

BATH HOUSE



**HANS HENNY
JAHNN**



BATH HOUSE

HANS HENNY JAHNN

TRANSLATED BY ADAM SIEGEL
WITH INKBLOTS BY JUSTIN KASE

SOLAR LUXURIANCE, 2015

INTRODUCTION

Hans Henny Jahnn's final novel(s), never completed, published posthumously: *Jeden ereilt es* (It Catches Up With Everyone). Originally published in Jahnn's collected works (Späte Prosa, Hamburg, 1994). Companion, source, and complement to his *Nacht aus Blei* (Night of Lead).



PARALIPOMENON I

I intend to leave neither the reader nor myself in the dark. Thus upon this work I pronounce something like a death sentence, for it has been moving, ever since my first foretaste of it, toward love. And could there ever be a love that was unobjectionable in the eyes of the unloving? By this I mean, knowing that once they are grown almost all men become unloving.

(You cannot just glide into eternity through the act itself, through living, through experiencing. For there is an eternal past which is part of an eternal future. This is where those who speak of heaven are mistaken. There are no half eternities.)

The Story of the Gold-Spangled Hustler

How love is born. The early days of poverty. All the wonderful talk of life.

How the cosmetics (and the perfumes) heighten the pleasure, lest a man stand ashamed before his lover (who might use him as a woman)¹. He loves him so much the more for being undisguised. But two hours each day, in disguise, is proof the other is really yielding to him, not just feigning.

¹In accordance with their orientation: that is, the younger is neither raped nor abused.

A question for the boy: Is he happy? The happiness of Antinous. Without love's favors and love's labors he would be nothing, not even a pretty doll. By love's favors and love's labors he is marked. He marks himself when he appears in public in make-up. (His white automobile. His monthly wages: 30,000 DM.) (The devastating effect his happiness has on the boys from the neighborhood: that those lacking in talent might become true virtuosos.)

(They will abide with one another their entire lives.)

The first discourse on dying (belief and non-belief in angels). The two pieces of tissue paper which the angels placed (folded together) in the drawer, beneath a tie box (there is none). They might wear gold bracelets. Gari repeatedly pushing his backside against Mathieu's abdominal wound (seemingly unmoved) — he is afraid he might be mortally wounded or killed. (He gets a schoolboy's cap and is protected because the gang thinks he can finger them to the police for attempted murder.)

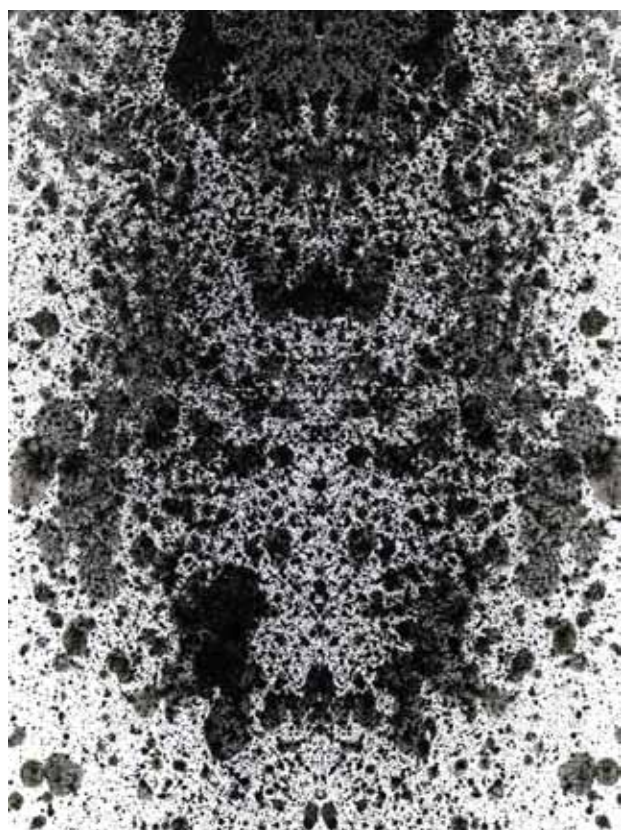
(Demonstrations outside the shipping firm offices. An injury. An apology from the Minister of the Interior. The coxswain second class who reports everyone, immediately branded a communist. The captain shooting the ship's boy dead with the canister on the 17th, even as he begs for his life on his knees.)

