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Zero Hour in Arno Schmidt's Triptych *Leviathan*; or, An Adventure Allegorist at the Crossroads

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Abstract: Arno Schmidt's tripartite *Leviathan* (1949; written 1946—1948) is one of the few German narratives composed immediately after World War II. Different from the then newly-propagated *Trümmerliteratur* (literature among the ruins) or the literature of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coping with the past), Schmidt's writing condensed and "dehydrated" narrative events, weaving antiquity and his personal experience into one in order to lay bare historical lines of continuity. Relating to Pytheas of Marsilia, to an ethics based on praxis and to modern physics, he undertakes a demanding topography of "hell descents" within which he also put into doubt political and academic demands upon a cultural legacy that was, to him, anything but timeless. The essay explores Schmidt's didactic, innovative use of allegory and other rhetorical devices as tools for understanding long-term consequences of failures of interpretation and forceful restrictions on the play of imagination.

Keywords: Arno Schmidt, avant-garde, Dante, Eratosthenes, Leviathan, Pytheas, 20th-century German literature

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52 Years in Gadir—Life and Death Within Six Days of Narrated Time

Arno Schmidt was a day-, moon-, and beast-dreamer. From adolescence up to his riper years, his dream scripts showed a remarkable consistency. Where did he start? What could have been more suitable for the debut of his old adolescent Herculean *pícaro* than the non-plus-ultra pillars of the Spanish flag, of the town that smiles (Martial), Gadir-Gades-Cádiz, *la tacita de plata* near Hades, with its altars to Cronos—an island and province fabled by Herodotus's Sataspes and Pytheas of Marseille, Philostratus' Apollonius of Tyana, Cervantes' rich kids with their parents all too ready to rescue them there,¹ and Voltaire's *Candide* (of *Candide oder die beste aller Welten* in the title of the first German translation which Schmidt retranslated into French for the title of the manuscript version of his "Leviathan")? In the first, 1949 edition of *Leviathan*, Schmidt threw a metaphorical net over all

the material he wanted to capture by making the story “Gadir” precede “Leviathan oder die beste aller Welten,”² a title that extended Voltaire’s satire of the *lex melioris* à la Leibniz and Wolff, who both had criticized Hobbes harshly. From the polyhistorical knot at the outer Western margin of Anaximandros’ Mediterranean-centered cartography, a New World would be discovered, to which also Mateo Alemán’s Guzmán de Alfarache would sail. There, Edgar Allan Poe wrote “Eureka: A Prose Poem” (1848), whose cosmological theory the narrator of the middle part of Schmidt’s *Leviathan* triptych would advocate instead of a *salto mortale* (a dangerous and daring jump with possibly lethal outcome) between reason and belief without the link of sensuality (to the later Schmidt a “*salto postmortale*”) as it had been diagnosed by the philosopher F. H. Jacobi when he read Leibniz on the basis of David Hume. We’ll start with the outer parts of the triptych’s shutters.

Alluding to Erytheia, the rosy dawn, the island of Gadir, today geographically merged with the then adjacent island Kotinoussa that the Phoenicians had mainly used as a burial place, the first (yet last written) part of Schmidt’s *Leviathan* amplifies the place name “Gadir” by arbitrating the exhortative *usum delphinium* as “or Know Thyself,” and by including Schmidt’s first poem, an ode to a Gadir that ended with the words “ich wandre mit der Wolke” (*Leviathan* 18; *Collected Novellas* 51), as if they were composed in retrospect, from some Grasmere its author would never leave again.

In August 1947, a vast part of Cádiz had been laid into ashes after the explosion of a secret deposit of German submarine munition near the wharf. It was in June 1948 in Benefeld (*Brüssel* 68), near the plot of the former munition company Eibia in Cordingen, where this munition was likely to have been produced, that Schmidt turned “Gadir” into a synonym for Pytheas’ prison in a Phoenician fort called Chebar which, it seems, has never existed among the fortifications of the town of Cádiz. Significantly, Chebar is a river at the banks of which Ezekiel’s book began with his most extraordinary vision, before he mourns with the prisoners and eats the secret scrolls.

Schmidt’s “Gadir,” as it emerges from the perspectival manipulation of attributes of Western antiquity (also, of the tri-Atlantic slave trade) and its textbook history, opens in 280 B.C.E., the first year of the Pyrric War, in Chebar with its inmate, the 98-year-old *pícaro* Pytheas of Massalia (4th century B.C.E.), the ancient Greek scientist, geographer, and explorer to the Northern Sea and first known reporter of the Arctic and the midnight sun, listening to a *Schlager* tango of the Weimar republic that his Phoenician guards seem to intone.³ Having associated the tides with the phases of the moon, Pytheas argues with himself about “our spatial situation” while he infers the solar system’s proportions from the duration of the eclipses of the moon (*Collected Novellas* 49).

