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Giants, Dragons, and the Confrontation with "den schrecklichen mystischen Naturkomplexen" – Apocalyptic Intertextuality in Alfred Döblin's *Berge Meere und Giganten*

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Giants, Dragons, and the Confrontation with “den schrecklichen mystischen
Naturkomplexen” – Apocalyptic Intertextuality
in Alfred Döblin’s *Berge Meere und Giganten*

Nathan Jensen Bates

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

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Berge Meere und Giganten (BMG) by Alfred Döblin is a fictional account of future events in which humanity brings about the ruin of western civilization by its own technological hubris. Although *BMG* has been examined considerably for its literary merit in light of the Döblin corpus, few scholars have identified Döblin’s work as an apocalyptic text especially after the Judeo-Christian tradition. The apocalyptic nature of *BMG* implies a profound religious experience on the part of the author, which in my view offers at least one plausible explanation for Döblin’s repeated fixation with *BMG*.

In my thesis, I explicate the apocalyptic themes of *BMG* by considering the intertextuality of the apocryphal Book of the Watchers, the canonical Book of Revelation from the New Testament with some of its connections to Babylonian mythology, and finally the function of the author as a conduit of the literary tradition of apocalypticism. Ultimately, I demonstrate that *BMG* draws heavily from these apocalyptic texts and is consistent with the Judeo-Christian apocalyptic tradition, which utilizes the descriptions of macroscopic catastrophes in human history as a metaphor of spiritual transformation.

Keywords: Alfred Döblin, Apocalypse, Apocalyptic, Apocalypticism, *Berge Meere und Giganten (BMG)*, Book of Revelation, Book of the Watchers, Nephilim, Promethean.

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Introduction

The name Alfred Döblin is most commonly associated with the expressionist novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz*, although he was a prolific and prodigious writer throughout his life. One of the precursors to Döblin's magnum opus was a 1924 novel¹ entitled *Berge Meere und Giganten* (*BMG*), a fictional account of future events in which humanity brings about the ruin of Western civilization by its own technological hubris. At the heart of *BMG* is the struggle between humanity's technological ingenuity and the raw surging power of nature. Also, on a more fundamental level, it deals with the philosophical dichotomy of spirit versus nature, a discourse with deep roots in the Western tradition.

Even though *BMG* was not a very successful project, it proved difficult for Döblin to leave behind. It enjoyed a mixed reception by critics and peers alike, while among the German public at large it received a lukewarm reception² and was largely forgotten after World War II.³ Shortly after the novel's first publication, Döblin wrote "Bemerkungen zu *Berge Meere und Giganten*," in which he compared the experience of writing the characters with that of a host who entertains guests for a visit. Believing he was finished with the story, Döblin wrote, "Wir verstehen uns am Händedruck und Blick, auch jetzt, wo ich euch Lieben und Schönen zur Türe begleite" (*AzL* 356). It seems that Döblin never got to this metaphorical door; or if he did, he

¹ *BMG* carries the label of "Roman" (novel), but from its inception there has been considerable debate about whether that is appropriate form. Critics of the first edition of *BMG* were especially confounded by its classification as a novel, see Wilhelm Rössle's and Klaus Herrmann's critiques at the publication of the work (Schuster and Bode 144ff), highlighting the epic nature of *BMG*. Karl Blessing's book *Die Problematik "des modernen Epos" im Frühwerk Alfred Döblins* attempts to make sense of this controversy and arrives at an answer somewhere between the two poles of novel and epic (241). The fact that Döblin was experimenting with narration techniques probably best addresses this confusion (See Sokol 2005).

² Gabrielle Sander summarizes the reception of *BMG* as follows: "Die beklemmende Zukunftsvision erschien nach insgesamt neun Vorabdrucken im Januar 1924 und wurde von der zeitgenössischen Literaturkritik kontrovers aufgenommen. Das Buch erlebte neun Auflagen (insgesamt 9000 Exemplare) und fand – wie Döblin meinte – 'mit schöner epischer Ruhe und Gelassenheit; seinen Weg zum Leser; Anfang der dreißiger Jahre war es 'vergriffen'" (Gabrielle, "Aus der Handschrift gelesen" 39).

³ *BMG* was not reprinted until 1977 (Ibid.).

never locked it. Eight years later, in his afterword to the a shorter version of *BMG* called *Giganten: Ein Abenteuerbuch* (1932), he wrote of his first experience with the story: “Nachdem die ersten Auflagen dieses Buches ihren Weg zu Lesern gefunden haben [...], habe ich die Möglichkeit, an eine zweite Fassung heranzugehen. Ich hatte das schon lange, eigentlich bald nach der Beendigung der ersten Niederschrift vor” (*AzL* 372). Evidently, it did not take Döblin long to reconsider his decision.

Later, during his exile in the United States, Döblin worked for MGM in Hollywood and converted *BMG* into a film sketch, hoping to gain approval to write a script for a feature film version. But the idea failed to impress MGM executives and was considered unrealistic.⁴ He had assumed falsely that MGM was genuinely interested in his talents; instead, “the employment offers were the result of a political decision made to enable Döblin’s flight from Europe. Hollywood was not interested in epic writers, especially not self-willed ones like Döblin” (Kleinschmidt 170). Döblin became understandably disillusioned with Hollywood and returned to writing his last major novels. Ultimately, Döblin attempted to convey his ideas from *BMG* through three different media: a novel, a shortened novel, and a screen play; yet he never succeeded in achieving a broad recognition of his work. What was so compelling about *BMG* to Döblin? Why did Döblin attempt to bring closure to *BMG* in “Bemerkungen” only to reincarnate the story twice more?

An exploration of the inception of *BMG* may shed some light on Döblin’s motivations. He described the experience of writing *BMG* as “eigenartig” (*AzL* 354), and the full strangeness becomes apparent as one reads his account.⁵ The concept for *BMG* was realized just after Döblin was discharged from his duties as a field doctor in the German Army during World War I.

⁴ Sander, “Nachwort” 787

⁵ I will discuss in more detail later how the process of writing *BMG* relates to the nature of *BMG*.

During a family vacation on the Baltic Sea in the summer of 1921, Döblin experienced a sort of revelation as he strolled on the beach staring at the grains of sand—an almost metaphysical experience somewhat reminiscent of Jakob Böhme’s experience with a beam of light.⁶ This epiphany casts Döblin in with the venerable tradition of German nature mysticism, suggesting a connection between *BMG* and the tradition of German “Naturphilosophie.” Döblin regarded this experience as the original inspiration for *BMG*: “Es bewegte sich etwas in mir, um mich” (*AzL* 345). The power of nature somehow seemed to move through him, drawing his thoughts towards a distant future, to the question: “Was wird aus dem Menschen, wenn er so weiter lebt?” (*Schriften zu Leben und Werk* 310). Döblin wrestled with this question, wondering how the future of the world would unwind. Later in November 1921, Döblin wrote about *BMG* in a letter to his friend Efraim Frisch: “Es ist die Entwicklung unserer Industriewelt bis auf etwa 2500: eine völlig realistische und ebenso völlig phantastische Sache; Jules Verne wird sich vor Neid im Grabe umdrehen,—aber ich habe ganz andere Dinge vor als er” (*Briefe* 120). Döblin would develop *BMG* into more than mere science-fiction, incorporating broad thematic streams of mythology and religion in the text. Döblin was tilling new soil⁷ in German literature not only stylistically by utilizing an objective, anti-psychological narrative, but also by discussing human society centuries in the future. The result reads like a future-history of humanity, dealing with macro-themes of humanity’s future development, not unlike the portents of doom in apocalyptic

⁶ “Beim Anblick eines im Sonnenlicht aufstrahlenden dunklen Zinngefäßes sah er [Böhme] im Geist, daß alle Dinge, selbst die Gottheit, in Ja und Nein’ bestehen, und daß sie aus einem Gegensatz hervorgehen: dem Für und Widereinander der beiden Urgewalten des Lichtes und der Finsternis” (Buddecke 388).

⁷ In many ways *BMG* was an experiment in novel writing, aside from Döblin’s unique narration approach. Gabriele Sander summarized it well: “Berge Meere und Giganten ist in seiner Kompromißlosigkeit ein Roman der Extreme, der Grenz- und Normüberschreitung. Der Charakterzug des Experimentellen zeigt sich auf formaler Ebene vor allem in der außergewöhnlichen Aufbau- und Erzähltechnik, der raumzeitlichen Dimensionierung des Geschehens, in der Mißachtung Roman - ‘ökonomischer’ Grundsätze und der forcierten, ‘manieristischen’ Sprache. Einzigartig und unkonventionell ist der Roman auch in der unbekümmerten Verschränkung von Realistik und Phantastik, von historischen und utopischen Perspektiven, in seiner kolportagehaften Mischung aus Elementen der Mythologie und Geschichte, aus Motiven des Reise-, Abenteuer- und Schauerromans” (Sander, “An die Grenzen” 2).

literature. *BMG* takes up these veins of apocalypse, which was a recurring topos in German literature and was an especially prevalent and contributing factor in the literature of the Weimar Republic.⁸ With regard to these apocalyptic elements, *BMG* could be read as a sort of revelation or prophecy, a warning that humanity must contend with and ultimately come to terms with nature in order to survive.

Originally, Döblin intended *BMG* to be a “Hymne auf die Stadt” and not a confrontation with “den schrecklichen mystischen Naturkomplexen”;⁹ but these same forces, according to his own words, would not let him go. Unlike many expressionist authors, Döblin wrote extensively about his own works, his theories behind them, and his own struggle to shape them. In the case of *BMG*, he describes a very anagogic experience during its inception. “Ich—betete. Das war die Verwandlung. Ich betete und ließ es gehen. Ich widerstrebte nur so leise, wie man im Gebet widerstrebt. Mein Buch war nicht mehr der gigantische Kampf der Stadtschaften, sondern Bekenntnis, ein besänftigender und feiernder Gesang auf die großen Muttergewalten” (*AzL* 351). The last reference to the “Muttergewalten”¹⁰ could be interpreted as a reference to Johann Jakob Bachofen’s highly influential book *Das Mutterrecht*, published in 1861, which asserted that many societies were originally matriarchal in prehistoric times. According to Bachofen, the matriarchal society, where women functioned as the source of moral and political authority, was eventually replaced by the patriarchal¹¹ society of the current era. Döblin’s work participates in this discourse, as has been demonstrated by recent scholarship.¹² *BMG* became, it seems begrudgingly, a hymn of praise to the maternal forces of nature, almost as if Döblin became

⁸ Multiple scholars have highlighted this connection. I have chosen the works of Jürgen Brokoff and Klaus Vondung for discussion here.

⁹ *AzL* 350

¹⁰ The connection to “Den Müttern” in Goethe’s *Faust: Zweiter Teil* has also been suggested (See Wolf 62).

¹¹ Apollonian according to Nietzsche’s terminology.

¹² Nevzat Kaya’s “‘Tellurische’ Rationalitätskritik: Zur Weiblichkeitskonzeption in Alfred Döblin *Berge Meere und Giganten*” analyzes *BMG* in context of Bachofen’s *Das Mutterrecht* along with Nietzsche’s *Geburt der Tragödie*.

converted to the cause of Mother Earth in the process of writing about humanity's struggle with her, as well as his own.

The conspicuous manner in which Döblin describes his experience of conversion gives one the impression that the purpose became manifest to him, perhaps from some external source. The passivity of the language, "ließ es gehen," "Bekenntnis,"¹³ underscores Döblin's capitulation. Writing *BMG* was like a wrestle with God in prayer, "wie man im Gebet widerstrebt," which resulted in the conversion of the writer to the written. In a sense, Döblin was not writing nature, but rather nature was writing Döblin; his mystical glimpse into the inmost core of nature transformed into a literary reflection. The message was like a revelation for Döblin, and it seems that he chose to spread through its codification in the form of *BMG*.

This quasi-religious epiphany out of nature awakened some drive to share the ideas of *BMG* with a broader audience, and maybe that is why Döblin often returned to it throughout his life. Döblin was motivated to spread the message of *BMG* through different media, attempting to expand the accessibility of his novel, even outside of the German speaking world with his efforts in Hollywood. What was so compelling about *BMG* to cause this kind of motivation? Can it be considered apocalyptic and what does its association with apocalyptic texts mean for our comprehension of the text? I believe the answers to these questions lie in comparing *BMG* to other Judeo-Christian apocalypses and deciphering the symbols of *BMG*.

Although *BMG* has been examined considerably for its literary merit in light of the Döblin corpus, little has been done to consider why this was such an on-and-off-again obsession for Döblin over the course of his life. Few scholars have identified Döblin's work as an apocalyptic text but even those who have, have not analyzed *BMG* in comparison to the tradition of apocalypse as a genre. In my view, it was the apocalyptic nature of *BMG* which caused

¹³ *AzL* 351

Döblin's repeated fixation with the subject matter, and which seems to have impacted him with unanticipated profundity. Döblin's comments to this effect will be examined in the course of this analysis. In my thesis, I will explicate the apocalyptic nature of *BMG*, by considering the intertextuality of the apocryphal Judeo-Christian apocalypse The Book of the Watchers in the events building to the climax of *BMG*, then discussing its climax in terms of The Book of Revelation from the New Testament, and finally examining the function of Alfred Döblin as a conduit of the literary tradition of apocalypticism. Ultimately, I demonstrate that *BMG* draws heavily from the Judeo-Christian apocalyptic tradition, which utilizes the descriptions of macroscopic catastrophes in human history as a metaphor for spiritual transformation, and I hypothesize that Döblin used apocalypticism for similar purposes.

The structure of my thesis will proceed as follows. In section one, I will address previous interpretations of *BMG* and the apocalyptic discourse in the Weimar Republic. The second section will introduce some of the basic elements of the story of *BMG* and then highlight the parallels between *BMG* and the apocryphal apocalypse, the Book of the Watchers. The third section will then include a comparison of arguably the best-known apocalypse, the Book of Revelation, to the Book of the Watchers and *BMG*, as far as some of these themes are related to the climax of *BMG*. With the fourth section, I will argue that Döblin's comments about the experience of writing *BMG* disclose the text as a metaphor for spiritual transformation. My concluding section will offer some final thoughts on the significance of *BMG* as an apocalyptic text.

Literature Review

BMG has had considerably more academic attention in the last couple decades,¹⁴ but for many scholars, *BMG* has been viewed as merely “science fiction,”¹⁵ by which they often mean it is “worthless” as high literature (Koepke 116). Where *BMG* had once suffered from neglect, there is now a consensus that it marks a turning point in Döblin’s work,¹⁶ especially in his religious views.¹⁷ In 1924, *BMG* was the fourth major novel written by Döblin. It departed from the historical excess of *Wallenstein* (1920), the grotesque humor *Wadzeks Kampf mit der Dampfturbine* (1918), and the exoticism of *Die drei Sprünge des Wang-Lun* (1915). *BMG* turned to the future for its contextual framework and Döblin found some common ground with the principles of futurism, presented in Filippo Tommaso Marinetti’s *Futurist Manifesto* (1909). Starting with *Wang-Lun*, Döblin had been cultivating a new narrative style focused on complete objectivity, which was hostile towards “the psychological analysis characteristic of nineteenth-century realism” (Dollenmayer 18), which he had in common with futurism. Döblin soon found that his goals with this narrative style were not compatible with futurism and wrote in a letter to Marinetti, “Pflegen Sie Ihren Futurismus. Ich pflege meinen Döblinismus” (*AzL* 15). Döblin wanted his novel to be uniquely his own, separate from other theoretical influences.

It is important to note that *BMG* was written after a period in which Döblin had been intensely involved in the political debates of his time. At first, he was merely frustrated with the extremists; but soon his discontent grew to even his own party, the SPD. In many critics’ eyes,

¹⁴ Koepke 115. Beginning with Ardon Denlinger’s *Alfred Döblins Berge Meere und Giganten: Epos und Ideologie* (1977) and then more so with Gabriella Sander’s “*An die Grenzen des Möglichen und Wirklichen*”: *Studien zu Alfred Döblin’s Berge Meere und Giganten* (1988), *BMG* has been given considerably more attention.

¹⁵ Wulf Koepke pointed out the fact that there is no German word for Science Fiction. At Döblin’s time, the novel was considered a “Zukunftsroman.”

¹⁶ Müller-Salget 224

¹⁷ Monique Weyembergh-Boussart especially highlights Döblin’s turning to themes of “christliche Reue und Buße” that especially begin to emerge in *BMG* (Weyembergh-Boussart 73). Increased interest in Döblin’s philosophical texts, *Unser Dasein* and *Das Ich über der Natur* have also contributed to this view.

