

Twentieth-Century  
Literary Criticism

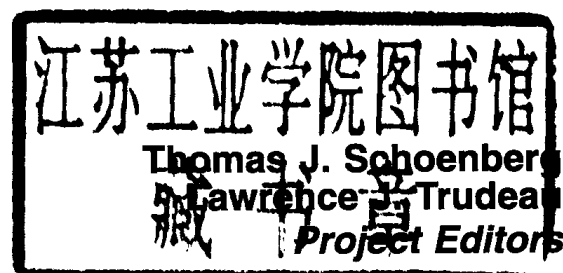
TCLC 204



Volume 204

# 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, Vol.  
204**

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## Preface

Since its inception *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC) has been purchased and used by some 10,000 school, public, and college or university libraries. TCLC has covered more than 1000 authors, representing over 60 nationalities and nearly 50,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical response to twentieth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as TCLC. In the words of one reviewer, “there is nothing comparable available.” TCLC “is a gold mine of information—dates, pseudonyms, biographical information, and criticism from books and periodicals—which many librarians would have difficulty assembling on their own.”

## Scope of the Series

TCLC is designed to serve as an introduction to authors who died between 1900 and 1999 and to the most significant interpretations of these author's works. Volumes published from 1978 through 1999 included authors who died between 1900 and 1960. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of the period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. In organizing and reprinting the vast amount of critical material written on these authors, TCLC helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in TCLC presents a comprehensive survey on an author's career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of TCLC is devoted to literary topics. These topics widen the focus of the series from the individual authors to such broader subjects as literary movements, prominent themes in twentieth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

TCLC is designed as a companion series to Gale's *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, (CLC) which reprints commentary on authors who died after 1999. Because of the different time periods under consideration, there is no duplication of material between CLC and TCLC.

## Organization of the Book

A TCLC entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym is listed in the author heading and the author's actual name is given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the name of its author.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose

works have been translated into English, the English-language version of the title follows in brackets. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication. Lists of **Representative Works** by different authors appear with topic entries.

- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it originally appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included. Criticism in topic entries is arranged chronologically under a variety of subheadings to facilitate the study of different aspects of the topic.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Source citations in the Literary Criticism Series follow University of Chicago Press style, as outlined in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Gale.

## Indexes

A **Cumulative Author Index** lists all of the authors that appear in a wide variety of reference sources published by Gale, including *TCLC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

A **Cumulative Topic Index** lists the literary themes and topics treated in *TCLC* as well as other Literature Criticism series.

A **Cumulative Nationality Index** lists all authors featured in *TCLC* by nationality, followed by the numbers of the *TCLC* volumes in which their entries appear.

An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *TCLC*. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, dramas, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Gale also produces a paperbound edition of the *TCLC* cumulative title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

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Brossard, Nicole. "Poetic Politics." In *The Politics of Poetic Form: Poetry and Public Policy*, edited by Charles Bernstein, 73-82. New York: Roof Books, 1990. Reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. Vol. 127, edited by Janet Witlec, 3-8. Detroit: Gale, 2003.

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Morrison, Jago. "Narration and Unease in Ian McEwan's Later Fiction." *Critique* 42.3 (spring 2001): 253-68. Reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. Ed. Janet Witlec. Vol. 127. Detroit: Gale, 2003. 212-20.

Brossard, Nicole. "Poetic Politics." *The Politics of Poetic Form: Poetry and Public Policy*. Ed. Charles Bernstein. New York: Roof Books, 1990. 73-82. Reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. Ed. Janet Witlec. Vol. 127. Detroit: Gale, 2003. 3-8.

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# Hermann Broch

## 1886-1951

Austrian novelist, short story writer, essayist, and playwright.

The following entry provides an overview of Broch's life and works. For additional information on his career, see *TCLC*, Volume 20.

### INTRODUCTION

Along with such authors as James Joyce and Thomas Mann, Broch is considered one of the innovators of the twentieth century novel. His *Der Tod des Vergil* (1945; *The Death of Vergil*), written in the form of an interior monologue in a stream of consciousness style that blends poetry and prose, is viewed as a technical advancement in fiction. As a doctoral candidate at the University of Vienna, Broch was greatly influenced by the philosophy of Immanuel Kant and G. W. F. Hegel. Broch's philosophical hypotheses were incorporated into his writings, perhaps most notably in his three-volume novel *Die Schlafwandler* (1931-32; *The Sleepwalkers*). In this work, Broch devised a complex plot intertwined with philosophical theory to investigate what Broch termed the "disintegration of values" in pre-World War I European society.

### BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Broch was born on November 1, 1886, to a prosperous Jewish family in Vienna. His father, Josef, was a wealthy textile manufacturer, and his mother, Johanna, came from a family of well-to-do merchants. Broch as the eldest son was expected to enter his father's textile business even though his main interests were philosophy and the natural sciences. Following his father's wishes, he attended the Vienna Institute for Weaving Technology from 1904 to 1906. For one semester, winter 1904-05, he attended the University of Vienna to study philosophy and mathematics. He continued his textile studies at the Spinning and Weaving School in Alsace-Lorraine from 1906 to 1907, earning a degree in textile engineering. Upon graduation he traveled to the United States for six weeks to inspect textile mills, attend conventions, and visit the New York Cotton Exchange. After returning to Austria he began administering the family textile business in Teesdorf, further

learning the trade and progressively managing the mills while studying philosophy and mathematics on the side at the University of Vienna.

Broch spent a short time in the military, serving from May to October 1909, when he was released due to illness. In July 1909, pressured to assimilate and also intending to marry a Catholic, he converted from Judaism to Catholicism. From 1913 to 1923 he published a series of essays based on philosophical ideas. These writings led to the subjects of his later fiction. Having assumed his father's position as manager of the family business, he worked long hours and had difficulty finding time to continue philosophical research as a doctoral candidate at the University of Vienna. He sold the mills in 1927 and devoted himself to his studies full time. He left the university in 1928 to write his first work of fiction, *The Sleepwalkers*. The book was publicized by a friend and fellow author, Frank Thiess. *The Sleepwalkers* was well received by the public and established Broch as a major author among the intellectual elite. However, the complexity of the novel and the poor economic climate at the time in Germany, where it was published, resulted in limited sales.

Having little income after the sale of the mill, Broch was forced to find more lucrative assignments such as writing reviews, short stories, and essays. In 1938 Broch was turned in to the Gestapo by a postal employee who noticed his extraordinary amount of correspondence with well known liberal literary and public figures and his subscription to *Das Wort*, a publication associated with Soviet exiles. Viewed as a Marxist, he was imprisoned in Alt-Aussee and released several weeks later. Fearing for his safety, Broch's prominent friends helped secure him an exit visa to the United States via England and Scotland. It wasn't until 1945 that Broch's second major work *The Death of Vergil*, which he had begun writing while confined at Alt-Aussee, was published. On May 30, 1951, Broch suffered a fatal heart attack. Much of his work was published posthumously.

### MAJOR WORKS

Broch's first major work, *The Sleepwalkers*, established him as a major author among the intellectual elite. The book's plot is a complex metaphor about the degradation of society from the late nineteenth century through the end of World War I. Broch perceived this time as a

period of disintegration in which society's value structure had broken and had not yet been replaced with a new structure. The novel's three parts—"The Romantic (1888)," "The Anarchist (1903)," and "The Realist (1918)"—focus on pivotal stages in Germany's cultural history as depicted through the lives of representative characters. While the first two parts are straightforward narrative, the third is experimental, with an embedded essay-like section and short story-like sections in either prose or verse, signifying the disorder of the era it depicts.

*The Death of Vergil*, like *The Sleepwalkers*, focuses on a time of transition, in this case that of the late Roman Empire. The plot concerns the last hours in the life of the poet Vergil who, perceiving his *Aeneid* to be a flawed aesthetic indulgence, decides to burn it to protest his vacuous life as an artist rather than a man of charity. After intensely reflecting on his own life and on the world, he is reconciled to his fate, and decides not to burn the book. *The Death of Vergil* is entirely written as an interior monologue, in a stream of consciousness style with some sentences spanning pages. The work alternates between prose and lyric passages.

Like *The Sleepwalkers* and *The Death of Vergil*, Broch's three other novels reflect his philosophical theories and societal concerns. In *Die unbekannte Größe* (1933; *The Unknown Quantity*), love and death intrude into the life of a mathematician, shaking his reliance on rationality. *Die Schuldlosen* (1950; *The Guiltless*), a novel about mass brainwashing and corrupted values, portrays Adolf Hitler's rise to power amid the protagonists' indifference to politics. The same events are symbolically represented in *Der Versucher* (1953; *The Spell*), in which a man settles in a small village and gains control of its citizens through mass psychology.

*Die Entsöhnung*, Broch's best-known play, was first performed in Zürich in 1934. A critique of capitalism in modern Germany, its plot concerns two entrepreneurs who strive to ruin one other in order to achieve economic supremacy.