In between his flights and *pícardía* of imagination, the feverish Pytheas is inspected by an ill-meaning doctor and “there before him stood a spry little man with a light brown, conical cape” (52), the “little pointy-eyed man” (49) he anticipated in a dream. The *Fuchskopf* (fox-faced) “glassy” with scars, “with a broad shiny scar from ear to ornery mouth,” returns throughout all three parts of the triptych. In “Leviathan” a horrible fever befalls a child, and in “Enthymesis,” the fox demon with fasci of poisoned silver arrows takes the shape of the monster of Ravenna (the town of Dante’s burial place), a premonition mystifying the advent of bomb culture’s *Blutsumpf* (bloody morass). The *Fuchskopf* could be a phantom of, say, SS criminals like Heinrich Reinefarth or Joachim Mrugowsky—Schmidt’s memory of an advertisement in Lauban, prompted by one of SS-Reichsführer Karl Hanke’s appeals to the *Volkssturm* Schmidt read in a windowpane also taints the

Leviathan. The children of the Leviathan are transworld identities, but the *Fuchskopf* of evil blurs individuality and origin.

In a 1953 letter Schmidt wrote: “I don’t accuse; I’ve got no time for accusing. I’m the topographer of horizontal hell descents: The one, who descends alongside, and shorthands it out of his veins: if it is all, it’s all ! – Too much already –” (*Der Briefwechsel mit Wilhelm Michels* 8; *my translation*). We can see Schmidt cry over the tortures, mutilations, and murders of the lagers as his patient wife Alice reported, hiding his tears behind the script while he was reading out his 1955 response to Dante, whom he addresses in a fictive letter to the “*Reichsicherheitshauptamt, Abt. Einrichtung von Lagern*,” as “author of the Inferno, a handbook about the design of concentration camps” (“Herrn Dante Alighieri” 9).

As he tears his tunic in order to produce a rope for his escape, Pytheas personifies a worn and veiled self-world relationship that refuses any “exformulation” before Pytheas finally “unwraps” himself.⁴ Likewise, the narrative resists attempts at undoing it. One of his motifs for extending the frontiers of contemporary experience is, as the ironic subtitle “or Know Thyself” implies, the voluntary escape from the confinements of self-knowledge or -recognition. Concerning how we should react to this imperative nothing is suggested, but it takes some agility on our part to understand the figure’s full antagonism to the social and political forces operating in his and perhaps also in our world. All the while, his tale is being told mainly by himself to himself, commenting upon his situation with extended mind plays (*längere Gedankenspiele*). Turning us into his mind readers, Schmidt shows his thoughts working out more than one escape from his prison cell.

Elements of a signaling formula or *vademecum* not unlike Dante’s silver and golden keys to the Purgatorio appear in a dream, befitting for the name-giver of Britain, “Brettanike,” after its Pict inhabitants, in the shape of two pictograms that wear, like all hieroglyphs, “the double mantle of *both signifier and signified*” (Goldwasser 21). “Beautiful moon; whatever you pick up is made of silver” (Schmidt, *Collected Novellas* 47). Schmidt’s *allegoricum* shifts Egyptian icons from the concrete to the abstract and transrational, when Pytheas finds himself armed with a sickle-shaped buckle he picks up from the ground where it must have fallen off from a soldier’s shoe. He then discovers a socket wrench, the sandal-strap-shaped Egyptian *ankh* dangling in his right hand (55), an element of the hieroglyphs for the words “mirror” and “oath”—both of these instruments warrant a fantastic moonlight escapade. The sickle cuts the prison bar and his beard (caution, prudence, and foresight rather than adherence to the rites), and the *ankh* is unlocking the doors to an underground passage as they exist—some of them devoted to Isis-Astarte—in Cádiz. These hieroglyphs seem to activate one fantastic delaying niche after another between his rule-bound way of life and the “passing” into otherworldly rise and fall. The crescent moon, a hieroglyph for “month,” and the *ankh*, an icon for life and attribute of the creator gods, are microcosmically nesting a “tropic” relationship of cause and effect. They are representative of a reflection, a *stade du miroir*, revealing causality and a logical principle within the chronologies that split the parts of the triptych.

With Pytheas’ apprehension of his Herculean speed (including a *vaticinium ex eventu* he uses to semantically “castrate” “Appius Claudius Caudex” [*Collected Novellas* 54], who brought about the Punic War) and his exploration of Gadir’s surroundings from a treetop, accuracy shows no failure to act. A circular dream escapade, the flight of fancy of a flight, draws near its end when he, after having swum the bay and having hidden his trace in the cliffs behind Gadir, reaches the harbor again. Soon

the clairvoyant Pytheas beholds a monster whose frayed appearance, at once singular and plural, contradicts the Luther Bible's description of a Leviathan with its proud scales that are like strong shields:

the scales on its belly are rubbed off; the fins, the whole lower half of the body, look bloody, dark blue-red, and finally blue-black, zigzagging up the side of its body, repulsive to watch, like the scurvy, half gangrenous wounds on the carcasses of mistreated animals, raw as if teeming with spongy proud meat. (Schmidt, *Collected Novellas* 61-62)

This enigma testifies to a modal process, an experience between address and instruction, in which an answer is “both hidden and demanded by the structure,” as Theodor W. Adorno maintained, for whom “enigmaticalness” seemed to have been as Egyptian as it had been for Hegel when he commented upon the architext and architecture of Osiris in his *Aesthetics*. While “enigmaticalness outlives the interpretation” of its meaning (Adorno 165), it appears to be, in deviation from the results of Adorno's analysis, the very terrible but transient presence of a mode of allegory, the “allegoricum” (Schmidt, *Zettel's Traum* 106) of the Leviathan with its span (as it is rising, destroying, but also eaten), born and surviving in enigma as well as lending the enigma of Pytheas' passage to the Netherworld its demanding, “fractured” appearance that Adorno had noted as its characteristic.⁵ Vaguely but surely, as Adorno might have noticed, Schmidt had made a step towards a “mobile” avant-garde allegory “that accesses and thematizes its sources in a bloody history, conserved as a partial object” (Watten 101).

