

The Emperor's New Expressionism: Wilhelm II and the Modern Crisis

Christian Anderson

The remains of Wilhelm II lie under the Imperial flag in a mausoleum on the grounds of the estate in the Netherlands where the German Kaiser lived in exile from 1920 until his death in 1941. In an inner hallway, one level above the formal entrance hall of Kastel Huis Doorn, a large 1913 photograph framed in gold and bearing the inscription, “*Das letzte GANZE HALT;*” [hereafter: *The Last Full Stop*] preserves a moment of intense anticipation, before the realities of the First World War were known to anyone: The Kaiser stands in the center of a barren, rutted landscape, wearing a long field coat and a shining, metal *Pickelhaube* adorned with the eagle of the German Reich. His hands rest upon his hips as he gazes far into the distance, as if contemplating a grand vision. His cousin, Konstantin I, King of Greece, stands before him to the right holding a staff. He is busied with a field-glass, which stands upon a tripod and faces into nearly – but not exactly – the same direction as the Kaiser's gaze. Directly in front of the Kaiser and facing the opposite direction stands the highest-ranking General of the Imperial Army, Helmuth von Moltke; he holds a folded piece of paper and stares into the direction of the fanfare being blown into the heavens directly above the Kaiser's head. Off to the left stand two additional officers, one of whom is the Kaiser's aristocratic friend, Egon Fürst zu Fürstenberg; both stare menacingly out of the photograph toward the viewer. The sky is overcast, yet in motion, and the brightest object is the Kaiser's helmet.

A series of scenes emerges from the experience of viewing *The Last Full Stop* at twilight in Huis Doorn. One is confronted with violent contrasts: between the Kaiser's elusive vision and the historical fact of the defeat in 1918; between the repeated massacres at Ypres, Verdun, and the Somme, and the place of prominence, in an often-travelled corridor of his home, afforded the photograph by the exiled Kaiser. The viewer experiences the Janus-faced essence of Expressionism (Rumold), as temporal perspectives shift from the Kaiser's elevated hopes for a glorious future, back to the

Christian Anderson (PhD in German, University of California, Davis) analyses Germanic cultural production, creating phenomenological data-sculptures from works of philosophy, literature, film, architecture, and other media. He currently holds the position of Lecturer in German at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo (Cal Poly), where he teaches courses in German language and cultural studies. His current project is *Alternatives to Adulthood: Toward the Origin and Essence of the German Bildungsroman*.

historical, dynastic foundations of those dreams, forward again to the explosions, the surrender, and the exile, and back again to the frozen symbol of the vision hanging in Doorn, a gift to the exiled Kaiser from the photographer, Oscar Tellgman, in memory of this moment before all hope for a radically elevated German Prussian Hohenzollern future is irretrievably lost.



The photograph,¹ as displayed in Doorn, serves as the fulcrum of the logic of a *mise-en-scène*, of a pastiche, around which an unexpected metatext gathers. In this frozen moment from 1913, the essential structures of the Kaiser's interpretation of his inherited historical role are symbolized in sharp relief against the historical realities that follow. *The Last Full Stop* records the instant at which the final summer maneuvers, which Chief Warlord Wilhelm has led personally since 1888, are called to an end by the trumpets. The image functions as a movie still from Wilhelm's final dress rehearsal, replaying the moment of truth, as the Kaiser stares into the void and prepares to make his greatest gamble. The First World War ignites a year later. Throughout two

¹ Permission to reproduce *Das letzte GANZE HALT* is courtesy of Huis Doorn, which was the residence in exile of Kaiser Wilhelm II from 1920 until his death in 1941. The property was confiscated by the Dutch government in 1945 and has been preserved as a museum since then. See www.huisdoorn.nl for more information.

decades of exile, this symbol of the stillborn dream accompanies the Kaiser as surely as his uniforms, his collection of the personal possessions of Friedrich the Great, and the Hohenzollern saddle-chair. Indeed, a preponderance of historical evidence allows us to reconstruct the Kaiser's vision of himself as a spiritual reincarnation of Barbarossa, destined to restore German glory (Kohut 3). A metatextual Kaiser emerges from the photograph as "a dramatic sequence of sharply visualized scenes" (Sokel 44) featuring a performer, rather than a writer, *in extremis* (Sokel). Viewed from the doubly alienated perspective of Doorn, a museum-mausoleum of abdication and exile, *The Last Full Stop* opens a window into a performance of self-entombment, as Wilhelm curates symbols that reflect the subjectively determined historical meaning of his actions. The untimeliness (Laska) of his role is striking; looking backward while looking forward, a present-blinded mask doomed to obscure its own moment, the Kaiser stands on the edge of the abyss awaiting a spark of genius that would elevate him beyond the crisis of inherited historical intentions that define the possible outcomes of his reign. When seen from this perspective, Wilhelm's performance reveals itself as an astonishing masterwork of German Expressionism.

