

THE NEVERSINK LIBRARY



**YOUTH WITHOUT GOD**

---

**ÖDÖN VON HORVÁTH**

TRANSLATED BY R. WILLS THOMAS

INTRODUCTION BY LIESL SCHILLINGER

## PRAISE FOR ÖDÖN VON HORVÁTH

---

“Horváth had turned his back on the mournful realism of the émigrés, with their passion for easy caricature and their desire for revenge. He had realized with extraordinary acuteness that to meet the horror of reality with a horror literature was no longer possible or useful, that the reality of Fascism was in fact so overwhelming and catastrophic that no realism, particularly the agonized naturalism of the twentieth century, could do it justice.”

—ALFRED KAZIN

“Ödön von Horváth was a brilliant German writer.... He makes the truth irresistible.”

—EDMUND WILSON

“The most gifted writer of his generation.”

—STEFAN ZWEIG

“Horváth is better than Brecht.”

—PETER HANDKE

“One of the best Austrian writers ... In every line of his prose there is an unmistakable hatred for the kind of German philistinism that made the German murder, the Third Reich possible.”

—JOSEPH ROSS

## YOUTH WITHOUT GOD

---

**ÖDÖN VON HORVÁTH** (1901–1939) was born near Trieste, the son of a Hungarian diplomat who moved the family constantly. Horváth would subsequently say of himself, “I am a mélange of Old Austria; Hungarian, Croat, Czech, German; alas, nothing Semitic.” Although his first language was Hungarian, he went to high school in Vienna and college in Munich and began writing plays in German. Leaving school, he settled in Berlin, where in 1931 his play *Italian Night* debuted to rave reviews—except from the Nazi press, which reviled him. His next play, *Tales from the Vienna Woods*, starring Peter Lorre, drew an even stronger, equally divided response. When the Nazis came to power in 1933 Horváth relocated to Vienna, but on the day of the Anschluss—March 13, 1938—he fled to Budapest, and soon after, to Paris. On June 1, 1938, Horváth was caught in a storm after leaving a theater on the Champs-Élysées. He took shelter under a tree that was struck by lightning; a falling limb killed him instantly. He was 36 years old and had published 21 plays and three novels—*Youth Without God*, *A Child of Our Time*, and *The Eternal Philistine*.

**LIESL SCHILLINGER** is a critic and translator whose work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *The New Republic*, and *The Washington Post*. She is the translator of *Every Day, Every Hour* by Nataša Dragnić and the forthcoming *Camille*, by Alexandre Dumas.

**R. WILLS THOMAS’S** translations from French and German include Ödön von Horváth’s *Child of Our Time*.



---

## THE NEVERSINK LIBRARY

*I was by no means the only reader of books on board the Neversink. Several other sailors were diligent readers, though their studies did not lie in the way of belles-lettres. Their favourite authors were such as you may find at the book-stalls around Fulton Market; they were slightly physiologic in their nature. My book experiences on board of the frigate proved an example of a fact which every book-lover must have experienced before me, namely, that though public libraries have a stately and imposing air, and doubtless contain invaluable volumes, yet, somehow, the books that prove most agreeable, grateful, and companionable, are those we pick up by chance here and there; those which seem put into our hands by Providence; those which pretend to little, but abound in much.*

—HERMAN MELVILLE, *WHITE JACKETS*

---

# YOUTH WITHOUT GOD

---

ÖDÖN VON HORVÁTH

TRANSLATED BY R. WILLS THOMAS

INTRODUCTION BY LIESL SCHILLINGER



MELVILLE HOUSE PUBLISHING  
BROOKLYN • LONDON

Originally published in German as *Jugend ohne Gott* by Ödön von Horváth

Originally published in the United States by The Dial Press under the title *The Age of the Fish* in 1939

This edition © Melville House 2012

Translated by R. Wills Thomas

Introduction © Liesl Schillinger

Design by Christopher King

Melville House Publishing

145 Plymouth Street

Brooklyn, NY 11201

[www.mhpbooks.com](http://www.mhpbooks.com)

eISBN: 978-1-61219-120-1

Library of Congress Control Number: 2012936545

v3.1

# CONTENTS

---

*Cover*

*About the Authors*

*Epigraph*

*Title Page*

*Copyright*

INTRODUCTION by *Liesl Schillinger*

YOUTH WITHOUT GOD

1. Niggers
2. Rain
3. The Rich Plebeians
4. Bread
5. Pestilence
6. The Age of the Fish
7. The Goalkeeper
8. War
9. Venus on Trek
10. Weeds
11. The Lost Airman
12. Go Home
13. Human Ideals
14. The Roman Captain
15. Filth
16. Z and N
17. Adam and Eve
18. Condemned
19. The Man in the Moon
20. The Last Day but One
21. The Last Day
22. The Pressmen
23. The Trial
24. A Veil
25. His Dwelling
26. The Compass
27. The Box
28. Expelled from Paradise
29. The Fish

