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**GOODBYE TO BERLIN:
ERICH KÄSTNER AND CHRISTOPHER
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In their novels *Fabian* (1931) and *Goodbye to Berlin* (1939), two writers from different European cultures, Erich Kästner and Christopher Isherwood, present fictional models of the Berlin of the final years of the Weimar Republic and, in Isherwood's case, the beginning of the Nazi era as well.¹ The insider Kästner—the Dresden-born, left-liberal intellectual who, before the publication of *Fabian*, had made his name as the author not only of a highly successful children's novel but also of acute satiric verse—had a keen insight into the symptoms of the collapse of the republic. The Englishman Isherwood, on the other hand, who had come to Berlin in 1929 principally because of the sexual freedom it offered him as a homosexual, remained an outsider in Germany,² despite living in Berlin for over three years and enjoying a wide range of contacts with various social groups.³

At first sight the authorial positions could hardly be more different. However, as I will demonstrate in this article, there are similarities in the approach of the two authors, which go beyond the mere historical coincidence that they were writing about the same time and place. Both authors employ a similar social and political analysis, and both resort to traditional topoi to portray the malaise of German society. Both novels are presented from the point of view of a central figure whose perspective shapes the socio-historical material involved. Although it is tempting to see these figures as alter egos of the

respective authors—and they are frequently interpreted in this manner⁴—they are in fact fictional constructs whose passive detachment from their surroundings is subjected to a critique in both novels. Both authors thematize this detachment by having their central figures articulate it in a very conscious manner. In defence of his own passivity, Fabian stresses to his friend Labude: “Ich sehe zu. Ist das nichts?”⁵ For his part, Isherwood gives his narrator the famous lines: “I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking.”⁶ The wording in each quotation (Fabian’s question and Christopher’s “not thinking”) has the effect of gently questioning the validity of the attitude expressed, and as the novels unfold it becomes increasingly apparent that passive detachment comes to mean something very close to moral failure.

While neither work is restricted to Berlin this city is nevertheless the focal point of each novel, and the interpretation of the city is an important unifying feature. Both authors overlay the portrayal of the city with a series of traditional topoi. For Fabian, Berlin is a “Sodom und Gomorra” (80), a madhouse or asylum, and a “City of Doom”:

Soweit diese riesige Stadt aus Stein besteht, ist sie fast noch wie einst. Hinsichtlich der Bewohner gleicht sie längst einem Irrenhaus. Im Osten residiert das Verbrechen, im Zentrum die Gaunerei, im Norden das Elend, im Westen die Unzucht, und in allen Himmelsrichtungen wohnt der Untergang. (81)

To the young man from the provinces, it is also a vast and merciless labyrinth in which he is cast adrift and from which he finally flees at the end of the novel: “Als er aus dem Bahnhof trat und wieder diese Straßenfluchten und Häuserblöcke vor sich sah, dieses hoffnungslose, unbarmherzige Labyrinth, wurde ihm schwindlig” (128).⁸

In using such imagery Kästner is drawing on a rich tradition in European literature and art. Its origins can be traced back to the Old Testament and it experienced a revival earlier in the modern period when its standard metaphors were used to characterize the industrialized European metropolis (London, Paris and, in the second half of the nineteenth century, Berlin) as the “Hure Babylon” (Bergius 102).⁹ “[D]as Gefühl der Künstler ... in einer End- und Wendezeit zu leben” (Bergius 103), in a corrupt, degenerate city which is doomed to destruction, is especially prominent in the art and poetry of German

Expressionism and Dada, in particular the pre-World War I poetry of Georg Heym and the Berlin paintings of Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Georg Grosz and Otto Dix.

The highlighting of the seamy underside of Berlin in both novels evokes the underlying allusion to Berlin as Sodom and Gomorrah. Fabian is an enthusiastic patron of various unsavoury venues—bars and lesbian and transvestite dives, such as the “Cousine” (71). The “Kabarett der Anonymen” (54) is particularly interesting as a variant of the madhouse motif. Here Kästner describes amateurs, referred to as “Verrückte” (56), performing for well-heeled members of the middle class who are “slumming it” for the evening. “Immer herein in die Gummizelle!” (56), announces the manager as he guides people into the cabaret. Labude responds to the audience’s mockery of the performance with the telling phrase “unten Sadisten und oben Verrückte” (60), which is clearly a metaphor for the social and political structure highlighted in the novel and the mentality of the leaders and the led. The unsavoury aspect of the city is given even greater prominence in *Goodbye to Berlin* by means of the singer Sally Bowles,¹⁰ who is very much a denizen of the Berlin demimonde, and of Christopher who, like Fabian, is a devotee of the city’s bars and dives. Whereas Fabian responds to this milieu with amused curiosity, Christopher’s fascination is sometimes tinged with repugnance. On one occasion he observes the animal vulgarity of dancing Berliners in the Troika bar: “An orchestra in Bavarian costume whooped and drank and perspired beer. The place stank like a zoo” (65). The sexual permissiveness of Weimar Germany is illustrated not only by the heterosexual Sally Bowles but also by the nightlife Christopher observes in a homosexual and transvestite dive, the Salomé:

A few stage lesbians and some young men with plucked eyebrows lounged at the bar, uttering occasional raucous guffaws or treble hoots—supposed, apparently, to represent the laughter of the damned. The whole premises are painted gold and inferno-red. (296)

While Isherwood implies that the decadence depicted here is fake and unconvincing, the allusions to Dante parallel Fabian’s vision of Berlin as a “City of Doom.” This is not the only such metaphor in the novel. On another occasion Isherwood describes Berlin, for all the surface glamour of the city lights, in contrasting but equally apocalyptic terms

as a “winter desert,” heartless and inhospitable: “the city which glowed so brightly and invitingly in the night sky above the plains, is cold and cruel and dead. Its warmth is an illusion, a mirage of the winter desert” (288).

