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MAX BECKMANN'S "TRAPEZE"

By

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ABSTRACT

MAX BECKMANN'S "TRAPEZE"

By

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In this thesis I analyze Max Beckmann's painting of 1923, *Trapeze*, with simultaneous regard to the artist's three most important philosophical/religious sources from his post-World War I period: the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer, Helena P. Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine*, and the religion of Gnosticism. In addition, I outline Germany's socio-economic, political and cultural circumstances of the early 1920s, indicating the ways *Trapeze* reflects that environment.

At times my methodology is iconographical, finding direct correlations in the painting to specific tenets of the various systems of thought. I also construct a general picture of how Beckmann viewed his relationship to the world, indicating the ways *Trapeze* manifests this view with its synthesis of Schopenhauer, Blavatsky and Gnosticism. I conclude that *Trapeze* not only effectively documents a pivotal time in the artist's spiritual journey, but is an artistic object distinctly born of the Weimar Republic.

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My first gratitude must be to Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior, whose grace has always been sufficient, no less so during the present project than for so many other occasions.

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INTRODUCTION

Max Beckmann completed his painting *Trapeze* (Figure 1) during one of twentieth-century Germany's most turbulent periods. Still devastated from the defeat of World War I, caught up in the shrill and frequently bloody contention between the many extremist political parties, and suffering incomprehensible economic plight, many in the newly born German Republic experienced daily a grim struggle for mere existence.

Contemporary artists such as George Grosz and Otto Dix created savage caricatures of the social and political injustices they perceived. The critics often deemed such unflinching realism, especially when coupled with a certain philosophical or spiritual emotionalism, to be quintessentially German in character. Beckmann, an unflagging advocate of the objective in art with little regard for the abstractions of the Parisians, Russians or Italians, personified this aesthetic. "I believe in Germany," he told the publisher Reinhard Piper, "because I believe in myself. I see myself as a German through and through."[1] The art critic Wilhelm Hausenstein echoed this evaluation in a 1924 monograph on the artist: "The Gothic identity in Beckmann's work is indeed a German identity. If I imagine today a specific German art, it is

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[1]Reinhard Piper, *Mein Leben als Verleger: Vormittag-Nachmittag* (Munich: R. Piper Verlag, 1964), 330.

called Beckmann."[2]

Like so many of his non-German counterparts in the modern art world, however, Beckmann believed himself gifted with special insight into the nature of the world, God and life, and felt it his duty as an artist to bring his insight to humanity at large. Thus he might free his fellows from their pointless suffering. He was not often meek in his missionary role, nor were his goals humble. "We still have 20 years or more to set mankind before a new reality," he wrote in 1932 to his dealer, I.B. Neumann. "Right now we are needed more than ever, and I will force men again to art--for their own salvation."[3] In the aftermath of World War I, Beckmann urged his fellow artists to devote themselves to "poor, deceived humanity."[4] This the artist should do, he said, "In order that we can give humanity a picture of its fate, and that can only be done if we love them." *Trapeze* is an example of such evangelism.

My primary purpose in this essay is to examine a single Beckmann painting, seeking to demonstrate specific and concrete ways the work manifests Beckmann's close study of three worldviews: the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer, Helena P. Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine*, and the tenets of Gnosticism. At times my methodology is strictly iconographical, as for example when I connect the wheel motif

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[2]Wilhelm Hausenstein, "Max Beckmann," in Wilhelm Fraenger et al., *Max Beckmann* (Munich: Piper Verlag, 1924), 69.

[3]Max Beckmann to I. B. Neumann, 3 January 1932, in Klaus Gallwitz et al., *Max Beckmann: Frankfurt 1915-1933: eine Ausstellung zum 100. Geburtstag* (Frankfurt am Main: Städtische Galerie im Städelschen Kunstinstitut, 1983), 284.

[4]Max Beckmann in "Schöpferische Konfession," *Tribüne der Kunst und Zeit*, no. 13 (1920): 64.

in *Trapeze* to concepts of bondage in the three philosophies. In other cases I suggest why given concepts in Schopenhauer, Blavatsky or Gnosticism would naturally appeal to Beckmann's general *weltanschauung*, and would also validate and reinforce his general artistic approach, even if we find no direct *iconographic* correspondences. An example would be the discussion of Schopenhauer, Beckmann and objective art. In these and all cases, however, my aim is always to point to specific aspects of the object which indicate these influences. Wherever possible, I also show the interaction and commonalities between the three schools of thought as displayed in *Trapeze*. I hope to illuminate for the reader the painting's richly-layered and particularly lucid expression of the artist's postwar spiritual explorations.

I will also endeavor in this essay to place *Trapeze* squarely within the context of Weimar Republic society and culture. To this end I make use not only of contemporaneous accounts of postwar Germany, but particularly of contemporaneous art criticism. I thus present here, to the best of my knowledge, the first survey of Beckmann's Weimar Republic critics and possibly of any period. I base this approach on the idea--which would no doubt be readily embraced by the Berlin critics--that *Trapeze*, painted by the thoroughly German Max Beckmann, might transmit certain messages that resonate truly only for those caught up in that country's tumultuous and intoxicated times. Above all, of course, I want to establish *Trapeze* as an authentic child of postwar, Golden Twenties Germany.

Arthur Schopenhauer's philosophy is acknowledged nearly universally among Beckmann scholars for its importance to the painter's view. Hildegard Zenser, Hans Belting, Friedhelm Fischer and particularly Margot Clark make fruitful

observations on Schopenhauer's relationship to Beckmann's art, though all limit themselves mainly to one particular aspect or another of Schopenhauer's thought.[5]

The majority of Beckmann scholarship since the 1950s attempts to unravel the artist's dense and perplexing iconography. Fischer has been one of the most ambitious; his *Max Beckmann: Symbol and Worldview* both analyzes specific works throughout the artist's career and attempts an encyclopedic survey of Beckmann's myriad individual motifs and symbols. Charles Kessler's book on the triptychs also accents iconographical analyses of the works.[6] Belting looks at Beckmann's works iconographically by genre.

These authors and others necessarily concentrate on Beckmann's eclectic and far-ranging philosophic and religious interests. Clark, for example, is well-versed in the influence of Theosophy, Gnosticism and other "Hermetic" or esoteric religious systems on Beckmann's art. Sarah O'Brien Twohig's monograph on *Carnival* presents a Gnostic iconographical interpretation for that work as well.[7]

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[5]Hildegard Zenser, "Das 'Ich' als größtes Geheimnis des Lebens," *Weltkunst* 60 (1 November 1990): 3556-3561; Hans Belting, *Max Beckmann* (New York: Timken, 1989); Friedhelm Fischer, *Max Beckmann: Symbol und Weltbild: Grundriß zu einer Deutung des Gesamtwerkes* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1972); Margot Orthwein Clark, *Max Beckmann: Sources of Imagery in the Hermetic Tradition* (Ph.D. diss., Washington University, 1975); and Clark, "Beckmann's Abbilder des metaphysischen 'Selbst'," in *Max Beckmann: Frankfurt 1915-1933: Eine Ausstellung zum 100. Geburtstag*, eds. Klaus Gallwitz, et al. (Frankfurt am Main: Städische Galerie im Städelschen Kunstinstitut, 1983).

[6]Charles Kessler, *Max Beckmann's Triptychs* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1970).

[7]Sarah O'Brien Twohig, *Beckmann: "Carnival"* (London: Tate Gallery, 1984).

The least-used approach is to place Beckmann's art within the context of the contemporary society. Most authors make only passing references to the conditions of Germany during Beckmann's production (before he fled to Amsterdam in 1936). Matthias Eberle is an exception, giving a thorough account of Beckmann's experiences in World War I and in the immediate postwar environment, relating all to Beckmann's subjects and meanings.[8]

What I believe is unique to my approach is the bringing of all four of these areas of inquiry--the spiritual/philosophical systems and the social context--to bear on a single work. Rarely have I found any one of these aspects, let alone all four, investigated exhaustively, point by point, per specific details in the work. Ingrid Schulze, for example, has provocative ideas about male and female principles in Beckmann's art, but makes no reference to Blavatsky, Gnosticism or any other metaphysical system.[9] The writing most closely resembling my own monograph is Twohig's booklet on the painting *Carnival*. *Carnival* was painted just two years before *Trapeze*, but Twohig only briefly sketches the bewildering times in Germany. Her Gnostic analysis of *Carnival* is enlightening, but Blavatsky is left out altogether. Though many have delved into Beckmann's spiritual/philosophical sources, only Clark spends considerable time on Schopenhauer as well. But Clark covers all of Beckmann's career, as do most, and gives no attention to the social and political

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[8]Matthias Eberle, *World War I and the Weimar Artists: Dix, Grosz, Beckmann, Schlemmer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

[9]Ingrid Schulze, "Jahrmarkt-Metapher, Tiersatire und 'verkehrte Welt' bei Max Beckmann," *Bildende Kunst*, no. 4 (1989): 35-37; "Zirkus, Karussell und Schaubude: Ein Beitrag zu Max Beckmanns Graphikmappe *Der Jahrmarkt*," *Bildende Kunst*, no. 8 (1990): 60-63.

context of the postwar period and how that might affect those works. This is basically true of Kessler, as well, who considers only the triptychs, and hence none of works of the 1920s. Covering an entire career, of course, tends to move the analysis toward the more general. The usual trend is to discuss Beckmann's worldview in detail, and its manifestation in the objects only broadly.[10]

[10]At relevant points in the essay I present other authors' standpoints in more detail.

Chapter 1

"TRAPEZE" IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION

Max Beckmann began *Trapeze* on 1 April 1922, completing it more than a year later on 16 May 1923.[11] At the time of *Trapeze*'s creation, German society was in chaos. The Treaty of Versailles following World War I held Germany completely responsible "for causing all the loss and damage to which the Allied and Associated Governments and their nationals [had] been subjected as a consequence of the war imposed upon them by the aggression of Germany and her allies."[12] The Allies imposed reparation payments on Germany of 132 billion gold marks, along with extreme penalties on German trade.[13] On the pretense of late payments of these reparations, the French Army occupied Germany's industrial Ruhr section, further

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[11]Max Beckmann, "List of Works (MS)" (Frankfurt: 1923), quoted in documentation sheet for *Trapeze* (acc. no. 83.20), Toledo Museum of Art, 1983, photocopy. Beckmann wrote the publisher Reinhard Piper on 17 May 1923 that the painting was complete and that it ought to be included in the Beckmann monograph Piper was to publish the following year (Max Beckmann to Reinhard Piper, Frankfurt, 17 April 1923, *Max Beckmann: Briefe*, ed. Klaus Gallwitz et al. [Munich: Piper, 1993], 1:238).

[12]*The Treaty of Peace between the Allied and Associated Powers and Germany*, Part VIII, sec. I, art. 231 (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1919), quoted in Anton Kaes, Martin Jay, Edward Dimendberg, eds., *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 8.

[13]Erich Eyck, *A History of the Weimar Republic*, tran. Harlan P. Hanson and Robert G. L. Waite (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 180.

weakening an already reeling economy.[14] Late in 1923, the year *Trapeze* was completed, the rate of exchange for the mark--4.2 to the U.S. dollar before the war--reached an astonishing low of 4.2 *trillion* per dollar.[15] Prices would sometimes rise one hundredfold in a single day.[16]

With the economic state of the nation in disarray, the overwhelming hardships led to a seeming emotional and spiritual collapse as well. Typical of outsiders visiting Germany, George Brandes, writing for *New Republic*, observed:

> Thinking people in Germany are on the verge of despondency, while the masses are becoming completely demoralized. . . . The German Republic stands in great danger of being swept by hunger revolutions, plundering and confiscation of property; it is threatened with economic and political chaos, followed by brutal reaction.[17]

Langdon Mitchell reported a people "on short ration, mentally distressed, and living from hand to mouth; a people terribly shattered, terribly demoralized".[18] An account in a Berlin newspaper describes the day to day reality of the rampant inflation:

> It pounds daily on the nerves: the insanity of numbers, the uncertain future, today, and tomorrow become doubtful once more overnight. An epidemic of fear, naked need: lines of shoppers, long since an unaccustomed sight, once more form in front of shops, first in front of one, then in front of all.[19]

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[14]Louis L. Snyder, *The Weimar Republic: A History of Germany from Ebert to Hitler* (Princeton: Van Nostrand, 1966), 51-53.

[15]Ibid., 53-54.

[16]Ibid.

[17]George Brandes, "Germany Today," *New Republic* (11 November 1922): 88.

[18]Langdon Mitchell, "Germany," *Atlantic Monthly* (April 1923): 541.

[19]Friedrich Kroner, "Überreizte Nerven," *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, 26 August 1923, quoted in Kaes, Jay, and Dimendberg, 63.

