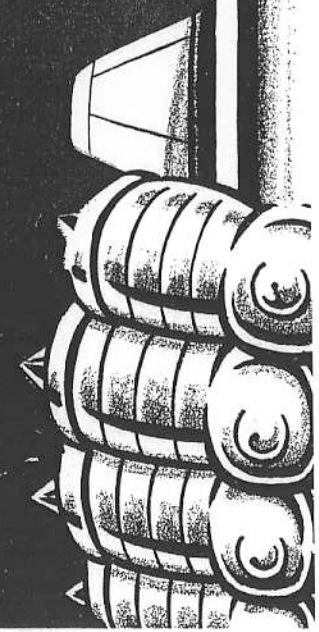
THE EMPIRE STRIKES OUT:

Kurd Lasswitz, Hans Dominik, and the Development of German Science Fiction

by William B.



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Chapter VII

Conclusions and Conjectures: Lasswitz, Dominik, and the Evolution of German SF

The preceding chapters offer detailed examinations of Kurd Lasswitz and Hans Dominik, the two most important writers of German SF. I have sought to show how the fiction of each is related to his personal experiences, his knowledge of science and technology, his concept of SF, his medium of publication and readership, and his larger environment. But a study of Lasswitz and Dominik would be both unsatisfying and incomplete without some attempt to assess their place within the broader context of German SF. With equal justification, and with a decent respect of course to the opinions of genre theorists and to the seeming paradoxes of literary hermeneutics, one may also observe, conversely, that whatever German SF might be can not be determined without consideration of Lasswitz and Dominik. The present chapter, therefore, proceeds from an appraisal of the two writers to an examination of the genre in whose history they figured so prominently.

I

Kurd Lasswitz was born in 1848 and died in 1910. His life and work reflect the German liberalism associated with his birthyear, the history of Wilhelmine Germany, the humanism of his cultural heritage, and his profound interest in science. In 1871, the year in which the Second Reich was founded, Lasswitz' first SF appeared in print. The novella *Bis zum Nullpunkt des Seins* and its later companion piece, *Gegen das Weltgesetz,* are scarcely the irrelevant flights of futuristic fancy which they might initially seem to be. Nor are the two stories merely compendiums of imaginary technology. In a brief but sometimes incisive and critical manner they express three of the fundamental social features and intellectual traits of Lasswitz' time: the growing awareness of science and technology, the concept of systematic and rationally comprehensible historical development, and eager optimism about the future.

During the next quarter-century Lasswitz elaborated and

improved his literary techniques in a number of short stories which are collected in the volumes *Seifenblasen* (1890/94) and *Traumkristalle* (1902/07). His non-fictional writings show that his understanding of science, philosophy, society, and history, and his concept of SF as well, had increased in sophistication, although no essential change of direction is evident. Lasswitz published his masterpiece, *Auf zwei Planeten,* in 1897, when the Second Reich had reached its political and cultural culmination, and when positivism had attained a similar intellectual dominance. The novel, which still ranks as one of the best works of German SF, is rich in imaginary science and technology; equally impressive are Lasswitz' descriptions of extra-terrestrial settings and of Martian society and history. In *Auf zwei Planeten* Lasswitz examines the role of science and technology in the modern world. He also offers a broad and provocatively critical analysis of Wilhelmine society, and indeed of Western civilization in general.

Unfortunately, Lasswitz' SF has not enjoyed the attention and appreciation it deserves, either in the literary community at large or among most readers and critics of SF. By inclination or necessity he wrote for a limited audience composed of readers who shared his liberal ideology, humanistic intellectual orientation, and at least some of his understanding of science. The failure of most contemporary readers to comprehend the nature of his fiction as SF, the lack of a more popular medium of publication, and the suppression of *Auf zwei Planeten* between 1933 and 1945 have all contributed to Lasswitz' obscurity.

The differences between Lasswitz and Hans Dominik (1872-1945), the best-known and most prolific writer of German SF in the first half of this century, are as great as those between the Second Reich and the spectacular, chaotic period which includes the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich. Dominik was a technician, not a philosopher and theoretical scientist, and he was certainly not a humanist or political liberal. He was, in blunt terms, a cultural Philistine, a racist, and a reactionary whose works were useful to National Socialism.

In Dominik's fictional visions of the future, technology occupies the position of vital importance toward which it was clearly moving in the early twentieth century. The frustrations of German history, as viewed by extreme conservatives at least, are exorcised, and national, often blatantly nationalistic dreams—above all the ideal of social *Gemeinschaft*—are acted out. Dominik was of course neither the first nor the last writer to express such ideas in fiction.

014-2

But in his SF the strong organic social unity of Germany and the assertiveness in foreign relations which it makes possible belong neither to the nostalgic past nor to the realm of hopeful theory. Dominik projected the notions of *Gemeinschaft* and national resurgence into the future and presented his visions as vivid actualizations, not as cherished memories, wishful dreams, or academic hypotheses. But the real future, as it emerged after 1933, when the National Socialist state first subjected all sectors of society to a process of forced "integration" or "coordination" *(Gleichschaltung)* and then waged a total and devastating war, represented a far less attractive version of the social and technological ideal conceived by Dominik, and by many other conservatives.