At least so much is certain, given the transitory impact of allegory in its enigmatic use up to the exceedingly agile Pytheas' contract with a ferryman who carries him over a choppy, metric sea to Mentonomon, a marshland (the estuary of Sancti-Petri, Cádiz, facing the Melkart-Hercules temple, or, as known from Pytheas' amber gatherers, the ancient Elbe estuary in which the island of Ratzeburg lies today and to which the narrative I of “Leviathan” will be duty-called [Schmidt, *Collected Novellas* 27], as its author once had been). In the harbor of Gadir, a “*Cap'n*” on a black ship nods to Pytheas' request in a way that may suggest he will not travel more than a few *stadia*—or pages, as far as we are concerned. “Why are they casting off so soon?” asks Pytheas, suspiciously (63).

Leviathan foreshadowed a mosaic fiction tightly welded with autopsychobiographical intrusions into the narrative I's inner monologue: Schmidt before, during, and shortly after World War II as a neglected child of an impoverished family, an anarchist *pícaro* “warehouse bookkeeper” under the sway of a director of the Greiff company nicknamed Hausenblase (“isinglass,” a kind of gelatin obtained from fish, especially sturgeon, and used also in dried form in making jellies, glue, etc., and for clarifying ale) and as an author of ten-digit logarithm tables. Like Pytheas, Schmidt belonged to the school-less scientific precariat. The way in which Schmidt drew elements of autobiographical self-portraiture into narrative and allegorical procedures forms a literary phenomenon unique in postwar avant-garde writing.

Within his “Meta=Litteratur” (*Zettel's Traum* 517), fragments of Egyptian, Gnostic, Jewish, and Christian beliefs meet allegorical ferments of the genre of the picaresque in ways similar to Thomas Pynchon's thanatoid *Vineland* (1990) or to Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett's apocalyptic and antithetical *Good Omens* (1990), in which a personified civilization writes letters to a local newspaper editor. In contrast to these later colleagues, however, Schmidt developed a postmodern version of the

desnovelización José Fernandez Montesinos described in mid-seventeenth-century Spain in favor of the *abitaristas* in his 1933 essay “Gracián o la picaresca pura,” where he analyzed the failure of its bourgeoisie to develop its values in the commodity of things (2). Schmidt’s dehydration of the novel into a short story that is neither a short story nor a German *Novelle* but a kind of condensed historical novel came together as a kind of ultimate avant-garde work produced by an end-of-the-world citizen with fragments of his human surroundings as *objets trouvés*. As an example of “Finismus,” as his contemporaries Gerhard Rümke and Werner Riegel advanced the concept in their journal *Zwischen den Kriegen*, from his very debut on Schmidt liked to call his condensed novel “the firstling of the flock” and his *Prunkwerk* (show work, analogous to “showpiece”). Later it would evolve into further triptych-like trilogies and also into *The School of Atheists*, written in German, “a dead language,” and set after the third world war, which Schmidt was convinced would come. Presumably this could have been more than enough to undermine an integration of the *Leviathan* triptych into chronological representations of postwar literature in German.

Shortly before the beginning of the third millennium Schmidt did not find entry into the text of the Reclam anthology *Die Stunde Null* (he is not mentioned in its foreword and commentary sections, although *Leviathan* is listed in the bibliography), nor is one of Schmidt’s works part of the 100 reading recommendations edited by the *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung* in which the eminent Stiftung Lesen listed exemplary novels dealing with German history in the 20th century under such headings as *Nachkriegszeit* and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Half-hearted solutions to the urgent requirement of choosing pieces of literature for postwar schoolbook texts and all too hasty attempts at establishing a new canon for decades to come created a plight Schmidt foresaw earlier than Peter Szondi, who warned against subsuming literature under history instead of finding history in literature. Given Schmidt’s own favorites and his relentless translations of part of the American canon, which he also discussed in a theoretical way, one could perhaps argue that he was an American writer who happened to have written in, and translated into, a dead language.

When we see Pytheas being imprisoned above the ocean’s rhythm and form and begin to imagine him attempting to flee from organic necessity—the historical Pytheas has indeed vanished from his own narrative and history (just a few phrases and only one sentence are left from his books)—the temporality of what is narrated is transcended in a radical way by the rapidly mutating allegory of the *Leviathan*, in front of which even Pytheas’ consolidated anger seems a mere construct.

Pytheas’ pride in speaking the language of his Phoenician environment, a skill of which he took advantage in his undercover missions, his way of reasoning as care for what it may exclude, the ignorance of his discomforts, and his aesthetics of resistance on his imagined flight in, but not out of, “Gadir” are accompanied by his contempt for the “disgusting merchants” who control the routes of experience, but to whom the spherical shape of the earth, “taught and proved for centuries by Pythagoras, Thales, Anaximandros” does not matter (Schmidt, *Collected Novellas* 50). While language triggers the illusion of hasty movement and of a chronological order of events, we are led to realize that the occurrences join in another, slower and deeper, way if their supernatural elements are taken into account.