30. The Fish Won't Bite

---

31. A Flag Day
32. One of the Five
33. The Club Steps In
34. Two Letters
35. Autumn
36. A Visitor
37. The Terminus
38. The Bait
39. The Net
40. N
41. The Ghost
42. The Doe
43. The Other Eye
44. Over the Sea



**INTRODUCTION:**  
**NO GOD BUT MEN**  
**BY LIESL SCHILLINGER**

---

*Ödön von Horváth's Youth Without God, and the devilry of ungodly times*

What does it mean, and why does it matter, to find yourself in godless times—particularly if you yourself are not what you would call “religious,” at least, not in fair weather?

In 1933 in Vienna, five years before Germany annexed Austria into the Third Reich, Viennese author, critic, actor, and boulevardier named Egon Friedell (born Friedmann, 1878, when Vienna was capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire) denounced the Nazi regime as: “the Reich of the Antichrist,” and wrote vehemently, “Every trace of nobility, piety, education, reason is persecuted in the most hateful and base manner by a rabble of depraved bootblacks.” Three days into the Anschluss, on March 16, 1938, Friedell jumped to his death from the window of his townhouse on the Gentsgasse when the SA came knocking. Three days before, Friedell’s good friend Ödön von Horváth, the prolific playwright and novelist (born in 1901 in the Austro-Hungarian port city of Fiume, which today is called Rijeka, and lies in Croatia), had prudently packed his belongings and left Vienna, ending up in Paris after a brief sojourn in Budapest. For decades, Vienna had been an enlightened, secular haven for culture and café society. No longer.

Von Horváth, unlike Friedell, was not Jewish; nor was he much of a churchgoer. He was a sophisticated Hungarian—a diplomat’s son—and had been schooled in Budapest, Vienna and Munich before moving to Berlin in his twenties to participate in the theater scene. His writing was irreverent, original and hostile to euphemism, and his two-dozen-odd plays and handful of novels mirrored his thoughts on the social, sexual and political hypocrisies of his era—dangerous transparency in the anti-intellectual times that accompanied Hitler’s rise. His 1933 comic drama *Italian Night*, in which two different parties are accidentally booked in a Bavarian pub on the same date—one a crowd of vociferous Fascists marking “German Day” the other a group of left-wingers celebrating “Italian Night”—infuriated German authorities. Light-hearted as the play’s jabs may have seemed to Berlin theatergoers who didn’t pick up on its subtext, von Horváth’s rubber bullets made him vulnerable to return fire of a more serious kind. In 1933, after Hitler became Chancellor, the playwright’s work was banned in Germany, and he fled for safety to Vienna. There in 1938, as a man of wit and conscience and something of a visionary as well, he could not help but perceive the existential threat that brown-shirted thugs posed to Viennese café society. A man does not need to be a fervent believer to sense the absence of God, or to detect the presence of darker agency.

The year before he left Vienna, von Horváth wrote the novel *Youth Without God*, which you now hold in your hands. It was published in Amsterdam in 1937, and in 1939, came out in English. Rich in parable, urgent in tone, and unusually earnest for the sly and mischievous von Horváth, the book takes the form of the diary of an unnamed teacher at a boys’ school who gets in trouble when he refuses to endorse the Aryan worldview. One of his students, “N” (the teacher identifies his pupils by initial letter only) turns in an essay in which he has written that: “All niggers are dirty, cunning, and contemptible.” [[this page](#)] Although this so

of racial propaganda was ubiquitous during the corrupting epoch in which the book is set (the teacher recalls having heard similar slurs broadcast from loudspeakers in public places) he refuses to let it pass unreprieved. “You shouldn’t have said that it doesn’t matter whether the negroes live or die,” he scolds the boy, as he hands back the essay. “They’re human too, you know.” [this page]

This (apparently) inflammatory comment is promptly reported by N. to his father, a local baker, who storms into the school and accuses the teacher of having made “an outrageous remark” [this page] by voicing the “odious sentiment” that “negroes” are human. “It’s sabotage—sabotage of the Fatherland!” the father roars. The teacher has “spread the poisonous slime of your humanitarianism” to the students, he charges. N’s father takes the case to the school’s headmaster; a confrontation that both he and the teacher deem the “Philippi”—referring to the historic battle (42 B.C.) in which the armies of Mark Antony and Octavian avenged Caesar’s death by defeating the armies of his assassins, Brutus and Cassius. In the same spirit, the baker means to avenge the teacher’s supposed slight against the Führer; while the teacher tacitly accepts the role of Brutus. The headmaster averts conflict by letting the teacher off with a warning to be sensible and keep in mind “the times we live in” [this page] It’s startling to realize how accurately, in 1937, von Horváth anticipated the extent of the moral rot that National Socialist ideology would foment in the young. The narrator senses that the only defense against the pervasive psychic poison is flight. The individual must act to protect and serve his own conscience, at whatever cost. Unfortunately, an entire population cannot flee en masse; and most people won’t make the attempt, however toxic their environment. The narrator does not say so; but the author knows this to be true, and the weight of this knowledge gives this deceptively ingenuous fable its surprising gravitas.