BMG is a reaction to this political frustration: “As Döblin gradually turned away from leftist party politics in the early twenties, bitterly disappointed at the failure of the Weimar state to achieve a genuine renewal of Germany, he evolved instead a new attitude toward the natural world” (Dollenmeyer 56). From this perspective, *BMG* functioned as a sort of escape¹⁸ for Döblin from his political frustrations, but it seems unlikely that this change of direction for Döblin represented his resignation to the situation. Peter Fisher elaborated: “Döblin’s postwar disillusionment impelled him to discover nature as the great alternative, but his search led him to adopt a universalist philosophy, while Weimar’s rightist visionaries wrapped themselves in the nationalist straightjacket” (Fisher 153). Fisher hints that *BMG* represented a solution to the vitriolic politics, which transcended the theatre of the political. As identified here, many of the elements of *BMG* are macroscopic, meaning they tackle the surface-level, all-encompassing elements of human civilization and even the cosmos itself. However, *BMG* does not deal only with politics, but also with intensely personal, spiritual issues. Apocalyptic texts appear to sketch only the large-scale events that will befall humanity, but inevitably their message is also applicable to the individual reader on an acutely personal scale.

It does not help our understanding of *BMG* that it reads more like a history book of the future or journalistic writing, lacking an omniscient narrator. Döblin’s narrative style (or rather, the lack thereof) originates in naturalism¹⁹ and was to be completely objective, devoid of any direct psychological input from the author. One critic described his style as follows:

Döblin jongliert seine Figuren so, wie es ihm gerade passt. Die Psychologie opfert er der Monumentalität des Geschehens. Die Menschen sind Ameisen, unwichtig, und Döblin verschwendet weder Liebe noch Mitleid auf sie; er gibt ihnen keine Seelen. Sie sind

¹⁸ In Wolfgang Reif’s *Zivilisationsflucht und literarische Wunschräume*, the author contends that *BMG* is nothing but a dream of escapism into the impossible (168).

¹⁹ See Walter Sokel’s discussion of “The Prose of German Expressionism” (70ff), where he discusses Döblin’s narrative style and its origin in naturalism. Döblin begins to shape this style in “Bemerkungen zum Roman” (*BMG* 19).

einzelnen alles andere als das Maß der Dinge; nur im Kollektiv sind sie wichtig - die von Nietzsche beschriebene Hautkrankheit der Erde. (Arnold 103)

At times, scholars have concentrated on the massive scale of events in *BMG*, as in this case with the accusation that Döblin favors discussion of humanity on a large scale over any identification with individual characters. These analyses overlook the apocalyptic approach to the “Monumentalität des Geschehens,” wherein macroscopic events can be regarded as metaphors for psychological transformations of the individual. Mostly likely, the reason for the neglect of this approach is due to Döblin’s attempt to avoid the subjective, psychological element of the narration. Eventually, Döblin departed from this narrative style,²⁰ perhaps because it was too difficult to dispel the psychological element, or perhaps because readers missed this mode of interpretation. Yet, other scholars have nevertheless attempted to approach *BMG* with a psychological mode of interpretation.

Ardon Denlinger’s *Afred Döblins Berge Meere und Giganten* represented one of the first serious and comprehensive discussions of *BMG* in mythological and psychological terms. Denlinger was also the first to compare *BMG* with the shorter vision of the story released in 1932 *Giganten: Ein Abenteuerbuch* at any length. He argued that Döblin’s goal with *BMG* was the poetic restoration of the world to the time of the gods—“die Einheit der Welt wieder herzustellen wie sie einst zur Zeit der Götter herrschte” (4). He believed that Döblin wanted to preserve the totality of the world, by emphasizing the dangers of technological escapism. The human psyche and human emotions are, according to his analysis, key to human salvation and the development of the “neuen Menschen” (11) in *BMG*.

Denlinger’s discussions of a restoration of mythology and establishing a new human being suggest an apocalyptic interpretation of *BMG*, but he never conducts any comparisons to

²⁰ Dollenmeyer 56

apocalyptic texts, nor does he overtly claim that *BMG* is apocalyptic. Instead, he insists that the role of Döblin's narrative style and his nature philosophy cannot be underplayed in understanding the more personal message of the text. "Gigantenromane sind ein Versuch, Naturphilosophie und Romantheorie zu verbinden, um [eine neue] Mythologie ins Leben zu rufen" (Denlinger 122). The retreat from the subjective and psychological to the objective narrative of a novel style leads "zur Psycholosierung des ganzen Kosmos" (122), deemphasizing the narrator and individual characters. Humanity, according to Denlinger, loses its ability to act for itself or to develop independently from nature (123) in terms of Döblin's nature philosophy. Accordingly, the individual, the ego, "das Ich" is only an extension of the "Ur-ich" and is not free to develop independent of the cosmos.

Denlinger's connection of *BMG* to Döblin's 1927 philosophical work, *Das Ich über Natur*, has proven to be one of the major keys for scholars, interpreting Döblin's early works. Essentially, Döblin's thesis asserts that all elements of nature are inspirited and connected to the creative core of reality. The power of creation plays a vital role in the individualization of reality.

Die alles umfassende Tendenz zur organischen Bildung in der Natur ist das "Ur-Ich", die natura naturans, die sich als Geistiges, als Denkendes sowohl in der Vielfalt der Naturdinge als auch in ihrer unbeschränkten Ganzheit ausdrückt. Das Erkennen dieser Tendenz ist für Döblin das höchste Ziel, das dem Leben als Ganzem einen Sinn geben würde. (Cornelesen 19)

According to Cornelesen, Döblin did have a specific message concerning his "Naturphilosophie" in *Das Ich über Natur*. This philosophical portrayal of the connection between the individual and nature is not necessarily equivalent to that found in *BMG*, but the parallels are striking.

Im Vergleich zu B.M.G. hat sich aber der Ton dieser Hymne besänftigt, alles scheint irgendwie geläutert worden zu sein. Die Welt wird jetzt als die vieldimensionale Äußerung einer anonymen Urkraft, eines Urgeistes dargestellt im Hintergrund aller dichterischen Werke Döblins von 1925 bis 1933, sie ist aber viel deutlicher in seinen zwei großen Essays ausgedrückt. (Weyembergh-Boussart 141)

Denlinger's and Weyembergh-Boussart's assumptions that *BMG* was retroactively the product of Döblin's philosophical writings—in other words, that *Das Ich über der Natur* is a clearer declaration of the ideas in *BMG*—eliminates perhaps too rashly alternative interpretations of the message of *BMG*. *BMG* preceded these writings, and therefore ought to also be considered for what it declared prior to subsequent publications by the author.

The fact that Döblin's philosophical writings could be seen as a clarification of his ideas in *BMG* points again to the apocalyptic nature of *BMG*. It is important to remember that *Giganten: Ein Abenteuerbuch* and the film sketch of *BMG* postdate Döblin's philosophical writings.²¹ Döblin wrote in the afterword to *Giganten: Ein Abenteuerbuch*, "Ich war einfach nicht mehr derselbe, der 1921–23 das Buch geschrieben hatte" (*AzL* 373), meaning perhaps that some of his ideas had changed since *BMG* and even since his philosophical writings. It seems Döblin did not want his ideas to remain static. After all, changing beliefs are perhaps the most human aspect of our being: "Es ist das Wahrste und Allermenschlichste in uns, das uns bei aller Daseinsfreude von Ablösung zu Ablösung treibt, jede Natur, alles Gewordene in Frage stellt" (373). In this commentary, Döblin emphasizes the human tendency to keep questioning existence, to maintain an element of mystery. *Giganten: Ein Abenteuerbuch* is for Döblin a different work, which stands "unverändert neben [*BMG*]" (*AzL* 374), because it reflects changes

²¹ *Das Ich über Natur* was written in 1927, whereas *Giganten: Ein Abenteuerbuch* appeared in 1932 and the film sketch was written in the winter of 1940/41 (*DHF* 405).

in Döblin's attitudes. Nevertheless, *BMG* is not discarded in favor of the new version; its distinctiveness is preserved, and therefore is also not necessarily the product of Döblin's later philosophical ideas. In this regard, *BMG* can be truly viewed as apocalyptic because of its distinctiveness. Perhaps, Döblin's effort to give the story of *BMG* new form was also an effort to retain the potential variability of the apocalyptic experience for each reader of *BMG*.

Another important study of *BMG* was Gabrielle Sander's "*An die Grenzen des Wirklichen und Möglichen...*": Studien zu Alfred Döblins Roman 'Berge Meere und Giganten,'" which addresses intertextual and mythological influences in *BMG*. Sander is probably one of the foremost experts on Döblin today. Her contribution to Döblin scholarship cannot be underestimated, especially considering her latest accomplishment, a critical edition of *BMG*, which I have utilized in my thesis.²² Sander interprets *BMG* as Döblin's attempt to transform "die Totalität des Lebens" into a novel. In order to argue this, she addresses the reception and inception of *BMG*, and then examines its complex narrative structure and its equally complex imagery. Her intricate analysis of the text sources and mythological allusions is an especially invaluable resource for Döblin scholarship. Of particular note, Sander also traced the evolution of the general references to mankind in *BMG*, with "man" and "niemand" at the beginning, to more specific references, concentrating personal names and more tangible characters, especially illuminating in context of revelatory nature of apocalyptic texts. However, her discussion of the various streams of intertextuality never implies that *BMG* belongs in the tradition of apocalyptic.

Dietmar Voss has a different critical approach, choosing to discuss *BMG* from a psychoanalytical vantage, concentrating on the reoccurring words and elements (Voss 8). The object of his analysis is not the psychology of the individuals, since there are no unifying characters in *BMG*, except if one considers the masses of humanity and the immensity of nature,

²² Sander discusses the benefit of such an edition for Döblin research (Sander, "Aus der Handschrift gelesen" 39).

instead he focuses on the symbolic role of language in many of Döblin's works. Paul Ricœur's metaphorical theories, combining phenomenology and hermeneutics, serve as the theoretical lens through which Voss interprets *BMG*. Two themes are especially highlighted: currents, which represent the chaotic, vacillating, mercurial aspect of existence; and stones, which represent the formative, constant, static aspect. According to Voss, the interaction between the two aspects is manifested throughout Döblin's oeuvre, especially in his symbolic language and results in a new aesthetic.

Roland Dollinger closely examines Döblin's nature philosophy in *BMG*. He adopts a psychological approach to his interpretation of Döblin's philosophy of nature, utilizing various conceptions of gender, including Klaus Theweleit's *Männerphantasien*, which analyzes various images and traumas associated with the male ego. Dollinger asserts that two views of nature exist in *BMG*: first, "a male technologically driven conduct of war against nature that is perceived as a female being" and second "a quasi-religious celebration of nature [...], perceived as a maternal power that reveals its autonomy and independence from human interference" (Dollinger 99). In both conceptions, nature takes on a female identity. He concludes that Döblin's message was a call for self-identification with nature, that humanity should not objectify nature.

Nevzat Kaya's "'Tellurische' Rationalitätskritik: Zur Weiblichkeitskonzeption in Alfred Döblin *Berge Meere*" interprets *BMG* in terms of Nietzsche's *Die Geburt der Tragödie* and Johann Jakob Bachofen's *Das Mutterrecht*. According to Kaya's analysis, *BMG* is the reversal of the typical conceptual development in these theories, starting with the "olympischen Zauberberg zu seinen Wurzeln," and then progressing to "den titanischen Mächten der Natur" (133). In other words, *BMG* starts with the "Apollonian" or patriarchal society and results in the "Dionysian" or

Matriarchal society. This dichotomy, no matter how it is labeled, will be important in my final analysis.

One particular thread of discourse concerning *BMG* has been the question of whether *BMG* should be regarded as utopian, which hints at the concept of apocalypse but does not necessarily assume it. For those who consider it utopian, the question is then in what manner does it manifest itself as utopian. For some it is a pessimistic²³ view of the future, resulting in the destruction and disorientation of humanity through technological hubris. For others it represents a return to a humanity in harmony²⁴ with nature. Yet others describe Döblin's utopia in a different manner. Hannelore Qual's analysis, for example, suggests that the result is an open political structure:

Das utopische Ideal des Romans gründet auf einer Weltsicht, die das Weltganze in seiner Komplexität und Kompliziertheit zu erfassen und nicht zugunsten eines einheitlichen, eindimensionalen Erklärungsmodells zu harmonisieren versucht. Diese Form der Utopie stellt gerade keine Flucht in den Mythos oder in die Eschatologie dar, sondern erhebt das Utopische zum Prinzip permanenter Vervollkommnungsfähigkeit. Indem die utopische Konzeption auf ein fixiertes ideologisches System sowohl als Vorgabe wie auch als Zielsetzung verzichtet, bietet sie durch diese Flexibilität die Möglichkeit, auch alternativen und differierenden Entwicklungstendenzen gerecht werden zu können, die ein in sich geschlossenes System nicht mehr zu erfassen vermag. (Qual 317-8)

²³ See Stephan Meyer, *Die Anti-utopische Tradition. Eine ideen- und problemgeschichtliche Darstellung*.

²⁴ For good examples, see Ardon Denlinger's *Alfred Döblin's "Berge Meere und Giganten,"* Christoph Eykman's "Man against Fire: Alfred Döblin's Utopian Novel *Mountains, Oceans, and Giants,*" Jan Mizinski's "Apokalyptische Utopie: Alfred Döblin und Günter Grass," Giovanni Scimonello's "Zur Theorie und Praxis der Utopien im technischen Zeitalter: Alfred Döblin's *Berge Meere und Giganten* (1924) und F.T. Marinetti's *Mafarka il futurista* (1910)," and Hannelore Qual's *Natur und Utopie. Weltanschauung und Gesellschaftsbild in Alfred Döblin's Roman "Berge Meere und Giganten."*

Qual postulates that the utopia of *BMG* is an open political system, meaning one where humanity is able to determine its own political system. Her analysis traces the philosophical background of anarchy and how *BMG* is a realization of that form of government. Her understanding of *BMG* supports my interpretation of *BMG* as the creation of a new paradigm, which I will discuss in my conclusion, but Qual's analysis is largely about political philosophy.

The debate concerning the dystopian or utopian nature of *BMG* is critical to understanding *BMG* in an apocalyptic context. As an ideal political system, the utopian idea plays a critical role in the Revelation of John, one of the central apocalyptic texts. There is a political contrast between Babylon²⁵ (the current political state) and New Jerusalem²⁶ (an idealized political state).²⁷ Despite the existing debate concerning utopian ideals as a possible interpretation of *BMG*, few scholars have analyzed *BMG* in terms of apocalyptic motifs and imagery.²⁸ Although *BMG* has certainly been acknowledged as apocalyptic in the apparent eschatological sense and for its potential impact on the spiritual development of an individual—that is, its revelatory aspect—it has never been directly analyzed in terms of its structural and conceptual intertextuality with traditional apocalyptic texts.²⁹ Although many interpretations focus on Döblin's nature mysticism, as well as on his existential and psychoanalytical approaches to *BMG*, which would suggest a reading in this direction, there has been no in-depth comparison of the eschatological imagery in *BMG* and the traditional apocalyptic texts. As a result of my analysis, an apocalyptic interpretation of *BMG* will be suggested that potentially

²⁵ Rev. 18:21

²⁶ Rev. 21:2

²⁷ Augustine of Hippo's *De Civitate Dei* (Concerning the City of God) is perhaps the most influential literary treatment on this subject.

²⁸ Thomas Wolf only alludes to apocalypse in passing: "Wie die Reiter der Apokalypse bringen sie Elend und Verwüstung über die Erde" (76).

²⁹ Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* has often been discussed as apocalyptic, see Werner Stauffacher's "Die Bibel als Poetisches Bezugssystem zu Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz*," Markus Wallenbor's "Apokalypse in Berlin. Die Elemente der Johannes-Offenbarung in Alfred Döblin's Roman *Berlin Alexanderplatz*," and Christian Clement's "'Die alte Welt muß stürzen': Berlin Alexanderplatz als Moderne Apokalypse."

bridges the gap between the macrocosmic and microcosmic, the “utopian” and the “psychological” approaches to this novel, thereby benefiting Döblin scholarship.

The Apocalyptic Readings of *BMG* and Apocalypse in the Weimar Republic

Apocalypse as a theme in literature has been discussed repeatedly and analyzed in several ways. The terms “apocalypse” and “apocalyptic” literally refer to revelation, the unveiling of the generally unknown or inaccessible, sometimes considered divine knowledge, but this is not the most common definition. “Vielmehr ist das Wort ‘Apokalypse’ umgangssprachlich zum Synonym für den Weltuntergang schlechthin geworden, für das—unter Umständen von Menschenhand herbeigeführte—Ende unseres Planeten und seiner Bewohner” (Wallenborn 1). According to a more inclusive definition, apocalypse could be extended to traditions beyond the realm of Judeo-Christian theology. In general, “the scenario was cosmic threat, combat, and rule of the victorious god; it envisioned the end of the present world and divine judgment upon it” (Clifford, “Roots of Apocalypticism” 14). One scholar has argued that five different hermeneutics, or means of interpretations, can be used to define a text as apocalyptic.³⁰ In the following analysis, the term “apocalyptic” will be discussed in archetypal and mythical terms, reflecting especially the potential influence of Judeo-Christian apocalypses.