Judged by general literary standards Dominik lacks any appreciable distinction, and as a writer of SF he evidences only a modest capability whose strongest feature is the vivid description of technology. He was not a profound or, in his treatment of science, even a daringly imaginative thinker. Yet the resources of his publishers, his competent command of the techniques of *Trivialliteratur,* and his feeling for the more sensational but in fact rather easily foreseeable aspects of the technology of the near future enabled him to reach a vast audience. Dominik's novels continued to appear in large editions during the Nazi Era, and indeed are still in print.

Despite the evident differences between Lasswitz and Dominik, the texts discussed in the preceding chapters correspond adequately to the definition of SF adopted in this study, and indeed satisfy any other reasonable definition. But Lasswitz and Dominik wrote SF which is also unmistakably *German* SF, for it was shaped to a significant extent by its specific environment. If the two writers differ greatly in so many ways, the virtual extremes they embody reflect the characteristic polarities of their culture. Lasswitz, writing in the late nineteenth century, was influenced strongly by German liberalism and the heritage of German Classicism and Idealism. He necessarily viewed concepts like imperialism, culture contact, and social organization from a different perspective than that characteristic of, for example, Anglo-American writers of SF. Dominik responded to the same or similar ideas, but in a manner consonant with the cultural Philistinism, racial attitudes, and extreme conservatism typical of a large segment of German society during his lifetime.

The German cultural environment also registered a distinct

effect on the treatment of science and technology in the SF of Lasswitz and Dominik. Both writers were intensely interested in contemporary German science, and proud of its recent achievements. While Lasswitz' understanding of the history and contemporary development of science was far superior to that of Dominik, much of his SF refers to the world of late nineteenth-century German science, especially the impressive but often esoteric work in physics being conducted in the universities. Dominik was a technologist who lacked not only Lasswitz' historical and philosophical knowledge, but also his cultural cosmopolitanism and his sense of the international nature of science. He clearly favored applied science over theoretical speculation, and consistently chose his material from those areas of technology which, like chemistry, metallurgy, and aeronautics, were most prominent in Germany during his time, especially in the eyes of the masses.

Even in their choice of settings and characters Lasswitz and Dominik differ noticeably from other writers of SF. In most American SF, and even in some British SF, the "heroes" and other "good guys," especially the valiant masters of science and technology, are American; much of the action, when it does not occur away from Earth, takes place in America. Since the time of Mary Shelley, however, a common stereotype in Anglo-American SF has been the German scientist, who is frequently caricatured as a mysterious savant, a villain, or an unimaginative and authoritarian technician. Needless to say, precious little of that convention, or rather of its pejorative features, is to be found in the work of either Lasswitz or Dominik, although the latter pictures—favorably, of course—more than a few enigmatic sages and superbly efficient, strong-willed technicians. More rewarding here, however, are the observations that each indeed employs national stereotypes and that in analyzing them one must take into consideration the nationality of author and reader. Here, again, Lasswitz and Dominik mark off the extremes of a cultural range. The former's attitude is good-natured, cosmopolitan, and ideologically liberal, that of Dominik crudely and stridently nationalistic. In *Auf zwei Planeten,* for example, Lasswitz criticizes British reserve and bluster, not without humor. Dominik, in much of his SF, viciously attacks what he viewed as the crass materialism, the cultural crudity, and the social irresponsibility of American society, especially its dominant capitalists and technologists. In the SF of neither writer is there a single major American or British figure which corresponds to the German scientist in Anglo-American SF

014-3

More important in the SF of Lasswitz and Dominik is the treatment of German characters, especially the heroic scientists and technologists. Lasswitz, living in provincial Gotha at the turn of the century, often pictures small, usually unnamed German university towns and somewhat eccentric academic scientists, or their analogs in future or alternate worlds. In his earlier SF, for example *Gegen das Weltgesetz,* the propensity to present imaginary worlds which are transparent, lightly-caricatured replicas of his own late-*Biedermeier* world often undermines the impression of plausibility. But Lasswitz manages German settings and characters far more maturely in *Auf zwei Planeten,* although his capabilities as a cultural philosopher may have exceeded his skills as an artist in his conception of Ell, the half-German, half-Martian figure who embodies German Idealism. Taken together, Lasswitz' three German scientists—the intrepid Torm, the reticent North German Grunthe, and the ebullient Tyrolian Saltner—represent an attitude toward ideological concepts and national traits which is literally more down-to-earth. In his characterization of the three, whose talents and personalities complement each other so well, Lasswitz suggests, in a patriotic but not blindly jingoistic spirit, the excellence and further promise of German science and the German personality. It should be noted that Lasswitz' expansive concept of German identity is, to use the terms of the time, *grossdeutsch*; we are reminded once again that, although he was a citizen of the smaller, *kleindeutsch* empire created by Prussia, Lasswitz was also a liberal in the tradition of 1848.