Expressionism anticipates the aesthetic of the First World War, illuminating the existential crises that erupt into it, depicting the catastrophe in advance, in action, and in retrospect. "[E]xpressionism's unparalleled aesthetic diversity, its ideological contradictions, and extraordinary tensions between archaic visions and modern views that seem to defy understanding it as a movement" (Rumold ix) define the phenomenon as an aesthetic moment, reflecting continuities throughout the decades surrounding 1914-1918. Looking back, Expressionist poet Ernst Blass reminisces that, "...there were of course enthusiastic friendships between individuals, but overall it was different people with different ideas, even if they did say similar things" (Raabe 39).² The similarity of expression among Expressionist artifacts is achieved through shared aesthetic forms that reflect a common constellation of metaphysical, social-environmental, and epistemological uncertainties. The domain-space of German Expressionism extends from the early notes sounded in Else Lasker-Schüler's *Weltende* (1903), all the way to the moment in Fritz Lang's *M* (1931) in which Elsie Becker speaks with the shadow of her murderer, from Nietzsche's late works *The Anti-Christ* and *Twilight of the Idols* (each written in 1888), and Münch's *The Scream* (1893; not to overlook his compositionally similar portrait of Nietzsche from 1906) to *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920) and *From Morn to Midnight*, both the play (1912) and the recently rediscovered Expressionist film (1922). Expressionism's essential pivot in time is the First World War; the war is Expressionism's unmatched apotheosis, the fully-expressed symbol of the cognitive landscape Expressionism attempts to transmit. The New Objectivity that follows the war, leaving Expressionism to survive primarily in film, (and there increasingly as an element of filmic narrative, rather than as a guiding aesthetic ideal), emerges deferentially and in awe of the high reality-quotient of the war experience.

² All translations, unless otherwise cited, are my own.

Expressionism is tied to an historical mindset, a collection of concerns in time. These cognitive landscapes are rendered impressionistically to s(t)imulate the expression of hopes for and anxieties about the future. Expressionist artworks are objectively subjective; subjectivity calls itself into material being, performing its meaning, transmitting and amplifying psychic states into artworks. Reverberating in the viewer, Expressionist artworks induce and reproduce a specific state of mind, a mood, a sense of the impending explosion of high hopes. The works of the Expressionist Era reflect aspects of a moment of unfolding psychic crisis related to the uncomfortable metaphysical and societal uncertainties felt since Descartes and Galileo, and intensified by the French, Industrial, and Technological Revolutions. The modern crisis manifests as a state of claustrophobia at the limits of the metaphysical realism that is foundational to the world-historical optimism that guarantees the fundamental subjective freedom that empowers modern consciousness. Nietzsche is an early responder to this mind-spiritual neurosis, with which he grapples from the perspective of Schopenhauer's pessimism while simultaneously observing and contemplating Wagner. Wagner's attempts to forge nationalistic foundational myths are born of this existential anxiety, as is the pervading sensation of something uncanny that follows.

Nietzsche provides a point of origin for Expressionism in his early work, *The Birth of Tragedy*. The ancient lyric poet Archilochus, "warlike servant of the muses, driven wildly through existence.... singing the entire chromatic scale of his passions and desires," (Nietzsche 44) is the proto-expressionist, whose mode of production, mimesis of internal psychic states, is adopted by Expressionist poets, artists, dramatists, and writers, awakened dreamers endowed with "epochal consciousness" (Bronner and Keller 12). "The expressionists themselves read Nietzsche in differing ways, but all of them, whether 'naïve' or 'sophisticated,' understood his thought as an expression of an agonistic era, in which an entire *Weltanschauung* was at stake" (Rumold xx). German Expressionism produces works of art as the crisis turns into terror. The longing for a higher state of being, for an *Übermensch*, to use Nietzsche's term, or a New Man, to use the Expressionist term, has reached an impatient moment of impending existential self-alienation. As the vibrations move from the realm of *Geist* into the world, a symbolic discourse objectifies itself. "Each artist belongs to us," exclaims Ernst Ludwig Kirchner in his 1906 woodcut *Program of Die Brücke*, "who directly and without adulteration represents that which drives him to create" (Anz 18).

