irish stove, on camp stools,  
listen as now and then, invisibly, through the silence, coke collapses in the grate,  
and in the dark enjoy the glow of our cigars!

[97]

Onto my test bench,  
beneath the cobbler's globe,  
the clumsy young giants drag to me their monstrosities.

The lifeless little limbs dangle slack, the little eyes don't turn –  
a bunch of little mandrakes!

Here I set a spine in place,  
there I trepan a cranial vault,  
with a thread of twine, artfully, I snip off a leg.

Then I take a pinch of snuff,  
push up my black hornrimmed glasses and adjust the lamp.

*So.*

Now I dip into the dye-pot.

Pulcinella, who still looks too educated, gets a liver-sausage nose,  
Little Colombina, not yet pretty enough, a wee mouth of cinnabar,  
a cheeping angel-chickadee (but nothing helps) a mother-of-pearl botty!

[98]

All about your gardens,  
so that you may laugh, rejoice and sing beneath blossoming trees,  
I coil, roll and wreath my dragon body.

Keeping a respectful distance  
the mob stands  
with stones, crowbars and slop-buckets.

Its rage foams up, its impotence roars  
when behind the high mirror-walls with the trailing roses  
suddenly your cymbals sound,  
or on white waters shooting higher than the tallest steepest cypresses  
your golden orbs dance.

From their eyes, from their fists,  
from their wordlessly lowered shoulders,  
craving trembles:  
to pounce on your bodies like beasts,  
to scabble yowling for your hearts,  
to drag your dethroned gods through black smoking temple ruins!

My claws flare, my eyes glow ...

[99]

A floorboard creaks!

My own shadow  
frightens me.

It has a fat toad belly,  
vulture claws,  
long swinging monkey-arms and a pig's eyes ...

I shine a light into every corner.

Dust,  
flakes of peeling limewash, dead flies and spider's webs.

When finally I bend down under the bed,  
my hair stands on end, the light flickers:  
jammed into a corner  
the Beast squats there.

From its mouth,  
half chewed  
my slipper hangs.

Horrified  
we stare at one another.

Gently,  
this way and that,  
its rat-tail coils.

**[100]**

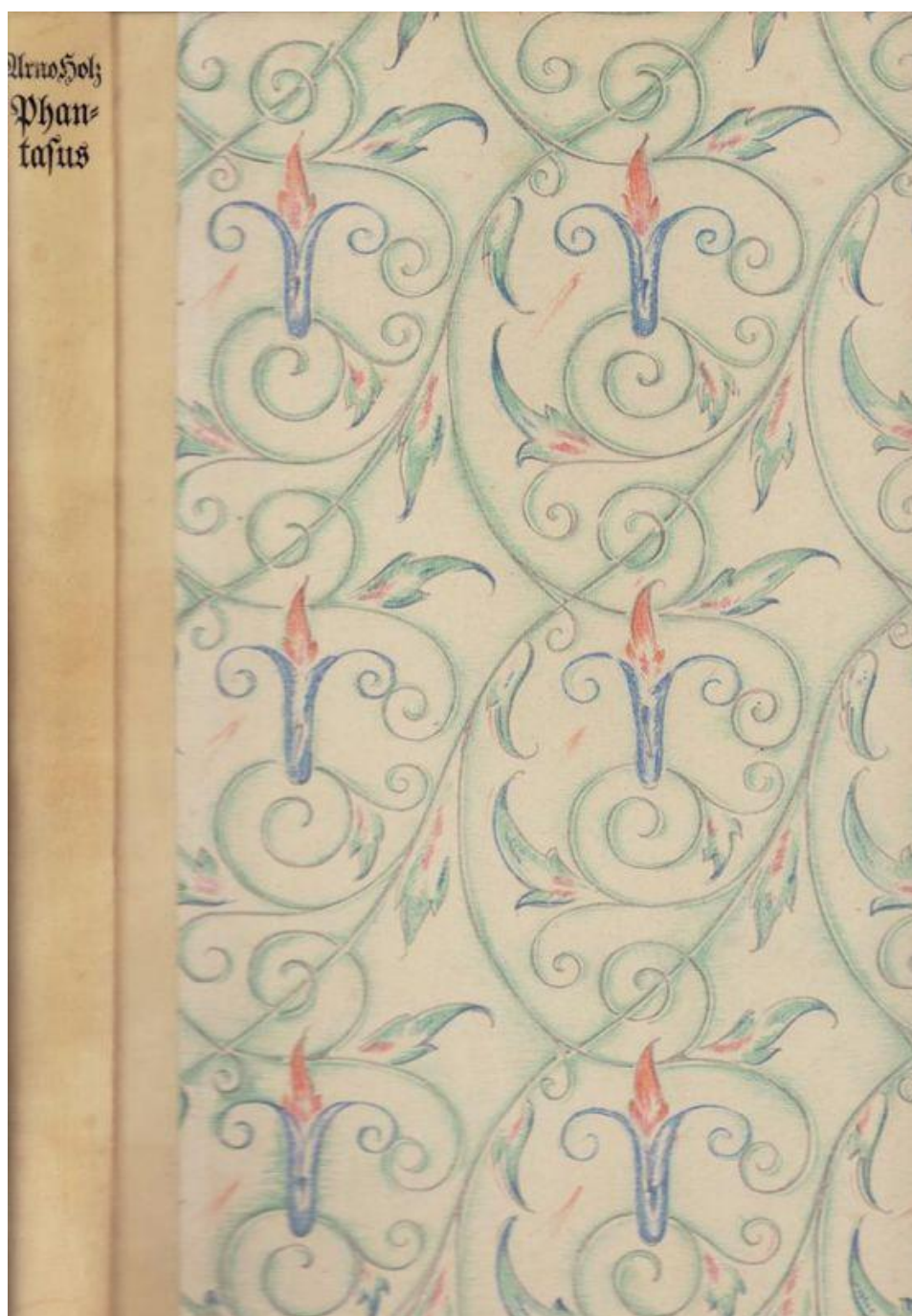
Into red fixed-star forests bleeding to death,  
I whip my winged steed.

On through!

Behind shredded planetary systems, behind frozen primal suns,  
behind wastes of night and nothing,  
New Worlds are growing glimmering – trillions of crocus flowers!

# PHANTASUS

Selection from the Second Edition  
(1916)



## CONTENTS OF THIS SELECTION

*Note: The 1916 Insel-Phantasia comprises 131 poems in seven parts.  
The poems within each part are numbered anew from 1.*

### **First set: New short lyrics similar to those of the first edition**

*(Titles as supplied in the posthumous 1962-64 edition)*

- [I/4] Birth and Baptism 1
- [I/5] Topsy-turvy
- [II/11] Miniature infatuation
- [II/15] The night wove so sweetly!
- [III/13] Yet is their strength but...
- [III/16] Soft melting largo
- [III/17] Sites of enchanted seclusion
- [IV/15] Through blackest darkness
- [VI/15] In Berlin N.
- [VII/5] "Hands up!"
- [VII/11] My barrel organ

### **Second set: New lyrics with ultra-long lines:**

- [II/4] April storm receding
- [III/3] Behind an old board fence
- [VI/16] In Berlin W.
- [VI/19] And yet!! .

### **Third set: Much longer versions of lyrics from the first edition:**

- [I/2] Myth of Power (complete) [52]
- [II/20] A year gone by (shortened) [74], [58]

**First set: New lyrics similar to those in the first edition:**

**[I/4] Birth and Baptism 1**

On a first blue day of Spring,  
in an apothecary's licensed by the King of Prussia called the Black Eagle,  
I was born.

From the tower of nearby St George's,  
across the old marketplace of the small out-of-the-way Teutonic Knights town,  
between the colourful round bumpy cobbles of whose pavings  
grass still grew,  
through the opened window  
there rang out  
Sunday bells.

No one "suspected" a thing.

For lunch  
there was pork roast and stewed plums,  
by coffee I was already there.

Even today,  
whenever she tells of it,  
my mother  
laughs!

**[I/5] Topsy-turvy**

At five years old  
everything was already clear to me.  
In China they spoke French,  
in Africa was a bird called kangaroo,  
and the Virgin Mary was Catholic and had a sky-blue dress.  
She was made of wax and was the dear Lord's mother.

When I grew up,  
I wanted to become Schiller and Goethe and live in Berlin behind the palace.  
When I had children,  
I'd paint them all all over.  
That didn't cost so much  
and they wouldn't tear their trousers.  
At Pollakowski the bookbinder's  
hung a big colourful broadsheet picture



of a white horse up on its hind legs.  
The fat Turk on it with the shiny sabre  
was called Ali Pasha.  
If I ever had a penny to spend  
I would buy it.

But most of all  
what I wanted was to discover the sources of the Nile!

I knew exactly how the thing was done.  
Where it flowed out  
you just sat yourself in a boat  
and then kept on going to where it all ended.

And then you were there.

There'd be monkeys pelting each other with oranges and coconuts,  
golden blotting-sand,  
and grape-raisin trees with almonds in the shell.  
And so I wouldn't go hungry for too long,  
I'd bring lots of barley-sugar sticks and oodles of carob pods.

But I never told anyone.  
I kept it all to myself alone.

It's just that I was puzzled  
that everyone else was so dumb!