In his autobiography, Leo Lania calls the winter of 1922 "days of madness."[20]

> In those months the people of Berlin did not sleep well. Fear of the uncertain kept them awake, no one could stay at home. It was a mood of paralysis combined with unrest: you were dead tired and at the same time wide awake. All human relations were dissolved, life had become an incomprehensible muddle of numbers, and no one had the strength left to figure out their meaning.[21]

The situation spawned debilitating political splintering as well in the already fragile Weimar Republic. The founding assembly of the Weimar Republic, in office as Beckmann painted *Trapeze*, contained representatives from five major parties as well as an assortment of independents and lesser parties.[22] Among the many small extremist parties that arose was the infant National Socialist German Workers Party, whose founder Adolph Hitler led its infamous "Beer Hall Putsch" against the republic the year *Trapeze* was completed.[23] Since the war's end Germany had endured revolutions, coup attempts and assassinations.[24] One writer of the time documented 376 politically motivated murders in the republic between 1918 and 1922, mostly committed by the right.[25]

To a certain extent, *Trapeze* is a metaphor for the disorder of 1920s

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[20]Leo Lania, *Today We Are Brothers: The Biography of a Generation* (Houghton Mifflin Co., 1942), 211.

[21]Ibid., 215.

[22]Snyder, 34.

[23]Ibid., 57-59.

[24]Ibid., chaps. 2,3 and 5.

[25]Emil Julius Gumbel, *Vier Jahre politischer Mord* (Berlin: Verlag der neuen Gesellschaft, 1922), quoted in Kaes, Jay and Dimendberg, 101.

German society. Instead ofa dazzling, energetic display of agility and movement, Beckmann shows us acrobats in a configuration too confining for their performance. Their expressions are sad and beleagured, and they seem to take no notice of each other. Rather than cheerful cohesion, we see disillusion and disjunction. In this sense, then, the painting may reflect the Weimar Republic.

The critics of Beckmann's day focused on the *zeitgeist* in his work more commonly than do recent authors. This is the simplest approach, to see the postwar paintings as mirrors of the turbulent Weimar Republic. Since the 1950s, critics primarily examine Beckmann's philosophical and religious sources and their purpose in the works, though most acknowledge some degree of social commentary as well. Charles S. Kessler, for example, analyzes only Beckmann's triptychs, of which the earliest is 1933, but refers to the carnival pictures of the 1920s, including *Trapeze*, as "satirical commentaries on a time out of joint."[26] Peter Selz notes the artist "certainly engaged in social criticism" in the postwar years, but tells us Beckmann's personal symbolism takes the pictures "far beyond Verist reportage and social comment."[27] Hans Belting writes that Beckmann holds a mirror to Weimar society, directly at first and then in circus and theater metaphor.[28] The most direct statement is made by Friedhelm Fischer:

> Around 1918/19 protest is an essential motivating force behind Max Beckmann's art. This protest does not, however, refer to any sort of social or political circumstances, it sets itself against God and is therefore characterized as a

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[26]Kessler, 3, 67.

[27]Peter Selz, *Max Beckmann* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1964), 39.

[28]Belting, 59.

religious phenomenon.[29]

Beckmann did have a political awareness as well as a sensitivity to the plight of people around him. In 1920 he contributed to "Creative Credo," a collection of essays in which contemporary artists explained their purpose and motivation. In one excerpt, Beckmann demonstrates concern for the state of affairs in Germany:

> We are most certainly facing a difficult time. Yet right now I have the urge even more than before the war to remain in society. In the city. Right here is our place now. We must share in all the suffering that will come. We must abandon our heart and nerves to the horrifying cries of pain of poor, deceived humanity.[30]

On Beckmann's political awareness, Hausenstein wrote in 1924,

> It should be explained here, that Beckmann is a kind of political radical. He believes in socialism. He believes in progress through socialism. . . . About these perspectives we used to argue in a friendly way by twos, threes, fours.[31]

We must note, however, Beckmann's opening declaration in his 1938 lecture at the New Burlington Galleries in London: "I would like to emphasize that I have never been politically active in any way."[32] There is little in his biography to indicate otherwise was true of the artist's life. This does not preclude, however, the contemporary political situation as a subject for his art.

The 1919 graphic portfolio, *Hell*, for example, has contemporary social and political subjects. *Martyrdom* (Figure 2) portrays the January assassination of Rosa

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[29]Fischer, 19.

[30]Beckmann, "Schöpferische Konfession," 63-64.

[31]Hausenstein, "Max Beckmann," 30.

[32]Beckmann, "On My Painting," in Stephen Lackner, *Max Beckmann: Memories of a Friendship* (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press), 45.

Luxemberg, leader of the Marxist revolutionary "Sparticists." Beckmann positions her body to suggest the Deposition of Christ. *The Holdouts* (Figure 3) shows partisans of the failed Sparatacist revolt still waging a gun battle from their loft, while in *The Ideologues* (Figure 4) leading leftist thinkers hold an imaginary meeting.[33] Barbara Buenger has convincingly identified these figures as, among others, Max Herrmann-Neiße, the leading Weimar Republic theater critic, who wrote Marxist pamphlets in 1919; pacifist writer Annette Kolb; art critic Carl Einstein, arrested briefly for supporting the Sparticists; and novelist Heinrich Mann, who supported socialist revolutionary causes but preferred above all a revolution of *geist*.[34]

Focusing more on social conditions, the print *Hunger* (Figure 5) movingly portrays a starving family saying grace over a single bowl of food. Both *The Way Home* (Figure 6) and *The Street* (Figure 7) feature severely handicapped war veterans begging, a topic that other artists such as Grosz and Dix covered with brutal directness.

In form, the compostion of *Trapeze* can be seen as a metaphor for the political instability and social alienation of early 1920s Germany. Beckmann places his figures in stifling proximity to each other, yet there is no emotional contact between them at all. Not one of these melancholy characters looks at another. It is as if they are trapped in their own individual realities, reminding us of Lania's observation that

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[33]From December 1918 to January 1919, a number of armed conflicts took place in the streets of Berlin between the Sparticists and government troops, which included ad-hoc *freikorps* composed of displaced WW I veterans and the unemployed. Many *freikorps* participants later became Nazi storm troopers. See Snyder, 28-32.

[34]Barbara Buenger, "Max Beckmann's *Ideologues*: Some Forgotten Faces," *Art Bulletin* 71 (September, 1989): 453-479.

"all human relations were dissolved." Certainly the "mood of paralysis" Lania describes is an apt characterization of *Trapeze*. A number of Beckmann's paintings from these years exhibit claustrophobic gatherings of figures in cramped picture fields, such as *The Night* (Figure 8) *Carnival* (Figure 9), *The Dream* (Figure 10), and *Dance in Baden-Baden* (Figure 11). As in *Trapeze*, no figure in these paintings meets the gaze of another, but instead looks off into a space beyond the picture frame.[35]

The physiognomy of *Trapeze*'s figures, as well, seems perfectly captured in Mitchell's observation of Germany in 1922 that "apart from profiteers, the people on the street looked either anxious, or sour and embittered, or listless, or abstracted, or in a dull despair."[36]

The paralysis of *Trapeze*'s acrobats may also suggest the infant German Republic's chaotic political environment of revolutions, putsches and assassinations. A passage in *Living Age* from 1922 observes:

> The difficulty of making a living, the instability of values and with them of moral standards, the distress begotten of defeat and revolution have made every German the competitor, the adversary, and almost the enemy of every other German. We encounter this trait in domestic politics, where it is very marked. It also manifests itself prominently in all community relations. . . . Every man goes his own way.[37]

The Weimar Republic critics, on whom the conditions of the day were not lost, believed Beckmann's work mirrored the contemporary situation to some degree. In 1923, Paul F. Schmidt's article on the artist's recent etchings referred to "the

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[35]See also the 1922 lithograph, *The Theater Foyer*, from *Berliner Reise*.

[36]Mitchell, 540.

[37]"A Staggering Civilization," *Le Correspondant*, 10 April 1922, quoted in *The Living Age* (27 May 1922): 521.

enormous anguish of our times."[38] Hermann Eßwein wrote, "And one does not forget this unbelievable, raving, nerve-racking reality of the present-day impossibility, the present-day absurdity, when one examines Beckmann's art with its fanatic rationalism of the irrational."[39] To Julius Meier-Graefe, Beckmann was the perfect symbol of postwar Berlin. He calls Berlin a "public toilet," whose art scene is founded on its citizens' "lewdness and oppression," which Beckmann does not hesitate to show.[40] In contrast to pre-war avant-garde notions of a spiritually rejuvenating Armageddon, Meier-Graefe decides that to find hope for the future Germany must "actively rot." Berlin contains the right "toxins," and Beckmann "breeds them with destiny and circumspection."[41] According to Beckmann's friend Stephen Lackner, during the "Roaring Twenties" the artist himself said that he wanted to be "a child of his time."[42]

Contemporary critics noted the emotional isolation characterizing Beckmann's figures during this period, as when in the 1924 monograph Wilhelm Fraenger described Beckmann's painting *The Dream* as "a spiritual space of quite purely imaginary strivings, of which each is so restricted to itself and connected so

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[38]Paul F. Schmidt, "Neue Graphik von Max Beckmann," *Jahrbuch der jungen Kunst* (1923): 411.

[39]Hermann Eßwein, "Max Beckmann," *Der neue Merkur* 7 (October 1923-March 1924): 326.

[40]Julius Meier-Graefe, "Max Beckmann." In Wilhelm Fraenger, et al., *Max Beckmann* (Munich: Piper Verlag, 1924), 27-8.

[41]Ibid., 28.

[42]Stephen Lackner, *Max Beckmann: Memories of a Friendship* (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1969), 35-36.

solely to itself, that it passes by ghostlike [vorüberspenstet] in its deepest lack of inner relationship to the neighboring dream."[43] Although he does not refer specifically to *Trapeze*, Rom Landau writes in an essay of 1925, for which *Trapeze* is the only illustration,

> Beckmann's people are completely alone and brought together as if by accident. Held together not by their common life, but merely by the space in which they stand and their outward way. . . . His acrobats and artistes, his carnival players and dancers, his drunken ones and those rooted in family are torn out of all human relationship. The same canvas holds them together. Purely and simply the canvas.[44]

Of Beckmann's tall, narrow compositions, the cirtic Julius Meier-Graefe observed, "The narrowness of the box moved the faces obliquely, bent the limbs. The crowded-together objects made friends with each other by force, dialogued, slept together, murdered themselves."[45] Glaser felt Beckmann's art "affirms every dissension and every disharmony of the grim present."[46]

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[43]Wilhelm Fraenger, "Max Beckmann: *Der Traum*: ein Beitrag zur Physiognomik des Grotesken," in Fraenger et al., 42.

[44]Rom Landau, "Max Beckmann," in *Der Unbestechliche Minos: Kritik an der Zeitkunst* (Hamburg: Harder Verlag, 1925), 61.

[45]Julius Meier-Graefe, "Max Beckmann," in Fraenger et al., 30.

[46]Curt Glaser, "Max Beckmann," *Kunst und Künstler* 21 (August 1923): 313.

Chapter 2

"TRAPEZE" IN THE CONTEXT OF WEIMAR REPUBLIC CULTURE

Varieté

It is probable, then, that this petrified, disconsolate, emotionally unengaged troupe of acrobats reflects in part the confused and shattered postwar German social structure. If we look at the setting of *Trapeze*, a form of stage entertainment that flourished in Germany in the 1920s known as *varieté*, we find another analogy to the troubled times.

In 1920, there were 298 varietés in 147 German cities.[47] Varieté grew out of the circus in the nineteenth century and was, during the 1920s, very much akin to cabaret and vaudeville. Varieté shows could take place in large halls or in nightclub settings with food and drink served at tables.[48] There were also seasonal outdoor varietés. A succession of short acts averaging seven minutes each was the general format, and a typical two or three hour evening might include comics, singers,

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[47]Ernst Günther, *Geschichte des Varietés* (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1978), 141. General information on varieté comes from Günther's book.

[48]Such an example of varieté is seen in Beckmann's etching *Nude Dance* from the *Berliner Reise* portfolio of 1922. Female nudity became prolific in the mid-1920s varieté shows.

dancing girls, dance couples and groups, magicians, animal tamers, and riders (where there was room). Occasionally one would see displays of curious human phenomena, scientific experiments or wonders of nature. Always, though, there were circus-type acts, and especially acrobatic troupes. Hermann-Neiße sums up varieté in a 1922 article, published the very month Beckmann began *Trapeze*. He describes the Oriots troupe as "a comic acrobatic act which contains everything the ideal varieté number should have: movement, the most brisk tempo, exuberance, a slight erotic thrill and high acrobatic ability."[49] The scene Beckmann painted could hardly contrast Hermann-Neiße's observations more completely.

