

A Tragicomedy of the South Seas

Marc Buhl's and Christian Kracht's historical novels on the imperial project of August Engelhardt

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I. Fictitious biographies – art or racism?

What a coincidence! Within the relatively short time span of a year, two German novels appeared on the very same bizarre character of German colonial culture: Marc Buhl's *The Paradise of August Engelhardt* (2011) and Christian Kracht's *Imperium* (2012).¹ The first one would have been already forgotten if the second had not produced a notorious literary scandal. So what is it all about?

Both literary texts are historical novels on the life of August Engelhardt (1875–1919), set in the context of German imperialism in the South Seas and the Life Reform Movement of the turn of the century.² When Buhl's Engelhardt steps on the beach of a Pacific island, he throws away his clothes: "He stood there naked, raising his arms to the sun".³ Kracht's novel quotes the same motive in the form of photography. Engelhardt can be seen raising his "arms into the sky" – the image of a "radical new man". The narrator of the novel claims that the image had been lost in the course of time.⁴ However, the novel ironically refers to a frequently reproduced image of the painter Fidus by the title of *Light Prayer*, an icon of the German Youth Movement.⁵ A similar illustration by Fidus embellishes the inside cover of a brochure by Engelhardt entitled *A Future Without Sorrows* (figure 1).⁶

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¹ Marc Buhl, *Das Paradies des August Engelhardt. Roman*, (Frankfurt/M: Eichborn, 2011). Christian Kracht, *Imperium*, (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2012).

² Sven Mönter, *Following a South Seas Dream. August Engelhardt and the Sonnenorden*. (Auckland: University of Auckland, 2008).

³ Buhl, *Paradies*, p. 8, cf. pp. 56, 141 and 63 f.

⁴ Kracht, *Imperium*, p. 51.

⁵ Marina Schuster. „Lichtgebet. Die Ikone der Lebensreform- und Jugendbewegung“, in: Gerhard Paul (ed.): *Das Jahrhundert der Bilder. 1900 bis 1949*, (Göttingen: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung 2009) pp. 140–147.

⁶ August Bethmann / August Engelhardt, *Eine sorgenfreie Zukunft. Das neue Evangelium. Tief- und Weitblicke für die Auslese der Menschheit* (1898). 5th edition, (Insel Kabakon bei Herbertshöhe: Re-formverlag Bethmann & Engelhardt) 1906.



Figure 1:
“Attend to the sun, oh friend!”
Graphic art by Fidus, i.e. Hugo Reinhold
Karl Johann Höppener (1868–1948)

The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* praised Buhl’s novel as the story of a “tragically failed drop-out”.⁷ The same newspaper recommended Kracht’s *Imperium* as an ironic adventure novel.⁸ A reviewer from the magazine *Literaturen* appreciated that Kracht dared to address the “tragicomical history of the Wilhelminian colonial empire”. He found the text as amusing as frightening.⁹ Others celebrated the novel as a masterpiece.¹⁰ A critic in the left-wing newspaper *taz* declared that Kracht had failed when he tried to imitate the discourse of the German empire, the language of Wilhemianism.¹¹ Georg Diez criticized *Imperium* in the news magazine *Spiegel* as “penetrated by a racist ideology”, and denounces the author as “gatekeeper” of far-right ideas. Kracht’s method, he claimed, was to use literature for funnelling “antimodern, antidemocratic and totalitarian thoughts” into the mainstream.¹²

Authors like Daniel Kehlmann and Nobel prize-winning Austrian novelist Elfriede Jelinek indicated that this critic mistook the position of literary figures for the political perspective of the author.¹³ Kracht’s publisher pointed out that even a narrator is just another character of the novel. For him, this “very mixed play” changes between melodrama and tragedy. As a “black

⁷ Martin Halter, „Der Ritter der Kokosnuss“, in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ)*, 17.6.2011, p. Z5.

⁸ Felicitas von Lovenberg, „Ein kultischer Verehrer von Kokosnuss und Sonnenschein“, in: *FAZ*, 10.2.2012. Cf. Felicitas von Lovenberg, „Kein Skandal um Christian Kracht“, in: *FAZ*, 14.2.2012.

