Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

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Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

Criticism of the Works of Novelists, Poets, Playwrights, Short Story Writers, and Other Creative Writers Who Lived between 1900 and 1999, from the First Published Critical Appraisals to Current Evaluations

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Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism

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William H. Slavick, "Going to School to DuBose Heyward," *The Harlem Renaissance Re-examined,* ed. Victor A. Kramer (AMS, 1987), 65- 91; reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism,* vol. 59, ed. Jennifer Gariepy (Detroit: The Gale Group, 1995), 94-105.

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Readers who wish to suggest new features, topics, or authors to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions or comments are cordially invited to call, write, or fax the Managing Editor:

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Contents

Hugo Ball
1886-1927

German poet, novelist, dramatist, biographer, critic, and diarist.

INTRODUCTION

Ball was a founding member of Zurich Dada. Together with the other members of the early Dada group who met at the celebrated Cabaret Voltaire—Tristan Tzara, Hans Arp, Richard Huelsenbeck, Marcel Janco, and others—Ball led a nihilistic revolt in arts and literature against the dominant, bourgeois social and aesthetic values of Western culture. Though he did not remain a part of the Dada collective for long, Ball wrote and delivered the "First Dadaist Manifesto" in 1916 and produced many expressionistic poems and experimental works, such as the novel *Flametti oder vom Dandysmus der Armen* (1918) and his diary *Die Flucht aus der Zeit. Tagebücher 1912-1921* (1927; *Flight Out of Time: A Dada Diary)*, that are numbered among the most significant Dadaist writings. Following a conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1917, Ball also wrote several religious and political works of a more scholarly nature, including his polemical *Zur Kritik der deutschen Intelligenz* (1919; *Critique of the German Intelligentsia).*

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Ball was born in Pirmasens, Germany on 22 February 1886. His father was a shoe salesman, and his mother a profoundly religious woman, whose spirituality was to have a deep impact on Ball throughout his life. After completing high school, Ball became an apprentice leatherworker, acquiescing to his parents' desire that he focus on work rather than academics. Displeased with this occupation, he entered the University of Munich in 1906, where he studied philosophy and wrote a dissertation on Friedrich Nietzsche. His first published work, a satirical drama entitled *Die Nase des Michelangelo* (1911), was also written in Munich. Determined to pursue a career in the theater, he entered the Max Reinhardt School in Berlin, and between 1910 and 1914 attempted to support himself as an actor and director. Concurrently, Ball began to frequent the cafés of Berlin and Munich, associating with German artists and intellectuals. With the outbreak of war in 1914, Ball enthusiastically enlisted in the German military, but was soon discharged for health reasons. The following year, Ball and his wife, the artist and writer Emmy Hennings, moved to Switzerland. A period of desperate poverty followed, until Ball's transformation of the backroom of a Zurich café into a venue for *avant-garde* artists, poets, and musicians called Cabaret Voltaire in 1916. That year Ball, clad in a bizarre uniform made of painted cardboard, read an early "sound" poem before the collected audience at the café—an event generally associated with the initiation of the Zurich Dada movement. Ball's official involvement with Dada was relatively short-lived; he defected from the movement by July of 1917, after stating his belief that no attempt to form Dada into an artistic school should be made. During the ensuing decade, Ball produced his principal literary works, and contributed poems and essays to numerous literary journals. Ball died on 14 September 1927.