Ernst Günther observes that "the rushing succession of numbers was often characterized as 'an expression of the spirit of the times'," and a number of accounts from the period verify this.[50] "Rarely," wrote Fred A. Colman in 1928, "has a time been so inspired by the world of the varieté, by the varieté impulse, like that of ours."[51] At the turn of the century, Ernst von Wolzogen found in vaudeville "a sign of our nervous, precipitate age," and O. J. Bierbaum complained in 1901 that

> the contemporary city-dweller has vaudeville nerves; he seldom has the capacity of following great dramatic continuities, of tuning his senses to the same tone for three hours. He desires diversity--Varieté.[52]

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[49]Max Hermann-Neiße, *Kabarett: Schriften zum Kabarett und zur bildende Kunst* (Frankfurt am Main: Zweitausendeins, 1988), 128.

[50]Ibid., 135.

[51]Quoted in Günther, 11.

[52]Ernst von Wolzogen, *Vossische Zeitung*, 31 October 1900, quoted in Peter Jelavich, *Berlin Cabaret* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 24; Otto Julius Bierbaum, ed., *Deutsche Chansons (Bretl-Lieder)*, 3d ed. (Berlin, 1901), xi-xii, quoted in Jelavich, 24.

Understanding varieté to comprise dazzling stimulation at a frenetic pace, Beckmann's depiction exudes a sense of things gone terribly awry. If the fast-paced, vivacious varieté symbolizes the Golden Twenties, Beckmann makes an ironic statement--what has gone awry is below the glittering surface. We will explore this aspect of the painting further ahead in the essay.

Circus and Varieté Motifs in German Art

Circus, cabaret and varieté motifs have played a significant role in modern German art. This was so before World War I, and again during the 1920s.

Perhaps the best-known circus and cabaret paintings in German art come from the ***Brücke*** artists. Jill Lloyd demonstrates that these entertainments were important sources for, as well as vehicles of, the ***Brücke*** Expressionists' concepts of the primitive. In the winter of 1908-09, three founders of ***Die Brücke***, Ludwig Kirchner, Max Pechstein and Erich Heckel, exchanged numerous postcards on which they depicted visits to circuses, cabarets and varietés in Dresden, Hamburg and Berlin (Figures 12, 13).[53] The nightspots and the circuses presented a variety of acts allegedly from India, China, Senegal, and Indonesia, among other places. Many of these non-European acts were depicted on the ***Brücke*** postcards, as well as in paintings such as Kirchner's ***Panama Girls*** (Figure 14) of 1910.

Besides presenting non-Western cultures, however dubiously, the varieté

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[53]Jill Lloyd, ***German Expressionism: Primitivism and Modernity*** (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 87.

and cabaret genre offered a certain immediacy, sexual abandon, and primal energy (recall Hermann-Neiße's allusion to "a slight erotic thrill"). Especially when embodied in so-called "exotic" acts with sexual overtones, such as belly-dancers, snake-handlers and apache dancers, *Die Brücke*'s ethos of the primitive and non-rational was near-literally brought to life.

Lloyd also suggests that Kirchner used the cabaret and varieté motifs as signs of his commitment to modernity. As mentioned, cabaret and varieté had come to symbolize a certain pace of living, an engagement with the rush and excitement of the pre-war German city. Thus a painting like *Panama Girls* mixes emphatic urban modernity with a primitivist spirit.

Several Weimar Republic artists as well, although not necessarily part of the Expressionist movement, took the circus, cabaret, and other urban entertainment for their subjects. Their motivations, however, were diverse.

Paul Kleinschmidt (1883-1949) was described in the mid-1920s as an "ardent visitor of concert cafés and night cabarets."[54] There he painted women with unvaryingly robust and buxom figures, either as patrons or as performers behind the scenes. *Dressing Room* (Figure 15) and *Theater Dressing Room* (Figure 16) typify what Barbara Lipps-Kant regards as Kleinschmidt's fascination for the "dazzling, dubious atmosphere" of performers' dressing rooms.[55] The circus provided Kleinschmidt with a similar subject matter. In 1926 and 1927, he spent time with the

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[54]Barbara Lipps-Kant, *Paul Kleinschmidt: 1883-1949* (Ph.D. diss., Universität Tübingen, 1974), 61.

[55]Ibid., 55.

Busch Circus, painting and sketching both performances and backstage scenes. From this association emerged a series of circus rider portrayals, including both the "large" and "small" *Female Circus Rider* (Figures 17, 18).

Lipps-Kant and Ernst Schremmer, another of Kleinschmidt's biographers, disagree on some points regarding the artist's intentions in the nightspot paintings. Schremmer detects no social critique, and only rarely satire or caricature.[56] Instead, Schremmer believes the artist simply displays a feel for the superficial conviviality of 1920s Berlin.[57] By contrast, Lipps-Kant feels Kleinschmidt wanted to "unmask the racketeers and the war profiteers, wanted to show the subversion of life."[58] *Coffee Concert* (Figure 19) of 1925 is typical of these nightclub pictures; Lipps-Kant believes the men in many such scenes are gangsters with their girlfriends. In partial agreement with Schremmer, she also considers the paintings "records of the environment" and "artistic witnesses with the character of period documents."[59] She compares Kleinschmidt to Dix and Grosz in this regard, though Kleinschmidt hardly treats his jolly nightclubbers with Grosz's uncompromising vilification, or Dix's vapid amorality.

In her dissertation, Lipps-Kant contrasts Kleinschmidt's circus paintings

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[56]Ernst Schremmer, ". . . und zwingt sie, schön zu sein: der Maler Paul Kleinschmidt," in *Paul Kleinschmidt: 1883-1949: Gemälde, Aquarelle, Zeichnungen, und Druckgraphik* (Stuttgart: Galerie der Stadt Stuttgart, 1983), 43-44.

[57]Ibid.

[58]Lipps-Kant, "Wer ist Paul Kleinschmidt?" In *Paul Kleinschmidt: 1883-1949* (Ulm: Ulmer Museum, 1978), 14.

[59]Ibid., 22.

with the title page of Beckmann's *Yearly Fair* portfolio, *The Barker* (Figure 20). Beckmann, she says, uses the carnival barker persona, and the circus motif generally, for "self- and social-critical reflections.

> Paul Kleinschmidt's view is completely different. He does not endeavor to take stock of himself. Nor does the meaning of life appear to be questioned. He is impressed with the power of clustered physicality and the force of the movement. He brings both into view together in heightened form.[60]

Whether he painted the circus or Berlin nightlife, however, the true raison d'être of Kleinschmidt's paintings were his sculptural, athletic, and buxom women. Both Schremmer and Lipps-Kant point out Kleinschmidt's emphasis on his female figures' "physicality" or "substantiality" [Körperlichkeit].[61] It is Schremmer's contention that these women depict Kleinschmidt's ideal of beauty, "measured against the appearance of his mother and of his wife."[62]

Similarly to Kirchner and the *Brücke* Expressionists, Georg Tappert (1880-1957) used the varieté motif to evoke the pulse and atmosphere of modern city life. In the opinion of his most recent biographer, Georg Wietek, Tappert's pre-war varieté paintings, such as *Can-Can* (Figure 21) and *Two Female Dancers* (Figure 22) utilized contrast and repetition to mimic the insistent rhythms of the new jazz music.[63] In 1924, Paul Glaser had likewise compared Beckmann's paintings, in his review of the Berlin exhibit that included *Trapeze*, to contemporary jazz. He called Beckmann "this

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[60]Lipps-Kant, *Kleinschmidt*, 69.

[61]Lipps-Kant, *Kleinschmidt*, 69; Schremmer, 42, 47.

[62]Schremmer, 47-48.

[63]Gerhard Wietek, *Georg Tappert: 1880-1957: Ein Wegbereiter der deutschen Moderne* (Munich: Verlag Karl Thiemig, 1980), 38.

artist with the blare of the jazz band shrilling in his ears."[64] Contrasting Beckmann's new postwar style and realistic subject matter with his earlier Romantic, historical style, Glaser said the Berlin pieces contain "something from those new sounds that arise in the music of our day, in which the artistic form would seemingly be found in the noise itself, and perhaps it is no accident that a shrill uproar is executed in Beckmann's pictures with wind instruments. Now that we have the jazz band, a Vienna waltz is a sentimental lie."[65]

Following the war, Tappert, like Kleinschmidt, took long expeditions through the cafés and nightspots of Berlin. He thus continued his varieté genre, painting many subjects behind the scenes in those venues, as Wietek tells us, with an "unfeigned and unveiled glance (63)." Wietek also observes in these later works a "deeply rooted compassion and sympathy for the human creature," as in *The Negress Nyassa with Conch Shell* (Figure 23) and *Young Woman Acrobat*, both of the late 1920s (63).

It is Wietek's opinion that during this period Tappert used the clown figure, many of which appear to be unacknowledged self-portraits of the artist, as an embodiment of human tragedy. In 1928, Tappert befriended the famous acrobatic family, the Fratinellis, and Wietek speculates that Tappert's paintings of the family in action represent "both a human and an artistic overcoming of resignation (63)."

Carnival, Harlequin and Pierrot, and the circus were frequent motifs in

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[64]Paul Glaser, "Beckmann: zu der Ausstellung bei Paul Cassirer," *Berliner Börsen-Courier*, 6 January 1924.

[65]Ibid.

Karl Hofer's (1878-1955) paintings of the 1920s. Harlequin and Pierrot have a long history of representing the dichotomy between one's outer "performance" and their true (usually doleful) inner life. As with Beckmann, these figures further represent for Hofer the artist's special license, whether it be to dispense wisdom or express one's guarded inner life. Ida Katherine Rigby relates that the artist's friends characterized Hofer as "a taciturn, proper, brittle man whose face never betrayed an emotion . . ."[66] Hofer's masked Harlequin figures, as in *The Brothers* (Figure 25), expressed freely for Hofer his inner feelings.

Similarly, Jürgen Schilling believes the carnival pictures signify "the ideal proximity of artist and fool."[67] As Margot Clark points out, the fool traditionally "was adjudged to have clairvoyant abilities, and he had the privilege of being allowed to tell his so-called lord the truth with impunity."[68] This is the role Clark believes Beckmann plays in *Self-Portrait as a Clown* (Figure 26), the artist who possesses higher knowledge and sensitivity than ordinary men, who imparts hard, tragic truths to humanity. Matthias Eberle analyzes Hofer's painting of 1921, *Circus People* (Figure 27), linking it to Hofer's continual unsettledness between Expressionist currents and

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[66]Ida Katherine Rigby, *Karl Hofer* (New York: Garland, 1976), 122.

[67]Jürgen Schilling, *Karl Hofer*, (Unna: Unna Kreise, 1991), 15.

[68]Margot Clark, "Beckmann's Abbilder des metaphysischen 'Selbst'." In *Max Beckmann: Frankfurt 1915-1933: Eine Ausstellung zum 100. Geburtstag*, ed. Klaus Gallwitz (Frankfurt am Main: Städische Galerie im Städelschen Kunstinstitut, 1983), 37.

Classicism.[69] In the painting, the muscular acrobat eyes Columbine, the dancer, longingly. But Pierrot pushes him away with one hand while pulling Columbine to him with the other. The ball and flowers on Columbine's side of the stage, according to Eberle, represent play and beauty, while the various apparatus around the acrobat indicate dexterity and agility. Eberle simply writes, "The composition is indeed a metaphor, a simile of the position of Pierrot (the artist) between the overcoming of reality (acrobat), and love and play (female dancer)."[70] To expand on this remark, love, play and beauty would represent the passionate approach of Expressionism, while the acrobat stands for disciplined classicism, grounded in controlled depiction of nature. Pierrot, as the artistic persona, is denying Hofer's conservative, academic tendency the free reign of the Expressionist style. Thus Pierrot is not so much coveting Columbine as shutting her away from the acrobat, protecting him from temptation. On a more personal level, if Hofer is indeed so reserved and inhibited, and if masked Pierrot figures allow Hofer deeper psychological expression, this might explain Pierrot's unabashed pursuit of Columbine, at the acrobat's expense. In either case, the irony is that Hofer uses so traditional a motif, in a Cubist-Neoclassical style, to seemingly lament his own lack of spontanaeity. Like Beckmann, then, Hofer used the carnival and circus realm for personal exploration.

Hofer also painted cabaret and jazz club scenes, such as *Tiller Girls*

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[69]Matthias Eberle, "Neue Wirklichkeit, Surrealismus und Neue Sachlichkeit." In *Tendenzen der Zwanzingen Jahre* (Berlin: Dietrich Reiner Verlag, 1977), 131. Eberle even suggests this was one source of Hofer's melancholy, a melancholy Rigby calls "congenital" (130).

[70]Ibid.