⁹ Christoph Bartmann, „Welteroberung und Rohkost“, in: *Literaturen* 105, 2012, p. 55.

¹⁰ Paul Michael Lützel, „Hitler und die Kokosnuss“, in: *Die Welt*, 11.2.2012, p. 3. Cf. Adam Soboczynski, „Seine reifste Frucht“, in: *Die Zeit*, 9.2.2012, p. 49. Cf. Lothar Schröder, „Imperium. Der große Roman von Christian Kracht“, in: *Rheinische Post*, 16.12.2012.

¹¹ Andreas Fanizadeh, „Das Imperium des Christian Kracht“, in: *sonntaz*, 11/12.2.2012.

¹² Georg Diez, „Die Methode Kracht“, in: *Der Spiegel*, 13.2.2012, pp. 101–103. Two weeks later, Diez softens his critique, cf. Georg Diez, „Meine Jahre mit Kracht“, in: *Der Spiegel*, 27.2.1912, pp. 125–128.

¹³ Katja Lange-Müller et al., „Offener Brief an die Chefredaktion des Spiegel“, <http://www.kiwi-verlag.de/news/17022012-offener-brief-an-die-spiegel-chefredaktion-zu-kracht/>, 17.2.2012.

comedy”, this novel makes fun of the breakdown of German dreams.¹⁴ And Erhard Schütz, a Berlin-based professor for German studies, insists that this is “art and not Nazi junk.”¹⁵

The novels of Buhl and Kracht are hybrid genres, as they mix fact and fiction, tragic and comic motives.¹⁶ I classify them as tragicomical, insofar as they displace a comical character into the tragedy of real history¹⁷, leading from imperialism to fascism. In doing so, the question arises whether these novels fall into the trap of colonialism and racism.

II. The real August Engelhardt as a tragicomical character

At first, it is important to find out what makes Engelhardt so interesting for the problem of coming to terms with the colonial past of Germany. Before World War I, several groups of islands in the Pacific were colonial possessions of Germany. Her empire reached from Samoa and the Solomon Islands to the Marshall Islands, from the Caroline Islands and the Mariana Islands to New Guinea. There, the islet of Kabakon became the scene of a tragicomedy, starring a German pharmacist from Nuremberg: August Engelhardt bought the island in 1902 together with its inhabitants, for the purpose of running a palm-tree plantation and founding a sun order. The seller was the richest woman in the Pacific, the half-Samoan ‘Queen Emma’. Engelhardt settled down on Kabakon with not much more than a big library (figure 2).¹⁸

Engelhardt’s first follower was dead after six weeks only; the cause of the death was unknown. The second victim was the musician Max Lützwow. After he fell sick on Kabakon, he fled the island. Lützwow ended up in a storm and reached the beach only to die there of exhaustion.¹⁹ Engelhardt’s community attracted up to 30 members. Another adherer drowned while sailing.²⁰ The fourth victim was an old friend of Engelhardt, the author August Bethmann. Together they had published the fifth edition of a gospel of “tropical cocovorism” in 1906. In that brochure they propagandized for an “international tropical colonial empire”, settled by nudists. The population should eat fruits and coconuts, while the sun would contribute free “life energy”. They promoted their “mission of the tropics” with the slogan “Up the equator, down

¹⁴ Helge Malchow, „Blaue Blume der Romantik“, in: *Der Spiegel*, 18.2.2012, pp. 126–128.

¹⁵ Erhard Schütz, „Kunst, kein Nazikram“, in: *Freitag*, 16.2.2012.

¹⁶ Cf. Moritz Baßler, „Gattungsmischung, Gattungsübergänge, Unbestimmbarkeit“, in: Rüdiger Zymner (ed.), *Handbuch Gattungstheorie*, (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2010) pp. 52–54.

¹⁷ Cf. Jens Roselt, „Tragikomödie“, in: Gert Ueding (ed.), *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, vol. 10 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), pp. 1316–1326.