Frau Linde, who makes a bed for Gari on the chaise longue. Gari doesn't use it, he crawls into bed with Mathieu during night (night shirts). The differences (the nervous father, the more refined mother) with the doctor.

Gari (at last):

“Every hustler’s backside is a paradise, comparable to a barn whose gates no longer close, because of the tractors constantly driving in and out, battering the posts. —You can quit hoping, Martha, I’ll pay for your brandy, but not for your hole. It’s for just around the house, not for a grand adventure. There are no angels in your slippery folds. I’m saving my pound and half of flesh for myself.”

Boy (later): “If you need anything like me....”



BATH HOUSE

They were standing on the street. They turned off the street. Gari was carrying the suitcase.

“I have to find a place,” Matthieu said.

“You’ll find a place,” Gari said. “We’re not going to deviate from our ritual. First, we go to the bath house. When you take to the sea, wind and water all around you, you still stink of sailors’ berth. It doesn’t bother you if I stink or what I stink of. But I’m sleeping with Agnete too. A little washing up. But I imagine with you such procedures are less necessary.”

They got on a streetcar.

“There aren’t any hotels here with rooms cheap enough for me to be able to stay. Not even for a couple of nights.”

“You’re not going to be sleeping outdoors or in some flophouse, you can forget about that.”

They got off at the “Triangel” and walked down the street to the bath house on Foelledpark. Gari went to buy tickets for the steambaths. Mathieu grabbed his arm and held him back. “Not the steambaths, not right away —” he said timidly.

“Why should we skip it? You don’t have to be so stingy. I still have a couple of kroner.”

“It’s not that, Gari — it’s just that...I don’t feel like I’m very potent today.”

“Not very potent — what does you mean?”

“I might be embarrassed in front of everyone else. I might get excited when I look at you. I feel so uncertain, like I’m half-asleep. I have no poise —”

Gari understood. “It happens to everyone from time to time. You ought to know what happens to young sailors when they’ve had nothing but a ship’s deck under their feet for a couple weeks. Anyway, the way you say it makes it all sound strange, foolish, serious. So you need a bathing suit, fine. I’m always sporting my full pound of flesh, or even more. It almost looks like we’ve been trying too hard, like we’ve been holding ourselves back for too long —” Gari bought tickets to the swimming pool.

“The feeling will pass, Gari — it’s already gone — I was just afraid — only for a moment — that I was losing my mind, that I was losing sight of that contract we have with each other — that I was going to turn into something priapic, something ridiculous, something debased — and embarrass you. It was just a fit of insanity, but it’s over now.”

“Come here,” Gari pulled him inside.

In the changing room they took off their clothes without paying much attention to each other, and pulled on their bathing suits. Suddenly Gari shoved his friend up against the wooden wall and pressed the full weight of his body against him; he opened his mouth and pressed his full moist lips against Matthieu’s. For an instant Matthieu was paralyzed. He felt like swooning. Then he understood the full force of the kiss. Their teeth scraped. Gari’s tongue was in Matthieu’s

mouth. Almost against his will, as if in a dream, Matthieu drank Gari's saliva, let his tongue play around Gari's lips. Gari raised his knee and shoved hard between Matthieu's legs: the pain made Matthieu want to scream. But his mouth was closed, and the pain increased his ecstasy. Eyes closed, the pressure of Gari's face against his nose leaving him barely able to breathe, he gave in to the touch, to the kiss that went on for minutes; gradually, he tasted blood. He only dimly sensed Gari pulling away. He leaned half-slumped against the wooden wall, and heard, eyes still closed, the door opening, and then a slapping noise, like a belly-flop against the water. That's Gari, Matthieu thought. But he could still feel Gari. Who was this? It couldn't be Gari. He had jumped into the pool. But this other being, the one who was using Gari, possessing Gari's body, to be a body, his meat or whatever it is that we can grasp or feel, that solace which throbs at the same temperature as us.