As he develops his story, von Horváth follows the teacher and his class on a junior ROTC style camping expedition, during which adults and children lose their compasses, both morally and literally, as violent and dishonorable deeds take place, testing the proposition that anyone can lead by example during a lawless era—imagine *Lord of the Flies*, with no lord and with the addition of grown-ups who are just as selfish and wilful as Golding’s marooned children. “Everything is permissible?” the teacher marvels incredulously, shocked by the unsoundness of the Nazi philosophy. “Murder, robbery, arson, perjury—these are not only allowed, there simply can be no wrong in them if they are in the interest of the cause.” [this page] As he rues the sclerosis of his pupils’ humanity, he wonders, “What sort of a generation will theirs be? Hard? Or only brutal?” By now, everyone knows the answer to that question. Two millennia before, the Roman orator Cicero had deplored the character of his own countrymen, crying: “O tempora! O mores!” ... and it bears remembering that he was beheaded for disloyalty to Caesar the year before Philippi; when there was as yet no Paris to offer him sanctuary. The crimes that unfold during the school camping expedition bring on trial; but the question von Horváth implicitly poses, is this one: in an age of misrule, who is competent to stand in judgment?

In nearly all of his other writing, von Horváth exhilarates readers with cold-splash satirical lip-smacking seediness (bathroom scenes, STDs, spying, lying, petty thievery, slovenliness) and un-airbrushed portrayals of ordinary *Volk*, and brashly confident political observation. His slim but potent dagger of a novel, *The Eternal Philistine*, (1930) mocked the amorality of the

late 1920s by sending up the shady dealings of a pair of skirt-chasing, money-grubbing cheaters (a businessman and a journalist) who head to Barcelona World's Fair, in search of easy women and easy living. But *Youth Without God* shows little of the irony that characterizes von Horváth's usual style. The barbs in this book aren't zingers or razor etchings of sordid characters, they pop out like snags of despair, catching and tearing at the European social fabric. The teacher in *Youth Without God* grieves at the obduracy of the boys in his charge: "Thinking is a process they hate," he reflects. "They turn up their noses at human beings. They want to be machines—screws, knobs, belts, wheels—or better still, munitions—bomb shells, shrapnel." [this page] His revulsion at his pupils, colleagues' and fellow citizens' prevailing mindset is palpable; so is his sadness, and his sense of powerlessness. The conclusion one draws, reading this allegorical, prophetic work, is that in 1937, as the Anschluss approached, von Horváth correctly understood the virulence of the degradation, militarization and cruelty that were overtaking the countries around him and infecting the minds of young people, and could not laugh at it.

In France, in the spring of 1938, the author, by some reports, was meeting with a filmmaker to discuss adapting *Youth Without God* for the movies. But on June 1, only a few months after he had left Vienna, he was killed. He did not die of an act of aggression by the Reich's enforcers, he died in a freak accident on the boulevards of Paris, across from the Théâtre Marigny. A thunderstorm broke a limb off a tree, which fell on von Horváth, killing him. Had he survived that spate of Parisian bad weather, and had the Third Reich come to a less protracted and horrific end, it's tempting to ask if he might have altered the screenplay of his novel; if he might have made it less raw, less portentous, more satirical, more in the mood of his other work. In the event, though, he did not survive; and the corrosion of national character he foresaw in his novel, warning against the advent of days when "the souls of men, my friend, will become as rigid as the face of a fish" was worse than any scenario could have predicted.

One of the most moving passages in all of literature appears in the *Aeneid*, which Virgil wrote in the decades immediately after the Battle of Philippi—that contest that serves as such a crucial touchpoint in *Youth Without God*. Reading von Horváth's book summons recollections of Virgil's account of the horrific end of Priam, that venerable, once mighty king of Troy. Priam has seen his city invaded, his people ravaged, and his court overrun by a brutal army. In his last minutes of life, frail but still courageous, he buckles on a young man's suit of armor and rushes at the massed foe. But in front of his eyes, the pitiless soldier Pyrrhus stabs Priam's young son Polites to death. In grief and outrage, the king cries out (the Robert Fitzgerald translation):

" 'For what you've done, for what you've dared,' he said, 'If there is care in heaven for this atrocity, May the gods render fitting thanks, reward you / As you deserve. You forced me to look on / At the destruction of my son: defiled / A father's eyes with death.' "

After Priam throws his spear at the warrior and misses, Pyrrhus drags him by the hair to an altar to Zeus, where he plunges his sword into his body, up to the hilt. What will become of the dead king? Will Priam posthumously receive the honors due him? No. "On the distant shore / The vast trunk headless lies without a name."

