**EINMAL UND NIE WIEDER**

(Once and Never Again)

By Theodor Lessing

(Translation by Jefferson Chase)

**Preface & Chapter One** *(Full Edition Pending)*

**Preface**

At the end of a life that has seen many countries, pondered much that is human and survived many crises, internal and external, at the end of an active life covered in scar tissue practically without compare, at the end of a life thus tried and tested, I can no longer expect that the publication of a volume of "observations" about the past will change anything – either concerning the biography of their author or the prejudices of the world he lived in. Except perhaps that others will be even more inclined to kill any memory of this uncomfortable contemporary with silence and even more circumspect in criticizing and even more non-committal in praising his writings, assuming that some praise and criticism are inevitable.

Nonetheless, these pages aren't written for those alive right now or with an eye toward the present day. Instead, during their composition, I thought about my readers as I would a set of grandchildren or great-grandchildren in the distant future or a small circle of initiates and connoisseurs. I was rarely concerned with "world history," this *danse macabre* of accidental shifts of power, this ocean of blood, bile, sweat, and tears – to say nothing of the bottomless stupidity of what's happening in Germany right now, of which I have so often, instructively and unforgettably been, on the receiving end. Such events have yielded a veritable portait gallery of cheats and their victims, straw men, bellowing bulls, and vacuous know-nothings – inhumanly distorted faces that did nothing to make me or those two great masters who trod my path before me, Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche, into rapturous German patriots. On the contrary, too often, we three were left feeling ashamed at being German.

I have thrown a single message-in-a-bottle into an unfathomable sea of darkness. If it doesn't reach those souls at whom it was aimed, I can at least console myself with the couplet

with which my most beloved teacher in my youth sent me out into the world: “What you have been inside in the end/Has never been printed in a book nor read by any friend.”

Even if my belief that in one-hundred years a new generation of youth will follow in my footsteps and seek out my writings should turn out to be a delusion, indeed even if my entire intellectual legacy (“*History - Making Sense of the Senseless*,” “*The Human Mind as World’s Demise*,” “*The Axiomatics of Values*,” “*Philosophy as Act*,” “*Nature Trilogy*”) should disappear without a trace, the present book will at least stand as the sole historical source on the lives of my more successful contemporaries: the early days of Stefan George, Max Scheler, Georg Simmel and above all the formative years of Ludwig Klages, whose childhood I necessarily had to recount in the process of relating my own.

Anyone who has tried to record the major events of his time will discover how uncertain, indeed how dubious, history and biography are if they go beyond just retrieving the past in the form of situations and conditions preserved in mausoleums, but rather seek to revive the sound of long-lost words or even claim to know whether the moon or sun was shining, the blackbird was singing, and which of the winds was rustling the rose hedgerows in accompaniment to them. Simple self-observation shows that whenever we experience or suffer things, we perceive nothing of the environment and the surrounding circumstances, whereas when we observe things and note our perceptions, we leave the realm of experience. A person who is directly involved in something cannot comprehend it. No one can simultaneously be the harp upon which nature plays and the artist exercising his mastery on the instrument. I completely rewrote these observations three times over these last twenty years between 1912 and 1932. And I destroyed them three times, always plagued by doubts that I had been unable to be sufficiently impersonal and honest. On the contrary, I invariably felt my words to be too exaggerated, too charitable, too bitter, too cowardly, too vengeful, too sluggish of heart, or too trapped in everyday human foible. I have always doubted whether any human being has ever been capable of thinking clearly, truthfully, or even honestly about himself. Are now even the most sublime biographical accounts we possess – the recollections of Plato, Zenophon, and Augustine, Dante’s *Vita Nuova*, Goethe’s *Truth and Poetry*, Nietzsche’s *Ecce homo*, Hebbel’s diaries, Rousseau and August Strindberg’s confessions, and Leo Trotsky’s *My Life* – all products of myth? Even if I could completely reveal myself, as is a popular pastime at present, what would be the value for either me or anyone else? Is not better to tell a life story than to confess it?