The "shocking and upsetting" birth of the modern era (Sokol 1) finds personal resonance in the crippling birth of the Kaiser in 1859.³ Wilhelm's mother, Victoria, is the eldest daughter of Queen Victoria of England. Princess Victoria marries Crown Prince Friedrich of Prussia shortly after her seventeenth birthday, twelve years before the founding of the Second Reich (1871-1918), at a time when Prussia can hardly match the global political-economic power of mighty Great Britain. The *Times* of

³ Four years before Edward Munch is born in Ådalsbruk, Norway. Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (named for Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia) is a 14 year old half-orphan in Naumburg in Prussian Saxony, 150 miles southwest of Berlin.

London notes that the match is unfortunate and unequal, calling Prussia a “wretched German state” and the Hohenzollern a “paltry German dynasty;” Bismarck asks, “How will that be, when the first lady of the land is an Englishwoman?” (Van der Kiste 3). Physically and metaphorically, a collision between Prussia and Great Britain leads to the Kaiser’s traumatic entry into the world, as his English mother falls and injures herself on a slippery parquet floor in the Berlin City Castle during the fourth month of pregnancy, knocking the unborn Kaiser into the breech position. Wilhelm is barely alive during the first hours after his birth, essentially having been ripped out of the womb by the ruined arm that he will struggle to hide for the rest of his life (Van der Kiste 3). The violence of this opening metatextual scene casts a heavy foreshadow upon the action that follows.

Hegel famously refers to Napoleon as the World-Spirit on horseback. Kaiser Wilhelm II clearly thinks of his own role as German Emperor in similar historical dimensions. A phenomenological gaze into the internal structure of Wilhelm’s role demands bracketing of the historical givens – the Kaiser’s dynastic inheritances, the geopolitical climate in which he must enact their legacies, the uncertainty underlying the possibility of their triumphant reconciliation – and discloses the forces and parameters under which the Kaiser shepherds the oncoming cataclysm into Being. Wilhelm’s personal performance of *Weltende* looks beyond locomotives crashing from bridges and attempts to forge a new heroic chapter in world history that will overcome the modern crisis and advance the multigenerational tale of dynastic glory in which he is the living protagonist. In Expressionist drama, “the symbolic character ceases to be the portrait of a three dimensional person and becomes nothing but a functional idea of the work” (Sokol 34). The Expressionist hero is identical with his role, changing his name – or rather his functional title—with the relationship in which he is involved (Sokol 52). Despite caricature of Wilhelm as “*the most personal personality*” (Mann 283), analysis of Wilhelm’s public statements reveals a uniform commitment to an uninterrupted, authentic interpretation of his duties as the present incarnation of the mythical form of Hohenzollern War-King. Thus Wilhelm becomes Kaiser fully, unlike Walder Nornepygge, and despite the innumerable changes of costumes, Wilhelm has only one role. *The Last Full Stop* preserves the moment of future-oriented hopefulness that defines Wilhelm’s performance of Kaiser. It evokes the majesty of his dreams and illuminates the contours of an existential crisis that can resolve itself only through the appearance of an Imperial German Prussian Hohenzollern inflection of the *Übermensch*.

Impossible inheritance leading to acute intergenerational conflict and revolt is a common theme in Expressionist drama, and the belief that the parental generation is responsible for the present state of crisis resonates strongly in Expressionist drama and verse (Riedel 2). Revolt against the father is a key thematic structure in works such as Sorge’s *The Beggar*, Werfel’s *Father and Son*, Georg Kaiser’s *The Coral*, Hasenclever’s *The Son*, and Bronnen’s *Parricide*. Georg Heym’s bitter diary entry, “I would have become one of the greatest poets, if I had not had such a pig for a father” (Paulsen 31) captures the emotional charge of this shared belief. Wilhelm’s parents

name him Friedrich Wilhelm Viktor Albrecht after his ruling grandparents in England and Prussia, and hope that he will become a ruler of the proportions of Friedrich the Great. They also hope that, rather in contrast to the original incarnation, Wilhelm will become committed deeply to the English-Liberal-institutional form of government (Kohut 31). Wilhelm rejects his parents' Liberalism from an early age, and violently enacts this mental posture in his first order as Kaiser, anticipating the close of his dying father's 99-day reign in 1888 with the order:

At the moment that you receive the report that the Kaiser [Friedrich III] is dead, occupy the entire palace and let no one out, without exceptions (Röhl 1993, 820).

