



# Zettels Traum

*Arno Schmidt*

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## **Zettels Traum** Arno Schmidt

“I have had a dream past the wit of man to say what dream it was,” says Bottom. “I have had a dream, and I wrote a Big Book about it,” Arno Schmidt might have said. Schmidt’s rare vision is a journey into many literary worlds. First and foremost it is about Edgar Allan Poe, or perhaps it is language itself that plays that lead role; and it is certainly about sex in its many Freudian disguises, but about love as well, whether fragile and unfulfilled or crude and wedded. As befits a dream upon a heath populated by elemental spirits, the shapes and figures are protean, its protagonists suddenly transformed into trees, horses, and demigods. In a single day, from one midsummer dawn to a fiery second, Dan and Franzisca, Wilma and Paul explore the labyrinths of literary creation and of their own dreams and desires.

Since its publication in 1970 Zettel’s Traum/Bottom’s Dream has been regarded as Arno Schimdt’s magnum opus, as the definitive work of a titan of postwar German literature. Readers are now invited to explore its verbally provocative landscape in an English translation by John E. Woods.

## **Zettels Traum Details**

Date : Published 2013 by S. Fischer Verlag (first published 1970)

ISBN : 9783596505609

Author : Arno Schmidt

Format : Hardcover 1334 pages

Genre : Fiction, European Literature, German Literature, Cultural, Germany

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## From Reader Review Zettels Traum for online ebook

### Nick says

The Beast has been slain!

A masterpiece of the highest order. This book will test your reading abilities, patience and endurance to the fullest. Most are not worthy. I pity those who don't relish the challenge.

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### Michael says

Frau Zeh: Da sitzt dieser gut aussehende Typ im ICE und liest *Narziss und Goldmund*. In einem Akt spontaner Hilfeleistung rate ich ihm, von diesem Machwerk abzulassen. Daraus ergibt sich eine Diskussion über den Sinn und Nutzen von Hermann Hesse und im weiteren eine glückliche Ehe mit vielen Kindern.

JZ: Das ist Ihnen passiert?

Frau Zeh: Hergott, nein! Einen Mann, der in der Öffentlichkeit Hesse liest, würde ich niemals ansprechen.

JZ: Was müsste er lesen?

Frau Zeh: Wenn es Arno Schmidts *Zettel's Traum* wäre, wüsste ich, dass er nicht nur literaturbegeistert ist, sondern auch kräftig genug, um Hecken zu schneiden, Bäume zu fällen und Rasen zu mähen.

(Juli Zeh: Lebensverändernde Bücher – eine Selbstbefragung)

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### Matt says

NOTE\_ For a real review (AFTER reading the book) click here:

<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>

PRE\_READING\_REVIEW

**OMGIF, OMGIF, OMGIF!!!1!!**

Received the book today! And what a book this is!! I never realized how large it is, and heavy too!!!

I guess some photos are in order. When people put videos of unpacking their A\*ple products on *youtube* I can at least snap some photos of this piece of art, can't I?

[the \$-bill is not included, I just added it for scale]

[[click on the photos to enlarge]]

## The actual book and its slipcase

## The first *Zettel* with text

## The edition notice

## Collage of the titles

[slipcase; cover; the title-*Zettel*]

[[ApostropheAficionados will love this]]

## Description of the cover picture

## A Thumb-through-video

All 1334 *Zettels* in less than four minutes:

<https://youtu.be/fpb9QxrmeGo>

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**Update 9/7/2016** I also ordered a copy of Bottom's Dream.

I wonder if the two tomes are equally big. I will post a photo of both of them.

In the meantime check out Ronald's status pic here:

[https://www.goodreads.com/user\\_status...](https://www.goodreads.com/user_status...)

