

= Berge Meere und Giganten =

Berge Meere und Giganten (Mountains Seas and Giants) is a 1924 science fiction novel by German author Alfred Döblin . Stylistically and structurally experimental , the novel follows the development of human society into the 27th century and depicts global @-@ scale conflicts between future polities , technologies , and natural forces , culminating in the catastrophic harvesting of Iceland 's volcanic energy in order to melt Greenland 's ice cap . Among critics , Berge Meere und Giganten has the reputation of being a difficult and polarizing novel , and has not received nearly as much attention as Döblin 's following novel , Berlin Alexanderplatz (1929) .

Inspired by the mundane sight of pebbles rolling in the Baltic Sea surf in the summer of 1921 , Döblin began writing Berge Meere und Giganten that fall , conducting extensive research into various natural and human sciences in the process . Although he had originally conceived of it as a hymn to the city and technology , over the course of writing the novel it evolved into a tribute to the power of nature . He finished the manuscript in the summer of 1923 , and it was published by Fischer Verlag the following year .

= = Plot = =

= = = First Book : The Western Continents = = =

The novel begins by recounting the time that has passed since the First World War : generations have come and gone , and technology continues to advance and spread from Europe and America over the rest of the world . Overpopulation has become a problem , and the leaders of industry have seized state power . Pacified by the improvement in material conditions , the masses of the cities raise no objection . At the same time that it sees radical technological innovations , Europe suffers declining birth rates and experiences waves of mass migration from Africa . In an effort to maintain their rule , the ruling Senates of Europe agree to restrict the public 's access to science and technology . London is the leading power in the west , and " India @-@ Japan @-@ China " is the other world power .

= = = Second Book : The Ural War = = =

After years of state repression and surveillance , the masses have become soft and restless . A spirit of resistance against the machines arises , and the new generation of rulers shifts course . After the end of the twenty @-@ fourth century , access to science and technology is opened up again and nationalism reemerges , alongside a quasi @-@ religious devotion to the machines . Later , researchers led by a scientist named Meki invent synthetic food production , which leads to the abandonment of farms and the countryside , a new wave of urbanization , and the solidification of the Senates ' political control . By the twenty @-@ seventh century , freed from the need to support themselves the masses have again become fat , idle , and restless ; it becomes increasingly difficult to even find enough people to run the synthetic food factories . A group of leaders incite nationalism and war to combat this tendency ; the result is a catastrophic world war between Europe and Asia ? the " Ural War " ? involving advanced weapons that are able to channel the elements and that turn much of Russia into a wall of fire , and then into a flooded plain . After the war the states of Europe grow increasingly isolated from each other , and " every cityscape fought for its existence . "

= = = Third Book : Marduk = = =

The postwar climate sees a period of austerity and mistrust towards the machines . Returning from the horrors of the war , Marke becomes the Consul of Berlin and instates a reign of isolation and deurbanization . Advanced weapons are destroyed , people are driven out into the countryside to

cultivate the land , and the giant energy accumulators are destroyed . Columns made to look like bulls are erected in city squares and at crossroads , and roar twice a day like a dying animal to remind people of the catastrophe of the Ural War . Marduk succeeds Marke as the Consul and continues the period of brutal authoritarian rule .

= = = Fourth Book : The Deceivers = = =

Marduk 's rule begins to be challenged by both his friends and his enemies . Groups of " deceivers " (" Täuscher ") wage a protracted guerrilla war against him , seeking a rapprochement with science and technology . The resurgent London senate seeks to bring Marduk 's excesses under control , and he in turn attempts to expand his realm to gain more cultivable land , attacking nearby city @-@ states such as Hamburg and Hannover . Zimbo , from the Congo , becomes a rival of Marduk 's . New elemental weapons are developed over the course of these struggles , which involve scenes of violence and torture . Zimbo 's forces eventually manage to unseat Marduk , who then wages a guerrilla campaign of his own , destroying machines and factories wherever he can . He dies in action , and Zimbo becomes the third Consul of Berlin .

= = = Fifth Book : The Draining of the Cities = = =

As the fifth book begins , the setting shifts briefly to North America . Following the Ural War , the Japanese had led an Asian occupation of western North America . The local populations , inspired by Native American beliefs and mythologies , react by leaving the cities for the wilderness and destroying the food factories and cities , eventually driving out the Asian occupation . In America and then globally people begin leaving cities in favor of the wild . Shamanism and the belief in ghosts reemerge amongst the populace , as does an oral tradition of story @-@ telling . The draining of the cities grows into a settler movement : egalitarian communities that live in nature , characterized by gender equality and sexual liberation . In response to the threat this movement poses to the ruling Senates , political leaders in London hatch a plan to colonize Greenland , thereby channeling both the drive for technological innovation and the drive to settle new land .