Louis Huguet was one of the first scholars to mention *BMG* in terms of apocalypse. Huguet asserts that *BMG* is best understood as a metaphysical struggle between two forces: spirit and fire. The myth of Prometheus plays a central role in understanding this struggle, but Huguet also draws on biblical mythology in this interpretation. “La lutte de Prométhée incarne celle de deux puissances, de l’Eprit divisé contre soi-même. *Berge, Meere und Giganten* est la représentation mythique d’une querelle de famille. Le drame humain prend des proportions

³⁰ See Douglas Robinson’s “Literature and Apocalyptic.”

métaphysiques” (264). The characters of *BMG* and their actions are interpreted as extensions of the struggle between these two related forces. The ultimate resolution of *BMG* represents the restitution of these opposing forces back into the whole of nature, which Huguet astutely connects to the concept of Yin and Yang in Taoism.³¹ His reflection of apocalypse and the Bible is only applied in order to compliment the mythical collage of elements supporting his thesis, and not in order to discern themes from apocalyptic texts.

Rolf Geißler was the first scholar to definitively identify *BMG* as an apocalypse after the Judeo-Christian tradition. In addition to his assertion that *BMG* has the basic elements of an apocalypse—catastrophes in the distant future, fantastic images, the end of the world, etc.—Geißler examines some of the later essays of Döblin as secondary evidence. One essay of Döblin’s in particular is central to his interpretation.³² In this essay, three forms of narratives are outlined: informational, imitational, and epic. The last of these attempts to impart some kind of truth, which is the object of both *BMG* and an apocalypse. Geißler then concludes that *BMG* is more than science-fiction. “Als Bericht über die Zukunft kann er gar nicht informierend oder imitierend sein, sondern muß der Versuch sein eine Wahrheit darzustellen” (Geißler 158). The rest of Geißler’s treatise is dedicated to discussing what truth might be at hand in *BMG*.

According to Geißler’s analysis, the giants are the embodiment of an entertainment craze and insatiable thirst for self-gratification in humanity, and *BMG* answers the question of what would happen to humanity if they continued to develop as they were in the early twenties. The giants only wield their power in an ecstasy of their seeming omnipotence:

Und das alles, weil sie weder Sinn noch Zweck mehr kennen, sondern alles in unverbindlichem Entertainment und Spaßbetreiben, so die eigene Leere mit der totalen

³¹ Huguet 257

³² See Döblin’s *Der Bau des epischen Werks* (1929).

Verfügung verbindend. Alles ist möglich. Hatte die Enteisung Grönlands noch einen, wenn auch vorgeschobenen Zweck, so führt der Spaß als alleiniges Ziel und einziger Antrieb nur zu einem totalen Zerstörungstaumel. Im Irrgarten der Möglichkeiten wird das Notwendige nicht mehr erkannt. (Geißler 169)

For Geißler, the truth of *BMG* is a warning against the pride in human technical achievement and a parable for humility to remember that just because a thing can be done, does not mean that it ought necessarily to be done. Geißler also argues that indulging all possibilities also cuts off humanity from reality, like the giants who distinguish themselves so much from other humans. These morals seem especially applicable to many issues in Döblin's time and even in the modern day.

Although Geißler argues eloquently that *BMG* is an apocalypse because it follows similar patterns of Judeo-Christian apocalypses, outlining fantastic events, grotesque images, culminating in the end of the world (157), he also discusses *BMG* as a literal apocalypse in the sense of revelation, suggesting that it is a warning against the danger of technology's ability to alienate human beings from reality.³³ Geißler's commentary is very insightful, but he asserts this comparison without any concrete comparison or discussion of the symbols and images in *BMG*. His discussion of the "message" of *BMG* draws sound conclusions, but also ignores the intertextual ties³⁴ of *BMG* with the actual Judeo-Christian apocalypses. Gabriele Sander and Louis Huguet discuss, on the other hand, many of the allusions and intertextual discourse in *BMG*, but together they miss Geißler's hypothesis that *BMG* is an apocalypse in the Judeo-Christian tradition. All of these analyses skirt around the missing element of *BMG*'s apocalyptic intertextuality within the discourse of the apocalyptic themes in the Weimar Republic and in

³³ Geißler 167ff

³⁴ Likewise, Jan Mizinski's brief comparison of Döblin's *BMG* and Günter Grass's *Die Rättin* discusses the themes of apocalypse in terms of the more common definition, as the end of the world (Mizinski 1991).

direct comparison to the Judeo-Christian texts. In my analysis, I will combine the approaches of Huguet and Sander and argue that placing *BMG* in connection with these texts will benefit *BMG* scholarship.

Klaus Vondung's *Die Apokalypse in Deutschland* tackles the discourse of apocalypse in much of German history and culture. His purview encompasses not only the Weimar Republic, but also the influence of apocalypse long before and after. He sees apocalypse dualistically as the "Spannung" (tension) between fulfillment and deficiency and can be manifested in many varying ways: "als Hässlichkeit und Schönheit, Unwissenheit und Weisheit, Sterblichkeit und Unsterblichkeit, Zeitlichkeit und Ewigkeit" (Vondung 69). This tension can be manifested on societal and personal levels. Indeed, Vondung does not constrain his analysis to simply the historical, but he insists that, "Die Apokalypse ist ein vielschichtiges Phänomen" (14) and ultimately, "ein existentielles Phänomen. Sie wird durch bestimmte Erfahrungen und Emotionen hervorgerufen" (15). At its heart, apocalypse poses philosophical questions about existence and meaning and Vondung discusses at length its application to existentialist meaning of man in this discourse.

For Vondung, it is impossible to determine the position of humanity between the beginning and end of its own history. "Es ist richtig, die Geschichte der Menschheit bewegt sich, wie unser eigenes Leben, von einem Anfang zu einem Ende; diese Bewegung steht unter Spannung zwischen Defizienz und Fülle" (509 -10). But Vondung does not hesitate to connect the historical with the personal in the context of apocalypse. He adds, "und zu ihr [Apokalypse] gehört der Drang, sie zu transzendieren und einen Zustand vollkommener Fülle zu imaginieren" (509-10). Apocalypse is, then, the manifestation of a human need for transcendence and absolute fulfillment. Vondung advocates that fulfillment need not depend on a distant resolution of the

tension. “Solange wir in der Bewegung zwischen Anfang und Ende sind, gibt es Erfahrungen der Fülle nur in der 'Mitte', als 'Wunder' des gegenwärtigen Augenblicks” (510). One should live in the present and regard apocalypse on a psychological and personal level as a symbolic catalyst for fulfillment in the now, despite existential angst.

In contrast to Vondung, Jürgen Brokoff limits his analysis to the influence of the structure of apocalyptic texts on literature³⁵ in the Weimar Republic. Brokoff discusses political and philosophical essays dealing with violence in the Weimar Republic, climaxing in an analysis of Adolf Hitler’s “Apokalyptische Weltanschauung.” For Brokoff, the structure of apocalypse comprises at its core more than the end of one world system replaced by the birth of a new one. Babylon is not actually replaced by the New Jerusalem, but the two forces cancel each other out. “Folglich ist das ‘neue Jerusalem’ nach dem Untergang der Welt nicht transzendent, sondern differenzlos: Es herrscht die reine Wahrheit Gottes” (Brokoff 21). In the metaphysical sense, it is the end of the difference between immanence and transcendence, erasing the gap between the spiritual “within” and the spiritual “without.” This paradigm shift can also be applied to epistemology itself, which would mean the end of the difference between seeing and believing, or from the perspective of deconstruction, the gap between signified and signifier is eliminated. There is no new world order per se, but an entirely different paradigm of truth, a whole new way of being and knowing altogether, which was incomprehensible in the preceding paradigm.

According to Brokoff, this structure of apocalypse was assimilated into the political discourse of the Weimar Republic³⁶ and culminated in the new “Weltanschauung” of Hitler. In this volatile political era, the language of apocalypse exacerbated the political discourse, suggesting that a new system would inevitably be established with great violence. The language

³⁵ Brokoff 9

³⁶ Ibid. 10

of the academics became just as violent as the later political acts. Thus, for Hitler, the destruction of the Jews represented an apocalyptic rebirth, which foremost had to occur as an “intro”-cendence in the minds of the German people, an internal realization, before it could be realized literally.³⁷

Apocalypse in the Weimar Republic and leading up to the establishment of the Nazi dictatorship was a resolution and ultimately evasion of polar opposites. The result was the violent removal of the old conventions. Ironically, this is exactly what took place, but not in the manner Hitler imagined it. As with Döblin’s experience of writing *BMG*, the events and structure of *BMG* unfolded contrary to his anticipation. As I discussed earlier, Döblin intended *BMG* to conclude with the victory of mankind over nature, but reversely, it is humanity that is humbled before nature. *BMG* evolved then into a text beyond Döblin’s control, an inexplicable phenomenon, driving towards an unforeseen conclusion. The following section will examine in what ways these apocalyptic elements formed the structure and content of *BMG*.

The Rise of Giants in *BMG* and their Previous Mythological Representations

In this section, I will discuss some of the mythological elements in *BMG* in order to prepare the ground for a discussion its apocalyptic implications in the next section. As mentioned previously, the theme of giants has been undervalued in previous scholarship. I will concentrate on the giants especially by examining how the giants as depicted in *BMG* are reminiscent of the antediluvian giants of the some of the apocalyptic writings of Hebrew mythology. First, a brief summary of the creation of the giants in *BMG* and their common mythological interpretations will help explain this allusion.

³⁷ Brokoff 159

The very title of Döblin's epic implies that the story centers on the relationship between humanity and nature.³⁸ Typically, giants are not associated with humanity in mythology, but the connection will be made clear through the course of this section. On the one side of the title, *Berge Meere und Giganten*, two of the most imposing elements of nature are represented. The seas encompass roughly 70% of the sphere of nature, and the mountains symbolize the land or other 30% of nature's realm, where mankind dwells. In this instance, it is significant that Döblin does not adhere to standard punctuation; in fact, he often leaves out many necessary commas throughout the text of *BMG*. This technique, along with others, seems to be part of Döblin's unique narrative style, which had long been in development³⁹ and would eventually evolve into his freer, intertextual technique used in *Berlin Alexanderplatz*. In the case of the title of *BMG*, the omission of punctuation serves to unite these two elements of nature in contrast to the "giants." Ultimately, the "giants" embody the human element⁴⁰ in the story, the element which is conscious of itself, thus separating it from nature. The conjunction "und" ultimately suggests that the three elements must eventually merge, which is ultimately the conclusion of *BMG*.

The giants themselves are created through a combination of genetic manipulation and exploitation of the forces of nature; the exact process is never explained in full detail. These giants represent the contorted devolution of human beings from the beginning of the novel. Starting with incredible machines, used to lay waste to much of Europe in the Ural war, human beings become more destructive, more obsessed with harnessing or rather manipulating the

³⁸ Indeed, although there are individual characters in *BMG* their intentions remain obscure; alternatively nature and humanity are more appropriately the main characters in *BMG*.

³⁹ See Karl Herbert Blessing's *Die Problematik des 'Modernen Epos' im Frühwerk Alfred Döblins*. Döblin was influential in defining the modern novel for the twentieth century, eliminating traditional elements of narration and elaboration of plot development, or psychological influence. Whether *BMG* was successful is debated.

⁴⁰ Döblin's 1934 parody on the Chaldean-Assyrian god, Marduk, briefly takes up the theme of fallen Titans in Greek mythology, but interestingly Döblin equates giants and humans in this case as well. Die Giganten waren Menschen, schrecklich anzuschauen, übermenschliche Körperkräfte, ihre stinkenden Haare hingen über Kopf und Kinn dicht herunter und versteckten sie (*BW* 566).

power of nature. For example, Marduk, a sadistic tyrant⁴¹ of a middle European empire with its center around Brandenburg, develops various technologies which can both transform people into plants and trees, and then expand trees to tremendous sizes. In Babylonian mythology, Marduk ascended to the head of the pantheon by slaying the female dragon-monster Tiamat.⁴² For his amusement, Döblin's Marduk releases some of his technocrats into a park, where he turns some people into trees and has others crushed to death by mammoth trees (*BMG* 138-143). In the very manipulation of this technology lie the seeds of its unraveling or even the downfall of mankind's technological progress.

Eventually, this technological excess leads a disastrous war between Asia and Europe, called the Ural War, which lays waste to all of Western Europe's arable farmland. Consequently, an expedition to Iceland is undertaken, which aims to melt the glaciers in Greenland by tapping the geothermal energy of the Iceland's volcanoes through the enlargement technology stolen from the now deceased Marduk. The end goal of this expedition is to create new arable land⁴³ to sustain Europe and eventually allow civilization to find a rebirth on the island continent of Greenland.

But the Ural war and the subsequent expedition to Greenland are only excuses for power-hungry men and women to reach new heights of technological exploitation, even surpassing the forces of nature herself. "Ihnen war gleichgültig, was aus dem neuen Erdteil wurde und was von dem ganzen Plan gelang. Sie dachten nur daran, wie sie die entbundenen Gewalten angreifen sollten. Die Gewalten, die sie sich gar nicht ungeheuer genug vorstellen konnten" (*BMG* 362-3). The goal of completely subjugating nature through technology plays a central role in *BMG* and

⁴¹ *BMG* 166, 201, 391

⁴² Allusion to this archetype in apocalyptic texts will be discussed in the next section.

⁴³ This is also the final goal of Faust in the fifth act of Goethe's *Faust: Zweiter Teil*. It is interesting that in both instances the aim is to create a new world, purely through human exertions and ingenuity.

will be discussed more extensively in its mythical context later in this paper. The “forces” unleashed by the expedition are captured with the magma from these volcanoes in tourmaline containers and transported to Greenland. Within the magma pulsates the inexplicable power of nature to quicken and nourish life; Döblin calls this “die große Urmacht” (*BMG* 630). This power has a hypnotic and ultimately deranging effect on the members of the expedition, causing many of the enormous ships to be destroyed. The role of this mysterious power will be crucial to the task of establishing the apocalyptic nature of *BMG*.

Even in the planning stages of the expedition to harness the power of nature, there was an air of destiny in the undertaking, that the result would be critical to humanity. “Man hatte das Gefühl vor einer Entscheidung der ganzen Existenz zu stehen” (*BMG* 361). History itself seems to be dependent on the outcome of the newest human endeavor to dominate nature. The fatality of this remark emphasizes the apocalyptic nature of *BMG*, suggesting that a new era will be shaped by the results of this undertaking. In due course, the volcanic energy is let loose on the Greenland glaciers, melting the ice. Simultaneously, this energy rejuvenates numerous and varying prehistoric monsters frozen in the ice, which are later called “dragons.” These monsters, within a matter of months, swarm across the air and sea, landing first on the northern coast of Scandinavia and then slowly choking the beaches and adjoining cities all over Europe. The monsters are never identified as dinosaurs, which would seem logical according to some of the descriptions, but are instead referred to as dragons.

Efforts are made to contain these monsters using “Türme aus lebenden Stoffen gebaut,” but the destruction inflicted by the innumerable prehistoric creations proves too devastating (*BMG* 515). Eventually, the populations of the European city-states of London, Brussels, etc. must seek refuge by burrowing deep underground, establishing equally vast and expansive cities

under the earth, relocating industry and residency underground from the threat of these new monsters. These cities become as corrupt as their predecessors, featuring various frivolities, gladiator games, and drunkenness. At this moment, the powerful oligarchs of this futuristic era expose themselves to the power of the “Urmacht,” harnessed in laboratories, and are turned into literal giants, who aim to contain the threat of the Greenland monsters. In addition to the ability to grow at will (*BMG 591*), the giants can also change shapes into various animals and even become something resembling a steam cloud (*BMG 598*). In the end, the giants inflict just as much damage on humanity, as they provide protection for it, despite their claims to be the “Erlösung” or salvation of humanity (*BMG 591*). They trample the remaining ruins of London and go about devouring livestock and even human beings.

These giants are led by a man named Delvil, a perhaps too-obvious allusion to the English “Devil,” who in the end condemns the actions of his fellow giants. These giants are corrupted by their genetic transformation, becoming terrifying monsters themselves both in appearance and in their treatment of their environment. They are described as “wolkenhoch anschaukelnden Giganten,” able to quadruple their size at will (*BMG 592*). In appearance, they are hunched like bells, swinging their gigantic arms; they have the distinguishing features of human beings: feet, toes and knees; but a hide-like skin covers their exterior with warts and boils (*BMG 591*). They also oink and gargle, being quite revolting to all who behold them. Despite their mannerisms, the giants consider themselves superior to normal humans, distinguishing themselves as “Aasfresser” compared to normal humans, “Krautfresser.”