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## Update 1/18/2017

Finished the book today! And feeling pretty much like this right now:

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## Matt says

ATTN: Due to limitations from GR in displaying

-formatted text I setup a webpage, so you can read the entire review (including the right=hand=column) here:  
<http://www.butterweck.de/goodreads/bd...>

1st of all I have to cunfess that I didn't read the English eddytion BOTTOM'S DREAM (BD) of Arno SCHmidt's (AS) Magnus opus, butt the original one in GermAn (ZETTEL'S TRAUM (ZT)). The translation in BD was cumposed by JohnnE Woods over the course of several years and published by Dalkey=Archive=Press in September 2016. I mention this because a close tranSlation of AS's words in general seems very hard=on any translator, and l of ZT almost an impussybellytee. Mr Woods managed thou. I POKEd my nose in BD a couple of times & read perhaps 1 - 2 perScent; and from what I read I have to say the re=write?translation is the best you pussibly can get. ZT(however)I read completely - every?single?word - an it took me more thän a hundred days to do so (There are a few manual corrections by AS in the fucksimile edition I couldn't decypher). Moist on=line reviews I found mention the size & weight of the physical book (so I do so too). 8=- ZT: 32.7x44.5x7.5cm / 8,1kg // BD: 25.5x34.5x7.8cm / 5,7kg. What's more IMPortant is the cuntent.

(HIRSCHFELD!

(MAGICK MOUNTAIN Man(n)

(English readers reJOYCE!

(errect; rectum  
(aka tEyePoe=script

(size?sighs matterS  
(¿inches & pounds?

The entire story is set in the li'l HAMLET of Ödingen in the Lüneburg Heat(h), which to German ears sounds like the aPOetheosis of a dull=place. In Ödingen lives Daniel Pagenstecher (Dän), the 1st=person narrator. He receives a visit by the Jacobi family; father Paul (P), mother Wilma (W) and seir (sweat liddell) sixteen=yo daugther Franziska (Fr.). P (with help from W) is working on a translation of Edgar ALLan Poe into German and came to Dän to ask for his advice. Dän's a literary person ; someone who knows about everything there is to know about letteratour in general and Poe in purticular (he has read Poe's whole øvre prior to the visit). He is also blessed?cursed with a cast=iron memry and is therefor able to recite the relevant passages by heart. The ZT/BD=reader follows the 4 persons for 24 (w)hours. During that time Dän explains a whole new theory on the interpretation of Poe and other so called Dichter=Priests which is based on ETYMs. It's hard to describe in only a few words what etyms are. Think of them as unconscious associations you have when you read or hear a

(just like AS was

(+2 more virtual ones

(=DP;Dichter=poet

(according to Dän?AS  
(as in FREUD

particular word or parts thereof. I already? + a 4th instance  
deliberatly wrote some words here in their  
etymised form; like "impussybellytee" or  
"cumpletely". As you can see those interpreta  
tions of words are not nessesarily G-rated.  
In fuct most of the etyms that Dän pushes fur-  
ward carry a sexual conotation in one form or (=S  
another. With the help of his etym=theory (&  
what he calls Extended Mind Game) Dän tries (=EMG  
to convince PW to accept the fuct that Poe  
was indeed a boner=fide Voyeur (and much more;  
but to x=plane that would be a S=poiler).  
While P is more or less eager to follow Dän's  
approach (jotting down notes all the time and  
hoping to turn them into valuable S=ays some  
day), W is rather opposed to the matter for  
different reasons so a certain tension is  
buil=ding up -:|:-. To cumplicate things far-  
ter Fr. is helplessly in love with Dän ever  
since she spent some weeks in Dän's cottage  
when she was a Li'l gîrrl. So in addition to  
this quirky literary etymosis we get a love=  
story of the older=man=younger=woman kind. (POE & Varginia

The first pages of the book are rather diffi-  
cult to read & cumprehend. It seems like Arno  
SCHmidt deliberatly makes it Hard for readers  
to enter his stories. Almost every (German)  
word is mis=spelled and the PUNctuation is  
creative and øriginal to say the least.  
In ZT/BD there's an additional obstacle to  
overcum, because the text is set moistly in  
three columns. The middle?main column cont-  
ains the actual story - that's where the  
actors are acting, the dialog and the inner  
thouhts of Dän. The left column is the POE=  
column; discussions & quotes of several?many  
of his works are here. The right column is  
reserved for quotes from other work? of lit,  
anecdotic S=tuff, more thoughts of Dän & so  
on. Sometimes the middle column is divided  
further (the hardest parts for me). That's  
when there are parallel actions or conver- (tipp: keep an opaque  
sations, usually when the characters are ruler nearby!  
split up into groups.