¹⁸ Cf. Dieter Klein, „Neuguinea als deutsches Utopia. August Engelhardt und sein Sonnenorden“, in: Hermann Joseph Hiery (ed.), *Die deutsche Südsee. Ein Handbuch*, (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2001), pp. 450–458. Cf. Alice Schalek, „Herr Engelhardt in Neu Lauenburg, Neuguinea“ (1913), in: Elke Krasny et al., *Von Samoa zum Isonzo. Die Fotografin und Reisejournalistin Alice Schalek*, (Wien: Jüdisches Museum, 1999), p. 90.

¹⁹ Wendland, „Deutsch-Neu-Guinea“, in: *Medizinal-Berichte über die Schutzgebiete für das Jahr 1905/06*, (Berlin: Mittler, 1907), pp. 252–298, here p. 259.

²⁰ Wendland 1907, p. 260.



Figure 2:
August Engelhardt with his books on
Kabakon (1913)

with the poles” / „Hoch der Äquator! Nieder mit den Polen!“²¹ Buhl quotes these mottoes verbatim.²² Likewise, Kracht’s Engelhardt announces his idea of surrounding the earth with a belt of “coco colonies”.²³ Obviously, this megalomaniac wants more than he can do, which would make him a tragicomical character by encyclopaedic definition.²⁴ A medical doctor of the colonial administration of New Guinea rated Engelhardt’s brochure a “confused botch” („konfuses Machwerk”) of a paranoiac. Engelhardt suffered from scabies and looked like a skeleton.²⁵ He was the living proof of the fact that his diet leads to malnutrition. Involuntarily, his appearance as the living death also makes him an allegory of the terror that inevitably follows imperial dreams.

It seems as if a drama of jealousy had developed between Engelhardt and Bethmann, with Bethmann’s fiancée Anna Schwab at the centre. Engelhardt’s biographer Dieter Klein even assumes that the coconut-guru may have killed his friend.²⁶ – During World War I, Australia took over the Bismarck Archipelago together with Kabakon, where Engelhardt died in 1919.

This sun fanatic had done nothing else but taking the demands of German foreign minister Bülow very seriously. Bülow had asked for a “place in the sun” for Germany. Engelhardt just boosted this watchword of German colonial desire. An analysis of his megalomania and his paranoia can serve as a critique of imperial reason. The extremism of Engelhardt’s project

²¹ Bethmann / Engelhardt, *Zukunft*, pp. 32, 35, 61, 63, 84.

²² Cf. Buhl, *Paradies*, pp. 83 and 167.

²³ Kracht, *Imperium*, p. 80.

²⁴ Cf. Roselt, *Wörterbuch*, p.1324.

²⁵ Wendland, „Deutsch-Neu-Guinea. Herbertshöhe“, in: *Medizinal-Berichte über die Deutschen Schutz-gebiete für das Jahr 1906/07*, (Berlin: Mittler, 1908), pp. 190–224, here 215. Cf. Wendland, *Medizinal-Berichte*, 1907, p. 260 (paragraph on „Paranoia“).

²⁶ Klein, *Handbuch*, pp. 455 f.

exaggerates and thus at the same time exposes the irrational character of the colonial desire that drives German colonial masters into the tropics. Quoting his hyperbolic programme ridicules the rhetoric of empire ironically. Engelhardt asks for an “intensive sun und palm policy”, in a “net of colonies”, reaching from the islands of the Pacific Ocean through tropical Asia to equatorial Africa: „Der nackte tropische Fruktivorismus, Palmivorismus, Kokovorismus – das ist der einzig wahre Vegetarismus“ / “The naked tropical fructivorism, palmivorism, cocovorism – that is the only true vegetarianism”.²⁷

III. Buhl’s version: a crime story with postcolonial perspectives

In Buhl’s novel, Engelhardt travels to the South Seas via Bombay. In India, he learns how to climb a coconut tree. A fakir teaches him how to make a headstand, together with some philosophy: “Look at the world from different positions.”²⁸ The novel certainly has literary qualities as it implements this motto in the form of a polyperspective narrative, with a strong tendency for free indirect speech.