(Figure 28) of 1923, as well as patrons in loges at the ballet, opera and theater. Rigby declares these scenes "entirely different" from the work of *Die Brücke*, as well as of Dix and Grosz.[71] Rather, she compares his interest in these bourgeois entertainments to that of the Impressionist and Post-Impressionists--not, then, as satire or social criticism. In Adolf Jannasch's 1946 description of Hofer's nightclub scenes the relationship to comtemporary jazz is once again raised, as other critics have done with Tappert and Beckmann: ". . . the syncopes of the jazz orchestra solidify into period documents, become frozen music, the dancing girls of the night cabarets remain like enchanted puppets in the parallelism of their rhythm, . . ."[72]

All these German artists, then, used the varieté and related venues as icons of frenetic and disjointed modern German urban life. With the apparent exception of Kleinschmidt, they also used carnival and circus motifs to explore deeper human issues. In many of these works, and certainly in *Trapeze*, the varieté provided the artist both worlds: something of the circus, with its rich and time-honored potential for symbol and metaphor, along with a thoroughly modern setting.

Art Criticism during the Weimar Republic

German art criticism during the Weimar Republic was often an impassioned affair. Following the devastating world war, many critics ecstatically

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[71]Rigby, 147.

[72]Adolf Jannasch, *Karl Hofer* (Postsdam: E. Stichnote, 1946), 13, quoted in Schilling, 15.

proclaimed the new artistic generation's role in creating a millenium of world community. There was also no lack of conviction as to what constituted truly German art. Such art was passionate, touched by suffering, and grounded in objective reality. Critics often contrasted this vigorous German art with what they disdained as the effete intellectualism of the French. Occasionally one even detects fertile soil for Naziism in this criticism, both groups sharing heartfelt concepts of a superior "Northern" spirit that runs in German blood. But whether running to extremes or taking a more level approach, whether praising or deprecating his work, the majority of critics found Max Beckmann to be authentically German.

As noted earlier, Beckmann's critics who wrote under the Weimar Republic tended to see him as a chronicler of his times more than have recent scholars. Doubtless Beckmann's images had more impact on those living the reality of postwar Germany. Moreover, contemporary artists like Grosz and Dix, as well as John Heartfield and the Dadaists, actively engaged in social satire. Many critics discerned in Beckmann a meeting of contemporary realism and more transcendent concerns. "Beckmann's art is a coming-to-terms with the world and with life. . . .," declared Georg Swarzenski in 1927.

> It is so emphatically current that its emergence is only conceivable today, and yet has already begun to envelop a worldview which stands so solidly between past and present that it must be felt as an enduring existence, and is convincing as to its absolute reality.[73]

Much of his essay--written when Beckmann's style was at its most economical, and his objects their most corporeal--elucidates the organic quality the artist imparts to

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[73]Georg Swarzenski, "Um Max Beckmann," *Das neue Frankfurt* 1, no. 4 (1924): 81.

those objects, implying a hidden content. Beckmann's objects and people, Swarzenski wrote, have become "bearer, theater and playground of life" and "embodiments of hidden and visible humanity."[74] In the same year, in the first English language essay published on Beckmann, the painter Adolph Glassgold said the graphic portfolios reflected Germany's postwar tragedy. But instead of pointing at any one group, wrote Glassgold, Beckmann "sees inhumanity as the tragedy of existence. . . . He interprets his '*zeit*' with material found in the very depths of his being."[75] Heinrich Simon praised Beckmann's *Hell* portfolio for showing that "the connections between overall events and the individual soul . . . is also secretly discernible in that which is unconscious in existence."[76]

Simon believed that now more than ever, artists must wrestle with their souls and not turn away from events around them. "The pretty cover is shed and underneath lies a body ravaged from lack, sickness and wounds," he writes of Germany, and the artist must not be detached. Instead he should resolve his inner spiritual conflicts and exhibit "a new ecstasy of the soul" in his art.[77] Such a challenge echoes Beckmann's call of 1920 to "abandon our heart and nerves to the horrifying cries of pain of poor, deceived humanity," in order to give them a "picture

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[74]Ibid., 84.

[75]Adolph C. Glassgold, "Max Beckmann," *The Arts* 11, no. 5 (May 1927): 243-44.

[76]Heinrich Simon, "Max Beckmann," *Das Kunstblatt* 3 (September, 1919): 258-60.

[77]Simon, "Max Beckmann," 258.

of its fate."[78]

As the early postwar years progressed, Beckmann's art indeed became less and less directly about "general events"; much more, it was founded on humanity's, and the artist's own, struggle to find meaning. "One cannot doubt that today's art is an indispensable expression of our spiritual condition," opens Schmidt's essay of 1919 on Beckmann.[79] Schmidt spends much time on *The Night*, surely Beckmann's most powerful work from the early postwar period. *The Night* illustrates the critic's belief that "the true artist is a prophet of his times and not 'topical'; his art arises from deeper and truly religious layers of the social consciousness."[80] Of this work, Schmidt wrote,

> We look through the horror of the proceedings as through the veil of Maja into the tragedy of life itself; into that which is confused and insolvable in a state of affairs, which means war in the broadest sense, war of the living and of the material, madness and derangement of the spirit and hopeless suffering of all creatures. Not that men are being killed here is the horror, but rather that there is murder and pain, that life is not a paradise but rather a senselessness and a mass of tortures of every kind.[81]

Concurrently with Beckmann's own inner search, a preoccupation with the modern artist as priest and evangelist of a spiritual rebirth developed in German criticism. This same thread ran through European avant-garde art generally, of course--but it was a time of diverse and perhaps a desperate religious seeking in Germany, and surely critics were sensitive to metaphysical currents in art. The flame still burned

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[78]Beckmann, *Schöpferische Konfession*, 63.

[79]Paul F. Schmidt, "Max Beckmann," *Der Cicerone* 11 (31 October 1919): 675.

[80]Ibid., 684.

[81]Ibid., 683.

in modern art to lead mankind to a new heaven and a new earth.

Schmidt exemplified this attitude. His essay of 1924, "The Art of Our Time," is largely an apologia for the often disturbing trend in German contemporary art. Today's artists, proclaimed Schimidt, are heroes, struggling for salvation, for a new spiritual path for humanity. The art appears as "blasphemy" only to those who don't understand, who don't share the vision. Schmidt was rhapsodic concerning the heroic artist: "The sacrifice of an individual's life weighs lightly when the mission is the revelation of a worldview; regarding the suffering of all creation, these great souls deliver themselves up to all trial, and this with joy, with the conviction of martyrs."[82] In 1922, in his essay, "The New Religion of the Artistic Youth," Paul Küppers appeared to be more mystic than art critic. Also extolling the young postwar generation, who "build monuments to the new faith," he insisted art must evidence "the experiencing of the religious."[83] In nearly Biblical language, he wrote, "Whoever does not believe in this new religiosity, from them will the deep heart of this artistic movement remain forever hidden. What can the unbeliever say about the prayer of the believer?"[84] As with many artists and critics alike, "prayer" is an apt word--Küppers, too, saw the new art as an heroic journey to spiritual salvation, "an expression of human longings and hopes," and, "milestones on the path to God."[85]

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[82]Schmidt, "Die Kunst unserer Tage," *Jahrbuch der jungen Kunst* (1924), 356.

[83]Paul Erich Küppers, "Die neue Religion der künstlerischen Jugend," *Jahrbuch der jungen Kunst* (1922), 259.

[84]Ibid., 260.

[85]Ibid., 260, 263.

Georg Biermann was the most ecstatic of all. He assumed that art reveals the underlying spiritual currents of society, and recognized that the contemporary art, of *Trapeze*'s time, sought to show the way to a new ideal society and personhood.[86] His aspirations for art bespoke the avant-garde's optimism and sense of mission in the century's first quarter:

> Here is the postulate of the new youth, here flames the torch of the future with strong hope, into the night of a present harnessed in gloomy doubt. Here for the first time we sense clearly that community of European spirit, in which--contemptuous of the petty acts of day to day politics--the wish for ultimate human creed manifests itself. In the pictures of the new art we experience the new man, . . ."[87]

Biermann ended by comparing the day's artists to evangelists and apostles whose challenge was to bring the new artistic consciousness to the general public.[88]

How extraordinary these passionate visions of world community were, arising as they did out of humiliated Germany, a country that in many quarters still raged--eventually with catastrophic results--over the terms of the Versailles peace. In Schmidt's case, even as he wrote, the French had invaded the Ruhr district on the slimmest of premises.

Though the alleged new spiritual currents in art and society appear to have enthralled Küppers as much as Biermann and Schmidt, Küppers also desired a measure of reality and control. His ideal art exhibited a balance of "logos" and "eros". He found Chagall to be an outstanding alchemist of logos and eros: "Here is heart and

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[86]Georg Biermann, "Kunstwende: Die neue Kunst al soziologisch-psychologisches Problem," *Jahrbuch der jungen Kunst* (1921), 281.

[87]Ibid.

[88]Ibid., 288.

brain, flesh and spirit, animalistic and godly."[89] He admired Chagall's combination of ecstatic color and disciplined "concreteness." These remarks are a bridge to those German critics who admired Max Beckmann's unrepentant devotion to nature and objectivity.

In his review of the Berlin exhibition in 1924 that included *Trapeze*, for example, Paul Glaser described Beckmann's "clarity in space, objectivity of representation, cruel sobriety of hard contours."[90] In a mostly disdainful essay, the conservative and highly respected critic Meier-Graefe applauded the "iron discipline" evidenced in Beckmann's concrete form.[91] "After the heavenly fiction of a merely aesthetic painting," he wrote, probably referring to Kandinsky, among others, "we need such of Beckmann's, completely abstained from it, that the fiction might be continued, but without the heavenly." In his history of modern painting, Meier-Graefe criticized Expressionism's "fiction" generally: "That which was dubious about the blood-rich art of the last generation was its loss of the fact. Over painting, reality came to grief."[92] Swarzenski acclaimed Beckmann's "substance," that the people and objects form a "pictorial totality whose construction is felt monumentally."[93] Beckmann does not operate in the realm of the intellect, of aestheticism, but rather

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[89]Küppers, 256.

[90]P. Glaser.

[91]Meier-Graefe, "Max Beckmann," in Fraenger et al, 32.

[92]Meier-Graefe, *Die Kunst unserer Tage: Von Cézanne bis heute* (Munich: Piper Verlag, 1927), 678. Emphasis added.

[93]Swarzenski, 84.

possesses "the categorical will and compulsion to fashion the chaos into form."[94] Beckmann seemed to strike precisely the right balance for Swarzenski between *geist* and *sinn*, conveying potent meditation on the human condition, and perhaps something transmundane, while remaining rooted in nature and objectivity. By comparison, Swarzenski found Expressionism "undisciplined," abstraction and Cubism "playful," New Objectivity "boring and illustrative."[95]

Admiration for Beckmann's combination of a figurative style with transcendent content ran deeper than mere aesthetic rifts between Classicist and Expressionist advocates. Beckmann's critics awarded him their most passionate and prolific approval based on his unimpeachable *Germanness*. Numerous essays took up the debate between French and German art, seeing the two as fundamentally opposed. The arguments frequently described national psyches and spirits, even using the term "blood"--also a favorite of the National Socialists. Even the relatively conservative critics exalted nature, suffering, passion and spirit over the precious intellectual contrivances of the French. Paradoxically, these notions infused the very essays which celebrated the new art's role in realizing the coming universal brotherhood.

"If I imagine today a specific German art, it is called Beckmann."[96] So pronounced Wilhelm Hausenstein, with Meier-Graefe the period's most respected art critic. Hausenstein defined German art with conviction, contrasting the "Gothic" and "Romanic [*sic*]" sensibilities. While acknowledging that the Gothic originated in

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[94]Ibid.

[95]Ibid., 85.

[96]Hausenstein, "Max Beckmann," 69.

France, he nevertheless maintained that that which truly *appears* Gothic opposes the mindset of "the Romanic nations": "The Gothic genius actually won its identity specifically in the German spirit," he wrote.[97] Classicism is innate to the French, he believed, due to their Latin heritage. Both Cubism and the resurgent Neoclassicism in France (for example, André Derain) are content posing artistic problems for themselves to solve--thus indulging in a self-secure insularity. By contrast, "the problematic, the tormenting, is the Germans' portion."[98] Curt Glaser made a nearly identical statement: "It appears a fate of German art that it produces works of struggle, fulfills itself in the problematic, only rarely comes to peaceful tranquility, to idyllic peace and lovely self-indulgence in sensuous charm."[99] The true German art, according to Hausenstein, mixed objectivity and the metaphysical, mixed nature and passion. Such a mix is compulsive in the German spirit:

> It is most certain that the Gothic, at the same time an expressive and constructive notion, corresponds particularly to the genius of the Germans and, in this sense at least, is generated from the simultaneously exuberant and constructive mentality of the Germans. The crossing of excessiveness and construction is clearly, all too clearly, a German virtue--a German necessity.[100]

Meier-Graefe derided French Impressionism, rueing that school's "loss of the object"

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[97]Ibid.