= = = Sixth Book : Iceland = = =

To settle Greenland , it is necessary to melt its ice sheet ; to do this , a massive expedition sets out for Iceland to harvest its volcanic energy . Led by Kylin , the expedition begins breaking open Iceland 's volcanoes . Resistance by the local population is met with massacres . Once Iceland has been split open and turned into a lake of magma , the energy is stored in " tourmaline veils " (" Turmalinschleier ") . The geography of Iceland is described in rich detail in this section , as is the cataclysmic destruction of the landscape . The scale of destruction proves traumatizing to many of the expedition members , who flee and have to be forcibly recaptured before the expedition can head to Greenland .

= = = Seventh Book : The Melting of Greenland 's Ice = = =

As they sail for Greenland , strange things begin to happen to the ships bearing the tourmaline veils . Marine life and sea birds of all kinds are attracted towards them , and crew stationed aboard them for too long begin acting intoxicated and amorous . The plant and animal life attracted to the ships experiences rapid growth , so that before they reach Greenland the ships look more like mountains or meadows than ships . Strange sea creatures never before seen appear around the ships , and when the expedition is ready to deploy the tourmaline veils , they have to cut through the riot of organic growth that has totally filled the ships . Once the energy of the veils is unleashed on Greenland , it melts the ice quickly but also has unanticipated effects . Prehistoric bones and plant remains that were buried under the ice are reanimated , and fuse together into monstrous forms made up of plant , animal , and mineral parts . Greenland , free of its icy burden , rises up , ripping

from north to south in the process and becoming two separate islands . As the chapter ends , the now enormous monsters brought to life by the volcanic energy are spilling away from Greenland towards Europe .

= = = Eighth Book : The Giants = = =

As the wave of mutilation breaks over Europe , the force animating the monsters proves fatal : any contact with their bodies or blood provokes a frenzy of organic growth , so that animals of different species grow into each other and humans are strangled by their own growing organs . The populations remaining in the cities move underground . The ruling technocrats , led by Francis Delvil , begin to devise biological weapons to combat the monsters . Using the energy of the remaining tourmaline veils , they construct massive towers ? the eponymous " Giants " ? out of humans , animals , and plants , grotesque assemblages of organic life that , planted on mountains or in the sea , serve as defensive turrets . In a frenzied technological mania , some of the scientists turn themselves into giant monsters and wander around Europe , wreaking havoc and forgetting their original intent . A group of the original Iceland expedition led by Kylin returns to Europe , bearing the memory of the devastation they caused .

= = = Ninth Book : Venaska = = =

The novel 's final book begins with a group of settlers in southern France who call themselves the " Snakes " (" Die Schlangen ") . Venaska , a beautiful woman from the south , becomes influential amongst the settlers and is revered as a kind of goddess of love . With the other " Snakes " she lives in nature , apart from the wrecked cities and their dwindling authoritarian rule . As the traumatized remnants of the Iceland expedition come into contact with the settlers , a new type of society comes into existence , marked by a reconciled relationship to nature and egalitarian social relations . To the north the giants , now including Delvil among them , still rage , but their violence slowly subsides . Within the large number of creatures that compose their bodies , they begin to lose their individual human consciousness and grow into the earth , becoming mountains and hills in England and Cornwall . As Delvil fights to retain his consciousness , Venaska arrives and reconciles him with his dissolution into nature . She too grows into the hills that mark the former giants . In the wake of the destruction of Europe 's cities and the collapse of its governments , waves of refugees storm across the landscape accompanied by rage and cannibalism . The survivors of the Iceland expedition meet them head @-@ on , dividing them into groups and leading them to settlements around the globe . As the novel ends , humanity has resettled and begun to cultivate the destroyed landscapes . The fertile land between the Belgian coast and the Loire is renamed Venaska .

= = Thematic and stylistic aspects = =

Critic Gabriele Sander has called *Berge Meere und Giganten* an " epic about the conflict between nature and technology , " and other critics have also emphasized the novel 's portrayal of the often violent relationship between humanity , nature , and technology . Peter Sprengel has taken a different approach , arguing that the novel is characterized not by a dichotomous opposition between nature and technology , but rather by the way it blurs the distinction between the organic and the inorganic . Hannelore Qual has documented how the novel ties Döblin 's philosophy of nature to his ideas about society and politics , arguing for an affinity between Döblin 's thought and the anarchism of Gustav Landauer and Pyotr Kropotkin .

