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Michael Kimmage (Washington D.C.)

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Michael Kimmage (Washington D.C.)

„... es ist eine historische Stunde, Amerika in Deutschland, die *stars and stripes* über Europa...“

Wolfgang Koeppen, *Tauben im Gras*

In New York City, on the corner of 47th Street and Fifth Avenue, in the year 1958, Wolfgang Koeppen came across pieces of European jewelry. He would describe the scene in *Amerikafahrt*, with characteristic fictional touches, writing that on 47th Street “bot man in vielen Juwelenantiquariaten das Geschmeide einer unglücklichen europäischen Damengeneration feil, Großmutterringe, vergilbte Perlen, Diamanten unmodischen Schliffes, die nach Krieg, Vertreibung, Umsturz, Gefangenschaft für Brot oder Zigaretten hergegeben und von findigen Geschäftsleuten über den Ozean geschmuggelt waren... Diese Straße war Wien, die Straße war Berlin, die Ecke war Warschau oder Czernowitz.”¹ This sentence establishes the typical connection between Europe and America, for this self-consciously European writer; and it emphasizes one of *Amerikafahrt's* more obvious themes. Something – something as tangible as jewelry and as intangible as political power – has passed from Europe to America. This passage was commensurate with the Second World War. As with the émigré artists and scholars whom Koeppen encountered in America, in 1958, much of Europe's loss has been America's gain. If Athens were to be reconstituted in the modern world, it would not be in Schinkel's Berlin but somewhere around the San Francisco Bay. The only viable twentieth-century Rome would not be in London or Paris but in New York City, with some support perhaps from Washington, DC. The Old World had yielded to the New at mid century. Because of Hitler's ambi-

tions, even the jewelry of European women was being sold in Manhattan some thirteen years after the war.

Amerikafahrt was published in 1959, a year after Koeppen's first trip to the United States and almost a decade after Koeppen had published *Tauben im Gras*, his most enduring literary work. Strangely, the jewelry and the antique shops of *Amerikafahrt* echo the plot of his earlier novel. In *Tauben im Gras*, the sale of antiques plays a prominent role. Europeans are handing over Europe's wealth to Americans able and eager to buy, the great nineteenth-century subject of Henry James. Philipp, a struggling German writer, is living on his wife Emilia's money, and Emilia is selling off family heirlooms.² Emilia meets a young American, Kay, in an antique shop and decides impulsively to give her a necklace. Later, Kay goes with Philipp to a shabby hotel and, seeing his poverty, returns him the necklace Emilia had given to her – a reiteration of the “kleine Maupassantgeschichte” Kay had been told in the antique shop.³ This convoluted story emphasizes postwar German poverty – impotence and decadence at work in a once proud culture. One might call this theme, revisited in *Amerikafahrt*, the simple version of the German-American relationship, the story contained in America's military occupation of Germany. The necklace that passes from Emilia to Kay to Philipp is an elegant story of antiquities. It is paired with another story, in *Tauben im Gras*, in which an American husband, Christopher, buys a teacup for his European-born wife, Henriette. She is a German Jew from Berlin who had gone to Hollywood before the war, whose family was killed in the Holocaust and to whom a Prussian artifact will be returned as a gift. This is the complicated version of the German-

1 Wolfgang Koeppen, *Amerikafahrt*, in *Wolfgang Koeppen Gesammelte Werke 4* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1990), 293-294.

2 This replicates a circumstance from Koeppen's own life. In postwar Germany, Koeppen's „materielle Existenz sicherte er mit dem Verkauf und Handel von Antiquitäten aus den Familienbesitz.“ Anja Ebner, „'Ich warte, ... mein düsterer Literat.' Über Marion Koeppen,“ in „*Trotz allem, so wie du bist*“: *Wolfgang und Marion Koeppen. Briefe* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2008), 398. The family property here was that of Koeppen's wife, Marion.

3 Wolfgang Koeppen, *Tauben im Gras*, in *Wolfgang Koeppen Gesammelte Werke 2* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1990), 153.