## CRITICAL RECEPTION

While Broch was held in high regard by the literary avant-garde, he received limited recognition from critics and struggled to earn a living as an author. Today Broch is viewed by some critics as a writer whose talent for fiction writing is in conflict with his emphasis on philosophy. Broch viewed his fiction as primarily a vehicle for expressing his philosophical thought and commentators tend to view his philosophy as unoriginal. Nevertheless, Broch is ranked among the most important modern novelists for the literary value and technical and thematic innovation of his works. *The Death*

of Vergil and *The Sleepwalkers* in particular have earned him a reputation as an innovator who greatly advanced twentieth-century storytelling techniques.

## PRINCIPAL WORKS

- Die Schlafwandler*. 3 vols. [*The Sleepwalkers*] (novel) 1931-32  
*Die unbekannte Größe* [*The Unknown Quantity*] (novel) 1933  
*Die Entsöhnung* (play) 1934  
*James Joyce und die Gegenwart* (essay) 1936  
*The City of Man: A Declaration on World Democracy* [with Herbert Agar and others] (nonfiction) 1940  
*Der Tod des Vergil* [*The Death of Virgil*] (novel) 1945  
*Die Schuldlosen* [*The Guiltless*] (novel) 1950  
 \**Gesammelte Werke*. 10 vols. (novels, essays, poetry, and letters) 1952-61  
*Short Stories* (short stories) 1966  
 †*Bergroman: Die drei Originalfassungen*. 4 vols. (novel) 1969  
 ‡*Kommentierte Werkausgabe*. 17 vols. (novels, essays, plays, poetry, and letters) 1974-81  
*Hannah Arendt-Hermann Broch. Briefwechsel 1946-1951* (letters) 1996  
*Geist und Zeitgeist* (essays) 2002

\*Comprises *Gedichte: Mit 9 Bildern und 2 Handschriftproben des Autors*; *Die Schlafwandler*; *Der Tod des Vergil*; *Der Versucher*; *Die Schuldlosen*; *Dichten und Erkennen*; *Erkennen und Handeln*; *Briefe: Von 1929 bis 1951*; *Massenpsychologie: Schriften aus dem Nachlaß*; *Die unbekannte Größe und frühe Schriften*; and *Mit den Briefen an Willa Muir*.

†*Bergroman* is three versions of the novel *Der Versucher*, originally published in *Gesammelte Werke*. It was then published in *Kommentierte Werkausgabe* as *Die Verzauberung* [*The Spell*].

‡Comprises *Die Schlafwandler*; *Die unbekannte Größe*; *Die Verzauberung*; *Der Tod des Vergil*; *Die Schuldlosen*; *Novellen*; *Prosa*; *Fragmente*; *Dramen*; *Aus der Luft gegriffen oder Die Geschäfte des Baron Laborde*; *Es bleibt alles beim Alten: Schwank mit Musik*; *Gedichte*; *Schriften zur Literatur: Kritik*; *Schriften zur Literatur: Theorie*; *Philosophische Schriften: Kritik*; *Philosophische Schriften: Theorie*; *Politische Schriften*; *Massenwahntheorie: Beiträge zu Einer Psychologie der Politik*; *Briefe 1913-1938*; *Briefe 1938-1945*; and *Briefe 1945-1951*.

## CRITICISM

[Ralph Westwood Moore] (review date 28 September 1946)

SOURCE: [Moore, Ralph Westwood] "Virgil's Last Hour." *Times Literary Supplement*, no. 2330 (28 September 1946): 461.

[In the following review, Moore praises *The Death of Vergil* as complex, insightful, and poetic, but overly long.]



The reader [of *The Death of Virgil*] is offered a long, imaginative rhapsody on the last few hours of the poet Virgil's life, in which there is hardly any action and such traditional facts as are available for framework are used with poetic freedom. The sick man arrives at the port of Brundisium in the imperial convoy from Greece, spends a night of fever in which he is moved to destroy his life-work, the *Aeneid*; the next day has a long conversation with the Emperor Augustus and with Plotius and Varius (who, tradition says, were his literary executors), alters his will, and dies. This is a slender enough framework, and those who look within it for a novel in the normal connotation of the word will turn with impatience from the pages of unrelieved poetic monologue of which the book is largely composed. Many who might be well qualified to appreciate the book will find unreadable the endless circling of the poetic mind in the cage of words; many will find that the oases of illumination will vary in frequency with their own application. But those who have knowledge of the historical background and sufficient patience to follow the unfolding of the story in this psychological drama may find here a wealth of beauty and wisdom.