The images of decadent Berlin in both novels that made them controversial and titillating when they were first published are, however, really only metaphors for a wider social malaise—the crisis of urban life, a profound breakdown of values, and a craving for distraction under the impact of the economic depression and political polarization that occurred in the last years of the Weimar Republic. Through the figure of Fabian, Kästner focuses on a society which appears on the surface to be an orderly one but is revealed to be corrupt and disintegrating. It is a class-ridden society, characterized by great differences in wealth and income and by the struggle for survival that dominates people’s lives. The social consequences of the economic crisis are highlighted—the demoralizing effects of unemployment, constant fear of losing one’s position, the need for some women to turn to prostitution in order to survive. The luxurious world of the Grunewald, where Labude’s lawyer father has his villa, is contrasted with the milieu of Wedding in the north of Berlin—“im Norden [wohnt] das Elend” (81)—that Fabian visits briefly and where he experiences a workers’ demonstration, a fair where food is distributed as prizes, and lastly a casual affair with a married woman (133-36). Both spheres are tainted by moral corruption (Labude senior and his mistress, Fabian and the wife of the travelling salesman).

The two adulterous relationships referred to here, the sexual anarchy depicted in general in *Fabian*, and the numerous references to prostitution (Frau Moll and her male brothel, Cornelia’s decision to sell herself to the film magnate, Makart, in order to advance her career, “die Kulp” and Wilhelmy, and so on)—all illustrate a key aspect of the social disintegration depicted in the novel, namely the commodification of human relationships in the Berlin of the early 1930s. Cornelia herself refers to “den Warencharakter der Liebe” (74),¹¹ and Fabian warns her later, “Hier wird getauscht. Wer haben will, muß hingeben, was er hat” (141). The impression of a moral vacuum at the heart of German society is underlined by examples of corruption in other areas, including the intellectual “prostitution” of

the journalists who falsify the news or do not report the truth as they see it because they do not wish to jeopardize their livelihood (in Chapter 3).

Goodbye to Berlin provides a similar picture of social decay and destabilization. As in *Fabian*, striking class differences are highlighted. While the landlady, Fräulein Schroeder, can be said to represent the “bankrupt middle class” (13),¹² many of Christopher’s pupils are from affluent bourgeois families, in particular from the well-to-do Jewish sector. Christopher, however, moves not only in upper middle-class circles. Isherwood also focuses on the situation of the working class, embodied by the Nowak family. In contrast to the fortress-like villas of the Grunewald (31) is the Nowaks’ squalid, damp and cramped flat in a tenement block (with one toilet shared by four families) in the Wassertorstraße, an impoverished area of Berlin where social deprivation is clearly apparent:

Weak yellow gleams shone out from the cellar shops. At a hand-cart under a gas-flare, a cripple was selling vegetables and fruit. A crowd of youths, with raw, sullen faces, stood watching two boys fighting at a doorway. (202)

The social consequences of the economic crisis suggested here are also revealed by Christopher’s comments on the whores in the street who proposition him (27), on unemployment among his acquaintances, for example the barman Bobby (289) and Lothar Nowak (177), and on his visit to a reformatory where the master, Herr Brink, discusses his fear of a rise in crime as a result of the imminent closure of the bankrupt engineering works, the main source of employment in the area (303).

Given the picture of social dislocation and moral malaise found in both novels, it is not surprising that disease and sickness, both literal and metaphorical, figure prominently. Isherwood’s Herr Brink even goes so far as to generalize about the state of the world in terms of sickness: “It seems as if there were a kind of badness, a disease, infecting the world today” (303). Metaphors of sickness also permeate the texture of *Fabian* as has been pointed out by critics.¹³ The journalist Malmy, for example, makes extensive use of “Krankheitsbilder[n]” (32) to give expression to the European, indeed international economic crisis: “Der Blutkreislauf ist vergiftet” (31); “Die Kaufkraft der

Massen hat die galoppierende Schwindsucht" (30); "Wenn das, woran unser geschätzter Erdball heute leidet, einer Einzelperson zustößt, sagt man schlicht, sie habe die Paralyse" (30-31). The most important of these metaphors are, however, associated with key characters in the respective novels. While it is clear that Frau Nowak's tuberculosis and the ghostly figures at the sanatorium suggest "the general social disintegration,"¹⁴ Fabian's "Herzkrankheit" exemplifies the "Trägheit des Herzens," the moral paralysis of the society as well as the more specific failure of intellectuals (to which I shall return shortly). Frau Nowak's and Fabian's "sickness" is further paralleled by Bernhard Landauer's "fatal disease" (241), that is, his decadent inertia which marks him as representative Jewish victim. The parallel with Bernhard is moreover given an ironic twist by the fact that Bernhard's death at the hands of the Nazis is reported as "heart failure" (282).

