

but the problem was easily got around: I joined two municipal libraries, one in Schöneberg and the other in Wilmersdorf.

I have a fairly good memory of what, upon my deportation from Germany in the autumn of 1938, I knew of world literature. I find it difficult to explain today how I managed, within a span of five or six years, to read all the plays of Schiller and most of those by Shakespeare, nearly everything by Kleist and Büchner, all the short stories of Gottfried Keller and Theodor Storm, some of the great and mostly voluminous novels of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, of Balzac, Stendhal and Flaubert. I read the Scandinavians, especially Jens Peter Jacobsen and Knut Hamsun, all of Edgar Allan Poe, whom I admired, all of Oscar Wilde, who filled me with enthusiasm, and a great deal of Maupassant, who amused and stimulated me.

Probably my reading was often cursory and certainly there was a lot I did not understand. But even so: how was it possible? Did I know of a method for rapid reading? Certainly not – I do not know of any such method to this day. On the contrary, I tend to be a slow reader. Because if I like a text, if it is really good, I savour every sentence, and that takes time. And if I dislike a text? Then I get bored, am unable to concentrate and suddenly notice that I have failed to understand a whole page and have to read it again. Good or bad, I am a slow reader.

There were probably special circumstances which enabled me to cope with the quantity of my youthful reading matter. I was able to spend several hours reading each day because I finished my homework very quickly: I only devoted enough time to it to ensure the grade of 'Satisfactory'. In consequence I neglected the science subjects and unfortunately also foreign languages. Sport – regrettably – occupied very little time. And I did not attend a dancing school – a matter I greatly regret. I certainly never learned to dance.

My reading matter was determined not only by my studies at school and my love of the theatre, but also – strangely enough – by Nazi cultural policy. The extensive printed catalogues of the municipal libraries continued to be in use, except that the titles withdrawn were crossed out in red ink. The names and titles of Jews, communists, socialists, pacifists, anti-fascists and emigrés may have been deleted, but they continued to be easily legible – names like Thomas, Heinrich and Klaus Mann, Alfred Döblin, Arthur Schnitzler and Franz Werfel,

Carl Sternheim, Carl Zuckmayer and Joseph Roth, Lion Feuchtwanger, Arnold and Stefan Zweig, Bertolt Brecht, Ödön von Horváth and Johannes R. Becher, Anna Seghers and Else Lasker-Schüler, Bruno and Leonhard Frank, Tucholsky, Kerr, Polgar and Kisch, and many others.

It does occur to me, though, that at that time I had not heard a name of supreme importance – Franz Kafka. Of the six-volume edition of his *Collected Works*, four volumes still appeared on the list of a Jewish publishing house in Berlin in 1935, but the last two – since Kafka had of course been placed on the 'list of harmful and undesirable authors' – were published in Prague in 1937. But it seems that none of my contemporaries knew of Kafka either. He was still a treasure to be discovered.

The numerous red deletions were most welcome to me. Now I knew what I had to read. Of course, I had first to get hold of these undesirable and prohibited books. But this was not all that difficult. In the book burnings in Berlin in May 1933 some 20,000 volumes were allegedly thrown into the flames – predominantly from public libraries. In other towns the number of books destroyed was probably less.

Be that as it may: these improvised actions, with their mainly symbolical significance, only resulted in the destruction of part of the stock of proscribed books. Many survived in bookshops, in publishers' warehouses and in private homes. Most of these sooner or later found their way into Berlin's second-hand bookshops where, of course, they were not to be seen in the windows or on display. But the shopkeepers, especially if they knew their customers, were willing enough to produce them, and they were cheap. Moreover, my relations and the friends of my parents, as was customary in middle-class families, had bookcases containing a lot of the titles now deleted from the official catalogues.