Berge Meere und Giganten presciently invokes such topics as world war , urbanization , the alienation from nature , mechanization , the dehumanization of the modern world , as well as mass migration , globalization , totalitarianism , fanaticism , terrorism , state surveillance , genetic engineering , synthetic food , the breeding of humans , biochemical warfare , and others . Döblin 's experiences during the First World War , when he served in Alsace as a military doctor , left their mark on the novel : psychically damaged veterans , devastated landscapes , and all @-@

destructive technological excesses give this novel its particularly apocalyptic feeling . Because of the bleak vision of the future that the novel presents , it has often been described by critics as a fundamentally pessimistic , irrationalistic , or regressive work . Hannelore Qual argues against this that *Berge Meere und Giganten* is instead characterized by an optimistic view of social and historical perfectibility ; the portrayals of catastrophic destruction and brutally authoritarian regimes reflect , in this reading , not Döblin 's own world view but instead different historical possibilities , alongside which more egalitarian and peaceful social orders are to be found .

Stylistically , it is characterized by its innovative syntax and the frequent paratactic use of multiple subjects , objects , and verbs in a single sentence without conjunctions or punctuation to separate them . Structurally , it consists of nine books that , because of the immense time span , often do not share common characters or settings ; the third @-@ person narrative voice , which has been likened to that of an anonymous chronicler , does not pass judgment on the events or provide commentary that would help tie events together .

= = Critical reception = =

The novel was regarded as a difficult work upon its release , and its experimental stylistic , structural , and thematic idiosyncrasies have often provoked emotional judgments from critics , ranging from fascination to repulsion . Among others , Günter Grass has praised the novel 's continued relevance and insight .

Despite the early fascination with the novel , after the Second World War it fell into neglect as critical attention to Döblin was directed primarily towards his next novel , *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929) , and a new edition of *Berge Meere und Giganten* was not published until 1977 . The last few decades have however seen a resurgence of critical interest in the novel .

= = Genesis and publication = =

Döblin wrote the novel between fall 1921 and summer 1923 . According to the author , the novel set out to explore the question : " What will become of the human being if he keeps living like he lives now ? " Döblin would later write that the original inspiration for the novel was the sight of pebbles rolling in the surf on the Baltic Sea coast during a family vacation in the summer of 1921 ; this epiphanic vision provoked a sudden and uncharacteristic interest in nature for Döblin , who began taking extensive notes in various Berlin museums and libraries on natural history and science , geology , geography , climatology , ethnography , and other fields . If he had originally conceived of the novel as a " hymn to the city " and to technology , as he got into the project it increasingly became an encomium to nature . In early 1922 he closed his medical practice for a month to further his research for the novel . The section on Iceland and Greenland , which occurs towards the end of the published novel , was one of the first sections Döblin envisioned and drafted , and an advance publication of this section appeared in the *Vossische Zeitung* on New Year 's Day 1922 with the title *Die Enteisung Grönlands im Jahre 2500 . Das Zauberschiff* (The Melting of Greenland 's Ice in the Year 2500 : The Magical Ship) . In May 1922 Döblin rented a villa in Zehlendorf to complete the draft of the novel , a setting explicitly referenced in the novel 's unusual " Dedication " . The exertions of drafting the novel provoked a sort of nervous breakdown : as he would later write , " the fantasy was too wild and my brain would not release me . " In a 2011 biography , Wilfried Schoeller has suggested that there was an additional reason for Döblin 's breakdown ? namely , that the temporary move to Zehlendorf was also his unsuccessful attempt to leave his wife in favor of his lover Charlotte Niclas . According to Schoeller , this personal dimension left its mark on the novel , especially on the novel 's dedication .

Berge Meere und Giganten was published in 1924 by the Fischer Verlag . In 1931 Döblin began working on a radically simplified and shortened version , in order to make the difficult work more accessible to a wider audience ; the new version was published by the Fischer Verlag in May 1932 under the title *Giganten* (Giants) . 2006 saw the release of a new critical edition of *Berge Meere und Giganten* by the Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag (Munich) , edited by Gabriele Sander . The

original manuscript and Döblin 's extensive notes for the novel are preserved in the German literary archive in Marbach am Neckar . As of 2016 , there is no English translation available .