It wasn't just my skittishness about revealing too much of myself that made me hesitate for years about the rectitude of exposing my all-too-personal experiences to strangers' scrutiny. No! A greater doubt was the question: Does a writer have right to put on display the hearts and deeds of those people connected with his own life and destiny? Is he allowed to intervene in a foreign arena to which he can by no means do justice? Yet precisely this most nagging of all qualms was the decisive, indeed sole factor in my decision to publish these pages. There is nothing worse than a writer who never published a sentence, even anonymously, because he lacked the desire and will to defend it, eye-to-eye and person-to-person, if necessary, but who then allowed his "memoirs" to appear posthumously, after he had left the realm of the living. The suspicion necessarily arises that such an author only wanted to be have the last word, put a positive gloss on his failings, justify his erroneous paths, make an impression on generations to come, and to take his revenge from the grave on all those who ever abused him or treated him unfairly. – No! I want to hold a day of judgement on myself and honestly represent my convictions as long as I am able – and to endure the natural setbacks of life as long as I must.

My first book, sent out into the world at the age of twenty in 1892, began with some childish verses, which I'd like to repeat here.

My Germany, whether I love you better or worse
My words do not express
So hear my song and my rageful verse
And judge, please, for yourself

Judge from my jokes
For indeed my jokes are good.
You laugh because you cannot know
That I wrote them in my own blood.

You are a father to me, and a mother too
And to being is rooted in you alone.
If I felt not so serious and devout about you
You wouldn't cut me so very much to the bone.

The arrows of my hate
And the shaft of my love
Take flight up upon a singular faith
The belief in the power of

You, oh Germany, holy Germany
The flame of my muse is all aglow,
And in my soul, I mean it seriously.
I love Germany, for you are my home.

How much disappointment did I endure before this simple love was shattered and yielded way to the disgust I feel today at German intellectual life and its leading lights. The weight upon my wings grew ever heavier; less and less was I able to fly unencumbered. We exchange the flashes of the dreams of our youth for a drab knowledge of a drab reality, and the gold nuggets of our younger years for the hard-won coin of experience. But we experience the same thing at the end as we did at the start. All human words, values and works, like the human intellect itself, wound and heal at the same time. People, Germans more than any others, *hate* the intellect, feeling it to be either an emergency path out of inhibition or an hindrance in life. But one thing they don't know. Only intellect can, like Achilles lance, close and heal the wound it itself inflicted.

In 1914, the first year of the war, I served as a doctor in a convalescent home for military officers. It was set aside for well-born, high-ranking persons who had committed acts of stupidity, misused their authority, and tormented those under their command at the front but who could not, thanks to their elevated status, be otherwise rendered incapable of doing harm. So they were sent to convalescent homes, also known as lunatic asylums.

In every bed, some illustrious fool would be crowing, carving up empires, saving his people and improving humanity. There was no thought behind what they did, and they had earned no right to do so by shedding their own blood. Their own "world view" could be reduced to the simple formula: have a big mouth in peace and an iron fist in war. The whole world seemed to have become one big asylum of this sort. Nonetheless things ran smoothly.

The unparalleled, cold-hearted dispassion of the military apparatus had fortunately removed from all our national heroes and so-called leading personages any proclivity toward thought. Our daily routine was regulated automatically. You needed do nothing more than pull a lever or push a button.

I ultimately became convinced during this time that in an empire of sublime human idiocy, the all-important thing is to create measures of security, removed from the influence of individual caprice, to ensure no one could do any harm to anyone else or himself.

The demons demolished human community long ago. Thousands of inflated, capricious human wills have been subjugating and martyring one another. The community of nature has been killed off. Countless self-righteous individual men of power have been subjugating and martyring one another. There is no longer any security in the face of uncertainty. So how can we we reinforce the staves before the cask splits apart?

The sphere of mathematics, that foundation of logic and ethics, is our guide and center. We have mastered it step-by-step amid the growing threat. All human value, all human works, are compromise. Put another way: The more community crumbles, the more society must come to together. The world's nations are rescuing themselves using an international state. Legal and economic conformity guarantees the riches of the various parts of the earth. The more binding the superstructure, the more freely the soul can do as it will. And the more freewheeling the soul, the more rational the machine.

So, I'm leading the fight for humankind's geniuses because I love its demons. Humanity will drown, pathetically, in the depths of religion and racist nationalism or will rip itself apart if the all-binding and all-protecting superstructure of international culture doesn't save it from itself. The natural order is disturbed. It can only be rescued though a "divine order." The soul can only be saved by the mind.

I am a communist, and I have become a rationalist on the strength of individualism and thanks to anarchistic and liberal visions of a dictatorship of reason as the ultimate aim. A talent for literature has made me a man of logic, and my romantic proclivity has made a socialist. And a deep knowledge of politics and history has filled me with certainty that only politics can free us from politics, and only history from history, that is to say from the entire caprice and randomness of the merely individual. I have stared fearlessly into the eyes of the Medusa, that

horrific mother of the demons, who was beheaded by Theseus, the god of the intellect, so that the flying steed Pegasus could rise from her dark blood.