Another powerful metaphor in both novels is that of the "Lost" or "Damned." Isherwood had originally intended to transform his Berlin material "into a huge episodic novel ... *The Lost*."¹⁵ In the first volume of his autobiography, *Christopher and His Kind*, he explained that by *The Lost* he meant:

"those who have lost their own way"—that mass of Germans who were now herded blindly into the future by their Nazi shepherds. It meant "the doomed"—those who, like Bernhard Landauer, were already marked down as Hitler's victims. And in a lighter, ironic sense it meant "those whom respectable Society regards as moral outcasts"—Sally Bowles the "lost" girl, Otto Nowak the "lost" boy
...¹⁶

Apart from Sally, Otto and the Nowaks, and all the other marginalized victims of the crisis, Christopher himself comes close to being "lost," only to escape at the end of the novel (83). It is, however, the perilous situation of the Jewish community which is particularly stressed by Christopher. He gives expression to his sense of the coming catastrophe at the party Bernhard gives for "all the relatives, friends and dependents of the family" (268), on the day a referendum was held to decide the fate of the Brüning government (August 1931):

Over there, in the city, the votes were being counted. I thought, of Natalia: She has escaped—none too soon, perhaps. However often the decision may be delayed, all these people are ultimately doomed. This evening is the dress-rehearsal of a disaster. It is like the last night of an epoch. (271)

As this quotation reveals, the picture as far as the Landauers are concerned is a differentiated one. Despite Natalia's fears of what the future will bring—"I await always that the worst will come. I know how things are in Germany today, and suddenly it can be that my father lose all" (227)—she and her parents have the foresight to escape from Germany. Bernhard, however, whose world-weary fatalism robs him of the will to leave—even though he is fully aware of his own precarious situation, brought home to him by the threatening letters he has received (274)—is subsequently murdered by the Nazis. The melancholy fate of Bernhard can be contrasted with the ultimate survival of a representative non-Jewish figure, Frl. Schroeder who, at the end of the novel, talks "reverently about 'Der Führer'" (316), even though at the last elections she had voted Communist. Her ability to adapt herself to the Nazi regime, it is suggested, is typical of that of a large number of Germans:

She is merely acclimatizing herself, in accordance with a natural law, like an animal which changes its coat for the winter. Thousands of people like Frl. Schroeder are acclimatizing themselves. (316)

In *Fabian* too the lost are contrasted with survivors. The fate of the corrupt Frau Moll, who flees to Budapest with the profits from her male brothel, throws into sharp relief that of the two central figures, Fabian, the immoral "moralist," and the idealist Labude, both of whom prove no match for the times. As an heir to the traditions of the Enlightenment, Fabian would like to believe in the possibility of progress in human affairs. However, he is sceptical about the likelihood of this occurring and his pessimistic view of Germany's and Europe's future dominates the novel. He believes that there will soon be another war—"Wann gab es wieder Krieg? Wann würde es wieder soweit sein?" (52)—and compares the present situation where he lives in expectation of "[d]en Untergang Europas" (38) with the sense of imminent crisis and the concomitant "gefährlichen Lebenshunger" (50), which he and his fellow students had felt before the First World War, when they had been waiting to be called up and had been convinced that their lives would soon be forfeited:

Ich saß in einem großen Wartesaal, und der hieß Europa. Acht Tage später fährt der Zug. Das wußte ich. Aber wohin er fuhr und was aus mir werden sollte, das wußte kein Mensch. Und jetzt sitzen wir

wieder im Wartesaal, and wieder heißt er Europa! Und wieder wissen wir nicht, was geschehen wird. Wir leben provisorisch, die Krise nimmt kein Ende! (50)

In a sense Fabian is a representative of the “lost generation,” caught between the wars, victim of the first (through his heart condition), and rendered incapable of action and commitment by fear of the second. He is also the most important representative of the intellectuals whose behaviour and attitudes are one of Kästner’s central concerns.

The metaphor of the “Wartesaal”¹⁷ is not only part of the diagnosis of the provisional nature of the times. It also suggests the fatalistic and defeatist mentality of the intellectuals who, Kästner implies, were ineffectual in the face of political and economic crisis. By contrast with his activist friend Labude, who hopes to bring about change through political action, Fabian remains detached and sceptical: “Ich sehe zu und warte. Ich warte auf den Sieg der Anständigkeit, dann könnte ich mich zur Verfügung stellen. Aber ich warte darauf, wie ein Ungläubiger auf Wunder” (81). His inability to commit himself to taking positive action springs as well from a certain elitist misanthropy. While he would like to help “die Menschen anständig und vernünftig zu machen” (44), he is sceptical about “die Erziehbarkeit des Menschengeschlechts ... Vernunft könne man nur einer beschränkten Zahl von Menschen beibringen, und die sei schon vernünftig” (125). In general, Fabian’s stance as a moralist is very ambiguous.¹⁸ He has a sense of moral superiority, an unwillingness to compromise his principles, and to an extent this attitude explains his role as passive onlooker. He measures contemporary human behaviour against the values of “Vernunft” and “Anständigkeit,” a modern version of the Enlightenment concepts of “Vernunft” and “Tugend.” However, because he firmly believes no one can live up to them (except for his mother), these values become a means of rationalizing his inaction.