[98]Hausenstein, "Zum Thema: Die Situation der Kunst," *Die neue Rundschau* 34 (March 1923), 223.

[99]Curt Glaser, "Max Beckmann," *Kunst und Künstler* 21, no. 11 (August 1923), 312.

[100]Hausenstein, "Max Beckmann," 70.

as well as its upholding of rationality over passion.[101] Schmidt similarly disdained Impressionism as "the artistic expression of a materialistic epoch."[102]

Schmidt, amidst his bright prophecies for the brave new world, argued German art's superiority over French with particular emotion. He continued of Impressionism that it was "a flower of a Romanic-French cultural form and completely and from the roots contrary to the German being."[103] French art comprised rules, order and convention. The French made "ephemeral, rarefied things of beauty" and "luxury articles of superior grade;" their concern was for "beautiful form" and "atelier problems."[104] German art, by contrast, was of heart and bones, of the here-and-now struggle and passion of real humanness. It was "a virulent rebellion against Romantic formalism."[105] Coming as they do from an art critic, Schmidt's fevered exaltations of artistic Germandom are remarkable even for the idealistic milieu of European modernism. "Germanic art," he argued,

> is not a matter of form and harmony, but a vessel of demonic will to expression, a means to release the soul from panic-stricken earthly and religious anxiety,. . . . Their rhythm is not the illustration of a pre-stabilized harmony, but a helpless doubt about the disharmony of the world, and thus a materialized chaos with the vain longing after order. Absolutely no Classicism and no Cubism satisfy such a wild urge for self-absorption into the cosmos (364).

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[101]Meier-Graefe, "Unsere Kunst nach dem Kriege," *Die neue Rundschau* 34 (May 1923), 397.

[102]Schmidt, "Die Kunst unserer Tage," 359.

[103]Ibid.

[104]Schmidt, "Neue Graphik von Max Beckmann," *Jahrbuch der jungen Kunst* (1923), 411.

[105]Schmidt, "Die Kunst unserer Tage," 360.

Schmidt maintained that a higher law embraces the German spirit than structured society's external, traditional, and learnable law--which is to say, "the closed unity of schools" found in French art. The Germanic spirit follows a calling "dangerous" and "rich," because "there is no measure for the experience of the soul (364). What of French art and the soul?--"The entire French development . . . bypasses every spiritual meaning and art of expression for formal problems (372)."

A final aspect of Schmidt's aesthetic completed Beckmann's qualification as a "most highly representative German."[106] A truly German art encompassed not only nature, but the present. It consisted of "the vile sin of the current; and an unpardonable barbarity of frankness, a fanaticism of truth which is very difficult for all the priests of pure painting to digest."[107] It was "in the highest sense a document of the times," concerned for "the incredible distress of our time."[108] The metaphysical willfully submitted to concrete nature, the turmoil of the modern world lifted up into the ageless realm of human passion, struggle, suffering and transcendence--many Weimar Republic critics saw this as German art, many saw this as Max Beckmann. Curt Glaser contrasted Beckmann with Matisse and "art for art's sake": the German sought not peace, but agitation; not "an objective picture of tranquil existence," but a "subjective expression of agitated fantasy . . . With all this

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[106]Schmidt, "Neue Graphik von Max Beckmann," 416.

[107]Ibid., 411.

[108]Ibid.

is Beckmann a German painter."[109] We recall Hausenstein's identification of Gothic and the German spirit; to Hausenstein the Gothic is "palpable," and "a given" in Beckmann. "The Gothic lives in him, is inherent in him; it declares in him its permanence . . . "[110] Hausenstein discussed contemporary German art's "chimeric" character, "the crossing of excessiveness and construction" referred to above. There was a "violent verism," a "torturing truthfulness of the objects," which then transform abruptly into the metaphysical. "Thus comes into being the chimeric of the German Gothic," he concluded, ". . . thus comes into being the chimeric of Beckmann's art."[111] Heinrich Simon focused on German art's "barbarity of frankness," to use Schmidt's term. "There is and was," he wrote, "to every time a German art that was looked at by the plentiful philistines in one's own and foreign lands as ugly, crude, crass, unnatural, violent.

> This unnatural art, which is therefore an art not remaining in the agreeable, but rather forging ahead toward the spiritual--this ugly, therefore desiring of truth, this crude and violent, therefore brave art, which does not shrink back in fear from the most difficult problems, is and will always be a singularly German art. Beckmann is in this sense a German painter.[112]

Some found Beckmann's supposedly relentless depiction of life's unpalatable side stiff and unconvincing. Meier-Graefe opened his essay in the monograph of 1924 with the declaration, "Beckmann is the new Berlin," and told us

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[109]C. Glaser, 313. Glaser is quick to make clear he does not mean this in a nationalistic sense.

[110]Hausenstein, "Max Beckmann," 69.

[111]Ibid., 70.

[112]Simon, 264.

that Beckmann was perfect for that city's decay.[113] He criticized the artist's postwar style, however, for being *too* relentlessly factual, at the expense of any real feeling.[114] Beckmann's figures convey no suffering, only "the non-spirit of the fact."[115] In his essay containing *Trapeze* as the only illustration, Landau complained that "matter-of-fact ugliness, merciless sobriety and open-ribbed nakedness have reigned [in German art] for years, while "charm and beauty are despised."[116] He called Beckmann's figures "marionettes" and "mannequins" which "are missing the first thing: the breath of good-hearted humanity."[117] Karl Scheffler praised Beckmann highly before the war, but in 1924 found that "His space is not spacious, his light does not illuminate, the dreams are not dreamlike, his prostitutes are not slutty, his iron is not of iron, the air is not breezy."[118]

Religion in the Weimar Republic

The Weimar Republic art world's fervid prophecies reflect the postwar crisis of faith. Discussing Post-Impressionism, John Richardson observed in *Modern*

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[113]Meier-Graefe, "Max Beckmann," 27.

[114]Recall Swarzenski criticized the New Objectivity (with which critics occasionally associated Beckmann) on the same grounds.

[115]Ibid., 30.

[116]Landau, 61.

[117]Ibid.

[118]Karl Scheffler, "Max Beckmann," *Kunst und Künstler* 22 (February 1924): 109.

Art and Scientific Thought, "As usual in ages of doubt and uncertainty, melancholy and foreboding, people everywhere exhibited strong inclinations towards spiritualism and a predilection for the certainties of religion."[119] Such was the case in Beckmann's Germany, where any number of cults and movements, along with more conventional religious explorations, mushroomed. In his 1922 report, Brandes described the spiritual restlessness he saw: "German youth is lost in abstractions as to the future; it lives in a world that bears no relation to real life; it dreams of the coming of a new religion."[120] Gordon Allport reported in *The New Republic*, as Beckmann completed *Trapeze*, that "religious life has been shaken from the foundations. The state evangelical church has rapidly lost its hold; mystical sects--both Christian and non-Christian--are on the increase.[121] Hermann Hesse confirmed the situation:

> In times like the present a general impatience and disillusion with both received religious creeds and scholarly philosophies grow; the demand for new formulations, new interpretations, new symbols, new explanations is infinitely great. These are the signs of the mental life of our times: a weakening of received systems, a wild searching for new interpretations of human life, a flourishing of popular sects, prophets, communities, and a blossoming of the most fantastic superstitions.[122]

In 1925, the German government recognized 812 different religious

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[119]John Richardson, *Modern Art and Scientific Thought* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 84.

[120]Brandes, 328.

[121]Gordon Allport, "Germany's State of Mind," *The New Republic* 34 (14 March 1923): 64.

[122]Hermann Hesse, "The Longing of Our Time for a Worldview (Die Sehnsucht unserer Zeit nach einer Weltanschauung)," *Uhu* 2 (1926): 3-14. In Kaes, Jay and Dimendberg, 366.

designations.[123] The great expansion of independent Christian and pseudo-Christian churches and sects accounted for one substantial part of this astonishing number. Typical, for example, was the Weissenberg sect, whose members embraced occult practices and featured mediums supposedly speaking for Biblical figures.[124] Drechsler Lorenz founded the Lorenzians, occupied especially with *The Revelation of St. John* and declaring Lorenz to be Christianity's final prophet.[125] Many Christian offshoots were nationalistic, Aryanist and anti-Semetic. They sought the reunification, as they saw it, of Christianity and the German *volk*. Several allied themselves with the Nazis, including the German Christians and the German Ecclesiastical Movement.[126]

Some religious movements combined Christianity with other notions, as in the *Nordic Religious Association*, a conglomeration of earlier groups that obtained strength after the war.[127] These groups were pantheistic, incorporating Norse religious motifs and occasionally practicing nudism. Many were Aryanist and anti-Semetic.[128] These same spiritual currents often took hold as well in the period's prolific Youth Movements, or *wandervögel*, with other such movements recognizing

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[123]Ernst Christian Helmreich, *The German Churches under Hitler: Background, Struggle, and Epilogue* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979), 92.

[124]Ibid., 91.

[125]Ibid.

[126]Josef Höfer and Karl Rahner, eds., *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* (Freiburg: Herder, 1957), 3:263, 308.

[127]Helmreich, 79.

[128]Höfer and Rahner, 3:306.

Christian or Far Eastern philosophies.[129]

Still other sects seemingly developed on purely original, personal inspiration. The charismatic Friedrich Muck-Lamberty engendered a provincial phenomenon in 1920. Calling the population of Thuringia to awake to life and be merry, Muck-Lamberty lectured on "the Revolution in the Soul" and led thousands of barefoot followers, calling themselves the New Band, on triumphal processions into the reluctant local churches' sanctuaries.[130]

The currency of Far Eastern and Indian belief systems was also marked.[131] The Nobel prize-winning Indian poet and philosopher Rabindranath Tagore's spiritual writings, advocating "love, not power," were first published in Germany in 1921, enjoying great popularity.[132] The same year, Hermann Keyserling, a cultural psychologist and liberal Christian drawing on Eastern religion, founded the School of Wisdom in Darmstadt.[133] As a contemporary witness described it, Keyserling believed that "The ideal man was to be created by blending the inwardness of Asia with the vigour of Christian Europe. The new world must be built by new citizens."[134] The second statement, of course, closely follows Schmidt's, Küppers's,

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[129]Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 77.

[130]Walter Z. Laquer, *Young Germany: A History of the German Youth Movement* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), 117.

[131]Ibid., 116.

[132]Ibid.; Höfer and Rahner, 9:1275.

[133]Höfer and Rahner, 6:138.

[134]George P. Gooch, *Germany* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1927), 326.

and other German critics' scenarios for Germany's spiritual renaissance.

Not everyone shared an enthusiasm for the Weimar Republic's preponderance of chimeric religious embarkations. Hans Martin Elster, editor of *Die Horen*, wrote,

> We are, in the greatest measure of the word, too religious. This religiosity encompasses the entire positive and negative bearing of life, in the same way creatively as destructively, no less in eternal agitation as rest, no less in the ever new tension between the beliefs as in the gaining of unity by force. This religiosity embraces equally the world of Demeter, the Earth Mother, the maternal womb, as the realm of Apollo, God the Father, Christ, the heavenly boundlessness, and we are its bearers and its obligated ones in every time and in every extent.[135]

Paul Dahlke, who wrote extensively on Buddhism during the period, doubted the integrity of the burgeoning movements:

> Now indeed our times work at the creation of new moral values, but all these values deny their artificiality as little as the synthetic medicine of modern chemistry denies its artificial character. They lack the inner necessity peculiar to all that is natural. All moralistic endeavors of our time retain the character of experiment or sport.[136]

In light of the postwar religious scenario, a detailed investigation of its Theosophic, Gnostic and 19th-Century German Romantic philosophical content will show *Trapeze* to be a representative feature in the Weimar Republic's complex spiritual landscape.

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[135]Hanns Martin Elster, "Die Lage des deutschen Geistes in der Gegenwart," *Die Horen* 2 (1926): 4.

[136]Paul Dahlke, *Die Bedeutung des Buddhismus für unsere Zeit* (Munich: Oskar Schoß Verlag, 1924), 7-8.

Chapter 3

PHILOSOPHICAL AND RELIGIOUS ASPECTS OF "TRAPEZE"

The real basis of Beckmann's art, writes Kessler, is "an involved philosophic-romantic-religious tendency of thought."[137] Carla Schulz-Hoffman recognizes "a religious/philosophical understanding fed through the most diverse sources."[138] Beckmann's library and diaries, and accounts of those who knew him, indicate the artist was well-read in both philosophy and religion. All scholars agree that German philosophers as well as ancient Western and non-Western myths and religious systems greatly influenced Beckmann's worldview. To varying degrees, most explore how these sources manifest themselves in the artist's work.