I am well aware that these memoirs have not only an individual, personal but also a general significance. It is a precious miracle that whoever penetrates to the innermost core of solely personal, unique conscience will arrive at the general and the universally applicable in the process.

For that reason, the title "*Once and Never Again*" shouldn't be interpreted to mean that something unversally valid and unique will be lost with the author's death. On the contrary, the title of this book signifies that these pages record nothing but a minor, random life, one of billions, but nonetheless a unique and non-repeatable life like that of every human being. And finer sensibilities may detect an undertone of glee that this difficult path will soon come at an end and will not need to be repeated, in the vein of the inscription on many a grave in India that reads, "Pray for our sake that we will never return."

**Part One: The World Before**

*"And my part is more than simply this life's slender flame"* – Hugo von Hoffmansthal

**1. Hanover**

"My home is a dark and cloud-hung land
The heath blossoms, and the birch sways on the fields' foggy edge
The birch is tough and puts down roots even in rocky ground
But it has the loveliest leaves and its bast in spring is the tenderest."

Back in the days when we used to play as boys in its alleyways, the city of Hanover was one of the friendliest places in the Germanic Confederation. It was nestled amidst the trees on the Leine River, a tributary of the Aller, and had, around 1880, about eighty-thousand inhabitants, the majority of whom still half-existed as farmers, living in fields and maintaining gardens within an expansive stretch of land. Those who worked with their heads, the bourgeois and especially the so-called fine families, referred to these people as "our garden cossacks" or with the popular slang word *Pisen*.

Today, the surrounding villages - Hainholz, Limmer (where Jacobus Sackmann once preached in Low German), Vahrenwald, Döhren, Riklingen, List – are industrial districts covered in coal dust and overpopulated with working people. Back then, they were still dreamy, isolated spots in the forest. The old city center on the "Hoher Ufer" (High Bank) of the Leine, which allegedly gave the town its Low German name Hohenowere, slumbered with its many towers behind many gates, surrounded by venerable walls.

The main gates were the Leintor, the Steintor, and the Gate of Giles the Hermit, the patron saint of all northern German cities in the Catholic period before the Reformation in 1533. When threatened or pressured, citizens would pray to him using his German name: "O Aegidi, Aegidi." This is echoed today in the exclamation, exclusively used by Hanoverians, of "Gitte, Gitte" when facing anything hostile.

The city's centerpiece and main landmark was the spire of the Market Church, completed around 1350, its broad gable towering next to the town hall with its clinker and glazed red bricks – a paradigm example of the German "Brick Gothic."

A thick ring of brush and forest, called the Eilenriese, or probably earlier the Ellern-Ried, formed an wide arc of green around the city. Even today, some three thousand morgens (one thousand hectares) of oak and beech trees still exist. The forest grew out into the city alleys from three directions. Only in the fourth one, to the south, was there an open plain, called the Masch, a landscape of fields with lots of water flowing down from the Harz Mountains. Three waterways – the Leine, the Ihme and the Ohe – converge there. On their fringes, woodland slopes and foresty hillscape can be seen. This spot is called the Deister, which likely stems from the word "Dixter" meaning thick forest.

The hereditary lords of Lower Saxony were fond of saying about this fertile terrain: "The land between Leine and Deister/ Is what I love and pine for." But another saying went: "The nearer the Deister, the bigger the beasts are." The more distant city environs in the directions of Berlin, Cologne, Bremen, and Hamburg are not nearly as charming and easy-going as the woody Leine Valley. The terrain gives way to tranquil lowlands, a bluish-red sandy heath extending to the North Sea coast. It's the most melancholy landscape in Germany.

In my youth, much of the area between Braunschweig, Celle and Lüneburg was abused and laid waste to by smelting works, salt mines, and industrial factories. But few places have endured such a rapid and terrible transformation as the one I've observed in my home city in the past fifty years. In my childhood, Hanover was a fine, clean, down-to-earth small city governed by bourgeois conscientiousness. In my latter years, it's become a clamorous collection of profane activity, of industrious, swarming ants full of mercantilism, bureaucracy, and desperately back-breaking work – the most prematurely aged and sallow of our cities.

During my father's childhood, the green nest of the Welf dynasty, as Hanover is also known, would have looked much as Karl Philipp Moritz described it in his youthful novel *Anton Reiser*: a city surrounded by green with lots of animals like martens, beaver, wildcats, and foxes, sung to by many species of birds that are extinct today. In 1880, the ornithologist Paul Leverkühn counted twenty types of songbirds in the Arnswaldt Garden district. They disappeared during my youth. Today only sparrows chirp there.