The book has an elaborate pattern and advances towards its conclusion, through four movements, in a structure resembling that of a symphony. The material circumstances lead the poet in his sickness to descend to an Avernus which is the context at once of the tragedy of an individual and of the crisis of a world; from this entranced experience he ascends to the meeting with Augustus in which the destinies of soul and state and the superficialities of mere statesmanship are searchingly explored; thereafter he sinks again below the verge of consciousness, voyaging into the immensities of the unknown. As he does so he has a vision, one among many, of the child whose smile is the token of a new age.

There is here something of the quality of Proust's *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*, but the theme is deeper and more ambitious. It is the exploration of the macrocosm refracted at various levels in the microcosm of the poetic consciousness. The levels are stratified and fused with great skill. The fevered meditations and dreamings of the poet, in spite of the jungle of imagery, seldom lose clarity. The deep and pregnant symbolism of the *Aeneid* is skilfully exploited. For all its turgidity and repetition—it is much too long and its essential virtuosity would have been enhanced by a greater regard for economy of line—this book is manifestly a labour of insight and of love. It will stand or fall as a work of creative imagination, though it is unfortunate that it will contribute to the fashion of over-intense mysticism with which the appreciation of the poet has been overloaded. *Or se' tu quel Virgilio?* and, with all respect to Herr Broch's poetic seership, we may take leave on the historical plane to doubt it.

### Hannah Arendt (essay date summer 1949)

SOURCE: Arendt, Hannah. "The Achievement of Hermann Broch." *Kenyon Review* 11, no. 3 (summer 1949): 476-83.

[In the following essay, Arendt asserts that in *The Sleepwalkers* and *The Death of Vergil*, Broch used innovative techniques that, along with novels by such authors as Marcel Proust and James Joyce, have incorporated philosophy into the novel genre.]

Hermann Broch belongs in that tradition of great 20th Century novelists who have transformed, almost beyond recognition, one of the classic art-forms of the 19th Century. The modern novel no longer serves as "entertainment and instruction" (Broch) and its authors no longer relate the unusual, unheard-of "incident" (Goethe) or tell a story from which the reader will get "advice" (W. Benjamin). It rather confronts him with problems and perplexities in which the reader must be prepared to engage himself if he is to understand it at all. The result of this transformation has been that the most accessible and popular art has become one of the most difficult and esoteric. The medium of suspense has disappeared and with it the possibility of passive fascination; the novelist's ambition to create the illusion of a higher reality or to accomplish the transfiguration of the real together with the revelation of its manifold significance has yielded to the intention to involve the reader in something which is at least as much a process of thought as of artistic invention.

The novels of Proust, Joyce and Broch (as well as those of Kafka and Faulkner who, however, each in his own way is in a class by himself) show a conspicuous and curious affinity with poetry on one hand and to philosophy on the other. Consequently, the greatest modern novelists have begun to share the poets' and philosophers' confinement to a relatively small, select circle of readers. In this respect, the tiny editions of the greatest works and the huge editions of good second-rate books are equally significant. A gift for story-telling which half a century ago could be found only among the great is today frequently the common equipment of good but essentially mediocre writers. Good second-rate production, which is as far removed from *kitsch* as it is from great art, satisfies fully the demands of the educated and art-loving public and has more effectively estranged the great masters from their audience than the much-feared mass culture. More important for the artist himself is that a widespread possession of skill and craftsmanship and a tremendous rise in the general level of performance have made him suspicious of facility and mere talent.

The significance of *The Sleepwalkers* trilogy (whose German original appeared in 1931) is that it admits the reader to the laboratory of the novelist in the midst of

this crisis so that he may watch the transformation of the art-form itself. Reaching back into three crucial years—1888, when *The Romantic* finds himself in the not yet visible decay of the old world; 1903, when *The Anarchist* gets entangled in the prewar confusion of values; 1918, when *The Realist* becomes the undisputed master of a nihilistic society—Broch seems to start in the first volume as an ordinary story-teller in order to reveal himself in the last as a poet whose main concern is judgment and not reporting, and as a philosopher who wants not just to portray the course of events but to discover and demonstrate logically the laws of movement governing the “disintegration of values.”

The first part, which consciously imitates the prose style of the 'eighties, is so skilfully told that one begins to understand the extent of sacrifice made by those great narrative talents who suddenly refused to continue telling tales about the world because they had realized that this world was going to pieces. The story stops abruptly with an unconsummated wedding night, and the author asks the reader to figure out the rest for himself, thereby upsetting the illusion of a created reality in which the author controls all events and the reader is admitted only as a passive observer. The fiction itself is expressly depreciated, its validity is set at an ironical and historical distance. The story is over not when the characters' private invented destinies have been played out, but when the historical essentials of the given period are established.