### **[II/11] Miniature infatuation**

In her little dress of threadbare muslin  
with red heart flowers in bloom that Grandma had once worn at her wedding,  
sitting bent over her sewing things  
the little Madonna with the radiant golden hair.

Lilac, though the open window,  
wafts its scent.

A glance:

You want to kiss me? Come!

Then she lowers her eyelashes again quick as lightning.

**[II/15] The night wove so sweetly!**

The night wove so sweetly!

Beneath the dark chestnut trees, against the moon-bright wall  
you leaned, eyes closed, in the shadows.

We did not kiss.

Our silence  
told us  
everything.

**[III/13] "Yet is their strength ..."**

On my final harvest wagon!

Reins loose, stretched slack-armed across swelling sheaves,  
joyfully content!

Hundred summers burned my breast, hundred winters bleached my hair.

Crickets shrill,  
tinkling herd, swallows darting,  
the long, marvellous, lovely golden working day  
fades.

The tired horses jolt me  
back home!

Once more  
I lie amid bright flowers!

You sky so blue!  
Broad green trusty sweet-home treetops greeting me!  
White clouds that I so loved:  
I shall see you  
nevermore!

### **[III/16] Soft melting largo**

My delight?

My delight is the play of a leaf in summer breeze,  
the light delicate shadow that the swallow flickers over me,  
the last little floating purple cloud  
that after a lovely long golden day of sun sinks blissfully into pale green!

### **[III/17] Sites of enchanted seclusion**

Behind rusty wire fences where roofing felt is rotting,  
amid crumbling bricks and old refuse,  
the strangest flowers bloom.

Blue, tiny, with a glint like pottery shards,  
colourful, shimmering like snakes, the purple of butterfly wings,  
tall, erect, Imperial Chinese dragon yellow,  
black, silvery as on sarcophagi!

Through the grizzling twiggery of a curious little tree,  
from the windows of a distant edge of buildings,  
flashes  
of evening sun.

A little bird I've never heard before  
is singing.

- Stops - sings.

**[IV/15] Through blackest darkness**

Oh, where have I been!

Cushions in disarray,  
heart filled with dread, I've woken up!

The pallid window!

It's dark!

There's a weaving and surging around me still, like non-existent shadows!

Sleep!  
Think of nothing! ... Forget it all! ... Be far away again!

Outside, the old poplar  
rustles,  
caressing waves  
bear me to a bank of roses.

**[VI/15] In Berlin N.**

In Berlin N.,  
outside the Nazareth Church,  
our dear Lord sits and begs.

Timid, in a semicircle, children stare at him.

His eyes water,  
his hair is stringy,  
his face all eaten away as if by vitriol.

He doesn't have a single tooth left!

I think of the nice time we had at the Sea of Gennesaret  
and toss my last penny into his greasy hat.

He thanks me with tears in his eyes.

Then he hauls himself up, trembling, onto his crutch,  
squeezes his right nostril with a thumb, snorts,

and limps off past blooming lilac and laburnum,  
pursued by the children  
- a doll trails along behind the smallest -  
away across the big road behind the hackney stand,  
into the nearest gin shop.

### [VII/5] "Hands Up!"

All my doves that I throw laughing in the air for you have dragon-claws!

Take care!

Their flashing beaks  
peck at brains.

Don't even think  
of drawing a bead on them in ambush with your old rusty flintlock-with-rest.

The dear little creatures  
might feel tickled if you do.

First thing, don't make any "suspicious moves"!

It's just how they are.

The best is:  
relieve yourselves at the cloakroom of all that's superfluous.

Even if I allow you  
now and then to step in  
to my singing gardens through the big gate of miracles,  
in return for a fee of so and so many Mark per head to be handed over at the till,  
never forget  
that with me you are on alien ground,  
and so to speak no longer at home.

Comport yourselves decorously!

Your banausic insolent effronteries  
should be left discreetly in the innermost vest pocket.

My budget  
boasts a line especially for skunk traps.

There is no  
forgiveness.

What I demand of you  
is respect.

Read  
what is written on the little posters,  
always keep a nice distance between you and the thorny cacti,  
and refrain from trampling  
on my hundred thousand dollar rebates.

Above all,  
don't pilfer anything!

The thin longhaired string-tie absinthe youngster with the sallow leathery hawk face  
seems to me not quite irreproachable.

*Hands up!*

Behind every forget-me-not  
there's an ecrasite cartridge with your number!

### **[VII/11] My barrel organ**

Ever and again  
there's a squealing coming from my barrel-organ.

Ever and again, climbing and twining into the tormenting air:  
my songs.

The public  
pushes fiercely past and is in a hurry.

Below the green woollen blanket, between the shiny organ pipes,  
painted bloodily on porcelain,  
my battle scenes do the begging.

Even the children don't find them interesting!

The snow on my nose is melting,  
my peg-leg hurts.

## Second set: New poems with ultra-long lines

*The fiendishly long lines in the 1916 Phantasia are impossible to reproduce cleanly in Portrait format. The possible inconvenience of the Landscape format used for these pages is, we hope, compensated by the more faithful rendering of Holz's original layout.*

### [II/4] April storm receding

Facing a dark dully rolling slant-black storm wall in retreat,  
from which the last goutts come hurtling onto me,  
suddenly,  
- air brightens, puddles sparkle, the fermenting whitegrey seething sky above at once torn open -  
the Sun sparkflashes.

Chasing clouds, dazzling blue!

Into green grass the wind grasps, silver willows brace themselves.

Head lowered,  
eyes almost shut, hat low on the brow,  
I struggle through the rushing roaring springtime uproar!

All of a sudden  
- chest breathes out, my coat no longer flapping, I look around astonished -  
all - is calm.

All the spectacle, din and tumult  
- no small leaf stirring, no little stalk swaying, and now not the least gentlest breath of wind -  
as if blown away!  
Invigorating placid glass-clear freshness!  
Glinting sky, a little tomtit sings again,  
I sense the most comforting warmth.

On a young alder tree,  
rainbow-scintillant, jewel-sparkling, fairytale bright,  
quivering drops are cradled!

### **[III/3] Behind an old board fence**

Behind an old, wind-battered, sagging,  
lichen-flecked board fence smelling of tar, extruded resin and blazing most scorching summer sun,  
the black-green crazy branchwork of an elder – all knobby, dinnerplate flowers – poking through,  
a little garden lies dreaming by the wayside.

Tippytoed  
on a big smooth-slippery almost egg-round cobble,  
hardly even so able to hold myself upright with my two hands,  
I peep over.

Firelilies, turksheads,  
blue manhigh larkspur,  
hollyhocks,  
snapdragons, foxtails, cockscomb,  
all blooming wild and intermingled!

Three narrow tread-worn stone steps,  
thick clumps of grass pushing through their yawning cracks,  
lead to a low mossy cot already half in ruins,  
the rotten window shutters  
now still barely hanging on their rusty hinges.

In a little totally scabby unappealing dustgrey wormeaten apple tree,  
with little poison-green brownblack maggot-holed nubs of fruit,



all around it bumblebees humming, busy bees buzzing,  
butterflies tumbling,  
it's the truth now,  
quite distinctly,  
in a forking branch,  
- I can hardly keep my balance on the cobblestone, in my delight I nearly fall off -  
Death has hung his scythe!

**[VI/16] In Berlin W.**

In Berlin W.,  
outside the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church,  
under the sandstone Trinity portal,  
- lofty bronze candelabra, gas-green through evening's violet dusk, have just lit up -  
two frock-coated gentlemen stand  
and with white gloves hand out programmes in exchange for judicious consideration, altar seat not less than 20 Mark.

In immaculate cravat,  
garish yellow "Orange Gong" on proud black manly breast,  
the sexton keeps an uneasy eye on things.

Under the gracious auspices  
of her Imperial Royal Highness the Crown Princess,  
with the most welcome collaboration of mesdames  
Baroness Maria Concha Codelli (violin), and Mademoiselle Shereshevski (voice),  
the intention is  
within fifteen minutes  
for the benefit of the General Fatherland Support Fund for the latest victims of flooding (75 percent)  
and the Royal Prussian Military Orphans Institute (25 percent)

to perform  
for the Creator of all things,  
for the Almighty, All-present, All-powerful,  
Lord of Heaven and Earth,  
a serenade.

Policemen,  
under personal direction of the relevant precinct commander, Police Captain Hampe,  
monitor the arriving carriages,  
braided lackeys with grey clean-shaven marzipan faces  
most reverently show Their Excellencies where to go.

“Make way!”

In a double-klaxoned automobile  
- the public stands head to head, the officer in charge salutes -  
their two Majesties.

All traffic in the evening street  
comes to a halt.

For the third time already, keeping an eye on the frock-coats, still undecided,  
I lurk behind the oleander tubs.

I count off my buttons: should I? Or ... odd. Hm!

I do so enjoy a female alto!  
I'm in love with Johann Sebastian! The organ always quite discombobulates me!

.....

No!

No!! ...No!!!

I shall *not* revel ... in your *opprobrium*!

Once,  
hurled from your blooming sunny Paradise  
out into the old primordial night,  
I squirmed:  
from the gaping mouths of your uprearing hissing tongue-flicking snake-scourge  
there spurted  
the Pleiades,  
through the fingers of your left hand  
there bled  
my human heart!

Tempi passati!