As with comic strips or graphic novels, the headings that chop every two or three paragraphs seem to mark a fictive present only to lead over to a mythical *fabula* again that in turn is schizochronotopically exformulated by Pytheas’ calculations, during which he also draws attention

to the nonlogical usage of grammatical tenses. We are drawn into this as we are drawn into endless references to ancient data that seem to have whirled about by a resolute Levante, until we wonder: do the Carthaginians really have any information about Pytheas' identity? Did he really die before his escape, which was in any case an unlikely endeavor for a man of his age? Or is it all just some yarn, told by the narrative voice? Did the famous explorer exist at all or did he just imagine himself to be transported to the Northern Sea (his Thule being mentioned just once in this)? Is the temporal domain additional to the time of the fictive present actualized on nontemporal, ontological grounds?

There appears, at the story's ending, opposite of the cosmic tango, the voice of the prison manager, a certain Abdichiba, reporting to the Carthaginian general Geskon (a transworld identity that derives from the Punic War future), asking his superior for more troops and noting Pytheas' death en passant. Abdichiba alludes to the political potential of, and the impending conflict with, the clan of the Turdetanians who inhabit Gadir's surroundings. In contrast to the Governor of Hobbes's Leviathan frontispiece ("no power on earth can be compared to it"), Schmidt depicts a hegemony of military state and police that needs no legitimation other than its alleged continuous need to secure economic structures and 'prevent' war (in the Phoenician Abdichiba's words there occurs the exonym of "Iberians" who "ravage the whole of it"; *Collected Novellas* 44). While the cartographer Pytheas calculates distances even in planetary space, his incalculable action is excluded and locked away from the multiply translated cultural space in which ever changing politico-economic alliances are being made. Within his calculations, which are exploited by capital, bureaucracy, and technocracy, falls the abyss between two cartographies: there is the politics of merchants and dominant classes that projects "history" by referring to a cultural hegemony of classes who decide in their own interests about what or who gets represented on the contemporary map and what or who does not (in Pytheas' case also: what or who does not become published); and there is Pytheas' far more stable charting based on rigid and passionate thinking, the exploration of his heterotopia and of his understanding of dead and unwritten languages.

Abdichiba's formal phraseology is actually that of the Phoenician governor of Jerusalem [Ursalim] writing to Amenophis III in the Amarna letters,⁶ and his name centers, strangely, in an "ich" [German for "I"] and this interrupts the intentness with which we may receive the passage, like the repetition of the word seven and its awkward kotau). If we nevertheless were to believe Abdichiba, Pytheas was a madman enacting his psychodrama with the sparse requisites available in his cell before he is finally thrown into the sea:

Two days ago, there finally died the unclean, uncircumcised, troublesome one, whom for time out of mind and for reasons inexplicable to me we have had to feed. He was still at his table and stank indeed; no wounds were found; deep in his left palm was clutched an old shoe-plate; the dog had torn an expensive blanket to shreds, and his tunic as well; the unbeliever had mutilated his beard: he was a hundred years old. (64)

Pytheas' imprisonment may exemplify what Schmidt called the *Kulturverdrängungsmaschinerie* (a machinery for displacing culture and imprisoning the imagination) that defines law and order by depriving the exploited freedom-seeking intelligentsia of their echo before eliminating them. In the enigmatic spontaneity of his mind, reading ratio and overhearing love as a mythical shadow play (a

bit of a trifle to him), Pytheas is just one part *pícaro* and adventurer—in the other parts he is allusive of a sibyllinic spring of thought, Pythia, working from the prison's pit, as a world-creating angel of topography for whom it is enough to know the own “strange,” displaced and powerless situation in space, so that we wonder about this figure's role in the production of what Schmidt's former work slave and anti-Orpheus, the poet Caliban, alluding to Spinoza's *causa sive ratio*, stenographs as “Uni=sive Perversum” (Schmidt, *Caliban* 528). According to Angus Fletcher, “a *kosmos*, which is at once the old name for a *decorative ornamental image and a cosmic order*,” is the allegorist's “requirement for allegory.”⁷ With these requirements having been established, the cosmic reflections of “Gadir” lead us to a guilt-ridden world of chaos whose gaps leave some room, if we like to use the Lacanian terms Fredric Jameson uses for his analysis of allegory, for our libidinal investment (84).

“Oh, Weilaghiri”: Anatomy of Postacademic Devilry

Crucial turns, each a potential shift towards Hades, correspond to the *exempla* of all parts of the hypertextual triptych, preceded by literal cliffhangers (in the hills around Gadir, on a bridge trunk, and on a desert rock), each with its specific rhetorical preparation: *digressio*, when merchants begin to control the routes to be experienced and to displace the culture in which Pytheas created his model of space; *interruptio*, characterizing the loss of the axiom of historical progress and of a capacity to return; which is flanked at its outer end by *reticentia*, the very epitome of a void, the amphora's shards, which bring Eratosthenes' comment on Philostratos to an end (23).