The force of these lines comes from their two-part encapsulation of the worst-case-scenario of the before-and-after consequences of living in a godless age. No divine justice will come

not before death, and not after it; not for the old, and not for the young. This was the worst case-scenario that Europe faced in 1937, when *Youth Without God* was composed.

Anyone who opens this book expecting to find von Horváth's customary jaded breeziness will be struck rather by abundant Classical and religious allusions: to Philippi (of course); to the Roman Empire; to Julius Caesar; [this page] and to Jesus Christ [this page] passing himself. Brooding on the fall of the Roman Empire, thinking of his own present-day, von Horváth's teacher envisions: "new hordes, new peoples. Arming, arming, waiting." [this page] Despite the simplicity of his journal entries, the homiletic quality of his conversations and the chalky breath of the schoolroom; and notwithstanding the Boy's Own set dressing of camps and tents and sleeping bags; the teacher's diary quite intentionally, and presciently, exudes the aura of Classical tragedy.

The same preoccupation that haunts the players in the *Aeneid*—the realization that the Greco-Roman gods, during the prolonged moment of Virgil's tale, not only have no care for the atrocity, but often *fuel* it (particularly spiteful Juno), haunts von Horváth's teacher in the Christian era. If Virgil's predecessor Homer can be believed, men of earlier times had confidence that the gods took an interest in their fortunes. Virgil's gods showed less benevolence. Aeneas and his entourage, vanquished and adrift, could not benefit from the consolation that fortified Odysseus, because the gods were not on their side and were not just; they were capricious, even malicious. The misery of the refugees on their hard-won road to Rome—their excruciating losses, arduous travels, and heaped misfortunes—is compounded by their sense of abandonment. Erratic behavior on Olympus had queered their fates and confounded the rules by which they lived; making their survival precarious, and their suffering meaningless—salved only by the far-off promise of the new city they will eventually establish. This was precisely the plight in which Ödön von Horváth found himself and his continent in 1937; and the plight that motivates the book he wrote in his last year of life. Divinity had fled; and no Rome beckoned on the horizon as excuse or incentive.

Two thousand years after the demise of Virgil and the Greco-Roman pantheon, and more than a century after Nietzsche declared in *The Gay Science* that "God is dead," and that moreover, "we have killed him;" the mystery of the role that God plays—or does not play—in human affairs continues to compel authors, theologians, readers, and indeed, most thinking people. It's safe to say that the rumor of God's death that Nietzsche started 130 years ago has been exaggerated. And yet, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the questions that the philosopher raised on the heels of his inflammatory proclamation remain unanswered: "How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers?" and "What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent?"

These questions of solace, guilt and atonement stung even more sharply in the last century during Hitler's murderous dictatorship, which acquired its full strength after von Horváth was dead, and expired, ignominiously, less than a decade afterwards. If God exists, the atheist taunts, and the boulevardier asks with regretful politesse: how could he permit infernal states like the Third Reich to arise? In *Youth Without God*, von Horváth puts one possible answer in the words of a disgraced priest, [this page] who explains to the demoralized narrator that the state "is a necessity of nature, and it is willed by God." But what if the state is a bad state? what if its structure collapses? the teacher presses. "Very often such a collapse is the will of God," the priest responds. He adds, "God is the most terrible thing in the world." [this page]

In *Youth Without God*, with unique sincerity and unique power, von Horváth suggests that men who play God are more terrible still.



# **YOUTH WITHOUT GOD**

# 1. NIGGERS

---

*25<sup>th</sup> March.*

THERE WERE FLOWERS ON MY TABLE. BEAUTIFUL. A present from my landlady, kind old soul: a birthday present.

But I needed to use the table, and I pushed the flowers aside, together with the letter from my people. "For your thirty-fourth birthday," my mother wrote, "I send you the very best wishes, my dear child. May Almighty God bring you health, luck, and happiness." And my father: "For your thirty-fourth birthday, my dear boy, I wish you the very best. Almighty God give you luck, health, and happiness."

Well, luck will always come in useful, I thought—and thank your stars you've got your health into the bargain. Touch wood. But happiness? No, happiness I've missed. No one really, is happy.

I sat down at my table and uncorked my bottle of red ink: it got onto my fingers and I was annoyed. Somebody ought to invent an ink which would put an end to stained fingers ...

No, I can't call myself a happy man.