Döblin is careful, however, to keep these giants associated with their human originals, a reminder perhaps of the true monstrosity of man. At one point, Delvil calls to his comrades: “Das sind meine Gefährten. Giganten wie ich Mann und Männin” (*BMG 603*), referencing the creation

of man in the Martin Luther translation of Gen. 2:23. Later, Döblin again reinforces the connection in his description of the giants: “Es war kaum mehr ein Mensch, was da glitt und hinzog, ein See ein Dampf, der sich immer mehr verbreitete, mit einem menschenähnlichen Kern, der sich lockerte” (*BMG* 606). The giants are hardly human anymore. By the power of the “Turmalinschleier,” the giants are able to transform themselves, altering their shape and appearance, even becoming wisps of steam. Although the creatures are undergoing extreme vacillations in their transformation, they retain the seed of their humanity. In this sense, the giants represent a perverted offspring⁴⁴ of human beings, a creation of a new race.

Before interpreting the biblical implications of the giants in *BMG*, it will be helpful to discuss the other mythical influences that have been addressed by Döblin scholarship. The giants theme has been largely connected with the titanomachy or gigantomachy of Greek mythology, extant only in Hesiod’s *Theogony*. The Titans, or giants,⁴⁵ led by Chronos who ate the children of his wife Rhea, were overthrown from their hegemony of the cosmos by Zeus, his son, and the Olympians in a primordial struggle. As a resident of Berlin for forty-four years, Alfred Döblin was most likely familiar with the famous Pergamon relief on Berlin’s Museum Island, which was a depiction of the gigantomachy or the war between the Olympians and their gigantic predecessors from antiquity. Gabriele Sander first substantially connected *BMG* to Greek mythology, but admitted that the application was “freizügig” in its imitation of the

⁴⁴ Giants also play an important role in theosophical and anthroposophical accounts of Atlantis. The antediluvian giants according to that tradition are also a perverted form of humanity and these beings were able to change their body size as with the giants of *BMG* (see for example, Rudolf Steiner’s “Aus der Ahasa-Chronik” [1905-08] and H.P. Blawatsky’s *Secret Doctrine* 1888). This tradition could have served as another possible source for Döblin’s utilization of giants.

⁴⁵ *gigas* (Genitive *gigantos*) in Greek is the origin of the modern word in German *Gigant*, which quite literally references Gaia, the goddess of the earth (“Gigant” 278).

“Gigantenkampf” (“An die Grenzen” 409). Others have taken up the related theme of Prometheus, which would later be the topic of a political essay by Döblin.⁴⁶

Prometheus, a Titan who stole fire from the gods and granted technology to human beings, was bound to a mountain peak, where his continually regenerating liver was repeatedly pecked out by an eagle in the Caucasian mountains. The Promethean connection to the danger of technology, made explicit in Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, fits well in within the schema of *BMG*. This theme is even strengthened in *Giganten* (1932), the shortened second version of *BMG*, where instead of Delvil’s original assertion, “Feuer besitzen wir ... Unauslöschbares Feuer” (*BMG* 602), he declares, “Prometheus hat nur einen Funken gebracht. Wir haben es ganz. [...] Das Feuer der Unsterblichkeit” (*Giganten* 248). Louis Huguet has argued that this myth is the inspiration for the Döblin’s entire novel: “Ce roman d’anticipation s’inspirant du mythe de Prométhée; évoque les étapes qui jalonnent la quête titanesque de la surhumanité” (Huguet II 3). A few lines later, however, Delvil continues by stating, “Feuer besitzen wir. Das besitzen wir. Unauslöschbares Feuer. Das besitzen wir. Was die Blumen macht, die Tiere und Menschen macht. Was den Wind und die Wolken macht. Was die Gase treibt. Das besitzen wir ... Meki ist nichts; wir machen nicht Meki.⁴⁷ Wir haben die Urwesen⁴⁸ selbst” (*BMG* 602). The fire here represents more than just the power of innovation bestowed to man through divine intrigue; the fire in *BMG* corresponds to the whole power of nature as mentioned here by Delvil, essentially the power of God, man becoming as the gods. This power is of course a Pandora’s Box, which is

⁴⁶ *Prometheus und das Primitive* (1938)

⁴⁷ “Meki” refers to Maschinen Fabriken, which are vital to the technology dependent society of the future.

⁴⁸ Thomas Wolf has discussed Goethe’s role in Döblin’s *BMG* (Wolf 62). Élcio Cornelesen has discussed the Döblin’s nature philosophy in context of Goethe’s *Urpflanze* and even connected his ideas to romantics like Höderlin and Novalis (Cornelesen 51). Cornelesen’s discussion even touches on the use the “Ur” prefix in many of Döblin’s works and its rise in the German language in the nineteenth century, but he never addresses *BMG* in his analysis.

also related to the Prometheus legend. Other mythologies speak more to the attempt to usurp the power of God.

Thomas Wolf has asserted that Norse mythologies are interwoven into *BMG* along with the Greek mythologies. According to Wolf's reading, the ultimate obsession with conquering the northern polar regions, Greenland and Iceland, has connections to the human confrontation with the collective consciousness in C.G. Jung's psychology, or Sándor Fenczi's association of polar or water expeditions with a need to return to the womb, in order to resolve childhood trauma. These psychological interpretations complement the Norse version of giants:

Das Motiv des 'Pols' deutet außerdem auf die stofflichen Bezirke der nordischen Mythologie (Riesen) und den griechischen Mythos von den Hyperboreern. Mit den Gestalten der 'Turmmenschen' und der 'Giganten' zitiert Döblin auf deutliche Weise Elemente der nordischen Mythologie und verbindet damit zugleich eine inhaltlich belangvolle Botschaft. Die dem Eis entsprungenen Riesen und Titanen verkörpern 'die alten Naturgötter.' (Wolf 55)

Wolf connects the giants of *BMG* to the Scandinavian legends of giants, who fought against the Æsir and Vanir and were particular enemies of Thor. These giants, or *jötunn*, had their dominion in the most frigid ice regions, again connecting to Wolf's interpretation of the giants as a representation of the subconscious. According to Jakob Grimm's discussion of the symbolic meaning of giants in his *Deutsche Mythologie*, which Wolf also cites, giants represent excess, human greed and are also connected to stone,⁴⁹ since they live in rocks and cliffs, which all corresponds to the plot of *BMG*. Fighting the giants results in self-assertion against nature and chaos.

⁴⁹ Some of the giants of *BMG* turn to stone at the conclusion of the epic, see *BMG* 621.

Thomas Wolf affixes these discussions to the Prometheus theme, analogizing Döblin's unique "Mythische Innovation" of both Prometheus and the Norse giants with Nietzsche's *Übermensch*⁵⁰ (Wolf 56). He associates the scientist of *BMG* with a "superman" who may seem to be able to dictate his own fate by dominating nature; but mankind and the giants are simply an extension of nature and the elements *in toto*, submitting to nature in the end. In actuality, the giants in *BMG* do not originate from the Greenland expedition, but rather from the experiments of Marduk, which is inconsistent with Wolf's analysis of the giants. Instead, the "dragons," or prehistoric monsters, are encased in the glacier ice, and mankind harnesses the fire of the "Urkraft" in order to spawn the giants. The giants of *BMG* originate then in fire, not ice or water.

Biblical references are often neglected in these analyses, although they are obvious and numerous.⁵¹ This blind spot in Döblin scholarship may be one reason for the unawareness of the apocalyptic undertones in *BMG*. A comparison of this text with the original apocalyptic texts of the Bible and the Apocrypha has never even been approached. In the following sections of my thesis, I will attempt to close the gap by examining the biblical references, an exercise which will yield additional understanding into Döblin's quasi-religious view of nature⁵² and also tie *BMG* in with the discourse of apocalypse⁵³ in the Weimar Republic and the tradition of Judeo-Christian apocalypticism.

⁵⁰ Wolf describes the theme further: "Döblin's mythische *Innovation* besteht darin, den Mythos von den Riesen mit Nietzsches Übermensch-Vision zu verknüpfen und das Resultat auf das Naturthema anzuwenden. Der Naturwissenschaftler als ein Übermensch, ein *moderner Prometheus* (Frankenstein), wird als sein eigenes monströses Produkt geschildert" (Wolf 56).

⁵¹ Sander, "An die Grenzen" 399

⁵² See Bousset-Weyembergh 148

⁵³ See Jürgen Brokoff's *Die Apokalypse in der Weimarer Republik*.

Giants in Canonical and Apocryphal Apocalypticism

One text in particular has not been considered in analyzing the symbolism of giants in *BMG*; namely, the story of the antediluvian giants found in the Hebrew Bible or the Torah. Döblin often alluded to the Bible in many of his works (e.g. *Berlin Alexanderplatz*), and *BMG* is no exception.⁵⁴ Although there is no direct evidence that Döblin specifically utilized the Book of the Watchers in developing *BMG*, the parallels, which I will highlight in this section, are striking. Considering the other literature which scholarship has identified were in his possession⁵⁵ coupled with the many parallels between the two texts, it is reasonable to acknowledge the giants of Genesis as another point of reference, along with the Greek and Norse mythologies.

Examining the references to giants in Genesis and the apocryphal text, the Book of the Watchers, will provide the initial foundation for discussing the parallels between these texts. Gen. 6:4 (1 Mose 6:4) is the earliest mention of giants in the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, where the Hebrew word “Nephilim” is commonly translated as “giants.” The story of these giants occurs not long after the dual creation myths⁵⁶ of mankind in the first two chapters of Genesis. Below is the text found in Emil Kautzsch’s *Textbibel*, which was reportedly

⁵⁴ There are many biblical references in *BMG*, which have been carefully documented in the footnotes of the critical edition cited in my thesis. I list a few especially relevant examples here. In the text of *BMG*, there is one scant reference to the most famous giant of the Bible, Goliath (*BMG* 377), the ancient nemesis of the mythical founder of Israel, King David, but this allusion is applied to the Iceland Volcano, Krabla. The application of the giant metaphor here is consistent with that of the giants, since this is the same power being used on both man and nature. In addition, the reference to “Mann and Männin” from Gen. 2.23 throughout *BMG*, the relationship between Marduk and Jonathan has also been seen as an imitation of the relationship of David and Jonathan (1 Samuel 18:1-4). In *BMG*, the relationship has a sadistic-homoerotic element (Müller-Salget 34 and *BMG* 153), which may also be true of the biblical story, see for example Martti Nissinen’s *Homoeroticism in the Biblical World*. Additional pertinent references are as follows: the serpent (*die Schlange*) of Gen. 3:1 and *BMG* 148, Leviathan Myth found in Job 3:8, 41:1,19 and Ps. 74:13-14 and *BMG* 299, the flood in Gen. 6-9 and *BMG* 343, etc.

⁵⁵ Gabriele Sander’s article “Aus der Handschrift gelesen” discusses this topic extensively.

⁵⁶ Brettler 5

used by Döblin while writing *BMG*.⁵⁷ The full context in which the giants are mentioned proves interesting in connection to *BMG*:

1 Als nun die Menschen anfangen, sich zu vermehren auf der Erde, und ihnen Töchter geboren wurden,

2 da sahen die Gottessöhne, daß die Töchter der Menschen gar schön waren, und nahmen sich zu Weibern, welche ihnen irgend gefielen.

3 Da sprach Jahwe: Mein Geist soll nicht ewig im Menschen walten, denn auch er ist Fleisch, und seine Lebensdauer betrage 120 Jahre!

4 Zu jener Zeit waren die Riesen auf Erden; und auch nach der Zeit, wo sich die Gottessöhne zu den Töchtern der Menschen gesellten, und diese ihnen gebaren - das sind die Recken, die in grauer Vorzeit waren, die Hochgefeierten.

5 Als nun Jahwe sah, daß die Bosheit der Menschen groß ward auf Erden und alles Dichten und Trachten ihres Herzens allezeit nur böse war,

6. da bereute Jahwe, daß er die Menschen geschaffen hatte auf Erden, und war tief bekümmert. (*Kautzsch Textbibel* Gen. 6:1-6)

At first, these verses seem rather perplexing due to the oscillation of the perpetrator: from “men” to “sons of Gods” and “daughters of men,” then to “giants,” then the children of “sons of Gods” and “daughters of men” who became “men of renown,” and finally back to “man.” Questions abound as to how to define all these terms. Do all these identifications discuss the same actor—namely, humanity—or are these figures from other legends, of which we are not familiar? The mention of giants without any context or elaboration seems especially vague, but examining the original Hebrew word for “giants” at this juncture in the Old Testament can explain the lack of continuity in this passage.

⁵⁷ Sander, “Aus der Handschrift gelesen” 68

Without a doubt, the reference to “giants” in the Old Testament has presented considerable difficulty of translation and caused equally considerable debate for biblical scholars over the centuries. There are several Hebrew words translated as “giant” in the Old Testament, including *rephaim*, *emim*, and *gibborim*;⁵⁸ the latter can essentially be translated as “mighty men.” Whether all these entries for giants can refer to the original reference to giants in Genesis is debatable. The NRSV⁵⁹ maintains the original Hebrew word used for these giants, *Nephilim*, opting to transliterate rather than translate the term, which circumvents discussion of the whole giant controversy altogether. This particular word has been given a few different interpretations from its meaning, but originally “Nephilim” (נְפִילִים) derived from the Hebrew root *npl* (נָפַל) “to fall,” with the Hebrew plural suffix “im” designates roughly the “fallen ones.”

To many scholars this interpretation is a clear reference to an earlier myth about an ancient race, which predated the Great Flood mentioned in the Bible. The redactors⁶⁰ of the Pentateuch apparently had knowledge of another earlier legend about the giants of which we do not have an extant source or even a complete text. There are several theories as to what legend might be the impetus of this reference, which I will discuss shortly, but a 4th century BCE apocryphal text known as the Book of Enoch was inspired by this verse and elaborates upon the story of the giants told in Genesis, possibly referencing the ancient texts in more detail. Before examining the relevance of the Book of Enoch to *BMG*, it is necessary to discuss some of the differing explanations of the biblical verse. The alternative interpretations will also prove enlightening in the textual relation between the two texts.

⁵⁸ Hess, “Nephilim” and Clifford, “Giants” 375-76

⁵⁹ *NRSV (New Revised Standard Version)* Gen. 6:4 and Clifford, “Giants” 376

⁶⁰ Modern scholarship asserts that at least four separate texts were combined to create the Pentateuch as we now know it today (Brettler 6).

Biblical scholars have three primary theories explaining who the Nephilim actually were and what the “fallen ones” might connote in this context. The first theory asserts that the Nephilim were demigods of sorts, literally the children of rebellious angels, known as the Watchers, who were giants in human form. Some maintain that “Nephilim” refers to both the actual Watchers and their progeny. The second theory asserts that these fallen beings were simply a deceased race of human beings⁶¹ who had incurred the wrath of God, according to the biblical text. “Fallen,” in this sense, references their destruction. A final interpretation regards the “fallen ones” as great warriors or legendary figures of great renown, perhaps ancient kings or figureheads. According to this view, the gigantic stature would have been a reference to their considerable military prowess (Clifford, “Giants” 376).

Where the Septuagint, the Vulgate, and the King James Bibles use the word “giant” for “Nephilim,” Martin Luther renders it as “Tyrrannen” in 1 Mose 6:4. From the Greek for “ruler” or “king,” the decision clearly affiliates Luther with the theory that the Nephilim were simply ancient kings or heroes of renown. A second reference to the Nephilim, found in 4 Mose 13:32–33, is alternatively translated by Luther as “Riesen,” the German word for giant. Later, German translations of the Bible prefer to translate the verse in 1 Mose as giants.⁶² Döblin, however, may have known that “Tyrrannen” could be rendered as giants. Marduk, who is the first giant created in *BMG* and the first to harness the power of nature to expand, is repeatedly referenced as a “Tyrrann” (*BMG* 166, 216, 419). Döblin also commented in an article which he wrote for the *Republik*, “Tyrrannen sind Tiere, die nur zerstören können” (*Schriften zur Politik und Gesellschaft* 120). This equation of tyrants with giants underscores the nature of the giants in

⁶¹ Some have suggested that the “daughters of men” were the descendents of Cain, while the “sons of God” were the progeny of Seth (see Trever Major’s “The Meaning of the Sons of God in Gen. 6:1-4”). Thus, the “righteous” and the “wicked” descendents of Adam intermarried producing offspring, who were deemed worthy of destruction by Yahweh.

⁶² *The Elberfelder Bible* of 1905, for example, chooses in this verse the German “Giganten” and the catholic *Einheitsübersetzung* uses “Riesen.”