After “Gadir's” surreal fortress with its underground passages, the train as allegory of a *machina machinarium*, much like Bosch's Haywain Triptych, comes to a standstill on the fragment of a bridge and finally we see the Libyan desert sand through which a young bematist trudges, measuring distances in preparation for some military action by counting his steps. Opposite of, and implicitly contradicting, Pytheas, there appears Philostratos, supposed student of the Greek polymath and first literary scholar of acclaim, Eratosthenes, librarian of the Alexandrian academy (about 276–195 B.C.E.), who has sent his student on this desert surveying expedition because of his rebellious behavior. On the grounds of this humiliation he fulfils this order with painstaking *accuratesse*. The name Philostratos alludes to the Sophist and politically commissioned biographer of Apollonius of Tyana Philostratus Flavius, who was born about three centuries after Eratosthenes and possibly wrote the *Heroikos*, a dialogue between a Phoenician merchant and a vinedresser who is in charge of the gardens around a hero's tomb. The first Greek warrior to die in the Trojan war according to Homer (*Iliad* 2.695-710), Protesilaos, comes to life in the merchant's and the gardener's discussions about war, ghosts, and Homer.

The diary of the continuously counting yet universally erring Philostratos starts *in medias res*, at the end of the third day of a fatal total of seventeen in the first year of the Second Punic War, after almost 120 kilometers of walking. With one of the poisoned arrows (a version of the deadly Sachsenhausen aconitum bullets) of his friend, the silver-shoed fox-faced merchant Beschar, whose jewelry and grand-seigneurism he admires, Philostratos turns into the murderer of the Roman Aemilianus, when he, pitilessly, realizes that members of his expedition team are about to leave the endeavor because they would starve if they continued their way.

In proud displays of his private opinion or enthymemes, Philostratos opposes himself to Eratosthenes' teachings about the roundness of the earth, considering it to be a disk instead, designed only for a future necessity of escaping from the scene in a quite literal sense, without having to return to a former standpoint while being able to continue without any correction:

the hallmark of the intellect is that it desires infinity; and since a disk is more infinite than a sphere, the earth must be a disk. [...] But I spoke not a word about the most important thing: where shall one flee if the earth is a sphere? (Schmidt, *Collected Novellas* 8-9)

Earlier, Philostratos had argued about the physical impossibility of the spherical shape, considering it as an impossible “very rare exception among the countless rotating ellipsoids” (7).

Counting steps in the wind-whirled sand, the sophist might be an element of the “damaged parables” Adorno described for which a key seems lost—damaged, to him, presumably, not only by the way in which their image givers and theme receivers can no longer be firmly told apart, but also by the loss of their parabolic values through their already much-worse-than-imagined realization in our world (126). Had Schmidt drawn conclusions from a similar diagnosis? Actually, Philostratos personifies a loss of civism and a general intellectual damage, the negative parameters of which arise with his inner monologue. Instead of his affects of hate and ambition (an important basis of Hobbes's state model), we rather trust the anger of the dirty prisoner who despises the frenetic mood at the Olympic games or of the man with the steel helmet who curses the priest in their necessary affective outputs of a recognition that, by fanning out into reason and imagination, can prevent a failure to act. We may come to rely on the question posed and the reaction upon the answer shown by (the personification of) Aemilianus, the “practical Emil” who abandons the expedition team (Schmidt, *Collected Novellas* 8). When faced with the challenge of presenting “the practical implication” of his tenet (7), the restless Philostratos refers to his perspective which he sees as perfect legitimation in combination with his enthymeme that everything has an explanation—also when he is standing at the rim of a crater: “– Down I go ! –” (7). Nevertheless, he naively trusts the storyteller Tarfan, who sees the fabled aegipans (goat-like creatures resembling a satyr, sometimes having a fish's tail) of the crater without setting a step downwards, just like Herodotus described them. It is only after Beschar, the mysterious traveler, appears and after the murder of Aemilianus with the experimental arrow Beschar had passed on to him, that Philostratos, too, develops a vision and beholds, within a dream, from a ship called Uatzinta, in the opposite direction of the silver town, how “oily peddlers gawked through greasy shelves; fire came, disease and war, oh Weilaghiri” (16). In the word for the nightmarishly bombed-out phantom town that is foreshadowed with a *conferatur* in “Leviathan,” the German words *weil*, “because,” and *Weile*, “a while”; Lager; the name Alighieri; and *ghiri*, an Italian dormouse seem to have agglutinated for a much longer time than Philostratos had noted “a little while ago” (14).

The shortage of water, upon which the members of his team had decided to leave the expedition, now compels him to prepare “two slender amphoras to hang on cords” from his shoulders “and the next night, as the moon gaped greenish through a pale fog, I sprang across” (16). Schmidt's scene caricatures the poetic origin of the well-known sculpture of the helmeted warrior torso, looking down and slightly to his left, with his right arm raised and prepared to strike, its forward-slanting base schematically carved as the prow of a ship encircled by waves: Protesilaos about to jump ashore.

After having been led to the uninhabited silver town by the fox-faced demon only to arrive at the hell of Weilaghiri, Philostratos starts to follow the strange trace of a half-human- and half-claw-footed “Friday” only to turn, within a painful process, into his double, a lame bird with just one human leg that nevertheless can prompt his rise.