Does *Trapeze* indicate Beckmann's self-image as artist-evangelist? The small, prone figure beneath the trapezists themselves is very close to a self-portrait. If so, Beckmann appears to present the scene to us, as if indeed to "give humanity a picture of its fate." At the same time, he is pressed almost flat to the stage under the tableau's weight, as though nearly crushed by the awesome responsibility of his

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[137]Kessler, 6.

[138]Carla Schulz-Hoffmann, "Gitter, Fessel, Maske: Zum Problem der Unfreiheit im Werk von Max Beckmann." In *Max Beckmann: Retrospektive*, Carla Schulz-Hoffmann and Judith C. Weiss, eds. (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1984), 51.

prophetic vision.[139] In more recent scholarship, Eberle notes a gesture appearing in several Beckmann self-portraits from this period. The right arm is extended with the palm up, which Eberle suggests identifies the artist with the martyred Christ, as found in Gothic Deposition scenes.[140] This gesture first evolves in *The Descent from the Cross* (Figure 29), where Beckmann portrays himself literally as Christ, a part he also plays in *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery* (Figure 30) of the same year. The gesture as it appears in *Trapeze* is seen in the tormented man in *The Night*, as well as in *Family Portrait* (Figure 31) and *Self-Portrait as a Clown*. In this last painting, the shadow in Beckmann's extended palm suggests a nail hole.

Schopenhauer

The scholars Hildegard Zenser, Hans Belting and Margot Clark have explored the impact of Schopenhauer's ideas on Beckmann's art in more detail than most. Only Clark, however, thoroughly analyzes a Beckmann work per Schopenhauer's thought. She devotes some twenty-two pages of her dissertation to Beckmann's 1942 painting, *Four Men around a Table*, characterizing it as "saturated

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[139]In a passage from 1924, Hausenstein's imagery seems to validate this latter reading for the Beckmann figure. To Hausenstein, Beckmann was indeed a heroic martyr, weighed down with the burden of a higher calling: "In this art, absolutely nothing has happened by accident, but rather everything by moral imperative. This art is a true misfortune--of fate: Destiny--pain and lust under the pressure of a destiny. Beckmann, proletarian specialist, a man of strong vigor, a worker, a pack-carrier, carries this destiny. Through days and weeks he is hidden behind the work and groans under the burden (Hausenstein, "Max Beckmann," 71).

[140]Eberle, *The Weimar Artists*, 92.

with Beckmann's ruminations on the Self in terms that owe much to Schopenhauer."[141] Clark limits herself primarily to Schopenhauer's and Beckmann's comparative ideas concerning the individual's transcendence of worldly life. Besides this area of Clark's research, I will explore how Beckmann's opinions regarding art and spirituality relate to Schopenhauer's philosophy. I will also look at both men's belief in the essentially tragic nature of human sexuality.

Because Beckmann was almost militantly against abstract art, believing that transcendental meanings must be grounded in nature, he was quite in accord with certain ideas of Schopenhauer.[142] Schopenhauer held that all phenomena, all sensation, all experience and all that we designate "reality" is simply a construct of the intellect in exclusive service to the objectification and manifestation of the *Will*, a blind and purposeless life force, at once self-perpetuating and self-devouring. The very *act* of perceiving is in fact identified with the Will manifesting itself. The Will is *noumena*, the thing-in-itself, the transcendent, irreducible, true reality. We can never experience or even completely conceive of the Will outside of the phenomenal world through which the Will "chooses"--is mysteriously motivated--to manifest itself. Nor can we experience it or conceive of it in any terms other than the finite terms of our

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[141]Clark, *Sources of Imagery*, 55-77; specific quote, 56.

[142] Beckmann was reading Arthur Schopenhauer well before the time of *Trapeze*. His copy of Schopenhauer's *Parerga and Paralipomena* is inscribed "To my dear Max Beckmann, Minna [Beckmann], Christmas 1906," and one of Beckmann's marginal notes in *The World as Will and Idea* is dated 8 November 1919 (See Peter Beckmann and Joachim Schaffer, eds., *Die Bibliothek Max Beckmanns: Unterstreichungen, Kommentare, Notizen und Skizzen in seinen Büchern* [Worms-am-Rhein: Wernische Verlagsgesellschaft, 1992], 73, 81). Dated marginal passages in *Parerga* continue through the 1930s to 1940.

given modes of perception, our familiar human ways of organizing to our minds the world in which we find ourselves--as already stated, those very modes of perception, those ways of organizing our world, are the Will manifesting itself.[143] Thus *for our human purposes*, maintains Schopenhauer, ultimate reality is not to be sought outside the world of appearances and experience, *even though it exists*, for any reality outside of our limited, finite means of experience would, of course, be impossible *to* experience, or know at any level, and so the very idea is meaningless. "If we go to the bottom of the matter," writes Schopenhauer, "all truth and wisdom, in fact the ultimate secret of things, is contained in everything actual, yet certainly only *in concreto* and like gold hidden in the ore. The question is how to extract it."[144]

This idea surely resonated for Beckmann, for throughout his career he maintained a passionate devotion to figurative, objective art. To Reinhard Piper, Beckmann remarked of the painting *The Night*,

> What I aspire to is an ever more clear and definite form. I make no forms for their own sake--as abnormal flourishes. Everything must remain concrete.[145]

Beckmann's lecture at the New Burlington Galleries made clear his purpose in remaining concrete, and parallels Schopenhauer's metaphor of gold hidden in ore:

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[143]As Bryan Magee states it: "There are no terms in which we can have any apprehension of whatever exists other than through the categories made available to us by what we are--the categories of human sense, feeling, thought and so on, . . . Of what exists as it is in itself [the Will, for example], independent of us and our categories, we have no way of forming any conception" (Bryan Magee, *The Philosophy of Schopenhauer* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983], 83).

[144]Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover Publications, 1966), 2:72, quoted in Magee, 45.

[145]Piper, 324.

> What I want to show in my work is the idea which hides itself behind so-called reality. I am seeking for the bridge which leads from the visible to the invisible, like the famous cabalist who once said: "If you wish to get hold of the invisible you must penetrate as deeply as possible into the visible."[146]

Spiritual bondage was one of Beckmann's major preoccupations, and it is also an important aspect of *Trapeze*. The Will, according to Schopenhauer, manifests itself in all objects and phenomena, but in human beings, as in other higher lifeforms, it manifests especially as desire and incessant, aimless striving, which is never finally satisfied. "The nature of satisfaction, enjoyment, and happiness," writes Schopenhauer, "consists solely in the removal of a privation, the stilling of a pain."[147] All of nature exists for the sake of the Will feeding off itself, constantly recreating itself, eternally *willing*. Thus our satisfactions are always temporary, only to be replaced with new desires. We vacillate interminably between urgent striving to satisfy impoverishments of every sort and degree and restless emptiness when the Will's willing is temporarily satiated, thus dissolving our only mode of living. We are, according to Schopenhauer, bound and enslaved to perpetual suffering.[148]

Sexuality is one perpetrator of this bondage that Beckmann probes. Schopenhauer considered sexuality simply the Will's means of preserving its continual self-manifestation, a seductive urge that only sustains life's cruel cycle of desiring, striving and suffering. He believed that our discomfiture concerning sexuality was because at some level we view lovers as "the traitors who secretly strive to perpetuate

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[146]Max Beckmann, "On My Painting," in Lackner, 45-46.

[147]Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E. F. J. Payne, 1:318, quoted in Magee, 219.

[148]See Magee, 219.

the whole trouble and toil that would otherwise rapidly come to an end."[149] Several authors recognize a similar attitude in Beckmann's art, pointing to the artist's treatment of sexuality as ensnarement or enslavement. Both Eberle and Fischer, for instance, remark on such a treatment in the painting, *The Night*. Fischer actually makes a direct connection to Schopenhauer's thought and calls the fundamental relationship between attraction, desire and catastrophe one of Beckmann's "lifelong themes."[150] Schulz-Hoffmann calls attention to a persistent theme in Beckmann's work that she labels *unfreiheit*--lack of freedom, or bondage. In *Trapeze*, for example, she recognizes a "wheel of life" motif, apparently referring to the general counter-clockwise, oval-shaped movement suggested by the figures. This wheel symbolizes the "impossibility of free self-determination" and of "the open relationship of people amongst each other." *Trapeze*, says Schulz-Hoffmann, is also a picture of "forced sexual intercourse." This she no doubt infers from the suggestive positioning of the male trapezist over the blond female's upturned legs.[151]

Trapeze does indeed appear to be a picture of subjugation. The trapeze bar stretches and pulls the vertical female trapezist against her will. Likewise, the man in the upper right background is pulled relentlessy upward by the chain clenched in his teeth, his hands helpless behind his back. The upside-down acrobat at top is trapped in

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[149]Schopenhauer, *World as Will*, 2:560, quoted in Kathleen M. Higgins, "Arthur Schopenhauer," in *The Age of German Idealism*, eds. Kathleen M. Higgins and Robert C. Solomon, vol. 6 of *Routledge History of Philosophy*, eds. G. H. R. Parkinson and S. G. Shanker, 354.

[150]Fischer, 23.

[151]Schulz-Hoffmann, 24.

a spinning polygonal ring. The bare-breasted woman below seems caught up helplessly in the sweep of forces, rocked literally head over heels. Behind it all a masked juggler, analogous to the three spinning Fates, tosses balls in a circle that matches the "wheel" of hapless acrobats.[152]

For Schopenhauer, The Will is life's masked juggler. Our existence can have no consoling purpose or meaning, our lives no real choice, as long as we are merely instruments of an impersonal force. "Gone through in detail it has the character of a comedy," writes Schopenhauer.

> For the doings and worries of the day, the restless mockeries of the moment, the desires and fears of the week, the mishaps of every hour, are all brought about by chance that is always bent on some mischievous trick; they are nothing but scenes from a comedy. . . . Thus, as if fate wished to add mockery to the misery of our existence, our life must contain all the woes of tragedy, and yet we cannot even assert the dignity of tragic characters, but, in the broad detail of life, are inevitably the foolish characters of a comedy.[153]

How apt, then, that Beckmann portrayed humanity bound in misery and ignorance as a colorfully-costumed acrobatic troupe, put on stage for the entertainment of an audience they cannot see beyond the footlights, bridled when they should be flying freely, forlorn when they should exude lively cheer. At least one critic picked up on this irony: "This opposition between the joy of color and the sorrow of content," wrote Glassgold in 1927, "is evident in the greater part of his paintings from about 1920 to 1924."[154] Equally significant, Beckmann uses the varieté motif, bringing

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[152]Kessler believes inverted figures in Beckmann's work suggest "an extreme or desperate fate," and names *Trapeze* specifically (Kessler, 162 n. 10).

[153]Schopenhauer, *World as Will*, 1:322, quoted in Higgins, 353.

[154]Glassgold, 246.

Schopenhauer's grim view of existence sharply home to his Weimar Republic audience.

In his public pronouncements and private diaries, Beckmann's lifelong obsession with the idea of an undying, unique, transcendent "Self" is evident. Beckmann clings tenaciously to this concept of an indestructible Self, roughly corresponding to the "soul," and it is often the sticking point in his disagreements with philosophers and religious writers. Similarly, for all the Will's tyranny and omniscience, Schopenhauer believed that a separate, peculiar, individual Self does exist. Somehow this individual Self must penetrate the illusion of objectification perpetrated by the Will--for which Schopenhauer uses the Indian concept *maja*--and ultimately deny the Will its machinations. Life then becomes a challenge to purify the Self of all the Will's desiring, thus transcending the temporal prison the Will constructs.[155] Art, aesthetics--the world as *Idea*, liberated from the world as *Will*, according to Schopenhauer--is both an escape from the pain of the struggle and a means to enlightenment and redemption. Quite accurately, Zenser states, "Beckmann stands to a great extent under the influence of this thinking."[156] Belting agrees: "It is in this intellectual tradition that Beckmann's notion of self as an almost sacred being is rooted."[157]

The soul chained unknowingly to a futile, wretched existence by an uncomprehended force; the imperative to penetrate the fog of illusion and come to the

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[155]See Magee, 221-24.

[156]Zenser, 3557.

[157]Belting, 52.

truth, art leading the way; the individual spirit's grueling journey to freedom; this is the foundation of Beckmann's *weltanschauung*. The religious systems of Theosophy and Gnosticism give these concepts still richer dimensionality, and reveal *Trapeze*'s meaning yet more deeply.

Madame Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine*

The two religious systems most significant for analyzing *Trapeze* are Helena P. Blavatsky's prodigious nineteenth-century work, *The Secret Doctrine*, and Gnosticism. Of the three main sources under discussion, modern Beckmann scholars write least of Blavatsky's writings, the principles of which are known as *Theosophy*. Twohig and Fischer acknowledge the presence of her ideas in the artist's pantheon, but only Clark spends considerable time treating this connection. Still, in her exhaustive treatment of Beckmann's 1942 triptych, *The Actors*, including much iconographical analysis, Clark discusses Blavatsky, Gnosticism and other esoteric religions somewhat interchangeably.[158] She does state categorically in her Frankfurt exhibition catalog essay that "the views of Helena Blavatsky and Richard Wilhelm contributed in great measure to the formulation of Beckmann's ideas and that awareness of Beckmann's sources helps the viewer of his paintings perceive more deeply-lying layers of meaning."[159]

Exactly when Beckmann first became acquainted with Blavatsky and

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[158]Clark, 77-99.