Fabian’s position as moralist is thus problematical. He is portrayed as a “good” person who is appalled by the indecency of others and who regularly performs acts of charity on behalf of needy individuals (inviting the unemployed man into a restaurant, saving the little girl who steals an ashtray, taking the inventor in for the night). Yet he fails to live up to his own ethical standards. First, he compromises his own

concept of decency by frequent visits to brothels and sleazy night-clubs and, most significantly, by his behaviour with the married woman in Wedding. Secondly, in his case, "Anständigkeit" comes into conflict with "Vernunft," which he sacrifices entirely to "Anständigkeit" when he jumps into the river at the end of the novel. All the examples of decency on Fabian's part encourage the reader to sympathize and identify with him. Yet this final episode, when with uncharacteristic decisiveness Fabian plunges into the river to save a drowning child, only to drown while the child swims ashore—"Fabian ertrank. Er konnte leider nicht schwimmen" (188)—demonstrates beyond any possible doubt that, as a character, Fabian is not intended to be a figure of identification for the reader but, as an ineffectual moralist, a target of the novel's satire.¹⁹ This intention is in fact brought home by the narrator's curt admonition at the beginning of the chapter in question—"Lernt schwimmen!" (184; Chapter 24).²⁰

The idealistic Labude is also a failure. Fabian and Labude are parallel figures in the sense that they share a value system derived from the Enlightenment. However, whereas Fabian is a sceptic, Labude is an activist who does not suffer from Fabian's "Trägheit des Herzens." Rather he dreams of controlling capital (43), and of European youth revitalizing the continent through a "Quer Verbindung der Klassen" (65).²¹ Nonetheless, Labude lacks the strength of will to put his ideas into practice—he is too easily discouraged and too full of self-pity. Fabian's scepticism about Labude's idealism which, he implies, is predicated on a naive failure to understand human nature, is revealed most clearly in his dream. This dream, with its bizarre visions of technology out of control, sexual anarchy and human baseness—"Jeder bestahl jeden. Jeder wühlte heimlich in den Taschen des Vordermannes, und während er das tat, wurde er vom Hintermann beraubt" (121)—is highly derivative, recalling the grotesque paintings of Georg Grosz and images from Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis*.²² One function of the dream is to ironize Labude's endeavours, since his appeal to the pilfering crowd—"Freunde! Mitbürger! Die Anständigkeit muß siegen!" (121)—though met with enthusiastic agreement, fails to prevent the people continuing to rummage in one another's pockets. The dream also provides the most striking images of the likely fate of the Weimar Republic found in the novel. Labude's concluding

remarks, “Die Vernunft wird siegen, auch wenn ich untergehe” (122), culminate in an anticipation not only of Labude’s suicide but also of violence and political chaos:

Da fielen Schüsse. Fabian sah hoch. Überall waren Fenster und Dächer. Und überall standen finstere Gestalten mit Revolvern und Maschinengewehren ... Flugzeuge schwirrten unter der Saaldecke und warfen Brandfackeln auf die Häuser. Die Häuser begannen zu brennen. (122)

The picture of the intellectuals provided by the presentation of Fabian and Labude is complemented by other figures. Dr. jur. Cornelia Battenberg prostitutes her talents by throwing in her lot with Makart. Because she is willing to do so, Cornelia is one of the survivors of the novel, though Fabian paints an ambiguous picture of her future as “[e]ine unglückliche Frau, der es gut geht” (141). Other key intellectuals survive as a result of their cynical collaboration with the existing system, notably the journalists Münzer and Malmy. Like Fabian, they are fatalists who clearly recognize the plight of Germany but are not prepared to enlighten their readers to bring about change. Malmy, the “Handelsredakteur,” shares his colleague’s cynicism: “Ich lüge auch ... Aber ich weiß es. Ich weiß, daß das System falsch ist. Bei uns in der Wirtschaft sieht das ein Blinder. Aber ich diene dem falschen System mit Hingabe” (27). Malmy provides the most detailed analysis of the economic crisis in Germany found in the novel, yet he is not prepared to write about it: “Ich helfe, das Verkehrte konsequent zu tun. Alles, was gigantische Formen annimmt, kann imponieren, auch die Dummheit” (29).

The picture of the moral paralysis affecting intellectuals is quite highly developed and differentiated in *Fabian*, which records a range of intellectual responses to the situation in Germany and in Europe generally. In *Goodbye to Berlin*, the crisis among intellectuals is largely restricted to the portrait of the fascinating and enigmatic aesthete, Bernhard Landauer, and to a certain extent that of the narrator, Christopher. Bernhard shares Fabian’s fatalism, even down to reminiscing about the First World War:

I knew that I myself would soon be called up. ... I accepted it. It seemed quite natural that we should all have to die. I suppose that this was the general wartime mentality. But I think that, in my case, there was something characteristically Semitic in my attitude. (261)

In the face of the present crisis, and though lacking Fabian's craving for diversion and voyeurism, Bernhard shares the inability to take positive action. Even when his own life is at stake, he prefers to withdraw from the world whenever he can and disregard his awareness of the threat posed by the Nazis: "Do you know, Christopher, I quite envy you because you do not know where we are going?" (256).

The portrayal of the Landauer family also highlights a striking difference between *Fabian* and *Goodbye to Berlin*. Whereas there are few references to Jews in *Fabian*,²³ Isherwood focuses strongly on anti-Semitism and the plight of the Jews.²⁴ The key Jewish figures in the novel—the warm, charming paterfamilias, Herr Landauer, his wife, Natalia and Bernhard—are generally characterized very favourably. There is, however, a remarkable contrast between the depiction of this highly cultivated family and the crass clichés through which Isherwood conveys the openly anti-Semitic attitudes of a number of characters, including Sally Bowles, the Bavarian Nazi Fräulein Mayr, and the Nazi doctor on the island of Rügen. These anti-Semitic clichés present Jews as dirty old lechers, in Sally's words (57, 250), or in terms of Nazi racist propaganda, as "the obscene anti-Nordic menace" (294), preying on German womanhood. Age-old scapegoating of Jews as polluters of wells and as bloodsuckers also recurs in Fräulein Mayr's delighted response to the news of the smashing of "the windows of all the Jewish shops" in October 1930:

This town is sick with Jews. ... They're poisoning the very water we drink! They're strangling us, they're robbing us, they're sucking our life-blood. Look at all the big department stores: Wertheim, K.D.W., Landauers'. Who owns them? Filthy thieving Jews! (219)

A more ambivalent attitude is however displayed by Frau Nowak, who comments with reference to the Jewish tailor owed money by the whole neighbourhood: "When Hitler comes, he'll show these Jews a thing or two" (184). Nevertheless, she does not want the Jews removed: "a Jew will always let you have time if you're in difficulties. ... You ask the people round here, Herr Christoph: they'd never turn out the Jews" (184-85).