MAJOR WORKS

Ball's earliest works include a number of expressionistic lyric poems first published in the journals *Die Aktion, Die neue Kunst,* and *Die Revolution* prior to 1915. "Der Henker" combines erotic and religious imagery in a chaotic and near-blasphemous display of the lustful excesses of modern European civilization. Written at the dawn of World War I, "Das Insekt" equates humanity with insects as it forwards the theme of impassioned self-destruction. Another segment of Ball's poetic work includes the so-called "sound" poems, which defy ordinary textual interpretation, and instead are designed to conjure rhythms and associations in the minds of listeners. For instance, Ball described the nonsense lyrics of "Karawane"—which features the line, "jolifanto bambla o falli bambla"—as evocative of the sounds of an elephant caravan. The experimental novel *Tenderenda der Phantast,* written between 1914 and 1920 but first published in 1967, lacks plot or characters, but is instead an inchoate blending of poetry and prose, religious imagery, and metaphysical musings concerning the artist's precarious place within modern society. Ball presents a similar theme in his more traditional novel *Flametti oder vom Dandysmus der Armen* (1918). The novel follows Flametti, the vagabond leader of a troupe of impoverished artists and performers, in his attempts to secure work; efforts that ultimately end in the band's dissolution. These early Dadaist works offer a considerable contrast to Ball's later writings, including his attack on German nationalism in *Critique of the German Intelligentsia* (later significantly revised and republished as *Die Folgen der Reformation,* 1924) and his *Byzantinisches Christentum. Drei Heiligenleben* (1923), which contains hagiographies of three Byzantine saints. Ball's other work includes his *Flight Out of Time: A Dada Diary,* and a biography of his friend, the German writer Hermann Hesse.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Critical evaluation of Ball's writing has generally focused on the intensely personal and subjective nature of his work, as well as the wide stylistic variety of his output. Some modern commentators have also noted the significant influence of Nietzschean thought on his writings, particularly in regard to irrationality and the modern collapse of traditional morality. Overall, Ball has been viewed as a seminal Dada figure, though critics continue to emphasize his idiosyncratic relationship to the movement. Rex W. Last has written, "for Ball, Dada represented the culmination of his revolt against external authority, and at the same time a means of breaking through the surface appearance to the realms of the spirit beyond. But Dada turned against him and threatened to destroy him."

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Die Nase des Michelangelo (drama) 1911
Der Henker von Brescia (drama) 1914
Flametti oder vom Dandysmus der Armen (novel) 1918
Zur Kritik der deutschen Intelligenz [*Critique of the German Intelligentsia*] (nonfiction) 1919
Byzantinisches Christentum. Drei Heiligenleben (nonfiction) 1923
Die Folgen der Reformation (nonfiction) 1924
Die Flucht aus der Zeit. Tagebücher 1912-1921 [*Flight Out of Time: A Dada Diary*] (diary) 1927
Hermann Hesse. Sein Leben und sein Werk (biography) 1927
Briefe 1911-1927 (letters) 1957
Gesammelte Gedichte (poetry, novels, dramas, and diary) 1963
Tenderenda der Phantast (novel) 1967

CRITICISM

Hugo Ball (essay date 1916)

SOURCE: "The First Dada Manifesto," translated by Erdmute Wenzel White, in *The Magic Bishop: Hugo Ball, Dada Poet* by Erdmute Wenzel White, Camden House, 1998, pp. 228-29.

[*In the following reprint of his "First Dada Manifesto," originally delivered in 1916, Ball relates the significance of Dada.*]

Dada is a new art movement. One can tell this from the fact that until now nobody knew a thing about it, and tomorrow everyone in Zurich is going to be talking about it. Dada comes from the dictionary. It is terribly simple. In French it means "hobby horse." In German it means "so long," "go fly a kite," "I'll be seeing you sometime." In Romanian: "Yes, indeed, you are right, that's it. But of course, yes, it's a deal." And so forth.

An international word. Just a word, and the word a movement. Very easy to understand. Quite terribly simple. To make an art movement of it must mean that one wants to avoid complications. Dada psychology, Dada Germany cum indigestion and fog paroxysms, Dada literature, Dada bourgeoisie, and yourselves, most honored poets, who are always writing with words but never writing the word itself, who are always writing around the actual point. Dada world war without end, Dada revolution without beginning, Dada, you friends and also-poets, esteemed sirs, manufacturers, and evangelists Dada Tzara, Dada Hülsenbeck, Dada m'dada, Dada m'dada Dada mhm, dada dera dada, Dada Hue, Dada Tza.

How does one achieve eternal bliss? By saying Dada. How does one become famous? By saying Dada. With a noble gesture and polite deportment. Till one goes crazy. Till one loses consciousness. How can one get rid of everything that smacks of low-brow journalism, everything slick, everything nice and smart, narrow-minded, moralizing, Europeanized, enervated? By saying Dada. Dada is the world soul, Dada hits the nail on the head. Dada is the world's best lily-milk soap. Dada Mr. Rubiner, Dada Mr. Korrodi, Dada Mr. Anastasius Lilienstein.