Dominik is far more chauvinistic in his use of national stereotypes. Many of the heroes, heroines, and mysterious sages who appear in his SF are German, of course, and they exhibit traits of physical appearance, personality, intellect, and social and racial consciousness customarily prized by extreme German conservatives or fascists. They and other "good" Germans—for Dominik there is scarcely a bad one in that lot—advance the glory of their nation and guard it tenaciously against the encroachment from outside that always seems to threaten. Naturally the future Germany which constitutes one of the major settings as well as the paramount political interest of Dominik's novels is scarcely to be found elsewhere than in such German SF, except in dystopias, for Dominik's vision of the future is predicated on certain obvious national experiences, assumptions, and dreams not shared by other societies, nor indeed by many Germans.

Other Early German SF

Lasswitz and Dominik are by no means the only writers of German SF, even in their own time (see Bibliography, Section III).[1] Since at least the early seventeenth century, German writers have composed utopias, imaginary voyages, future war stories, and whimsical semi-fictional discourses which have to do in some way with imaginary science. The *Somnium*, a didactic moon-voyage narration by Johannes Kepler (1571-1630), comes readily to mind, although it was written in Latin; composed sometime around 1610, it was first published posthumously in 1634—and appeared in German only in 1898, perhaps not entirely by chance the year after *Auf zwei Planeten*. Scattered through the eighteenth century are a few German utopias or imaginary voyages, like Eberhard Christian Kindermann's *Geschwinde Reise auf dem Luftschiff nach der oberen Welt* (1744), which is supposedly the first story about a voyage to Mars; and at the very limits of literary-historical perception a second Mars story, Carl Ignaz Geiger's *Reise eines Erdbewohners in den Mars* (1790), of which apparently but a single original copy exists. Later in the century Georg Christoph Lichtenberg (1742-1799), certainly a respectable figure among both scientists and literati, tossed off a few humorously satirical pieces which incorporate science-fictional motifs. Not quite so honored among historians of science or, much less, literature, but important because of his influence on Lasswitz, is Gustav Theodor Fechner (1801-1887), a rather mystical physiologist and psychologist. Under the pseudonym "Dr. Mises" he published a few fantastical parodies of scientific argumentation, such as the "Beweis, dass der Mond aus Iodine bestehe" (1821) and the "Vergleichende Anatomie der Engel" (1825). He thus stands—with, as I have argued, Lasswitz—as a modest contributor to an interesting peripheral zone of SF whose more familiar representatives are Poe's hoax stories, Abbott's *Flatland* (1884), and Asimov's "thiotimoline" spoofs.

It is scarcely less legitimate to cite such figures in a study of Lasswitz, Dominik, and modern German SF than it is to allude to Thomas More or Restif De la Bretonne in histories of British and French SF. But perhaps the present instance better shows the dangers of antecedent-hunting and influence-mongering to which SF history and criticism has often fallen prey. For it was only in the time of Kurd Lasswitz that literature which might in retrospect be called German SF became more than an extremely rare and usually obscure form of literary expression. The years around the turn of the nineteenth century are relatively rich in utopias like *In purpurner*

014-24

Finsternis (1895) by the Munich Naturalist Michael Georg Conrad (1846-1927), chauvinistic future war novels like *Der Weltkrieg: Deutsche Träume* (1904) by August Niemann, and stories which, like the amusingly titled *Der Mond fällt auf Westpreussen* (1928) by R. Budzinski, would seem to describe catastrophes resulting from natural events or Man's abuse of nature.

During the first few decades of this century there appeared even more works of fiction which deserve to be classified as SF, though sometimes with reservations. Best among them are *Der Tunnel* (1913) by Bernhard Kellermann (1879-1951), *Druso, oder die gestohlene Menschenwelt* (1931) by Friedrich Freksa (pseud. of Kurt Friedrich-Freksa, 1882-1955), and the novels of Rudolf Daumann (1896-1957) and Otto Willi Gail (1896-1956), which were mentioned in the preceding chapter. There, too, I referred to the juvenile-oriented stories which appeared in *Das neue Universum*. During the Weimar years German cinematographers produced a number of classic SF films, such as *Metropolis* (Fritz Lang, Ufa, 1926), *Die Frau im Mond* (Fritz Lang, Ufa, 1928), and *F.P.I. antwortet nicht* (Karl Hartl, Gaumont-Fox-Ufa, 1933). Lastly, two somewhat earlier works, *Astrale Novelletten* (1912) and *Lesabéndio: Ein Asteroiden-Roman* (1913), by the puzzling and eccentric writer Paul Scheerbart (1863-1915), also deserve consideration as SF, although the element of pure fantasy in them is very pronounced.