On Kabakon, Engelhardt devotes himself to a pantheistic ‘oceanic feeling’. In the water, this desiring machine becomes a “part of everything, connected to all seas and coasts and islands, a part of nature”.²⁹ When his follower Max Lützow³⁰ wants to return to civilization, Engelhardt presumably bashes his head in with a coconut. The musician survives, however he dies later while trying to flee Kabakon in panic.³¹ New followers of the sun order arrive together with Engelhardt’s friend Bethmann and his fiancée Anna.³² Inevitably, a drama of jealousy unfolds. While the novel shies away from resolving the murder of Bethmann, Engelhardt and Anna make love to each other in the end.³³

The Life Reform movement of the turn of the century was an ambivalent project. Buhl’s novel responds to this ambivalence, as Engelhardt’s nudist colony splits in two camps. The adherents of the proto-fascist camp commit themselves to racial purity. They claim that “Negroes” and the “Jews” had to disappear from Kabakon.³⁴ Anti-Semitism, racism and the pursuit of world supremacy drive away the more likeable supporters of Engelhardt.³⁵ This part of Buhl’s story about Kabakon is counterfactual. In real history however, anti-Semitic tendencies

²⁷ Engelhardt, pp. 63, 73.

²⁸ Buhl, *Paradies*, pp. 9 f.

²⁹ Buhl, *Paradies*, pp. 30 f.

³⁰ Buhl, *Paradies*, pp. 106 f.

³¹ Buhl, *Paradies*, pp. 133 f., 136, 150.

³² Buhl, *Paradies*, pp. 153, 158.

³³ Buhl, *Paradies*, pp. 236 f.

³⁴ Buhl, *Paradies*, pp. 175, 187, 190 f.

³⁵ Buhl, *Paradies*, pp. 198 f.

were present in Germany's nudism movement from its very beginning.³⁶ In Buhl's novel, the camp of the heretics mingles and hybridises with the islanders.³⁷ The most radical becomes the concubine of chieftain Kabua.³⁸ There are rumours that the governor of German New Guinea, Albert Hahl, had a child with a native woman in his real life.³⁹ In Buhl's imaginary colony, he is the one who has to mark the external border of German biopolitics. Hahl asserts: If the German public came to know that a white woman gets involved with an islander, the end of the colony would be near.⁴⁰

In the novel, it is chief Kabua who criticizes the way the Germans took possession of their empire. He is particularly critical of the colonising practice of sending punitive expeditions.⁴¹ Kabakon belongs to a white man because Kabua's father once put his thumbprint on a piece of paper.⁴² From time to time, other white men come along and burn down the huts and the fields of the tribes. They ban polygamy, dancing, smoking, tattooing and the consumption of dogs and castaways.⁴³

The novel's missionary, Joseph, sceptically compares colonial ideology and practice. On the one hand, there is the hospital, the orphanage and the school, enlightenment and the pacification of the tribes, the fight against superstition and cannibalism. On the other hand, there are the white colonial masters – alcoholics suffering from tropical neurasthenia. The white men on the spot contaminate the paradise with syphilis.⁴⁴

The name of the raw material, which governs the oceanist dreams of colonisers, is copra. Buhl's novel blames the philanthropic saviour Engelhardt for hypocrisy. Being the owner of a palm plantation had turned him into a "trader of death". The imperial industry uses copra not only for producing soap but also for the production of nitro-glycerine. Bethmann accuses Engelhardt in the novel for growing "bombs and grenades": "You are cultivating dead soldiers! The upcoming war is growing on your palm trees."⁴⁵ The novel does not convict Engelhardt directly as a murderer. However, the division of labour in an imperial economy makes a colonial producer of copra together with arms manufacturers jointly responsible for the mass murder in the upcoming World War. This statement should be enough to grant the novel a critical postcolonial status.