In plain language: the hospitality of the Swiss is to be profoundly appreciated. And in questions of aesthetics the key is quality.

I shall be reading poems that are meant to dispense with conventional language, no less, and to have done with it. Dada Johann Fuchsgang Goethe. Dada Stendhal. Dada Dalai Lama, Buddha, Bible, and Nietzsche. Dada m'dada. Dada mhm dada da. It's a question of connection, and of loosening it up a bit to start with (or: The rhythm is all important. Namely, my own). I don't want words that other people have invented. All the words are other people's inventions. I want my own nonsense, my own rhythm, and vowels and consonants too, matching the nonsense and all my own. If this pulsation is seven yards long, I want proper words for it that are seven yards long. Mr. Schulz's words are only two and a half centimeters long.

It will serve to show how articulated language comes into being. I let the vowels fool around. I let the vowels quite simply occur, as a cat miaows. . . . Words emerge, shoulders of words, legs, arms, hands of words. Au, oi, uh. One shouldn't let too many words out. A line of poetry offers a chance to get rid of filth. I really wanted to get rid of language itself. This accursed language, covered with filth, as if put there by stockbrokers' hands, hands used to wear out coins. I want the word where it ends and begins. Dada is the heart of words.

Each thing has its word, but the word has become a thing by itself. Why shouldn't I find it? Why can't a tree be called Pluplusch, and Pluplubasch next time, when it has

been raining (or: when it is soaked with rain)? The word, the word, the word beyond your sphere of influence, your stuffiness, your ridiculous impotence, your stupendous smugness, beyond all the parrotry of your self-evident stupidity. The word, gentlemen, is a public concern of the first order.

Rex W. Last (essay date 1973)

SOURCE: "Hugo Ball: A Man in Flight from His Age," in *German Dadaist Literature: Kurt Schwitters, Hugo Ball, Hans Arp,* Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1973, pp. 62-115.

[*In the following essay, Last surveys Ball's life and career, emphasizing "the variety of styles and forms which he adopted."*]

Of all the Dadaists, Hugo Ball was the one whose life was the most fraught with physical deprivation and inner tension, and torn between the most violent extremes. And yet, at first sight, it appears somewhat surprising that this should be so, for the usual image of Ball is that of a man reveling in the artistic revolution, rather than of an individual borne along upon a tide of conflict and emotion which he was powerless to control.

To look at most studies of Dada and the *avant-garde* to date, it would seem almost compulsory to introduce the Zurich movement through Ball's recitation of the first sound poem in the Cabaret Voltaire (despite the fact that the claim to the title of first sound poem is more than a little suspect). In a contemporary illustration, Ball is pictured uncomfortably clad in cardboard between music stands upon which the script of the poem—written in red—reposes. His legs and body are encased in colored cardboard tubes; about his shoulders there hangs a kind of cardboard poncho; and the whole creation is topped by a blue-and-white-striped hat. In this eccentric uniform Ball intoned his "first" sound poem to the horrified citizens of Zurich, who were hardly expecting such strange entertainment.

But this picture of Ball the extrovert on the makeshift stage in the Spiegelgasse—something of a comedown for a man who had once studied at the Max Reinhardt school in Berlin—represents no more than a fraction of the truth and, because it is a partial picture, actually distorts the truth.

The real Ball was a tragic figure, a man who took many years to come to terms with the harsh facts of life; and in his final escape into religion he admitted perhaps by implication, that he was essentially incapable of facing the world.