Hussars actually raid the family palace so that private papers proving a Liberal-constitutional conspiracy between Wilhelm's parents and Great Britain can be found, but Wilhelm's parents have expected such a move, and their personal papers have been transported a year earlier to England (Röhl 1993, 820). Wilhelm promises in his first proclamation as Kaiser and King, "to bear always in mind, that the eyes of My ancestors from the afterworld look down upon Me" (Röhl 2001, 22), showing clearly that he imagines his role as a continuation of prior performances by the Prussian Hohenzollern. The grand narrative that connects Friedrich Iron Tooth to Friedrich the Great to Wilhelm I, to whom William II attempts to affix the moniker "the Great," without lasting historical success, provides the discursive framework of Wilhelm's impossible inheritance. Wilhelm performs the role of Kaiser as if a heavenly audience of Hohenzollern princes were watching him with interest.

Upon opening his father's will, Wilhelm encounters a letter containing a plea from Friedrich Wilhelm IV (1795-1861) that his successors should rescind the constitution that he has been forced to grant his subjects in the aftermath of the Revolution of 1848. Wilhelm's father and grandfather have both initialed the letter and replaced it in the archives, yet Wilhelm burns the letter on the pretext that it could endanger an inexperienced ruler, although Wilhelm himself is not yet thirty years old (Van der Kiste 58-59). Wilhelm appears to intend to settle the matter of the constitution himself, recognizing that the moment to rescind the constitution would certainly have passed by the time any possible successor were to follow him. His interpretation of the meaning of his time heavily determines the inflection of his performance of his role. Wilhelm is painfully aware of the possibility that he might be the last Kaiser able to perform the role in a world-historically meaningful sense. Queerly alienated from his time by the essence of his station in the multigenerational game of aristocracy, Wilhelm II sits upon a different throne from 1890-1918 than Victoria does from 1840-1900. He writes in 1891 in the Golden Book of the City of Munich, "*Suprema lex, regis voluntas*" [the will of the king is the supreme law], spurring his mother to comment to Queen Victoria, "A Czar, an infallible Pope – the Bourbons – and our poor Charles I – might have written such a sentence, but a constitutional monarch in the 19th century!!!" (Van der Kiste 82-83). Wilhelm does not wish to play at being Kaiser, in the sense of reigning as a figurehead, but rather intends to exert the full force of the

role, of his personal rule, upon his audience. “The expressionist dramatist, like the dreamer, concentrates entirely on the purpose of expressing an inner world and refuses to let conformity to external reality divert him from this purpose” (Sokel 38).

Attempts to articulate the concept of a New Man are a hallmark of Expressionist literature. The Billionaire’s Son in Georg Kaiser’s *Gas* hopes to usher in a new era, but is doomed by the inheritance that simultaneously defines his role and empowers him. Impossible inheritance explains the Expressionist revolt against the parents, but also shows that the revolt is existential, the result of determining historical circumstances that demand to be transcended. Wilhelm is thrown toward the limit that threatens the existence of the role of Kaiser. He repeatedly attempts to achieve a salvational state of transcendence that would free him from the demands of his dialectical-historical time. The form of the *Übermensch* is universal, as are the Kantian metaphysics on which it is grounded, the Hegelian time-narrative into which it springs, and the Schopenhauerian pessimism that forces the concept into existence. The content of the *Übermensch* is Prussian, an elongated hope that preserves the transmetaphysical possibility of redemption for a decadent philistine culture in a messianic future. Wilhelm’s role *in its time* carries a performative imperative, not only toward an “essentially other” and “mind-spiritually renewed human being” (Riedel 3), but also toward a transcendental goal that denies the radical openness of *Übermensch* or New Man. Wilhelm must become a New Kaiser, adding a level of complexity to an already pataphysically complicated task. Performing his own transcendental dance before the gallery of Prussian Hohenzollerns to which he refers, as well as before his living and not-yet-overcome English relatives and his millions of Imperial subjects (the German Volk in its first modern national form), Wilhelm exemplifies Habermas’ description of the modern consciousness of time, in which the present becomes a being-called-to-account for the past of a future present (Habermas 52-58).