Don't be so silly, I said to myself. You've got a safe job with a pension at the end of it. Isn't that something in these days, when nobody knows what to-morrow holds? How many fellows would almost give an arm to be in your shoes? For what a tiny percentage of candidates for the teaching profession succeed in getting good posts in the end! Be thankful that your post is in a county high school, where you can grow old and senile without a moment of real worry. Why, you might live to be a hundred—the oldest inhabitant of the Fatherland! Then, on your birthday, you'd have your photo in the illustrated newspapers. "He is still in possession of all his faculties," you would read beneath it. That's where the pension would come in! Think over, and count your blessings.

I did: and I began working.

Twenty-six blue copy-books lay before me—I've twenty-six boys in my charge, fourteen year-olds; for yesterday's geography lesson they wrote me an essay. Geography and history are my subjects.

Outside, the sun was brilliant. It must have been fine in the park! Well, work's work. Must get on correcting the essays and put down the marks in my register even though I know how meaningless these marks are.

The subject set for the essay was this: "Why do we need colonies?" ... Yes, why do we need colonies? Let's hear what they've got to say.

The first pupil whose book I opened had a name beginning with B. Bauer. Franz Bauer. There are no A's in my class, but to balance that there are five B's. Curious, that—so many B's in a class of only twenty-six. But two of them are twins. Automatically I ran down the list of names in my register, to discover again that the B's are no distance from the S's. There are four S's, three M's, two each beginning with E, G, L, and R, but only one to represent F, H, I, T, W, and Z. Names beginning with A, C, D, I, O, P, Q, U, V, X, Y do not figure on my list.

Now, Franz Bauer, why do we need colonies?

"We need colonies," he had written, "because we need numerous raw materials; without raw materials we cannot keep our home industries working at high pressure. This would have



disastrous consequences: our workmen, here at home, would once more be without work. Quite true, my dear Bauer. "The workers are not the only party concerned: the whole of the nation is involved. The workers are ultimately a part of that whole."

Well, ultimately, that's a great discovery, isn't it, I thought. And it occurred to me at the moment how often to-day the most ancient platitudes are disguised as up-to-the-minute slogans! Or have they always been?

I don't know.

But I knew I'd got to get on with my task of correcting twenty-six essays—essays packed with false theories and distorted conclusions. Wouldn't it be nice for us if the very meaning of words like "false" and "distorted" were unknown to us—but there, they are only too familiar and they go strolling arm in arm and singing their vain lays.

I must be careful: I'm a State employé. It wouldn't do for me to venture the tiniest criticism. Even if silence irks me—what good could one man do? He must keep his anger to himself. I mustn't lose my temper.

Get on with your correcting. You want to go to the cinema to-night.

Well, what's this that N's written? I found myself reading: "All niggers are dirty, cunning and contemptible." What rubbish! Cross it out.

I was on the point of writing in the margin, "An unsound generalization," when I pulled myself up. Hadn't I recently heard this very opinion of niggers? Where was it? Yes—it came out of the loud-speaker in a restaurant where I was having dinner—and quite took my appetite away.

So I let N's sentence stand. For it is not for a schoolmaster to question the opinions stated on the radio.

And while I read on, there was the radio still droning and cackling and vibrating through my mind: the newspapers re-echoed it and the children wrote it down like a dictation.

Soon I'd got as far as T: beneath his book lay Z's. Where was W? Had I mislaid his work? No, he was poorly yesterday—caught a bad cold at the Stadium on Sunday—inflammation of the lungs. I remember now, his father wrote me a note. All in order. Poor W! What were you doing at the Stadium, with that icy rain storming down?

Well, you might as well ask yourself what you were doing there! You were at the Stadium too on Sunday, you stuck it out till the whistle went, although neither of the teams was at all good in the first class. Why?—play was slow, tedious even—why did you stay? You, along with thirty thousand other spectators?

Why?

When the outside right outplays the left half and centres, when the centre-forward breaks away and shoots, when the goalkeeper throws himself on the ball, when the back's attempt to clear brings a free kick and a spectacular save, whether the play's fair or foul, the referee's good or weak-willed, impartial or the reverse—then for all those onlookers nothing exists but the world outside the game. The sun may shine or it may be pouring or snowing. It makes no difference to them. They've forgotten everything.

What is "everything" for them?...

I had to smile: the niggers, perhaps—



## 2. RAIN

---

NEXT MORNING, AS I WENT INTO THE HIGH school, on going upstairs to the master common-room I heard quite an uproar coming from above me. I raced up and saw five of my youngsters—E, G, R, H, and T—laying into one opponent, F.

“What’s going on here?” I shouted. “If you really want to brawl like board-school boys then have it out one with another and not five against one—that’s a rotten thing to do.”

They all looked up dumbly at me—even F, the victim of the attack. His collar was torn.

“What’s he done to you?” I inquired; my heroes weren’t very ready with an explanation. Nor was the bullied one. At last, I learned that F had done nothing to the other five. Quite the reverse—they had taken his bread roll—not to eat it themselves, but just to see him without one. They’d thrown it through the window into the yard.