"Don't betray me," Matthieu said softly. "Please don't betray me. For me hope takes but one form."

He was still there. Grander and more mature than the first time, clothed, when he was twelve or thirteen.

"You're naked," Matthieu said, "naked, like a dream promising something that never happens."

But the other one was no longer there. Matthieu's hands, which had been holding the abundance of this marvelous body, were empty. He still hadn't opened his eyes. "It wasn't that many years ago," he thought, "when he kissed me like that in Bengstborg, in the room we shared. Back then he was softer, more childlike. And his knee wasn't so hard." It was difficult for Matthieu to take in this brief glimpse of reality, this sudden blow. He wiped his lips with his hand. They were bloody. There was blood on the back of his hand.

“What’s happening to me?” he asked himself. “I need to get out of here. I need to jump into the pool—” But he remained motionless, leaning against the wall. He collected his thoughts. “A girl sees a boy on the street; she likes him. She doesn’t know who he is. She’s never said a word to him. She likes him. She doesn’t even know what it means that she likes him. The word has no weight to it. In the future it might acquire some gravity. It’s afternoon — the sun has suffused the earth with warmth, and in the middle of nowhere she’s assaulted, thrown to the ground, dragged into the tall grass. She sees it’s the boy she’s never said a word to lying on top of her. She doesn’t cry out; she doesn’t defend herself. She can’t see his face anymore. She just knows it’s him. Alone, she lies in the grass. She can hear him walking away. He’s long gone now. What does she feel? She feels the pain in her mouth from his fists when he beat her. She tastes the blood. She lies in the grass for a long time. — This is a story that didn’t happen but might have happened.” Something had happened between Gari and him. But he had to leave now. He wants to see Gari, how he moves through the water, how he stands on the tiles. He pulls himself together, steps to the edge of the pool, and dives into the water, surfaces, and begins to swim, slowly, calmly.

His thoughts came with a great deal of equanimity. “He is an angel,” he said to himself, and spitting out some water, “there can be no doubt, that’s how such beings are, somewhat vulgar maybe, but oh so wonderful. Especially those who do not know what they are. One cannot unmask them. One can only yield to them. One is damned to stay attached to them, while their only task is to appear as ordinary as everything else.” He dove back down and swam underwater. He rinsed himself free of thought or emotion, his dream-state, his odor, the thin crust of his dirt or filth. When he surfaced, he said, as he spat out more water, “An ache, a genuine ache in the kidneys, or maybe something in my liver or my bladder, a

toothache, a headache — that will temporarily dissolve this transitory image, so that this immortal image, this undying feeling might pass — this munificence, this abundance, these thighs, this back, all that yielded to the touch of his fingers. But the pain isn't here, it won't take me. The feeling is in my hands.” He looked up. Gari stood nearby, at the edge of the swimming pool. As was his wont, very much his wont, he was tempting, if not exceedingly seductive, freed of the angel once more and left behind, seemingly ignorant of who he actually was. He was talking to Sören. Sören was a twelve-year-old boy, a little small for his age. His one ambition was to claim and hold the title of best diver at the pool and hold it. Most boys his age masturbated, but he likely knew nothing of this pleasure: his desires were restricted to diving. Gari and Matthieu had met him the year before. Strangely enough, he was always on hand when they made their ritual visit to the bath house. Sören's manner of speaking was precocious, Gari's childlike. Matthieu came closer to the two of them and listened, occasionally nodding like an imbecile, bobbing his head, grimacing without reason, until it occurred to him that grimacing for no reason must look awful. The topic conversation eventually turned to Gari's throwing some five-öre coins in the water for Sören to retrieve and keep. Gari was stingy this time. He usually had Matthieu give him 25-öre coins. It was out of the question this time. Obviously, Sören would have preferred the bigger coins, but he kept his disappointment to himself. He hesitated to act on the transaction. He was looking for a pretext for raising his price. He feigned disinterest, he barely spoke, his responses mumbled. Finally he tugged down his bathing suit, held his penis and sent a high arc of pee into the water, as if to demonstrate his utter indifference, his contempt for all such affairs and arrangements. For him it was both a relief and an exciting provocation. He expected Gari or Matthieu or both of them together to reprimand him. Then he might have a reason to quarrel with them. But Gari