The analogies of the commissioned “scientist” Philostratos with Protesilaos, the first soldier killed in the Trojan War, and the highly specified demon point to science’s involvement in, and mystification of, military action. A claw- and human-footed “monster” circulating on “scientific” European prints allegedly had announced god’s wrath and consequently the Battle of Ravenna and so mystified the foreseeable advent of bomb culture in its first-time open-field exchange of cannonade fire, which had put an end to the at least weakly protective use of corral wagons. So the monster which Schmidt juxtaposes to the frontispiece *Leviathan*, the sovereign of social contracts, is an enemy per se, signifying, since Ancient Egyptian times, the annulment of contracts and oaths that it was imagined to bear in its claws.

After having followed the trace and after having met Beschlar with the dissimulative openwork silver shoes again, who, now having turned into the nameless monster, seems delighted that Philostratos had used his silver arrow to kill Aemilianus, Philostratos experiences some release of the horrible pain in his leg and states: “With ease I rise *on high* . . .” (Schmidt, *Collected Novellas* 23).

All the while in this allegory-as-parable, or this allegorical equation with at least one variable, our philosophical attention is driven toward the tracks on the ground, the grounds of reason, the cause of freedom but then also, considering the actual *Blutsumpf* out of which Schmidt started to write the *Leviathan*, toward the still-existing potential ground of evil, gnostically, the bastard of wisdom, Enthymesis. The sole occurrence of this word, in the title, may make us wonder whether enthymesis is a desire for a kind of self-empathy, as a philosophical dictionary would have it, and, perhaps above all, makes us ask by or of whom the forms of enthymesis in concern are engendered. Schmidt’s cryptic acronym *W.I.E.H.*, which offers itself as an alternative to enthymesis, might abbreviate the *tropos* “How I Hate You All” (*H.I.H.Y.A.* in the translated title), as in Schmidt’s radio essay about Johann Karl Wezel’s novel “Belphegor oder wie ich euch hasse,” but also may be decoded in *Weilaghiri*, taking up the 1st, 3rd, 2nd, and 7th letter of this word. Indeed there is (the diagnosis of) a double enthymesis in John 13.27, “that thou doest, do quickly”: “Und nach dem Bissen fuhr der Satan in ihn. Da sprach Jesus zu ihm: Was du tust, das tue bald!” (literally, “that thou doest, do soon”). The word *bald* appears frequently after the contact with Beschlar, as when Philostratos’ ambition combines with an inner attitude of urgency so that he prays, “If only humankind would soon succeed in destroying itself” and “may the silver town come soon,” finding its climax in the hope “if only the demon appears soon” (Schmidt, *Collected Novellas* 21).

Upon his Miltonic rise (cf. *Paradise Lost*, book 1), we read the not-to-the-point comment of Eratosthenes on the diary of Philostratos, his former student, whose intelligence and talents he prides himself in underlining. Added to his comment is an impression after a glance into the amphora shards⁸ that are left of the vanished man: “two giant birds, passing at a great height, flew over us and away” (23).

After the parabolic mode had come to echo noncontent (Baudrillard’s simulacrum) during modernity, Schmidt marks a terminal point in the decline of the salesman narrative that had been present from Ancient Egypt onward as he takes up the allegory of E.T.A. Hoffman’s “Sandmann” as

Gestaltwerdung (“becoming gestalt”) of the libidinal investment of Nathanael’s authoritative father as well as of (the running out of) time itself. When the core of law is transgression, it becomes a vehicle for contagion. Instead of the moral conversion that parables used to provoke, versions of appropriation, disintegrative personification shifts, and constructions of a nonhomogeneous subjectivity now come to block a readerly identification. Franz Kafka’s bureaucrat Poseidon who, while being preoccupied with activities that are much like Philostratos’ counting of steps in the windy sand, imagines himself as a world tourist at the end of the world might have been a model for Schmidt. In its transition from an allegorical beast to personification, the Leviathan has become a variable in the version of allegorical personification Schmidt came to call *Gleichungen* or “equations.”

The Seamstress in the Tie-Buster: A National Allegory

The eponymous story between “Gadir” and “Enthymesis,” “Leviathan or the Best of All Worlds,” began as “Leviathan ou the mellieur des mondes possibles Die beste der Welten (Fledermaus-Portrait)” in the original manuscript on British telegram paper (dated 20 November 1947), which was later typed with few changes on a borrowed Corona typewriter). The *Fledermaus* was perhaps intended as a self-portrait, strategically balanced between the scientific explorer and the soldier who lost his orientation in a murderous desert.

“Leviathan” opens with a letter mailed by “Jonny” from Berlin on 20 May 1945 (after the war’s aftermath on the island of Texel). It announces the arrival of a private chronicle that came together with watches and bracelets passed from a Russian Lance Corporal to Jonny in exchange for some cigarettes. Jonny had a British accent in Schmidt’s reading. German newspapers quoted an American officer who had found that the town of Münster “looks like Pompeii” on 7 May (Schröder 12). Jonny’s statement that the town is “fearfully smashed, rather like a bad dream” and even that “they asked for it and they got it” appears quite naturalistic (Schmidt, *Collected Novellas* 3). The opening letter also refers back to Schmidt’s dedication of his first book to his sister Lucie in New York, who had married Rudy Kiesler, an American, with whom she left the country before the war.