Dedication to his imagined historical task becomes obvious as Wilhelm struggles as a child, despite his physical handicap, to master horse riding. He weeps upon reflection that he might prove unfit for the throne, having overheard his great uncle Friedrich Karl’s remark that a one-armed man would never be king (Kohut 43). Kohut calls the mastering of riding Wilhelm’s greatest developmental accomplishment, echoing the Kaiser’s friend Bernhard von Bülow’s admiration of the great energy with which Wilhelm strove to overcome his disability (Kohut 44). Wilhelm, who could neither dress himself nor cut his food without the help of others, was in childhood an admirer of the ancient orator Demosthenes, who overcame stuttering by shouting at the sea with his mouth filled with stones (Kohut 44). This element of his self-image strongly resonates with Nietzsche’s proto-expressionist Archilochus, and provides an uncanny resonance to Wilhelm’s declaration at the dedication of the harbor at Stettin, that the future of the German Empire future was “on the water” (Penzler II, 118). Wilhelm clearly perceives a connection between England’s naval might, her colonial Empire, and her status as the world’s greatest power. The naval race represents Wilhelm’s attempt to extend the Imperial German Prussian Hohenzollern narrative in a way that synthesizes his English inheritance into a vision of the future in which Great

Britain is overcome on the world stage by the German Empire. In the yacht *Hohenzollern* Wilhelm competes each year in the regatta at Cowes, often claiming victory, defeating the mighty sailors of the British navy. This sporting victory can be seen as a prelude to the military victory Wilhelm hopes to win once the German fleet has surpassed the English one. Wilhelm explains in a later address:

And as my grandfather for his army, so will I for my navy just as unwaveringly support the value of carrying forward its reorganization, so that it can stand with equal rights at the side of my fighting forces on the land, and through it the German Empire will be in a position, outside of its borders, to secure its not-yet-reached-place (Penzler II, 183).

By becoming a power at sea, the German Empire will become a global power of British stature. The abstraction 'not-yet-reached-place' forces interpretation, and is read both as an obvious demand for colonies, as well as an intention toward an improved future state of affairs. Wilhelm promises his audience that a mythically strong Kaiser will usher in an elevated state of reality. Wilhelm's Chancellor, Bernhard von Bülow articulates the promise with the infamous sentence, "We do not wish to place anyone in the shade, but we demand also our place in the sun" (von Bülow). This imaginary location represents Wilhelm's ultimate goal, an ambiguous and unclear, yet also glorious and improved, future for his Reich, an Imperial Hohenzollern orgasm of the World-Spirit.

William's response in 1883 to the gift of a complete costume of Royal Stewart Tartan from Queen Victoria provides a glimpse into his vision in an early stage. He distributes to his English relatives photos of himself in the Highlander costume inscribed with the enigmatic words "I bide my time," essentially creating a personal teaser trailer, announcing to his English relatives that he is a force with which they someday must reckon. Certainly there is an overt threat to England, which the general public perceives, as well as an inside reference to his admiration for the success of the Highlanders in the Egyptian campaign, which he had expressed to his grandmother a month prior (Kohut 81). Wilhelm shows that he has considered the monarchical role that he is to play, and is waiting patiently for his chance to come to center stage. Indeed, Wilhelm dreams in 1893 that German warships, which at the time did not yet exist, would fight alongside the Royal Navy, destroying both the French and Russian fleets. A scene of celebration at Trafalgar Square would follow, climaxing with Queen Victoria greeting Wilhelm at the foot of Nelson's stone (Cecil 300).