and Matthieu only watched as the stream, sparkling in the light, sprayed forth from the warm flesh and scattered into billions of droplets in the depths below. Droplets made of some substance or another, refined through a lengthy process of leaching and supplementing. Urea, for example, and other hormonally treated ingredients. Along with the brightest colors of amber, fish oil, cherry tree resin. Above, it was as though water, cacao, coffee, soup, milk, or vegetable broth had been added, but below it came out clear and filtered, as though run through the necessary membranes, appropriately concentrated and enriched with the most vital ingredients — “waste,” the foolish call it. And the wise...? — just look into the strangely relaxed face of someone relieving himself and you shall discover the animal that yields, innocent and mild, to the moment.

Someone shouted at them from the opposite end of the pool.

“You pig!” the lifeguard came running over. His wooden clogs clapped against the tiles. Quickly, Sören jumped into the wake of his own stream, and into the water. There was applause, both for the lifeguard and the boy. The other boys cheered Sören with a kind of roar. They danced around and threw their hands in the air. A fountain of pipes could scarcely have produced a more exuberant commotion. But they did nothing more. We live in the civilized world — Denmark, in a big city, in Copenhagen. The adults stood in the way. The adults felt differently. They sided with the lifeguard. They shared his moral convictions, all the paraphernalia of a well-ordered society and all its ineradicable superstitions regarding objectionable and less objectionable matters. In short, they made accusations, nonsensical comparisons to every piglet, farrow, sow, or castrated boar they claimed the wayward Sören resembled — Sören, who had relieved himself in an inappropriate place out of sheer foolishness and boorishness or whatever. The lifeguard went over to Gari and Matthieu

and reproached them for not having prevented this piggish impudence, this piggish disgrace, this piggish obscenity, for not having forcibly taken Sören by the hand to thoroughly teach him — in effect, they were guilty by association, for not behaving as ordinary people do. Of course, on the other hand, they were adults, and of course they had never been involved in outrages or violations such as these. Of course they hadn't, absolutely never, of course.

Matthieu cleared his throat. "It's not so bad," he said.

"Not so bad?" the lifeguard sputtered. "What's that supposed to mean?" He lowered his voice. "What do you mean by that?"

Matthieu was silent. Gari answered: "Who wouldn't want to piss in your pool?"

The lifeguard was taken aback. He gasped for breath, hardly able to take in a mouthful of air.

Then Matthieu launched into a mock-scholarly argument. He concentrated on the fundamentals, without overdoing them, of course. But he kept talking, and it killed time, if nothing else. "Urine," he said, "the urine of a healthy person is one of the most germ-free substances our body produces. And Sören is, in all probability, thoroughly healthy, through and through. Moreover, he is young, barely pubescent, and this greatly improves the purity of the substance, imbuing it with a degree of comeliness."

The lifeguard kept swallowing back air, and Matthieu realized he'd been speaking badly, that he would have to change his tone, if he were unable to withdraw into the wisdom of silence. But he did not want to be silent. He was filled with happiness, for a man and an angel had kissed him.

And he knew the demonic double nature of this being, this Gari, benign yet extreme, his flesh aloof yet dissolute, was a monster, seemingly made of stone, a colossus, one beneath whom people lay crushed, to be crushed, to be slain by all the coldness and severity of his substance; but Gari was also warm and filled with viscera, and at times he spoke in a manner that was vulgar and crude. And so Matthieu now spoke in a manner that was vulgar and crude.