[159]Clark, "Beckmann's Abbilder," 37.

Gnosticism has been open to speculation. Beckmann's copy of Schopenhauer's *Parerga and Paralipomena* contains a short treatise on Gnosticism that the artist underlined.[160] Beckmann's published library contains an edition of *The Secret Doctrine* from 1920, though none of the copious marginal notes are dated earlier than 1935.[161] Two personal accounts, however, indicate that he was familiar with both Blavatsky and Gnosticism at the time of *Trapeze*. In her autobiography, Beckmann's second wife Quappi writes,

> In earlier years Max had read lots of Western philosophy, but also was very interested in Theosophy. He had studied the writings of Helena Blavatsky thoroughly, which ultimately led him to Hindu philosophy and the "Vedas."[162]

This statement immediately follows, and is apparently meant to expand upon, an anecdote about the couple discussing their spiritual beliefs just prior to their marriage in 1925 (they had only met in 1923). Quappi's phrase "in earlier years," then, must surely mean before their marriage, and so at least before the 1920s. A former student of Beckmann's, Marielouise Motesiczky, recalls that "in those legendary days of the twenties and thirties" the artist would expound on spiritual matters in the studio.[163] She paraphrases his message: "Perhaps from the beginning had the gods veiled the meaning of the world, concerning which man, who already was God at one time, was

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[160]See Beckmann and Schaffer, 74. Recall this book was a 1906 gift from the artist's wife.

[161]Beckmann and Schaffer, "Blavatsky-Die Geheimlehre," 123-295.

[162]Mathilde Q. Beckmann, *Mein Leben mit Max Beckmann* (Munich: R. Piper and Company Verlag, 1983), 136.

[163]Marielouise Motesiczky, "Max Beckmann als Lehrer: Erinnerungen einer Schülerin des Malers," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 11 January 1964.

gradually unveiling it."[164] This statement, as we shall learn, has decidedly Gnostic overtones.

As Maria Carlson states in the opening sentences of her outline of Theosophy,

> The underlying premise of Theosophy is that there exists a single, universal occult tradition (the Secret Doctrine), ancient but ageless, on which all religions, past and present, are based. This ancient "wisdom-tradition," claim Theosophists, unites religion, science, and philosophy into one grand synthesis that explains everything: God, the Universe, Man, Being, and Creation.[165]

To a great extent, Helena Blavatsky based her book, *The Secret Doctrine*, on Eastern religions, ancient Western mystery religions, Gnosticism, neo-Platonism and Western occult beliefs. According to *The Secret Doctrine*, every human being's soul is a spark emanating from the Divine Principle. This spark, called a *monad*, travels through many lifetimes and many incarnations in a cycle, first downward into matter, and then returning upward into the spiritual realm. These monads must experience every possible form of existence, whether animate or inanimate, from the highest to the lowest to the highest again, including human, during their nearly endless journey. This Blavatsky calls "the obligatory pilgrimage for every Soul."[166]

On its pilgrimage, the monad manifests itself in seven successive human

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[164]Ibid.

[165]Maria Carlson, "Theosophical Doctrine: An Outline," in *"No Religion Higher that Truth": A History of the Theosophical Movement in Russia, 1875-1922*, 114. Carlson's work is the basis for my exposition of *The Secret Doctrine*.

[166]H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion and Philosophy*, vol. 1, *Cosmogenesis*, 6th (Olcott) ed. (Wheaton: Theosophical Press, 1952), 82.

"root races," only one of which we would actually recognize physically and biologically as "human being." Presently the fourth human root race, or "Aryan," is manifested on Earth, marking the monad's lowest descent into matter.

Beckmann may have captured these concepts in the composition of the painting *Trapeze*. The prominent juxtaposition of the upside-down male trapezist and the upright female trapezist may symbolize the descending and ascending monads. The entire complex of figures, as alluded to by Schulz-Hoffmann, seems to revolve counterclockwise, down and up again in an elongated oval. According to *The Secret Doctrine*, the Cosmos is initiated at each new great Period "by means of the two contrary Forces, (the centripetal and the centrifugal Forces, which are male and female, positive and negative, physical and spiritual, the two being one *Primordial Force*), and thus causing it to become objective on the plane of illusion."[167] Beckmann may allude to these complementary forces, male and female, as well. *Trapeze*, then, presents the moment of genesis--humanity and the world appear on the cosmic stage. The curtain flap behind the tableau even suggests a birth canal.

In *Trapeze* there are seven figures, and careful extrapolation reveals the suspended polygonal framework at top, in which the acrobat apparently turns, also to be seven-sided. The number seven is highly significant in Blavatsky's system: "Everything in the metaphysical as in the physical Universe is septenary," she tells us.[168] This applies to the "Great Wheel" as well:

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[167]Blavatsky, 324.

[168]Blavatsky, 213. Pages 212-22 outline the septenary division of the universe in detail.

> the whole duration of our Cycle of Being, or Mahâkalpa, i.e., the whole revolution of our special Chain of seven planets [Globes] or Spheres from beginning to end; the "Small Wheels" meaning the Rounds, of which there are also seven.[169]

The polygon in *Trapeze*, then, may represent the human spirit fixed in the cosmic cycle of incarnations.

The varieté motif is also appropriate to Beckmann's meaning. A consistent theme of the *Secret Doctrine* is the material world's deceptive transience:

> The Universe, with everything in it, is called Mâya, because all is temporary therein, from the ephemeral life of a firefly to that of the sun. Compared to the eternal immutability of the ONE, and the changelessness of that Principle, the Universe, with its evanescent everchanging forms, must be necessarily, in the mind of a philosopher no better than a will-o'-the-wisp. Yet, the Universe is real enough to the conscious beings in it, which are as unreal as it is itself.[170]

The rapid comings and goings on the varieté stage effectively embody the human monad's fleeting existences.

Just as Schopenhauer felt the secrets of existence were "like gold hidden in the ore," so Beckmann believed that the spiritual in art should be grounded in material reality. Theosophy validates Beckmann's approach as well. For example, *The Secret Doctrine* establishes the relationship between the spiritual and the material:

> Noumena and phenomena are connected by analogy and correspondence. Events in matter are distorted, at times parodic, even grotesque reflections of events occuring on the spiritual plane. The noumenon is enciphered in the phenomenal event, and the occultist who has developed his "spiritual sight" can see behind the distorted pseudoreality of the manifested mechanical Universe to the real meaning of the noumenon that informs it.[171]

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[169]Ibid., 113 n. 1.

[170]Blavatsky, 317.

[171]Carlson, 124.

Trapeze is a distortion and a parody of a varieté acrobatic number, and so perhaps an apparition of unseen, otherworldly afflictions.

Certainly Beckmann counts himself as one whose "spiritual sight" is developed enough to see such things. It has been suggested that the figure beneath the trapezists is Beckmann himself presenting the truth to wretched mankind. If the trapezists represent the descent into and emergence out of material existence in a Theosophical sense, we can also consider this small self-portrait as the "pilgrim" figure Blavatsky describes in *The Secret Doctrine*. "The *Pilgrim*," writes Blavatsky, "having struggled through and suffered in every form of life and being, is only at the bottom of the valley of matter, and halfway through his cycle, when he has identified himself with collective Humanity."[172] The Theosophic pilgrim, we shall discover, has a significant counterpart in the doctrines of Gnosticism, as well as in *Trapeze*.

Gnosticism

"Beckmann's worldview can be characterized overall as Gnostic," is Friedhelm Fischer's categorical statement.[173] Along with Schopenhauer's philosophy and Madame Blavatsky's *The Seceret Doctrine*, Gnosticism is the most important

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[172]Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, vol.1 (New York: Theosophical Publishing Company, 1888), xx, quoted in Carlson, 231-32.

[173]Fischer, 19 n. 21. Clark and Fischer give extensive consideration to Gnosticism in Beckmann's art, as does Twohig in her *Carnival* monograph. As stated earlier, Clark is quite attentive to esoteric religions in general as they appear in Beckmann, but never exhaustively surveys an object for its manifold correlations to one particular system. Twohig's reading of *Carnival* is first and foremost Gnostic, and indicates specific iconography.

source for analyzing *Trapeze*. Gnosticism is a religious system with Hellenistic Greek origins whose greatest activity was during Christianity's earliest centuries.[174] It posits a divine Realm of Light, the realm of God, from which life has not emanated or descended as part of a cycle, but fallen.[175] What has fallen specifically are sparks of the godhead, called *pneuma*; pneuma comprise the human soul.

These immaterial, divine entities from the Realm of Light have fallen into matter, into the physical cosmos. According to Gnosticism, the cosmos was consciously created as by an evil force, the Demiurge, as a trap and a prison for the pneuma. Spiritually asleep, numbed or intoxicated, men are ignorant of their divine origin, unwitting jailers for the pneuma that longs for reunion with God in the Realm of Light. All creation is alienated from God, who, compounding the predicament, is both unknown and unknowable by any natural means. Only revealed knowledge, or *gnosis*, can awaken humanity to its own divinity and inspire longing for the Realm of Light. A redeeming messenger--called the "Alien Messenger"--is sent into the cosmos bringing the gnosis, emancipating the pneuma, teaching the soul the return path to the godhead.

It is most likely a conflation of roles as the Pilgrim-Soul--the monad--of Blavatsky's work, and the Gnostic Alien Messenger, that Beckmann plays in *Trapeze*. The acrobat in brown-and-orange-striped costume, upside-down in the polygon at the

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[174]See Hans Jonas, "Introduction: East and West in Hellenism," in *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), 3-27.

[175]My exposition of Gnosticism is based on Jonas's book, especially "Abstract of Main Gnostic Tenets," 42-48, and "Gnostic Imagery and Symbolic Language," 48-99.

top of *Trapeze*, resembles Beckmann partially, though it is not an exact self-portrait, and as suggested earlier, one can read this polygonal framework as a wheel. The Gnostic Alien Messenger reappears many times, in many different forms, throughout history until his mission is completed, a concept well-symbolized by the acrobat turning in the wheel.[176] It has also been noted that the wheel in *Trapeze* is septagonal. Correspondingly, the Alien Messenger of the Gnostic texts must penetrate the seven layers of the cosmos, represented by the then-known seven planets, each one guarded by a minion of the Demiurge.[177] Awareness that one is not truly of this world, but is in fact godly and far from home, brings loneliness and longing. The Alien Messenger feels this no less than those he reaches. If *Trapeze* is viewed upside-down this acrobat-emissary, wearing a forlorn expression, appears to be shouldering the tubular framework like a heavy load, recalling Hausenstein's characterization of Beckmann as a "pack-carrier" who "groans under the burden."

Sexual connotations in *Trapeze* further its connection to Gnosticism. Hans Jonas tells us that "The main weapon of the world in its great seduction is 'love'."[178] In one Gnostic text Adam, the first man and tribal head of the Sons of Light, personifies the divine sparks' fettering in the material cosmos. The evil planetary forces plot to introduce in Adam the fleshly pleasures:

'We will practice embracing in the world and found a community in the

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[176]"I wandered through worlds and generations," says the redeemer in the Mandaen Gnostic text. "How long have I endured already and been dwelling in the world!" is the cry in another (Jonas, 53).

[177]Jonas, 43, 77.

[178]Ibid., 72.

> world. . . . Let us practice the mysteries of love and seduce the whole world!' . . . They took the head of the tribe and practiced on him the mystery of love and of lust, through which all the worlds are inflamed. They practiced on him seduction, through which all worlds are seduced.[179]

In Beckmann's painting, the male trapezist seemingly "falls" into the blond female trapezist's proferred sexuality. It is also possible that the woman is actually pulling him downward. Her exposed breast further implies erotic temptation, for in Beckmann's 1917 etching *Adam and Eve* (Figure 33), it is not the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge which Eve offers Adam, but rather her bare breast. Much as was seen in regard to the ideas of Schopenhauer, then, *Trapeze* links sexuality with tragedy in a Gnostic context as well.[180]

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[179]Ibid.