In purple frock coat,  
widow's peak carefully combed over,  
eyes cornflower-blue,  
between pillars of syenite, beneath a sky of lapis lazuli,  
"all-bountiful",  
with the smile I know so well  
you stroke the well-trimmed silver beard.

Business is business!

The organ booms, the wide bronze-studded doors now are closed,

the entire stone edifice  
is thoroughly illuminated.

Directly opposite,  
behind draped reflective windowpanes  
with cosy little ivy corners and discreet little glow-lamps in red coquettish dinky silken shades,  
pursuing his honourable trade –  
Meyer's Oyster Bar.

**[VI/19] And yet! ...**

And ... yet!! And ...yet!! ...And ...yet!! And ... yet!!

“Our best  
yearning  
cries out for righteousness!

Out of this vile filthy pandemonium in which we all wade muddied to our necks,  
the demand comes  
from even those most besmirched, those most bedaubed  
for a cleansing, regenerating spiritual transmutation and rebirth,  
for a saving, redeeming bath to wash away sins,  
for a spotless  
purity!

Even if for the longest time no more in this one,  
then in some other distant,  
consoling,  
often only in obscure dreams hoped for  
and glimpsed,

imaginary other world!  
For every sorrow,  
in unescapably necessary reciprocity  
according to an ultimate most profound most intimate moral law within us,  
from what was already at time's beginning immanent in us, far beyond our understanding and our senses,  
out of an ultra-imperative Must,  
there is a corresponding  
joy!

To every negative a positive,  
to every minus a plus,  
to every relative an absolute,  
to every This World  
a balancing Other World  
that compensates and offsets all earthly things."

This I believe, in this I hope,  
this my base, this my faith, I swear by it, rely on it,  
hold fast to it, hold fast, hold fast,  
fast!

And yet!! And yet!! ... And yet!! And yet!!  
And ... yet!!

### Third set: Longer versions of predecessors in the first edition

#### [I/2] Myth of power (complete)

*(Compare [52] from the first edition)*

Remarkable!

Somewhere out there in Indo-china,  
when I surreptitiously listen really hard inside,  
when I think it over very carefully, every last detail from the ground up,  
and don't immediately lead myself down the garden path and become stuck,  
but yes,  
quite certainly, without any doubt,  
I must already at some time, somehow, have been alive!

Obscure

glimmers of memory-things  
forever floating already inside me,  
that with their curiously alien, confidingly confusing blaze of colours  
delight and frighten me,  
that I can't unravel in a regular way and I certainly don't know of just from books,  
come bobbing up ever more gaudily, ever more clearly, almost palpable before me!

A high sheer slender blood-smearred barbarous grotesquely curving palisade gate,  
before which, extending to both left and right  
on black stout round-pointed stakes, hands heads and feet are impaled and drying;  
a gurgling mud-yellow sunny-shady wide rapid jungle river  
out of which tapirs, buffalo, wild boar, rhinoceroses and crocodiles teem;

a sky-high utterly disgusting octagonal sandalwood pagoda  
everywhere heaped with repellent layers  
engraved with horribly grinning convoluted gods, demons and grimacing monkey faces,  
its upturned spiral corners dripping with emeralds, sapphires and rubies;  
in the steaming jungle, fantastic scrappy visions,  
segment of a tiger hunt,  
a huge mossy ancient breadfruit tree swathed in climbing chains of liana, with a thousand air-roots like a temple grove!

.....

Whatever  
was all that?

I can see,  
between pointed gleaming snowpeaks,  
as if through drifting rising veils of haze,  
a long bare endlessly lonesome trough of scree,  
in whose flat pale centre shimmering with little twinkling grains of crystal a turquoise lake shows blue,  
on a dry waste of treeless gloomy dust-storm plain,  
unsightly,  
a scattered camp of dirty blackish low felt yurts assembled in random haste, jittery nervous livestock crowding all around,  
above a foaming greygreen raging roaring wildwater spate  
a hellish path winds narrowly, slick precipitous vertiginous breakneck away high along a sheer gorge,  
out of which  
so that my heart – almost stops,  
clumped into a most horrible tumbling knot, thundering into bottomlessness,  
horses, riders and boulders come rumbling!

.....

Right!

I was hunting on a wild icy Tibetan steppe,  
wheezing,  
in dirty ragged herdsman's skins, lasso swinging  
behind a storming snorting herd of yaks,  
when,  
after ferocious close-quarter,  
breast to breast, stone dagger in right hand  
tussles with bears, lynxes and wolves,  
my nomad clansmen jubilantly chose me to be their chieftain,  
- at the head,  
as I turned to gaze swollen with pride, of my uncountable horde stretching far to the north,  
murderous, hungry for plunder -  
drunk already at the first dreamlike swelling lush tight-closed groves of fern, cypress and rhododendron,  
on I went,  
beguiled by the seductive scintillating fabulous myth-songs, sagas and chants  
that the old wise itinerant shaman singers  
in the evening, white-bearded, to the beat of muffled magical drums, sang around our dying fire,  
ecstatic, aflame from their animated rapture-dripping images  
that made our eyes more radiant, our temples pulse and hearts beat faster,  
that banished sleep at night and already as a child had infatuated me,  
of the great wide deep evergreen wonderlands  
in the ah! so distant, heavenly blue, most intimately fervently wished for, sweet  
sun-shimmering South!

.....

A sudden vague sinister dread  
sends shudders through me!

I can hear,  
as lurking silent in the darkness



and with utmost vigilant caution we advance,  
the gentle sporadic eerie chinking of my saddlery,  
I feel how a pale dew-heavy twig of blossom glittering in the moonlight suddenly strokes my brow,  
I gulp once more, deep breaths, mild scented soft night air!

As if it all – happened yesterday!

.....

Silent,  
torpid,  
bamboo huts on slanting slender tall untrimmed bamboo piles, dreamily secluded,  
into which, murderously glinting pitiless bronze scythes, knives and bone axes in our teeth,  
bodies crouched, eyes shining, shoulders hunched, not breathing,  
we climb sly as cats;  
clamorous  
from village to village, camp to camp, place to place,  
“fire,  
horrid murder and rape” mewling out from wooden clappers  
while little by little in the east the gold-red bloody morn is already rising,  
wailing, cries of despair,  
shocked from their gentle, happy, palmleaf-sheltered pious centuries of peace by our sudden strike,  
chaotic blackbrown human hordes rushing our way valleywards  
into which with whistling darting arrows, hurled javelins clanging, and stunning whirring mangling clubs  
we dash howling on our ponies;  
wide, broad,  
bristling with flashing brazen heavily-armed and armoured tight-closed mighty standfast warrior folk  
under a burning scorching broiling sun,  
field of battle sown with stinking wall-high festering corpses, pestilential bloated horse-cadavers, groans and moans of dying men  
to which never tiring, ever cunning, not for a moment losing my cold blood  
I whip my wavering hordes

by example, exhortation and knotted thongs  
ever on to victory;  
prosperous  
smoke- and ash-filled ruined cities,  
in whose proud still-standing remnants, beneath a night-blue light-dripping starry paradise of sky  
to the shrill intoxicating jangling music of fife, cowhorn and drum,  
by dance and burning torches,  
I allowed my roaring unleashed beasts to enjoy their brutish rutting raging orgies;  
a huge high hexagonal alabaster courtyard set around with pillars,  
to which, accompanied by my whooping men,  
I ride in on an elephant, white with gold trappings and jewels flashing,  
to a jumble of defeated shackled slavishly prostrate princes, lords and dignitaries,  
into one of whom, womanish in wide soft pearl-seamed kingly garb  
writhing whimpering before me  
amid his unveiled pale sobbing kneeling handwringing women slithering all about me  
- screeching eunuchs and imploring playthings -  
while two of my loyalest  
hold in an iron grip the shaking tortured sweat-streaming thing, now barely gasping in his deathly terror,  
with my own hand,  
the blue swollen jaws wrenched wide apart,  
I empty a small round dainty shining enamelled poison-pot;  
a long mirrored hall of onyx,  
in which amid flickering flames, the bravest of my brave around me,  
drunk on my imperial splendour,  
with mocking laughter  
onto my shaven bandit chieftain skull  
I plonk the old, young, self-won crown,  
a wide luxurious .... purple couch ... onto its swelling cushions I ... replete with lust ...

.....

Thick roiling clouds of fog  
weave it all back together!

Did I decree that the great among the captives,  
trusting most submissively, most humbly, most credulously to my mercy,  
in the cruellest,  
most ruthless way, in batches,  
be roasted, impaled, boiled, quartered,  
and buried honey-smear'd to the neck naked in termite mounds?

Did I, every early morning,  
decree that one of those plundered concubines,  
she having in abject trembling submission, hoping to be spared and in concupiscent despair shared my bed,  
be thrown bound, before all eyes devoid of every sympathy, into the Mekong?

Did I decree that the truest of my true –  
who'd hoisted this despisèd wretch,  
when misery and want oppressed me yet, when nary a back bent to me yet, when no royal wreath adorned me yet,  
in homage on their shoulders,  
who toiled from clan to clan, from tent to tent, from man to man wooing for me friends, comrades and brothers  
whose blood in a hundred skirmishes and battles was most freely shed for me, whose bodies formed a ring of fire for me, shielded  
[and protected me –  
most stealthily, most treacherously, most cunningly,  
one by one,  
simply because my crawling, searing, harrowing fear, bad conscience and gnawing shame tormented me,  
because none, none now did I trust, on none none now placed my faith,  
because I dreaded every, every one of them,  
because in every, every, every one  
I spied my certain vengeful future deadly enemy, rival, adversary, masterer, conqueror, dethroner decrowner depurpler –  
did I decree that the truest of my true

be murdered, strangled, cut through, hacked down, stabbed, massacred and –  
slaughtered?