This book was unlike any other book I ever  
read, and I didn't dare touch it for quite  
a while after=purchase. Although I don't  
find it IMPoerative to read the hole  
POE=universe prior to reading ZT ('cept (POE=Pun-o-rama  
maybe PYM & RODMAN; and the others if you  
feel you should when you encunter them in  
ZT/BD). I strongly suggest you don't read  
IT as your first Arno SCHmidt! Start with

some of his earlier?shorter works. His No-  
vellASS (like LIFE OF FAUN / LEVIATHAN /  
POECAHONTAS / DARK MIRROR) will slowly draw  
you into reading and pussibly understanding  
AS and his way of thinking. At least that's  
how it was for me & it helped me a Græt Dæl.  
Since I'm a sucker for the German romanTIECKs  
and especially for JEAN PAUL I was delighted  
to find gobs of references in here. Other  
readers will be pleased to diScuver manny  
mentions of JOYCE (FW & ULYSSES), and also  
SPENCER (FQ), CERVANTES (DQ), BULWER (Z.),  
DICKens, STERNE, GOETHE, & & just about  
evryone else from that happy bunch - - not to (+QUINN  
mention SHAKESPEARE whose MIDSUMMERNEITH'S=  
DREAM inspired the hole thing. This is A  
trou literatour=d?=farce. Readers who are  
more well=read than me will probably spot  
myriads more books & aut(w)hor(e)s hinted at  
in the text! (nothin' to it!  
(is there anything  
that's NOT in ZT/BD?)

Be aware though that this book contains a lot  
(& I mean a lot) of S=descriptions; discussed  
by the various characters or hinted at in the  
text itself. This is probably the book with  
the highest ratio of S=puns?lang per page! (more than FW? (I dunno.)  
There's a constant S=drumming thrûout and  
hardly any topic from the S=coSmoS is left  
undisclosed. For me it wasn't odious or yukky (S=wHole=Shebang  
at all but others might be offended. But it  
is literary ; often scholarly ; and the Bottom  
line is: It's awfully=funny and will take me  
some time to fully diJest.

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### **Anthony Vacca says**

I did it. I pre-ordered this beast of translation as a late-arriving birthday gift to myself, God help me. And  
God help the Dalkey Archive if they push back the pub date again.

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### **Sam says**

"Ha, Women and Men's a book for ants!"

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## Nathan "N.R." Gaddis says

The apostrophe (') belongs. That's the joke, folks.

But the Stiftung was so generous as to post a little Look=Inside of the recently type=set edition of ZT ; includes a few little explicatory things in Blue;Ink and a pair of pages from the original typescript edition. Fazin=ear=Ende.

<http://www.arno-schmidt-stiftung.de/c...>

Review of the type=set edition of 2010 ; from Frankfurter Allgemeine "Die Welt ist groß genug, dass wir alle darin Unrecht haben können"

<http://www.faz.net/aktuell/feuilleton...>

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A bevy of links and things concerning this "Roh=Mann=Tick" and his *Traum* book.

from zinzin we have links with excerpts of those links, plus some cool photos:

<http://www.zinzin.com/observations/20...> And I'll replicate zinzin's links ::

Innovative Fiction Magazine ::

<http://www.innovative-fiction-magazin...>

The site looks worthwhile for browsers intrigued by the magazine's title.

"Watching TV with Arno Schmidt", an essay/analysis ::

<http://web.archive.org/web/2007100917...>

A googlebooks excerpt from Arno Schmidt's Zettel's Traum: An Analysis ::

<http://books.google.com/books?id=xY8l...>

The Arno wikipedia page ::

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arno\\_Sch...](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arno_Sch...)