The narrator, the Herr Christoph addressed here, is also an intellectual but this aspect of his portrayal is not nearly as developed as that of Fabian or Bernhard. As a foreign visitor he cannot hold a

representative position and is presented mainly as a listener in intellectual discussions with others, particularly Bernhard. His political views are delineated somewhat more clearly. We are told he is a Communist (174), and an anti-fascist (313). Some additional information about his political attitudes can also be inferred from references to political developments in the Weimar years.

Although there is an underlying political matrix in both novels, there is more overt signposting in *Goodbye to Berlin* but it also contains less analysis and direct commentary on events. In keeping with his self-description as “a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking” (13), Christopher’s roles are largely those of a dispassionate observer (who in general doesn’t really attempt to penetrate beneath the surface of events) and a conduit for the views of others. For example, it is Fr. Schroeder (as reported by the narrator) who announces the 1931 shutting down of the “Darmstädter und National” bank (94) and comments on the implications: “There’ll be thousands ruined, I shouldn’t wonder! The milkman says we’ll have civil war in a fortnight!” (94). Christopher’s role in this incident is confined to observing the anxious crowd gathered outside a branch bank. In the same section he notes “the new emergency decrees” (94) in the papers. Comment is, however, restricted to an alarmist headline and a response by a Nazi journalist (95). In a similarly detached way, Christopher also documents growing social unrest during 1930 (37), the range of political views in Fr. Schroeder’s boarding house and the Nowak household, the growing politicization of the country during the summer of 1931, revealed by the flags families display on the beach on Rügen island, “There are the German city-flags—Hamburg, Hannover, Dresden, Rostock and Berlin, as well as the National, Republican and Nazi colours” (138), and Nazi rioting and demonstrations against Jews (219).

Occasionally political anecdotes are personalized. Christopher describes the brutal treatment of Werner, a Communist acquaintance of his, at the hands of the police (308). A humorous aspect of the episode is, however, also exploited by Isherwood, who highlights the satisfaction Werner later gets from press cuttings of the incident. There is, however, no humour in Christopher’s description of an attack by

three SA men on an opponent, probably a Communist, which is recorded with brutal realism:

Another passer-by and myself were the first to reach the doorway where the young man was lying. ... As they picked him up, I got a sickening glimpse of his face—his left eye was poked half out, and blood poured from the wound. (308)

The incident is important for two reasons. While Christopher's role remains principally that of an observer, there is a hint of political judgement in his description of the behaviour of "a group of heavily armed policemen. With their chests out, and their hands on their revolver belts, they magnificently disregarded the whole affair" (308). The tone of these observations amounts to an indirect criticism of the lenient attitude of the police and judiciary toward right-wing violence during the Weimar Republic and illustrates the growing politicization of the narrator during the course of the novel. It is noteworthy that this incident occurs towards the end of the novel in the second "Berlin Diary" (winter 1932-33). Christopher's description of the funeral in March 1931 of Hermann Müller (the Social Democratic Chancellor and predecessor of Brüning) in the early chapter "Sally Bowles" provides an illuminating contrast. Christopher observes the funeral procession together with Sally and the American millionaire Clive, who has offered to finance a world trip for the three of them. Christopher's description of the funeral procession, "Ranks of pale steadfast clerks, government officials, trade union secretaries—the whole drab weary pageant of Prussian Social Democracy—trudged past" (82), suggests that while he is aware of the status of the deceased (unlike Clive, "Say, who was this guy, anyway?" or Sally, "'God knows,' Sally answered yawning"), he shares the others' detachment from the Germans and their fate:

We had nothing to do with those Germans down there, marching, or with the dead man in the coffin, or with the words on the banners. In a few days, I thought, we shall have forfeited all kinship with ninety-nine per cent. of the population of the world... (82)

The contrasting description of these two events suggests a modification of the "I am a camera" attitude through the course of the novel. Even though direct political comment is sparse, a gradual increase in political insight and personal concern is implied the longer Christopher

stays in Germany, witnessing the deteriorating fortunes of the Weimar Republic and the more involved he becomes in the lives of certain friends who are at risk. These include above all Bernhard and Natalia Landauer, but also Communists such as Werner who share his anti-fascist views, and other anti-Nazis like his pupil Herr N, the police chief (314). This tendency culminates in Christopher's self-criticism at the conclusion of the novel. On the last page, after Hitler's coming to power, "the Reichstag fire and the mock-elections" (279), and the day before he is to return to England, he describes his horror at finding himself smiling at the beautiful weather even though he knows "dozens of my friends ... are in prison, possibly dead," and that his young Communist friend Rudi is "[p]erhaps at this very moment ... being tortured to death" (316-17). Christopher is conscious of the contrast between such atrocities and the brilliant sunny day, with its appearance of normality, as if the present has been preserved in a photograph:

The trams are going up and down the Kleiststrasse, just as usual. They, and the people on the pavement ... have an air of curious familiarity, of striking resemblance to something one remembers as normal and pleasant in the past—like a very good photograph. (317)

This appalling contradiction is, however, too much for him to bear and he can only deal with it by denying the reality of the whole experience, "Even now I can't altogether believe that any of this has really happened" (317), absolving himself of any sense of connectedness with the events he has witnessed.