Shuddering, I feel rock-solid in me  
just one certitude,  
and I know:

My sallow turbaned twinkling slit-eyed majesty,  
surrounded by the vilest crawling bootlicking curs,  
by the whole drooling varlet-swarm of too-cowardly hangers-on,  
beset by the most blasphemous gushing adulation of the wicked venal priest-pack,  
fanned by black-brown silver-grey rust-red waving lyrebird tails,  
sat omnipotent,  
conqueror-legs in billowing green silk pantaloons, gold slippers, crossed in august nonchalance,  
slender curving boldly hooked raptor nose  
and long diabolically thin-tipped dangling Tatar moustache,  
on a round  
high peacock throne  
flashing with a myriad jewel stars, shimmering little mother-of-pearl specks,  
and dazzling seven-sided metal mirrorlets,  
impaled any  
whose look or word or shadow was displeasing to me  
on his own ever-ready always watchful menacing spearsharp throwing-sceptre  
by my own sovereign hand against the wall,  
to rage and roar in his delirium  
until his final foaming brutish raving knavish ruthless end,  
more grimly frightful than a vulture, more venomous than a cobra, more guileful than a Sunda panther,  
and instead of vitiating the sufferings of this world  
as far as humanly possible,  
exacerbated,

atrocified and increased them  
so that Timur,  
Attila and Genghis Khan,  
after this rabid infernal Ogre  
were really nothing more than gentle pretty so so cute white clean-washed little lambs!

Inconceivable! ... Insoluble! ... Atrocious!

Atrocious! ... and yet ... quite certain!

.....

A very small minimal percentage portion of me,  
still in me there floating around,  
was in this way to blame, so to speak, that later on there was Gautama Buddha,  
and even today,  
at night,  
in dreams,  
when I can't control the beast and no longer have the bit properly between my teeth,  
the scoundrel prances around with his women,  
sings,  
growls, rages, roars,  
reviles,  
and by the litre, bucketload, hogshhead, quaffs foaming raw palm wine  
from the most gigantic huge antediluvian rhinoceros horns!

**[II/20] A year gone by (excerpts)**

*(Compare [74], which continues as follows; [58] is also revisited:)*

...Both arms  
you flung around my neck!

.....

Larks jubilating overhead, through the blue summer,  
out of gently clustered treetop green, over yellow corn dense with flowers in bloom,  
we were greeted by the grey tower -  
its rusting gilded angel-trumpeter had long since stopped rotating -  
of the silent shingle-roofed little village  
that we had come to love.

We walked hand in hand.

From the nearby wood,  
now and then, caressing,  
a refreshing balmy pleasantly cool breeze fanned us,  
shy playful little zephyr-clouds sent now and then a flirting shadow over us,  
from under your nodding gleaner's hat,  
hardly perceptible,  
now and then  
a hair of yours brushed me.

A big mystically dark purple-brown Mourning Cloak -  
wide open curious sulphurously serrated shimmering mother of pearl bluish iridescent wings settling ever and again just ahead,  
ever and again fluttering up close ahead -  
drew us on

as if entranced,  
through a narrow long boxthorn gully sinking away in greengreen curves,  
into which we had never yet strayed,  
away from the beaten path,  
always on and on.

At a last  
juniper-bush bend with an almost overpowering scent,  
the white-green swaying double-handsbreadth dinnerplate blooms only now blocking all the view,  
suddenly  
it was gone!

Where  
were we?

Out of a lost terrain,  
in which a strange egg-round reedy pond lay dreaming in the sun,  
amid sweet clover, cornpoppies, beesuck, vetches, spurge, meadow campion and golden yellow felt-silvery fabulously soaring  
[kingcandles  
there snaking away, winding and dividing like veins high up the slanting scarp,  
numerous forgotten paths!

All of them led – up to Heaven!

.....

Through rustling autumn foliage in sunshine,  
behind the hidden redthorn grove from which once one early unforgettable azure July day  
– slender catkins as they waved stroked softer than silk or satin, little clumps of quake-grass nodded, swung and swayed,  
proud white asters stood tall and glowed –

melting, sobbing, fervently exulting, hour after hour unseen an errant blackbird piped away,  
we sought the enchanted Rose Garden that enclosed us in our highest joy.

We found it.

Wild ivy creepers still aglow clambered on shapeless crumbling sandstone balustrades,  
and out of burst overturned basalt urns  
amid rampant floppy dark-flashing dandelions, bushy purple barberries and late violets pale, Septemberish, dull-scented  
the porphyry flame still writhed,  
the cheeky wingèd stark-naked urchin -  
on the tip of whose drawn-back aiming elbow in a greenish patch of sun a ladybird was just then so daintily seated,  
he still slyly winking,  
little right leg precariously raised with improbable adroitness, twisted in a manner still grotesque behind the slightly  
[bended knee,  
mischievous merry puffed-out chubby cheeks already half weathered away -  
was still setting  
a blunt moss-feathered arrow on which an innocent quivering dewdrop had just now hung.

We kissed!

From the circle of blaze on a pale lilac flowery carpet,  
delicate tugging threads playing all around,  
gleamed  
- the bank of lawn.

.....

In the violet winter afternoon,  
through a forest of ice-palms sparkling in every jewelled colour,  
amid whose dangling liana bridges we huffed round holes to peep through,



we peeked  
out from our little warm parlour.

The tangled oddly branching elm-top  
- it pressed almost underneath our little wide projecting already red-streaked mansard window -  
with its fantastical hoarfrost limbs  
sparkled, gleamed, glinted;  
the people trudging shoulders hunched past the houses across the square  
looked like bent fluffed up Samoyeds muffled to the nosetips;  
when over their heads an unexpected mini-avalanche came crashing down rainbow-bright spraying in all directions  
we were transported with delight!

We were like two little children!

Every malicious sweeping gust of wind that span in circling dusting whirls across the open ice-smooth expanse  
enhanced our sense of well-being,  
every little sled-bell tinkling bravely from around a corner  
rejoiced in our applauding recognition,  
the feisty snowman,  
whose lopsided hard-frozen battered Veterans Union topper has already been half knocked off  
by apparently anti-patriotic youthful vim armed with fur hat, greasy boots, mittens, earflaps and knitted woollen jacket,  
for a lark  
we dubbed "Uncle Theodor!"

*[1 page omitted: Christmas scene]*

.....  
Once more  
through the dying spring,  
young lindens  
spread their fragrance.

Nightingales no longer sing,  
flaminghearts in every garden turn pale, and wilt.  
How could so much wonder, how could so much bliss,  
so inexpressible, that should have been enough for two whole human lives,  
end  
this way?

Here at our favourite spot,  
where you were reading your little yellowed book that time,  
alone,  
I sit and stare  
after the vanished sun.

Everything  
is unsettled in me,  
everything  
around me trickles away,  
I don't know if I'm coming or going!

In vain do I cudgel, uselessly do I rack  
my brains.

Just yesterday,  
when after weeks of torment I begged and urged you:  
"But what is it?  
Have I upset or hurt you?  
Have I unknowing, not wanting to, somehow done you wrong?"  
- when I entreated, pleaded with you:  
"You're no longer how you used to be! You've changed towards me!  
Tell me, do!"

- when you threw yourself sobbing in my arms,  
bewildered,  
- I couldn't make out your words -  
your face distorted, streaming with tears,  
you blamed yourself to my face!

"I've been so bad, so horrible to you! Forgive, forgive me!  
You don't know, have no clue, how mortally unhappy I so often am! Sometimes I no longer understand myself!  
I really wanted not to go on living,  
if you didn't still feel a tiny, tiny bit of love for me!"

Your shoulders shook, your lips quivered,  
your knees trembled, you closed your eyes, your voice broke.  
I stood shattered before your contrite grief!  
I felt again so profoundly sure of your inmost love! Not for a single moment did I doubt your words!

Wearing your light airy forget-me-not dress,  
just as on that first occasion,  
you promised me you would come!

I was to believe and trust you:  
you'd never again turn coldly away from me! never again cause me pain!  
All, all of it  
should be as it was before!

I hoped, and waited.

And now?

Happy, anxious,

even before the appointed time,  
I watched out for you!  
Before me nimble shiny trembling little waves around our charmingly inviting emerald peninsula glittered, shimmered and flitted  
across the broad bright shimmering June meadows,  
ceaselessly, incessantly  
playing, juggling, dancing, tumbling, tagging, rocking,  
thousands of butterflies,  
the high heavens above  
gleamed.

You didn't come!

The shadows of the alders loomed and lengthened,  
the soundless play of butterflies grew more and more languid,  
across the ever more silent plain the first most tenuous veil of scented haze  
was already spilling spreading stretching.

My yearning desire for you  
deepened!

Where were you?

Evening dimmed,  
pale hovering misty distances took slowly on a tint of bluegrey,  
and white placid afternoon clouds became fiery blazing castled mountains!