American relationship, in which America and Germany circle around each other, countries caught in a self-creating embrace, a married relationship, as it were: not occupier and occupied, not buyer and seller, not democracy and autocracy but partners in the same tangled historical moment. As with the necklace, the cup voyages from German to American and back to German hands.

Amerikafahrt illumines *Tauben im Gras*, and the America present in *Tauben im Gras* anticipates the America encountered in *Amerikafahrt*. In the travelogue, the New York streets suddenly become Europe, shifted by the mechanism of Koeppen's deceptively simple prose: "die Straße war Wien, die Straße war Berlin, die Ecke war Warschau oder Czernowitz," statements of fact, it seems. Vienna, Berlin, Warsaw and Czernowitz, emptied of their Jewish communities in the war, are visible in postwar New York, just as, in a seamless trans-Atlantic metamorphosis, New York suddenly was these cities. The simple story of *Tauben im Gras*, the story of German depletion and American assertion, leads to the complex story, the story of America and Germany mingled, merged and married. Their merger is symbolized by an event that the novel implies, without ever reaching: the marriage of the black American, Washington Price, with the German woman, Carla, and the birth of their mixed-race child. The nearness of foreign countries need only be recognized, as "für dumme Menschen war die geographische Entfernung immer die Wüste, die Unkultur, das Ende der Welt." If New York can be Berlin, then Berlin can be New York, America can be Europe, and Europe can be America. They can all be words in the same sentence, as very often they are. In its sadness, the *Amerikafahrt* sentence about jewelry is indicative. None of this intermingled being and becoming is liberation; nor is it cause for joy. America is not liberating Germany, in *Tauben im Gras*, and Germany, only a few years after the Nazis, has little liberty to give, or to sell, to Americans. This is a Germany destined for catastrophe, its postwar history "eine Atempause auf dem Schlachtfeld." At best, if Germany is not a battlefield, it is a "Spannungsfeld," or as one of

the characters in *Tauben im Gras* thinks to himself, "es war nie wiedergutzumachen."⁴

In *Tauben im Gras*, Germany's world-historical collapse is traced through three very different couples. These are: Alexander and Messalina; Frau and Obermusikmeister Behrend; and, lastly, Philipp and Emilia. Each couple is a ruin of sorts, similar to the bombed-out buildings of the novel's unnamed city (unnamed but clearly a fictional Munich, most likely in February of 1951). Alexander is a famous movie actor who carries the name of a great European conqueror and is depicted dressing up as an *Erzherzog*, his latest movie role. His wife has the name of another legendary figure from antiquity, a name synonymous with debauchery. Alexander has the fake charisma and authority of cinema, while he and his wife practice a decadence that is starkly real. Both are exhausted by the orgies they sponsor. If their decadence is unspectacular by the standards of twenty-first century fiction, Koeppen's novel, with its profusion of homosexual characters, was avant-garde for the 1950s. In context, it resembles Federico Fellini's 1960 film, *La Dolce Vita*, a portrait of postwar European confusion, also with memorable American motifs. In both the novel and the film, the old European order has crumbled and a modern American anarchy is ascendant. Koeppen's Alexander and Messalina are celebrities, while the Behrends are ordinary Germans. Obermusikmeister Behrend had once played for the German army, but "nun in Gott weiß was für Kaffeehäusern für Neger und Veronikas 'Wenn-ich-nach-Alabama-komm' spielte." This is a decline in status acutely felt by Frau Behrend, who herself drinks Maxwell coffee. The Behrend family had disintegrated during the war; more than the war, the father had made it collapse. Obermusikmeister Behrend had served in Bohemia, where he left his family for a Czech woman, with whom he continues to live. For their daughter, Carla, "Es gab kein Elternhaus mehr. Als das Haus durch Bombenwurf zerstört würde, hatte die Bombe nur gezeigt, dass es lockere Bande gewesen waren..."⁵

Emilia and Philipp are ordinary gebildete Germans. The Buddenbrooks-like decline of Emilia's family leaves her

4 Ibid., 101, 11, 11, 45. The words "Spannungsfeld" and "Schlachtfeld," intoned at the beginning of *Tauben im Gras*, are repeated in the novel's last sentence: "Deutschland lebt im Spannungsfeld, östliche Welt, westliche Welt, zwei Welthälften, einander feind und fremd, Deutschland lebt an der Nahtstelle, an der Bruchstelle, die Zeit ist kostbar, sie ist eine Spanne nur, eine karge Spanne, vertan, eine Sekunde zum Atemholen, Atempause, auf einem verdammten Schlachtfeld." *Tauben im Gras*, 219.