It is not surprising that by contrast with Christopher, Fabian, the creation of the insider Kästner, displays from the outset considerable insight into political events. While Fabian's political attitudes are revealed on occasion, for example, his sympathy for the democrat Rathenau (157), his apparent support for the republican government, "Schreiben Sie dafür!" (27), or his rejection of the irrational and antidemocratic views of his old school friend Wenzkat, now a member of the rightwing "Stahlhelm" (179), like Christopher, he generally displays considerable detachment from political events. When he describes a demonstration in a working-class area of Berlin, "Am Weddingplatz" (131), he expresses no sympathy with the working-class demonstrators but merely notes the absurdity of one group of

proletarians being pitted against another:

Berittene Polizei wartete hinter der Sperrkette darauf, zur Attacke befohlen zu werden. Uniformierte Proletarier warteten, den Sturmriemen unterm Kinn, auf proletarische Zivilisten. Wer trieb sie gegeneinander? (131)

A similar lack of sympathy, this time for the unemployed, is revealed during the scene at the "Arbeitsamt" (101). Another incident, "[d]er Zweikampf am Märkischen Museum" (49), involving a shoot-out between a Nazi and a Communist, provides a satirical comment on the violence and polarization of politics in the final years of the Weimar Republic. Both the Nazi and the Communist are wounded, though Kästner seems to take particular delight in having the Nazi shot in the backside. Kästner exploits the satiric potential of the scene, which contrasts strikingly with the very realistic and horrifying depiction of the attack by the three SA men in *Goodbye to Berlin*. Kästner also uses the scene to illustrate Fabian's critical attitude to both the NSDAP and the KPD. The NSDAP is criticised for having little to offer: " 'Ihre Partei,' er meinte den Faschisten, 'weiß nur, wogegen sie kämpft, und auch das weiß sie nicht genau' " (53). While Fabian expresses his solidarity with the Communist, he is also convinced of the inherently illiberal nature of the KPD:

Daß ihr euer Recht wollt, ist eure Pflicht. Und ich bin euer Freund, denn wir haben denselben Feind, weil ich die Gerechtigkeit liebe. ... Aber, mein Herr, auch wenn Sie an die Macht kommen, werden die Ideale der Menschheit im Verborgenen sitzen und weiterweinen. Man ist noch nicht gut und klug, bloß weil man arm ist. (54)²⁵

The episode is also of interest because of Fabian's general characterization of the state of impasse in Germany and his oblique criticism of the Brüning government, which had no parliamentary majority and ruled by "Notverordnungen":

Daß es mit Deutschland so nicht weitergehen kann, darüber sind wir uns wohl alle einig. Und daß man jetzt versucht, mit Hilfe der kalten Diktatur unhaltbare Zustände zu verewigen, ist eine Sünde, die bald genug ihre Strafe finden wird (53).²⁶

Just as Christopher appears to come to some degree of recognition of the inadequacy of the "I am a camera" attitude, so Fabian at the end of the novel finally questions his own detachment. On the train

journey to the provincial town clearly modelled on Kästner's home city of Dresden, he acknowledges the possible validity of Labude's activism and compares his own attitude unfavourably with it: "Labude hatte auf dem Boden der Tatsachen gestanden, hatte marschieren wollen und war gestolpert. Er, Fabian, schwebte, weil er nicht schwer genug war, im Raum und lebte weiter" (168). Fabian's self-criticism is, however, short-lived and has no practical consequences as he soon lapses into his familiar indecisive ambivalence, which is not even resolved by his absurd death at the end of the novel.

The outsider Christopher escapes from Berlin shortly after Hitler comes to power. Fabian's return to his home town in the final section of the novel, triggered by his grief at Labude's suicide and by what he perceives as Cornelia's betrayal, is an analogous attempt to escape from the failures and contradictions of his life in Berlin. It is an abortive attempt, since what he finds at home is as corrupt and uninviting as the metropolis he has left behind.²⁷ Indeed, Fabian finds his home town so unsatisfactory that he contemplates fleeing even further to the "Erzgebirge" in the hope of finding there "ein Ziel, das den Einsatz lohnte" (187). Christopher's escape is a real one. As a foreigner he can turn his back on Berlin and leave people like Frä. Schroeder and the other Berliners to their fate: "After all, whatever government is in power, they are doomed to live in this town" (316). There is no such escape for Fabian. Flight to the "Erzgebirge" is clearly a fantasy and his death confirms the underlying ambivalence of his attitude, the unresolved contradiction between his personal kindness and noble intentions and the fact that he is ill equipped to put these intentions into practice.

Despite the differences inherent in the respective insider and outsider positions and in the time frames employed in both novels, the striking similarities identified between them—in particular the interpretation of the social, political and economic crisis in the last years of the Weimar Republic; the use of traditional topoi in the portrayal of the city; and the critique of the underlying detachment of the respective central figures from their surroundings—all raise the question whether *Isherwood* was influenced by *Fabian*. Whilst in the absence of conclusive evidence a definitive answer might not be possible, the textual similarities between narratives, characters, situa-

tions and themes outlined above are compelling. It is hard to believe that given his experiences in Berlin Isherwood would not have been interested to read a contemporary German novel on the City of Doom.