I waited. How long ...

Ever and again  
back into old wonderful times,

heavy with memory,  
my thoughts plunged.  
Every shared  
tiniest joy  
painfully  
reawakened in me!

To have you! Have you! Never let you go!

Was it all now  
really  
over?

Out of sight,  
like choked-back sobs,  
the murmuring of the river beneath the willows.

You're not coming!

The approaching night  
shivers through me with its coolness,  
water gurgles,  
the last pale streak up there  
goes out.

Through the dark, at my side, I grope for the red flowers.

They've faded.  
You've forgotten me!

## BACKGROUND NOTES

### First Album

- [1] The nocturnal visitor is not an actual long-deceased loved one, but the Muse of German poetry, for so long neglected and abused by a rotten literary culture.  
The etching *Im Tiergarten*, by Lovis Corinth (1858-1925) was made for Holz' 1904 work *Dafnis: lyrisches Porträt aus dem 17ten Jahrhundert* (Dafnis: lyrical portrait from the 17<sup>th</sup> century) – which was his only commercial success in the realm of poetry.
- [2] Friedrichstrasse: somewhat like London's Oxford Street.
- [3] In English as *Down There, or The Damned*, Huysman's 1891 novel depicts a Satanist cult still active in Paris. The French lines read: "Then, in its white splendour, the soul of the Middle Ages radiated into this room".
- [5] The picture is a detail from a cartoon by artist and photographer Heinrich Zille (1858-1929) who produced extensive documentation of everyday life in rapidly growing Berlin. Zille was much loved by ordinary Berliners: a cab driver, recognising him, refused to take his money.
- [12] The Bo tree is what Buddha sat under to attain enlightenment.  
The shepherdess and the chimney sweep feature in a Hans Christian Andersen fairytale, from which lines 6-17 are drawn.
- [14] One of five poems set to music by Karl Weigl (1881-1949) in *Fünf Gesänge aus Phantasus* (1905). There's a recording of these at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P-21TcnN1HM> (regrettably low-volume). See a full set of Holz poems as Lieder at [www.lieder.net](http://www.lieder.net).
- [16] Some of the names (Thiel, Knorr) and context feature in 'The first schoolday', one of the three novellas in the 1889 *Papa Hamlet*, which Holz published in collaboration with Johannes Schlaf under the joint pseudonym Bjarne P Holmsen.  
Hoffmann (1814-82) was a prolific writer of children's adventure stories.  
The drawing by Ernst Liebermann accompanied the 1907 reprint of the poem in *Jugendblätter*, a magazine for young people.
- [18] Dinner: 'Mittag' in the original, so the midday meal. In the U.K. the upper classes take 'lunch' at midday and 'dinner' in the evening. The lower orders have 'dinner' followed by 'tea' or 'supper'. The timing of this 'dinner' is clear from the context.
- [19] The Tiergarten is Berlin's answer to Hyde Park.  
The reader may not at once detect the contempt for Prussian militarism lurking in this simple scene; it emerges more clearly in the next poem.  
The picture is from a set of 100 cigarette cards issued by WD & HO Wills in 1895.
- [20] Victory Row is the Siegesallee, a broad avenue driven through the Tiergarten in 1895, lined on both sides with grandiose bombastic statues commissioned by the Kaiser.
- [24] 'slithery mer-fogies': the phrase 'glamsrige Meertaper' took some researching! Eventually an 1882 dictionary of Prussian provincialisms yielded 'glamsrig: glatt, schlüpfrig' (smooth, slippery). 'Meertaper' is a 'dodderer of the seas', as depicted in several paintings by Swiss artist Arnold Böcklin (1827-1901), like the detail shown here.
- [29] The picture is a detail from Arnold Böcklin's *Ideal Spring Landscape*.
- [38] Holz married Emilie Wittenberg in 1893. They had three sons: Werner (=Biela) 1894, Walter 1895, and (too late for this poem) Günther 1900. (Walter would go missing in action during the German retreat in summer 1918.)
- [42] Some critics accused Holz of "spoiling" the much-translated Frog Haiku by Matsuo Basho (1644-94): 'an ancient pond / a frog jumps in / the splash of water'. But Holz' poem was first

printed in 1893, when he could not have known of Basho. (Holz does show Japanese influence in his later work.)

- [45] Garden colonies – a superior version of the British allotments – were a feature of rapidly growing Berlin. The picture is by Zille (see note [5] above.)
- [46] In 1848 revolutionary uprisings rocked several European cities, but the middle-class insurgents were unable to mobilise mass support. On 18 and 19 March 1848 the Berlin authorities shot large numbers of people.
- [47] The sketch is by Käthe Kollwitz: *Bread!*
- [48] Himmelschlüsselchen (keys to Heaven) is one of many German words for cowslip.

## Second Album

- [51] This verse and the next were expanded greatly in subsequent editions of *Phantasmus*. A longer version of this one was translated by David Dodd – see the Translator’s Notes at the front of this volume.  

In November 1898 the Viennese art periodical *Ver Sacrum* published illustrations for ten items by Arno Holz; this one was made by Koloman Moser.
- [54] Dhaulagiri is a Himalayan massif in Nepal.
- [55] The illustration is another from the *Ver Sacrum* series, also by Koloman Moser.
- [56] The illustration is by Rudolf Jettmar.
- [59] The illustration is by Alfred Roller.
- [66] In the 1916 edition, this little intro had expanded to 92 very large pages, and in the 1962 Collected Works filled the entire 460-page vol. II, where it was graced with Holz’s title ‘The Thousand and Second Tale’.
- [67] Holz’ father was an apothecary in Rastenburg, East Prussia.
- [68] rum’nate: the German word is ‘simmiliere’, used by uneducated people to mean ‘ponder’.
- [70] Preaching to the poor, or genuine admonition to savour the world, despite adversity?  

The photo, possibly by Zille (see note [5] above), is of the medieval Berlin street Am Krögel.
- [71] Herr Fiebig: actually Hugo Krügel, compiler of an 1870 collection of songs and ballads about the Franco-Prussian War.  

*Klinginshertz!* “Chime into the heart” (1883, when Holz was just 20).  
The German book titles are: *Die Wunder der Zeugung*, F.G.K. Hildebrand ca. 1866; *Liebe und Ehe*, F. Weiss 1851; *Der Mensch und sein Geschlecht*, J.F.E. Albrecht, 1880.  
There are several possible paintings of a bathing nymph, by e.g. the Swede Adolf Wertmüller (1751-1811), or an even less-clad version by the American John Vanderlyn (1775-1852).  
Alfenide: an alloy of nickel, copper and zinc.  
A character in Holz’s 1896 comedy drama *Sozialaristokraten* (Social Aristocrats) edited a magazine called *Herzblättchen*.
- [75] Ludwig Richter: prominent artist (1803-84) of Late Romantic and Biedermeier periods, known for his fairytale illustrations.  

Daniel Chodowiecki (1726-1801) was the most famous engraver and illustrator in 18<sup>th</sup> century Germany.  
Vertiko: a waist-high cupboard with two doors and a small drawer.  
Redoute was a typical name for a dance hall.
- [76] Christiane Vulpius (1765-1816) was Goethe’s lover from 1788 (wife from 1806), and mother of his children.

- Jobst Sackmann (1643-1718) was a theologian who preached in Plattdeutsch.  
 Plattdeutsch phrase: ‘toasts him with a dram of caraway liqueur.’
- [77] This biting little verse is aimed at the pseudo-aristocratic aesthete Stefan George, of whose output Holz wrote: ‘Never has such an extravagantly stuffed word-sausage been encased in such artificial ornamentation’. (*Collected Works*, vol. X, p. 488) Along with [79] and [98], it reveals the depth of Holz’ problems with the literary establishment.
- [78] Reinhard Piper (later founder of the Piper Verlag), one of the small group of poets who clustered around Holz, was invited to the home of well-off Rolf Wolfgang Martens, another member of the group, and in his memoirs wrote about this visit: ‘Then I walked across thick carpets. From the first room with a reddish light I entered another with a blue light. On the walls hung weapons, mirrors in grandiose frames, oil paintings.’  
 George Ohnet (1848-1918): popular French novelist disparaged by the critics.  
 Julius Stinde (1841-1905): journalist who wrote burlesques and plays in Plattdeutsch, as well as a series of novels about a lower middle class Berlin family.  
 Max Klinger (1857-1920): sculptor, painter, graphic artist.  
 Anton von Werner (1843-1915): painter of mainly historical subjects; hostile to Modern Art.  
 Ludolf Waldmann (1840-1919): singer, actor, director; composed popular and patriotic songs.
- [80] The Grunewald forest in the west of Berlin became accessible as a recreation area from 1879.  
 Pushbikes: ‘highway fleas’ in the original; I haven’t found a suitable English slang equivalent.  
 Pankow: Berlin suburb. The rousing chorus makes a brief appearance in this 2017 video by the (former East German) rock music band Pankow (fast-forward to 03:40):  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DQ99rFRNjVE> .  
 Rixdorf (Neukölln): famous for dance halls. See [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Li3Az4JJtwg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Li3Az4JJtwg) for a jolly example.  
 A crowdsayer is at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=UN\\_wrF8Vteo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UN_wrF8Vteo).  
*Die Holzauktion im Grunewald* was a popular 1892 dance tune by Franz Meissner, referring to tree clearances when parts of the forest were being developed for villas. Listen here:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yH3tgkZ8yjk>  
 “Tortured Dog”: “Hundequäle” is a jokey reference to the Hundekehle (‘dog’s neck’) restaurant by the lake of the same name, as depicted on the contemporary postcard.  
 The Blue Flower was the favourite symbol of the Romantic movement.
- [83] ‘Pansy’ in German is ‘Stiefmütterchen’ (Little Stepmother).
- [84] The illustration, from the *Ver Sacrum* series, is by Adolf Böhm.
- [86] Tarlatan: a loose weave like cheesecloth, much used by printers to wipe inkplates.
- [94] The illustrations to [94] and [95] are by Friedrich König.
- [95] Katerlieschen is the foolish wife in the comical Grimm’s folktale ‘Frederick and Catherine’.
- [96] This poem and the next are about the ‘Regiment Sassenbach’ – the small group of like-minded poets who clustered around Holz between 1897 and 1903 (see the Afterword).  
 Kitagawa Utamaro (1753-1806): leading artist of *ukiyo-e* woodblock printing.  
 Pietro Mascagni (1863-1945): Italian opera composer.
- [97] Cobbler’s globe: a glass globe filled with water, used in pre-electric times by artisans to focus diffuse sunlight in their poorly-lit workshop.  
 Monstrosities: i.e. poems submitted by the Regiment to each other’s criticism under Holz’ watchful eye.