“And knowing that these adults and their worn-out tools have been in the water is just as distasteful,” he began. “They jump in the water with their puckered, wrinkled assholes, it doesn’t matter if they have syphilis or drip with the clap. They’re much more disgusting than some boy’s peepee. To lick the hand wet with the contents of Sören’s bladder would be doing them a favor.”

The lifeguard closed his mouth and shook his head. He thought Matthieu was crazy. Indubitably. No need even to respond.

“Bravo,” Gari said, so quietly that only Matthieu could hear him. The conversation had reached its close, and the last word belonged to the lifeguard.

“It’s against the rules! Sir, you have to understand — you’re just being unreasonable when you argue with me. I misjudged you; I was mistaken.”

Sören was splashing in the water nearby, indifferent. The lifeguard started talking to another swimmer, the two of them conversing loudly and at length in mutual agreement. Gari vanished into the locker room for a moment and returned with some more 5-öre pieces. An odd number. He divided them up perfunctorily...

“Gari, did you really, actually — before you jumped into the pool — did you really kiss me?”

“You doubt it happened?”

“It was so strange — so unusual, like a fragment of the past—”

“Do you really and truly need to know?”

“I don’t know what we share. I’m so discouraged. I always feel like I need assurances, reassurances, the repetition of old promises.”

Gari untied the little leather bag containing Mathieu’s desiccated finger, and held the case underneath his friend’s nose. “Does this mean nothing?”

“These are oaths, Gari — oaths that testify to our being friends for such a long time. Along with them are lives, our daily existence, our souls, as we call them, and our bodies — they make us weak, they make demands on us — and at the end of it you’ve got a girl, your bride, along with the occasional girl from the streets, at least that’s what my father told me —”

“If you had a hole, Matthieu, you and I could have been flesh and blood for a long time together.”

“My God, that’s what it comes down to?”

“Our bodies have their preferences. For millions of years the rule has been that a hole is for sticking things into. How many millions of years it’s been, you know better than me. It was the Greeks, you know, who understood this rule — in every instance, and in every circumstance.”

“What are you trying to say?”

“Think about it. It’s simple enough. And you know it better than I do.”

Matthieu was desperate. He covered his face with his hands. Rashly, defiantly, swallowing back his tears, he said:

“But those boys cut a hole in my guts.”

“Maybe it was necessary,” Gari said.

“Necessary? Necessary for what? For who?”

“For me, Matthieu. That was when I woke up. I became someone else. I was assigned to you. And that hole, awful as it might have been, made you into something, something sublime, an image that drew itself toward my soul, to the exception of everything else. It was the reason for my love.”

“I don’t understand, Gari — I don’t understand you.”

“That was the day I became your friend. My perspective changed. I abandoned Tyge. I decided that if you died I would die with you.”

“Did you kiss me today, Gari? That’s what I need to know.”

“No.”

“You’re lying, Gari — you’re lying — to prove — that, that there’s someone else, that there’s this angel that you and I have — unwisely — always talked about.”

“No.”

“Gari — you want to deceive me — you want to shove me into some sort of twilight world. You know I’m confused and you want to confuse me even more.”

“No.”

“You don’t really believe in the angel — you just pretend, for my sake. At most, you believe in the conversations we used to have, those childish fantasies, those hypotheses—you believe in the fairy tale that we created around my fragile nerves, and my loneliness, this hermaphrodite life I’ve been forced to live.”

“But you believe in it.”

“I do believe in it, but I don’t know for sure. And now you want to prove to me, to prove it to me with forged proof — “

“But we love each other, Matthieu.”

“This situation of ours — it might be love.”

“I’m not a hustler, Matthieu.”

“So what is it then?”

“When people love one another — I’m talking about average people, normal people — you know, they make a baby, or babies, and that’s the way things are. They don’t have to pay attention to whatever nature demands of them. They’re barely listening. They swim in a stream. Someway, somehow, every one of them gets told what to do. They’re surrounded by role models, thousands of years worth of role models, and all their pubescent confusion counts for nothing. They’re most of them mere wage slaves of procreation. We who weren’t made like that for one another — we need angels

for role models, as substitute beings, as representatives for all our aspirations. They can do what we cannot, or are not allowed, or at least not yet allowed to do. It sounds a little complicated. And it doesn't help us for very long — at least not until the end. We must listen carefully. The voice that reaches us is often indistinct. Nature does not hesitate to lie or be ambiguous.”