³⁶ Cf. Heinrich Scham (= Heinrich Pudor): *Nackende Menschen, Jauchzen der Zukunft* (2nd edition, London: Scham, 1893), p. 23.

³⁷ Buhl, *Paradies*, pp. 208 f.

³⁸ Cf. Buhl, *Paradies*, p. 217.

³⁹ Cf. Hermann Joseph Hiery, „Die deutsche Verwaltung Neu-Guineas“, in: Hiery (ed.), *Handbuch*, pp. 277–311, here 300 f., cf. Buhl, Engelhardt, p. 35: Hahl is married to a native girl.

⁴⁰ Buhl, p. 212.

⁴¹ Cf. the speeches of Erich Scheurmann's chieftain Tuiavii, Erich Scheurmann, *Der Papalagi. Die Reden des Südseehäuptlings Tuiavii aus Tiavea*, (Buchenbach: Felsen 1920).

⁴² Buhl, *Paradies*, p. 50.

⁴³ Buhl, *Paradies*, pp. 15 f.

⁴⁴ Buhl, *Paradies*, pp. 23 f. Cf. for statistics Wendland, *Medizinal-Berichte*, 1907, pp. 253, 263 f.

⁴⁵ Buhl, *Paradies*, Engelhardt, pp. 227 f.

IV. Kracht's variation: the ironical quotation of colonial discourse

It seems to be more difficult to put up a defence for Kracht's novel. When visiting Tokyo's Rikkyo University for a conference on 'Pacificism' in 2014, the author scolded literary scholars wholesale as 'secondary intelligence'.⁴⁶ While their bailout had saved Kracht from incarceration as a rightist, he suggested their parasitic status towards himself as a kind of 'primary intelligence'.

The narrator of Kracht's *Imperium* presents himself as an authoritative chronicler surveying the first half of the twentieth century. He claims that it had looked as if Germany would assume a "legitimate place of honour and chairmanship at the global roundtable". The narrator stresses that he is telling the story of only one representative of German culture, who was a romantic artist. Consciously he is drawing parallels between the biographies of Engelhardt and Hitler.⁴⁷ Considering the imperial megalomania of both vegetarians, this may be evident.⁴⁸ However it remains unclear why the narrator claims supremacy for Germany and why he calls Hitler a romantic. Hitler appears as a "small vegetarian" with an "absurd black toothbrush under his nose". The "Indian sun swastika" adorns the flags of his Nazi-movement. The narrator comments that this "play of darkness" („Finsternistheater“) could be regarded as a comedy, if not for the "unimaginable cruelty" that followed: „Gebeine, Excreta, Rauch“ / "bones, excrements, smoke".⁴⁹ In opposition to Diez's article in *Der Spiegel* I would not call this account of the Holocaust a provocation.⁵⁰ In this passage, German history ends in the catastrophic terror of gas chambers and crematoria. It is clear without ambiguity that the narrator assesses this part of German history not as comic but as exclusively tragic.

However, the novel's style turns into a comedy when it comes to Wilhelmian imperialism. The German colonial masters lose out when the narrator calls them "administrators of the reputed progress". They are syphilitic and they smack their lips when they dream of "bare-breasted, dark brown negro girls".⁵¹ The narrator tells us from the perspective of Engelhardt in free indirect speech: "He had ended up among horrible people, among uncharitable brute barbarians".⁵² He is not talking about indigenous people but about colonisers. This does not make the novel a postcolonial critique. Even Hitler militated against colonialism because it had generated only a "foul bastard breed".⁵³

⁴⁶ Kai Köhler: „Die Auslotung des Pazifik. Von der Bibel bis zu Godzilla: Auf einer Tagung in Tokio ging es um den Stillen Ozean in Geschichte und Gegenwart“, in: *junge welt*, 16.08.2014.

⁴⁷ Kracht, *Imperium*, p. 18.

⁴⁸ Kracht, *Imperium*, p. 90.

⁴⁹ Kracht, *Imperium*, p. 79.

⁵⁰ Diez, *Methode*, p. 102.