The visionary heroic Kaiser refuses to be reigned in by his aging chancellor, Otto von Bismarck. Bismarck's contribution to the Prussian Hohenzollern past is important in sustaining the historical narrative upon which Wilhelm's role is founded, but the role's crisis-laden existential performance-imperative requires elimination of all elements that do not conform to the Kaiser's vision. Wilhelm repeatedly demonstrates to Bismarck that the monarch's will – not the chancellor's – is the law of the land, leading to a final break in 1890. Wilhelm informs the Crown Council that he will mark his 31st birthday with two proclamations, one promising new laws to protect

working men and limit their hours of labor, and the other summoning an international conference at Berlin, where delegates will discuss improving the conditions of labor throughout Europe. Bismarck has little time for reform, as he is occupied with a Reichstag election in which the Catholic Centre Party seems to be destined to obtain more votes than the Bismarckian Conservatives, thus necessitating a coalition. Bismarck attempts to curb Wilhelm's power, and after a few weeks of posturing, resigns from his office. "I owed it to the crown to separate myself from the man!" (Röhl 2001, 365) is the exiled Wilhelm's summary of his dismissal of the person who has made the greatest contribution toward creating and sustaining the Second Reich. Wilhelm explains further in his memoirs, composed in Doorn:

My tragedy in the case of Bismarck is that I was the successor of my grandfather, so to some extent skipped a generation. This is hard. One always has to work with old men of merit who live more in the past than in the present and do not grow in the future. (Wilhelm 4).

Bismarck has become too blind to see into the marvelous future ready to be coaxed into being from the Imperial prophet's will. Wilhelm recounts Bismarck's astonishment upon viewing the new harbor in Hamburg:

And Prince Bismarck, as Ballin showed him an image of the harbor in Hamburg, felt that a new era, that he no longer fully understood, had begun; the prince said at that time, "Another world, a new world!" (Wilhelm 5).

The new world will be led by a new man; the old must make way, even if they are of Bismarck's awesome stature.

Wilhelm is famous for exclaiming "I will lead you to glorious times!" Despite the wide variety of inflections of the role he attempts in order to bring the New Kaiser and corresponding glorious times into being (Kohut 141), Wilhelm is unable to find the way forward. The modern crisis is after all an existential crisis, a case of extreme psychological pressure resulting from *Geworfenheit* (situational-thrownness) gone heavy. Wilhelm reaches his *Scream* moment, as the shadows of threats of hereditary extinction and of personal impotence grow long. As in the poetry of Georg Heym and Georg Trakl, which reflects "the intense registering of civilization's Dionysian endgame, as it was felt in the years before and during the First World War" (Donahue 168), the Kaiser's actions begin a descent toward doom, toward Doorn, as the twentieth century commences. *The Scream* provides a preview of the full expression of the Expressionist moment; *The Last Full Stop* shows us the final moment before the uncanny transforms to horror. The cataclysm is the enduring present of Expressionism, which has no future, since the moment is absorbed into the fire of its own annihilation. Time moves against the Hohenzollern monarchy, as Wilhelm inherits it. To have maneuvered himself to *The Last Full Stop* is certainly Wilhelm's responsibility, but the elevated hopes of 1913 were not yet plunged into the horror of trenches, explosions,

and gas.⁴ As failures mount, Wilhelm's increasingly belligerent behavior resembles Wilhelm Worringer's descriptions of primitive art, which influence the early Expressionist painters. The Kaiser sends troops to China to quell the Boxer Rebellion in 1900, the year of Nietzsche's death.

Should you encounter the enemy [...] No quarter will be given! Prisoners will not be taken! Whoever falls into your hands will fall to you. Just as a thousand years ago the Huns under their King Attila made a name for themselves, one that even today makes them seem mighty in lore and myth, may the name 'German' be proven by you in such a way that no Chinese ever again will dare to look cross-eyed at a German (Wilhelm, 1900).

Wilhelm attempts to forge for his subjects a place in the collective consciousness that will raise them to the level of Attila the Hun. The bold and bloody deeds he imagines will serve to create a new and vital myth while simultaneously leading the German Reich further along the path to world power. The pretender New Kaiser beckons a complementary imaginary New Volk that the Nazis will summon into existence in the decades following 1918.

The madness of this endgame becomes painfully clear in the 1908 *Daily Telegraph* Affair, which takes place five years before *The Last Full Stop* is composed. The Kaiser displays signs of recognizing the impossibility of his role and subsequently falls into a nervous collapse during which he considers abdication. In an English newspaper interview Wilhelm calls the English "mad, mad, mad as March hares," stressing that he is dedicated to peace and condemning the English press for portraying him as an enemy.

To be forever misjudged, to have my repeated offers of friendship weighed and scrutinized with jealous, mistrustful eyes, taxes my patience severely. I have said time after time that I am a friend of England, and your press --, at least, a considerable section of it -- bids the people of England refuse my proffered hand and insinuates that the other holds a dagger (Wilhelm, 1908).