**PART TWO** [listed in the order they appear in the text]

- [VII/5] ecrasite: an explosive developed in Austria in the 1880s.
- [III/3] Death ...scythe: recalls a Bechstein fairytale where three wishes enable the trapping of Death in a pear tree.
- [III/13] The title is from Psalm 90:10: 'The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, **yet is their strength** labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.'
- [III/17] One day Holz and his associate Stolzenberg discussed what would constitute the lowest boundary of material for poetry, and agreed that it always depended on the poet's talent. The conversation occurred near a disgusting pile of urban refuse. Holz put the discussion to the test in this piece; Stolzenberg refused to take part.
- [VI/16] The church is on Breitscheidplatz, at the eastern end of Kurfürstendamm.  
'Orange Gong': Apfelsinenorden – mocking term for the widely awarded Royal Prussian Centenary Medal.  
Austern-Mayer was a high-class oyster bar at 237 Kurfürstendamm.
- [VI/19] This text is lifted directly from Holz' 1913 play *Ignoramibus*.
- [I/2] Holz was known to his friends as a kind and decent man. Yet (like Nietzsche) he was only too aware of 'the beast within'.
- [II/20] The Mourning Cloak butterfly is also known in the U.K. as the Camberwell Beauty.  
The German flower-names are all evocatively composed of everyday words; some English equivalents are less familiar (or even Latin): 'beesuck' is Phacelia, 'kingcandles' are Mullein. 'Flaminghearts' (further down) may be Dicentras.

## AFTERWORD

by Robert Wohlleben,  
translated by C. D. Godwin<sup>1</sup>

### A poet's transformations

Every decent human on attaining the age of 18 makes verses. I was one, and made a few. But then this "youthful ailment" which in others no doubt mostly occurs in acute form, with me soon became alarmingly chronic. I suffered for years. And everything revolved for me around this one imperative, I was as obsessed as a mediaeval flagellant with his notion of penitence: verses, verses, verses!<sup>2</sup>

Thus, self-mockingly, Arno Holz on his beginnings as a poet. With astonishing energy, Holz produced poem after poem: barely in his twenties he had published two volumes of verse, in content and form still utterly conventional. He justified them to a friend as

...untendentious poems, or attempted poems, of a budding young poet whose highest ideals revolve around blue eyes, flagons of wine and suchlike folderol. A stage every young person must go through before his face grows serious.<sup>3</sup>

Yet already the "literary revolution" was stirring inside Arno Holz, as he took a stand against the stock epigonal inventory and vocabulary of the currently popular lyric. In summer 1885 (Holz just 22) there appeared his virtuoso *Das Buch der Zeit. Lieder eines Modernen* (The Book of Time: Songs of a Modern): still conventional in form, yet in content rebelliously provocative. It applied rhyming vocabulary to depict the everyday, an innovation that set Holz apart from the typical lyric of the age. The 16-page poem "Ecce Homo!" for example offers as rhymes Kalabreserhut (Calabrian, or Republican, hat); Parlament; Druckerei (printshop); Grossstadt-Trottoir (metropolitan pavement); Gesundheits-Elixir (elixir of health); Broschüren (brochures), Mandat (mandate).

The poems aroused attention, but reactions were highly disparate. The poet Detlev von Liliencron – well-regarded by the "Naturalists", fervent monarchist and Bismarck admirer – was both enthused and appalled, describing Holz as "an awful social democrat of reddest hue" but nevertheless "a poet of the first rank, absolutely the first."<sup>4</sup> One critic described the volume as "a swamp flower of pessimism"<sup>5</sup>; the satirical magazine *Kladderadatsch* advised Holz to set up as a vinegar manufacturer. No publisher in Imperial Germany was bold enough to challenge Bismarck's anti-socialist law, which threatened fines and imprisonment for "spreading dangerous social democracy"; so *Das Buch der Zeit* appeared in Zurich. A charge of indecency laid

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<sup>1</sup> See Acknowledgements for information on Robert Wohlleben. In response to my invitation Robert supplied a 7,000 word draft in German, extremely thorough with extensive footnotes, which I felt would overwhelm a new Anglophone readership. I am grateful to Robert for approving my much shorter adaptation into English.

<sup>2</sup> Arno Holz: *Die Kunst: Ihr Wesen und Ihre Gesetze* (Art: its essence and its laws). Berlin 1891, p.10.

<sup>3</sup> Letter to Max Trippenbach, 1 November 1884, in Holz, *Briefe*, Munich 1948, p.59.

<sup>4</sup> Letter to H. Friedrichs, editor of a magazine of Domestic and Foreign Literature.

<sup>5</sup> Holz, *Briefe*, p.63.

against a copy brought into the Empire was dropped when the authorities realised there were too few copies to worry about.

### The germ of the “Middle Axis” *Phantasmus*

*Das Buch der Zeit* concludes with 13 strophes titled “Phantasmus”, each strophe having four eight-line verses. (Holz claimed he began to write these while still in his teens.) The name of a Greek god of dreams at first glance seems to announce an escapist dream sequence. But the first strophe lands us smack into hard reality:

|                                        |                                       |
|----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Ihr Dach stieß fast bis an die Sterne, | The roof soared almost to the stars.  |
| Vom Hof her stampfte die Fabrik,       | Thuds came from the backyard factory. |
| Es war die richtige Mietskaserne       | It was a proper tenement slum,        |
| Mit Flur- und Leiermannsmusik!         | With hall- and hurdy-gurdy music!     |

|                                          |                                         |
|------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Im Keller nistete die Ratte,             | Rats nested in the cellar,              |
| Parterre gabs Branntwein, Grog und Bier, | Ground floor had brandy, grog and beer. |
| Und bis ins fünfte Stockwerk hatte       | And all the way to the fifth floor      |
| Das Vorstadtend sein Quartier            | The borough’s misery had its abode.     |

It’s the milieu of a starving poet, reminiscent of Carl Spitzweg’s archetypal 1839 painting “The Poor Poet”. Grandiose ideas loom as a dream-flight from the attic, e.g.:

|                                           |                                  |
|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Ein grüner Turban schmückt das Haupt mir, | A green turban adorns my head,   |
| Von Seide knittert mein Gewand,           | My clothes are rustling silks,   |
| Und jeder Muselmensch hier glaubt mir,    | And every Musselman believes me: |
| Ich wär der Fürst von Samarkand!          | That I was Prince of Samarkand!  |

But always we are reminded by adjacent lines of the wretched conditions in which the poet (and his neighbours) live; or a pithy saying contradicts the dream-flights:

|                                      |                                               |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Dem Elend dünkt ein Stückchen Butter | In misery a dab of butter                     |
| Erhabner als der ganze Faust!        | Seems more sublime than all of <i>Faust</i> ! |

The programme of contrasts eventually becomes a vote against conditions of reality that cannot be dreamed away. Reality simply switches off the dreams:

|                                      |                                          |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Sein Freund, der Doctor, aber zierte | His friend the doctor hummed and hah’ed, |
| Brutal sich durch das Kämmerlein     | Pacing brutally about the little room,   |
| Und schneuzte sich und constatirte   | And blew his nose and then attested      |
| »Verhungert!« auf dem Todtenschein.  | “Starvation!” as the cause of death.     |

Holz introduced the sequence as “the soul states of a young poet defeated by the triviality of his milieu, up there in Berlin N. in an attic room. Was it mere chance, or more than that?”<sup>6</sup>

In the 1898-99 *Phantasmus* Holz forsook the lachrymosity of the earlier “Phantasmus”, to which it bore almost no resemblance. The starving poet was now a “cardboard prop, tucked away in the box room”, the earlier version merely “a premature self-portrait.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Arno Holz: *Revolution der Lyrik*. Berlin 1899, p.10.