⁵¹ Kracht, *Imperium*, p. 13.

⁵² Kracht, *Imperium*, p. 27.

⁵³ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*. Vol. 2: *Die nationalsozialistische Bewegung* (1927), (München: Eher, 1932) pp. 446, 741 f.

When Kracht's Engelhardt travels to the Pacific, he stops over on Ceylon. In free indirect speech, he acknowledges the superiority of vegetarian Hinduism over Christianity: "Were not the dark races centuries ahead of the white races?"⁵⁴ This is certainly not the position of Hitler but trivial exoticism. Not only the ironic exaggeration but also the narration ridicules such platitudes. Engelhardt's putative vegetarian travel companion, the Hindu Govindarajan, later turns out to be a carnivorous and ignoble thief.⁵⁵

The following statement on Queen Emma, who sold Kabakon to Engelhardt, is a racist remark in more than one way: "Mrs. Forsayth, although halfblooded (Halbblut), spoke an excellent if not more than perfect German (ein ausgezeichnetes, man möchte fast sagen, ein überperfektes Deutsch)."⁵⁶ The term "half blood" is a quotation from colonial discourse.⁵⁷ There one can also find an uneasiness of the colonisers when they are confronted with the mimicry of the colonised. Even if the feeling of unease is rhetorically disguised as appreciation, this mimicry irritates the desire of the master race for social distinction and undermines its authority.⁵⁸ The concession, "although halfblood", claims that hybridity and excellent language competence are regarded as mutually exclusive. However, the narration focalises with this statement on thoughts and perceptions from the perspective of Engelhardt only. The rules for writing a historical novel require that its characters use the language of their time.

At first, Queen Emma offers Engelhardt a plantation in the interior of New Pomerania. Its owner had gone mad, as he went on a killing spree before killing himself. In his last will, he demands: „Bringt sie alle um“.⁵⁹ This is a bad translation and crypto-quotation of a note, left by Kurtz in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*: "Exterminate all the brutes".⁶⁰ The example illustrates once more the rhetorical method of Kracht. A literary critic cannot convict an author for ironically quoting racist language like "negro girl" and "half blood".⁶¹

Like in Buhl's novel, Kracht's narrator does not answer the question whether Engelhardt is a murderer.⁶² In his paranoid tropical neurasthenia, Engelhardt blames his follower Lützow for planning an infamous conspirative takeover. He insists that Kabakon was no democracy.⁶³ The island's would-be dictator not only suffers from paranoia but also from leprosy.⁶⁴ When he finds

⁵⁴ Kracht, *Imperium*, p. 38.

⁵⁵ Kracht, *Imperium*, pp. 44 ff., 141 f.

⁵⁶ Kracht, *Imperium*, p. 57.

⁵⁷ Cf. Kracht, *Imperium*, p. 154.

⁵⁸ Cf. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994), (London: Routledge, 2010), pp. 158 ff., 172.

⁵⁹ Kracht, *Imperium*, p. 59.

⁶⁰ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (1902), London: Norton, 1988, p. 51.

⁶¹ Cf. Kracht, *Imperium*, p. 66 f. For the motive of the barbarian see Paul Gauguin, *Noa Noa. Voyage de Tahiti*. ed. by Pierre Petit, (München: Metamorphosis, 1992), pp. 34, 68.

⁶² Cf. Kracht, *Imperium*, pp. 124–127, 129 f. Buhl was not pleased when he realized that Kracht copied some of his ideas. Cf. Andreas Platthaus, „Finden Sie die Unterschiede?“ in *FAZ*, 6.3.2012.

⁶³ Kracht, *Imperium*, pp. 185, 209, 213 ff.