This utterance is impossible to accept at face value from a monarch who repeatedly states that he is the enemy of the English form of government, and moreover is constructing a battle fleet to rival England on the seas.

The prevailing sentiment among large sections of the middle and lower classes of my own people is not friendly to England. I am, therefore so to speak, in a minority in my own land, but it is a minority of the best elements as it is in England with respect to Germany (Wilhelm, 1908).

⁴ Could Bismarck have managed affairs to a better outcome? Could Walter Benjamin have found a more elevated approach to transcendental synthesis? Perhaps.

Wilhelm succeeds in alienating himself from both the English and the Germans. The claim that most Germans are anti-English, and by extension not of the “best elements,” enrages opinion in the Reichstag. Furthermore, the German people have openly supported the Boers against the British, and are unhappy to read in the interview that the Kaiser has shared a military plan to defeat them with England. The notion that the German Kaiser has supplied England with war plans is simply unbelievable in British circles, where the statement is received as an arrogant lie; people of both nations doubt that Wilhelm has the military skill needed to develop a winning strategy, despite Wilhelm’s assertion that the document “is among the state papers at Windsor Castle, awaiting the severely impartial verdict of history” (*Daily Telegraph*). Wilhelm returns finally to the fleet, with which he contradicts himself thoroughly:

But, you will say, what of the German navy? Surely, that is a menace to England! Against whom but England are my squadrons being prepared? If England is not in the minds of those Germans who are bent on creating a powerful fleet, why is Germany asked to consent to such new and heavy burdens of taxation? My answer is clear. Germany is a young and growing empire. She has a worldwide commerce which is rapidly expanding, and to which the legitimate ambition of patriotic Germans refuses to assign any bounds. Germany must have a powerful fleet to protect that commerce and her manifold interests in even the most distant seas. She expects those interests to go on growing, and she must be able to champion them manfully in any quarter of the globe. Her horizons stretch far away (Wilhelm, 1908).

The fleet is not designed to threaten England, yet the German Empire has no bounds assigned to it and hopes to grow in all quarters of the globe. The *London Times* notices this contradiction and publicly asks why the German fleet was in the North Sea rather than in the Pacific, if it were not intended for use against England. Wilhelm is the friend of England, yet he is also the jealous archenemy. He pretends to have mastered military strategy, yet has no experience with war beyond the yearly maneuvers which the general staff consistently lets him win. The *Daily Telegraph* Affair strikes the beginning notes of the outright impossibility of completing Wilhelm's performance of Kaiser; as if Wilhelm were howling feelings of impossibility and alienation into swirling lines of screaming newsprint. Wilhelm has a nervous breakdown in the aftermath of the affair. Chancellor Bülow apologizes to the Reichstag, and the following day, "breaking down in tears, racked by spells of giddiness, shivering and facial neuralgia, he [takes] to his bed and Bülow [receives] a phone call telling him the Kaiser [intends] to abdicate... To the Crown Prince his father "[seems] aged by years; he [has] lost hope and [feels] himself to be deserted by everybody" (Van der Kiste 140-143). The Crown Prince deputizes for a number of weeks while Wilhelm recovers. Speculations of madness begin to surface. Wilhelm becomes taciturn and melancholic, and never is quite the same again. Some speculate that Wilhelm will share in the fates of his great-great-grandfather, the mad King George III of England and of his great uncle, the mad King Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia (Van der Kiste 140-143). The impossibility of reconciling his inheritance with modernity is symbolized by this epi-

sode of actual madness. The mental trauma is the outer symbol of Wilhelm's inner cognitive state: he physically reacts to the impossibility of that which he attempts to perform.

The *Daily Telegraph* Affair “reveals [Wilhelm’s] inability to realize the symbolic value he had promised the Germans and that the Germans demanded of the Kaiser” (Kohut 2); it also shows the ultimate impossibility of his existential task. “*Darum auf, zu den Waffen!*”⁵ Wilhelm is driven toward the Great War by the impossibility of enacting his vision of the elevated Prussian Hohenzollern narrative under any other circumstances. The war is the Kaiser's last attempt at opening a space in which the role as he interprets it would be possible to heroically perform. War will return the Kaiser to the graces of the Nordic war gods, who will allow him to lead his nation to victory against a world of enemies. The new glory demanded by the Prussian Hohenzollern narrative can only be achieved in this manner. From the position of victory, Wilhelm will be able to revoke the constitution and claim his revenge for 1848. He will integrate his English inheritance by subduing it. The Social Democratic Party, which voted to support the war in 1914, used these words (quoted by Rosa Luxemburg a year later in the anti-war *Junius Pamphlet*) to describe the coming war in 1913.