Disappointed by the reception of *Das Buch der Zeit*, the ambitious activist decided to try his hand at prose. An attempted autobiography of childhood was abandoned (a Proust lost?); then in 1887 Holz made his way to Paris where he bought all seven volumes of Zola's critical works, and delved into the novel and the role of the novelist as observer and experimenter; this led to collaboration with his friend Johannes Schlaf on three novellas published in 1889 as *Papa Hamlet* (under the pseudonym Bjarne P Holmsen, Nordic writers being fashionable in Germany at the time). They also collaborated on a play, premiered in 1890, *Die Familie Selicke* (The Selicke Family), depicting a lower middle-class Berlin family in naturalistic terms: one character even spoke authentic Berlin dialect.

### The 1898-99 *Phantasmus*

Meanwhile, as galloping industrial, technological, demographic and social changes transformed Berlin, Holz continued to experiment with poetry. Yet his approach was not to throw all tradition overboard:

You arrive at the principle of form not by turning previous findings on their head, but by freeing them from whatever is superfluous. ... not a radical break, but a new phase of development from old roots!<sup>8</sup>

Such an *evolutionary* approach proved no more acceptable to the German literary world than a more *revolutionary* approach might have been. Reactions to the 1898-99 *Phantasmus* were generally hostile, ranging from incomprehension to invective. One critic likened Holz' poems to a literary purgative, and hoped the soft paper they were printed on would prove useful in every family privy! Others considered that just anybody could write in Holz' new style, and "proved" this with lampoons.

The Middle Axis typography also aroused controversy: critics read deep significance (or nonsense) into what Holz admits he adopted initially simply as a "quirk", but then justified thus:

Say this line contains just one syllable. But the next line may have twenty or more. If I use left-justification, the eye is forced to take twice as long to scan the lines. On the principle of least effort etc.!<sup>9</sup>

But the Middle Axis served primarily the sound-picture of the poems. Holz rejected the use of words-as-music as an end in itself (cf. Introduction, note 11.); what he sought was the "necessary rhythm": "A lyric that ... is carried, purely formally, simply by the rhythm which comes alive only by means of *that* which is struggling to come to expression through it." Natural rhythm was the constant controlling factor as he sought "utmost simplicity" and "the most natural rhythm possible"<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Arno Holz: *Die Blechschmiede* (The tin-smithy), Dresden 1921 p.433.

<sup>8</sup> Holz: *Revolution...* p.56.

<sup>9</sup> Holz, *Revolution...* p.62

<sup>10</sup> Holz, *Revolution...* pages 24 and.29.

Rhyme fell away, its banal over-use having become unhelpful to poets.

By now the formally more “standard” contents of *Das Buch der Zeit* had become accepted as virtuoso productions. But the public reacted unfavourably to the same poet’s unrhymed unmetrical *Phantasmus*.

### A lyrical world-picture

In the 1898-99 *Phantasmus*, Arno Holz attempts to construct via lyrics a world-picture comprising succinctly sketched details of a stream of consciousness, test samples from flowing water, the reservoir of motifs being virtually without limit:

The new ‘world-picture’, for which almost all lyricists of this era strive, is not to be achieved by reverting to the archaic, but by an ever stronger splintering and faceting of all attainable complexes of knowledge and feeling, whether dreams, visions, instinctual impulses, concrete experiences, reminiscences, the scientific, the religious, even the everyday. The whole thing is a first attempt to lay bare the consciousness of all the varied realms of experience, in their unsorted juxta- and super-positions; corresponding at some distance to Freud’s attempts in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900).<sup>11</sup>

Poem [66] indicates how ideas come to the poet: “along past the wallpaper / off now on a wonderful trip to ancient lands.” Returning home is an escape from the pressures of the everyday, which the house door keeps at bay. The wallpaper is now a broad territory for thought-journeys ... in a trance dimension. In the 1916 *Phantasmus*, a 92-page extravaganza finds Holz with his fellow “Regiment Sassenbach” poets in the attic room where, rather than wallpaper, it is the mortared ceiling and crackling stove that lead to “inspirations, phantasms, creations, enthusiasms, hallucinations, exaltations, notions, twitchings and brainstorm” tied to “causes, conditions, chances, impressions, influences, experiences and occurrences”. From the crackling rumbling squealing stove they perceive “deeds, / facts, / deals, affairs, happenings, events, occurrences, / executions, actions, operations, / tragedies, interludes, manoeuvres, procedures, / adventures.”

And *Phantasmus* continued to grow. In 1899 Holz envisaged that, with luck, it would eventually comprise not just the hundred pieces he had just published, but a thousand similar pieces. Instead, he began revising those hundred along with a further 39 not yet published. Poem [66] grew even beyond the 1916 version to cover an entire 382 page volume in the 1924-25 edition, and 468 pages in the posthumous edition of 1961-64, where it was subtitled “The Thousand and Second Tale”. Only three of the original 100 were left untouched: [3], [21] and [23]. New motifs were added, and the language proliferated very differently from the succinctness of the originals: piled-up near-synonyms; whole trains of superlatives; alliterations; neologisms; even some rhymes. How did Holz justify the change?

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<sup>11</sup> Jost Hermand, Introduction to the Johnson Reprint edition of the 1916 *Phantasmus*, New York/London 1968, p.xxxvi-vii, see also p. xxix.

Between 1903 and 1911 almost his only income came from five dramas written (four with Oskar Jerschke) purely for the stage.<sup>12</sup> By 1913 the royalties amounted to 45,000 Goldmark. The tragedy *Traumulus* alone brought in 15,000 Mark in 1904, enough – somewhat recklessly – to furnish the family home in good middle-class style. But as Holz wrote to Maximilian Harden in 1903:

Why did I take up this new “business”? The realisation, which has only grown stronger each passing year, that Art in its sublimest noble meaning has no traction with the contemporary public. Least of all today, and in the theatre. But I cannot turn my back on the theatre, for I have to exist! Even if, maybe ten or twenty years later, simply to provide a home for my one and only *Phantasmus*, into which I pour all the art that contemporaries spurn.<sup>13</sup>

Some *Phantasmus*-style passages occur the plays: poem [VI/19] comes from *Ignorabimus* (1913) in which, Holz declares, he succeeded in forming lyric and drama into a unity.<sup>14</sup> The poem beginning “Somewhere in Indo-China” (poem [I/2] in the 1916 *Phantasmus*, expanded from little [52] in the earlier edition) was described as:

nothing less and nothing more than a musical score, which should therefore be not read but performed. And if there is as yet no performer ... one day he shall appear! I see him facing a darkened hall, walled in by heavy folded curtains, seated on a timeless curule chair of power, in a costume just as timeless, the changing expressions sharply illuminated and not only his word speaks, his tone, his voice, ... the whole man, his slightest gesture, his minutest movements.<sup>15</sup>

The audience, he prophesied, would remain enraptured even as the lights went up.

*Phantasmus* makes the same absolute demand on the reader as for example Milton or Joyce, or in the German world Quirinus Kuhlmann<sup>16</sup> and Arno Schmidt.<sup>17</sup> No wonder it was hard to build an audience: critics complained that “a poem should not be a dictionary”<sup>18</sup>; and “lyrical substance [is] destroyed by piled-up details”<sup>19</sup>. The difficulties are understandable, for what reader is capable of imagining these texts *spoken out loud*? They would have to be “word-musicians”, and Holz says “those are rare.”<sup>20</sup> The motif complex, too, is hard to bring into order. Holz considered the work the “autobiography of a mind”. The overarching theme is an implicit oscillation between the awareness of biographical realities and the boundless possibilities of

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<sup>12</sup> The four co-written plays were *Traumulus* (1904), *Frei!* (1907), *Gaudeamus!* (1908), and *Büxl* (1911).

<sup>13</sup> Letter in the Harden collection at the Bundesarchiv in Koblenz.

<sup>14</sup> The 1986 production of *Ignorabimus* by Luca Ronco in Prato lasted 12 hours. Holz himself had estimated five hours: no longer than *Tristan*.

<sup>15</sup> Arno Holz: *Phantasmus. Zur Einführung* (Phantasmus: an introduction): Berlin 1922, p.26.

<sup>16</sup> Baroque mystic (1651-89), one of the few poets (Giordano Bruno; Anne Askew, ...)ever burned at the stake.

<sup>17</sup> Novelist (1914-79), described by a critic as “that rarest of rarities: an experimental writer who’s fun to read.”

<sup>18</sup> *Berliner Börsenzeitung*, 22 April 1917.

<sup>19</sup> Editor Gerhard Schultz’ view of the later versions; see the ‘mini-facsimile’ edition of *Phantasmus*, Reclam 1968.

<sup>20</sup> *Introduction to Phantasmus*, Berlin 1922, p.40.

mind-games. Hence the enormous range between the crude exhortations of an advertising pillar (poem VII/10 in the 1916 edition), via impressionistic notation of moods, to the monumental cinematic imaginings of “Somewhere in Indo-China”, and the “Thousand and Second Tale”.