The arNO Complete Review page ::

<http://www.complete-review.com/author...>

A magazine profile of genius translator John E. Woods ::

<http://www.thelocal.de/society/201006...>

Also ::

For the geek, an Arno Schmidt archival collection ::

<https://archives.pdx.edu/archon/?p=co...>

The Zettel's Traum page-turning video ::

<http://vimeo.com/6422567>

A review, auf Deutsche, from Die Zeit, of the 2010 edition of Zettel's Traum (the 1970 edition was offset from the typescript ;; the 2010 edition was in properly set type) :: <http://www.zeit.de/2011/06/Leser-Zett...>

fictional woods has a discussion thread ::  
<http://w11.zetaboards.com/thefictiona...>

"Arnotations: Arno Schmidt Annotates Finnegans Wake" by Friedhelm Rathjen::  
<http://www.joycefoundation.ch/An%20Oc...>

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John E Woods translation forthcoming ; with rumor for a this=year pub-date, but that's a stale rumour and furtherly that it'll be the final bookend of his career which began in the beginning with Evening Edged in Gold, his discovery of which led him to become a translator and produce his masterful transitions into English of Mann's work.

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And you thought *Women and Men* was expensive.

<http://www.abebooks.com/servlet/Searc...>

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## David Auerbach says

So this monster arrives as the Dalkey Archive book to end all Dalkey Archive books. The invaluable independent Dalkey Press has long been known for publishing monstrous and difficult tomes of literature like *Miss Macintosh*, *My Darling* and *Women and Men* (could we get a reprint on this one please?), but this has got to be \*the\* echt-Dalkey book, 1500 pages containing over a million words in heavily-addled typography, set in anywhere from two to four columns that poke and intrude upon each other.

For all that, it's not as difficult as your typical Dalkey offering, and far easier than *Finnegans Wake*, which Schmidt at one time intended to translate, and which looms very large as an influence here. Despite the constant puns and wacky punctuation, the language is in relatively clear English, and the overall structure is a lot more easily grasped. A married couple, both translators, go to visit a Poe scholar, there begins a very, very digressive evening on the nature of literature, language, love, meaning, and the like. The couple's teenage daughter is there too, nursing a huge crush on the Poe scholar. (Yes, you may find Schmidt a tad regressive in his gender attitudes.)

I've only made it through the first of the eight chapters, but I gather that Schmidt sticks more or less with the program for the entire book. The program appears to be constant literary allusions, direct references, quotes, and analyses, all tied together and mutilated with a Joycean sense of punning. Unlike with Joyce, Schmidt's agenda is focused more narrowly on literature, leaving aside myth and history. While *Finnegans Wake* very explicitly claimed the mantle of all of human history, Schmidt is after a sort of shared linguistic unconscious, where "etyms" form a deep structure of language that guides how we interpret reality. The resemblance could be pure coincidence, but the dual structure is uncannily reminiscent of Chomsky's universal grammar in form, though not in content. These are the reference points to which I kept returning:

SUBJECT MATTER: Poe

PRESENTATION: Joyce

MEANING: Freud

THEORY: Chomsky

I don't claim to have any grasp of the motivic movement of the book, so I cannot assemble the allusions to Jean Paul, Goethe, Hoffmann, and thousands of others into a whole beyond the explicit "etym" theory. And I suspect a lot of people won't see Chomsky in it. But that's one of the main communal purposes of a book like this: you can read what you wish into it and people can't just wave you away and say, "That's ridiculous."