Small neighboring cities – Hameln, Goslar, Göttingen, Hildesheim, Bückeburg – still had exteriors that conjured up the good old days. But the Wilhelmine era wiped away that venerable mien with the souless conformity of industry. The architecture, the lifestyle, and

even the facial features of the people became identical, and the stones that told the ancient history of the place gradually wore away.

Welf history, passed down over generations, played a huge role in my early years. The city inhabitants were still personally acquainted and felt a tribal connection, symbolized in the life stories of the ruling dynasty. Because the kings of Hanover were also kings of England, we were bound in many ways to Great Britain and the great world city of London. In a volume of "Letters of a German Traveling in Germany," Hanover around 1800 struck the author (Carl Julius Weber) as "almost a British colony." There were many English enrolled in schools there, legend had it that Hanoverians spoke the purest and best German, and many parts of the city, especially the new outlying Calenberg district, where the three most influential authors of the day, Leisewitz, Detmold, and Feder, lived, were reminiscent of Old London and the empire of Kings George I, II, and III.

Herrenhausen, the summer residence of all those three monarchs, was also where my childhood dreams resided. Not far from a courtly hedge garden in the style of Le Nôtre's Versailles – a Baroque park full of water artistry, living walls, and Bernini-esque statues, between which Leibniz had lectured lords in allonge wigs and ladies in crinoline dresses about the "excellence of the world" – was a massive farmhouse. These are the places that hold my first memories. The mysterious, always closed, blue rolling shutters of the castle, the stables with their famous, apple-colored figures of Isabella of Castile, Duchess of York, the splendid, gold-plated royal carriage, King Ernst August's mausoleum, next to which was a beehouse I was forbidden to pass, the azalias and rhododendrums in the "paradise" of the castle garden— all of these sights shaped my earliest childhood dreams.

There were still many traces of the old culture, in comparison to which the later masses of buildings, painted murals and monuments of Prussian rule after 1870 appear utterly vapid. Works by Lawrence, Gainsborough, and Holbein the Younger had hung in now forgotten places. There were marvelous, beautiful curiosities in overgrown cemeteries: the graves of the Turkish giant Ali and of the "gentle lady who died of a too tightly cinched corset," as well as the famous grave in the churchyard whose stones had been pried up by a young birch tree and which bore the inscription, "This grave, purchased for eternity, must never be opened." Next to it was the final resting place of Lotte Kaestner, the inspiration for Goethe's *Lotte in Weimar*. The work of the master sculptors Jeremias Sütel and Peter Köster could be seen in

the churchyard of the St. Nicholas Church next to the Cross Church, and in Wilkenburg village and in many other places. Back then, the entire old city on the Leine, nicknamed Little Venice, was a slice of the Middle Ages, covered in flowers and ivy, as were Hildesheim and Braunschweig. Along with the flowers, legends climbed the walls of the city buildings. Back then I knew, as I still know today, who lived in these houses one hundred years ago. I felt interwoven with my people.

As I grew up and began to ponder myself and everything around me, it was the start of a painful disillusionment, and even in my early years, I realized that many fresh wellsprings of the human mind like those in my homeland and home city Hanover had bubbled up without the lumbering masses of humanity ever wanting to drink from all the majestic fountains. Thus, to me as an adolescent, my home reminded me of a hostile clenched fist which would never open, neither to bestow any maternal gifts, nor to receive a tribute even from its most generous son.

My kindred spirits – the artists, thinkers and scholars – had breathed the air here, and I passionately retraced their steps. But they had always lived either in obscurity or by accident in Hanover. There was no real necessity, as far as I could comprehend, for their roots in this environment. They could have chosen another lovely German city in which to make their mark. The broad masses only tolerated the thinkers and poets as they did their rotating government officials or assigned garrison commanders. Hanover was a great place to live for decorated generals like Scharnhorst, Caprivi, Waldersee, and Hindenburg or great politicians such as Justus Möser, Stüve, Windthorst, Bennigsen, Miquel, and Karl Peters. But the songbirds only stayed for a summer and then fled the bitter blackthorns.

The dull indifference of the people of Lower Saxony toward the human intellect manifests itself particularly in the biographies of its two greatest geniuses, both of who tried to reform Hanover's educational system: Albrecht von Haller and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz.