I A Life of Searching

Ball was not born into circumstances which might seem to have guaranteed him literary greatness. He was the fifth of six children—he had two brothers and three sisters—of whom one of the latter was destined to take the veil. Ball entered the world in Pirmasens on February 22, 1886. His father was a wholesale shoe salesman, a withdrawn individual who was by no means successful in his profession. His mother was a deeply religious woman, and hers seems to have been the decisive influence upon the young Hugo, both in the positive and negative sense. Positively, Ball inherited a profound religious awareness; but this was countered by a sensibility which bordered on the emotionally unstable, as his biographer-widow, Emmy Ball-Hennings, somewhat effusively recalls in her introduction to her husband's diary, ***Die Flucht aus der Zeit***:

> Above his little iron bedstead there hung a picture of the Sistine Madonna, at whose feet reposed two little angels on cushions of cloud, dreamily gazing down from heaven upon the tiny earth beneath. Where their wings were, there could be found the marks of little Hugo's lips. He never neglected to stand up in his bed of an evening in order to wish the angels a good night. . . . This practice, so he told me, also enabled him to make observations on his own growth rate, for with his young lips he was able to reach the cloak of the Virgin when he was seven, and her dress too, without having to stretch himself unduly or stand on tiptoe.[1]

There is something obsessive about Ball's childhood religiosity which was to set the pattern for the rest of his life and to have such a crucial and dominant impact upon his creative period.

Much has been written in general terms about the alienation and spiritual malaise of the creative artist in this century, and it is significant just how often this general state can be traced back to a specific imbalance in the personal development of the individual artist rather than to wider historical circumstances. In Ball's case, the imbalance was particularly severe, and the compensation was equally violent. As Steinke records, his own dark fears and profound insecurity led him into pathological behavior: "At night when he was put to bed, he was beset with fears that he would never see his loved ones again or that he would get lost in the dark. He always begged his mother to hold his hand and even at the age of twelve demanded that all the members of the family assemble around his bed until he feel asleep."[2] His academic career, which ended when he left grammar school at the age of fifteen, was average without being remarkable in any way. He was yet another in a long line of creative artists whose school reports on his competence in his native tongue gave little hint of his later work as a writer. At school, he was undoubtedly inhibited in his personal and social development by the fact that he was a Catholic child in a predominantly Protestant area,[3] but it is clear that Ball was destined, from the very beginning, to be in a minority of one, so to speak, for nearly the whole of his life.

When he left school, it was to take up an apprenticeship in the leather industry, a career he had not sought and which he heartily disliked. But his parents' wish was that he should go out into the world and earn his keep rather than

pursue his academic studies any further; and so, once more, the imbalance of his life was heightened. All day long he would work in uncongenial employment, and at night he overcompensated with avid reading. It was at this period that he came upon the writings of Nietzsche, which exercised upon him an influence no less shattering than the discovery of Kant by Kleist—with whose cosmic gloom Ball had more than a little in common—in the previous century. Now Ball made his first efforts at writing poetry and drama.

He set his sights on the university as both a means of escape and of fulfillment; and, after a period of intensive effort, he returned to school, where he matriculated in record time. The fall of 1906 found him at the University of Munich, embarking on studies which were to continue until 1910. Despite this abrupt change of direction, his parents apparently continued to give him moral and financial support. While at the university, he wrote a dissertation on Nietzsche (which remained incomplete and unpublished); sought to counter a certain Jewishness in his appearance by a not particularly successful cosmetic operation on his nose;[4] and penned a vicious black satire, ***Die Nase des Michelangelo,*** the nose of the title having been put out of joint by Torrigiano.[5]

Having so far achieved very little, Ball determined on a theatrical career. To him, the stage was the arena in which the great social and philosophical battles had been waged in the past, and were now once again being fought in earnest. It was on the stage that Ball saw the possibility of giving practical expression to the Nietzschean revolution which had taken place within his own spirit. And in this respect, the "fearful, cynical drama"[6] of Frank Wedekind, which so closely paralleled his own convictions, was the strongest influence.

Once again—and not for the last time—Ball was taking his fervent beliefs to their logical conclusion and beyond. In 1910 he became a student at the Max Reinhardt school of acting and directing in Berlin. His new enthusiasm was total: "Between 1910-1914 the theater was everything to me: life, society, love, morality. To me the theater signified elusive freedom."[7]

As an actor, Ball was a failure. Predictably, he lacked the ability to distance himself from the characters he was portraying, and in this respect his Nietzschean subjectivity became his own worst enemy. So he turned, instead, to directing, and in June, 1913, he was trying to keep the Munich Kammerspiele on an even keel financially. Like so many artists of his generation, he drifted out onto the fringes of conventional society, frequenting the cafés which were so symptomatic of a society in which the artist and intellectual found himself more and more pushed to one side and at odds with the establishment.