BMG, where the giants are literally the rulers, tyrants in the strict sense of the Greek etymology of the word as a “king,” but also in the sense of abusers of their authority. In this manner, the giants of *BMG* are both monsters and tyrants, corresponding to the possible interpretations of the meaning of the word “Nephilim.” In terms of *BMG*, it is unknown whether Döblin had knowledge of this biblical myth or the difficulties surrounding the origin of the myth, but the fact remains that this myth finds numerous parallels to *BMG*. Whether the verses of the Torah referred to literal giants or ancient kings of some type poses no threat of conflict with *BMG*. The giants in Döblin’s epic are both literal giants, humans of monstrous stature, and rulers of their respective city-empires,⁶³ which makes their relevance to the biblical myth all the more compelling.

My primary focus of comparison is the apocryphal text in the Book of the Watchers, the common name for the first thirty-six chapters of the Book of Enoch, although the story of the Nephilim is probably rooted in other ancient Mesopotamian mythologies.⁶⁴ The Book of Enoch elaborates on Gen. 6:1-4 and dates from the beginning of the second century BCE. It contains one of the earliest apocalypses ever written and its origins date even earlier, to the end of the Persian period in Jewish history (Himmelfarb 35). The only complete, extant text exists in the Ethiopic translation of the Greek text, but fragments of the Aramaic version of the story, found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, are the earliest references known.

The Watchers were a rebellious group of angels, who became enamored by the beauty of “daughters of men.” The “sons of men,” or Watchers, decide to descend to earth and copulate with mortal woman; but first they swear an oath with a curse in case any of the group should betray the others. With their condescension, the Watchers teach their selected mates “sorcery and

⁶³ The development of city-states in *BMG* hearkens back to the first advanced political entities of Greece and Mesopotamia.

⁶⁴ Himmelfarb 36

charms, and...reveal to them the cutting of roots and plants” (1 En. 7:1). Later, after the birth of the giants, the angels also teach men “to make swords of iron and weapons and shields and breastplates and every instrument of war” (1 En. 8:1). Included in this transmission of knowledge are the children of this union, the giants who also had “mysteries” revealed to them (1 En. 8:3). The Watchers impart to mankind the primordial equivalent of advanced technology, which recalls the theme of Promethean fire.

The conjugation of divine and mortal beings results in the production of giants in human form, or the Nephilim.⁶⁵ All too quickly, the giants become a considerable nuisance to mankind:

They [the giants] were devouring the labor of all the sons of men, and men were not able to supply them. And the giants began to kill and to devour them, and they began to sin against the birds and beasts and creeping things, and fish, and to devour one another’s flesh. And they drank the blood. Then the earth brought accusation against the lawless ones. (1 En. 7:11-15)

According to the remainder of apocryphal text, the archangels, Michael, Sariel, Raphael, and Gabriel bring the complaints of mankind and the earth before God. The giants and the Watchers call upon the prophet Enoch to act as their mediator before God, but their appeal is ultimately rejected. The Great Flood, commonly associated with Noah, the great-grandson of Enoch, ensues and destroys the Watchers and the giants.

Essentially, the Watchers’ intermingling with mankind results in two offenses against God: (1) the breeding of giants (abominations) who devour man’s food supply, men themselves, and giants, and who also sin against nature, which causes earth herself to exact revenge; and (2) the dissemination of forbidden knowledge, specifically sorcery, medicine, and weaponry through

⁶⁵ In context of this story, Nephilim refers to either “their fall from heaven, their ‘fall’ into sin, or their fallen status as dead at the time when the events are recorded” (Hess, “Nephilim”).

the sexual sin of predecessors. These two cataclysmic violations of God's commandments cause the earth to appeal to heaven to appease the grievances. These two causes and their effect find many parallels with the downfall of humanity in *BMG*.

As in *BMG*, the giants inflict a great extent of damage upon the possessions and creations of humanity. Likewise, in the Book of the Watchers, the giants blight humanity. They rampage across continents; inflict heavy damage on the remnants of civilization and humanity; destroy livestock, the underground cities, and the mechanized factories; and terrorize humans.⁶⁶ The giants of *BMG* are guilty of cannibalism⁶⁷ just like the children of the Nephilim. Kuraggara, one of the most vicious and destructive of the giants, and her partner Mentusi declare to Delvil: “‘Ich bin heut schmutzig. Heut war es nicht Pferdeaaas. Heute war es Menschenaas.’ Keuchte Delvil. Seine schwarzen feuchten Augen traten hervor. Lange sprach er nichts. Dann brüllte und weinte er: ‘Das tut ihr. Das tut ihr ... Und Pferde freßt ihr. Und Menschen freßt ihr.’ Und Delvil weinte” (*BMG* 598). Delvil, the leader-giant, laments this violation of humanity greatly. The giants disregard their own origins, distancing themselves from humanity, by using the pejorative “Krautfresser” (*BMG* 590) for other human beings. Even Delvil declares in the end, after the other giants make fun of him for defending humans, that “‘Mich gehen die Läuse und Ameisen ebensoviel an wie die Menschen” (*BMG* 590), convincing himself of his superiority and the insignificance of the rest of humanity.

That the giants raise themselves ultimately above humanity is important to understanding the impending apocalypse. This represents a sort of separation of the “wicked” and “righteous,” like the separation of “sheep from the goats” (Matt. 25:32) before the destruction of the wicked. In context of the Book of the Watchers, the impending punishment is not intended for all of

⁶⁶ There are multiple references *BMG* 539, 591-2, 596, 603, 607.

⁶⁷ Human beings are also forced to cannibalism after the rampage of the giants, see *BMG* 617.

humanity, since Enoch's righteous seed will be preserved through Noah (1 En. 10:4). Similarly, Kylin functions as a kind of preserving progenitor of mankind. In the tradition of apocalypse, typically a portion of humanity is preserved in order to affect a rebirth.

Lasciviousness, which is cited as one of the major offences of the Nephilim, can be associated with the giants' lust for technological supremacy over nature. One expert on the Book of the Watchers offered the following explanation:

The cry of the earth is caused by pollution—mainly through violence but also through fornication. Two accounts of the source of that violence are interwoven side by side. If recent critics are correct in holding that the 'Aśa'el revelation material was added latest we must consider whether the redactor wished to offer a reinterpretation of the sexual myth in terms of inappropriate revelation. Given the long traditional usage in the Hebrew prophets of fornication as a metaphor for religious infidelity, it is even possible to take the story of the descent of the Watchers as a metaphorical expression of illicit revelation.

The understanding of the sin of the Watchers as improper revelation provides the obvious counterpart of the proper revelation of Enoch in the rest of the book. (Collins 53)

The giants also epitomize the indulgence of modern technology. Like the “forbidden knowledge” of the giants in the “Book of Watchers,” Delvil and his fellow giants represent the culmination of what we would call genetic manipulation⁶⁸ today; they have taken all the powers of nature and twisted them, transmogrifying them into a sort of modern sorcery. One scholar aptly described the giants' degradation, “Die Giganten mit ihrer Fähigkeit, Welten zu schaffen und zu vernichten, sind zuletzt menschenfressende Tiere, eine höhnische Entlarvung des faustischen Menschen” (Arnold 106). Likewise in the Book of the Watchers we read, “And they [the

⁶⁸ Annette Ripper discussed the role of genetic manipulation in *BMG* and its relevance in the discourse of Döblin's time. She concludes that *BMG* emphasized an inherent contradiction in discourse at that time (Ripper 219).

Nephilim] have revealed to them [mankind] all sins, and have taught them to make hate-inducing charms” (1 En. 9:8). The giants in both circumstances typify the lust to innovate beyond propriety, the unbridled drive towards progress, which at one point in *BMG* is labeled as “vernichtende[r] Fortschritt” (*BMG* 80).⁶⁹

The technological excess or “improper revelation” of *BMG* stems from the violent and sexual misdeeds of humanity. Döblin describes the growing hate and violence between the sexes and the bizarre sexual relations early on.⁷⁰ The scenes with Marduk and Jonathan also portray a stark homoerotic sadism (*BMG* 153). Rolf Geißler calls this “sexuelle Anarchie” (Geißler 164), and argues that this “Geschlechtshaß” (*BMG* 97) is the result of increased boredom in the future human society, brought on by the creation of more machines, which free up more time for humans. For Klaus Scherpe, these scenes “der sexuellen und mörderischen Exzesse” are paralleled by the excess of verbalization, meaning the text literally reflects the violence of the plot (144ff). Both the signified and the signifier reflect the essence of human ambition to usurp the power of nature. With these misdeeds, a vicious cycle of hybris is initiated, which eventually spurs the creation of the giants and leads to the apocalyptic conclusion of *BMG*.

One final parallel between this apocalyptic text and *BMG* is the role of the earth as the accuser of the giants, although not as explicit as the Book of the Watchers. For example, White Baker warns Delvil of the foolishness of the Iceland expedition and pleads with Delvil to reconsider: “Sag nein. Beim Himmel, bei der Erde, Delvil, sag nein. Es ist entsetzlich. Laß die Erde ruhen” (*BMG* 356). In this sense, after the far-reaching destruction caused by the Ural War, White Baker suggests that the earth needs rest. Delvil, later enraged by the destruction caused by the prehistoric lizards, determines, “Ich greife die Erde an. Das tue ich [...] Ich zerreiße die Erde“

⁶⁹ See Thorstan Hahn’s “‘Vernichtender Fortschritt.’ Zur experimentellen Konfiguration von Arbeit und Trägheit in *Berge Meere und Giganten*.”

⁷⁰ See *BMG* 80 for a prime example.

(*BMG* 607). Later the role the earth has played in bringing about the end of the giants is acknowledged. “Die große Urmacht, die sie verehrten, hätte die Giganten auf Cornwall weggerafft und sie hätte sich Venaskas bedient. Denn es ist keine tote Macht, sondern ein wissendes schwelgerisch tiefes Wesen” (*BMG* 630). It is clear from the role of the “Urmacht”⁷¹ from the Iceland Volcanoes and Venaska’s absorption into the nature, that the earth itself does play a role in *BMG*. That the earth itself performs functions actively is consistent with many apocalyptic texts (i.e. the Book of Revelation and the Book of the Watchers) as mentioned earlier in this section.

The personification of the earth and ultimately nature itself points again to the introspective nature of the apocalyptic experience. Döblin’s application of the “Urmacht” relates back to the writings of the seventeenth-century German mystic, Jakob Böhme. Böhme’s concept of the “Ungrund” is similar to the “Urmacht” in that it represents not only God, but also nature and the cosmos. The individual human being is part of this cosmic force; thus, when individuals introvert to discover God, they are a part of this entity, according to the mystic. They in fact discover the inmost reality of their own being. “Nun hat ein jeder Wille eine Sucht etwas zu thun oder zu begehren, und in demselben schauet er sich selbst: er siehet in sich in die Ewigkeit, was er selber ist; er machet ihm selber den Spiegel seines gleichen, dann er besiehet sich, was er ist: so findet er nun nichts mehr als sich selber, und begehret sich selber” (Böhme 8). The discovery of the self in nature is a critical element of the apocalyptic or revelatory experience, which corresponds to Döblin’s later discourse on nature philosophy in *Das Ich über der Natur*.

The textual parallels between *BMG* and the biblical and apocryphal texts mentioned here are also mirrors to the spiritual experience of each individual. From the perspective of Böhme,

⁷¹ Much has been discussed about Döblin’s *Naturkomplex*, or mysticism with nature. See for example, Thomas Isermann’s *Der Text und das Unsagbare: Studien zu Religionssuche und Werkpoetik bei Alfred Döblin* or Thomas Wolf’s *Die Dimension der Natur im Frühwerk Alfred Döblins*.

the giants and their downfall reflect a part of our Selves, which has transgressed the “Urkraft” or cosmic whole. This aberration from the whole must be brought back into harmony in order to restore, or perhaps transcend the violation of the laws of God. Thus, a punishment or correction must be enacted, which is where the Revelation of John and the Babylonian myths will be applied to assist our understanding in the next section. In this section, I have reviewed the basic parallels between the narrative of the giants found in the Book of Watchers and in the last two chapters of *BMG*, namely “Die Giganten” and “Venaska.” From the juxtaposition of these two texts, I hope it has become clear to what extent elements of the Old Testament and apocryphal narratives have interacted with *BMG* and that they are just as vital to an exegesis of *BMG* as the Norse and Greek mythologies. Now, I will now analyze the Revelation of John and some Babylonian myths as additional points of reference in *BMG*.

Dragons and the Two Punishments of Mankind

While the notion of giants ties *BMG* into the context of Genesis and the Book of the Watchers, Döblin’s use of dragons⁷² as a crucial motif establishes a link to Babylonian mythology and the biblical Book of Revelation. The appearance of the dragons in *BMG* paves the way for the final apocalyptic stages of Döblin’s futuristic humanity and provides the final clues for understanding to the apocalyptic experience of *BMG*. Although several terms are used to describe the prehistoric creatures in *BMG* beginning with “Untiere” (beasts or monsters), “Dragon”⁷³ becomes one of the most prevalent terms, especially among the giants.⁷⁴ The dragon

⁷² Döblin does not exclusively use the image of dragons in a biblical sense or in the sense of apocalypse. Consider this reference: “Die Meeresberge waren niederzuwerfen wie Quadern einer Burg. Grönland war eine verwunschene Prinzessin, von Drachen umgeben” (*BMG* 364). Although, one could argue that this scene is also somewhat reminiscent of the scene in Revelation 12. Fairy tales and other legends could also be considered.

⁷³ The creatures from the cretaceous (Kreidezeit) first are seen swimming in the water by some of the members of the Iceland-Greenland expedition, “Aus dem Meer aber wand sich der Rücken eines braungrünen

is a complicated myth both in terms of *BMG* and in Revelation 12. The precise design of this theme in *BMG* is not completely congruous with those of the Bible, but there are certainly broad commonalities. Ultimately, the giants affiliate themselves with the image of the dragon, calling themselves as much,⁷⁵ which leads to an increased dimension of apocalyptic intertextuality.

Revelation Chapter 12 comprises one of the most elaborate narratives of the dragon in the Bible. The scene described here begins with the appearance of a woman in heaven, who is clothed with the sun, sitting upon a half moon, crowned with twelve stars. The woman is about to give birth, when the dragon appears, threatening her and her unborn child. Later, the archangel Michael battles with the dragon and casts him down from Heaven to Earth. The Dragon then continues his pursuit of the woman and her male child into the lower, earthly realm.⁷⁶ In this scene we can see rough parallels with *BMG*. Like the dragon who threatens the woman and her offspring, the “dragons” of *BMG*, or the prehistoric creations thawed from the Greenland glaciers, also threaten mankind and their hope for survival. The woman in travail has been much discussed in terms of mythology.⁷⁷ It is interesting to note in *BMG* that Venaska, an enchanting female giant, is also referred to as the “Mondgöttin” (*BMG* 572), which may be a direct allusion to the woman in this scene.⁷⁸ The traditional interpretation of the woman in Revelation 12 is that she represents the church or community of believers, threatened by sin and the devil. In *BMG*,

schuppenglänzenden Untiers, eines Reptils mit langem Schnabel, seitwärts gestellten blicklosen Vogelaugen...” (*BMG* 474). The experience was reportedly not pleasant. Later they are described thus “Straßenlagen Schlangenleiber ringelten Echsen über die Felse, stürzten sich ins Wasser” (492) and also as “Reptilien,” “Vogeltiere,” “Krokodile,” (497), “Fischwesen” (499), “Medusen mit Armen” (500), “Urtiere,” (501), and finally “Drachen” (507). The later term dominates for the rest of the book. It is apparent from Gabriele Sander’s research (Footnote on *BMG* 752) that Döblin is referencing dinosaurs (see Mathias Jakob Schleiden’s Chapter on “Flora and Fauna der Trias u. Kreidezeit” in his 1888 *Das Meer*), although he never uses the term “Dinosaurier.”

⁷⁴*BMG* 598

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 507

⁷⁶ This could have connections to Freud’s view of the subconscious.

⁷⁷ One common connection is the myth of Leto, pregnant by Apollo, who is pursued by Python the dragon from Hyginus’s *Fabulae*.

⁷⁸ This connection to “Mondgöttin” must have been important, since Döblin included the reference in the film sketch of *BMG*: “Man nennt sie die Mondgöttin.” Navzat Kaya associates this symbol with love and death, which is the ultimate role of Venaska (*DHF* 139).