II

The year 1945, in which World War II ended and Dominik died, marks the "Year Zero" in German SF, as in other German literature. But soon after the end of the war the demand for SF in Germany revived. It has grown ever since, in large measure because of the widespread interest in science and the infusion—much welcomed and much condemned—of American popular culture. Some of the demand has been met by several mass re-editions of Dominik's novels and, to a far lesser extent, by the new abridged editions of *Auf zwei Planeten*. Dominik's type of SF, with its short-range technology, predominantly terrestrial settings, exciting plots, and sometimes its not so latent racism, has survived in the works of several writers, for example *Weltuntergang* (1957) by Freder van Holk (pseud. of Paul Alfred Müller, b. 1901); its residual effect even on some early East German writers was noted in Chapter V. In the immediate postwar years a few well-known "serious" writers, some of them emigrés, attempted to use a form

give utterance to their thoughts about the past, present, and future—if any—of their civilization. Novels like *Die Eroberung der Welt: Roman einer Zukunft* (1943/49) by Oskar Maria Graf (1894-1967), *Heliopolis* (1949) by Ernst Jünger (b.1895), and *Stern der Ungeborenen* (1946) by Franz Werfel (1890-1945), have enjoyed a limited appreciation among readers of SF, both in Germany and even elsewhere.[2]

Several modern "highbrow" or "Establishment" writers, perhaps most notably the Swiss author Friedrich Dürrenmatt (b.1921), have also written works which can be described as SF. Dürrenmatt's play *Die Physiker* (1962) can be termed SF by virtue of its theme and content; the dangers as well as the exciting promise of theoretical physics have long been a part of SF. But there may be no essential connection between *Die Physiker* and the "indigenous" tradition of SF, and the adoption of the dramatic medium is not typical of most literary SF—at least outside Germany. Dürrenmatt's earlier radio play *Das Unternehmen der Wega* (1955) appears to make use, not very successfully in my opinion, of the conventions of "space opera" and *Buck Rogers*. The works of Dürrenmatt and other "Establishment" writers, however, are peripheral to the evolution of post-war German SF.

Until recently much of the demand for SF in Germany has been satisfied by works from abroad, which have often set the tone for native writers. During the first two decades after 1945 the German market was fairly inundated by imported Anglo-American SF. The writings of American and British authors, and foreign SF films and TV series as well, still comprise a sizable part of the commercial offering. Since the early Sixties, however, the large-format softcover pulp novel series or *Romanheft*—the form has long been used for many types of popular fiction in Germany—has attracted a large if not very discriminating SF readership in Germany. The leading *Romanheft* series is *Perry Rhodan* (1961-), which is produced in Munich by a stable of house authors, some of whom have adopted American-sounding pseudonyms; thus Walter Ernsting (b.1920), for example, writes under the pen-name of "Clark Darlton." *Perry Rhodan* appears weekly in editions numbering in the hundreds of thousands, and has enjoyed the distinction, rare for German SF, of translation into English. The series is notorious for its juvenile style, monotonously repetitive story lines, and reactionary ideological content.[3]

014-5

Contemporary German SF

Yet by the late Fifties there were also a few writers who sought to make SF in Germany something more than native pulp novels and translations of good, mediocre or even execrable American or English works.[4] Two decades later they had attained no little success in attracting the attention of readers and publishers at home, though they have yet to receive much notice from abroad or from the German literary Establishment. Striking achievements have been registered in several subgenres; and writers, editors and critics generally express solicitude for their fellows and evidence a desire to reconstruct links with the past. It appears that this promising development—the emergence of a self-aware, cohesive, and literarily competent tradition of modern German SF—will continue.[5]

(i) Herbert W. Franke

Best known among writers of literarily and intellectually serious German SF is Herbert W. Franke (b. 1927), a native of Vienna who now lives near Munich. His novels are difficult to judge, especially the earlier ones. Their sensational plots, garish settings, and occasionally rough prose are reminiscent of Anglo-American SF, particularly that of the "Golden Age", and not necessarily its better examples. That is not surprising, since Franke has worked for years as SF editor for two large West German publishers, Goldmann and Heyne. But like some "New Wave" British and American writers, he uses the conventions of traditional, even primitive SF to create dystopian narratives. To encourage a sense of alienation he also employs the devices of experimental (or once-experimental) "mainstream" literature, among them collage, non-linear plot chronology, and distortion or fragmentation of narrative perspective. Those probable influences, as well as his work in cybernetics, are especially evident in *Ypsilon Minus* (1976), part of which is narrated in computer jargon. Although Franke favors settings and characters not identifiably German but instead American or vaguely international, one can perceive an ideological attitude which is definitely German or "national" in the larger, non-pejorative sense. Its topical targets seem to be at once the excesses of both the American capitalism and Soviet authoritarian collectivism which have for so long contended over Germany

by writing a futuristic literature. Although (or because) it would always reflect the discrepancy between the real world and the ideal, imaginary world, it would tell modern mankind, whom civilization has made both sophisticated and alienated, whither it was to go.[35]

Perhaps, then, East German SF, at least as represented in the works of the Brauns, is even more "German" or "national," in the favorable sense, than is West German SF, for it explicitly addresses the questions of knowledge, creativity, individualism, and civic responsibility which were so long the prime concerns of its parent culture. And yet what was remarked earlier of West German SF applies to its East German counterpart, even though Kurd Lasswitz and Hans Dominik lived and wrote in what is now the territory of the GDR, just as the cities which were once centers of German classicism are now in the same country. If what is commonly termed East German SF is in fact SF, and if it is indeed German SF—and both the general term and the qualifier seem reasonable—it is nevertheless something other than the direct descendant of what was created in Germany between 1871 and 1945.