In the famous Berlin Café des Westens—pilloried by opponents as the "Café Größenwahn" (Megalomania Café)—he met Richard Huelsenbeck; but far more significant was his encounter in the Simplicissimus Café in Munich: there he heard and was introduced to the cabaret performer Emmy Hennings.

As the account of Ball's earlier years would seem to presage, and as an examination of his works will shortly demonstrate, Ball's relations with the opposite sex—where they existed at all—were hardly normal and balanced. Emmy Hennings, however, was an exceptional woman. She exercised a fascination over him which was to endure for the rest of his life; for, although the two were both drifters on an uncertain tide in search of personal fulfillment, she had acquired maturity and had been hardened, rather than weakened, by experience. Thus it was that she became the dominant partner, and perhaps it is not too far from the truth to state that, in Emmy, Ball at last found a surrogate for the mother who had failed to recognize that her son had inherited the full measure of her own intense subjectivity.

Emmy Henning's life had been far more adventurous and filled with greater adversity than Ball's. A previous marriage had failed, and after wandering about Europe she had finally found herself in Munich. She was a gifted woman with a considerable talent for the theater, as a conventionally overwritten piece in *Die Aktion* indicates,[8] and some minor abilities as a poetess.

Convinced that the war was the cleansing fire which would purge society of its manifold ills, Ball—in a typical fit of passionate enthusiasm—enlisted in 1914, only to be discharged because of a weak heart. With the total commitment to the current obsession which was characteristic of him, he repeatedly sought reenlistment; and after repeated failure, he actually went to the front line in Belgium, where he was utterly shaken by the nastiness of the reality of war. "What has been unleashed there," he wrote in his diary, "is no less . . . than the devil himself."[9] Once again Ball's personal state coincided with the general climate of the hour.

Ball had been much influenced by Franz Pfemfert, editor of *Die Aktion,* who had published his work, and in that journal and those who wrote for it he found a prop for his own disillusionment: "P. and the close members of his editorial circle are radical opponents of the war and antipatriots. They clearly know more than someone like me who, up to this time, has had no dealings with practical politics. . . . And my own patriotism does not go so far as to approve of war even if it is unjust."[10] Ball's sense of rootlessness and the essentially negative nature of the position in which he found himself was intensified by the fact that the Kammerspiele had been obliged to close; Emmy too lacked employment, as the Simplicissimus was under new management which did not require her services.

In May, 1915, the two artists, with little prospects and no money, went to Switzerland, where they faced immediate trouble with the police, and in the long run severe poverty. At one point in his diary, Ball recalls that in Geneva he

"sat by the lake near an angler and envied the fish the bait which he cast at them."[11] A further blow came in 1915 with the death in battle of Hans Leybold, Ball's friend and collaborator, which set the seal on Ball's utter repugnance at the war and despair for the future.

Ball's reduced physical circumstances meant a further drain on his limited mental reserves, and the more unpleasant life became for him, the more he withdrew into the inner world of his imagination, nourished by a heady mixture of Baudelaire, Wilde, and the German mystics.

Gradually some of his former associates began to appear in Zurich, thus at least alleviating his sense of isolation. Then came the founding of the Cabaret Voltaire and the birth of Dada, which Ball exploited in order to plunge himself further into the depths of his own subconscious. Suffering a nervous breakdown largely as a result of his artistic experimentation, he withdrew for a while, returned briefly into the Dada limelight, and then turned his back on Dada once and for all. He became a journalist in Berne for the bi-weekly *Freie Zeitung,* and he also worked for René Schickele's magazine *Die weißen Blätter.* In 1919 he and Emmy became friends with Hermann Hesse, a close friendship which for Ball was to end only with his own death, shortly after he had written a biography in celebration of Hesse's fiftieth birthday. Ball died on September 14, 1927, in Tessin. Emmy, who finally became his wife in 1920, survived him by many years and died in 1948.