“So there'll always be an impasse between us. Is that what you're saying, Gari? Our world is a dizzy fantasy. I might take your words for obscene, for saying our relationship is unnatural or repugnant. All the same, whenever I walk you, walk myself, back to the tactile, to the flesh and bone animating our souls, I see us in a state of great despair.”

“But that can change quickly,” Gari said almost cheerfully.

Matthieu slipped into his underwear, pulled on his shirt, and put on his pants. Gari remained naked, standing in the narrow enclosure, playing with the leather pouch around his neck, and watched his friend get dressed.

“Let me ask you one more time — did you kiss me before?”

“No,” Gari smiled. He made no attempt to conceal his artless cunning. And Matthieu, who was sitting bent over, tying his shoes, didn't believe him. “If you're not lying,” he said, “please keep in mind that my memory is not that reliable — it makes mistakes — errors and hasty conclusions — there are dangers.”

“Stand up, Matthieu. Look at me. The floor doesn't care if you're staring at it. I'm still here with you in this tiny, tiled hole—”

Matthieu stood up from the wooden bench. Gari stepped

closer to him.

“But I’ll kiss you now,” he said, and he opened his mouth and surrounded his friend’s with his moist lips.

For a moment Matthieu tried to resist, but every instinct to fight dissolved in an instant, all time had passed as though leaving no trace in his memory. He closed his eyes. He opened his mouth to Gari’s tongue. His hands, touching the back of this other, were immersed in a feeling of eternity. Gari seemed to be lifting or holding back all his weight. No pain or unease could reach him: their saliva mingled as their tongues dueled. The kiss and the embrace ended. Matthieu slumped back onto the wooden bench, hid his head in his hands, and began sobbing, he couldn’t tell why. Every nerve, every muscle, every drop of blood roiled violently, every secretion flowed unbidden, even his tears. His mouth felt as though it were filled with water.

Gari took a step back.

“Why don’t you look at me, Matthieu? Why are you crying? Why don’t you touch me? Why won’t you embrace me? I’m still here.”

Matthieu raised his head. He saw Gari, this being, this body, this image of an angel, unimaginable and yet visible, the measure of all things — the only form, yielding and warm, emerging from eternity. And then he saw how Gari’s member stood, that hoisted pound of male flesh — bigger than he had ever seen it, a twelve-year-old no more. He threw himself at Gari’s feet and rested his head against them. He thought of nothing. But still his lips moved. “I’m praying,” he whispered incomprehensibly, unable to take in the meaning of his words.

“This is how it is with me,” he could hear Gari’s voice, “big and thick when it’s filled with blood. Stand up, Matthieu — look at me, hold me, touch me —”

Matthieu obeyed him, he stood up, and almost stunned, mad with desire, his face contorted, he saw the landscape of these thighs, nearly unrecognizable in their proximity; with a feeling of great urgency he pressed his head with its tangle of blonde hair against the dark masculine weight of his beautiful friend. He was not aroused; he felt exhausted, abandoned, dissolved within this other. He was suddenly struck by the thought that what he was doing was unspeakable, impermissible. Then he leaped up and wrapped his arms around Gari’s neck. Kissing his neck, searching Gari’s ear with his mouth.

“Touch me, Matthieu — touch me down there where I’m rounded and split. I’m the same all over, there’s no difference anywhere. There’s just the difference in the sensation and pleasure.”

Gari sought Matthieu’s mouth. When their lips parted, he said, almost harshly, “We have to get dressed. We’ve been in this changing room too long. We might be noticed.”

Matthieu touched Gari’s small, dark nipples, the incomparable tiny goosebumps covering the muscle. He would recognize his friend among thousands. Only an angel, if only one formed from this reddish-brown gold—

The moment passed. Gari got dressed. Painstakingly, Matthieu tied his tie, fastened his suspenders, and listlessly took his jacket and vest from the hook.