NOTES

- 1 Most of the stories which make up *Goodbye to Berlin* were published earlier as independent pieces, as Isherwood noted in the Preface to the first edition: "The first *Berlin Diary*, *The Nowaks* and *The Landauers*, have already appeared, in John Lehmann's *New Writing*. *Sally Bowles* was originally published as a separate volume by the Hogarth Press" (London, Hogarth Press, 1939, 1954).
- 2 For one thing, as Breon Mitchell has pointed out, Isherwood acknowledged that "[f]or the first year and a half [he] knew too little German" to go to the theatre: "W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood: The 'German Influence,'" *Oxford German Studies* 1 (1966): 164. However, it should be noted that, according to a statement by Isherwood in the autobiographical *Christopher and His Kind. 1929-1939* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1977), he was speaking German fluently by late 1932 (94).
- 3 See Geoffrey Halson, "Introduction," in *An Isherwood Selection* (London: Longman, 1979), 2.
- 4 The autobiographical dimension of *Fabian* was first noted by Hermann Kesten in "Abrechnung mit der Moral," *Das Tagebuch* 47 (1931): 1833-34. Parallels between Kästner and Fabian, however, should not be overemphasized, as Kästner distances himself from his central figure. Isherwood in turn cautioned against readers assuming that *Goodbye to Berlin* was "purely autobiographical, or that its characters are libellously exact portraits of living persons. 'Christopher Isherwood' is a convenient ventriloquist's dummy, nothing more" (Preface to *Goodbye to Berlin*). For the figure of Christopher as persona see Alan Wilde, "Language and Surface: Isherwood and the Thirties," *Contemporary Literature* 16 (1975): 478; Lisa N. Schwerdt, "Isherwood's Namesake Narrators: Device, Persona, and Alter Ego," *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 29 (1988): 196; Stephen Wade, "The Berlin Period: Shorter Fiction," in Wade, *Christopher Isherwood* (New York: St. Martin's, 1991), 59.
- 5 Erich Kästner, *Gesammelte Schriften. Band 2. Romane* (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1959), 43. Subsequent references to this volume are included in the text. For a review of secondary literature on *Fabian*, see Volker Ladenthin, "Erich Kästners Roman *Fabian*: Ein Literaturbericht," *Sprachkunst* 19 (1988): 171-88, and Andreas Drouve,

- Erich Kästner: *Moralist mit doppeltem Boden* (Marburg: Tectum, 1993), 19-50.
- 6 Christopher Isherwood, *Goodbye to Berlin* (London: Hogarth Press, 1939, 1954), 13. Subsequent references to this volume are included in the text. The detachment of Isherwood's narrator, as well as the use of the camera image to reinforce "the theme of disengagement" (Alan Wilde, *Christopher Isherwood* [New York: Twayne, 1971], 76), has often been commented on by critics; for example, Wade 52-53, David P. Thomas, "Goodbye to Berlin: Refocusing Isherwood's Camera," *Contemporary Literature* 13 (1972): 44. Thomas, however, calls the detachment into question: " 'I am a camera,' the act of neurotic withdrawal, the blandness of Isherwood's hero in the Berlin fiction, all speak of their opposites, of an aching need to join the mainstream of direct human sympathies" (52). It is interesting to note that an early reviewer also described Fabian as a "Kameramann": see Rudolf Arnheim, "Moralische Prosa," *Die Weltbühne* 47 (1931): 789. For Fabian as "Kamera," see also Dirk Walter, *Zeitkritik und Idyllensehnsucht. Erich Kästners Frühwerk (1928-1933) als Beispiel linksbürgerlicher Literatur in der Weimarer Republik* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1977), 241.
- 7 John J. White, "Sexual Mecca, Nazi Metropolis, City of Doom: The Pattern of English, Irish and American Reactions to the Berlin of the Inter-War Years," in *Berlin: Literary Images of a City. Eine Großstadt im Spiegel der Literatur*, ed. Derek Glass (Berlin: Schmidt, 1989), 125. For Berlin as topos see also Karl Riha, "Berlin im Kopf. Die Stadt als literarisches Thema: zwischen Realität und Imagination," in *Medium Metropole. Berlin, Paris, New York*, ed. Friedrich Knilli, Michael Nerlich (Heidelberg: Winter, 1986), 33-51; Michael Rutschky, "Das Reden von Berlin. Über Literatur und die große Stadt," in *In der großen Stadt. Die Metropole als kulturhistorische Kategorie*, ed. Thomas Steinfeld, Heidrun Suhr (Frankfurt: Hain, 1990), 9-21; Erhard Schütz, "Zwischen Alexanderplatz und Kurfürstendamm. Verändern, Verschwinden, Vergessen—Berlin-Topoi der Weimarer Republik," *Der Deutschunterricht* 44 (1992): 53-68; Volker Ladenthin, "Die Große Stadt bei Erich Kästner," *Euphorion* 90 (1996): 317-35.
- 8 For the motif of the city as labyrinth see Hartwig Isernhagen, "Die Bewußtseinskrise der Moderne und die Erfahrung der Stadt als Labyrinth," in *Die Stadt in der Literatur*, ed. Cord Meckseper Elisabeth Schraut (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 81-104; Hanne Bergius, "Berlin als Hure Babylon," in *Die Metropole. Industriekultur in Berlin im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Jochen Boberg, Tilman Fichter, Eckhart Gillen (München: Beck, 1986), 104; Ladenthin, "Die Große Stadt" 321.