III

The Generic Nature of German SF

The present study scarcely exhausts its subject. I have already touched on many topics which, besides modern German SF, merit further investigation. Among them are the function of ideology in SF, the effects of publication media and readership groups, the writers associated with the *Verein für Raumschiffahrt,* German theories of SF, the relation of German SF to other SF, and the still broader subject of the interaction of science and German literature.

But the issue which has fascinated me most during my research is the generic nature of German SF. Like a number of other critics, I believe that the confrontation of writers with science affects all aspects of SF, from its philosophical attitudes to its stylistic features. Science, in effect, defines SF as a genre and determines its history; in other words, its synchronic and diachronic unity depends first of all on that of modern science. Some bodies of SF, however, can also be viewed as *literary* genres or traditions which evidence, at least during certain periods, a dense pattern of significant connections among writers and texts. Writers belonging to those traditions create their works not only in response to their experience of science, their general knowledge of literature, and their various social and personal concerns, but also with constant and conscious reference to their conception of the present state, heritage, and

014-6

possibilities of the genre.

Here one thinks, of course, primarily of Anglo-American SF. During its "Golden Age" it was produced by a fairly small group of writers who responded to many of the same scientific and technological stimuli, and who for several reasons became a closely-knit community quite distinct from other literary groups. In their social, intellectual, and even psychological background they often had much in common; and, by chance, or often by choice and necessity, they associated personally with each other, worked with the same editors, published in the same media, wrote for the same audience, explored similar stylistic possibilities, and read and criticized each other's work. Often enough the "indigenous" SF community undertook the historical research, practical criticism of contemporary works, and theoretical discussion which have resulted in the assimilation of literary predecessors and the evolution of the concept of SF typical of the group. Such close relationships can contribute to the viability and stability of a genre; if too exclusive and one-sided, however, they can also transform it into a "ghetto" literature, as "Golden Age" Anglo-American SF has occasionally been described.[36]

Indispensable to the cohesion of "Golden Age" Anglo-American SF were the specialized but widely read "pulp" magazines and a readership which was large enough to support them but still sufficiently homogeneous in its special interests. By reprinting *as SF* the works of earlier writers, some of whom had little direct connection with the new SF community and may even, like Verne, have written in other languages, the magazines in effect created, *post hoc,* the literary heritage of Anglo-American SF. They also enabled new writers to enter the field with relative ease, and provided them with editorial tutelage. Yet another important feature of the magazines was their function as channels for powerful "feedback" from reader to writer, which appeared in the form of letter columns, popularity prizes, and fan-group organizations, and in the person of readers who themselves became writers, editors, and active critics.

Historically—that is, during the period primarily addressed by this study—German SF deviates radically in every major respect from the pattern described here. I would suggest therefore that it is with regard to its distinct lack of cohesion as a literary tradition, rather than its stylistic features or its specifically "German" ideological or scientific content, that German SF differs most significantly from other major bodies of SF, including not only

Anglo-American but perhaps even Russian and Soviet SF as well. For most of its history German SF has been a seldom-noticed, thinly-represented, poorly-defined type of fiction. Its antecedents in other kinds of literature are most unclear, and its early representatives, if they can indeed be called SF at all, are almost without exception extremely obscure texts. Even in modern times, during the last century approximately, the creation of German SF has been either the central literary pursuit of a very few "outsiders," or else the occasional experiment of writers whose other works cannot be classed as SF. Until the term "science fiction" was borrowed, there was even no single name for such literature in German.

The confrontation with science is therefore the only significant and consistent source of generic unity in the overall history of German SF. To adopt two scientific metaphors, the "normative" tradition of Anglo-American SF might be viewed as a sustained chain reaction initiated after the accretion, under suitable conditions, of a "critical mass" of writers, readers, and media. German SF—at least until the last two decades, perhaps—is best described as a kind of spontaneous combustion. Certain individuals—scientists interested in literature or writers interested in science—were affected in similar ways by science and technology, and sought to explore and express that experience in fiction. They were for the most part isolated from each other and lacked any real sense of belonging to a definite textual tradition; but because of the underlying similarity of intentionality, their works exhibit a number of recurrent similarities in outlook, theme, and style.

The material examined in the main chapters of the present study strongly supports the conclusions advanced here. Neither Lasswitz nor Dominik, the two most significant writers of German SF during its most distinctive period, can be associated with any cohesive generic tradition. German SF, like modern Germany, was born in 1871, when Lasswitz published his first novella. But neither in his own time nor later did Lasswitz become the center or progenitor of any discernible "school" of writers. There is little evidence that the various writers of German SF and related literature during the last century were actively interested in each other's works, that they knew each other personally, or—much less—that they considered themselves part of a well-defined literary tradition. It would seem, for example, that Lasswitz must have been familiar with the futuristic utopia *In purpurner Finsternis* (1895) by

Michael Georg Conrad, a well-known writer associated with German Naturalism. Yet in his essays on SF Lasswitz does not mention Conrad or, for that matter, more than a scant few other writers of SF. Nor does the influential critic Wilhelm Bölsche, himself a German Naturalist and a leading popularizer of science, allude to Conrad in his study of Lasswitz and other late nineteenth-century writers of SF. Yet another indication—both a symptom and a cause—of the diffuseness of German SF as a literary tradition during Lasswitz' time is the absence of a popular, regular, and specialized medium for the publication of SF.