*Phantasmus* is not to be judged by conventional and familiar concepts of literary taste or properties of the lyric genre. So one must venture into the unfamiliar and wrestle with new categories. Alfred Döblin was one of the few who came to an appreciative verdict:

We understand better what exists within these mammoth creations, the streaming rhythms, if we recall modern painting, non-objective, so-called abstract. Kandinski, say. With Kandinski you see bright expanses, colourful lines, and the whole swings into place as a composition, a together of colour-groups, of which it is not permitted to think or to ask: what's it supposed to be? The painting of huge wide surfaces into a composition that the understanding cannot follow is the material parallel to Holz' mammoth creations.<sup>21</sup>

## The Regiment Sassenbach

Even before the 1898-99 *Phantasmus*, Holz had gathered a small group of friends around him who wrote lyrics in his style and met regularly, always on a Wednesday in his attic study<sup>22</sup> to discuss them. Four published slim volumes at the same time as *Phantasmus*, with the same publisher, Johann Sassenbach, hence the group's nickname.<sup>23</sup> Poem [97] “Onto my test bench” indicates how Holz and his friends went about critiquing each other's efforts (under the “master's” watchful eye/ ear of course).<sup>24</sup>

Many “student pieces” bear comparison with poems by “the master”, e.g. Robert Reiß<sup>25</sup>, depicting complex sensitivities around a child burial with a minimum of means:

Der Pastor spricht ein Gebet.

Kaum weint dir Mutter.

Schon im Gespräch über den nächsten Kegelabend  
steckt der Vater am Kirchhofsthor  
die Cigarre in Brand.

Jetzt steht die Wiege leer fürs Nächste.

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<sup>21</sup> Alfred Döblin: *Arno Holz: Die Revolution der Lyrik: Eine Einführung in sein Werk und eine Auswahl* (Arno Holz: Revolution in the Lyric: an introduction to his work and a selection). Wiesbaden 1951, p.18-19.

<sup>22</sup> Berlin Wilmersdorf, Pariserstrasse 52, rear.

<sup>23</sup> The four slim volumes, together with a fifth published separately, are collected in *Antreten zum Dichten!* (Fall in for poetising!), edited with commentary by Robert Wohlleben. Leipzig: Reinecke & Vos, 2013.

<sup>24</sup> The American SF writer Ursula Le Guin reports similar travails with a writer's workshop: “An uneven lot of stories, ... lots of good stuff, bogs of imitation, sloughs of despond, lightning flashes of brilliance, great ideas badly worked out, stale ideas beautifully imagined, stories with no ending, stories with adipose middles, stories that were all beginning.” Lee Harding (ed): *The Altered 'I'*. New York: Berkley 1978.

<sup>25</sup> Robert Reiß: *Farben* (Colours). Berlin: Johann Sassenbach 1899, p.28.

The pastor recites a prayer. / The mother sheds hardly a tear. /  
Already chatting about the next skittle evening / the father at the churchyard gate /  
lights up his cigar. / The cradle lies empty for the next one.

This is no crude denunciation of the mindless urging to “make babies”. Reiß points rather to a medical crisis: the high rate of infant deaths.<sup>26</sup> The apparent indifference of the parents suggest thorough habituation. Rolf Wolfgang Martens, another member of the group, depicts the psychic deformation produced by socialisation:<sup>27</sup>

Einst  
war meine Seele ein Lämmchen.  
Sie packten es,  
schoren ihm gierig seinen weißen Flaum,  
und auf sein rosiges Schnuffelschnäuzchen schlugen sie mit Knütteln.  
Sein jämmerliches Weinen  
rührte sie nicht.  
Aus meinen Schwielen  
wurden Schuppen.  
Ich wuchs zum grünen Drachen mit langer Krokodilschnauze,  
unter jedem Zahn eine Giftdrüse.  
Ich beiße alle in den Bauch!  
Sie weichen mir aus.  
Ich bin böse, unchristlich und überhaupt ein Gemütsmensch.

Once / my soul was a little lamb. / They grabbed it, / greedily sheared its white fluff, /  
and beat its dear pink little nosy-wosy with clubs. / They were unmoved by /  
its woeful cries. / The calluses / became scales. / I grew to a green dragon with  
a long crocodile snout, / a venom gland under every tooth. / I bite them all  
in the belly! / I'm wicked, unchristian, and a thoroughgoing sentimentalist.

This reads as if written for the cabaret, as is the case with other “Holz School” lyrics. I surmise that the “Regiment Sassenbach” was stimulated by the first literary cabarets that began appearing in Berlin in 1897-98. What the critics judged to be banal or inadvertently comic in the productions of the “Holz School” was often ideal cabaret material, like this pointed paradoxical grotesquerie from Robert Reiß:

Aus der Sofaecke  
predigt mein alter Grosspapa.  
»Junge!  
Dass Du nie heiratest!«  
Entfaltet eine rote Kinderwindel,  
und schneuzt noch einen Placken Schnupftaback hinein.  
Durch das Stübchen summen die Fliegen.

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<sup>26</sup> Berlin statistics: 1907: 17.7 per thousand infant deaths in the first year. 2007: 3.49 per thousand.

<sup>27</sup> Rolf Wolfgang Martens: *Befreite Flügel* (Liberated wings). Berlin: Johann Sassenbach 1899, S. 17.



From his corner sofa / my old granddad preaches at me: /  
“Boy! / Don’t you ever get married!” / He unfolds a red kid’s nappy /  
and clears his nose of another snort of snuff / Flies buzz about the room.<sup>28</sup>

The Holz School approach lives on, as in this 1970s verse from Ralf Thenior:<sup>29</sup>

**Der Trapper**

Aus den Savannen  
kommt er geritten  
mit heißem Gesicht  
das Gewehr auf dem Rücken  
er hätte noch weiter gejagt  
aber seine Mutti hat gesagt  
wenn die Lampen angehn  
kommst du nach Haus

**The Trapper**

Out of the savannah  
he comes riding  
his face hot  
rifle at his back,  
he would have kept on hunting  
but Mummy told him  
when the street lights go on  
you come back home

And in 2015 a secondary school in Bayreuth set its pupils the task of recasting Holz’ Tiergarten poem [19] for the modern day.<sup>30</sup> How well the cinematic *mise en scène* of the original guides the noting of all kinds of everyday perceptions:

**Im Zug (Mehmet Daglioglu)**

Im Zug sitze ich, tippe auf meinem Smartphone;  
freue mich über neues Datenvolumen.  
Vor mir stehend, eine junge Dame,  
sie spiegelt sich in meinem Display.  
Ich nehme die Kopfhörer aus den Ohren.  
Sie spricht mich an  
in ihrer verspiegelten Sonnenbrille  
– mein Spiegelbild –  
wie verliebt schaue ich sie an  
Der Schaffner spricht  
eine Durchsage.

**On the Train (Mehmet Daglioglu)**

On the train I sit tapping at my iPhone;  
happy about my new data package.  
Standing in front of me a young lady,  
she’s reflected in my display.  
I take the earbuds from my ears.  
She addresses me  
with her reflective sunglasses  
– my reflection –  
I stare at her infatuated  
The conductor makes  
an announcement.

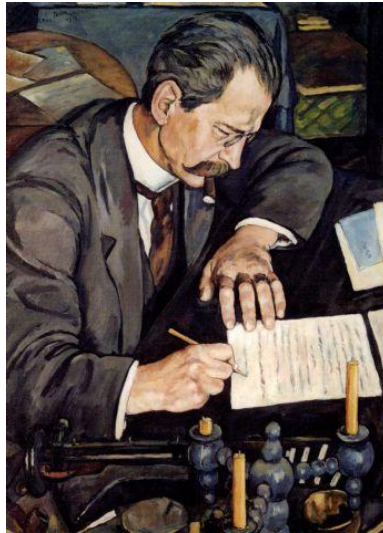
Robert Wohlleben    September 2020

[www.fulgura.de](http://www.fulgura.de)

<sup>28</sup> Robert Reiß: *Farben* (Colours). Berlin: Johann Sassenbach 1899, p.47

<sup>29</sup> Ralf Thenior: *Taurige Hurras* (Sad hurrahs). München: AutorenEdition 1977, p.119.

<sup>30</sup> <https://wwgbayreuth.wordpress.com/2015/07/22/arno-holz-im-thiergarten-und-einige-moderne-umdichtungen/>. (Arno Holz in the Tiergarten and some modern variations).



This volume contains all 100 poems from the 1<sup>st</sup> edition of *Phantasia*, plus a selection from the much enlarged 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. The Introduction and Afterword provide much background information and trace the influence of Holz on writers like Alfred Döblin and Arno Schmidt.

Arno Holz (1863-1929), a pioneer of German literary Modernism in the generation before the Expressionists, was active as poet, dramatist, critic and theoretician at a time when profound changes in newly-unified Germany were largely ignored by an ossified literary establishment. His poem-cycle *Phantasia* gives substance to his theory of how poetry (word-art) connects to World/Nature/Reality by attention to authentic *spoken* language.

These 100 poems, appearing in full for the first time in English, are distillations, exquisitely cut gemstones, moments of perception, memory, imagination captured in words and phrases whose impact comes from their very naturalness and simplicity, from the discipline with which the poetic sensibility selects and shapes and sets out on the page, in a format as important for the sound-images as the words themselves.

- **from the Introduction**

The ultimate 'secret' of *Phantasia* consists essentially in that I ceaselessly disassemble myself into the most heterogeneous things and shapes.

- **Arno Holz**

*Phantasia* ... proliferates in powerful images, ... the style-technique is developed to the height of virtuosity, a thing to marvel at, to learn from, and often simple, moving and delightful things are strewn through it.

- **Alfred Döblin**