To his utter amazement he noticed a small damp spot on his pants. He felt it. He recognized it right away — like a bit of

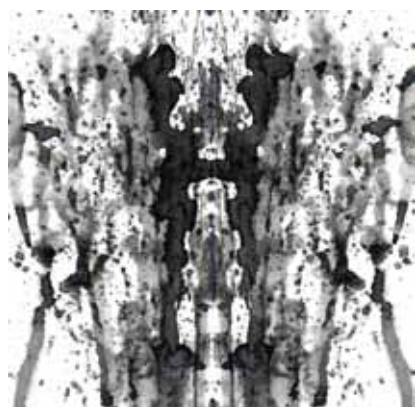
egg white or mucus.

“Gari couldn’t hold back his excitement,” he thought.

“Matthieu, forget all this for now. I only had an uncontrollable desire to kiss you. Your mouth and its lips, filled with your tongue and your saliva. It tastes of you, and nothing else. I like the taste. It’s not even worth mentioning. It doesn’t mean anything. It’s like restful sleep when I close my eyes.”

They locked the door and left.

The eclipse that had crept up on Matthieu passed quickly. He expected nothing, but he knew Gari would not stray.



PARALIPOMENON II

“We’ll have our fill of one another, Gari — the infinite, which is the void, for everything that never was anything. Whatever was something that returns or travels the long road — 3000 years or 5000 years (horses, soft nostrils, skin, warmth, innocence, smell, the beauty of the mares’ dark labia, the stallions’ heavy members), and we are no worse than they, their companions.”

Notes

Gari's tame rat in his cage, he comes out and goes to M., even laps at the blood (G. prevents this).

G. "It speaks well of you, after all, that he likes you."

G. takes off his jacket and hangs it over M., who has the chills, while he buttons up his suit. Tapes a clean handkerchief to M.'s stomach, and on his forehead G. places his dirty handkerchief, which he rinsed first and then spit on (he claims it's perfectly healthy).

G. "I'm not one of the others either, I'm at the *very bottom*."

Boy: Cut him down first, under the stones, so a mass murderer can feel how it is when such pleasure goes rogue. (Consensus, but not from their leader, of course, with the knife.)

M.: terrifying thoughts later on. Crying in bed, Gari must constantly comfort him. M. sometimes doubts G. would save him from that. Gari's response: What never happened, never happened. That it almost happened is irrelevant, more irrelevant than a dream.

The Wake / In the Ferry Building

Where Gari tells the story: his mother in bed, he on the sofa, two bed sheets because of the stains. He cries as he thinks of his father. The order of his loves: 1. Father; 2. *M.*; 3. Mother. She tells how Gari came to be, how they welcome him as a child. — The descent only came later.

Evidence / Proof

- 1) The ring and its history.

- 2) The gloves. Traces of machine oil on his neck and his ring finger. *M.*'s gloves examined. (The judge always has something against the police investigator.) They find metal residue from the glove buttons in the oven (Where Gari had burned them completely. There: because the night was so hot.) *M.* testifies he never used the oven, he never owned any such gloves. (The police investigator's response) "We'll introduce more evidence. We'll prove that you must have committed the murder, that you continued to lie to us when you claimed no one came to see you the night of the murder. Your bathroom breaks seem to have been far too brief...."



PARALIPOMENON III

“The pain — the pain — Cursed! — I curse you, Gari — I curse you.” His brain kept saying it, but the words did not pass his lips.

In his ear he could still hear the voices of dissuasion: “You need not return. Do not turn around! You have crossed the border — and Gari has crossed it too. It was the night of your union that took you across. You need not return. You might not be allowed to return. The pain in your anus shall not return. But happiness shall return. You shall be transformed and yet remain the same. You shall not question it. You shall take and you shall give. — Do not turn around! Is this not how it has been? You must wait at a certain place. Choose where it will be. There you shall meet him. Is this not how it has been. Did you not wish to cross the border. Your curse died on your lips. You shall not be defiled. Your suffering body wanted the curse, but your lips have remained pure. They shall not poison the kisses to come. Your limbs have remained pure. They shall not poison the union to come. Your entrails have remained pure. They shall not poison the union to come. Your flesh has remained pure. It shall not poison the caresses to come. Your heart has remained pure. It shall not poison the joy to come. Your kidneys have remained pure. They shall not poison the water in your blood. — Do not turn around! You need not return.”