The insubstantiality of German SF as a literary tradition, the lack of strong connections among writers and texts, is especially evident at what one might well suppose to be its very core. Lasswitz was one of Dominik's instructors at Gotha; and, according to Dominik himself, Lasswitz also furnished material for magazines published by Dominik's father. The older author lived and wrote until 1910, several years after Dominik had begun to write SF. A better opportunity for the establishment of a close link between the founder of modern German SF and one of its most popular later practitioners could scarcely be imagined. Such a relationship, whose existence would do much to suggest that German SF possessed at least some significant cohesion as a literary genre, did not come into being. Lasswitz' and Dominik's acquaintance with each other apparently ended when the latter left Gotha, and in his autobiography Dominik makes only brief and slighting reference to his major predecessor. Certainly Lasswitz' SF left scarcely any mark on that of Dominik. There is also very little evidence of a significant relationship between Dominik and the German rocket experimenters or such writers as Otto Willi Gail, whose SF explores their research. Less evident still are indications of associations among less important writers of German SF during the first half of the century, for example Bernhard Kellermann, Friedrich Freksa, or Rudolf Daumann.

The year 1945, as I have suggested, is just as important a milestone in the history of German SF as is 1871. Postwar German SF still exhibits only a modest degree of cohesion as a literary tradition. The SF *Romanheft*, for example, provides a focus for several authors and many readers of one not very impressive type of German SF. The popularity of the label "Science Fiction" in German-speaking countries, the emergence or expansion of specialized media of publication, and the development of German SF criticism also suggest some growing idea of common generic

identity based on a sense of literary tradition. But Herbert W. Franke, the writers of *Perry Rhodan*, and such other authors of postwar German SF as Franz Werfel and Friedrich Dürrenmatt make strange literary bedfellows. It is also obvious that postwar German SF, whatever its generic status, and however much recent writers honor their predecessors, is not the direct descendant of earlier German SF. National Socialism, of course, was the chief proximate cause of the discontinuity. The proscription of Lasswitz' works greatly hindered the influence they might and should have had on later German SF. But, as a mundane biographical observation shows, the disruption far exceeded that sad exercise of *Literaturpolitik*. Many of the pioneers of Anglo-American SF continued to write during and after World War II, and some of them are still active. But no German SF writer of any comparable stature was active both before and after 1945. Admittedly, Dominik's novels are still read, and they appear to have influenced some postwar writers. But the mass demand for SF in Germany has been met even more by imported SF, and the work of better writers like Franke or Jeschke has little in common with that of Dominik and Lasswitz, whether in its view of science, its ideological orientation, or its literary style.

In seeking to describe and explain the nature of German SF as a genre, one easily comes to wonder why Germany, a major force in both literature and science during the last two centuries, did not produce a body of SF more impressive in quantity and quality and more cohesive as a literary tradition. Certainly the disturbances and catastrophes which characterize the history of Germany during the first half of the twentieth century had as adverse an effect on German SF as they had on all other areas of German society and culture. I think that the development of German SF was also greatly hindered by the weak and belated incorporation of science and technology into German literature generally. Here, as in industrialization and national unification as well, Germany lagged behind Great Britain and the United States, at least until the late nineteenth century. During most of the nineteenth century, when SF was in an embryonic but important stage of its development, German writers still tended to neglect, disparage, or even actively avoid dealing with modern science and technology, whether as a theme or as an influence on form and language.[37]

Several other factors of a more specific nature also deserve mention. The internal history of German SF, as the preceding discussion shows, is replete with unreconciled polarities, missed

opportunities, and recurrent instances of the isolation of authors and texts. As I have suggested throughout my study, mature SF reflects the successful union of two types of intentionality which have to do in turn with two kinds of content. The first, expressed in concepts and terms like "speculative fiction" or "social" SF, is the urge to construct and describe, in systematic and detailed manner, entire imaginary worlds which are manifestly different from our own; such SF, which may well be related to utopian thought and fiction, gives relatively free play to the creation of imaginary science. The second intentionality, whose products are sometimes termed "gadget" or "technological" SF, is characterized by a more rigorous and more practical view of science; such SF reflects the desire to demonstrate the importance of science, or more precisely technology, in the fictional world and in our own. Typically the narration is set in the near future and concentrates on the careful description of imaginary technology, although the writer must necessarily include some information about the larger fictive environment. Students of SF sometimes refer to the first sub-type of SF as "Wellsian" and the second as "Vernian."

I would suggest that the integration of both elements or attitudes is as important to the development of SF as a genre as it is to the creation of individual works. Modern Anglo-American SF has been notably successful in unifying the two varieties of science-fictional intentionality and content; one could say alternately that Anglo-American SF has established a sense of continuity and kinship with its recent literary forebears, particularly Wells and Verne. Although I lack the expertise to argue the point with informed confidence, it may be that much the same could be asserted of Russian-language SF, even in its early modern period, as is shown by the example of *We* (written 1920-21) by Yevgeny Zamyatin (1884-1937). The works of Stanisław Lem manifest a similar synthesis and assimilation, which—along with their inherent literary quality—may explain their exceptional popularity with readers domesticated in the Anglo-American SF tradition and customarily loath to appreciate foreign works.