⁶⁴ Kracht, *Imperium*, pp. 188 f., 191, cf. 221.

out that governor Hahl wants to ditch him, he turns to anti-Semitism. Like Hitler, Engelhardt believes in a Zionist plot. A commentary of the narrator criticises Engelhardt's madness,⁶⁵ so there is no need to blame him for being ambivalent in this text passage. As a matter of fact, the real Albert Hall was not Jewish but Christian. Knowing this only adds more weight to the diagnosis that Engelhardt suffers from paranoia. Kracht's narrator also criticises his grandparents for ignoring that the Nazis had deported their Jewish neighbours to the "rim of the empire", as if these human beings were 'already shadows, embers and smoke'.⁶⁶

Kracht's Engelhardt survives World War II on a Pacific island, where the US marines pick him up. They feed him with hot dogs and Coke and make a Hollywood movie out of his life story.⁶⁷

V. The theatrical self-staging of imperialism

Imperial self-staging is an important ritual, aiming at impressing the colonised. In Kracht's novel, the colonial power stages the brutal corporal punishment of an islander in front of governor Hahl's residence. Hahl justifies these drastic measures against thefts. At the same time, he argues for teaching the natives the moral advantages of German law and philanthropy. Unlike the French, the Dutch and the Belgians the German colonisers would not enslave and exploit their colonial subjects for profit.⁶⁸ This tragicomical novel exposes the cynical ambivalence of colonial ideology and practices.

In Kracht's novel, Engelhardt travels as a stowaway on the German warship *Cormoran* through the South Seas.⁶⁹ Symptomatically the novel does not know much about the history of this vessel, thus reinforcing the myth that German colonialism in the South Seas was comparatively harmless, compared for example to the genocidal extermination strategy of General Trotha against the insurgents of the South African Herero uprising in 1904. However, ships like the *Cormoran* also left behind a trail of blood.⁷⁰ I am quoting from the memories of an officer of the *Cormoran* who participated in the crushing of an anti-colonial rebellion on the island of Ponape in 1911. He is proud of destroying the wealth of the rebellious islanders within a few days, as the German blue jackets pursued a strategy of scorched earth.⁷¹ The demonstration of

⁶⁵ Cf. Kracht, *Imperium*, pp. 127 and 224 f.

⁶⁶ Kracht, *Imperium*, p. 231: „als seien sie jetzt schon Schatten, jetzt schon aschener Rauch“.

⁶⁷ Kracht, *Imperium*, pp. 240 ff.

⁶⁸ Kracht, *Imperium*, pp. 168 f.

⁶⁹ Kracht, *Imperium*, pp. 144 f.

⁷⁰ Cf. Alexander Krug, *„Der Hauptzweck ist die Tötung von Kanaken“*. *Die deutschen Strafexpeditionen in den Kolonien der Südsee 1872–1914*, (Marburg: Der Andere Verlag, 2005).

⁷¹ Edgar Freiherr Spiegel von und zu Peckelsheim, *Kriegsbilder aus Ponape. Erlebnisse eines Seeoffiziers im Aufstande auf den Karolinen*, (Stuttgart: Union Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1912), p. III: „Wißt ihr noch, wie wir gehaust haben in den strotzenden Fruchtgärten Ponapes, wie der Reichtum eines ganzen Volkes in wenigen Tagen von euch verschleudert und vernichtet wurde? [...] Wißt ihr's noch, wie wir sengend und brennend durch das blühende Land zogen, wehende Rauchsäulen verbrennender Dörfer als Wegweiser des Tags, als leuchtende Fackel des Nachts?“

power was staged “with great pomp”. The cannons of the ship had sent “iron messages” into the hostile villages.⁷² As a deterrent, the colonial power got the leaders of the rebellion publicly executed. This went along with collective punishment, as the colonial power deported the ethnic group of the rebels.⁷³ Colonial reality was certainly less comic for the colonised than the imperial scenery is depicted in Kracht’s novel. As imperial dreams go hand in hand with violent terror, some of the parallels however which Kracht draws between imperialism and fascism are more than justified.

Unlike Buhl’s novel, *Imperium* seems to largely ignore postcolonial political correctness. In Kracht’s tragicomedy, the perspective of the native population of Kabakon hardly comes into play.⁷⁴ However, literary texts should not be confused with political manifestos. For a Japanese translation, the challenge would be to highlight the ironic qualities of the novel while taking serious its distancing from fascist practices.