The manuscript that Jonny sends to Betty (is she able to read the German?) appears to chronicle about two and a half days and begins on Valentine’s Day, 1945. The narrative I, whose nationality is not indicated, joins a small group (among them a postmaster, two *Hitlerjungen* and two soldiers, and a priest with seven children, who uses his pretensions to belief as alibi for his unwillingness to see the consequences of his moral inadequacy), to whom he successfully suggests a joint effort to flee the town of Lauban on a locomotive with a freight car linked to a railroad plough that destroys the track behind it. The “trackwolf” (*Schienenreisser*), which works in two ways by destroying both what lies behind it and any future use of the railroad, is allegorical of a technocracy that destroys preceding and alternative values and is hidden, animalistically, even in the name of the chronicler’s girlfriend, Anne Wolf, a self-reliant emancipated woman with a brazen laugh.

Strangely, the narrative I does nothing to stop the rape of a woman the soldiers call out as “whore,” who, however, can in no other way be identified among the cast of characters than as the “vulgarest seamstress type,” perhaps preoccupied with realizing an omnipresent “sewing pattern” or role model. The unnamed chronicler cannot but notice the rape, but he confesses his inability to protect his Hanne from being a witness of what goes on invisibly in another zone of the train car.

Schmidt shows violent rape as an essential element of the formation of the generalized identity of German fascists. He politicizes rape as the soldiers' will to continue and reestablish fascist superiority. At the core of the *Leviathan*, alluded to in not more than three short parentheses, the rape does not prompt the chronicler to intervene, as if its full horror were marked as happening continuously, in a nonobjectifiable anywhere, and though it is being witnessed is hardly reaching the center of attention. Characteristically, the trace of the crime is eliminated. The emblem of the whore of Babylon, a country as a prostitute, functioning as allegory of a people willing to corrupt and prostitute their nation and nationality to the fascists, clearly reverses traditional insertions of rape into the discourse of political occupation, where a victimized female may appear as an allegory of a nation in distress. Schmidt unmasks the melodramatic display of violated female bodies that transported the propagandistic appeal to national cohesion. By letting the crime take place within a moving freight car joined to the tie-buster's destruction of the railroad track, Schmidt crisscrosses conventional myths of national origin as related to a prior rape and violation of territory. Instead, nation is depicted as a corruptible concept without fixed borders. With Anne Wolf, however, who in her way really seems the best of all worlds and to a degree overtowers the action, Schmidt constructs a vivid counterimage to the allegory of the prostitute as standing for a country that its inhabitants have prostituted to fascists.

The allegory-of-emblemata based on the notion of a sovereign authority as an artificial Person built up from the consent of the multitude of natural persons should have resonated deeply in postwar Germany also on the grounds of Hobbes's theory that "a multitude of men, are made one person, when they are by one man, or one person, represented; so that it be [now read: was] done with the consent of every one of that multitude in particular" (Hobbes, *Leviathan* 1.16.13).

In accordance with this almost unnoticeable allegory, Schmidt's writing works against a representation of historical timespaces and characters as doubles of contemporary nationalities. In their allo-function, Schmidt's allegories compare the historical roles of nations or people as ideological failures, although on a lower level of allegoresis such speculations can form, in their alienation, an aesthetically relevant background with which we can become trapped in historical prejudices: are the Phoenicians Canaanites thought to be British or should we read Cherbourg in Chebar? Is the Greek or Celt Pytheas a Soviet? Are the Carthaginians asked for help against the Greek under the "Suffete" Geskon Americans or Soviets? More confusion arises when we discover that the letter to the Suffete actually comes from Amarna. Are the lovers Pytheas meets Khabirians, Calé, or mythological figures? Or are they turtling Turdetanians and their village "Izquierda" is the Soviet Zone or, simply, Portugal? And is the Roman Aemilianus, "der praktische Emil," perchance a Polish Nazi spy instead of an allegory of *praxis*?

While the train is being bombed, the chronicler, evoking non-Euclidean geometry, explains his philosophy about the evil creator *Leviathan*, of whom "we ourselves are part." Pit against the *Leviathan*, who is mortal, as he affirms, is the cosmology of a finite yet unbounded universe that does not correspond to the illusion of three-dimensional space and the Doppler effect, on which bats rely and according to which, if "heavenly bodies move away from us, their velocity increases [with distance], approaching the constant of the speed of light" (Schmidt, *Collected Novellas* 32).

The story ends Titanic-ally with the last step out of the cabin door of the last survivors of the trackwolf, the unnamed man out of the dark and his love towards a *salto immortale* from the aqueduct fragment on the (future border) river Neisse. If we like to see a not deadly *Ursprung* in the

cinematically impending unruly union of bravery with the profound, Sophia and Horus, the limiter of Valentinian gnosis, come to mind: Amor and Psyche. Or Batman and Catwoman? Or Lucie and Rudy.

Arno Schmidt as Zero Hour Avant-garde Allegorist

In his condensation of ancient and modern settings, narrative events and voices as well as in the clash of words with roles, of genre with captions and of rhetorical conventions behind the agora, Schmidt irreverently and meaningfully confronted elements of the contexts of the largely unaccused *Blutsumpf* generation's culpable involvements as they continued to control and influence politics as, or together with, the new *Bundes-* and *DDR-Bürger*.

Schmidt's laconic or lapidary lingo, and in themselves strangely consistent exaggerations of seemingly irrelevant details, generate innovative code switchings with aphoristic wit that he involved in a dialectical play of allegory that makes full use of the potential of this global cultural method and so creates a thematic and heuristic continuum.