Whoever calmly considers the possibility of a major European war can come to no other conclusion, as the one proposed here. The next European war will be an all-or-nothing gamble such as the world has not yet seen; it will be in all likelihood the final war (Luxemburg).

On the 6th of August, 1914, the Kaiser completes his existential gambit. His unfitness for the task of discovering the radically renewed state of being that would save him is precisely the fate of the expressionist protagonist, who finds himself unequal to the task of creating the New Man in drama, poetry, and prose. The Kaiser quotes the German version of Hamlet in his declaration of war.

It is a matter of to be or not to be for our Empire, that our ancestors newly founded, a matter of being or non-being of German power and German existence. (Wilhelm, 1914)

The Kaiser might have added his own existence to the list of matters that the war would settle; the question of to be or not to be applies foremost, from the perspective of Doorn, to the Kaiser’s inherited role. Wilhelm is a first-rate overcomer of obstacles, but he is not the *Übermensch*.

We will fight until the last breath of man and horse and we will win this battle even against a world of enemies. Germany has never been defeated, when it was united. Forward with God, who will be with us, as he was with our ancestors (Wilhelm, 1914)

⁵ Therefore, off to arms!

The text of Wilhelm's declaration of war is the perfect accompaniment to the *The Last Full Stop*, taken only a year earlier. As if in a dystopic version of Eichendorff's poem *Magic Root*, "Auf zu den Waffen!" are magic words that bring the world to sing four years of nonstop music that defies classification, combining hiking songs and cries of death from the youthful *Wandervogel* with atonal artilleries and silent gases. *Grodek* comes from this space, as does the work of August Stramm. The barren landscape on which the Kaiser stands in *The Last Full Stop* is undeniably the same scarred and wasted landscape mechanically reproduced along the western front from 1914 through 1918. Unexploded shells are found in Flanders' fields to this day.

New constellations forged from the aftermaths of the World War render Aristocracy and Expressionism essentially tangential to the respective avant-gardes that follow, although both anachronisms continue to exert an influence on film and popular culture for decades to follow, impacting communism, fascism, and Americanism as their aesthetics develop. Expressionism reveals itself as an end of Romanticism, a set of self-inflicted hammer-blows against the hollowness of the symbolic apex of bourgeois consciousness, the Emperor, destroyed for his drunken followers like Dionysus, signaling the apocalypse with his mad dance. This performance of doom, a "mental flight from reality" (Lucacs 123) leads directly to Doorn, the last stop for the Kaiser, where he continues to perform the role, wearing uniforms to dinner and having his portrait painted in full regalia for his seventieth and eightieth birthdays, despite his role's abolished political reality and forgone highest aspirations. Wilhelm composes his memoirs and remains alert to the possibility of a return to power in Germany. Sitting atop a Hohenzollern saddle chair at his desk down the hall from *The Last Full Stop*, Wilhelm fully inhabits an unending moment of alienated failure. The Kaiser's chief occupation during twenty years of exile is the felling of trees and splitting of logs from the estate woods, which he obliterates. Standing where Wilhelm surely stood, and sharing his vision, looking back in confinement at the image of his last moment of hope on the world-stage, the aura of Expressionism haunts Doorn as surely as the millions of war ghosts that might be imagined to chop Doorn's woods along with the mad emperor in exile, recreating the moon landscape in a final, extended echo of Passchendaele. *Caligari* closes with a post-festum perspective from inside the madhouse, and this is also the view from Huis Doorn. The Kaiser's 1940 telegram congratulating Hitler upon the fall of Paris might provide a final Expressionist work to be included in Goebel's catalog of degenerate art. All that remains is for a graffitied *Kaiserdämmerung* to appear on the mausoleum in which *der expressionistische Expressionist* lies in eternal anticipation of the restoration of the Hohenzollern monarchy. Expressionism shows vividly from Doorn.

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