Would a provincial town that knew the value of intellectual greatness not have provided every manner of assistance and aid to man like Haller, who founded the contemporary disciplines of anatomy, physiology, and biology? Instead he was allowed to leave, just as all minds of higher distinction have only lived temporarily in Hanover before departing for somewhere where they can have greater effect. In the poems of the old writer and translator Johann Heinrich Voss, I found some striking verses that tell of a visit to Hanover,

I believe in 1780. He himself came from the Hadeln countryside, and he dubbed Hanover the "city of the finer Cheruski." He traveled there because he wished to see the grave of Leibniz, the greatest genius to ever work in the city, who had died in 1716. But like Cicero, who asked in vain after the grave of Archimedes, Voss found that the philosopher and his final resting place had been completely forgotten in the intervening sixty-four years. No one in Hanover could tell him the first thing about Leibniz. In the end he was directed to a ninety-year-old Jew, the mathematician Rafael Levy, who had known the philosopher personally. He took Voss to a spot in the Neustadt Church, where, one hundred years later, Leibniz's remains were indeed discovered, and where today a commemorative stone stands bearing the words "Ossa Leibnizii."

I succeeded in locating the mathematician Levy's grave in the Jewish cemetery adjacent to the Church of Christ. He served as an apprentice in my great-uncle Simon's bank and met Leibniz by chance. One day while on his morning walk, Leibniz noticed a boy arguing with the stone masons and drawing geometric shapes in the dirt before a new building, the corner house on Postkamp near the Klages Market. He stopped and heard the adolescent explaining to the masons that they had made a static mistake, demonstrating his mastery of geometry in the process. The philosopher inquired as to the name of this young person, and upon hearing that he was an apprentice at a bank, immediately went to his superior and asked for permission to instruct him in mathematics. Leibniz was so pleased with his pupil that he took him into his large house on Schmiedestrasse, which is today the city's most notable building and above whose lovely renaissance gate a single, proud word stands: "Posteritati." Levy lived there until Leibniz's death. The latter had fallen out of favor with the royal court, and he had always kept his distance from the masses, who considered him the human embodiment of He-Who-Shall-Not-Be-Named and nicknamed him "Herr No-Belief." He died in complete isolation. But in his final years, he worked together with Levy on a machine to perform mathematical calculations. Levy was the only one with him when he died and accompanied him to his grave, much as in neighboring Braunschweig the ignobly treated author Gotthold Ephraim [Lessing] died in the arms of a Jew. It was very amusing that in 1890, Hanover discovered that a street, a city square, and a cookie factory had been named after Leibniz, and a monument to him erected, but that his name had been misspelled "Leibnitz." Around this time, his coffin was located in the crypt of Neustadt Church. It was identified because it was blue and had a spiral pained upon it. What did the spiral mean? I have an

explanation. For Leibniz it was the symbol of creation and destruction (*evolutio* and *involutio*), allowing us to see simultaneously the unfolding of life from an invisible point, or monad, and the return from its development in three dimensions into its dark, maternal womb.

The city of Hanover is a major crossroads and hub in the German Empire. All Germans are likely to have traveled through it at some point and many have stopped there for a time, short or long. But few have spent a lengthy life there between its turnip patches as I have.

It is completely accidental that Friedrich and August Wilhelm Schlegel, and with them German Romanticism, had their childhood home in Hanover (by the way, the grimmest house in the city), or that the playwright Leiswitz, the diector Klingmann, the actor Iffland, the set designers Ramberg, Pape, and Gay, the poets Grabbe and Griepenkerl, the singers Niemann and Schott, the thespians Devrient and Grunert lived either there or nearby – and that Hanover was thereby a center of German theatrical history. It's also accidental that back in my day the authors Frank Wedekind, Otto Erich Hartleben, Karl Henckell, Börries von Münchhausen, and Wilhelm Meyer-Förster were born in Hanover and attended the same horrible school I did. And that Händel, Spohr, Brahms, Joseph Joachim, and Hans von Bülow made music for several years in Hanover, as Heinrich Marschner did almost his whole life. And that the greatest German artists – Arnold Böcklin and Anselm Feuerbach – produced paintings during one terrible year in Hanover, as did Koken, Oesterley, Breling, and Kaulbach, Rechberg, and Ramberg, and the master of fear, Otto Gleichmann, did throughout their lives. And that the charming poet Emil Edel, Karl Marx's friend Otto Kugelmann, philosophers Bruno and Edgar Baur, the unjustly forgotten August Niemann, and the writers Friedrich Spielhagen und Georg von Ompteda, Julius Rodenberg, Franz Dingelstedt, epic poet Gustav Kastropp, authors Golo Raimund, Leo Hildeck, Emilie Vely, Klara Eysell, the enthusiastic Eugen Kühnemann, and the noble Heloise von Beaulieu all came from or lived in Hanover, as did the dancer Mary Wogman, the actress Lucie Höflich, and the musical genius Waler Gieseking. None of them – not even proudly regional authors like Wilhelm Raabe, Wilhelm Busch, and Hermann Löns – ever felt they entirely belonged there. The cleverest of them all, Lichtenberg, eternally complained of intellectual loneliness. Zimmermann wrote his painfully beautiful book about that very isolation. And many smaller stars – Kaestner, who preferred to live in Italy, Brandes, Knigge, Mädler, worthy Pertz, and courageous Oppermann – only shone while lost in darkness. But how can one absorb the history of place other than by engaging with the lives of the few