Thus one of the chief attractions of novel reading, the reader's identification with the hero, is consciously destroyed, and the daydreaming element, which always had brought the novel so suspiciously close to *kitsch*, is eliminated. *The Sleepwalkers* is of course a historical novel, but the point is that Broch is never engrossed in, and never permits the reader to become absorbed by, the story itself.

The first part of *The Sleepwalkers* describes the world of the Junker von Pasenow, whose youth is spent in military duty in Berlin, years of honor and boredom brightened only by the usual affair with some sweet girl below his own class and therefore beyond responsibility, whom, however, against all rules, the lieutenant Pasenow seems to love truly, a fact which he himself realizes dimly through the fog of inarticulate class prejudices and under the shock of his unhappy wedding night. To the world in Berlin belongs Pasenow's friend, Eduard von Bertrand, who is about to desert the narrowness of Prussian aristocracy, has resigned from the army and set out on a civilian career as an industrialist. The world at home is made up of the landed nobility with their estates, the horses and fields and the servants, and their constant fight against emptiness, boredom and financial worries. Pasenow marries the “pure” daughter of his neighbors on the adjoining estate—just as it should be and just as everybody had expected.

Broch does not picture this world from the outside; even fifty years later when, simply because of contrast, one was easily impressed and fooled by its façade of stability, he did not trust its obvious indications. Instead he uses the technique of the stream of consciousness novel whose radical subjectivization allows him to present events and feelings only insofar as they are objects of consciousness, which, however, gains in significance what it has lost in objectivity by picturing the full meaning of each experience within its proper framework of biographical reference. This enables him to show the frightening discrepancy between the open dialogue which respects the conventional forms and the always panic-ridden thoughts that accompany speech and actions with the obsessive insistence of compulsive imaginations. This discrepancy reveals the fundamental fragility of the time, the insecurity and convulsiveness of those who were its representatives. It turns out that behind the façade of still strong prejudices is a complete incapacity for orientation and that the clichés that impress society because they seem to reflect principles are the only remnants of former nobility and glory. The discrepancy dissolves and a unity of character is established when the father of Pasenow sinks into a senile insanity which gives him the privilege of saying what he thinks and acting as compulsively as he pleases.

The second part retains only a few rudimentary examples of this technique. Its principal character, the bookkeeper Esch of petty-bourgeois origin, feels no need for pretenses and is therefore even more helpless, more openly confused, and at the mercy of the general decay. The idea of justice possesses him like a hallucination of a bookkeeper who wants to keep his accounts in good order. A man of “impetuous actions,” he spends his life settling imaginary accounts. The climax of this volume is a dreamlike dialogue between Esch and Bertrand (from the first volume) after Esch, in his confused fanaticism, decided to denounce the beloved president of a shipping line for homosexuality. Bertrand's role in both volumes is the same: he appears as the only superior personality who is the master of his life and not a driven victim of events. As such he is the human yardstick against which the shady and shifty doings of the others are measured.

While the first part seemed to follow the tradition of the psychological novel, the second part seems to be realistic. Everything, except for the dialogue between Esch and Bertrand, happens on the tangible surface of reality. Yet this reality is no more fully and objectively presented than the psychology of the figures of the first part was objectively stated. The world of 1903 is a shadowy, sketchily drawn backdrop against which people act without any true contact between themselves so that their behavior becomes most compulsive when it seems most impetuous. Since the compulsive actions of the characters can find no common ground they con-

stantly destroy or at least undermine the reality of the common world. Like the first, the second volume ends when the marriage of its hero seems to assure a normal, reasonably safe future. If only these two parts of the work existed, one might be left with the impression that the banality of everyday life eventually overcomes human perplexity and resolves confusion into some kind of middle-class normalcy.

The third part deals with the end of the first World War and the actual breakdown of a world which had held together and retained its right senses not by any "values," but only by the automatism of habits and clichés. The two heroes of the preceding volumes reappear: the lieutenant and junker Pasenow, returned to active duty during the war, has become a major and military commander of a small town in Western Germany; the former bookkeeper Esch is now editor of the town's newspaper. These two, the Romantic and the Anarchist, unite and become friends across all differences in class and education against the protagonist of the third volume, the Realist Huguenau who, after deserting the army, begins his successful career as a businessman. It is Huguenau's "realism," his consistent application of business standards to all fields of life, his emancipation from every value and every passion, which eventually demonstrate the Romantic's and the Anarchist's unfitness for life: for "objective" reasons, that is for reasons of his own logical self-interest, he slanders the Major, murders the editor, and winds up a respected member of bourgeois society.