Until recently German SF, as a whole, has not been characterized at all by the reconciliation of the "social" and "technological" aspects of SF. The absence of such a synthesis is evident, as I have already suggested, in attempts to devise a suitable German term for "science fiction." Expressions like the common "utopischer Zukunftsroman," "technischer Zukunftsroman" (Dominik), "Zukunftsgeschichte" (van Loggem), "modernes,"

"wissenschaftliches," or "naturwissenschaftliches Märchen" (Lindau, Lasswitz, Bölsche, Lampa), "literarische Zukunftsgeschichte" (Hienger), or "naturwissenschaftlich-technische Utopie" (Schwonke) suggest how difficult it has been for German-speaking writers, readers, and critics to envision "social" or "utopian" SF and "technological" SF as aspects of a larger concept.[38] It is significant, I think, that works of German SF which do exhibit a generally successful balance between the constituent sub-intentionalities of SF—*Auf zwei Planeten, Der Tunnel* (1913) by Bernhard Kellermann, *Druso* (1931) by Friedrich Freksa, some of Franke's novels, Weisser's *SYN-CODE-7* (1982)—are characterized both by their quality and by their rarity. The impetus for such a union in Franke's writing, it might be noted, seems to have at least one external source, namely the example of Anglo-American SF.

Both the diffuseness and the polarization of German SF in its early modern period are exemplified by the SF of Lasswitz and Dominik. Each wrote a clearly different type of SF, and it would seem that the readers to whom their works appealed were notably disparate in social background, attitude toward science, and ideology. While Lasswitz and Dominik have on occasion been compared respectively to Wells and Verne, neither writer had a strong and lasting influence on a single, broader community of writers and readers. German SF, therefore, did not assimilate its two chief early practitioners, as did Anglo-American SF; in more general terms, the full range of older German SF was not effectively accessible to later writers.

Another major weakness of German SF throughout its history, but especially during the Twenties and Thirties, I think, was the lack of a viable specialized medium of publication—not necessarily a pulp magazine, of course—which would have promoted the emergence of a large but well-defined readership community, encouraged new talent, and helped to establish a sense of generic identity and continuity. Even now there is no regular medium which functions as a strong central support for SF and is nevertheless broad enough to appeal to most of the diverse subgroups of readers.

Although factors like those discussed here may do much to explain the history of German SF, the primary requisite for the creation of SF, as I have suggested, is the desire to express in literature the confrontation with science. That intention, and the means to accomplish it, depend in turn on the presence in the writer's environment of suitable raw material, in the form of provocative science and technology. The development of German

SF was disrupted, as was that of other German literature, by the cultural policies of National Socialism and the material consequences of World War II; it was also affected in a special way by Nazism. It is my opinion that the suppression or classification of scientific and technological research between 1933 and 1945, particularly the work of the German rocket experimenters but also that of German astronomers, physicists, chemists, mathematicians, and biologists, inhibited the development of German SF to a nearly fatal degree by denying it access to material especially congenial to the intellectual and literary goals of SF. It is even conceivable that, had not authoritarianism intervened, the history of German SF might also include a "Golden Age" of mature and well-established literature, as did that of Anglo-American SF, which benefited so richly from its greater freedom to speculate about modern science, above all nuclear physics and space flight.[39]

Each kind of literature, however, develops in its own ways, and should not be subjected without reservations to invidious comparisons or, much less, teleological second-guessing and extraneous metaphors of growth. German SF need not be viewed merely as a genre *manqué;* what one observer may consider to be an absence of generic cohesion and historical continuity another may perceive more positively as the presence of freedom, receptivity, and opportunity. Throughout its history German SF has been open to many kinds of writers and many ways of writing. While modest in size when compared to some other traditions of SF, it has exhibited a great diversity in artistic quality, scientific interests, ideological attitudes, and literary forms. That traditional breadth, once evident only in a meager miscellany of curious and curiously-regarded texts, now serves very well to encourage a diversity of interests and approaches among those who are collectively creating—whether it is nascent or renascent—a modern German SF which is, I think, already richer and stronger than what came before it.

Speaking to Hans Lindau, his admiring but somewhat credulous young interviewer, Lasswitz once remarked:

> "Actually I like best to read two kinds of things.... Wild West stories [Indianergeschichten] and Goethe. With other reading matter one has to exert oneself too much. But Wild West stories are completely undemanding, and Goethe satisfies all demands. With these two good things one need not torment oneself with criticism. It is possible to relax equally well with that which is sublimely above all criticism and that which is naively beneath all criticism."[40]

Beneath Lasswitz' characteristic modesty and gentle irony lies a more serious thought. Certainly he himself, quite earnest about his intellectual, social, and artistic vocation, but aware, despite his ambitions, that he was no Goethe, believed in the virtue and value of creating and criticizing literature which ranks somewhere above the mire of Grub Street yet below the peak of Parnassus. German SF may still lack its Goethe—though in that it is not alone as a literary current. But often enough it has risen above the level of unregenerate kitsch, and in recent years its social and aesthetic permeability—perhaps ultimately its most outstanding strength as well as, historically, its most grievous weakness—has been superseded, or rather balanced, by a promising sense of generic cohesion and direction. German SF, as one of its greatest theoreticians and practitioners himself must have believed, is a varied and colorful literature, one which offers entertainment, challenges, and rewards to its readers, its writers, and sometimes even its critics.