5 Ibid., 19, 110.

despondent. Yet what remains of the family's wealth is culturally moribund. Emilia's apartment is a museum of outlived German culture, a gloomy Weimar of "tote Bücher, toter Geist, tote Kunst." She concentrates her hopes on Philipp, a writer unable to write. He has a rich European *Geist*, not at all decadent and almost monastic, for which he wants to sacrifice, and sacrifice he does; but still he cannot create. His is a literary life interrupted by the war. Intellectually and personally, he is a man on the edge of impotence: Philipp "war wie gelähmt und seine Stimme war wie erstickt." Alexander has commissioned him to write a screenplay, but Philipp cannot serve the popular gods of cinema, and the more refined muses of literature, poetry and criticism are inhospitable to him. He is only oppressed by his splendid European culture. For this reason perhaps, he is drawn to Kay, the young American woman, whose lips taste like the prairie. Kay, aged twenty-one, "kommt aus einem anderen Land, mit Weite, Frische und Jugend." This is the America of virgin soil, the European fantasy of an unspoiled continent; Emilia calls Kay an „Unschuldslamm." Rather than seduce her, however, Philipp wants her to lead him away from Germany and toward the New World of myth, legend and stereotype: "ich will das andere Land," he thinks when he is with Kay, "ich will die Weite, ich will die Ferne, einen anderen Horizont, ich will die Jugend, das junge Land, ich will das Unbeschwertere, ich will die Zukunft und das Vergängliche, den Wind will ich..." The historical parallel to Philipp's lust for "das andere Land," an intellectual's lust, is the longing of German women for American G.I.'s. Americans, in this Germany, come from a land of abundance. They are also freer than their German counterparts, at least in the fantasy vision of German women: "Sie waren nicht so mit Schicksal, Angst, Zweifel, Vergangenheit und Aussichtslosigkeit belastet wie die deutschen Jungen."⁶

Were this the political story writ large, *Tauben im Gras* would read like a script authored in the American State Department or in the Pentagon, a fantasy vision of occupied Germany, diminished in world war yet freed from its history and able finally to join in the Americanizing

future. Americans, and black Americans especially, are virile in *Tauben im Gras*: their virility could curb the impotence of a Philipp and, properly balanced, it could negate the decadence of an Alexander or a Messalina. This virile America could build the home that Herr Behrend leaves for war and then for another woman. The loss of jewelry to the occupying American army would be a small price to pay for an end to German impotence, German decadence and German nightmares. Such a Maupassant story would also be too simple, too inaccurate and too optimistic for a writer of Koeppen's searching talent and melancholic sensibility. "Ein Dichter schreibt Zeitgeschichte," read a review title of *Tauben im Gras*, and this was a critical, even despairing attempt, on Koeppen's part, to write the history of the present moment.⁷

It is not merely the German world that refuses simplicity, in this novelist's purview, and it is not only Germans who are complicit with paradox and contradiction. All people are sentenced to complexity and difficulty. There are "überall Risse in der Materie." No one is unitary or whole. Everyone possesses "zwei Seelen, ja, zwei Seelen wohnten in jeder Brust, und mal schlug das Herz mit der einen und mal mit der anderen Seele." Ugliness may be the only unitary essence: "die ganze Hässlichkeit des Daseins." In *Tauben im Gras*, these are claims with geopolitical implications. The owner of a German bar called the Broadway Bar "hatte es vorgezogen, zum wirklichen Broadway zu fliehen," a mildly ironic gesture of escape. Escape is a doomed venture: "doch niemand entflieht seiner Welt," the narrative voice reminds us a few pages later, whether the provincial Broadway that can be exchanged for New York or Manhattan's Broadway that can fade into the provinces. Modern America has marched into Europe, intent on planting its main streets and its broadways in the Old World, on making the world safe for democracy yet again. Yet for all its Napoleonic, world-changing verve, modern America is really something ancient. Its black soldiers "sahen wie nubische Legionäre des Caesar aus." African-Americans are thus transformed into Nubians and Eisenhower's divisions into Caesar's legions.