Venaska is strongly associated with forces of eroticism and death, which places her on the side of the raw power of nature, as Döblin envisioned it. Navzat Kaya views Venaska as the embodiment of the “Magna Mater” (great mother), who was the focus of the matriarchal worship described by Johann Jakob Bachofen.⁷⁹ Continuing this analysis in Nietzschean Terms, Kaya associates the giants and dragons with the Apollonian and the Venaska with the Dionysian.⁸⁰ This connection between the giants and dragons as apocalyptic monsters plays an important role in the conclusion of *BMG*. Although there is no imagery of Venaska with child as in the Book of Revelation, the protection of the earth on her behalf, like the woman in Revelation 12, is evident.⁸¹

The final scene seems to draw the strongest parallels to both the Book of the Watchers and *BMG*. The Flood is in both cases the punishment and demise of the giants. In Revelation, the Earth swallows up this flood in defense of mankind, allowing the woman and her child to escape. “Then from his mouth the serpent poured water like a river after the woman to sweep her away with the flood. But the earth came to the help of the woman and opened its mouth and swallowed the river that the dragon had poured from his mouth” (Rev. 12:15-18). This shows strong parallels to *BMG*, where the earth literally acts to swallow the giants and humanity receives a new birth. These two latter scenes from Revelation 12, where the dragon is cast down to earth and then a deluge is produced, are in my view both imitated in *BMG* as two forms of retaliation by nature against humanity. The apocalyptic scene of Revelation and its two punishments have been connected by scholars to older myths, suggesting an apocalyptic archetype which plays a significant role in *BMG*.

⁷⁹ Kaya 139

⁸⁰ *BMG* 139

⁸¹ *Ibid.* 616

Hermann Gunkel (1862-1932), an influential protestant Old Testament scholar, connected the eschatological scenes of Revelation 12 with the creation of the world in Genesis 1 in his *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit* (1895). His assertion that both these stories were inspired from an earlier Babylonian myth, specifically the myth surrounding struggle between Marduk and Tiamat for control of the pantheon⁸² is still debated among Old Testament scholars.⁸³ The connection between the beginning and closing books of the Bible is derived from verse two of Genesis 1, where in the creation myth it reads, “the earth was formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God⁸⁴ swept over the face of the waters.” The Hebrew word for the deep in Gen. 1:2 is תְּהוֹם “tehom,” which many scholars connect directly to the Babylonian goddess *Tiamat*,⁸⁵ who represents the oceanic chaos and has a vast monstrous body, which some scholars have identified with the dragon. She is defeated by Marduk in the Babylonian creation narrative, *Enuma Elish*, and from her body the world is created. Other biblical references to Yahweh’s defeat of the Leviathan in Job 3:8; 41:1, 19 and Ps. 74:13-14 seem to support this interpretation. Thus, Gunkel refines these texts to the most basic elements: a female monster of the water (the Dragon or Tehom) defeated by a masculine god of the sky (Yahweh and Michael); which are the same as in *Enuma Elish*. The elemental struggle between these masculine and feminine depictions has been interpreted repeatedly in philosophy and psychology as the struggle between spirit and matter or man and nature.

⁸² Much has been discussed about the “Chaoskampf” and the transformation of many pantheons in various Indo-European religions. Common examples include the gigantomachy or Titanomachy in Greek Mythology, the war between Æsir with the Vanir and Jotuns in Norse Mythology, Tuatha Dé Danann and the Fomorians in Celtic mythology, the struggle between the Tuatha Dé Danann and the Fomorians in Celtic mythology, as well as the details of the *Enûma Eliš*.

⁸³ For example, Robert O’Rourke’s “The Earth of Genesis 1:2: Abiotic or Chaotic?”

⁸⁴ Yahweh is the Hebrew word used in this context to denote god.

⁸⁵ “Der Name der allgebärenden Großen Mutter in der Babylonischen Mythologie lautet Tiamat” (Kaya 137). For Navzat Kaya, Tiamat represents the maternal power of creation.

The golden thread, which I would like to emphasize here, is the connection between elemental water as a punishment for wickedness. In *BMG*, the dragons, which originate from ice are first seen coming out of the ocean,⁸⁶ connecting them to the element of water, as are these monsters throughout biblical apocalyptic mythology. Consider again the Book of the Watchers and the story of Noah, great-grandson of Enoch, where a great flood is exacted on the giants as punishments for their transgressions. Interestingly, the same word used in Gen. 1:2 “tehom” is used when the Great Flood is unleashed to punish the giants and/or mankind: “on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth” (Gen. 7:11).

Many scholars claim that the Enoch and Flood accounts of the Bible are connected to older traditions, the most extent examples existing in the Babylonian culture, but clearly older origins are indicative of the Arcadian and Sumerian cultures. The punishment of mankind by flood has been recorded in *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, which predates the written versions of the Hebrew Bible.⁸⁷ According to Gabrielle Sander,⁸⁸ Döblin probably consulted *The Epic of Gilgamesh* while writing *BMG*, which contains its own account of the flood story, described as a deluge caused by the Gods, who were infuriated with the overpopulation of mankind.⁸⁹ Gilgamesh, seeking the secret of everlasting life after the death of his friend, Enkidu, attempts to visit a human, who has apparently gained immortality from the gods, whose name is Utnapishtim.⁹⁰ Utnapishtim relates his story of the deluge and how the god Ea warned him in a

⁸⁶ *BMG* 474

⁸⁷ Scholars are divided on the origins of the Old Testament. Some assert an ancient oral tradition that cannot be accurately dated or older (lost) written traditions, but most agree that the codified version known today was probably written after the Babylonian captivity of Israel around 586–538 BCE. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, on the other hand, has at least fragments on clay tablets dating earlier’ than 2000 BCE.

⁸⁸ Sander, “Aus der Handschrift gelesen” 68. Döblin seemed to also have copies of Franz Kaulen’s *Assyrien und Babylonien nach den neusten Entdeckungen* (1899) and Emil Kautzsch’s *Textbibel* while writing *BMG*.

⁸⁹ The text actually asserts that the gods were literally annoyed by the noise of mankind. The text reads, “In those days the world teemed, the people multiplied, the world bellowed like a wild bull, and the great god was aroused by the clamour. Enlil heard the clamour and he said to the gods in council, ‘The uproar of mankind is intolerable and sleep is no longer possible by reason of the babel.’ So the Gods agreed to exterminate mankind” (*Gilgamesh* 108).

⁹⁰ Utnapishtim is commonly associated with Noah in the Old Testament.

dream to build a boat in order to save his family. When the flood finally comes, the “gods of the abyss” Nirgal and Ninurta also rise up to contribute to the totality of the disaster (*Gilgamesh* 110). This Babylonian account of the great flood emphasizes the mythological theme of punishment by the elemental nature of water. It is significant to note that Ten Keir identifies the engulfing of the giants by nature with water. “Es ist das Wasser, das sie verschlungen hat. Das hat die Giganten verschlungen” (*BMG* 628). Thus, the result of the first punishment is an overwhelming flood, recalling the fate of the Nephilim. The final result will lead to more than just death, but also to the loss of all identity for Delvil and his giants.

The “flood” of monsters or dragons inflicts about as much devastation on Europe as the Ural War,⁹¹ the first apocalyptic event in *BMG*, and causes mankind to backlash even harder against nature. Delvil and the other city-potentates cause organic weapons to be created, described as “Turmmenschen,” artificial giants and predecessors to Delvil’s own transformation, which hold back the tide of destruction. Delvil and his cohorts then decide to seek revenge against the dragons and nature itself.⁹² They turn the technology of Marduk and Kylin on themselves, becoming real giants with the power to not only grow⁹³ to gigantic proportions⁹⁴ but also transform themselves into various animals and forms. Delvil prefers to take on human form but often “haushoch” or bigger.⁹⁵ Kuraggara and Mentusi take on various forms settling into monstrous vultures,⁹⁶ who follow Delvil. Many of the giants also take on the form of a yellow

⁹¹ The political opposition to Delvil asserts that he has created a desert in Europe “schlimmer als die im Uralischen Krieg” (*BMG* 507).

⁹² Ibid. 533

⁹³ Ibid. 588

⁹⁴ “Delvil dachte nur daran zu wachsen” (Ibid. 591).

⁹⁵ Ibid. 590

⁹⁶ Scholars connect this image to the Titan Tityos in Homer’s *Odyssey* as well as to the two ravens who accompany Wotan (see Endnotes, “Sie waren zwei Geier” Ibid. 762).

cloud, which sounds like a swarm of insects (*BMG* 597).⁹⁷ These images are predominately of flying or towering, controlling the skies, etc., which again parallels the domination of the male gods of the heavens in mythology e.g., Yahweh, Marduk, Zeus, Michael the Archangel, over female nature, often represented by the sea. But unlike the traditional narrative, the domination of the giants is short lived. A sort of “second” deluge of nature seals their fate, exacting their final punishment.

Disgusted by Mentusi’s and Kuraggara’s cannibalism in their rampage against nature, Delvil flees in a tantrum to Brandenburg, where he finds the corpse of Marduk. Perhaps out of a need to assert his own supremacy over all, or perhaps out of need to seek guidance from wisdom beyond his own,⁹⁸ he presses Marduk to his breast for days until the “islandische Urkaft” pulsating out Delvil’s body revives Marduk (*BMG* 599). Marduk does not seem to fully comprehend the situation, like one awoken from a dream.⁹⁹ Both Marduk and Delvil recall their namesakes, both mythological figures who attempted to dominate nature, either as Tiamat or the Woman in Revelation. Delvil believes he is reanimating a comrade who will give him new guidance:

Feuer besitzen wir. Das besitzen wir. Unauslöschbares Feuer. Das besitzen wir. Was die
Blumen macht, die Tiere und Menschen macht. Was den Wind und die Wolken macht.

⁹⁷ Plagues of locusts (Rev. 9:3) and swarms of flies (Exod. 8:20-24) are associated devastating punishments on mankind.

⁹⁸ Mentusi und Kuraggara are perched in this scene on Delvil’s shoulders, solidifying the resemblance to scenes from Greek and Norse mythology. In essence, the scene here is a “Katabasis,” a descent into the underworld, not unlike Wotan’s plea for counsel of Erda at the opening of the third act of Richard Wagner’s *Siegfried* or Oðin’s sacrifice of his eye for wisdom in “Völuspá” of the *Poetic Edda*, or the descents of Aeneas, Odysseys, and Gilgamesh into the underworld. Even a comparison to John the Revelator (See Rev. 20:12) is not out of the question.

⁹⁹ The dissemination of apocalyptic revelation through a vision or dreams is a common literary device. For example, the discoveries of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the caves of Qumran also revealed an extended version of the Book of the Watchers narrative, known as the Book of Giants (see Stuckenbruck 1997). In this version, it is the giants who receive dreams about their immanent destruction. In *BMG*, Hojet Sala dreams after their destruction that he has also become a giant and dissolves as they did (*BMG* 625), and Mentusi the giant also dreams of the destruction of the dragons (594). Marduk’s dream-death and Delvil appeal to him for interpretation, like the giants’ appeal for interpretation to Enoch in the Book of the Giants suggest another apocalyptic connection.

Was die Gase treibt. Das besitzen wir. Marduk. Alles haben wir in den Händen. Ich bin kein Großmaul; ich sage: alles. Dich habe ich machen können. Meki ist nichts; wir brauchen nicht Meki. Wir haben die Urwesen selbst. (*BMG* 602)

For Delvil possessing the very power of nature has always been the goal of mankind. For many scholars this passage suggests a repudiation¹⁰⁰ of Nietzsche's concept of the "Übermensch," and moreover, the power being usurped here is more than just nature; it is the power of creation and resurrection itself, the power of God.¹⁰¹ Once again, the Promethean association with Frankenstein holds true, but even the Frankenstein motif suggests more Judeo-Christian elements. For instance, nature does not resurrect itself; it only perpetuates life and does not reanimate dead beings. The power of the "Urkraft" here can also resurrect and return the dead to the living, which suggests that Delvil and his giants are attempting to replace god. Delvil believes in a very Nietzschean sense that he has transcended his human condition¹⁰² and now has displaced his dependency on nature, by seizing its very power. This should be Delvil's moment of glory, but instead he is begging for recognition from the dead, who rebuff him.

Marduk scoffs at Delvil's great achievement, "Es gelang dir nicht. Es ist dir auch jetzt nicht gelungen. Geh weg. Hol Tote, hol Pharao, Hyäne. Husch, daß dein Feuer dich brennt" (605). Despite the stolen power of the nature, Marduk returns to his state of death; his last remarks searing in the mind of Delvil. As declared, the great power, which Delvil has wrought, will burn him in the end. At this junction, explanation for Delvil's name becomes even clearer; not as the tempter of mankind, but as the side of mankind that wishes to usurp God and the power of creation.

¹⁰⁰ Giovanni 77

¹⁰¹ Döblin at this point did not believe in the Christian or Jewish conceptions of god; he believed nature was god. "Gott war ihm nur der Name, den der Mensch der absoluten Funktion gibt, die in der Welt wirksam ist. Alles, was ist existiert nur in Hinsicht auf die göttliche Substanz. Hier ist die Ähnlichkeit mit Döblins Gedanken auffallend" (Bousset-Weyembergh 148-9).

¹⁰² "Certainly modern apocalyptic thinking is deeply inseparable from the death of God" (Altizer 356).

Delvil's complete transformation into a monster ushers in the final stages of this apocalyptic narrative. Abandoning the last remnants of their humanity,¹⁰³ Delvil, along with Mentusi and Kuraggara still pursuing as vultures, flee back to Cornwall,¹⁰⁴ deciding to attack the earth itself.¹⁰⁵ As already discussed, the giants could take on any form they pleased, even becoming wisps of steam. Mentusi and Kuraggara recognize their monstrosification in their boasts of power, "Jetzt sind wir die Drachen" (*BMG* 598). Hojet Sala recognizes this same trait in Venaska, "Du – bist aus dem Geschlecht der Giganten. Du bist die letzte. Du bist selbst ein Untier, das Grönland ausgeworfen hat" (616). The giants and the dragons are two sides¹⁰⁶ of the same coin.¹⁰⁷ They both represent the unmitigated rage and lust for control over the powers of creation. The final scenes of *BMG* reveal how Döblin's apocalypse draws on the traditional mythology but departs from it as well.

The final stage of this apocalypse of humanity is ushered in by the appearance of the mysterious figure of Venaska. She is a sort of exotic goddess and the center of worship for a cult-colony in southern France near Toulouse, founded by the survivors of the Iceland-Greenland expedition. Her origins are unclear but may be connected to the giants (*BMG* 616). She is described as a Malaysian-looking¹⁰⁸ seductress also associated much with snakes, which perhaps is an allusion to Eve and the Snake in Eden.¹⁰⁹ She is confronted by Kylin and Hojet Sala,¹¹⁰

¹⁰³ "Es war kaum mehr ein Mensch, was da glitt und hinzog..." (*BMG* 606).

¹⁰⁴ Cornwall is the scientific stronghold of Delvil's empire and becomes a central meeting place for the giants.

¹⁰⁵ *BMG* 607.

¹⁰⁶ The two beasts originating from the sea and earth respectively in Revelation 13 may also find common ground here.

¹⁰⁷ Louis Huguet identifies Delvil with the Dragon of Revelation 12 (258), which makes sense with the thinly veiled allusion to the Devil. The monstrous role of the giants underscores the reference to ancient myths, where the conqueror literally supplanted the previous deity.

¹⁰⁸ "Der Schnitt ihrer Augen, die Modellierung ihres Gesichts war mehr malayisch als europäisch. Manche nannten sie Mondgöttin" (*BMG* 572). Her Asian appearance may serve as a connection back to the Ural War, which caused the first destruction through technology in *BMG*.

¹⁰⁹ Serpents, as symbols of wisdom, traditionally perform a duplicitous function in mythology, as "symbols of both good and evil" (Handy). Thus, serpents can represent both sides of the transformative power of knowledge.

¹¹⁰ Some of the leaders of the Iceland-Greenland expedition.

who convince her to neutralize the giants, possibly because of her extraordinary connection with nature and ability to love.¹¹¹ She races from Toulouse to Cornwall to confront the giants, but at some point after she arrives in Paris, nature envelops her, literally being swallowed up by the grass (618). Through the power of the earth, she calls for the giants and sends her tears after them,¹¹² which burn on their shoulders.¹¹³ Her voice fills their minds as she calls the giants by name and specifically Delvil.¹¹⁴

In my view, Venaska seems to be speaking for the earth, but at the very least, she is guiding its power, the “Urkraft” to defeat the giants. Delvil begins to be absorbed into the earth and loses consciousness: “‘Die Steine. Es sind die Steine die Bäche. Sie nehmen mir das Bewußtsein.’ Das Gewitter prasselte, Schwärze, glühender Strahl” (*BMG* 620). The ensuing storm here recalls the biblical great flood, ushering in the second punishment of nature against the giants, who are the offending representatives of humanity. However, in Döblin’s apocalypse the giants dilute into both the sea and earth, suggesting a total submission to nature. Venaska begins to feel them in the earth, “‘Toter Bruder, sieh das Meer, es ist schön. Du fühlst mich, du fühlst alles. Du bist Wald Gebirge Fluß. Sieh das süße Leben an dir. Unser süßes Leben, Wald Fluß Gebirge. Laß sie heraufkommen zu dir. Laß sie nur kommen.’ Das Bewußtsein schwand ihm [Devil]... ‘Toter Bruder, blick dich um. Jetzt wirst du lebendig’” (*BMG* 620). Inundated by nature, the giants are admonished to feel their unity with the elements and give into the beckoning assimilation. That Venaska calls them her “dead” brothers but declares that they are now becoming alive, reveals the paradox of the destruction and carnage which results in rebirth

¹¹¹ The text is rarely crystal clear on motives, due to Döblin’s desire to keep the new type of novel clean of over-indulgent psychological interpretation.