I looked down. There it lay, bright on the dark asphalt in the falling rain.

Perhaps the other five had no rolls, I thought, and they were mad when they saw F’s. But no, they all had them. G had two. Once more I asked:

“Why did you do it?”

They didn’t know themselves. There they stood, in front of me, grinning awkwardly. Man must be evil: so we read in the Bible. When the rain ceased, and the waters of the flood began to recede, God said: “I will not again curse the ground any more for man’s sake; for the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth.”

Has God kept His promise? I cannot tell.

But I did not ask them again why they threw the bread out into the yard. I only asked them if they had never heard of that unwritten law, which for measureless thousands of years had grown stronger and stronger, to become a beautiful human precept: “If you must fight, then fight one against one. Be just.” I turned to the five again.

“Aren’t you rather ashamed of yourselves?” I asked.

They weren’t. I seemed to be talking another language to them. They stared at me, and even the victim, F, smiled. There was derision in his smile.

“Shut the window,” I said. “Or the rain will come in.”

They obeyed me.

What sort of a generation will theirs be?

Hard? Or only brutal?

I said no more, and went on to the common-room. On the stairs I stopped. Had they begun again? No, all was quiet. Perhaps they were pondering my words.

### 3. THE RICH PLEBEIANS

---

FROM TEN O'CLOCK TILL ELEVEN WAS ONE OF my geography periods. I must give out the essays on the colonial question which I had marked the day before. I have mentioned already that in accordance with instructions one could say little against the contents of the compositions.

So while distributing them, I confined my observations to a few remarks on style, spelling and sentence formation. For instance, I told B—one of the B's—that he mustn't keep going over the left margin. R should have spaced his work better. Z should know that the plural of colony isn't spelt with a "y." Only when I came to N, I couldn't pass it over.

"You've said in your essay," I told him, "that we white peoples are far in advance of the negroes in civilization and culture, and you're quite right. But you shouldn't have said that doesn't matter whether the negroes live or die. They're human too, you know."

He looked up at me very steadily for a moment, and a hostile expression ran like a shadow over his face. Or was I mistaken? He took his note-book, nodded very correctly, and sat down again in his place.

I was soon to discover that I had not been mistaken.

For only next day, N's father showed up during my "parents' hour"—the hour I set aside once a week to keep in touch with my boys' people. They come to me to inquire about the children's progress and ask a lot of questions, most of which are very unimportant. Tradesmen, officials, officers, business men—such are my boys' fathers. Not a working-class man among them.

With many of them, I have the impression that the thoughts which their sons' essays inspire in them are very similar to mine. But we just meet and smile and talk about the weather. Most of these fathers are older than I. One of them is hoary with age! The youngest was only twenty-eight two weeks ago. He married at seventeen—a manufacturer's daughter. He's a very smart fellow. When he turns up, it is always in his open sports car. His wife stays in the car and I can see her from up here. At least, I can see her hat, her arms, and her legs.

You could have a son too, I have thought to myself: but I can easily control any wish I have to bring a son into the world. To be shot down in some war ...

N's father confronted me. He had a very self-assured manner and looked squarely into my eyes.

"I'm Otto N's father," he began.

"I'm delighted to meet you, Mr. N," I responded with a bow; of course, I invited him to sit down, but he would not.

"My presence here," he went on, "is due to a somewhat serious occurrence. An occurrence which might well have grave consequences. My son Otto told me yesterday afternoon—and he was highly indignant about it—that you, his teacher, had made an outrageous remark—"

"I?"

"You, sir!"

"When?"

"During your geography lesson yesterday. Your pupils wrote an essay on the colonial question, and you remarked to my Otto: 'Negroes are human too.' You understand me?"

"No."

I was speaking the truth: I didn't. He looked at me, summing me up. God, what a stupid fool he looked.

"My presence here," he continued, pompously emphatic, "arises from the fact that from my earliest years I have struggled for what is just. And now I put you this question—did you voice that odious sentiment of yours on the negro question, in that class and at that time—did you not?"

"I did," I answered with a smile I could not restrain. "Your presence here, otherwise—"

"Please," he interrupted me sharply. "I am not in a mood for joking. You don't know yet what the expression of such a sentiment about negroes implies. It's sabotage—sabotage of the Fatherland! Oh, don't pretend you are not aware of it! I know only too well the secret ways in which you try to undermine the souls of these innocent children, and how you spread the poisonous slime of your humanitarianism among them."

This was a bit too much.

"Forgive me," I broke in, "you can find that in the Bible—that all of us, all men, are human."

"When the Bible was written, there were no colonies as we understand them," continued N's baker-father, impervious as a block of stone. "You can't take the Bible in an exact sense—you've got to take it figuratively, or not at all. Do you believe, sir, for instance, that Adam and Eve actually lived—or do you admit there's a mythological element in the story? You see? I'll take good care that we'll have no more expatiations on the love of God from you."