The technique of the narrative has again changed entirely. The story that binds together the heroes of the three volumes is broken by a wealth of episodes whose figures cross each other occasionally and which are woven and synchronized into the development of the main action. The most magnificent of these is the story of Goedecke of the Landwehr who had been buried alive and whom two comrades, on a wager, brought back to life. How the single organs and functions that were once the man Ludwig Goedecke slowly and piecemeal return to balance, how out of the decaying, doomed pieces a man rises up again who can speak and walk and laugh, how this "resurrection from the dead" resembles a second creation whose terrifying wonder lies in the animation and individualization of matter—this already foreshadows in its forcefulness of vision and language the most beautiful passages in *The Death of Virgil*.

The episodes that break into the narrative from all sides give the principal story—the story of the Romantic who believes in honor, of the Anarchist who seeks a new faith, and of the Realist who destroys them both—a somewhat episodic character. This impression is even strengthened through the introduction of two more levels of an entirely different kind, the lyrical parts of

"The Story of the Salvation Army Girl" and the philosophical speculations about the "disintegration of values," which somehow bring the eternal to the historical narrative plane. Neither the lyrical nor the philosophical parts have anything to do with the story itself, although it is suggested that Bertrand reappears as the narrator of the love story of the Salvation Army girl and a Polish Jew whom the war has driven to Berlin. The point is that this story is a purely lyrical interlude, frequently in verses, and the reflections truly logical discourses.

In other words, the novel at its end breaks into lyricism on one side and philosophy on the other. This is indeed like a symbol of what was happening generally to the novel as form of art. Neither the passions which lent the traditional novel its suspense, nor the universal and spiritual which illuminated it, could any longer be preserved in the narrative. The transparency of the world for the universal and the passionate affection of the individual have disappeared through "the disintegration of values," which consists in the collapse of an integrated view and way of life and the consequent radical atomization of its various spheres, each of which claims that its relative values are absolute. The universal and the rational on one side, the individual passion and the "irrational" on the other, have established themselves as the independent regions of philosophy and poetry.

*The Death of Virgil*, one of the truly great works in German literature, is unique in its kind. The uninterrupted flow of lyrical speculation leading through the last twenty-four hours of the dying poet begins when the ship that, in accordance with his imperial friend's desire, should carry him back from Athens to Rome, lies in at the port of Brundisium, and ends with the journey into death, when Virgil has left the feverish, overarticulated clarity of a conscious farewell to life and lets himself be led through all its remembered stages, over childhood and birth back into the calm darkness of chaos before and beyond creation. The journey leads into nothingness; but since it is an inverted story of creation, tracing all stages of world and man back to their creation out of nothingness, the journey also leads into the universe: "The no thing filled the emptiness and it became the universe."

The plot is dying itself in the sense that it is the story "of a man who feels the most significant thing of his life approaching and is full of anxiety lest he miss it." Apart from the introductory paragraph which describes the entry of the ship into the harbor, and which—comparable to the portrayal of Bohemia in the first pages of Stifter's *Wittico*—stands among the greatest literary landscapes in the German language, nothing is reported or perceived but what penetrates the invisible web woven of sensual data, fever visions and speculations which death has already spread over its victim. The richness of association produced through fever is used

not only to transform one thing into another in an endless chain of association, but to bring each floating bit of memory into full actuality and to illuminate it in its universally interrelated meaningfulness, so that the contours of the concrete and the particular are at once brought into sharper relief *and* merged into a universal, dreamlike symbol pattern.

The philosophical content itself resembles a Spinozistic Cosmos- and Logos-speculation in which all things we know to be separate and particular appear as the ever changing aspects of an eternal One, so that the manifold is understood as the merely temporary individualization of an all-comprehensive whole. The philosophical basis of Broch's speculations on the all-meaningfulness of all things that exist or happen lies in a truly pantheistic and panlogical hope of redemption in which eventually beginning and end, the "no thing" and the "universe" will prove to be identical. This hope illuminates the composition just as dying, understood as a conscious action, articulates it. The magnificent, fascinating rhythm of Broch's prose, which in the form of invocation reiterates constantly and always more insistently the fundamental themes of the work, is consistent with the gesture of farewell which yearns to save what is necessarily doomed as well as with an enthusiastic drunkenness with the universal being that can express itself only in exclamations.