Because Schmidt leans heavily on Freud (it's a book about a dream, after all) for *The Meaning Of It All*, Schmidt's account of deep structure is overwhelmingly sexual, and so dirty puns abound. And not just puns; Schmidt has his own dirty emoticon language, as with this punctuational depiction of sexual intercourse:

-.---. / --: "? " - ". " /-: "? ?" -- ". . ." - /: !!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Schmidt was a working-class autodidact who never went to university, and he shared with Joyce the paradox of relying on high culture for an audience while disdaining it for its narrow-minded snobbery and superficial intellect. Both Joyce and Schmidt loved high art and trash alike. Schmidt translated James Fenimore Cooper, Stanley Ellin, and Edward Bulwer-Lytton (yes, THAT Bulwer-Lytton) into German. And both Joyce and Schmidt happened on roughly the same solution to their alienation from high culture: write long and tricky books which it is near-impossible to speak authoritatively about. That's how you dethrone the literati.

As far as I can tell, Schmidt did not intend *Bottom's Dream* to be his greatest work, just his biggest. He did not devote the majority of his life to it, unlike Robert Musil with *The Man Without Qualities* or Uwe Johnson with his magnificent, forthcoming-in-translation *Anniversaries*. The afterword (by Schmidt's long-time and indefatigable translator John E. Woods, who also typeset this thing) even remarks that Schmidt suggested readers stick to chapters 1, 4, and 7, advice which I may yet take. It's hard for me to say that readers would be better served by starting here than *Nobodaddy's Children* or the currently unavailable *School for Atheists*. Hell, I would also recommend that Americans in particular read more Edgar Allen Poe before tackling Schmidt, since the background will be useful and because Poe is a vastly more important author whose influence is hidden in subsequent works high and low alike. Thomas Disch called Poe "our embarrassing ancestor," which is exactly what makes him suitable for Schmidt's Freudian take on the unconscious history of literature. Poe is the sort of author and influence a writer will tend to repress out of his or her mind. Poe's erudite violence, filth, and rage make him the perfect raw material for Schmidt's comparatively genteel book. Also, "po" is German slang for "buttocks," as Woods pointed out in an interview.

That leaves this book's attraction for many as a literary fetish object, a handsomely produced yet ungainly monster of indisputable erudition yet highly selective appeal. Schmidt has his followers, yet in a time when literature is desperately striving for social relevance, Schmidt's work stands proud and naked as a work of literature first and cultural politics second, though Schmidt's crabbed leftist elitism is hardly buried. In contrast, the work of Marianne Fritz, which plays far crazier typographical games than Schmidt's, puts those tools to far more explicitly socio-political ends in the portrayal of suffering and oppression. Schmidt may regain ground once the pivot swings back away from politics and back toward the sort of Barthian "everything is a story" hijinks that were popular in the 70s and 80s. For now, this is one seriously unfashionable book. The question in my mind as I read it is whether all the jokes and play will reconnect in some profound way to the living world, or whether they will become a hermetically sealed world of their own, aesthetically stunning but unable to move the human heart. The jury's still out for me, but at the moment this enormous book still \*feels\* smaller than *Finnegans Wake* or *Gravity's Rainbow*.

In sum? An easy five stars for effort and intellect, but by its very nature a mixed bag. I recommend it, but only to those who have read this review and already find themselves interested. It is a book you come to\*,

not vice versa. Regardless, full plaudits to Woods and to Dalkey for their pursuit of the literary and the obscure in a time of increasing indifference and cultural illiteracy.

\*Pun not intended, but I'm sure Schmidt would be delighted.

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## **Ian "Marvin" Graye says**

### **Big Wet Book:**

"I have had a dream past the wit of man to say what dream it was: man is but an ass, if he go about to expound this dream," says Bottom. Arno Schmidt might just as well have said, I wrote a Big Book, and a handful of readers in close circles had a Wet Dream about it. Und but so too, bro;;; let it be written:: man is but an ass, if he go about to expand this dream...into 1,496 pages. And a bigger ass to try to read it singlehandedly (but who actually has???). As with other forms of masturbation, the greatest risk factor is that you will end up with a wrist fracture.