"You needn't," I muttered, showing him out. I was almost throwing him out.

"We'll meet again at Philippi!" he shouted to me as he disappeared.

Two days later, I stood at Philippi.

The Head had sent for me.

"I wanted to tell you," he began, "that yesterday I had a letter from the authorities. The baker, named N, it seems, has lodged a complaint about you. Apparently you have expressed certain opinions. Now, I'm quite *au fait*, and I know how such complaints come to be made—there's no need for you to do any explaining. But, my dear colleague, it's my duty to warn you that nothing like this must occur again. You're forgetting the private memorandum that went round—number 5679, paragraph 33! We are supposed to keep youth at a distance from everything which doesn't in some way or another train their minds for war—which means morally, we must prepare them to be warriors. Just that."

I glanced at the Head. He was smiling. As if he guessed my thoughts. Then he rose, and walked up and down. A fine old figure.

"It may set you wondering," he said suddenly, "to hear me blowing the bugles of war! And you wouldn't be wrong. You're thinking, What sort of a fellow is this? Only a few years ago he used to subscribe to ardent peace propaganda—and to-day? To-day he's all for the slaughter."

"I'm aware that it's only because you're forced to be," I murmured, to reassure him.

He pricked up his ears, came to a stop in front of me, and searched me with keen eyes.

"Young man," he said, gravely enough, "one thing you must be sure of—there is no compulsion. I could—yes, I could—struggle against the spirit of the times, and have myself put in jail through the agency of our worthy baker. I could resign this position, but I don't intend to—I won't. I want to reach the age-limit and draw my full pension."

Excellent, I thought.

“You’ll think I’m a cynic,” he continued, and his manner was now quite fatherly. “All of us striving and aspiring towards better things for mankind, have forgotten one thing: the time we live in. My dear colleague, a man who’s seen as much as I have gradually acquires a sense of reality.”

It’s all right for you, went my thoughts, you lived in time to see that hey-day before the war. But what about me? It was in the last year of the war that I loved for the first time—what, I am not sure.

The Head nodded sadly.

“We live in a plebeian world. Think of the Rome of old, the Rome of 287 B.C. The struggle between patricians and plebs still hadn’t been settled, but the plebeians were already in possession of the highest State offices.”

“Forgive me, sir,” I ventured, “so far as my knowledge goes, no poor plebeians hold the reins of power with us. The great, the one and only power, is gold.”

His eyes came to rest on mine again, and he smiled slyly.

“Yes, but I can’t give you a satisfactory mark in history, though you may be an historian. You’ve forgotten that there were the rich plebeians too. Remember now?”

I remembered. Of course! The rich plebeians, who deserted the people and who, together with the already decadent patricians, built up the new nobility of office—the so-called Optimates.

“Don’t forget that.”

“I shan’t.”

## 4. BREAD

---

WHEN I AGAIN ENTERED THE CLASSROOM IN which I had permitted myself to say something in favour of the negroes, I experienced the sudden feeling that all was not well. Had these gentry smeared ink on my chair? No. Why were they looking at me like that, as they were quietly revelling in the thought of my discomfiture?

Some one raised his hand. What did that mean? He came up to me and made a little bow and he handed me a letter. Then he went back to his place.

What was wrong?

I opened the letter, glanced over it, and though I should have liked a minute longer, I controlled my curiosity and gave the impression of having read enough. Yes, every one had signed it—the whole twenty-five. W was still poorly.

“We do not wish”—that letter read—“to be taught by you, for after what has occurred with the undersigned, have lost our confidence in you, and would prefer another teacher.”

I glanced at “the undersigned.” My eyes went from one to another of them. They were silent and avoided my gaze. I counted ten, and asked as casually as I could:

“Who wrote this?”

No one came forward.

“Don’t be such cowards!”

My words had no effect.

“Good,” I went on, rising from my table, “it doesn’t interest me at all, any more than it does you, which of you is responsible for writing this, since every one of you has signed it. And I too have not the slightest wish to go on teaching a class which has lost confidence in me. Believe me, with the best conscience in the world, I—”

I stopped, having suddenly noticed one boy writing behind his desk.

“What are you writing down there?”

He tried to keep the paper hidden.

“Bring it here.”

I took it from him. He smiled scornfully. He had put down in shorthand every word I had said.

“Ah! So you want to spy on me?”

They grinned.

Grin on, I despise you! By God, I’ve nothing more to lose here. Let some other fellow try and grapple with you ...

I went to the Head, told him what had happened and made my request to be given another class. He smiled.

“D’you think the others will be any better?”