南洋の悲喜劇

ー エンゲルハルトの帝国主義プロジェクトを題材としたブールとクラハ
トの歴史小説についてー

トーマス・シュヴァルツ

近年、ドイツ植民地主義時代を生きたアウグスト・エンゲルハルト（1875-1919）を題材とした小説が相次いで発表された。マルク・ブールによる『アウグスト・エンゲルハルトの楽園』（2011年）およびクリスティアン・クラハトの『帝国』（2012年）である。エンゲルハルトは1902年に、ドイツ領ニューギニアに属するカバコン島に移住した実在の人物である。世紀転換期のドイツの若者たちの間では、都市文明の桎梏を逃れ、裸体での日光浴、肉食主義、衣服の改革などを通じて健康を取り戻し、生の変革を目指そうとする「生改革運動」が盛り上がりを見せていた。生改革運動家であったエンゲルハルトは、南洋の地で椰子のプランテーションを経営しつつ、新たな生き方を実践すべくコロニーを作ったのである。ブールの小説も好評を博したが、それにもましてクラハトの『帝国』は、傑作として称賛される一方、『シュピーゲル』誌において「人種主義的」で「極右的」な思想に扉を開くものと批判されるなど、大きな反響

⁷² Spiegel, *Kriegsbilder*, p. 100.

⁷³ Thomas Morlang, *Rebellion in der Südsee. Der Aufstand auf Ponape gegen die deutschen Kolonialherren 1910/11*, (Berlin: Links, 2010).

⁷⁴ Cf. Kracht, *Imperium*, pp. 70 ff.

を呼び起こした。両作品は、事実とフィクション、喜劇と悲劇のモチーフを混ぜ合わせる異種混濁的なジャンルである。太陽礼賛者・肉食主義者という奇怪な人物にまつわるコミカルな要素を、帝国主義からファシズムへと至る歴史の悲劇へと変容させるという意味において、本稿では、両作品を「悲喜劇」と位置づけ、そしてそれらが植民地主義や人種主義の陥穽に落ちているのかどうかを考察する。

プールの小説は、生改革運動のもつアンビバレンスを浮き彫りにする。南洋に移住したヌーディストたちの中には、人種的純潔を擁護し、「黒人」や「ユダヤ人」をコロニーから排斥しようとする「プロトファシスト」がいる一方、島民の生活に入り込み島民と親密な関係をもつ者もいる。また、この小説では、現地の酋長およびドイツ人宣教師の視点から、植民地主義の実践が批判される。椰子は肉食主義にとって重要であるだけではない。椰子油からはニトログリセリンが作られ、来たるべき第一次世界大戦で爆薬として利用されることになるのだ。こうした関連を示す本作は「ポストコロニアル」な批判的小説として評価される。

クラハト作品の解釈はより困難である。小説の語り手は、エンゲルハルトの生涯を、同様に肉食主義者で帝国主義的誇大妄想家であったヒトラーと重ね合わせ、第三帝国のカタストロフを暗示しつつ語る。語り手がそれを悲劇的なものと捉えているのは明かだ。しかしながら、その語りは、白人と有色人種との差異を強調する。それはアイロニカルな誇張であり、語り手はそうした人種差という決まり文句を嘲笑するかのようでもある。実在の人物とは異なり、『帝国』のエンゲルハルトは第二次大戦をも生き延びる。米兵がやせ細った老人を発見し、彼にホットドッグとコカコーラを与え、さらにその数奇な人生がハリウッドで映画化されるという結末である。しかし植民地の現実決してコミカルなものではない。プールの作品と違ってクラハトの悲喜劇では、植民地化された人びとの視点は欠落しており、「政治的公正さ」を欠いていると言わざるをえない。もっとも、文学作品は政治的マニフェストと混同されるべきではない。本作が日本語に翻訳されるとするならば、この小説がファシズムから距離をとっていることを真剣に受け止めつつ、小説のもつアイロニカルな質というものをいかに表現できるかという挑戦になることだろう。