### **Australian Translation of the Title:**

"Arsehole's Delight"

### **A Cretin's Assessment:**

*"A massive stack of pages."*

### **Gilbert "the Pure" Rile:**

*"A sex aid for a small circle of book fetishists."*

### **Edwin Turner, Biblioklept:**

*"...it's a primal gobbledygook wordmass...For now, my updates from this maelstrom will be sporadic at best."*

## **Experimental as Each Other**

Yet more conformist experimentalism for the noddies. Wow, three=columns!!! Didn't they already do this with poetry? What's new? Since when is experimentalism the duplication of past experiments?

## **Hand=Eye Coordination**

You can read this book in two days, if you use both hands.

## **Pulpit or Pulp It?**

**[Apologies to Page and Plant]**

*There's a reader who's sure  
That all fat books are gold*

*If it's a massive stack of pages,  
Surely reading it will take ages,  
It's even whispered that soon  
The piper will call his tune,  
So a new day will dawn  
For all those who read long,  
And the bookshops will  
Echo with laughter.  
But he doesn't concede  
His taste is misgiven,  
Because he's building  
A stairway to heaven.*

**Awards:**

Helen Warren DeGolyer Award for American Bookbinding 2017

*"It had me in stitches!"*

**William Shakespeare:**

*"If you desire the spleen, and will laugh yourselves into stitches, follow me."*

*"If the people have no bread, let them read Schmidt."*

**SOUNDTRACK:**

**Circle Jerks - "I Wanna Destroy You"**

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=APgg9LY...>

*"A pox upon the media  
And everything you read."*

**Radio Birdman - "Descent Into the Maelstrom"**

<https://youtu.be/dhS7jNaUWoE>

**Lou Reed - "I Wanna Know (The Pit And The Pendulum)"**

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=-7Cbhe...>

*"For certain minds  
This is  
Absolutely  
Irresistible."*

## POESIE:

### Edgar Allan Poe - "That Long Agony" (from "The Pit And The Pendulum")

*"I was sick—sick unto death with that long agony; and when they at length unbound me, and I was permitted to sit, I felt that my senses were leaving me. The sentence—the dread sentence of death—was the last of distinct accentuation which reached my ears. After that, the sound of the inquisitorial voices seemed merged in one dreamy indeterminate hum."*

### Edgar Allan Poe - "Something Damp and Hard" (from "The Pit And The Pendulum")

*"So far, I had not opened my eyes. I felt that I lay upon my back, unbound. I reached out my hand, and it fell heavily upon something damp and hard. There I suffered it to remain for many minutes, while I strove to imagine where and what I could be. I longed, yet dared not to employ my vision."*

### Edgar Allan Poe - To be Read (from "The Man of the Crowd")

*"It was well said of a certain German book that 'es lasst sich nicht lesen' - it does not permit itself to be read."*

### Edgar Allan Poe - Only Complex (from "The Murders in the Rue Morgue")

“What is only complex is mistaken (a not unusual error) for what is profound.”

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## m csmnt says

And with that, the time has come for me to write about my experience with this book.

I started this having read no Schmidt, and ended having read around half of his English'd works and one more favourite author.

Anybody who has the same curiosity I had on hearing about this book (granted it took me a year and a bit to bring myself to buy a copy) should take the leap and read.

1 page, 1 book (of the 8 contained in this giant), the whole thing... I wholeheartedly recommend it, or any of his other books for that matter.

I'm sure you don't need me to tell you any more to get you to try it. If you were already curious, you probably still want to read it.

The real winner here is literature as a whole. Through this translation, one of the most interesting works I've ever read is available to the whole of the English speaking world (thanks to John E. Woods' incredible work). If there weren't translators who didn't shy away from a project because of terms such as 'untranslatable' and 'impossible', we wouldn't have this and many other works available.

Just this year I've discovered so many incredible books, written in languages not my own, and translated by people who love the work so much as to share it with a whole new audience.

So, not only does this book as a translation get 5 stars from me, the publishers who take the risks releasing these kinds of works get 5 stars from me. The translators and typesetters (all Woods in this one) get 5 stars from me. The readers who love these books and make them known get 5 stars from me.

This year has been pretty good to me for discovering lit in translation. Check 'em out (they deserve the love and attention that books from huge publishing houses seem to unfairly get by default):

Arno Schmidt & Miklós Szentkuthy

Heimito von Doderer, Mathias Énard, Hans Henny Jahnn, Javier Pedro Zabala (that last one is debatable as to if it qualifies, but worth the read)...

And a big thanks to The Untranslated for the helping hand starting this book via their "Reading Zettel's Traum" posts, and great book recs.

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## Darwin8u says

IT CAME TODAY!!!

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## Geoff says

Pre-gawdang-ordered. Check is in the mail. No matter who wins that stoopid general election, this fall is going to belong to Arno Schmidt and John E. Woods. Who's getting a reading group together? We gotta Wake this sumnabitch!

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## Ronald Morton says

Translation is, as I am wont to say, an impossibility. Every language is unique to itself. So a translator tackles that impossibility anew with every author, with every sentence for that matter.

-John E. Woods

This is one of those works where it really should be impossible for an accurate translation to exist, and yet – after years and years of Woods' labor – it does exist. As with everything I read in translation, I can only react to the text as given by the translator (as I only speak/read English) and the overall impact of the work as presented; so: I know enough about what Schmidt was doing to at least be able to glimpse what has likely been sacrificed; but I also know enough to recognize what a monumental accomplishment this translation is.

I have to wonder: is Woods done? Will we ever see anything else from him again? After Mann and now Schmidt, what else can he tackle (and does he take suggestions)?

Okay, so the book itself. Oh, it's also about translation. At least, it uses translation – specifically translating Poe into German – as a jumping off point; it is both the reason behind Paul and Wilma Jacobi's visit to Daniel Pagenstecher (their daughter Franziska has her own motives) and one of the primary focuses of the first book/chapter/section of ZT/BD. The idea of translation and the *act* of translation is present throughout the work, but Daniel's Etym Theory quickly takes a place of prominence in the text and becomes by and large the main focus – both as general exploration of language/literature and specific explication of Poe's oeuvre – of the work as a whole. I'll get to that in a second, just one more quick note about the plot/narrative of the book:

There really isn't much to speak of. I don't mean that dismissively, I mean it more as encouragement: if you go a few hundred pages, pause, and wonder if you've missed some sort of plot development, you probably haven't. ZT/BD is very pointedly uninterested in narrative conventions; it is more a work of theory (etym) and criticism (Poe) but even then it does not bother with the forms or conventions of those either. But, as a cheat guide – without spoiling anything – the main plot points of the book are in Sections I, V, and VIII. And that's about it. (It's humorous to me that Schmidt expressed surprise – as noted in Woods' Afterward – that anyone would read this entire book, when I, IV, VII were quite enough - IV and VII (the *Walpurgis* sections) are easily the most experimental and etym-wild of the book, and I have to think that Schmidt was both recommending his favorite sections *and* generally messing with unsuspecting readers in saying this). I enjoyed the narrative portions of the text (there is some really great, insightful, dialogue; presented in distinctly convincing voices); thankfully I enjoyed the other portions just as much (at times more so), for they are considerably more prevalent.

*I firmly request that for Ice you don't piddle=around with the text! [...] By changing the orthography one can produce the wildest verbal tripe, and then interpolate any=old meaning whatever.*

So, The Etym Theory – this isn't just a theory that Dan Pagenstecher has concocted, it is Schmidt's personal interpretive theory of language (but I repeat myself: Dan is a pretty obvious Schmidt-stand-in); so when people reference this book as Schmidt's magnum opus, there is some weight behind that (and not just the 13 pounds of the book itself): this really is the culmination of over a decade of Poe scholarship (and within that, translation) – Schmidt did in fact feel that his interpretation of Poe's work would significantly influence Poe-criticism – and it is Schmidt's grand demonstration of his Etym Theory. His Etym Theory – to massively dumb it down, but I don't plan on sitting here typing forever – is basically a deconstructive Freudian interpretation of language, where one can unlock the subconscious meaning behind the text as written through a deep-dive of the etymology of the words utilized (though Schmidt didn't actually think this applied to all writing, only some authors could be unlocked in this manner). Or, even simpler: everything is about sex, or at least can be made to look that way. If you weren't aware by now, a (I don't think I'm exaggerating in saying this) majority of this book is made up of smutty plays-on-words, double entendres, and lecherous sex jokes. Some of it is really funny, some of it is clever in its execution, and some of it is pretty tiring (for instance, his persistence in replacing “con” and “can” with “cun” – typically more than once a page over the course of nearly 1500 pages – quickly stops being funny).