In this sense, the theme of the book is truth, but a truth that, like a mathematical formula, should become manifest in *one* word in order to be fully expressed at all. The repeating insistence on words like Life, Death, Time, Space, Love, Help, Oath, Solitude, Friendship, is like the speculative attempt to penetrate to the *one* word in which from the beginning the universe and man and life have been "dissolved and acquitted," "contained and preserved," "destroyed and recreated forever," to the Word of God that was in the beginning and is "beyond speech."

The prose rhythm reflects the movement of philosophical speculation, somewhat as music reflects the movements of the soul. As distinguished from *The Sleepwalkers* suspense and tension are not thwarted and broken; the suspense and the tension are those of philosophical speculation insofar as it is, independent of all philosophical techniques, the still inarticulate passionate affection by the philosophical subject itself. And just as one who has been seized by the passion for philosophy is not simply haunted by one particular problem, just as the passionate tension of speculation is not relieved by results, the reader of this book is drawn into the tenseness of a movement which is beyond the suspense caused by a plot and carries him, like Virgil himself, through all its episodes and visions to the solution of eternal rest.

The reader is expected to surrender himself to this movement and to read the novel as though it were a poem. Suspended between life and death, between the

"no longer" and "not yet," life reveals itself in that all-meaningful richness which becomes visible only against the dark background of death. At the same time, the "no longer and not yet" which permeates the work like a leitmotif signifies the turning point in history, the crisis between the no longer of antiquity and the not yet of Christianity, and its obvious parallel to the present. The philosophical significance of the crisis has a resemblance to the situation of farewell: a time which despairs of everything, touches every possible problem with its questions and asks redemption from every possible need.

"No longer and not yet," "not yet and yet close at hand," have replaced as a general frame of reference Broch's earlier insistence on the "disintegration of values." With the insight into this crisis, this turning point in history, Virgil despairs of poetry and tries to destroy the manuscript of the *Aeneid*. In the hour of his death, the poet reaches a higher, more valid region than art and beauty. Beauty, irresponsible in and excluded from reality, pretends a spurious eternity; the artist's productivity pretends to be creation, that is, it arrogates to man what is the privilege of God. Whatever the nature and level of this make-believe, circus-games for the Roman populace or masterpieces of artists for the refined, it always satisfies on different levels the same vulgar ingratitude of men who will not admit their non-human origin, and it appeases their vulgar desire to escape reality and responsibility into "the unity of the world established by beauty." "Art's . . . despairing attempt to build up the imperishable from things that perish" makes the artist treacherous, self-seeking, unreliable and oblivious of the essentially human.

Seen within the framework of literary history, *The Death of Virgil* solves the problem of the new form and content of the novel that *The Sleepwalkers* raised. There the novel seemed to have reached an impasse between philosophy and lyricism, precisely because pure storytelling, entertainment and instruction, had been taken care of by extraordinary but second-rate talents. The historical significance of *The Death of Virgil* is the creation in both of a unity in which a new specifically modern element of suspense could materialize. It is as though only now those purely artistic elements which always gave the traditional novel its literary validity, the lyrical passion and the transfiguration of reality through the universal, have emancipated themselves from the merely informative and found a new and valid form.

**James N. Hardin, Jr. (essay date January 1966)**

SOURCE: Hardin, James N., Jr. "Der Versucher and Hermann Broch's Attitude toward Positivism." *German Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (January 1966): 29-41.

[In the following essay, Hardin asserts that examination of Broch's essays and reviews written prior to *The Spell*



reveals that Broch was anti-positivistic and that the novel accordingly is implicitly critical of "materialism, Nietzschean relativism, philistinism, and political and philosophical quackery."]

Since its appearance in 1953, Hermann Broch's *Der Versucher*<sup>1</sup> has received critical attention both as a mythological novel and as a study of political dictatorship and mass-psychology. Schoolfield and other scholars have shown the relationship of the novel to the Demeter myth and have also drawn close parallels between the action of *Der Versucher* and current political events in Germany, particularly Hitler's rise to power, Nazi upheavals in Styria, and local Austrian history.<sup>2</sup> There is no question of the validity both of the mythological and the political or mass-psychological interpretations of *Der Versucher*, but for the most part the very significant connection between the novel and its author's attitude toward positivism has been neglected.<sup>3</sup> Doubtless this is largely due to the fact that such a connection is not immediately apparent unless one examine the novel in the light of Broch's early essays and literary reviews written prior to the inception of *Der Versucher* in 1934. These critical and theoretical writings have only recently become readily accessible<sup>4</sup> and, together with the essays written during Broch's sojourn in the United States (from 1938 until his death in 1951), they offer many valuable clues to the interpretation of *Der Versucher*. The early essays are unified in outlook, if not in style, and all reveal the anti-positivistic Weltanschauung of their author. Comparison of their content with the underlying philosophical and ethical themes of the novel indicates that *Der Versucher* is in large part a fictional illustration and re-formulation of Broch's message in the essays. On the one hand, the descriptive passages of the novel reveal Broch's Platonic idealism and mysticism, while on the other the action of the work and the characterization of its chief protagonists constitute an implicit denunciation of positivism—as Broch understood it—in all its forms: materialism, Nietzschean relativism, philistinism, and political and philosophical quackery.