II Ball's Creative Span

By any standards, Ball's published work is not voluminous. Two plays, two novels, and four other full-length works are supplemented by a handful of poems and articles in contemporary literary journals. Of these productions, only the Dada poems are known at all well; the rest can be described at the very least as obscure. Yet it is a highly significant body of writings for all that, because it both demonstrates what consequences the Dadaist tenets of art and philosophy hold for an individual of uncertain temperament and unstable personality, and it also goes some way toward explaining why Dada is generally held to be totally negative and nihilistic.

In order to trace the path Ball took in his descent into a private void of his own making, an experience shared by many of his contemporaries, it is important to follow the stages which led him to Dada and beyond to his reconversion to Catholicism, which tore him from the brink of insanity and almost certain suicide. A study of his earlier work further serves to demonstrate just how strong are the links between Expressionism and Dada, especially in what might be described as the "early stages"—not in the historical sense, but in relation to the mental attitude on the part of the creative artist.

Both Dada and Expressionism were in revolt against the morality of contemporary Germany, and both took as the point of departure the rejection of all authority and all the principles upon which society was founded. Having rejected all this, the next—and crucial—stage is the decision of where to turn now, what solutions, if any, there are, and what stand the artist should take.

Those who were honest with themselves also recognized that if a new and substantially different form of society were postulated as an alternative to the status quo, this projection would inevitably remain an unfulfilled aspiration. Here Ball's nihilism emerges in all its blackness, and there can be few individuals even in such a despairing generation whose attitudes could have been so uncompromisingly negative and totally without hope.

III The Bleak Expressionist

In a brief notice on the appearance of a collection of poems by Klabund, Ball stresses Klabund's roving spirit to the exclusion of all else: "Klabund has within him the spirit of adventure, that is to say: the realism of the uninhibited."[12] And he opens his diary ***Die Flucht aus der Zeit*** with a description of the mood of the age which illuminates his affinities with Klabund's restlessness:

> A kind of industrialized fatalism rules over all and accords to each individual a specific function, whether he will or no. . . . The church can be seen as a "salvation machine" of little consequence, literature as a mere safety valve. . . . But the deepest question . . . runs like this: is there anywhere a force strong enough and, above all, vital enough to bring about a change in this state of affairs?[13]

This is no unfamiliar pattern for the artist in this century. Ball expresses deep gloom at the present state of the civilized world, in which even those last repositories of hope and idealism, the church and the creative arts, have become trivialized and institutionalized in the great leveling down of humanity, and he seeks some way out, a force or power of some kind—of any kind—potent enough not simply to destroy the old world, but to create a new one. To borrow a term from current parlance, the "alternative society" is not enough. What is demanded is an "alternative cosmology." Thus Ball formulates, in his own terms, the dilemma of the artist, demonstrating that his premises are no different from those of his contemporaries. But the path he is about to travel, the way out he is to take, will lead him into a vicious circle of despair and exaltation. The spiritual development of Hugo Ball, as reflected in his works, is frighteningly close to that of the drug addict who experiences one "bad trip" after another, but, having irreversibly rejected the world beyond the self, finds himself with only one way to go, downward toward ultimate self-destruction.

The first group of Ball's works to be considered is a set of lyric poems published in *Die Aktion, Die Revolution,* and *Die neue Kunst* before Emmy Hennings and Ball emigrated to Switzerland. Their discussion can conveniently be divided as follows: a description of their chief characteristics; Ball's contribution to *Die Revolution*; and the po-

ems composed in collaboration with Hans Leybold. It should be stressed that this does not imply the analysis of three separate stages of his work but, rather, of different levels at the same stage. The two events of the outbreak of war and the death of a close friend in battle did nothing more than intensify attitudes of pessimism already deeply embedded within him. What these events did cause was his recognition that his own creative work needed to take on a more extreme form—and it was then that his next, Dadaist, phase can be said to have begun.