⁶ Ibid., 211, 101, 97, 154, 214, 191.

⁷ This review title is quoted by Hans-Ulrich Treichel, "Kommentar," 248. The review was by Heinz Schöffler.

Odysseus can at times be "König Odysseus," his royal predecessor in European literature. The Germans, in *Tauben im Gras*, have English words in their heads and American jazz in their ears; some of them dream of emigrating to America; their world has been forcibly opened to America; but so too are Americans being occupied by Germany. Americans are somehow responsible for the following cross-cultural ironies: "Das Amerikahaus, ein Führerbau," two epochs separated by something as slight as a comma; and, in the *Hofbräuhaus*-like beer hall, "amerikanische Soldaten und davongekommene deutsche Soldaten umarmten sich."⁸

This is not the attraction of opposites. It is a subtler alchemy, the same alchemy that informs the novel's twisting meditations on race and racism. Perhaps it is racism that unites postwar America and postwar Germany. Americans can be like us Europeans, they can be our brothers, because they too are racists: "Die Amis waren reich. Ihre Automobile glichen Schiffen, heimgekehrten Karavellen des Kolumbus. Wir haben ihr Land entdeckt. Wir haben ihren Erdteil bevölkert. Solidarität der weißen Rasse." This is not the de-nazification of Germany; it is the neo-nazification of America, a Columbian reverse journey into unfreedom prefigured by slavery and segregation. If they wish, Americans and Germans can conjure brotherhood from the sinister solidarity of the white race. Or racism may divide Americans and Germans. A group of German boys see the blackness of an American soldier as a mark of inferiority: "gegen Washington Price sprach die schwarze Haut, das auffallende Zeichen das Andersseins." For the parents of these boys, the blackness of some American G.I.'s is an especially reprehensible reminder that Germany has lost the war, "ein schwarzes Symbol der Niederlage, der Schmach des Besiegenseins, waren sie nicht das Zeichen der Erniedrigung und der Schande."⁹

Americans and Germans can also be thrown into more intimate, less delineated and less predictable relationships. *Tauben im Gras* features two German-American relationships in particular, each involving a black

American soldier: one is the relationship between Odysseus Cotton and his porter, Joseph, and the other the relationship between Washington Price and Carla. Odysseus has a surname that signals his skin color. He is related to King Cotton, to the agriculture of slavery. His name is almost too resonant, the first hero of European literature, the warrior who spends more literary time returning from war than fighting it, the man of twists and turns. Odysseus Cotton is a historical composite, indicated by the following list of associations, "Richter Lynch reitet über das Land, o Tag von Gettysburg, Lincoln zieht in Gettysburg ein, vergessen das Sklavenschiff, ewig das Brandmal ins Fleisch gesenkt, Afrika, verlorene Erde, das Dickicht der Wälder, Stimme einer Negerin." Joseph is embedded in a similar set of historical referents, "Verdun, Argonnerwald, Chemin-des-Dames, er war heil herausgekommen, und wieder Koffer, Reisende ohne Gewehr, Fremdenverkehr zum Gebirgsbahnhof... die Amerikaner kamen mit bunten Taschen..." History's servants, Joseph and Odysseus are drawn to one another: "wie Holz auf dem Fluss glitt eins zum andern." And, as with Cain and Abel, their unusual brotherhood ends in murder. Accident and misunderstanding, after Odysseus is robbed by a German woman, cause Odysseus to cast a stone, and the stone kills Joseph. Joseph, who had miraculously survived the First World War, dies in a race war being fought on German streets. An ostensible victor in World War II, Odysseus Cotton "war wieder im alten Krieg Weiß gegen Schwarz. Auch hier wurde der Krieg geführt."¹⁰