¹¹² “Die Tränen liefen der Venaska voraus, fielen auf die Schultern der Giganten” (*BMG* 618).

¹¹³ *Ibid.* 619

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* 620

that is so typical for apocalypse. This is the beginning and the end, which in the next section will become vivid in its spiritual message.

Finally, the giants begin to sink into nature, becoming one with that which they so desperately sought to supplant. Venaska continues her calls as the integration becomes complete: “Du hast Beine, sink hin. Hin. Hin. Wir sinken. Ach ist es schön zu sinken.’ Es war nicht mehr Delvil in Berg See Wald ausgedehnt, auseinanderfließend. Es war nicht mehr Delvil” (*BMG* 621). Delvil’s very being evanesces into the all-ness of nature, losing all sense of self-identity and likewise the other giants dissolve into nature.

Some scholars have suggested that this scene is a form of penitence; a redemption through pain.¹¹⁵ Monique Weyembergh-Boussart identifies this final scene as a sort of conversion through Venaska, the symbol of love: “So werden, am Schluß, die Giganten durch die Tränen Venaskas, die das Sinnbild der Liebe ist, bekehrt” (Weyembergh-Boussart 73). Gabrielle Sander views the giants as beings who have lost their souls through their manipulation of the power of the “Urwesen” and Venaska reintegrates them into back into nature, “die ihnen damit paradoxerweise zum Tode verhilft, zur Erlösung von ihrer dehumanisierten animalischen Existenz” (“An die Grenzen” 373-374). Weyembergh-Boussart agrees: “Ihre Macht bezahlen sie am Ende mit dem Verlust ihres Bewußtseins und ihrer Seele” (Weyembergh-Boussart 73). The strongest textual clue is the statement “Es war nicht mehr Delvil” (*BMG* 620), suggesting total oblivion, but the state of the giants’ “souls” is not definitively explicated. More important is the theme of punishment by deluge results in a resolution, destroying the old element of humanity and on a spiritual level of the human. “Becoming alive” for the giants through death epitomizes the evanescence of the Self into the All, the quintessence of the mystical union, which represents

¹¹⁵ “Die leidvolle Beschaffenheit des menschlichen Daseins” is according to Weyembergh-Boussart’s analysis one of the recurring themes in Döblin’s works (375). Guilt and pain are important elements in the religious thinking of Alfred Döblin.

the conclusion of *BMG*. Döblin described the moment when he realized how the climax of *BMG* would unfold:

Es war ein glückliches Gefühl, als ich – im Mai – das Geschick Venaskas erfasste: die schmerzreiche sehnsüchtige Seele senkt sich in die entsetzlichen tobsüchtigen Giganten, nennt sie ihre Brüder, und sie sterben willig. Die Seele in der Natur. Wir sind nicht an die anderen Gewalten verloren. Wir können uns bewegen. Das mächtige Gebiet der natürlichen 'Seelen'. Es ist schon nicht mehr dieses Buch. (*AzL* 354)

“Nicht mehr Delvil,” “nicht mehr dieses Buch”: the dissolution theme overflows from the book itself into the experience of the writer. Moreover, the theme of neutralization of forces in apocalypse is accentuated by this scene. The ideas of Döblin and the titanic forces in *BMG* nullify each other, resulting in a new paradigm through dissolution, establishing a new individual, who is a receptacle and benefactor of apocalyptic knowledge.

A new world is born from the carnage, but Döblin leaves the possibility of a return to the old political ways by the new leaders, “Ob sie sich wieder wie die alten Herren über die Menschen erheben würden.”¹¹⁶ Hojet Sala dreams he turns into one of the giants and succumbs to the same fate. He awakes trembling.¹¹⁷ It is possible to interpret this passage as a suggestion of the possibility for return to the hubris of Marduk and Delvil as Thomas Wolf and Thorstan Hahn have suggested, but I argue that this new religion, when analyzed with the concluding statements of Ten Keir and Kylin becomes more that a restart of hubris. Apocalyptic experiences are not about the forgetting of the past entirely, but more about departing from the false path, or correcting the rebellious element. Stone memorials are raised in remembrance of the giants,¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ *BMG* 624

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* 625

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* 630

but nobody wishes their return, “Wohl uns, daß sie hin sind.”¹¹⁹ Hojet Sala, talking to the former leader of the Brussels city-empire, Ten Keir, tries to convince him that he should be grateful that the giants have been defeated. Ten Keir misses the lust for power and mourns for the giants, but eventually decides to join the new movement, led by Kylin. Central to this departure from the old course is the recognition of the failure of the old course, which is connected to the apocalyptic ideal of the death of the old society, or the old individual. The apocalyptic experience of the downfall of technological hubris as demonstrated by Delvil provided the survivors with a new humility,¹²⁰ which is the crux of the revelation.

Thus, *BMG* is a complex and detailed amalgamation of overlapping apocalyptic texts, incorporating many streams of biblical and mythological inheritance. The initial punishment of humanity with the appearance of the dragons underscores the relation of *BMG* to Revelation 12, whereas the dissolution of the giants into nature corresponds with the Book of the Watchers. But, where Gods, heroes, or giants always conquered chaos¹²¹ definitively in traditional myths, in *BMG* the result is a stalemate. Neither the monstrous manifestations of the human innovation (i.e. giants), nor that of nature (i.e. the dragons) gain absolute dominance, instead they neutralize each other. This helps explain the paradoxical death-life declaration of Venaska to Delvil, “Toter Bruder [...] Jetzt wirst du lebendig” (*BMG* 620), for the giants become neither dead nor alive, but rather both. The result is a paradox, which represents the climax of the apocalyptic experience, the arrival at the ineffable, where the next level of experience can be obtained.

Döblin’s *BMG* is an apocalypse of the neutralization of opposing forces and not the demise of any one side. It should be considered that although the giants are defeated in *BMG*,

¹¹⁹ *BMG* 626

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* 630

¹²¹ “In accordance with the principle *Urzeit wird Endzeit* (the Primeval time becomes the End time), the conflict with chaos is associated not only with the creation of the world but also with the eschaton” (Day “Dragon”).

they are still memorialized in the post-apocalyptic society. The final discussion here between Kylin, Diuwa¹²² and Ten Keir is a pregnant discourse on the future of humanity.

Ich habe den Schmerz nicht vergessen. Wir haben die Giganten im Gedächtnis. Es sind überall Steinzeichen zu ihrer Erinnerung errichtet. Und zu ihrer Feier; sie waren gewaltige Menschen. Wir haben auch das Feuer. Es ist uns nichts entschwunden. Wir müssen dies festhalten. Diuwa, das Land nimmt uns, aber wir sind etwas in dem Lande. Es schlingt uns nicht. Wir haben keine Furcht vor der Luft und dem Boden. Kennst du, Diuwa, Ten Keir? Du kennst ihn. Er ist still geworden. Er weiß, wir haben die Kraft, das wirkliche Wissen, und die Demut. Er ist mein Freund. Er hat unser Zeichen genommen und geschworen, nicht von mir zu gehen. Warum? Er sieht, wir sind reicher und stärker geworden. Wir sind die wirklichen Giganten. Wir sind es, die durch den Uralischen Krieg und Grönland gegangen sind. Und wir, wir sind nicht erlegen, Diuwa. Du kannst an der Garonne und an der Rhone erzählen, was ich sage. Man wird uns bald auf der ganzen Erde sehen. (*BMG* 630)

These post-apocalyptic humans possess more than the Promethean power, after which the giants had so viciously lusted; they also possess knowledge from the bitter lessons of the giants. The declaration “Man wird uns bald auf der ganzen Erde sehen” implies that the fire of this knowledge will spread, that the new knowledge will transform the world. But, Kylin speaks of more than the transformation of humanity.

In recognizing that humanity had always been a part of nature, “Das Land nimmt uns, aber wir sind etwas in dem Lande” (*BMG* 630), Kylin also speaks to the metaphysical struggle in each human being between nature and spirit, inclusion and exclusion. In this light, *BMG* speaks to that naturally human element in all of us that connects us to the cosmos, to that thing greater

¹²² A female leader of one of the surviving groups.

than ourselves, but which simultaneously confirms that we are unique. The apocalyptic journey tells us that we are not exclusively part of either side of the duality of existence: the logical and the illogical, the mystical and rational, reality and irreality are inseparable. The confusing mesh of allegories and intertextuality of *BMG* reaffirms that truth is ultimately unveiled on the event horizon of the paradoxical paradigms of knowledge.

This section has taken us through another apocalypse from the Bible and its connection to older mythologies. I have attempted to show that *BMG* is not only a link to these traditions but also a departure from them. There are strains of imagery connecting *BMG* to the Book of Revelation and to the World-Deluge in the Book of the Watchers. Apocalypse, viewed as the end of the world, accompanied with great destruction, is prevalent in *BMG*. Döblin's giants, or humans at the height of arrogance, are dealt really three blows of apocalypse through their actions: 1) a devastating war between Asia and Europe, 2) an attempt to capture the power of nature in Iceland, which results in a dramatic backlash from cretaceous "dragons," and 3) a final attempt to usurp the power of creation, even reanimation, which results in the loss of the Self and being for the giants. But, as I have already stressed, the word apocalypse indicates a revelation of secret knowledge, an initiation, and the question remains to what extent this initiatory aspect of apocalypticism is manifest in *BMG*.

The Prophetic Elements of *BMG* and its Apocalyptic Resolution

In the previous sections, I have discussed some common themes between the apocalyptic texts and *BMG*, mostly in the sense of apocalypse as a great cataclysm culminating in the end of the world. In this last section, I would like to discuss more deeply the other aspect of apocalypse in *BMG*. Recalling the original etymology of apocalypse from the Greek ἀποκάλυψις (*apokálypsis*), which literally means "to reveal or uncover," we understand that apocalypse is

also a spiritual introspection. Apocalypse is intrinsically connected to the unfolding of divine knowledge, as Brokoff stated, “darüber hinaus geht es um Geheimnisse der himmlischen Wirklichkeit, die mitgeteilt werden” (8). But apocalypse, aside from what is uncovered in dreams or visions, can be intensely personal, referring to a spiritual vivisection of the old being, followed by a re-formation, or perhaps a transcendence of that individual. The view of Döblin functioning as prophet is not new,¹²³ but interpreting *BMG* as this internal renewal of spirit has not been explicitly discussed. In order to discuss this aspect, my discussion will focus more on Alfred Döblin and the formation of *BMG* than on the content of his novel.

In both the Revelation of John and the Book of the Watchers, the inductions provide us with some clue as to the intention of the authors. *BMG* also functions in this way, but to being with, I will discuss the biblical and apocryphal texts. Consider the opening passage of the Book of Revelation in the New Testament, where the author prefaces his vision: “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants thing which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John” (*King James Version* Rev. 1:1). The objective of John’s writing is clear; his vision is a warning of the events that will bring about the end of the world, but the “things which must shortly come to pass” may also refer to the things which will be read in this text. John continues with the promise, “Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of the prophecy and keep those things, which are written therein: for the time is at hand” (*King James Version* Rev. 1:3). In this way, the intention is to benefit the reader by exposing him to previously “hidden” knowledge, which requires the confrontation with the esoteric, grotesque, and incredible imagery common to the Revelation of

¹²³ Fisher 5

John. In the next chapters, it is clear that the readers are to overcome¹²⁴ in order to internalize the message of the revelation, or in other words to pass the test of the apocalyptic experience.

The task of transcendence is an onerous exercise for the individual.

Similar intentions are stated at the opening of the Book of the Watchers, although the intentions for an apocalypse of the soul are not overt.

The words of the blessing with which Enoch blessed the righteous chosen, who will be present on the day of tribulation, to remove all the enemies; and the righteous will be saved. And he took up his discourse and said, ‘Enoch, a righteous man whose eyes were opened by God, who had a vision of the Holy One and of heaven, which he showed me. From the words of the watchers and holy ones I heard everything; and as I heard everything from them, I also understood what I saw. Not for this generation do I expound, but concerning the chosen I speak now and concerning them I take up my discourse.’ (1 En. 1:1-3)

The apocryphal text attempts to be more exclusive, addressing a specific future audience and stating an intention to affect the righteous chosen, but the possibility remains to interpret the text as a spiritual journey for the reader. In this regard, “this generation” could be viewed as the reader in his or her uninitiated state and “the chosen” are those who will have read and understood the text. Interestingly, the speaker couples the experience of seeing heaven and hearing the watchers, those who revolt against the Holy One, juxtaposing the wickedness with righteousness. Thus, it is the confrontation with good and evil that provides clarity; by hearing the watchers, the reader understands what he is seeing. That these words are for those who will be present on the day of tribulation, also suggest a difficult journey.

¹²⁴ There are total of seven promises of great rewards, which shall be bestowed on those who overcome, see Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26 and 3:5,12,21. The number seven is also a repeated theme throughout the Book of Revelation.

For Döblin's novel, there is no direct declaration of purpose; instead the first person narrator hesitates,¹²⁵ suggesting that the experience before the reader is also an arduous one: "Was tue ich, wenn ich von dir spreche. Ich habe das Gefühl, das dürfte ich kein Wort von dir verlauten lassen, ja, nicht zu deutlich an dich denken" (*BMG* 7). The narrator is careful not to come too close to the all-encompassing source of existence, but the mood is one of reverence before the incomprehensibility of the cosmos. "Ich will nicht wagen euch nahe zu treten" and a few lines later, "Mit Angst habe ich mich vor euch¹²⁶ entfernt" (*BMG* 7). The voice here was a reluctant prophet indeed, reminiscent of Jonah in the Old Testament, "Da hatte ich euch [die Gewalten der Natur] verborgen, hielt die Türe zu," (7). Like Vondung's discussion of existential angst, the experience of apocalypse is a confrontation with the unknown, which inspires a deep-seated fear. But in the end the lure of divine knowledge proves too appealing, the voice insists on the need to share the experience, "Was habt ihr mit mir vor. Was bin ich in euch. Ich muß sprechen von euch, was ich fühle" (9). The "Zueignung" or dedication of the book, which has been quoted here, never definitively describes itself as a revelation, but it implies the need to acquire and share knowledge, "Ich will nicht aus diesem Leben gegangen sein, ohne daß sich meine Kehle geöffnet hat für das, was ich oft mit Schrecken, jetzt stille, lauschend, ahnend empfinde" (9). The Hebrew word for prophet is נָבִיא (navi), "may have an active sense 'speaker, herald, pracher' or (more probably) a passive sense 'one who has been called,'"¹²⁷ which complements the desired "calling-out" of the narrator. The description reminds one of Elijah's experience on Mount Horeb, "Jahwe war nicht in dem Feuer. Nach dem Feuer aber ließ sich ein sanftes Säuseln vernehmen" (*Kautzsch Textbibel* 1 Könige 19:12). Despite all the gargantuan

¹²⁵ The "Zueignung" to Goethe's *Faust* yields some interesting parallels, including some hesitation at the beginning of a tremendous literary journey.

¹²⁶ The text never overtly defines what is meant by "du" und "euch," but from the context it seems reasonable to conclude that the reference is to nature and its various manifestations.

¹²⁷ Köhler 661-62

vacillations of *BMG*, dealing with tremendous natural disasters and the annihilation of masses of humanity, approaching concealed knowledge originates as an extroverted glance at the universe, which then introverts into “was ich fühle” and “was ich oft mit Schrecken, jetzt stille, lauschend, ahnend empfinde.” “Mit Schrecken” also illustrates that the experience of reading *BMG*, like the Book of Revelation and the Book of the Watchers, will not be without stress.

Döblin’s own commentary about the experience of writing *BMG* corresponds with the reverence in the dedication. One especially fascinating aspect of Döblin’s commentary is how he discusses his ‘conversion’ to the true purpose of his book, namely the praise of nature. I include a lengthy passage here in order to highlight the revelatory manner in which Döblin describes the experience of writing *BMG*:

Aber etwas merkte ich bald in diesem Beginn: ich war ausgezogen, um den schrecklichen mystischen Naturkomplexen auszuweichen. Und – saß mitten drin. Mitten drin. Ich hielt mineralogische, petrographische, geographische Bücher in der Hand, betrachtete Steine im Museum! Von einer anderen Seite kommend war ich wieder hier eingedrungen.