in whom it gained a voice and who left behind the results of their earthly pilgrimages in verse, images, music, or works of the mind?

As I was gleefully tracing the footsteps, wherever I could, of such men and women as the legacy of my kindred spirits, I saw that many people in Hanover shared my fate of being completely unneeded and passed over. The precociously talented, nature-loving nightingale of German poetry, Christoph Hölty, sang the praises of this northern land, but many years after his death in sickness and misery, when it was decided to establish a memorial to him, no one knew where to find the man's grave. I tried without success to find traces of the once widely-known philosopher Johann Gottfried Feder, who died at a ripe old age in 1821 in Hanover and who left behind original descriptions of it, for instance, a poem in Latin hexameters about the George Garden, known then as the Walmoden Garden. But all of these people and everything they did had been forgotten.

So, too, did I search in vain for a sign of the Herschel family of mathematicians. And although a street name and a memorial plaque bore witness to the brilliant Karoline (Herschel – an astronomer), no one had bothered to investigate her life. That was how it went for many a native son and daughter.

My hometown believes it has achieved something when – doling out honors without discernment or differentiation in order to avoid embarrassment – it shoehorns its men and women of culture into scholarly lexica and educational tomes, names a street after them, grudgingly hangs a plaque no one reads on the houses where they were born or died, and – reflecting the fact that they were considered impediments when they were alive – converts them into stone-hewn traffic obstacles or impenetrable paragraphs in schoolbooks. It's the same sort of self-exoneration as when members of a community endow a little chapel to atone for a crime they helped commit.

My life has, admittedly, by no means been that of the tree in the desert or the flower in the abyss. Perhaps more bitterly, it has been the life of a creative musician who wore himself out giving piano lessons, or the artist who longed for monumental walls but was commissioned, at most, to give domestic fences a fresh coat of paint.

Ludwig Klages and Albrecht Schäffer, who grew up with me in Hanover, were clever enough to take wing early on, but my fate was to remain where my graves were. Shortly before his death, I reminisced with the hardest working painter I grew up with in Hanover, Ernst

Oppler, and we summed up our home city with the formulation: “It’s a paradise of medium-sized cities, the middle classes, the moderately well off and every sort of mediocrity.”

Herder, Karl Philipp Moritz and Hamann, today considered three of the most important Germans ever, all applied during their lifetimes to the city magistrate for the position of director of city academy, the Gymnasium, the same high school at which I suffered through twelve horrific years. All three of them were “contemptuously dismissed” by the mayor and city council. A fact like this should never be forgotten in the history of any German city.

Sedentarily locked in the stations of my young life and inclined to loyalty, I grew up on a patch of home soil that rejected me. I hated the very ground, drenched early on with tears and blood, in which I was rooted. Thus it was my destiny that as often and as far as I tried to get away, I always washed up, thanks to some unlucky detour and without realizing it, back on the shore of my youth, indeed in the same neighborhood and the same unadorned streets. My life in the south of Hanover on Hildesheimer Strasse and Stolzestrasse, in Kirchrode and Anderten, always in the “poor quarters” of the city, where the blind, bedraggled, crippled, ill and aged resided, where animals were slaughtered and children disciplined for their own good, and where the city, surrounded on three sides by forest, afforded a view of the expanses of the distant world outside. I sat there for half a century, always longing to leave and hoping for a mission in life, an echo, a university teaching position or, after my ambitions had grown more moderate, at least a heroic ending. But I was always pressed to the margins and held captive by the city in which I was born and died hundredfold, a non-arrival, called but not chosen, someone who never belonged, although the stones of that city existed for me alone.