The American Washington Price and the German Carla are lovers. Washington is a star baseball player and a family man, a bona fide American. Named after the founder of the republic, Washington is an idealist who voluntarily goes to war against Hitler. His liaison with Carla culminates in her pregnancy, leaving them with bitter options, whether German or American. Koeppen repeats simple grammatical forms, rotating adjectives to clarify the confusion of this inter-racial German-American couple: "fern er in Deutschland, fern sie am

8 Ibid., 36, 163-164, 86, 186, 219, 186, 161, 213, 193.

9 Ibid., 21, 75, 201.

10 Ibid., 27, 29, 30, 159. Hans-Ulrich Treichel notes "die Stimme des Erzählers, der spezielle Koeppen-Ton, der bei aller Vielfalt und Vielgestaltigkeit der Protagonisten immer charakteristisch und wiedererkennbar bleibt, und insofern ist das Bild der Nachkriegszeit, das Koeppen in *Tauben im Gras* entwirft, untrennbar verbunden mit Koeppens Sprache, ihrem Rhythmus, ihrem Tempo und ihrem Klang - und natürlich mit der 'Seele' und der Subjektivität des Erzählers." „Kommentar“, 265. This voice and this soul include American as well as German characters, therefore making American history - Gettysburg, the middle passage - a matter of narrative omniscience in *Tauben im Gras*.

Mississippi, und weit ist die Welt und frei ist die Welt, und böse ist die Welt und Hass ist in der Welt, und voller Gewalt ist die Welt, warum?"¹¹ Despite the patriotism sounded in his first name, Washington is too pragmatic to imagine an American future for Carla, himself and their child. The mother of his black child, Carla would be no less trapped in the coils of segregation than he, no less trapped in the American ethos of segregation. And so, Washington dreams of Paris, the European place of liberty: this American, facing this challenge, needs this territory of European freedom. The longing for Paris is naive in essence: "in Paris würden sie glücklich sein; sie würden alle glücklich sein." Carla, meanwhile, comes from a Europe that has little to do with Paris. She had had a husband and child in Nazi Germany; she had lost her German husband in the battle for Stalingrad; and she keeps a photograph of him in her room, the swastika clearly visible on his chest: "auf seiner Brust war das Hakenkreuz zu sehen, gegen das Washington zu Feld gezogen war." She suffers from bad dreams: "Sie träumte von Negern. Im Traum wurde sie vergewaltigt." Such is the family Washington is entering and such the price he must pay for following his internationalist heart. Or such is the price he must pay for being an heir to American slavery and segregation, "die Straße der Apartheid" of his native Baton Rouge, Louisiana.¹²

Carla possesses her own American images, and they are images she cannot reconcile with the America of segregation. The images of material abundance describe precisely what would be denied her, if Carla would move to America with Washington Price:

im Nichtstun gewöhnte sie sich an die Bilderwelt unzähliger Magazine, die ihr das Damenleben in Amerika zeigten, die automatischen Küchen, die Waschwunder und Spülmaschinen, die alles reinigten, während man im Liegestuhl der Television folgte, Bing Crosby erschien in jedem Heim... keine Angstträume ängstigten mehr, denn you can sleep soundly tonight mit Maybels Magnesium Milch, und die Frau war die Königin, die echte Tränen weinte.¹³

The narrative technique here is very similar to the one Koeppen would go on to use in *Amerikafahrt*. The voice of the Maybel's Milk of Magnesia advertisement is internalized, a part of Carla's consciousness, just like the magazine photographs Carla has absorbed while doing nothing. In *Amerikafahrt*, Koeppen would focus his attention on the tragedy of American race relations, not just the practice of segregation in the Southern states, but the insuperable distance between white and black all across America. This is the sentiment to which Koeppen returns, at the end of this description, when the glories of technology and artifice disappear, when the consumer empire of American women vanishes, and the tears being shed are real tears - likely the tears Carla herself would shed, if her mixed race child would bring her to America.