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Notes

Preface

[1]It would probably be impossible to compile an exhaustive bibliography of "fanzines." Two of the most prestigious modern North American amateur SF journals are *Algol* (New York) and *Riverside Quarterly* (Regina, Saskatchewan). Best known among German-language publications are *Science-Fiction Times* (Bremerhaven) and *Quarber Merkur* (Vienna). The standard histories of American "fandom" are Sam Moskowitz, *The Immortal Storm: A History of Science Fiction Fandom* (Atlanta: The Atlanta Science Fiction Organization Press, 1966), and Harry Warner, Jr., *All Our Yesterdays: An Informal History of Science Fiction Fandom in the Forties* (Chicago: Advent, 1969). Both Moskowitz and Warner are long-time fans. In his glossary of "fan slang" Warner includes the entry: "*Faiwol:* 'Fandom is a way of life' . . . antonym to *fijagh:* 'fandom is just a goddamned hobby.' " (p. xx).

[2]Jürgen vom Scheidt, "Descensus ad inferos: Tiefenpsychologische Aspekte der Science Fiction," in *Science Fiction: Theorie und Geschichte,* ed. Eike Barmeyer (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1972), 133-63.

[3]Leslie Fiedler, "Cross the Border—Close the Gap," *Collected Essays* (New York: Stein and Day, 1971), 2:461-85.

[4]Robert Scholes, *Structural Fabulation: An Essay on Fiction of the Future* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975).

[5]C[live] S[taples] Lewis, "On Science Fiction," in C.S. Lewis, *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories,* ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1966), 62.

Introduction

[1]For a history of the term "science fiction" see Sam Moskowitz, "How Science Fiction Got Its Name," *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction,* Feb. 1957:65-77, reprinted in revised form in Moskowitz, *Explorers of the Infinite: Shapers of Science Fiction* (1963: rpt. Westport, Connecticut: Hyperion Press, 1974), 313-33. The isolated occurrence of the expression as early as 1851 is discussed in Brian W. Aldiss, "On the Age of the Term 'Science Fiction,' " *Science Fiction Studies* 3(1976): 213, and Sam Moskowitz, "That Early Coinage of 'Science Fiction,' " *Science Fiction Studies* 3(1976): 312-13. The modern evolution of the term, however, seems to have been spontaneous.

[2]Martin Schwonke, *Vom Staatsroman zur Science Fiction: Eine Untersuchung über Geschichte und Funktion der naturwissenschaftlich-technischen Utopie,* Göttinger Abhandlungen zur Soziologie, 2 (Stuttgart: Ferdinand Enke Verlag, 1957); Hans-Jürgen Krysmanski, *Die utopische Methode: Eine literatur- und wissenssoziologische Untersuchung deutscher utopischer Romane des 20. Jahrhunderts,* Dortmunder Schriften zur Sozialforschung, 21 (Köln: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1963).

[3]Jörg Hienger, *Literarische Zukunftsphantastik: Eine Studie über Science Fiction* (Göttingen: Vandenhoecht & Ruprecht, 1972); Vera Graaf, *Homo Futurus: Eine Analyse der modernen Science Fiction* (Hamburg: Claassen Verlag, 1971); Dieter Wessels, *Welt im Chaos: Struktur und Funktion des Weltkatastrophenmotivs in der neueren Science Fiction,* Studienreihe Humanitas (Frankfurt am Main: Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft, 1974); Franz Rottensteiner, *The Science Fiction Book: An Illustrated History* (New York: New American Library, 1975); Eike Barmeyer, ed., *Science Fiction: Theorie und Geschichte* (1972); Karl Ermert, ed., *Neugier oder Flucht? Zu Poetik, Ideologie und Wirkung der Science Fiction* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1980); Ulrich Suerbaum, Ulrich Broich, and Raimund Borgmeier, *Science Fiction: Theorie und Geschichte, Themen und Typen, Form und Weltbild* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1981).

[4]Michael Pehlke and Norbert Lingfeld, *Roboter und Gartenlaube: Ideologie und Unterhaltung in der Science-Fiction-Literatur,* Reihe Hanser 56 (München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1970).

[5]Manfred Nagl, *Science Fiction in Deutschland: Untersuchungen zur Genese, Soziographie und Ideologie der phantastischen Massenliteratur,* Untersuchungen des Ludwig-Uhland-Instituts der Universität Tübingen im Auftrag der Tübinger Vereinigung für Volkskunde, 30 (Tübingen: Tübinger Vereinigung für Volkskunde e. V., 1972); Jörg Weigand, ed., *Die triviale Phantasie: Beiträge zur "Verwertbarkeit" von Science Fiction* (Bonn-Bad Godesberg: Asgard Verlag Dr. Werner Hippe, 1976).