My Uncle Max, the cheerful patent agent who never ceased to believe that the Third Reich would shortly collapse, perhaps even next year, had such a bookcase and I often had an opportunity of making use of this gold-mine. My uncle had a delightful young son, then about five years old, and I was frequently needed as a babysitter. Those were wonderful evenings: I not only amused myself with countless books but was also generously recompensed. I received one

mark for each evening and sometimes, when my uncle had no change, even two marks. The child I had to look after during those evenings never woke up once. An exemplary charge, and now one of the most famous painters in England – Frank Auerbach.

I badly needed the money, but chiefly for theatre tickets, not for books. A person emigrating could only take a few things with him and books were not usually among them. And if one did take books into exile, these were generally not novels or volumes of poetry, but specialized literature and, above all, dictionaries. What had to stay behind was given away.

A friend of this uncle, a research chemist in Berlin-Schmargendorf who was getting ready to emigrate, allowed me to help myself to his books. He advised me to bring a small suitcase along, or a rucksack. Instead I arrived with a large suitcase. I had not been able to find a smaller one, I lied. The amiable, though evidently dejected, chemist opened his bookcase and said casually, or even resignedly: 'Take whatever you like.'

What I saw took my breath away. I remember to this day what I spotted immediately – the *Collected Works* of Gerhart Hauptmann and Schnitzler, as well as those of Jens Peter Jacobsen whom Rilke had recommended so warmly and emphatically. I quickly took what I could fit into my case, unconcerned about its weight. I could barely carry it, but eventually managed to get it to the nearest tram stop.

The heavy load did not impair my happiness, nor did the elegiac warning of the friendly chemist: 'You have nothing to thank me for. I'm not making you a present of these books; they're only a loan – as are these years. You, too, my young friend, will be driven out of here. And all these books? You will be leaving them behind just as I am doing now.' He was right. I piled up many more books from many other bookcases, but when I was deported from Germany two years later I was only allowed to take one volume with me.

Occasionally I also profited from the journals displayed in the reading rooms of the municipal libraries. I would find articles there which interested me and which were not without influence on my reading. Thus, in 1936, the arresting title of a literary essay in the *Nationalsozialistische Monatshefte* caught my eye – 'An End to Heinrich Heine!' I read the article with growing attention and, what was more, with satisfaction.

The author, a philologist, had mainly picked on two poems which were among the most popular of Heine's repertoire – *The Lorelei* and *The Two Grenadiers*. Both, he argued, were typical of Heine's inadequate and shallow knowledge of the German language and represented 'not yet cast-off Yiddish'. This was proved, another German scholar wrote at the time, by the very first line of *The Lorelei*: '*Ich weiss nicht, was soll es bedeuten*'. A German would have written: '*Ich weiss nicht, was es bedeuten soll*'. It did not worry me that the Nazis, who vituperated Heine, were dishing out such nonsense. That issue of the *Nationalsozialistische Monatshefte* made me a passionate Heine reader.

What I could not find anywhere, of course, was the literature of the emigrés. Naturally we wanted to read what the expelled or escaped authors were now writing, but this was not obtainable. Germans travelling abroad would not have run the risk of bringing books or journals back with them, and sending them by post was out of the question. But there were two significant and memorable exceptions, two excited evenings I shall never forget. On these evenings two widely differing examples of German exile literature – both letters – were read aloud.

My sister, who had broken off her studies in Warsaw in the early 1930s and had moved to Berlin, there made the acquaintance of Gerhard Böhm, a German Jew whom – he has long been dead – I gratefully remember. Böhm, soon to become my brother-in-law, was one of the few people who, in my youth, interested themselves in my education, especially my literary education. He worked as an export merchant, but basically he had no occupation. Making money – to put it mildly – was not his strong suit. Maybe the fact that he was not very tall explained why he was fond of bragging. He would talk, most vividly, about his many trips around the world – except that he never made them. He was fond of boasting that, during the Weimar Republic, he had written under a pseudonym for *Die Weltbühne* – but that, too, was an invention.

Yet this Gerhard Böhm, a short man and a tall story teller, was a likeable person, intelligent and articulate. What he told me, in extensive conversations, proved that the entertaining can also be instructive, and that the instructive need not necessarily be impotent. He was extremely well versed in literature, especially in the