The voice that will capture in metaphor the inter-related troubles of Odysseus, Joseph, Washington and Carla is an American voice, the voice of spirit and intellect. It belongs to Edwin, who has come to give a talk in the local Amerikahaus: "Er sollte über die Unsterblichkeit sprechen, über die Ewigkeit des Geistes, die unvergängliche Seele des Abendlandes." His (American) success is the inverse of Philipp's (European) failure; Edwin does cigarette ads, such is his fame as an intellectual; and he may have come to Europe "aus welchem Mißverstehen gekommenen Ruhm zu kassieren, sich feiern zu lassen." Yet he is also a genuine intellectual, "ein Kreuzfahrer des Geistes" and, linked as he is with the Christian crusades, he "zählte sich (mit unbestreitbarem Recht) zur europäischen Elite."¹⁴ Hans-Ulrich Treichel refers to a real-life model, "der an T.S. Eliot erinnernde amerikanische Dichter und Vortragsreisende Edwin."¹⁵ Before Edwin's talk, he changes from a monk's cape into the clothes of a gentleman, and at the Amerikahaus his celebrated voice disappears into a faulty sound system, technology triumphing easily over Geist. Edwin offers no defense of American power and no lecture on American democracy; he is an intellectual whose subject and object is Europe. He argues that "der europäische Geist... sei die Zukunft der Freiheit."

11 Wolfgang Koeppen, *Tauben im Gras*, 63. Several times, Koeppen plays with the adjectives „near“ and „far,“ as if to minimize the physical fact of distance: „Massachusetts war genau so fern und genau so nah wie Deutschland.“ If perception can collapse distance, it can also fall victim to geographic and cultural distance. A group of American teachers "sahen so wenig vom Leben dieser Stadt, als die Stadt vom Leben der Lehrerinnen sah." *Tauben im Gras*, 165.

12 *Ibid.*, 85, 135, 49, 61.

13 *Ibid.*, 49-50.

14 *Ibid.*, 45, 45, 179, 105.

15 Hans-Ulrich Treichel, "Kommentar," in *Tauben im Gras* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2006), 233.

The final truth, he says, may be the Christian truth, "Christenheit... der vielleicht letzte Abendschein des müden Europas, das einzige wärmende Licht in der Welt."¹⁶ In the novel's concluding pages, this crusader of the spirit is robbed, a variation upon the theme of European-American transfers. In fact, Edwin is killed seeking homosexual prostitutes by the train station. Instead of jewelry being sold by Germans to Americans, American money and American life are being taken by denizens of the German underworld. The cultivated intellectual, apostle of Western civilization, and the humble porter both die violent deaths.

In his talk, Edwin cites Gertrude Stein. The cultural transfers at play here are extravagant. A rootless modernist, Stein was an American writer who lived much of her adult life in Paris. Her English-language phrase, "pigeons on the grass alas," from a 1927 play, becomes a German phrase in Koeppen's novel; it also furnishes the novel's title, *Tauben im Gras*. Koeppen pictures this phrase in Edwin's mind, "wie Tauben im Gras betrachteten gewisse Zivilisationsgeister die Menschen, indem sie sich bemühten, das Sinnlose und scheinbar Zufällige der menschlichen Existenz bloßzustellen, den Menschen frei von Gott zu schildern, um ihn dann frei im Nichts flattern zu lassen, sinnlos, wertlos, frei und von Schlingen bedroht, dem Metzger preisgegeben, aber stolz auf die eingebilddete, zu nichts als Elend führende Freiheit von Gott und göttlicher Herkunft."¹⁷ The word *frei* here is repeated against a backdrop of confusion and chaos, with touches of nihilism reflected in the novel as a whole. The absences are accented in the words *sinnlos* and *wertlos*, a freedom from God that, once again, is not a liberation. In Koeppen's postwar Germany, Stein's words are not a foreign presence: they perfectly capture the reigning anarchy. That they are spoken by an American, quoting an American writer, in an *Amerikahaus* makes Stein's words more rather than less coherent. To have cited Jefferson on the tree of liberty or Nietzsche on the transvaluation of values would have been mere rhetoric, without the force of Stein's haunting, enigmatic phrase. Confused by its racial contradictions and its newfound