The plot of *Der Versucher* can be outlined in a few words: Marius Ratti, a political fanatic of obscure origin, settles in a small, superstitious Austrian community and gains control of the minds of the villagers through his intuitive grasp of mass-psychology. In effect, he promises the inhabitants of Kuppron salvation from their fear of death, but at the same time plays on that fear, driving them to a frenzied orgy which culminates in the "sacrificial" murder of a young girl. Ratti succeeds in his schemes despite the opposition of Mutter Gisson, an archetypal figure symbolizing the beneficent wisdom of the Earth-Mother,<sup>5</sup> and despite the efforts of a country doctor, the narrator of the novel, to inject restraining forces of reason and tolerance into the emotional atmosphere of the village. At the end of the novel Mutter Gisson has died and Marius Ratti has assumed a

position of leadership in Kuppron. Temporarily, and in a material sense, the "tempter's" irrational, brutal doctrines have prevailed over the humanitarianism and essentially Christian ethic represented by the doctor and his mentor, Mutter Gisson.

This summary tells us little of the philosophical outlook revealed in *Der Versucher*, but before proceeding to an examination of that aspect of the novel let us first briefly survey the pertinent theoretical writings of Broch prior to 1934. According to Wolfgang Rothe, Broch was a neo-Kantian Platonist and mystic in the first years of his literary activity,<sup>6</sup> and, as regards Platonism and its relation to Broch's aesthetic views, it has been shown that as early as 1913 (in the essay "**Philistrosität, Realismus, Idealismus der Kunst**")<sup>7</sup> he in effect equated realism and naturalism with the materialistic worldview.<sup>8</sup> In the same essay he bases his argument on the aesthetics of Schopenhauer, maintaining that "künstlerisches Sehen ist die Fähigkeit, in den Objekten deren 'platonische Idee', das 'Ding an sich' zu ahnen."<sup>9</sup> Broch admits that the artist is not necessarily a philosophical idealist, that in fact such artists are rare in the modern age, but he implies that the Platonic, idealistic vision lacking in works of realism and naturalism informs the art-work with an underlying philosophical validity.<sup>10</sup> Broch's further essays<sup>11</sup> continued to reject all art grounded in what he considered positivism—Wagnerian opera, for instance—and he attacked the George circle for its grandiose but hollow "Dichterfürsten" and "Musikheroen."<sup>12</sup>

In *Der Versucher* Broch put his theory of "Platonic" art into practice, most conspicuously in the long, lyrical nature descriptions occasioned by the doctor's mountainside strolls. The latter views the empirical world skeptically as the "echo" (to use Broch's terminology) of the hidden, underlying reality. The doctor, who obviously voices the author's own philosophical outlook, seeks to perceive the "Unsichtbare im Sichtbaren," (8) to catch momentary glimpses of the interchange between the "Sichtbare und das Hörbare, das Unsichtbare und das Unhörbare" (63) in the constant flux of nature. Seen through the doctor's eyes, the landscape of Kuppron represents a kind of awesome and mysterious curtain separating the phenomenal world from ultimate reality.<sup>13</sup> Kneeling at a mountain spring the doctor relates:

Das Wasser ist eiskalt, und während ich meine Pulse lange im verwandelnd Dahinfließenden kühle und meine Schläfen benetze und in das unablässig sich Gebärende des Quells schaue, da ist es mir, als gebe es ein Fließen und Aber-Fließen zwischen dem Drüben und dem Herüber, so unablässig, daß keine Grenze mehr besteht und daß dies Fließen auch nur noch mein Haupt berühren müsse, um mich zu öffnen, einfließend in mein Herz. . . .

(541)

And elsewhere in the novel Broch describes a stream whose water is "unirdisch rein, gleichsam unmittelbar aus dem Unendlichen kommend." (537)