Blood Group

Hans Henny Jahnn

A₁ rh ÷ (negative)



HANS HENNY JAHNN: A TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

Let Klaus Mann start: “Hans Henny Jahnn stood alone. He was part of that secret kingdom of the unofficial German literature, a kingdom of unknown and uncrowned royalty.”

So Jahnn. Born Hamburg, 1894. Died Hamburg, 1959. Scandinavian exile: Norway during the First World War, Denmark during the Second.

The monuments: the Kleist Prize-winning drama “Pastor Ephraim Magnus” (1919), its premiere directed by Bertolt Brecht and Arnolt Bronnen. The first novel, *Perrudja* (1929). The three-thousand-page, three-volume magnum opus, *Fluss ohne Ufer* (River Without Banks) (1949-1961). And the late prose, the unfinished saga of Matthieu and Gari, *Jeden ereilt es* (It Catches Up With Everyone) (1968), including *Nacht aus Blei* (Night of Lead), and this excerpt, along with some of the fragments (paralipomena) that sketch out the rest of Jahnn’s nightmare picaresque.

“Coprolalia.” “Perversion.” So Jahnn’s critics. Jahnn’s own telos: the absolute, not entropy but putrefaction.

So Jahnn. A black hole at the heart of 20th-century German literature — such a numbingly awful term. Even to place the adjectives — temporal or geographic, linguistic, ethnic — before this “literature” is to kill it.

Some black hole at the heart of the 20th century then, its works, its obsessions — we lazily look for comparisons and

find the French *inaccrochables*: Artaud, yes, and Bataille.

But Jahnn, devoid of the French bent for theory...de-void, the void itself, nightmare black and claustrophobic and endless. Say, Bataille's *L'expérience intérieure*, stripped of its Descartes, and staged by Gregor Schneider — less *anus solaire* than *du vide*. The Jahnniverse. Actual coordinates in space: 55°41'57.8"N, 12°34'38.5"E.

So what is being read? Matthieu and Gari, a Gilgamesh and Enkidu for our time, youthful lovers and adventurers, who worship and defile each other. Vivisection, sodomy, murder, assault, the beauty and terror of the natural world, the facts of a meat body.

It catches up with you, the *Komplex* the text is drawn from. The roughest trade.

Let Hans Erich Nossack offer a valedictory: "I have never known anything more worthy of the name 'religion' than your empathy for all creatures, for every drop of water, for every living organism."

And let Brecht sum him up: "And I am so glad that you have been, and I am so glad that you are."

SL040

June, 2015

Originally published in *Späte Prosa* as
Jeden ereilt es. © Hoffmann und Campe, 1987.

Translation © 2014 Adam Siegel

Inkblot Drawings © Justin Kase

Published by Solar ▲ Luxuriance

San Francisco, CA

www.solarluxuriance.com

Design: M Kitchell

Printed on a Riso EZ220

ISBN: 978-1-940853-70-3



“Coprolalia.” “Perversion.” So Jahnn’s critics. Jahnn’s own telos: the absolute, not entropy but putrefaction.

So what is being read? Matthieu and Gari, a Gilgamesh and Enkidu for our time, youthful lovers and adventurers, who worship and defile each other. Vivisection, sodomy, murder, assault, the beauty and terror of the natural world, the facts of a meat body.

It catches up with you, the *Komplex* the text is drawn from. The roughest trade.

TRANSLATED BY ADAM SIEGEL
WITH INKBLOTS BY JUSTIN KASE
ISBN: 978-1-940853-70-3
S O L A R ▲ L U X U R I A N C E