power, America is Germany's modernist *Doppelgänger*. While the Pentagon is imposing its power upon Germany, German history is exerting itself in the lives of Americans, many of whom happen to have German heritage in this novel. The young Richard Kirsch, for example, is in the U.S. Air Force. His father had served in the German army during World War I, before emigrating to the United States, where he sells guns and ruminates on pacifism. The moment his son joins the American military, "fast schien es dem Vater, als gleiche sein Sohn den jungen Offizieren der Reichswehr der zwanziger Jahre." Another American boy, Ezra, has German roots, which amount to his linguistic birthright. Though he is an American child, his German-Jewish mother, Henriette, speaks German with him: "Henriette sprach deutsch mit ihm. Er verstand die Sprache nicht, und er verstand sie doch." The murdered Jews of his mother's family, and the mother's German-language lament for them, "wurden am Bett eines kranken Kindes in Santa Ana, Kalifornien, zu Gestalten aus Grimms deutschen Kinder- und Hausmärchen." Henriette teaches her son "die deutsche Leidworte, die Murmel- und Tränenworte." In *Amerikafahrt*, Koeppen describes refugees from the Holocaust, living near Los Angeles and beneath the California sun.¹⁸ When in Germany, Ezra gets involved in a children's dispute. He wants to say who he is, and he says, "'Ich bin Jude.'" To which the narrative voice adds: "Er war Katholik."¹⁹ Ezra is the product of his mother's words and of the Grimm's fairy tale that is recent European history. With a single phrase, he makes his American citizenship disappear, together with his California boyhood and his baptism into the Catholic Church. Old Europe lies buried beneath the bright American surface.

In a contrary motion, the Europe buried beneath America's surface is itself being Americanized. The profusion of English words in the German language can seem a recent phenomenon, a phenomenon of the 1990s or of the 1980s. Yet English words and phrases are everywhere in *Tauben im Gras*, as they are in *Amerikafahrt*. Koeppen was not only incorporating the techniques of Anglo-American modernism into German

16 Wolfgang Koeppen, *Tauben im Gras*, 206, 204.

17 *Ibid.*, 207.

18 Wolfgang Koeppen, *Amerikafahrt*, 386-387

prose – learned from writers like Gertrude Stein, John Dos Passos, William Faulkner and James Joyce – Koeppen was documenting the arrival of English in the German psyche. For this job the novel was a perfect tool. English words can be hypnotic phrases from popular culture, like the song names, “Night and Day” or “Stormy Weather” or “Candy, I Call You My Sugar Candy.” English words can describe the self-evident genres of Dixieland and boogie-woogie: “Die Kapelle spielte Dixieland”; people listen to “Jimmys Boogie-Woogie”. Or they can be English words for which there is already a German equivalent, forcing themselves nevertheless into the German language – “das Sandwich,” for example. “Das wie Gummi gekaute Amerikanisch” has a talismanic power over Germans, not for its beauty, but for its connection to the occupying superpower. Germany has ceased to be the source of German history, another of the confusions that likens people to pigeons on the grass. Carla’s son, Heinz, the son that had been born to her and to her German husband, uses an American word to describe his possible step father. Among his German friends, Heinz calls Washington Price a nigger: Heinz’s knowledge of American English extends that far. Heinz is himself studying English, because he wants to understand his mother’s conversations with Price. Understandably, he wants to know if “die Reise nach Amerika” is being planned.²⁰ Like his beloved Kafka, Koeppen had written a novel about America without ever seeing the country. Over time, he could not abandon America to literature alone, whether his own or Kafka’s. In 1958, Koeppen set forth on his *Reise nach Amerika*, to test reality against reality and fiction against fiction. In America, Koeppen could also revisit the European wealth that had found its way to America, the jewels that were neither European nor American but the shared property of intertwined and tragedy-touched continents.

19 Ibid., 120, 77, 77, 77, 78, 78.

20 Ibid., 188, 159, 124, 44, 76.