Versunken. Es hatte sich wieder erhoben. Die stärkste Waffe, die ich gegen diese schweren, die Brust beengenden Gedanken erhob, hatte nichts genutzt. Es ging mir selbst, wie das Thema sagte: die menschliche Kraft gegen die Naturgewalt, die Ohnmacht der menschlichen Kraft. Ich hatte, ohne zu wissen und wollen, ein Spiegelbild meiner kleinen Spezialbemühung gegeben. Aber doch war ich nicht derselbe wie vor Beginn des Buches. Jetzt beengten mich diese Gefühle von der Natur nicht mehr. Ich sage immer ‘Natur.’ Es ist nicht dasselbe wie ‘Gott.’ Ist dunkler, ungeheurer als Gott. Das volle schwirrende Geheimnis der Welt. Aber doch etwas von ‘Gott.’ Es scheint mir richtig, daß man sich diesem furchteinflößenden Rätsel nur mit Schuhen in der Hand und nur selten nähert.

Jetzt, wo ich schrieb, fand ich, das Geheimnis hatte sich verwandelt in meinem Gefühl. Ich fand in mir vor eine sichere, starke, nach Ausdruck verlangende Gewalt, und mein Buch hatte eine besondere Aufgabe: das Weltwesen zu preisen.

Ich – betete. Das war die Verwandlung. Ich betete und ließ es gehen. Ich widerstrebte nur so leise, wie man im Gebet widerstrebt. Mein Buch war nicht mehr der gigantische Kampf der Stadtschaften, sondern Bekenntnis, ein besänftigender und feiernder Gesang auf die großen Muttergewalten. (*AzL* 350-1)

There are many expressions here, which emphasize the revelatory style of *BMG*; the religious language of prayer, transformation, confession and hymns, but above all this is a difficult wrestle with the creative power. Döblin's experience in writing the book was a twofold microcosm; first for the universal wrestle between nature and humanity, which underscores the function of *BMG* as knowledge for the whole of humanity; and second for the wrestle of humanity with itself; the struggle between what the individual superficially appears to be and what the individual truly is. It is intriguing that Döblin includes God in his experience with nature, declaring it as a dark and monstrous side of God, but none the less a part. The experience of *BMG* was a confrontation with the secret of nature, an experience which changed him and one that neither he nor anyone else probably ever fully understood.

At other points in the commentary, it seems clear that Döblin felt driven, compelled, perhaps by some external force, to write this book. The experience of writing *BMG* was certainly out of the ordinary for Döblin:

In einigen Punkten war das Buch für mich eigenartig. Einmal stilistisch. Ich liebe sonst Knappheit, Gegenständlichkeit. Hier konnte ich Impulsen rein sprachlicher Art nicht widerstehen. Es ging ins Weite, Farbige. Es war, als wenn sich alles autonom machen

wollte, und ich musste auf der Hut sein. Das hohe Niveau mancher Parteien, ihr feiernder, hymnischer Charakter, trug dazu bei. Ich will auch gestehen, dass ich das Gefühl hatte, nicht im Gebiet eigentlicher oder gewöhnlicher Prosa mehr zu sein, im Sprachlichen. Wohin die Reise geht, weiß ich nicht. Die alten Versformen erscheinen mir unmöglich. Man soll nichts zwingen, nicht wollen und alles werden lassen. (*AzL* 355)

The passivity of the process becomes apparent, emphasizing the metaphysically inexplicable nature of Döblin's futuristic novel. He describes the experience as peculiar, a term which could be easily applied to the other apocalyptic texts with their unfamiliar symbols. It seems that even Döblin was not fully aware of all the implications of *BMG*. Klaus Müller-Salget argues the experience of writing *BMG* was so "unheimlich"¹²⁸ that Döblin had to write the "Bemerkungen zu *Beerge Meere und Giganten*" in order to make sense of it.¹²⁹

The thesis of Thomas Iserman's book *Der Text und das Unsagbare: Studien zu Religionsuche und Werkpoetik bei Alfred Döblin* suggests that writing was the means by which Döblin addresses difficult inexplicable experiences. "Döblins Absicht, diese Aporien zu lösen, führt ihn zu einer Schreibpoetik, die diese stets ungelösten Probleme auf sich lädt und episch perpetuiert" (Isermann 5). The confrontation with the inexpressible reflects the internal struggle for truth, which is not easily discerned or communicated. Similarly, Hanna Maria Hofmann asserted that *BMG* is so chock full of mythical allusions, that the implications of *BMG* are "simply unimaginable"¹³⁰ for Döblin. In this sense, the struggle to write *BMG* as interpreted by these scholars underscores an internal struggle, the need to express the inexpressible.

¹²⁸ Perhaps, Müller-Salget meant to associate this experience with Sigmund Freud's concept of "Das Unheimliche," but he does not explicitly state it.

¹²⁹ Müller-Salget 203

¹³⁰ Hofmann 170

Apocalyptic writings are exactly about the revelation of the unknown or perhaps even unknowable, which is one reason why their images are difficult to come to terms with.

Rolf Geißler emphasized Döblin's role in *BMG* as a prophet of sorts, a disseminator of "revelatory" knowledge. He associates Döblin with Homunculus in *Faust II*, who was derived from the secretive powers of alchemy and has the knowledge to convey Faust and Mephisto to Ancient Greece. Geißler claims further that, "Döblin ist also ein Proteus" (Geißler 154), the shape-shifting sea nymph, who could tell the future, as long as he could be caught. The knowledge of *BMG* has to be earned through concerted effort. Joseph Campbell associated mythology itself with Proteus, "...this wily god never discloses even to the skillful questioner the whole content of his wisdom. He will reply only to the question put to him, and what he discloses will be great or trivial according to the question asked" (Campbell 329). In context of this analysis, the apocalyptic experience, i.e. the confrontation with the terrifying on both a large and small scale, is protean, meaning that the experience is dependant upon the effort of the reader.

In addition to the correct question, it is important to note that this apocalyptic knowledge is only beneficial as long as it is obtained correctly. The "Nephilim" gave of their divine knowledge to women without authorization from God, which resulted in the catastrophe of the Great Flood itself. The Book of Revelation takes up a similar vein with the stern warning against tampering with the content of John's vision, "If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book" (*King James Version Rev. 22:18*). In *BMG*, Ten Keir confesses that Delvil's giants went too far, "Sie hatten sich übernommen,"¹³¹ but still Kylin says, "Wir sind die wirklichen Giganten" and "wir haben das Feuer."¹³² I do not

¹³¹ *BMG* 628

¹³² *Ibid.* 628

believe that this means the new humanity is every bit as proud as the giants, since the dogma of new age requires humility before the fire of nature.¹³³ Instead, Kylin declares “wir haben die Kraft, das wirkliche Wissen, und die Demut,”¹³⁴ suggesting that humanity can assimilate the “revealed” knowledge of nature, instead of grotesque and perverse raping of that knowledge on the part of Delvil and his giants. The apocalyptic knowledge of *BMG* functions like that in the Book of the Watchers as “a metaphorical expression of illicit revelation” (Collins 53), meaning that comprehension of the cosmos cannot be forcibly taken, rather the proper acquisition of knowledge requires humility before the source of all knowledge, even the entirety of nature. The key to understanding apocalyptic knowledge comes by concordance with nature in all its extremes and not in competition with it.

Whether *BMG* is utopian or dystopian is not as important as the new state of existence after the acquisition of apocalyptic knowledge. The result of the apocalypse of *BMG* is the neutralization of forces, rather than a victory of one over the other. Nature does not subjugate mankind, it reincorporates it, establishing a new paradigm. The destruction of Europe is the result of the cancelation of equal forces: human technological arrogance and the enormity of nature. This new truth is the realization of the balance, which must be struck between humanity and nature, as parts of the same entity. “[D]ie wirklichen Giganten” (*BMG* 630) chose to become accustomed to the new paradigm after the destruction of the Iceland-Greenland expedition.

The paradigm shift does not exclude the personal development, the spiritual struggle within that is reflective of the battle between Delvil’s giants and nature’s dragons. Thomas Wolf wrote of the climax of *BMG*: “Döblin imaginiert in seinem Roman keine einzelne letzte große

¹³³ *BMG* 624

¹³⁴ *Ibid.* 630

Katestrophe, sondern zeichnet die Welt als permanente Naturkatastrophe [...]” (Wolf 60). From the text, there is never any clear indication that the new paradigm will be a vicious cycle. The cyclical suggestion applies well to the spiritual struggle within each of us, however. When nature and spirit collide inside of us, the result is not the yielding of one side to the other; it is about a new harmony. A new instance of a confrontation with the inexpressible knowledge comes from each apocalyptic experience, from each collision with knowledge contrary to our preconceptions, which must be resolved.

Visually, I believe Döblin outlined this new relationship in the juxtaposition of the stars with the black ether of the universe. The remarks of the dedication to *BMG* and the concluding sentences draw the distinction.

Wie blendend tobt oben die Sonne. Wer ist das. Welche Masse Sterne Toben neben ihr, ich seh’ sie nicht. (*BMG* 8)

Schwarz der Äther über ihnen, mit kleinen Sonnenbällen, funkelnden verschlackenden Sternhaufen.¹³⁵ Brust an Brust lag die Schwärze mit den Menschen; Licht glomm aus ihnen. (*BMG* 631)

The first person narrator was at the beginning not able to see these stars, but now something as changed; they are visible *in* the human beings. The symbol of the stars is transferred onto humanity. The themes of “seeing” and “light” are well-established symbols of comprehension and knowledge. Humanity has achieved the new state of enlightenment, but the darkness is equally emphasized with the light, extending the definition of the new paradigm. The intimate position of the darkness “breast on breast” with human beings and the use of “funkelnden” and

¹³⁵ The theme of stars is a prevalent one in apocalyptic literature. “And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations [...] And I will give him the morning¹³⁵ star” (*King James Bible* Rev. 2:26, 28).

“verschlackenden”¹³⁶ suggest that the darkness is just as important as the light,¹³⁷ highlighting the apocalyptic nature of *BMG*. In order to appreciate the true brilliance of stars, or in this case humanity, one requires both darkness and light. Another biblical apocalypse described the process this way. “He revealeth the deep and secret things: he knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him” (*King James Bible Dan. 2:22*).

Döblin wrote that once he knew *BMG* would be a futurist novel that he did not know exactly where to go with it. “Ich wußte zuerst nicht wohin. Aber ich wollte nicht in die Luft zu den Sternen gehen, es sollte ein tellurisches Abenteuer werden, Ringen mit der Erde” (*AzL 349*). He wanted *BMG* to be an adventure, which wound up going to the earth, travelling inward. Navzat Kaya suggested the following interpretation of this decision: “Die ‘Luft zu den Sternen’ impliziert die apollinische Sphäre der Science-Fiction, bei dem tellurischen Abenteuer handelt es sich um eine archaisch-archetypische Reise zu den Ursprüngen, zurück zu Gää, der parthenogenetischen Großen Mutter” (137). As I have discussed throughout my thesis, I do not believe that *BMG* is the choice *between* but rather the embracing *of* polar opposites.

The journey to the earth parallels the notion of introversion, of intro-cendence in order to unlock truth from within, i.e. the apocalyptic experience. In light of the above passage, it seems *BMG* ended up somewhere different. By venturing introspectively, the journey morphed into extroversion, arriving at the stars after all. We along with Döblin arrive at the paradox of the juxtaposed positioning of darkness and stars. The dichotomy of all these elements, destruction and creation, knowledge and mystery, light and darkness can no longer be seen as a cancellation of each other, but that they forces were never separate but rather the same organism, part of one

¹³⁶ The German verb “verschlacken” refers to the slag or cinder created by the process of refining ore into metal, or it can even refer to the remnants left from coal transport.

¹³⁷ Mephisto’s defines himself in a similar matter in the “Studierzimmer” Scene in Act One of Goethe’s *Faust: Erster Teil*, “Ich bin ein Teil des Teils, der anfangs alles war, ein Teil der Finsternis, die sich das Licht gebar.”

whole. That the journey inward will also lead outward suggest that all the great exertions of man's spiritual journey are multi-dimensional. Our entire frame of reference has changed.

BMG like the Campbell's view of Proteus could reveal a variety of insights, depending on the question asked. Whether the point of origin of the question concerned nature, god, the definition of human existence, the questions are inter-linked and that linkage is essential to any ultimate understanding. The answer to the apocalyptic mystery is the need for humanity to realize interconnectivity of the questions in the first place.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have examined *BMG* in the light of two Judeo-Christian apocalypses, the apocryphal Book of the Watchers and The Book of Revelation from the New Testament. I then discussed revelatory knowledge and Döblin's role as a conveyer of that knowledge. These discussions have addressed both the apocalypse of humanity (microscopic) and the apocalypse of the human (personal). I have attempted to differentiate my analysis from other scholars by comparing many of the symbolic elements of apocalyptic texts directly with *BMG*.

Many scholars have touched on the philosophical and psychological significance of *BMG*, but only few have ventured into the spiritual nature of *BMG*, meaning the confrontation with the terrifying and indescribable within one's Self, which is one reason why it has not been largely recognized as an apocalyptic text. Some scholars have asserted that *BMG* is apocalyptic, but their evidences have come from broad generalizations and only fleetingly touched upon allusions to Judeo-Christian examples. No scholar has considered the especially striking parallels between the Book of the Watchers, despite the numerous correlations between the two texts and the probably connection to Babylonian mythology. In contrast to other scholarly endeavors, I have attempted to keep my interpretations very close to the text of *BMG*.

The interconnectivity of the apocalyptic myths within a variety mythologies originating from different cultural traditions has suggested the universality of apocalypse to the human experience. Each of us experience birth and death, a beginning and end to life as already mentioned with Klaus Vondung's analysis.¹³⁸ In a very literal sense, each of us is caught in the tension between these two forces, standing on unstable ground, ripe for our own apocalypse. *BMG*, like other apocalyptic texts, can act as medium to inner discovery of this tension and its implications on the purpose of existences. Such discussions of the meaning of life are beyond the scope of my analysis, but nevertheless remain a crucial element in *BMG*.

The role of apocalypse in *BMG* supports hypotheses of Thomas Isermann, Thomas Wolf, and Monique Weyembergh-Boussart, who asserted the key to understanding *BMG* lies in its religious appeal. Many scholars believe that Döblin's "Bekehrung zum Katholizismus" was an abberation, "einen Bruch, ja einen Verrat, und der Autor wurde als Renegat angesehen" (Weyembergh-Boussart 7). But Monique Weyemberg-Boussart argued that Döblin's conversion was instead "der Endpunkt eines langen Weges [...] das Sichtbarwerden einer seit langem vorhandenen Linie" (7). Döblin evolved into his own religious beliefs, but his beliefs are not the focus of my analysis. *BMG* was part of this "Sichtbarwerden" and possibly held the keys to unlocking the mysteries of Döblin's journey to conversion. Weyembergh-Boussart concluded, "Vieles scheint bei diesem Schriftsteller Gefühlssache, Intuition, Impulsivität zu sein. Daher bleibt manches undeutlich, ungenügend durchdacht und rational durchformt" (378). For Döblin, returning to the story of *BMG* may have functioned as the guiding compass along the journey, or perhaps, more precisely, there was something more mysterious, more unutterable behind *BMG* that drove its author. Indeed, each Döblin's novels may have been a medium for attempting to

¹³⁸ Vondung 509-10

express the new knowledge gained through his confrontations “den schrecklichen mystischen Naturkomplexen” (*AzL* 350).

The fault of humanity, the cause of its apocalypse in *BMG* did not lie in the pursuit of technology per se, but rather in the displacement of the whole of the cosmos and the power thereof. Ultimately, this goal was not only impossible; it was ludicrous, because the fight to usurp the power of nature was really the struggle to undermine our own power. Döblin emphasized humanity’s neglect of nature, but not just on an ecological or political plain; the paramount indictment is humanity’s neglect of the cosmos, similar to the principles of Taoism, which had fascinated Döblin since *Die Drei Sprünge des Wang-Lun*, but more so it is the neglect of one’s own self.

And yet the Self extends back out into the ether of the unknown, attempting as I have argued to reach the stars, balancing between dichotomies. In my experience with *BMG*, I was able to share in this introspective and simultaneously “extrospective” journey and realize aspects of myself that are incomprehensible. Never will I find expression for those discoveries, but the realization of them is another step on the path. *BMG* never definitively defined the parameters of the new paradigm it established, but that does not detract from its value. Its ability to draw the reader into a confrontation with the mystery within by describing events in the external world is thus the best witness for its deep congeniality with the apocalyptic tradition. For each reader willing to take the plunge into the apocalyptic waters of *BMG*, the potential to reveal unimaginable insights abounds, and after breaking the surface, one may come face to face with the ineffable abyss of the harmonious paradox.

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