- 9 The "Hure Babylon" is a recurring motif in the most important Berlin novel of the late Weimar Republic, *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (Bergius 108).
- 10 For an interesting reading of Sally Bowles, see Linda Mizejewski, *Divine Decadence: Fascism, Female Spectacle, and the Makings of Sally Bowles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).
- 11 That this concept was a product of its age is indicated by the fact that the title of the first version of Brecht's *Der gute Mensch von Sezuan* (1930) was "Die Ware Liebe": see Werner Hecht, *Materialien zu Brechts "Der gute Mensch von Sezuan"* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1968), 157. It is equally instructive that the central figure of the play is a prostitute.
- 12 Both Fräulein Schroeder and Frau Hohlfeld, Fabian's landlady, illustrate the phenomenon of "Deklassierung" (a typical theme of Weimar Republic novels), as they have been forced by economic circumstances to let out rooms.
- 13 See Wendula Dahle et al., "Hatte der Globus die Krätze? Anregungen zur Behandlung des Romans *Fabian* von Erich Kästner im Deutschunterricht der oberen Gymnasialklassen," in *Projekt Deutschunterricht 6. Kritischer Literaturunterricht. Dichtung und Politik*, ed. Heinz Ide, Bodo Lecke in Verbindung mit dem Bremer Kollektiv (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1974), 150.
- 14 Peter Thomas, "'Camp' and Politics in Isherwood's Berlin Fiction," *Journal of Modern Literature* 5 (1976): 127.
- 15 See Isherwood's Preface to *Goodbye to Berlin*. Peter Thomas suggests that Isherwood's reading of Baudelaire shaped his view of Berlin and of *The Lost*: "however ironic, Isherwood's conception of the 'doomed' underworld carried with it hints of the familiar *fin de siècle* descent into the corrupt depths of the dreadful city. Soon after moving to Berlin, Isherwood had in fact published a translation of Baudelaire's *Intimate Journals*" (118).
- 16 *Christopher and His Kind*, 134.
- 17 In *The Zeitroman of the Late Weimar Republic* (New York: Lang, 1995), Elke Matijevich notes that "the waiting-room metaphor is common to engaged novels of the 1920s" (116).
- 18 See Kurt J. Fickert, "Moral Ambiguity in the Weimar Republic: Kästner's *Fabian* Revisited," *Germanic Notes* 14 (1983): 51-54.
- 19 In *Erich Kästner* (München: Beck, 1981), Helmuth Kiesel describes Fabian as "eine vom Autor Kästner deutlich unterschiedene Demonstrationsfigur. Der Autor bedient sich ihrer, um durch sie die Gesellschaft einer kritisch-satirischen Betrachtung zu unterziehen, setzt zugleich aber auch seine Demonstrationsfigur der Kritik aus" (89).
- 20 The admonition "Lernt schwimmen!," however, makes little sense if the drowning is viewed as suicide, as often occurs in the critical literature;

see Renate Benson, *Erich Kästner. Studien zu seinem Werk* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1973), 39 and Fickert 54 n.3. In a recent study, *Cockpit of Ideologies: The Literature and Political History of the Weimar Republic* (Bern: Lang, 1995), Anthony Grenville also speaks of "Fabian's virtual suicide" (355).

- 21 Several critics see Fabian and Labude as complementary figures; for example, Fickert 52-54; Kurt Beutler, who in *Erich Kästner. Eine literaturpädagogische Untersuchung* (Weinheim, Berlin: Beltz, 1967) suggests they are "zwei Varianten einer Konzeption" (128); and Hans Wagener, who remarks in *Erich Kästner* (Berlin: Colloquium, 1973) that Fabian and Labude "[sind] trotz ihrer teilweise gegensätzlichen Ansichten beide Sprachrohre Kästners" (55-56). Others emphasize the novel's antithetical structure, "[die] Aufstellung von These und Antithese," as Helga Bemann puts it in *Humor auf Taille. Erich Kästner. Leben und Werk* (Berlin: Verlag der Nation, 1983, 1985) 237, or "die zwischen den beiden Hauptfiguren sich abspielende Dialektik," in Egon Schwarz's terms: "Fabians Schneckengang im Kreise," in *Zeitkritische Romane des 20. Jahrhunderts. Die Gesellschaft in der Kritik der deutschen Literatur*, ed. Hans Wagener (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1975), 138.
- 22 Egon Schwarz has also pointed out that the "Schießerei" in which the dream culminates recalls "eine Szene aus Hesses Magischem Theater im *Steppenwolf*" ("Fabians" 142).
- 23 See "ein Restaurant, wo russische und ungarische Juden einander anpumpen" (80), and Fabian's praise of Walther Rathenau, "An dieser Straßenbiegung war ein kluger Mann ermordet worden" (157).
- 24 For an analysis of anti-Semitic references, see Mizejewski, *Divine Decadence* 67-68 and 81-83.
- 25 In "Kästners *Fabian* oder die Karikatur freischwebender Intelligenz," in Lethen, *Neue Sachlichkeit 1924-1932. Studien zur Literatur des 'Weißen Sozialismus'* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1970), Helmut Lethen criticizes Fabian's "Berührungsangst vor jeder Theorie, die auf gesellschaftliche Praxis aus ist" (145), and views his attitudes as providing "eine Disposition für die innere Emigration im NS-Staat" (150). However, Lethen overlooks a number of key aspects, the most important being that Fabian is himself satirized in the novel.
- 26 Christopher by comparison makes no comment on the new emergency laws.
- 27 The comment that "[H]ier hatte Deutschland kein Fieber. Hier hatte es Untertemperatur" (183) recalls the "winter desert" in *Isherwood*.