But to turn to the general characteristics of these poems published in two of the leading and one of the most notorious literary journals of the day: they are in many respects typical of the flood of verse produced in what Peter Scher in *Die Aktion* somewhat hyperbolically, but not wholly inaccurately, called "the age of the lyric."[14] Many of these poems give an overwhelming impression of *déjà vu,* as is perhaps inevitable at a time when so many poets were repeating the same limited set of themes so frequently; but they are not without some originality, not to say idiosyncrasy, in expression.

The opening stanza of a poem not published in Ball's lifetime, but dating from the early war period, **"Das ist die Zeit,"**[15] demonstrates both this attribute and the poet's indebtedness to the kind of poetry which Georg Heym had written, both in its simplicity and directness, and in the conflict between the precise utterance and the horrors expressed:

> Das ist die Zeit, in der der Behemoth
> Die Nase hebt aus den gesalzenen Fluten.
> Die Menschen springen von den brennenden Schuten
> In grünen Schlamm, den Feuer überloht.
>
> (Now is the time in which the Behemoth
> Its snout above the salty tide does show.
> The people leap down from the burning boats
> Into green slime lit in the fire's glow.)

Presumably the monster is an eclectic borrowing from the Old Testament, and not the actual creature who "eateth grass as an ox,"[16] for the biblical animal is clearly of the fresh-water variety.

The poem advances a series of statements consequent upon the rising up of Behemoth and ends with an oxymoron: "Ein schwarzer Sonnenschein / Hängt wie Salpeter überm Höllentiegel." (A black sunlight / Hangs like saltpeter over hell's crucible.) All this seems to be a blend of "Der Krieg" and "Der Gott der Stadt," both by Heym, which gloomily predict the consequences of liberating the dark forces lurking beneath the thin surface layer of civilization, the "forgotten toys"[17] of cities and countries now being smashed as if by some demented child. In Ball's poem, however, tensions are even more acute, and the scene even more horrific and grotesque, as is shown by the red flames against the green slime at the close of the first stanza. The greatest tension is that between violent action and stillness, for Behemoth "rises up," men "leap," and the flames "flare up high." All is violent movement, especially in the second half of the poem where rabid angels destroy all in their path. And then, suddenly, above them hangs a black sun, motionless, the only point of reference in a world of agony and chaos. All that is certain is that the former source of all life and energy, the sun, has died, and that oblivion is inevitable. The impact of this "negative" image—and that not simply in the photographic sense—is intensified by the form, a comfortingly traditional but essentially delusive framework—because it is with a sense of considerable shock that the reader realizes that the poem is couched in that most conventional of forms, the sonnet.

It is significant that in the poem Behemoth, war, is not an alien visitor from another planet, but rises up from the depths of the sea, from the inner oceans of the mind, like the gray and menacing snout of a submarine. The devastation it wreaks is swift and total. Behemoth is both subjective and supernatural: it is a product of the individual mind, but comes to dominate it. Ball is concerned with the impact of these forces from within on a world whose population has summoned them into being without recognizing the destructive energies that have been unleashed. This interplay between transience and immanence is also the subject of a poem from *Die Aktion,* **"Der Gott des Morgens."**[18]

In lush imagery replete with strongly erotic overtones, the poem describes the God of morning reveling in the waking day:

> Der Morgen erwacht und schreitet aus grünlichen
> Toren, von Schaum gebaut.
> An seine Brust anklammert sich ein verfrühtes Mö-
> wenpaar
> Mit klatschenden Schwingen.
>
> (Morning awakes and strides out from doors of green,
> foam-built.
> A pair of early gulls cling to his breast
> With a clatter of wings.)

The poem is self-indulgent and precious, but demonstrates the power of Ball's Expressionist style in the now familiar violent verbal forms, the use of fire and garish illumination:

> Er schmettert den Stab auf das Felsengelände
> Und rosane Brände werfen aufbrausend Entzündung
> weit in die Ferne.
>
> (He smashes the rod down on the rocky regions
> And flaring up pink fires send flames shooting far in
> the distance.)

At first sight, an extravagant description of the first rays of the sun lighting up the plain from the hills, these words express the vehemence of the deity coming in the guise of the rising sun. This is hardly the conventional new dawn of hope; taken in isolation, the following lines could simply be an expression of divine exultation, yet the helplessness of man is clear enough: