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“Blake was a phenomenon”: Artistic, Domestic and Blakean Visions in Joseph Paul Hodin’s writing on Else and Ludwig Meidner

When Ludwig Meidner (1884-1966), the German-Jewish Expressionist painter, printmaker and writer, returned to Germany in 1953, he took what he could carry; personal belongings, books and images, his prints, drawings, paintings and watercolours.¹ Refugees face difficult choices; they can only take what is absolutely necessary. Meidner never adjusted during the fourteen years of exile and there is a sense, that he wanted to eradicate all that reminded him of London – except for Blake. Thomas Grochowiak, who first noted the significance of Meidner’s encounter with “the painter, poet, mystic William Blake” (“Maler-Dichter-Mystikers William Blake”), suggests that Meidner identified with Blake’s adverse living conditions and artistic neglect, arguing that the occult aspects and especially the Visionary Heads interested Meidner: “For him the preoccupation with Old-Testament figures and prophets, with mystical philosophers or religious ecstasies was just as natural as the everyday, familiar dealings with ghosts”.² Meidner not only took John Piper’s *British Romantic Artists* (1942) and Ruthven Todd’s edition of Alexander Gilchrist’s *Life of Blake* (1942) but also reproductions of *William Blake* by Thomas Phillips, the large colour print *God Judging Adam* (then known as *Elijah about to ascend in the Chariot of Fire*) and James Deville’s life-mask. These images were part of a selection that were to adorn the studio in Marxheim (1955-63),³ where Meidner shared his art with a small number of visitors who came to pay tribute to the Old Master of German Expressionism.

Meidner, Max Peter Maass acknowledges, managed to preserve his pre-WWI apocalyptic landscapes (1912-13), scrutinizing portraits and self-portraits despite his itinerant life style, which is what he is known for.⁴ Hans Sahl, who visited Marxheim in 1958 and found himself overwhelmed by Meidner’s forgotten greatness, quotes Meidner saying that he could only live where people spoke German; that he hoped to spend his remaining days in

¹ Meidner arrived in London with three portfolios of prints, 2,500 drawings and 80 paintings (Sander 2016, 228). In a letter (18 June 1953), he says that he created “a few hundred, interesting watercolours”, while in London (“ein paar hundert interessanter Wasserfarbenbilder”; Breuer and Wagemann 1991, 2: 486).

² “Ihm war die Beschäftigung und Auseinandersetzung mit den alttestamentlichen Gestalten und Propheten, mit mystischen Philosophen oder religiösen Ekstatikern ebenso selbstverständlich wie der alltägliche, vertrauliche Umgang mit Geistern.” Grochowiak, 1966, 200-01.

³ Erle 2018a.

⁴ Maass 1979, 119.

Germany and not be forced to emigrate again.⁵ Maass, who met Meidner around the same time, reflects on the impact of anti-Semitism, recalling Meidner's intense visions of 1914 and 1939. (Meidner's art had been included in the *Degenerate Art* exhibition in Munich in 1937;⁶ he left Germany on the eve of WWII.) His visions, so Meidner told Maass, returned in London.⁷ Meidner may not have got recognition but was, without doubt, productive as he found new themes in urban life and engaged with English art.⁸ Meidner's resentment dominates and echoes in the opinions of the visitors to the Marxheim studio. Maass compared the watercolours with Blake's and Fuseli's representations of ghosts ("Gespenster-Darstellungen des Blake und Füßli") (122) and argues that they show how Meidner dealt with the emotional pressures of isolation.⁹ Though life in exile was hard, Meidner's isolation is rhetorical stance and biographical fact; he explores this theme artistically in the descriptions of his studios; these texts, which refer to Meidner's works and possessions, examine his past but also dwell on the moment of writing by pausing to explore states of mind and allowing the visionary mode to disrupt narrative chronology.

Meidner's return to Germany, a decision that had come about gradually,¹⁰ marked the break-up of his family. Son David, shocked at his father's wanting to return to the country of the originators of the Holocaust, immigrated to Israel in May 1951 and broke off all contact. Else Meidner (1901-1987), his wife, painter and former pupil (Hodin 1979, 21, 25-37), visited in April 1963 and stayed until May 1964 (Hodin 1973, 71), to look after her ailing husband. She returned to London to attend a retrospective of her art at the Ben Uri Art Gallery (Hodin 1973, 75) and remained there, having become a British citizen in 1954. Like Ludwig, Else considered herself German (Hodin 1979, 46) but in contrast to Ludwig, she had lost most of her family in the Holocaust (47-48). Though many kilometres apart, the Meidners remained close; Ludwig tried to comfort Else, never challenging her decision, always encouraging her (Hodin 1973, 28-29). Both Meidners were interested in Blake. Else

⁵ "Aber ich kann nur leben, wo man Deutsch spricht und schreibt [...] und so hoffe ich, den Rest meiner Erdentage hier zu verbringen und nicht genötigt zu sein, von neuem in die Emigration zu gehen." Sahl 1958, 35. I am grateful to Erik Riedel who shared this article with me.

⁶ See Barron 1991, 53, 54, 298-299.

⁷ Meidner talked about new and very strong visions to Hodin in 1953 (1979, 121).

⁸ For Meidner's borrowings from Hogarth, Gillray and Rowlandson, see Dogramaci 2018, 265-74. For Meidner and Edward Lear, see Riedel 2016, 84.

⁹ "Zudem liegt hier psychologisch wichtiges Material vor, das Aufschluß darüber geben könnte, wie ein schöpferischer Geist von ungewöhnlicher Potenz Mißachtung und todesnahe Verelendung pariert, indem er Dämonen, die ihn bedrängen, auf Distanz bringt, wenn er sie bildhaft fixiert." Quoted in Hodin 1979, 122.

¹⁰ In letters written to Hannah Bekker (22 May 1949) and Wolf Bergmann (25 September 1949) Meidner is weighing up his options. Breuer and Wagemann 1991, 2: 478-80. His decision is consolidating during visits to Germany, see letters to Ernst Buchholz (15 December 1952) and Wolf Bergmann (1 February 1953) in Breuer and Wagemann 1991, 2:484.

had given Todd's edition of Gilchrist's *Life* to Ludwig as a birthday present in April 1945;¹¹ in December 1959 she put Blake's *Illustrations of the Book of Job*, the second edition of the facsimile published by Gowand & Gray in 1927, into the post. Blake's *Job*, I think, is an attempt to bridge the distance between them; in Blake's interpretation of The Book of Job, Job's wife never leaves the side of her husband. The occasion was "Chanukah 1959" (the eight-day-long Jewish Festival that started on 25 December in 1959), according to the inscription on the titlepage. 'Blake' had been part of the life they shared in London; her present was a reminder of that time.

This essay, which engages with the artistic visions of Else and Ludwig Meidner, focuses on their shared interest in Blake as mediated by fellow émigré and Czech-born art historian, art critic and author Joseph Paul (1905-1995), who managed, unlike the Meidners, to build a career for himself in England. In the obituary in the *Independent* it says:

Paul Hodin encapsulated in his work the values of the past, while devoting much effort to forging novel attitudes to interpret the art of the second half of the 20th century. The corollary was a dislike of, even an angry aloofness from, what was ephemeral, if insistent, in the artistic movements of the post-war years. (Mullaly 2011)

Hodin was a great friend of Meidner and is principally known for his biography of Oskar Kokoschka, published in 1966; Hodin, who approaches artworks through his understanding of the artist's personality, mentions Blake three times in *Ludwig Meidner: Seine Kunst, seine Persönlichkeit, seine Zeit* (1973). Hodin's book, begun in the summer of 1953, took twenty years to complete. The men met and corresponded and Meidner, going by the materials surviving in the Hodin Archive at Tate Britain, took a keen interest in this manuscript. After Meidner's death in 1966, Hodin produced a series of articles for *Darmstädter Tagesblatt* (1966-67). These texts present the materials for the 1973 book in an intermediary stage (Hodin 1973, 26), with Hodin reluctant to share all he knew about Meidner's visions.¹² Blake, as we will see, is a touchstone for Hodin's perception of Meidner's character and artistic achievements in the years in exile. Hodin's publications, primarily *Ludwig Meidner* (1973)

¹¹ Breuer and Wagemann 1991, 1:180.

¹² Meidner's apocalyptic landscapes anticipate events of WWI: houses are burning and collapsing; human figures are running for their lives (Grochowiak, 48ff, 64f, 72). Hodin views Meidner's Expressionist works as testimonies of anxiety (43), emphasizing that Meidner refused to identify the exact cause or reasons for his "doomsday gloom" ("Weltuntergangsstimmung"): "Ich habe – unerklärlich – entsetzliche Angst gehabt." ("I suffered – for no apparent reason – from extreme anxiety") (Hodin, 1973, 61).

and *Aus den Erinnerungen von Else Meidner* (1979), are inherently fragmented as they juxtapose and combine different kinds of text which also intertwine the Meidners' life-stories. Several pages into *Ludwig Meidner*, which is two parts, Hodin explains that his approach is dialogic:

What is recorded below was the subject of conversations I had with Ludwig Meidner in London in 1953. [...] Because the material is based entirely on the painter's personal statements as well as on the letters he sent me in the years 1955-1955 from London, Frankfurt am Main, Hofheim am Taunus and Bad Nauheim, it is to be reprinted here as an authentic statement, as it was in my manuscript from 1953, which the artist read and annotated in January of the following year.¹³

The materials Hodin is referring to are typescripts and many of these have annotations in either Hodin's or Meidner's hand. Else and Ludwig Meidner met Hodin in the early summer of 1953. Hodin, who had published a major study on Edvard Munch (1948) and was working on Oskar Kokoschka, was thrilled to make Meidner's acquaintance (1973, 15). Meidner introduced Hodin to Else on his second visit (1973, 69; 1979, 20) and Hodin, who quickly befriended her (1979, 22), published two articles on Else (in 1959 and 1960) and later, in *Ludwig Meidner*, included a long chapter on Else. In *Aus den Erinnerungen* Hodin uses materials written by Else, dating from 1959-1960 and 1969-1970. For Else, 1959, the year in which she sent Blake's *Job* to Ludwig, was a year of disappointment; the exhibition at the Beaux Arts Gallery, which Hodin helped with (Hodin 1973, 72-75; 1979, 90), achieved little for raising her public profile or finding buyers for her artworks. Hodin's organisation of the book and especially Else's poetry (1979, 70-74, 91) allow for speculation about her reasons for choosing Blake's *Job*. That Blake was on her mind is suggested in Hodin's preface; where Else talks about her illustrious guests ("erlauchte Gäste"), such as Beethoven and Goethe (1979, 9), which were, of course, visions. These stories, told by a woman who had professed that she did not take Ludwig's visions seriously (Hodin 1973, 143), have a Blakean ring to them. Else could have read the chapter "John Varley and the Visionary

¹³ "Was im Folgenden aufgezeichnet ist, war der Gegenstand von Gesprächen, die ich mit Ludwig Meidner in London 1953 geführt habe. [...] Weil sich das Material ganz auf persönliche Äußerungen des Malers sowie auf den Briefen aufbaut, die mir dieser in den Jahren 1955-1955 zuschickte aus London, Frankfurt am Main, Hofheim am Taunus und Bad Nauheim, soll es hier unverändert als authentische Aussage abgedruckt werden, wie es in meinem Manuskript aus dem Jahre 1953 vorlag, das der Künstler im Januar des folgenden Jahres gelesen und mit Anmerkungen versehen hat." (Hodin 1973, 25-26)

Heads” in Gilchrist’s *Life*, her birthday present for Ludwig in April 1945, and Hodin mentions that Meidner was a frequent visitor of the Tate Gallery and shared his impressions with his wife (Hodin 1973, 87).¹⁴ It is possible that Else invented these visions. Aware of Hodin’s interest in Meidner’s experiences of vision, she put on a show. Her script, and this is my point, follows Blake’s performance for Varley in that it imagines a visionary community of famous people.

Another example for the Meidners’ shared interests and Hodin’s intertwining is repetition. Else’s obituary of Ludwig comes at the end of *Ludwig Meidner* (1973, 133-134) and is repeated - twice - in *Aus den Erinnerungen* (1973, 74-75 and 123-124). “Farewell to the Master” (“Abschied vom Meister”) (1966), Else’s official good-bye, was first published in *Darmstädter Tagesblatt*. It is near to impossible to get a sense of a chronology in Hodin’s writing. The fragmentation of and in the texts written by Else especially create a fascinating portrait of inner psychology. Ludwig has a pervading presence but Else continually tries to disentangle herself from her husband, claiming, for example, that she was self-taught (1979, 34). Hodin presents the Meidners as ‘figures’ suffering in exile (1973, 71-79; 1979, 47, 66, 128-29) to note an important difference between the couple: Ludwig, apparently reluctantly though expectantly (1973, 88) experienced a “Renaissance” in Germany, while Else had to accept total lonesomeness (“totale Vereinsamung”) in England (1979, 42). In *Aus den Erinnerungen* Hodin reveals themes that connect with Blake’s *Job*. Possibly alluding to Job’s despair, Else Meidner wonders why she is being treated like the “pariah” of mankind - twice (1979, 20, 94).

Hodin’s role as mediator of European culture in post-war Britain cannot be underestimated. After settling in London in 1944, he made it his mission to challenge conservative tastes in art; he introduced English audiences to Expressionism but also wrote and lectured on contemporary British artists from a European perspective. In *The Dilemma of Being Modern* (1956), and in the chapter on Graham Sutherland Hodin, for example, aligns Sutherland with Neo-Romanticism and describes this movement as “pantheistic Romanticism”, a tradition he traces back to Samuel Palmer but especially to Blake, whose “mysticism and religiousness” was a major influence on Sutherland’s “mystical consciousness.”¹⁵ On account of his cosmopolitan background, Hodin was not only ideally

¹⁴ Meidner knew about Blake before he came to England through Blake’s early C20th German reception. He would have seen Blake’s artworks at *The Tate Gallery’s Wartime Acquisitions* exhibitions, recently acquired and exhibited in 1942 and 1945, as well as at the major Blake exhibition at the Tate in 1947 (Erle 2018b).

¹⁵ Hodin 1956a, 120, 123, 126.

placed to analyse trends in modern European art, he also developed a theory of art, which stressed the spiritual and psychological in art, as well as his own, unique method of “living art criticism”.¹⁶ Hodin wrote about his friends, artists he knew personally so that he could interweave interpretations of art with his understanding of the person who created it.¹⁷ In “Expressionism” (1949) Hodin insists that style and personality are connected and exist *par excellence* in Expressionism: “The expressionist is an archetype in Jung’s sense; that is, he possesses a collective unconscious whose content and functions are of an archaic nature. [...] In expressionism we are less concerned with a school than with personality.”¹⁸ Hodin’s misunderstanding of Jung speaks of his attempt to comprehend personal themes and resonances of biographical connections in works of art rather than processes and modes of representations.

In Germany and until Hodin’s biography of 1973, Meidner was foremost known through Thomas Grochowiak who had organised a major retrospective that travelled from Recklinghausen, Berlin, to Darmstadt (1963-64). Grochowiak’s *Ludwig Meidner*, the first monograph, followed in 1966; it deals primarily with Meidner’s Expressionist art. With agitated lines, Grochowiak explains, Meidner wanted to open the eye of the beholder to a vision of the future (74, 120) and this evaluation applies to Meidner’s painting and writing. When Meidner reflects on his Expressionist prose in *Im Nacken das Sternemeer* (1918) and *Septemberschrei* (1920), prime examples of Expressionist book illustration, he considers the effects of colour and brushwork. In mid-process, it seems, he has stepped back to take stock: “My last picture is bleeding on its easel. It is like open wounds and sores. One can still see how the moist colour shines fervently [...]”¹⁹ In *Septemberschrei*, he illuminates: “Did not I always have to paint bloodstreams into my self-portrait as well as eroded [eaten away] wounds?”²⁰ In his autobiographical works Meidner articulates his struggles, describing the easel as a space that can contain emotional pain as well as recreate an inner state or level of consciousness at which he could see what he describes. His paintings were created in a state of euphoria, though Meidner later told Hodin that he often painted under the influence of

¹⁶ Hodin 1956b. I am grateful to Shulamith Behr for her “Reframing Exilic Identity for a German Audience: Joseph Paul Hodin’s Encounter with Else and Ludwig Meidner”, prior to its publication in *Sites of Interchange* volume edited by Lucy Wasensteiner. Behr writes about the meetings between Hodin and the Meidners in June 1953 and explains how Hodin uses photography to document Meidner’s personality.

¹⁷ Vanek 1965, 83-104.

¹⁸ Hodin 1949, 45.

¹⁹ “Mein letztes Bild blutet auf seiner Staffelei. Es ist wie offene Wunden und Schwären. Noch sieht man, wie die feuchte Farbe brünstig glänzt. [...]” Quoted in Grochowiak 1966, 77.

²⁰ “Mußte ich nicht auf mein Selbstporträt immer Blutrinnsale hineinmalen und zerfressene Wunden? Gott war mir noch ferne in jenen Tagen.” Quoted in Hodin 1973, 41.

alcohol (1973, 83). Meidner's approach was physical but also visionary in that his technique and description thereof reveal or evoke what normally remains hidden or is impossible to define (Grochowiak 1966, 146-148, 184).

Except for the apocalyptic landscapes, Meidner created self-portraits. He painted and sketched his likeness many times and often in front of a mirror. Meidner made various attempts at writing his autobiography but most of them remain in manuscript or are unfinished; the narratives tend to focus on the Expressionist phase. "Dichter, Maler und Cafés" (Poets, Painters and Cafes, 1964), "Mein Leben" (My Life) and "Journal 1915" were published posthumously. An earlier version of "Mein Leben" had appeared in Lothar Brieger's *Ludwig Meidner* (1919), where Meidner explains that he started writing during the war and as a soldier. His ambition was to become a second Byron, Heinrich Heine or Victor Hugo.²¹ This identity-theme is continued by Hodin, who refers to Meidner as a painter and an author (44). Hodin, moreover, purposefully introduces Meidner as an author, when he says that on learning that Meidner was in London, he reached for his copy of *Eine Autobiographische Plauderei* (1973, 15). This volume, with yet another version of "Mein Leben", is identified by Hodin as the revised second edition of 1923 (1973, 15-25). The 1923 version of "Mein Leben" details how Meidner found comfort in his newly found faith.

The dramatic climax of Meidner's life-story is his conversion, which, he says, took place in 1912 (Sommerfeld 2017). This experience turned Meidner from a revolutionary atheist into an Orthodox Jew; it, too, exists in versions. The following is from "Leben auf dem Lande" (Life in the Country), dating from 1958:

Raptures, visions and ecstasies, I really experienced them, they were great and good gifts that suddenly started appearing from a day in December 1912. I was in my thirties and they always gave me incredible, unheard of experiences with such power that I learnt to curse the atheism, which I was still attached to, and recognize the truth of the belief in God with all my heart.²²

²¹ Breuer and Wagemann 1991, 2: 361.

²² "Verzückungen, Visionen und Ekstasen, das erlebte ich wirklich, das waren große und gute Gaben, die plötzlich von einem Tage an im Dezember 1912 auftauchten und in meinen Dreißigern mir immer wieder unglaubliche unerhörte Erlebnisse schenkten und mit solcher Macht, daß ich den Atheismus, dem ich noch nachhinkte, verfluchen lernte und die Wahrheit des Gottesglauben erkannte und meinem Herzen zueigen machen konnte." Meidner, "Leben auf dem Lande." Quoted in Breuer and Wagemann 1991, 2:452.

When talking to Hodin, Meidner dates his story, condensing into a single event: “One day the grace came, the miracle occurred. It was on 4 December 1912, when the Holy Ghost, the Shechina, visited and converted me. Then I was religious.”²³ Meidner’s declaration evokes immediacy and creates a distinctive moment of no return but also presents his Judaism as coloured by Christianity. He wanted to underline the importance of religious practice for his art and needed Hodin to understand why he had visions. He alludes to an altered state of consciousness, a power within and loss of self and an experience that dissolved the boundary between him and his art ²⁴

Hodin was Meidner’s trusted biographer. The second part of *Ludwig Meidner*, entitled “Else und Ludwig Meidner in England”, begins with the letter Meidner wrote to introduce himself to Hodin. Their collaboration was complex and superseded Grochowiak’s explaining of Meidner, something that Hodin stresses (26). Working with Hodin gave him the opportunity to help construct what I want to call a textual collage. As with his drawing sessions in front of a mirror, he realized that he needed an opposite to find his voice. Meidner’s decision to approach Hodin may have originated from reading Todd’s edition of Gilchrist’s *Life* because Gilchrist includes Henry Crabb Robinson’s conversations with Blake. I think that if the appeal of Blake is one of biography, then Meidner would have appreciated that Gilchrist took Blake’s vision seriously:

Now, in maturity, as when in youth producing the *Songs of Innocence*, or in age the *Illustrations of Job*, we see Blake striking the same mystic cord. The bridge thrown across from the visible to the invisible world was ever firm and sure to him. The unwavering hold (of which his ‘Visions’ were a result) upon an unseen world, such as in other ways poetry and even science assure us of, and whose revelation is the meaning underlying all religions – this habitual hold is surely an authentic attainment, *not* an hallucination (1942, 238-239).

Hodin was wary of what Meidner was telling him, implying that Meidner was prone to exaggeration. He informs readers that he interpreted Meidner’s statements as a commentary

²³ “Eines Tages kam die Gnade, das Wunder ereignete sich. Es war der 4. December 1912, da mich der heilige Geist, die Schechina, besuchte und bekehrte. Dann war ich religiös.” Hodin 1973, 116.

²⁴ Meidner had always been interested in religious art, believing that true art could only be created as a devotional act. Hille 1994, 42-50.

on everything that had been published about him, again, implying that Meidner knew the critical debate on his art, personality and philosophy:

Of course, everything that is pronounced by an artist must be assessed objectively and psychologically, especially in terms of the motives of the statement and the circumstances in which this happened. This applies both to clues concerning one's own person, as well as to art theories and critical statements. But even here, even if there are exaggerations and distortions, the essential expression of individuality can be determined. I couldn't publish anything about Ludwig Meidner at the time.²⁵

Hodin's comments interrupt the narrative of the biography and, as a result, position the moment of writing in the years after Meidner's death. There is plenty of evidence for dialogue between the men as well as for Hodin's editing of Meidner's life story. In the given example Hodin goes back on his intention to publish ("reprint") Meidner's "authentic" statements unchanged (1973, 26).²⁶ The contradiction, of course, is a consequence of the fragmented nature of Hodin's text, but it also suggests that he changed his mind. The following sections map the writing process and Hodin's scepticism and thus illuminate on Hodin's engagement with Meidner's visions.

In the summer of 1953, Meidner, inspired by his perception of Blake, set to constructing 'mystical Meidner' for what was to be Hodin's *Ludwig Meidner: Seine Kunst, seine Persönlichkeit, seine Zeit* (1973). What is at stake is Meidner's control over his telling of his life-story and Blake's function within that story.

Reception: Mystic Meidner & Appropriations of Blake

Meidner's exile began in a way typical for many German refugees; before settling in London and setting up studio proper on Finchley Road in NW2 (1947-53), he was interned (1940-41). In a letter to Hilde Rosenbaum (6/7 November 1948), Ludwig mentions that the Orthodox

²⁵ "Natürlich muß alles von einem Künstler Ausgesprochene objektiv und psychologisch gewertet werden, vor allem auf die Motive der Aussage hin und die Umstände, unter denen dies geschah. Dies gilt sowohl von Hinweisen, welche die eigene Person betreffen, als auch von Kunsttheorien und kritischen Aussagen. Doch wird man auch hier, selbst wenn Übertreibungen und Verzeichnungen vorliegen, den wesentlichen Ausdruck einer Individualität feststellen können. Publizieren konnte ich damals nichts über Ludwig Meidner." (1973, 80).

²⁶ Hodin wrote to Meidner (31 March 1956) to remind him about an essay on Kokoschka, which Meidner (writing from Frankfurt on 10 January 1956) had said he would (TGA 20062/4/258). Nobody but Meidner: "There is nobody but you who can write about the years in Berlin around 1910 authentically." ("Es ist ja niemand da der über diese Berliner Jahre um 1910 so authentisch berichten kann wie Sie." Stadtarchiv Darmstadt, ST 45/67 Meidner Nr. 438.

Community had offered him the post of death watch (known as *Shomer*) for Greater London, which he rejected, even though they desperately needed a stable income, as he wanted to work in his local community.²⁷ Rejecting an offer for paid work counts as testimony for Meidner's artistic integrity. Meidner always worked at night, forgetting everything around him, capturing the vividness of his visions (Hodin 1973, 114-15). The Meidners' efforts to get noticed by the London art world finally resulted in an exhibition at the Ben Uri Gallery: *Ludwig Meidner/Else Meidner* at the Ben Uri (5 October - 2 November 1949). Preparations gave them a purpose and Ludwig was content to postpone his move to Germany.²⁸ The long-awaited opportunity, however, was "ein 'Begräbnis zweiter Klasse'" (a second-class funeral), because it did not attract much attention beyond the members of the Ben Uri, which as an organisation, had been founded in 1925 to promote Jewish immigrant artists (Hodin 1973, 67).

Hodin quotes Meidner as well as passages from the reviews which describe the symbolic, mystic and religious qualities of the works exhibited at the Ben Uri. The exhibition included Expressionist art, but Meidner had been keen to show works created in London (Hodin 1973, 104-105). The catalogue introduced him "as very much interested in Theosophy, Mysticism and Magic" and asserts an affinity with Blake: "Since 1939 when Mr. Meidner settled in England he has become a great admirer of William Blake."²⁹ I doubt that Hodin grasped the full extent of Meidner's ambition for this exhibition as well as for the works created in exile, which, as argued above, Meidner appears to dismiss.

Almost halfway through *Ludwig Meidner*, in the section titled "Else und Ludwig Meidner in England",³⁰ Hodin shares Meidner's letter in which he introduced himself to him (13 May 1953; 1973, 64-65). In this letter Meidner explains that after his Expressionist phase, he dedicated himself to writing, but now – since in London - has resumed painting. The letter ends with an invitation: "If you would like to see some of my current production, please come and visit. It is well worth looking at."³¹ Meidner, to be clear, assumes that his

²⁷ Breuer and Wagemann 1991, 2:477.

²⁸ Meidner wrote to Hannelore Rothchild (13 February 1949): "Life here is like living in a desert, far from all people. I have also had enough of London and am determined to leave England this year." ("Man lebt hier wie in der Wüste, fern von allen Menschen. Ich habe auch nun genug von London u. bin entschlossen England in diesem Jahr zu verlassen.") Heuberger 2002, 78.

²⁹ Ben Uri Art Gallery, *Ludwig Meidner/Else Meidner* London: 1949, no page.

³⁰ It is worth noting that this section, the second part of *Ludwig Meidner*, was originally titled "Ludwig Meidner in London", which suggests that Hodin wanted to draw attention to Else. TGA 20062 4/4 Box 102.

³¹ "Sollten Sie Verlangen haben, etwas von meiner jetzigen Produktion sehen zu wollen, so kommen Sie mich doch, bitte, einmal besuchen. Es lohnt durchaus, sich das anzusehen." Hodin 1973, 65. Hodin says that Else, too, found a new style when in London. Hodin 1979, 52-53; 1973, 78-79.

Expressionist art is well known; he starts his letter with an acknowledgment of Hodin's publications, courting his attention, intend on enticing him with works created in London. His strategy to extend his audience was to seize on the Blake revival and especially the publicity of the discovery of the Arlington Court Picture in 1947, but it had not paid off.³²

The discovery of *The Sea of Time and Space* or *Arlington Court Picture* (Butlin 1981, #803) in 1947 was spectacular in that the painting had nearly been destroyed; it had been truly lost as it is not listed in "Works Lost or Conjectural" (pp. 186-89) in Geoffrey Keynes's *A Bibliography of William Blake* (1921). We cannot know if Meidner saw it, but there is enough circumstantial evidence to suggest that he was aware of its discovery.

According to a short notice in *The Times* (8 April 1950) *The Arlington Court Picture*, "signed 'W. Blake inventor 1821'", was exhibited in the Blake Room at the Tate Gallery: "This is the first showing of this picture since it was recently cleaned."³³ Geoffrey Keynes's interpretation, published in *Country Life* (1949), can explain why Meidner went to the Tate:

The central group of this picture may represent Adam Kadmon, the first ideal man (personified in Blake's own books as Albion, the ideal Briton) with his Emanation (personified by Blake as Jerusalem, or Britannia) standing beside him. Surrounding these two is a detailed sequence of symbolical figures in the mystical process of creation, beginning at the top with the 'Working of the Chariot,' so called in allusion to the first chapter of *Ezekiel*.³⁴

Keynes associates the painting with the Cabbala and says it is "unique in the whole range of Blake's art." Blake never commented on it and Meidner, who had read Gilchrist, would have projected his own associations. An entry point is the chariot with Apollo and the Muses in the upper left corner; the figures connect pictorially with the central female figure but the reason for this connection is unexplained. A chariot for visionary transportation evokes the story of the prophet Elijah's ascent into heaven and Blake's large colour print, one of the images Meidner took to Germany.³⁵ Hodin, who saw Meidner's illustrations for the Bible, refers to a drawing which shows Elijah taking his leave of Elisha with the heavenly chariot

³² Erle 2019, 1:288.

³³ In *The Times* the title of the picture is "'The Circle of the Life of Man'." Anon. 1950, 8.

³⁴ Keynes 1949, 1427.

³⁵ The image is a large colour print, now known as *God Judging Adam*.

approaching.³⁶ These drawings, charcoal drawings from the 1940s, were mostly the very works Meidner had wanted Hodin to see. The connection is travel between the worlds and Hodin discusses the drawing in the chapter on Meidner's mysticism (1973, 108).³⁷

Keynes's attributions imbue Blake's painting with status; the idea of it being the missing piece in the greater puzzle of 'Blake' chimes with J.G. Davies's approach in *Theology of William Blake* (1948) . and Keynes's review (1948, 658) is the minimum Meidner would have read.³⁸

The author quotes an opinion that 'to systematize Blake is to kill him,' and hopes that he has not been guilty of this crime. Readers of the book will at once exonerate him, and will feel grateful for what he has achieved. For it cannot be said that he has systematized Blake; rather, he has coordinated him, and thereby not only made him more comprehensible, but demonstrated his consistency and the wholeness of his theological conceptions.

Evidence for the notion of a 'system' driving interpretations of Blake in the 1940s is also in Northrop Frye's review which commends Davies's book, on account of its systematic approach, as a comprehensive introduction to Blake and the "meaning" of his works. So, while "Blake's mysticism" and influence of Swedenborg are acknowledged (this is Frye responding to organisation of the book into the chapters "The Church," "Swedenborg," "Mysticism," "God"), emphasis is on Christian ideas in Blake's art (1950, 77). Meidner, I think, would have taken a keen interest in this discussion as he was trying to understand his own visionary states, the outpouring of emotion into images, and how his visions changed how he perceived his relation with the world.

We do not know when Meidner annotated Todd's edition of Gilchrist's *Life*, which has pencil marks on pages 332 (margin), 334 (underlining) and 336 (margin). The dog-eared pages are all in Chapter XXXVI, "Declining Health; Designs to Dante; Mr Crabb Robinson's Reminiscences; Notes on Wordsworth". Else gave him Meidner his copy in 1945 and it is

³⁶ It is my belief that Meidner was interested in the relationship between the two prophets as well as the journey of one into the world of heaven.

³⁷ Christopher Heppner discusses the Greek-style decoration in the garment of the figure in red and claims to see Hebrew characters in the hem (242). I am grateful to Abraham Samuel Shiff who says that there is no Hebrew anywhere in this picture. Shiff drew my attention to the symbolism of the hand gestures of the figure identified by Heppner as Isaiah, which can be related to Jewish rituals of priestly blessing (2013-14). The connection to Blake's *Job* is evocative as Meidner came to own a facsimile. Plates from Blake's *Job* were also included in the exhibition at the Tate in 1947.

³⁸ There are two paper cuttings in Meidner's copy: Geoffrey Keynes's review of J. G. Davies's *The Theology of William Blake* (1948) and an announcement of a radio programme aired in 1946 and based on Jacob Bronowski's *Man without a Mask* (1943). See Erle 2018a.

possible that he reread this chapter when talking with Hodin: “At Mr Aders’s house the German painter, Götzenberger, met Blake. On his return to Germany he declared: ‘I saw in England many men of talent, but only 3 men of Genius – Coleridge, Flaxman and Blake, and of these Blake was the greatest.’” (1942, 332) Jakob Götzenberger, a minor painter on the periphery of the Nazarene Brotherhood, visited in February 1827. While Meidner may have compared his own list of English artists with that of Götzenberger’s (there is plenty of name dropping and Hodin is continually impressed with Meidner), he may have pondered the character of Henry Crabb Robinson, who had taken Götzenberger to see Blake, and his role in Gilchrist’s telling of Blake’s life-story. Gilchrist says Crabb Robinson met Blake (“the visionary man”) in 1825 and Gilchrist acknowledges Crabb Robinson’s *Reminiscences* on page 336, where Meidner made a mark against “Götzenberger” in the passage where it says that Götzenberger admired Blake’s illustrations of Dante. Above it is a section from *Reminiscences* which describes Blake’s poverty. Meidner marked this section and Hodin, too, describes the simplicity of Meidner’s studio in London, while focusing on his charisma: “All this was very modest, poor even, but not without hope when Meidner’s low voice sounded through the room.”³⁹

On page 334, it says that Crabb Robinson, who, as Gilchrist puts it, thought of Blake as an “insane man of genius” (333). Meidner underlined “Everything is good in God’s Eyes” and “Is there any purity in God’s eyes -?” (334). The combination of “pure”, “good” and with Blake’s question, asking if anything could ever measure up to divine standards, suggests that Meidner is navigating the challenges of religious doubt; to be pure something needs to be rejected. While Blake’s statements may have resonated with what Meidner was thinking (regarding the consequences of decisions in his personal life), he could have read to the end of the paragraph, where Robinson, who had asked Blake many questions, gives up as he cannot see what Blake is getting at. In his eyes, Blake was confused if not completely deluded: “My journal here has the remark that it is easier to retail his personal remarks than to reconcile those which seemed to be in conformity with the most opposed abstract systems.” (334) Gilchrist comments apologetically:

Perhaps, indeed, the attempt to methodize them into a system was so much labour lost?

Their key to the wild and strange rhapsodies Blake would utter can be supplied by love,

³⁹ “All dies war sehr bescheiden, arm sogar, aber nicht ohne Hoffnung, wenn Meidners leise Stimme durch den Raum klang.” (Hodin 1973, 83)

but not by the intellect. To *go with* Blake, it almost required that a man should have the mind of an artist – and an artist of a peculiar kind – or one strongly in unison with that class of mind.

Reading Blake's ramblings left Meidner unfazed; like Gilchrist, Meidner was sympathetic and open to the possibility that what Blake tried to communicate was not easy to grasp. Perhaps, reading Blake reminded him of his own, Expressionist prose; Hodin, too, included long passages from Meidner's early Expressionist writings so that readers were able to *go with* Meidner. This decision is consistent with Hodin's interviewing and giving Meidner the chance to freely express his personality (1973, 80). To be clear, Hodin's method, as previously outlined, appears to have its precursor in Crabb Robinson with Blake or rather Gilchrist's decision to source descriptions of Blake through those who knew him.

Artistic Practice: Mystical Meidners & Mystifying Hodin

In *Aus den Erinnerungen von Else Meidner* Hodin relates the story of the aging Else, her suicidal thoughts and growing disillusionment with friends and neighbours; the arrangement and repetition of texts reveal a woman who, surrounded by her paintings and books (1979, 16), is withdrawing from the world as well as from Hodin; at the moment of writing, Else was too ill to paint or write (19). Hodin presents her as slipping through his fingers. In the first half of the book, he includes Else's statements about her father's continual financial support (43) and turmoil of motherhood (44-45). In the second half, Hodin's narrative voice has all but disappeared. With Ludwig and son David gone, Else did not succeed in forging new, intimate relationships. The loss of a close friend in 1958 is captured in the poem "Auf den Tod eines Freundes" (On the Death of a Friend) (69-70) and developed in her imagined "Zwiegespräch mit Tod" (Tête-à-tête with Death) (103-106). The chapter "Aufzeichnungen von 1959" (Notes from 1959) reveals feelings related to loss of self-belief, humiliation and shame: "It is not so easy to strengthen your own backbone when it is already bent and broken by all the kicks that have stamped on it"⁴⁰ and "Why do I have to suffer like this? Why couldn't a real friend come to me again?"⁴¹ Did Else perceive herself as a female Job?

⁴⁰ "Es ist nicht so einfach das Rückrat sich selbst zu stärken, wenn es schon ganz verbogen und zertrampelt ist von allen den Fußtritten, die darauf gestampft sind." Hodin 1979, 89.

⁴¹ "Warum muß ich so leiden? Warum konnte nicht ein wirklicher Freund noch einmal zu mir kommen?" Hodin 1979, 94.

Rejection due to age is the topic of “Altersmaske” (Mask of Age), written in 1960. Another version of this poem dated “18 May 1960”, appears in “Aufzeichnungen von 1959” (91) and there is another chapter, based on a manuscript which Hodin says he found in her flat, “Aus Meinem Leben” (From my Life) (96), which ends with two short entries. Here, I think, Else articulates what can count as her identification with Job:

1 April 1963

It was difficult enough to have to bear the general fate of the Jews, but the personal tragedy of my life was too much grief and it ruined me.

2 April 1963

Oh God, please deliver me from this loneliness so that I can once again feel a little *joie de vivre*.⁴²

Hodin writes that Else “followed Ludwig to Darmstadt in a state of panic” (1979, 43). Her identification with Job’s dutiful and faithful wife as represented in Blake’s version of the story does not cover all. In *Aus den Erinnerungen* Hodin shows Else worried about societal expectations; she comments bitterly about the remarks of married women who put their husbands first. In her reflections Else manages, if we take Blake’s *Job* as a blueprint, to transcend the story of Job to critique traditional views of good wives. She may have sent Ludwig Blake’s *Job* as a reminder of shared suffering, well-deserved reparation of reputation as well as a personal offering of peace, but Else never handed “Aus meinem Leben”, addressed to Hodin, to Hodin and it is not at all clear how he came to it; it is as if she did not care; this document brings Else’s hardships into focus. There was to be no reward for her suffering which was quite separate from that of her husband’s.

Hodin’s biographies are a complaint about the undeserved neglect of the Meidners. The intention - to address the marginalisation of two artists - determines much of the organisation and layering of the texts; Hodin starts *Ludwig Meidner* with reflections about the British reservations against Expressionism (“ablehnende Haltung Londons”) (1973, 15). The tone of the early chapters is typical for Hodin who had made it his mission to educate; but since his biographies of the Meidners were written in German and for German audiences, his agenda was slightly different.

⁴² “1 April 1963 | Das allgemeine Judenschicksal zu tragen war schwer genug, aber die persönliche Tragik meines Lebens dazu war zuviel Kummer und mußte mich ruinieren. / 2 April 1963 / Oh Gott, hilf mir doch doch aus dieser Einsamkeit heraus, damit ich noch einmal etwas Lebensfreude empfinde.” Hodin 1979, 100.

In “Ludwig Meidners Londoner Jahre”, the first of the articles written for *Darmstädter Tagesblatt*, Hodin is explicit if not scathing about what Meidner had to endure in London.⁴³ In the final instalment of the commissioned articles, which is on Meidner’s mysticism, Hodin summarises all injustices, above all the Nazis’ destruction of Meidner’s reputation, to accentuate the significance of Meidner’s return to Germany: “none of the artists persecuted by Hitler suffered as much as Meidner, who after [Max] Liebermann’s death was the most important German artist of Jewish origin.”⁴⁴ Hodin, I think, was grabbling with the fact that the failing marriage of the Meidners appeared to be poised on Meidner’s decision to return. Aligning the Meidners with the post-war Blake revival allowed Hodin to pay tribute to their human complexity. In *Ludwig Meidner* Hodin presents Expressionism as a European art movement but says little about Meidner’s art. Instead, Hodin focuses on personality (28) and religion (38). Meidner’s faith is a focus; Hodin knows that religious rituals contributed to Meidner’s artistic practice. He even makes Meidner’s appearance a matter of religion when he says that Meidner looked like a Franciscan monk (82).

Regarding the construction of ‘mystical Meidner’ as a persona in Hodin’s biography, it is worth noting that ‘Blake’, almost like a free-floating signifier, appears in different contexts. In “Gruss des Malers an die Dichter”, an essay first published in *Im Nacken das Sternemeer* (1918), and included in Kunz’s edition of 1973, Meidner gives a list of authors who inspired him; it includes visionary, religious and mystical writers, such as Jeremiah and Isaiah, Augustine and Thomas à Kempis, Jacob Boehme and Angelus Silesius (Kunz, 24). Hodin includes this passage from “Gruss des Malers an die Dichter” (1973, 55) and comments: “Could Meidner not but feel the calling to awaking his slumbering consciousness to God, whose voice had comforted him one night so wonderfully? All mystical books opened up to him at that time.”⁴⁵ In this section of Hodin’s biography Meidner reflects to insist that his development ought to be perceived through the prism of his library. He presents himself as a voracious reader, which suggests that in reality his conversion, dated to 4 December 1912 (Hodin 1973, 116), was an incremental process, propelled by extensive reading.⁴⁶

⁴³ “Der Künstler ist für den bürgerlichen Engländer ein ‘crank’ – ein verschrobener Kauz, den man nicht ernst nimmt und nur die hohen Auktionspreise bei Sotheby imponieren und bedingen eine Hinwendung zu international berühmten Namen.” Hodin 1966, 30.

⁴⁴ “keiner der von Hitler verfolgten Künstler hat soviel gelitten wie gerade Meidner, der nach dem Tode Liebermanns der bedeutendste Deutsche Künstler jüdischer Herkunft war.” Hodin 1967, 1.

⁴⁵ “Mußte sich Meidner nicht berufen fühlen, das schlummernde Gottesbewußtsein zu wecken, er, den selbst eines Nachts eine Stimme wunderbar getröstet hatte? Alle mystischen Bücher erschlossen sich ihm damals.” Hodin 1973, 59.

⁴⁶ Heuberger and Riedel 2001, 32.

In their conversations Meidner, no doubt, singled out Blake; Meidner's emphasis, I think, is the reason why Hodin's "Meidners Studio in London" (1966) has a paragraph titled "William Blake". The difference between the versions is instructive as it tells us about Hodin's conceptualisation of Meidner's creative practice. The passage in the article concludes with: "The artist who is closest to me spiritually here is William Blake." In *Ludwig Meidner* this information appears at the end of the chapter on Meidner's London studio and with two sentences added on: "I got to know his work for the first time in 1932. Not much was known of him in Germany."⁴⁷ I have found no evidence in the correspondence in the Hodin Archive that Meidner told Hodin that he came across Blake in "1932". Meidner told Wolf Bergman on 25 September 1949 (10 days before the opening of *Ludwig Meidner/Else Meidner* at the Ben Uri) that he encountered Blake in 1922, which is when his Expressionist phase is said to have ended.⁴⁸ The said catalogue, on the other hand, creates the impression that Meidner discovered Blake when in London: "Since 1939 when Mr. Meidner settled in England he has become a great admirer of William Blake" (n.p.). The only trace that sheds light on Hodin's decision to amend Meidner's explanation and use "1932" is a note in red pen on the folder with the manuscript for the book of 1973: "It is impossible to encounter Blake in 1932 for the first time. (His paintings at most)."⁴⁹ The note, which Hodin wrote as a memo, is a recognition of Meidner's attempt to rewrite the story of his life. Hodin, who believes what Meidner says to be false, acknowledges not only the importance of Blake's German reception but also hints at a trend in Blake's European reception, one that focused on mystical qualities in Blake. On this occasion Hodin went with what Meidner told him. The papers in the Hodin Archive are mostly typescripts with hand-written corrections. In "Ludwig Meidner in Frankfurt" (no date; with notes by Hodin),⁵⁰ Hodin says that Meidner found a "kindred English spirit in William Bake" ("verwandten englischen Geist in William Blake").⁵¹ The work of Hogarth provided him with insights into satire and humour ("die Kritik und die Skepsis an der Zeit").⁵² For *Ludwig Meidner* Hodin was to edit this information and separate

⁴⁷ "Der Künstler, der mir jedoch geistig hier am nächsten steht, ist William Blake. Ich lernte sein Werk 1932 zum ersten Mal kennen. In Deutschland wußte man nicht viel von ihm." Hodin 1973, 85.

⁴⁸ Breuer and Wagemann 1991, 2: 479-80.

⁴⁹ "Man kann nicht Blake 1932 zum ersten Mal kennenlernen. (Höchstens seine Bilder)". In red pen on paper attached to folder "Meidner| I. Teil | Urmanuskript." TGA 20062 4/4 Box 102.

⁵⁰ TGA 20062 4/4 Box 102. | credit line for permission from A.H (Hodin estate)

⁵¹ Meidner first uses this descriptor ("kindred spirit") in a letter to Walter and Hilde Rosenbaum, written on 23 January 1943, See Breuer and Wagemann 1991, 2: 474.

⁵² "Urmanuskript" titled "Ludwig Meidner: Eine Würdigung seiner Kunst mit ihrer historischen Bedeutung." For the addition of "Blake" in Hodin's hand, see page 17. The slightly longer, earlier version, titled "Ludwig Meidner kehrt wieder nach Deutschland zurück" [crossed out and changed to "Ludwig Meidner wieder in Deutschland"], is in a folder dated to 11 August 1953. The second, edited version of the 11 August document

Blake and Hogarth – though they still appear in the same chapter; there is no mention of Hogarth in what Hodin wrote for *Darmstädter Tagesblatt*. We can, moreover, be certain that it was Hodin – not Meidner - who added “Blake” into the manuscript he shared with Meidner; this manuscript, which Hodin called ‘Urmanuscript’, has annotations by Meidner and Hodin but the insertion regarding Blake is in Hodin’s hand.⁵³ This means that the information about the year when Meidner first encountered Blake was inserted by Hodin and after Meidner’s death.

The second mention of Blake in *Ludwig Meidner* is in the chapter on English and Jewish Art (“Über Englische und Jüdische Kunst”). This chapter, which is not in the manuscript, states why Meidner found himself inspired by Blake: “Blake was a phenomenon, not just as a painter but especially and above all else as an artist, poet and visionary.”⁵⁴ The word ‘phenomenon’, signifying rare, impressive or exceptional, derives from the Latin ‘phaenomenon’, which comes from Ancient Greek and literally means ‘appearance’ or ‘thing appearing to view’. The word gives expression to Meidner’s admiration of Blake but also invites the idea that the perception of Blake is rooted in an experience that is beyond explanation. The emphasis on Blake’s singular role in Meidner’s exile can also be traced in a document surviving in Stadtarchiv Darmstadt; this is a note that Meidner wrote in Germany and in response to a question by Hodin about his return: “To cut a long story short: [the reason is my own] terrible and full-of-mistakes German.”⁵⁵ Meidner reiterates that he had always thought of himself as a writer as well as painter and he, like most of the refugees, was speaking a mish-mash, i.e. that there were too many “Anglicismen” in his language: “The German language owns my love, affection, admiration; it was my one and everything, my air, my innermost treasure.”⁵⁶ In this note he asserts that English Art and Literature held nothing for him and that he did not want to open up to anything, with the exception of the “phenomenon of William Blake.”⁵⁷

includes Hodin’s hand-written corrections; the title has been changed again: “~~Ein Künstler kehrt in seine Heimat zurück~~. Ludwig Meidner in ~~Deutschland~~ [Frankfurt]”, TGA 20062 Box 140 7.

⁵³ TGA 20062 Box 140 7

⁵⁴ “Blake war ein Phänomen, nicht nur als Maler, sondern alles in allem, als Künstler, Dichter und Visionär.” Hodin 1973, 86. Meidner uses the word ‘phenomenon’ in the letter written to Wolf Bergmann. See Breuer and Wagemann 1991, 2:480.

⁵⁵ “Um Ihre Frage kurz und bündig zu beantworten, kann ich nur sagen: scheußliches und falsches Deutsch.” (Stadtarchiv Darmstadt, ST 45/67 Meidner Nr. 1647)

⁵⁶ “Der deutschen Sprache gehörte meine Liebe, Zuneigung, Bewunderung; sie war mein ein und alles, meine Luft, mein innerster Schatz.” (Stadtarchiv Darmstadt, ST 45/67 Meidner Nr. 1647)

⁵⁷ “Ich hatte keine Lust mich mit der englischen Kunst und Literatur einzulassen. Abgesehen von dem Phänomen “William Blake” bekümmerte ich mich kaum [...]” (Stadtarchiv Darmstadt, ST 45/67 Meidner Nr. 1647)

Hodin's *Ludwig Meidner* has sprawling passages which originate from previously published works, such as from *Eine Autobiographische Plauderei* (1973, 15-25), passages that are transcripts of his conversations with Meidner or passages from Meidner's letters and postcards from Germany (88-90, 126-131). Hodin intersperses all passages with his comments, explaining, for example, about traditions in art history (48-49) or speculating on whether Meidner would have agreed (51); the latter is an example for when Hodin allows his narrator-persona to come to the fore.

The longest passages are in the chapter "Der Mystiker" (The Mystic, 114-133), where Meidner, after many pressing requests (115, 117), finally agrees to talk about mysticism, sharing his most personal thoughts and belief in the reality of his visions. In this section Blake, mentioned for the third and final time, is referred to as a 'visionary' rather than an 'ecstatic' painter (127). The difference being that whereas the former is an intellectual experience and ability of the mind to imagine, associated with seeing in a dream or trance, the latter is a sensual experience that is pleasurable and all-consuming. This section, which is on the experience ecstasy ("Ekstase") in creative processes, can be traced back to a 'conversation'; its context is a letter (25 August 1953), which introduces creativity as a topic for consideration. Talking about the difference between ecstasy, trance and vision - Else was to refer to Meidner an "ecstatic painter, draftsman, etcher and author of hymn-like prose" in her obituary (133) – Meidner writes to Hodin, outlining his thoughts: "True religious ecstasy is in the German Gothic [period], in Grünewald, Michelangelo, [El] Greco and Bernini. Blake is more visionary than ecstatic."⁵⁸ Hodin, who marked the passage in pencil to highlight its importance, was to include it in *Ludwig Meidner* but decided to omit it when writing for *Darmstädter Tagesblatt* after Meidner's death. The mention of Blake actually reads like an addendum, suggesting that Blake had come up in conversation in London. Meidner, moreover, underlined "Bernini" (Hodin does not) as if to create a certain hierarchy in his now more elaborate explanation which relegates Blake into an aside in the letter.⁵⁹ Meidner must be thinking of Bernini's *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (1647-52), a sculpture in Santa Maria della Vittoria in Rome that embodies the religious ecstasy of Teresa of Avila, as recounted in her autobiography in her vision of the angel who touched her heart with a golden spear.

⁵⁸ "Echte religiöse Ekstase ist bei der deutschen Gothic, bei Grünewald, Michel Angelo, Greco und Bernini. Blake ist mehr visionär als ekstatisch." TGA 20062/4/258. See also Hodin 1973, 127.

⁵⁹ Meidner and Hodin, who were great friends, met often to talk and exchange ideas in the coffee house in Hampstead and Swiss Cottage and with Meidner sketching their favourite streets. I am grateful to Annabel Hodin for this information. Hodin acknowledges that Meidner inspired him to write "The Problem of Jewish Art and its Contemporary aspect", published in *Modern Art and the Modern Mind* (1972) (1973, 91).

Visionary Experience: Travelling through the inner Landscape of Meidner's Studios

In the articles for *Darmstädter Tagesblatt*, written between November 1966 and January 1967, Hodin's appreciation of Meidner's visions is guarded. In "Ludwig Meidner hatte Erscheinungen" (1966) Hodin defers to the visions as apparitions or ghosts.⁶⁰ In the biography the passage appears in another, new chapter, with materials also not in the 1950s' manuscripts ("Parapsychologisches und Künstlerisches", 100-01). In the 1960s, it seems, Hodin had yet to decide how to work Meidner's contribution into his narrative. Alluding, for example, to Meidner's vision of the future, he admits: "I do not want to publish it at this point in time."⁶¹ Most of the material to go into the new chapter, however, is already in "Meidner – der Mystiker" (1967), where Hodin relates how he challenged Meidner by telling him that he doubted the reality of his visions.⁶² Hodin starts the section with a teasing question. Would Meidner like to hear his first impression of his house? The second sentence is Meidner's answer; Hodin drops his readers in *medias res* of their conversation:

He nodded: 'So you felt it too! This house was built for the purpose of carrying out abortions. You can also tell from the double windows that they intended to commit criminal acts against life here. The police intervened. Sometimes at night, when things happen on their own here. I see grey masses moving along the walls.' 'So,' I said with a sigh....⁶³

The dialogue meanders but eventually returns to the apparitions in Meidner's home, with Hodin admitting that he does not know what to make of what Meidner told him; he is puzzled but also intrigued (1973, 100). If he knew, that Meidner read Gilchrist's *Life*, it could have

⁶⁰ "Meidner hatte ohne Zweifel eine Seherkraft. Es war ein spiritistischer Zug in seinen Ideenvorstellungen. Geister waren für ihn eine Wirklichkeit, sie waren nicht nur psychische Triebfedern, die in den Vorstellungen von Menschen Gestalt annehmen. Mich beunruhigte dieser Gedanke mehr, als daß er mich aubaute, und gleichzeitig reizte er meine Phantasie." Hodin 1966, 60.

⁶¹ "die ich jedoch einstweilen nicht publizieren möchte." Hodin 1967, 17. Hodin's decision to publish Else's stories in 1979 contradicts his attitude towards Ludwig's "para-psychological Bekenntnisse" (parapsychological confessions). Already in 1955, he says, he wanted to publish *Ludwig Meidner* posthumously. Hodin 1973, 80-81.

⁶² This section is also in the typescript – much shorter - which Hodin shared with Meidner.

⁶³ "Er nickte: 'Sie haben das also auch gespürt! Dieses Haus ist seinerzeit zu Zwecken der Abtreibung erbaut worden. Sie sehen auch an den Doppelfenstern, daß Verbrecherisches hier gegen das Leben verübt werden sollte. Die Polizei griff ein. In der Nacht manchmal, da ereignen sich eigene Dinge hier. Ich sehe graue Massen sich die Wände entlang bewegen.' 'So', sagte ich gedehnt..." (Hodin 1973, 96)

occurred to him that Meidner rehearsed how Blake had interacted with John Varley.⁶⁴ If there was any hesitation about Meidner's sincerity, Hodin came round in the end, because Meidner's vision of a great famine, caused by ecological disaster, is in the chapter "Der Mystiker" in *Ludwig Meidner*: "In 1953, a vision kept repeating itself. He was obsessed with it. 'What I experience, I have to talk about it.' And just as he had announced both World Wars in allegories – they are often magical compositions - this time he experienced the gloomy prediction of world hunger."⁶⁵ This chapter also has Meidner talking about death and religious ecstasy (1973, 114-133).

We know that Meidner was categorically against publishing the material on the apparitions. In his correspondence, he says that he is looking through Hodin's manuscript to then reiterate what needs to be cut or added; Meidner laughed off the conversation about the ghosts; ghosts surely belonged into the realm of the occult (22 December 1953) and not into the biography of a painter; in a more conciliatory manner he points out that ghosts had nothing to do with his personality - only with his house. Meidner tells Hodin that he intends to write a section about his religious development which, he says, ought to be included as a personal testimony (11 January 1954).⁶⁶ Perhaps worried that his postcards had not reached Hodin, he elaborates further in a letter (24 January 1954): "All my explanations about this and that [...] were part of a simple and casual conversation and not intended for publication. And that I am reading them, they are really getting on my nerves [...]." Meidner, who stresses that their chat is lacking in literary form, says that he has no time to convert their conversation into "prose". The ghosts have to go.⁶⁷ In the manuscript in the Hodin Archive we can see that Meidner crossed out long passages.⁶⁸ Hodin, however, had the last word; he included what Meidner thought irrelevant - the story about the apparitions. I think that what was most likely a humorous repartee, sheds light on Hodin's scepticism about visions peculiar to Meidner. He may have doubted the reality of Meidner's visions, thinking that they were mere products of his imagination. Meidner claimed that he could see into the future as

⁶⁴ Meidner's explanations about ghosts appear to follow the episodes with John Varley and the pencil drawings that came to be known as the Visionary Heads. See Hodin 96, 98, 100-102. For Meidner's engagement with Blake's nightly drawing sessions with John Varley, see Erle 2018a.

⁶⁵ "Im Jahr 1953 wiederholte sich eine Vision immer wieder. Er war ganz besessen davon. 'Was ich erlebe, davon muß ich erzählen.' Und so wie er beide Weltkriege in Allegorien angekündigt hatte, - es sind magische Kompositionen oft – so erlebte er diesmal die düstere Voraussage einer Welthungersnot." Hodin 1973. 121.

⁶⁶ "Anstatt der Darstellung von Geister-Erscheinungen [...] möchte ich einen kurzen Abriss meiner religiösen Entwicklung einfügen, den ich selber schreibe [...]" TGA 20062/4/258.

⁶⁷ "Die ganzen Ausführungen von mir über dies und jenes [...] waren in reinem u. lässigen Plauderton u. nicht für Publikation gedacht. Und nun, da ich sie lese, gehen sie mir [...] mächtig auf die Nerven [...]" TGA 20062/4/258.

⁶⁸ TGA 20062 Box 140 7.

well as into another world, which suggests the enhanced alertness of his mind. I think that all his visions were genuine in that they created a different kind of ‘real’; Hodin, therefore, by including the story about the ghosts pays tribute to Meidner’s creativity; he presents all his visions as equally valid for the telling of his life story.

To give an example of Meidner’s treatment of visionary experience, this essay now turns to the prose descriptions of his studios in London and Marxheim; while the composition “Beschreibung eines Malerateliers in Marxheim” (Description of the studio of a painter in Marxheim) is dated to spring of 1962,⁶⁹ we can only speculate that Meidner wrote “Kleine Reise durch mein Wohnzimmer” (Short journey through my living room) in the early 1950s; this piece, which takes the form of an imaginary journey, renders his isolation and loneliness but also gives expression to feeling stuck and homesick. The travelling motif, the device used to explore a small space anew moreover, resonates with an aphorism, written around the same time, which refers to Blake ““William Blake, millionaire with a round-trip ticket through all regions of the universe and the imagination of ‘the unknown world’”, in a manuscript dated to 31 January 1950, which Meidner kept adding to.⁷⁰ Each studio is a space that contains images, books, papers, personal belongings, painting utensils, knick-knacks, while accumulating rubbish, leftovers and dust on its own account.

In “Kleine Zeitreise durch mein Wohnzimmer” Meidner transcends the physical confines of his studio by transforming his isolation, which goes hand in hand with feeling trapped, through an imaginary journey. He says that he has what it takes to be a “Globetrotter” but has been condemned to stay put. Talking about the expectations imposed on refugees, he mocks:

He should be modest and for heaven’s sake stay at home, because there is a lot to be admired there and the wisdom that he would have brought back from the South Pole would in the end be no more comprehensive than, for example, the one he collects on a single long evening, if he searches creeping around in his hermitage.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Breuer and Wagemann 1991, 2:453.

⁷⁰ Breuer and Wagemann 1991, 2:453 (“Beschreibung eines Malerateliers” and 454 (“Aphorismen über Künstler”). The German original in “Aphorisms on artists” is (“Millionär mit einem Rundreisebillet durch alle Regionen des Weltalls und er Phantasie ‘der bekannten Welt’”).

⁷¹ “Er soll sich bescheiden und um Himmels Willen zuhause bleiben, auch dort ist allerhand anzustauen und die Weisheit, die er vom Südpol mitbrächte wäre am End nicht umfassender als etwa jene, die er an einem einzigen langen Abend einheimst, wenn er duckmäuserig in seiner Klause umherspäht.” Stadtarchiv Darmstadt, ST 45/47 Meidner Nr. 1547.

In the description of the studio in Marxheim, Meidner, by comparison, accentuates real over imagined space and actual over imagined movement, while also blurring the boundaries between them; he says that he goes for a walk to keep fit: “Every evening I make my way through the newspaper pile, despite my riding boots whirl up the dust, I march like in a cloud of dust.”⁷² In London, his eyes move across the room; and yet, this mode of transport transcends the space, whenever he forges a connection with the world beyond. Whereas in London, Meidner is surrounded by his paintings - in Hodin’s words: “Meidner sometimes used to open up his large portfolios, which otherwise stood leaning against the walls, silently concealing their wealth – drawings, pastels, watercolours, old and new”⁷³ – in Marxheim the portfolios appear untouched, stacked in a corner. Meidner also distances himself from the images on the walls; they “do not count” (“zählen nicht mit”).⁷⁴ One of these images, the reproduction of Phillips’s *William Blake*, is a physical connection to the time in exile.

Each studio-space is a fluid backdrop for the rendering of the isolation-theme, expressed through images that become part of a text that Meidner orchestrates from his writing table. In “Kleine Reise durch mein Wohnzimmer” he starts his imaginary journey in the Eastern corner and along the wall. The furniture regulates both his movement and narrative chronology. He passes a bookshelf, full of books from Germany, without resting his eyes on a single volume, dismissing all of them as second-rate. Next, he approaches his bed, where he pauses to look at his ‘hero’, who was to ‘emigrate’ with him to Germany:

[...] who does an émigré-painter from Germany hang over his bedstead? William Blake, of course, who else?! You need to notice just a little bit in this room that you are in the British Isles. And then Blake is one of those can truly lean on. And if you hang Jakob Boehme next to him, that’s fine and also a reminder of Germany.⁷⁵

Meidner’s language slips; it moves from designating Blake’s portrait to Blake, the person and to an imagined juxtaposition with Boehme, again, via a portrait, then person and possibly

⁷² “So bahne ich mir jeden Abend einen Weg durch den Zeitungshaufen, mögen auch meine Reiterstiefel den Staub aufwirbeln, daß ich wie in einer Staubwolke marschiere.” Breuer and Wagemann 1991, 2:453.

⁷³ “Meidner pflegte manchmal seine großen Mappen aufzutun, die sonst gegen die Wände gelehnt standen, stumm ihren Reichtum verbergend – Zeichnungen, Pastelle, Aquarelle, alte und neue.” (Hodin 1973, 83)

⁷⁴ Breuer and Wagemann 1991, 2:453.

⁷⁵ “[...] wen hängt sich ein Maleremigrant aus Deutschland über seine Schlafstelle? Natürlich William Blake, wen sonst?! Man muss auch in diesem Raum ein bisschen merken, dass man auf den britannischen Inseln ist. Und dann ist Blake wahrhaftig einer von denen an dem man sich aufrichten kann. Und wenn man daneben Jakob Boehme hängt, so ist das ganz in Ordnung und überdies ein Gedenken an Deutschland.” Stadtarchiv Darmstadt, ST 45/47 Meidner Nr. 1547.

book. In this passage, Blake, who initially serves as an anchor, gets associated with pre-war Germany which allows for Blake to integrate with Meidner's list of mystical writers. What Meidner constructs through his thinking on his imaginary journey is reminiscent of Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History"; Benjamin argues that "When thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystalizes into a monad" (Thesis XVII). This "monad", for Benjamin, is the "Messianic cessation of happening".⁷⁶ Thinking, accordingly, alternates between 'flow' and 'arrest', which, I think, is what Meidner achieves; he moves through his studio but also never abandons his vantage point. Blake literally stops Meidner in his tracks but also 'crystalizes' what can never take place in Meidner's lifetime. Blake represents England and is a connection to the world outside and the Blake revival, but as a stopover on the imaginary journey 'Blake' causes Meidner not to connect with London but to think of Boehme and Germany, which in Benjamin's terms is part of his "oppressed past".⁷⁷ Meidner, to put this simply, uses 'Blake' to communicate a moment of recognition.

There is no mention of Blake's portrait in the description of the Marxheim studio, where Blake appears in a pile of books on mysticism and theosophy: "W. Blake, [Johann Joseph] Görres, [Gershom] Scholem."⁷⁸ Meidner, again, immediately distances himself, saying that his pupil assembled the books. Distance from London has perhaps given Meidner a new perspective on what he saw when he looked at Blake close-up. In the narrative of the imaginary journey Blake was presented as particular; in the context of the description of the Marxheim studio, Blake has all but disappeared; he is one of many images, high up on the wall. Blake is now literally with the other mystical writers but also surrounded by growing piles of papers. Taking the descriptions together, the portrait of Blake merges with the book about Blake to reveal the changing contours of Meidner's inner landscape. This landscape, a metaphor for Meidner's life, is filling up with dust, signifying approaching death:

I must not forget the dust that envelops everything, no ordinary everyday dust but a grayish millennium dust, thick, sticky, you dare not touch anything more. The dust, the newspapers, the pots, plates and cups rule the room and where is the art?⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Benjamin, 1999, 254.

⁷⁷ Benjamin, 1999, 254.

⁷⁸ Breuer and Wagemann 1991, 2:453.

⁷⁹ "Vergessen darf ich nicht den Staub, der alles einhüllt, kein gewöhnlicher Alltagstaub sondern ein gräulicher Jahrtausendstaub, dick, klebrig, man wagt schon gar nichts mehr anzufassen. Der Staub, die Zeitungen, die Töpfe, Teller und Tassen regieren den Raum und wo bleibt die Kunst?" Breuer and Wagemann 1991, 2:453.

Again, thinking this through with Benjamin, as an Orthodox Jew Meidner could only engage with his future by breaking the chronology of the present;⁸⁰ only by noticing the absence of his paintings can he anticipate or *en-vision* their afterlife in public museums and galleries. He, by extension, will not be forgotten. While Blake in London may have been looking like Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus* over Meidner, with his unfocused eyes, taking it all in in one, in Marxheim, Blake is part of the "piling wreckage" of the progress of Meidner's life.⁸¹

Conclusion

Meidner continually bemoaned that he was either not painting or not writing.⁸² In 1964, two years before his death, in a newspaper article on the rediscovery of Meidner in Germany, Ernst Buchholz quotes: "I am convinced that if I had not been a painter and if Hitler had not come, I could have improved my writing and would have become a good writer."⁸³ Meidner, in fact, differentiates between reading, writing and speaking. When in exile, his spoken English prevented him from making friends beyond the community of Jewish refugees.⁸⁴ Meidner never regretted his return to Germany. Writing to Franz Landsberger he acknowledges that he feels a little lonely ("etwas verwaist") but is pleased with "the late flowering of my work as a painter" ("die Spätblüte meiner malerischen Arbeit").⁸⁵

Hodin, who tried to place some of the materials with *The Jewish Chronicle* or *Arts Review* (1973, 80), ended up preparing Meidner's biography in German and for a German audience after Meidner's death. A review, which Hodin kept, overlooks tributes to Blake and art produced in London. It commends the biography as "true to life" ("lebensnah dargestellt") but also affirms that Meidner's return to Germany allowed him to realise long-postponed plans ("lange aufgeschobene Pläne").⁸⁶ Ignoring the nuances of Meidner's life in exile makes perfect sense because Meidner's return to Germany was remarkable; it came at a personal

⁸⁰ I am referring to Benjamin's concluding remarks: "We know that the Jews were prohibited from investigating the future. The Torah and the prayers instruct them in remembrance, however." Benjamin 1999, p. 255.

⁸¹ Benjamin 1999, p. 249.

⁸² See, for example, letter to Hilde Rosenbaum (6/7 November 1948), where Meidner reflects that he ought to have returned to Breslau and that the years in Berlin wasted of his talents. Breuer and Wagemann, 1991, 2: 477-78.

⁸³ "ich bin überzeugt, daß, wäre ich nicht Maler und wäre nicht Hitler gekommen, ich hätte mein Schreiben steigern können und wäre ein guter Schriftsteller geworden." (Buchholz 1964, n.p.)

⁸⁴ "Ich kann lesen u. schreiben, aber schlecht konversieren; ich hatte von Anfang an eine tiefgehende Antipathie gegen diese Sprache u. rede mit Engländern ein Gemisch von Französisch, Deutsch u. Englisch." Letter to Wolf Bergmann (20 March 1950), Stadtarchiv Darmstadt, ST 45/67 Meidner Nr. 113.

⁸⁵ The letter dates from 28 June 1960. See Breuer and Wagemann, 1991, 2:487.

⁸⁶ Anon. 1973, 13.

cost and was unexpected due to post-war discoveries about Nazi atrocities. Similarly exceptional is perhaps that Hodin reduced the fourteen years in England to the topics of isolation, poverty and Blake. The perception of Meidner as neglected and uncompromising does not do justice to Meidner's productivity in the 1940s; newly invigorated creativity was the impetus to contact Hodin in the first place.

Blake, as argued above, was part of Meidner's strategy to get noticed in London; when collaborating with Hodin, however, Blake became shorthand for 'mystic Meidner'. Hodin's tailoring of references to Blake to suit the Blake's German reception, therefore, also needs to be contextualized more broadly; in 1975 shortly after the publication of *Ludwig Meidner*, Werner Hofmann organised a major exhibition at the Kunsthalle in Hamburg. Following the German tradition of understanding Blake as a mystic thinker rather than just a visionary artist, Hofmann included Crabb Robinson's essay from 1811 into the catalogue. Hofmann introduced Blake as a follower of Boehme and in the reviews and publicity surrounding the exhibition emphasis is put on the mystic and religious themes in Blake's art. In the 1970s attempts to see Blake as a radical and political thinker were almost non-existent.⁸⁷ Hodin, in other words, follows the German tradition when attributing satire, humour and radical thought to Hogarth and Rowlandson rather than to Blake in his *Ludwig Meidner*.

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⁸⁷ For the perception of Blake in the context of exhibitions in Germany, see Erle 2019, 1: 261, 281-284.

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