Some stuff that you should read before tackling this behemoth, all Poe:

(in descending order of importance)

The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket (if you're only going to read one thing leading to ZT/BD, make it this, as it is by far the most discussed and cited work throughout the text)

The Journal of Julius Rodman

The Domain of Arnheim

Eureka (full credit to Nick for pointing this out)

The Fall of the House of Usher

Tamerlane

A Tale of the Ragged Mountains

A Descent into the Maelström

(I'm not including Pit and the Pendulum or Rue Morgue here; they are both referenced a number of times, but the small amount you likely already know/remember of them is sufficient. And, if not, see the first item on the next list)

Some stuff that would benefit you to read:

The rest of the Poe stuff (might as well, though not strictly necessary here - I think it would be more necessary when reading in the original German, as Schmidt's translations of Poe appear throughout the work, but that act of translation is lost in Bottom's Dream (as Poe is back in English where it began)

Both Faust volumes (Goethe) – at least the two walpurgisnacht sections

Freud – again, not strictly necessary, having a surface level understanding of Freud's major theories pertaining to the Id, Ego and Superego; as well as his theories around the subconscious is fine.

Ulysses (Joyce, duh) – I know, I know, you're asking *what about Finnegans Wake?*; Ulysses is actually referenced pretty frequently throughout the text here, where FW doesn't really get mentioned that much.

Schmidt's playfulness with language would make it appear at a surface level that FW would be helpful, but Schmidt and Joyce are doing very different things with language in the two books, to vastly different effect (for what it's worth, FW is considerably better than ZT/BD in my opinion). Understanding that Schmidt was influenced by FW is enough; even Schmidt himself acknowledged he was pursuing a much different avenue than Joyce.

Outside of those items one could basically spend a lifetime trying to read everything alluded to and quoted in this book – it would probably be an interesting (all encompassing) project, but not one that's really needed or required. On that note, and to that end:

This is a book that will challenge basically any reader; and it's one where even the most diligent of readers will miss allusions and plays and jokes that Schmidt is making. You would basically need to be Arno Schmidt himself not to. I managed to cram in nearly 60 hours of reading over the last two and half weeks getting through this for the first time, and even then I know that I barely scratched the surface, and that I'll likely re-visit this a couple more times in my life to explore it further. On one hand, this was not as OMG amazing as I wanted it to be – some of the beauty of Schmidt's earlier work, as well as some of his singular brilliance in presenting a fluid and *real* narrative has been lost – but on the other hand this work thrilled me in ways I didn't expect. While it is smutty and puerile, it is also ferociously intelligent; Schmidt displays an awe-inspiring depth of knowledge not just surrounding Poe, but around literature in general, and he makes leaps and connections that are genuine pleasures to behold. It's a damned difficult book, but its depths hold treasures and rewards for the dedicated reader. Of course, Schmidt wouldn't have it any other way.

*mústYou; (must We=as=readers), not behold 1 thing 5-10 times until We know it nicely & to our satisfaction; comprehend, understand value it? I'll put it vèry pointedly : A work of art that one needs to see=hear just 1ce in order to 've exhausted its meaning : that would be no work of art!*

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## **Nathan "N.R." Gaddis says**

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### **J.W. Dionysius Nicoletto says**

does an English

translation exist?

or shall I learn German

for the purpose of this

text

the way a Margaret Chardiet

now Pharmakon

learned French

just to read Baudelaire

when we were teenagers

in Manhattan

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