[180]An image linking sexuality and the wheel motif appears in "Tightrope Walkers," an etching from Beckmann's 1921 portfolio, *The Yearly Fair.* A hooded male tightrope walker totters blindly toward a female who lifts her leg high above her head, her groin pointed directly at the hooded man. Her groin is also centered on the hub of the background Ferris wheel. Similarly, the male trapezist's groin in *Trapeze* corresponds to the hub of the septagonal "wheel" atop the tableau. Ingrid Schulze makes thought-provoking explorations of sexual meanings in *The Yearly Fair* and other Beckmann works in "Jahrmarkt-Metapher, Tiersatire und 'verkehrte Welt' bei Max Beckmann," *Bildende Kunst* no. 4 (1989): 35-37; and "Zirkus, Karussell und Schaubude: Ein Beitrag zu Max Beckmanns Graphikmappe *Der Jahrmarkt*," *Bildende Kunst*, no. 8 (1990): 60-63.

CONCLUSION

Trapeze is a model artifact of Weimar Republic painting. Its subject, the varieté, is a quintessential phenomenon of 1920s German city life, and *Trapeze*'s acrobatic act follows the modern German (and European) artistic tradition of the circus motif. The painting satisfies a number of Weimar Republic critics' standards for proper Germandom, as well. For one, Beckmann overlays a determinedly objective style with a spiritual content. Some critics, as well, believed that Beckmann's art consciously reflected the uneasy days.

It is doubtful that *Trapeze*'s mood of distress and paralysis refers directly to events and circumstances in the degree Beckmann's earliest postwar graphic works did. Instead, Beckmann's Germany abets and confirms an already-established tragic worldview. But his audience was surely sensitive to the diffuse psychic bewilderment in the land, and when Beckmann uses the varieté motif, so contemporary and immediate, he indicates solemnly to his fellows that the signs of the larger affliction are all around them.

Trapeze also crystallizes an interval in the artist's inner journey. Beckmann had suffered a breakdown while serving as a field hospital orderly during the war, and Eberle characterizes Beckmann's imagery immediately following his wartime release from a sanitarium as a search to find "a new and personally genuine approach to the

fundamental questions of human existence for which philosophy and theology could no longer provide answers."[181] The early postwar paintings and prints are especially strident and tortured. In *Self-Portrait with Red Scarf* (Figure 33) Beckmann appears nearly mad, feverish with his disturbing vision and purpose. *The Night* culminates the artist's most drastic and sinister pictures. As the postwar years progress, a less alarmed mood prevails. *Self-Portrait as a Clown* exudes sobriety, purposefulness and authority, and one senses that Beckmann is facing and accepting the truth of our human condition, as he sees it.[182] From this he now gains inner healing and strength, and a mission to lead others on the path.[183]

Stylistic changes at this time reflect the evolution from shock and confusion to the resolute pursuit of an integrated metaphysical picture of things. Beckmann's postwar works comprise sharp edges, compressed space and jagged planes in multiple, skewed perspectives. They appear frenetic and convulsed, often overcrowded. By the mid-1920s, Beckmann's figures are full-bodied and more simply treated, their light and dark facets contrasting sharply. The compositions are generally spare, the atmosphere more spacious and unified. Sharp edges and conflicting perspective planes are gone. Colors are brighter and more pervasive, and a certain

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[181]Matthias Eberle, *World War I and the Weimar Artists: Dix, Grosz, Beckmann, Schlemmer* (New Haven: Yale University, 1985), 89.

[182]By 1927, *Self-Portrait in Tuxedo*, closely bound with the views of his essay, "The Artist in the State," shows a long-recovered Beckmann at his most confident and imposing.

[183]Heinrich Simon wrote of Beckmann in a 1919 essay, "Only the ever-wandering, the never-content, the ever-dying and newly-becoming are they who are called to service in the Most Holy (Heinrich Simon, "Max Beckmann," *Das Kunstblatt* 3 [September, 1919]: 257).

otherworldly quiet suffuses the pictures.[184] In general they are clear, full of conviction and seemingly untroubled at heart, despite their sometimes disturbing subjects. *Trapeze* exhibits the beginnings of these trends. These works of the mid-twenties, such as *Mardi Gras* (Figure 34) and *The Barge* (Figure 35), reflect equivalent characteristics in the artist's inner life as his many philosophical and religious influences coalesce into a more or less coherent *weltanschauung*.

To a great extent Schopenhauer, Blavatsky and Gnosticism describe this *weltanschauung*, and *Trapeze* synthesizes these schools. The painting, then, lucidly articulates the artist's early 1920s beliefs, as he emerged from his spiritual wilderness: that mankind is ignorant of its divine essence and must somehow recover its true inheritance. To do so, the world must recognize that illusory material life masks, hides, and diverts the truth, and keeps us imprisoned in fruitless suffering. Beckmann, as an artist, has the vision as well as the lonely duty to initiate souls to the journey.

One can debate how literally Beckmann's iconography can be read. Calling Beckmann's convictions "intuitive and thoroughly unsystematic," Margot Clark summarizes his relationship to Gnosticism as follows:

> Essentially, I think the gnostic [*sic*] material appealed to Beckmann because it offered an ample range of metaphor, from which he selected (probably not consciously and certainly not self-consciously) images that 'worked' compositionally and that spoke to him of what it felt like to live in the material world, not because any one gnostic system furnished a ready-made truth. He consequently felt free to combine the imagery of several gnostic systems or to

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[184]Concerning all these elements, contrast *Carnival* and *Double-Portrait Carnival, Max Beckmann and Quappi*, both of 1925, with *Carnival* of 1920.

include references to other sources altogether, . . ."[185]

Without doubt, Beckmann's sources are extensive and eclectic. But I believe that as one becomes familiar with the philosophies and religions which interested Beckmann, with his reactions to and dialogues with them, as well as with his personal pronouncements, certain commonalities arise; it *is* possible to serviceably outline his belief system.

Beckmann drew on a large range of metaphors, some more exactly corresponding to a doctrine or canon than others. But I don't believe, as Clark states, that his choices were entirely intuitive or unconscious. Beckmann's books, particularly the major religious and philosphical works, are full of thoughtful, frequently passionate marginal notes. He often addresses Nietzsche, Schopenhauer and Blavatsky by name in these notes, applauding or chiding them as the case may be, but always engaging them. When Blavatsky gives complex calculations for the time durations of the different creation cycles, Beckmann works out the math in his margins.[186] It is doubtful Beckmann believed completely or literally in any of these systems, but he appears to have taken them quite seriously. This attitude, and the fact that he regularly addressed the authors on very specific points, indicates to me that the painter was more than capable of consciously choosing specific iconography to illustrate peculiar aspects of a system. I certainly believe this was true in instances for *Trapeze*, when

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[185]Clark, "Beckmann's Abbilder des metaphysicischen 'Selbst'." In *Max Beckmann: Frankfurt 1915-1933: Eine Ausstellung zum 100. Geburtstag*, Klaus Gallwitz, ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Städtische Galerie in Städelschen Kunstinstitut, 1983), 37; Clark, *Sources of Imagery*, 94.

[186]See for example Beckmann and Schaffer, 115, 129, 132 and 264.

Blavatsky was still new territory for him. The odd choice of a *septagonal* wheel-motif, for example, could hardly be capricious. It seems only natural to me that Beckmann would "try out" some of the new ideas in his paintings, the ideas which were such a part of his newly-recovered conviction and direction.

In 1919, awaiting the first glimmers of dawn during his dark night of the soul, Beckmann wrote,

> This is my crazy hope that I cannot give up, and that in spite of everything is stronger in me than ever. To someday make buildings together with my pictures. To build a tower in which humanity can proclaim all its rage and despair, all its meager hope and wild longing. A new church. Perhaps the time is helping me.[187]

Trapeze is a significant icon in Beckmann's church.

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[187]Beckmann, "Schöpferische Konfession," 66.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

FIGURES

Figure 1 - Max Beckmann, *Trapeze*, 1923, oil on canvas. Toledo, Toledo Museum of Art.

Figure 2 - Beckmann, *Martyrdom*, from the portfolio *Hell*, 1919, lithograph.

Figure 3 - Beckmann, *The Holdouts*, from the portfolio *Hell*, 1919, lithograph.

Figure 4 - Beckmann, *The Ideologues*, from the portfolio *Hell*, 1919, lithograph.

Figure 5 - Beckmann, *Hunger*, from the portfolio *Hell*, 1919, lithograph.

Figure 6 - Beckmann, *The Way Home*, from the portfolio *Hell*, 1919, lithograph.

Figure 7 - Beckmann, *The Street*, from the portfolio *Hell*, 1919, lithograph.

Figure 8 - Beckmann, *The Night*, 1918, oil on canvas. Düsseldorf, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen.

Figure 9 - Beckmann, *Carnival*, 1920, oil on canvas. London, Tate Gallery.

Figure 10 - Beckmann, *The Dream*, 1921, oil on canvas. St. Louis, Saint Louis Art Museum.

Figure 11 - Beckmann, *Dance in Baden-Baden*, 1923, oil on canvas. Munich, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Staatsgalerie moderner Kunst.

Figure 12 - Erich Heckel, *Four Female Dancers in Black, Dresden*, 1911, pen and colored pencil. Hamburg, Altonaer Museum.

Figure 13 - Ludwig Kirchner, *Female Varieté Dancers*, 1909, India ink and colored crayon. Hamburg, Altonaer Museum.

Figure 14 - Kirchner, *Panama Girls*, 1910, oil on canvas. Raleigh, North Carolina Museum of Art, Wilhelm R. Valentiner Collection.

Figure 15 - Paul Kleinschmidt, *Dressing Room*, 1929, oil on canvas. Ulmer, Ulmer Museum.

Figure 16 - Kleinschmidt, *Theater Dressing Room*, 1930, oil on canvas. Stuttgart, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart.

Figure 17 - Kleinschmidt, *Large Female Circus Rider*, 1927, oil on canvas. Private Collection.

Figure 18 - Kleinschmidt, *Small Female Circus Rider*, 1927, oil on canvas. Stuttgart, Galerie der Stadt Stuttgart.

Figure 19 - Kleinschmidt, *Coffee Concert*, 1925, oil on canvas. Regensburg, Ostdeutsche Galerie Regensburg.

Figure 20 - Beckmann, *The Barker*, from the portfolio *The Yearly Fair*, drypoint, 1921.

Figure 21 - Georg Tappert, *Can-Can*, 1911, oil on canvas.

Figure 22 - Tappert, *Two Female Dancers*, 1914, oil on canvas.

Figure 23 - Tappert, *The Negress Nyassa with Conch Shell*, 1929, oil on canvas.

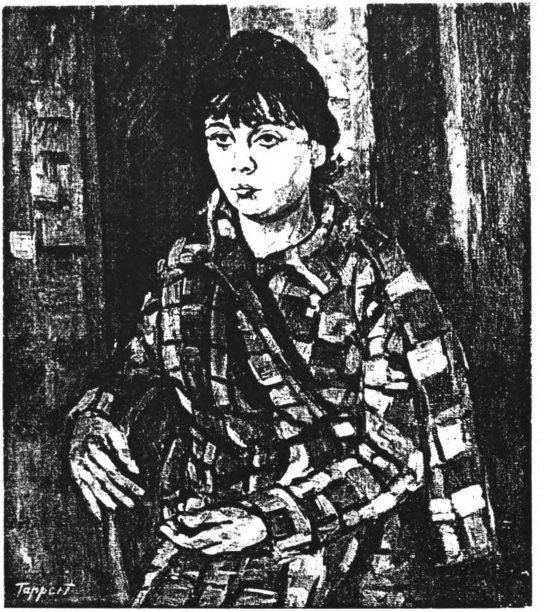

Figure 24 - Tappert, *Young Acrobat Woman*, 1928, oil on canvas.

Figure 25 - Karl Hofer, *The Brothers*, 1921, oil on canvas. Gelsenkirchen, Städtisches Museum Gelsenkirchen.

Figure 26 - Beckmann, *Self-Portrait as a Clown*, 1921, oil on canvas. Wuppertal, Von der Heydt-Museum der Stadt Wuppertal.

Figure 27 - Hofer, *Circus People*, 1921, oil on canvas. Private Collection.

Figure 28 - Hofer, *Tiller Girls*, 1923, oil on canvas. Emden, Kunsthalle Emden, Stiftung Henri Nannen.

Figure 29 - Beckmann, *Descent from the Cross*, 1917, oil on canvas. New York, Museum of Modern Art.

Figure 30 - Beckmann, *Christ and the Woman Taken in Adultery*, 1917, oil on canvas. St. Louis, Saint Louis Art Museum.

Figure 31 - Beckmann, *Family Picture*, 1920, oil on canvas. New York, Museum of Modern Art.

Figure 32 - Beckmann, *Adam and Eve*, 1917, drypoint.

Figure 33 - Beckmann, *Self-Portrait with Red Scarf*, 1917, oil on canvas. Stuttgart, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart.

Figure 34 - Beckmann, *Mardi-Gras*, 1925, oil on canvas. Mannheim, Städtische Kunsthalle Mannheim.

Figure 35 - Beckmann, *The Barge*, 1926, oil on canvas. Bedford, New York, Mr. and Mrs. Richard L. Feigen.

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