He accompanied me back to my classroom. He stormed, he shouted, he raved—magnificent piece of acting! It was an outrage, he roared, a mean, caddish trick—they had no right whatever, the louts, to ask for another teacher, had they all gone mad—and so on and so on ... And then he left me alone with them.

There they sit facing me, full of hatred. They’d like to ruin me—to blot out my whole existence, because they can’t bear to think that niggers are human too! Are they—human? No.

But wait, my friends. I'm not going to get into any trouble on your account, and I'm certainly not going to lose my job—and have nothing to eat, eh? No clothes, no shoes! No roof over my head? Wouldn't you like that! But from now on, I'll let you believe that there are no human beings besides yourselves, I'll go on drumming that into you until the niggers come and roast you! That's what you're asking for, and you shall get it.

## 5. PESTILENCE

---

THAT NIGHT I HAD NO WISH TO GO TO BED. Those shorthand notes were still in my mind's eye. Yes, they wanted to destroy me.

If they were Indians, they'd have tied me to a post and had my scalp, without the slightest thought that they might be wrong.

They're so confident that they're doing the right thing.

They're a nasty crowd.

Or is it that I don't understand them? I'm thirty-four: am I too old for them already? Is there a deeper gulf between us than between other generations?

I think it's an unbridgeable gulf.

If these fellows merely rejected everything that's still sacred to me—well, that wouldn't be so bad. What hurts is that they put it aside without even having known it. Worse still, they haven't the slightest desire to know it.

Thinking is a process they hate.

They turn up their noses at human beings. They want to be machines—screws, knobs, belts, wheels—or better still, munitions—bombs, shells, shrapnel. How readily they'd die on a battlefield! To have their name on some war memorial—that's the dream of their puberty.

Steady, though—isn't there something admirable there—in that readiness for the supreme sacrifice?

Yes—if the cause is a just one.

But what would be their cause?

Whatever benefits our race is right, drones the radio. Whatever hinders us is wrong.

So everything is permissible? Murder, robbery, arson, perjury—these are not only allowed there simply can be no wrong in them if they are in the interest of the cause.

The attitude of the lawless.

When the rich plebeians in old Rome feared that the people might succeed through their plan to reduce taxes, they sheltered behind a dictatorship. And they condemned to death for high treason the patrician Manlius Capitolinus, who with his riches had tried to free the plebeian debtors from their debts. They hurled him down from the Tarpeian Rock.

Since the very existence of human society, the need for self-preservation has driven men to commit crimes. But those crimes were secret deeds, men hushed them up and were ashamed of them.

But to-day men are proud of them. There is a pestilence among us.

All of us are tainted, friend and foe alike. Our souls are great black sores, and life is dying in them. They die, and we live on. And my soul too is poor and weak ... When I read in the paper that one of them has died, my mind finds words—"Too few are dead, too few."

To-day—even to-day—haven't I been thinking, "Die—all of you. Get out!"

But I don't want to keep thinking that ...

I had a wash and went out to a café I know, where you are bound to find some one to play chess with. I wanted to be free of my room, to be outside its narrow walls.

The flowers my landlady gave me for my birthday had faded. They would soon be withered.

To-morrow was Sunday.

In the café I found no one I knew. Not a soul. What should I do next? I went into the cinema. And in the news-reel I saw the rich plebeians. They were unveiling memorials for themselves, they were turning the first sods and inspecting their life-guards on parade. Then followed a cartoon, with Mickey out-witting the most formidable of cats. And then a thrilling crime picture, in which a good deal of shooting went to further the principle that good must triumph in the end.

When I came out of the cinema, it was night. But I didn't go home. My room held fears for me.

Across the road was a little bar—a minor night-club. I thought I'd step inside for a drink, but it didn't turn out to be too dear.

I found it quite cheap.

I went inside. A lady wanted to keep me company.

“You are all alone?” She smiled.

“Yes—unfortunately—”

“No.”

She drew back—slunk back as if hurt. I didn't wish you any harm, really! You shouldn't have let it hurt you.

I was alone.



---

sample content of Youth Without God (Neversink)

- [read online \*Unruly Places: Lost Spaces, Secret Cities, and Other Inscrutable Geographies\*](#)
- [click Quantum Gas Experiments: Exploring Many-Body States \(Cold Atoms, Volume 3\) for free](#)
- [read online Machine Man](#)
- **[download online Hildegard of Bingen's Book of Divine Works: With Letters and Songs pdf, azw \(kindle\), epub, doc, mobi](#)**
  
- <http://betsy.wesleychapelcomputerrepair.com/library/Writing-Art-and-Architecture.pdf>
- <http://musor.ruspb.info/?library/Adbusters--Issue-54--I--Terrorist.pdf>
- <http://damianfoster.com/books/Machine-Man.pdf>
- <http://weddingcellist.com/lib/Hildegard-of-Bingen-s-Book-of-Divine-Works--With-Letters-and-Songs.pdf>