Leviathan signifies a world judgment that is not executed by a savior but by the readers, according to the plight of a monster that is confronted with different narrative I's and develops in three steps and precisely outlined realms: from the ragged fish that arise within an enigmatic mixing mold of cultures, at a Western zero meridian of white cartographies in front of a narrative I that has been deprived of his radius of experience and whose "carcass" is finally said to have been thrown into the sea; to a leviathanic machinery, the emblematic, metatextual tie-buster in which rape represents the civilians' sellout of a country to the fascists and thereby a loss of past and alternative values; from which we are led to look backward to behold the Leviathan as it has come over the mind and doings of a be-matist, who is a product of a vulpine academy and its political affiliations at a "zero point"—according to Michel Foucault a "hollow of history" and "fold in time" where monsters are released (103). Inner and outer commentaries always played a significant role in allegory; at this historical hour, Schmidt decided to amplify them by a third, more challenging documentary and didactic plane that relies on the readers' moral evaluation of testimonials related to our old and new enemies Schmidt delineates as fateful control of imagination and the failure of interpretation which are antecedents to an irreparable damage, even so possibly "too late."

Notes

1. Cf. the ample quotation of Cervantes in Schmidt, *Abend mit Goldrand*, p. 129.
2. The original order of the three parts ("Gadir," "Leviathan," and "Enthymesis") in the first edition of *Leviathan* was reversed in the authoritative Bargfeld edition (the model for the Dalkey Archive Edition of Arno Schmidt) according to the order in which the parts were composed. Schmidt started his imaginary triptych with the center and proceeded with the right-hand panel, which traditionally rendered hell on world judgment triptychs. Although "Gadir" was written last, its topos was one Schmidt had written about already in his teenage years (Schmidt's father could have taken the ship to China from the port of Cádiz and through his tales already the young boy might have become acquainted with details of this town that he would never visit). The topos could be associated with creation or paradisaic scenes on the left-hand side panel of such triptychs. The three parts, of which the "outer" ones seem symmetrically antedeterminative, may also be associated with elements of comedy, melodrama, and tragedy.
3. The tango shows how carefully Schmidt chose his allusive references. The lyrics for "Oh, Fräulein Grete," written by the author of the *Buchenwaldlied*, Fritz Löhner-Beda, related to the *spiritus loci*. That this musical piece, rendered with the

“onomatopoeia” of its *ochó* and *barrida* steps and a change from Fräulein Grete (also the Garbo to which it was dedicated) to a Jewish Fräulein Mirjam opens the book can also be seen as a dedicative reference to its most famous performers, Marek Weber and the Russian poet-singer Leo Monosson, two of most talented Jewish musicians of the pre-Swing era. That the composer of the tango, Juan Llossas, was a stout Falangist, made the Eibia munition company appropriate the piece at their KdF (Kraft durch Freude)-events. At Schmidt's time, the oldest modern fortification in Cadiz lay close to the notorious dance and striptease bar (the Pay-Pay), and so the association of a Cádiz tango near a prison is not even far from the historical truth.

4. I make deliberate use of Kurt Schwitters's term *Entformeln* here, which is related to the action of deriving a thing from its specific “own poison” (*Eigengift*) within a work of art.
5. From ancient Greek theorists—who had linked allegory with the effects of “othering”—to Adorno's theoretic considerations on the antinomic, nondialectical allegory, for which “a key” seems “lost,” the mode of allegory, which often flourishes in ritual, has been an element likely to be downplayed or even intercepted. It seems a question worthwhile exploring which of the “excellent bitter drugs mixed together” found in allegory were not so closely read that it was defined what it actually was that in an enigma pointed to its “truth content” by mysteriously “demanding” a “solution,” as Adorno maintained.
6. For Abdichiba's official phrases at the beginning and end of his report, Schmidt used translations of letters he could have found in Carl Bezold's *Babylon und Ninive* (3rd edition; Velhagen and Klasing, 1909), namely from a letter by Abdichiba, governor of Jerusalem, to Amenophis III (cited on page 36) and from Amenophis III to the Babylonian king Kaschmancharbi (cited on page 38) on dried Nile sludge. Both letters were discovered in the archives of the factory town Armana.
7. Fletcher explains how the allegorist's interaction acquires an intensive form in the 12th-century *Cosmographia*, which explicates the story of creation by devising allegorical characters to act out the narrative. The appearance of the realm of the Egyptian deity Neith in Schmidt's *Zettel's Traum* is a similar case, given that an Egyptian narrative in the temple of Esra intersperses her creation of the world by means of seven powerful spells.
8. The shards are a potent image—both for the man near dying of thirst as well as for the character of Beschar who seems to command the grim desert magic. I owe thanks to the Egyptologist Dietmar Noering for having drawn my attention to E.W. Lane's *Manners and Customs of the Moderns Egyptians* (1860; Dent, 1963) as a tool for exploring Schmidt's oriental imagery. The broken jar might be read as a willful distraction from Beschar's trace as well as an expression of the custom that when “any evil is apprehended from a person, it is customary to break a piece of pottery behind his back” (263), so that what Eratosthenes tries to read could be a scenery that has been manipulated by an earlier interpreter in a telling way.

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