

Dresden, 3. Mai 1844

Grüß Gott!

I trust you are well, mein Kapitän! But before I begin in earnest, I must warn you, I am writing for a professional reason—please forgive me! I promise, however, that correspondence of a more personal nature shall find its way to your salt-kissed Kingsport. I trust you are in good health, and your business and studies are progressing to your satisfaction.

I am writing to ask your advice. I have a certain patient, a Berliner named Amon Stockhausen. A fellow physician, Herr Stockhausen specializes in physical disorders of the circulatory system. He began seeking my help last year, after becoming disturbed by a series of recurring dreams, vivid phantasies about an empty city of great domes and white minarets. These recurring phantasies produced a profound feeling of alienation and melancholy. Over time, we began discussing matters of philosophy and psychology, including Dalton, Weber, Fechner, usw. I found Stockhausen a healthy and reasonable man, perhaps a bit cold in demeanor, but that is to be expected in a Berliner.

A few months past, Stockhausen arrived at my office without an appointment. He was clearly distraught. I offered him brandy, and he told me a story I could scarcely believe. Stockhausen claims to have visited a brothel in Tegel. While this is hardly worth mentioning, this particular bordello has a reputation as being haunted. Indeed, this is apparently part of its appeal, and stories have circulated for years about spectral apparitions, some of which are coaxed to engage in the commerce at hand! (I can see you laugh, but I assure you—this is Berlin!)

Our Herr Stockhausen was attending to his business—with a flesh and blood woman, I am assured—when he was gripped by a sensation greater than any physical euphoria. He claims to have been violently expelled from his body, his mentality dispersed into a strange realm he called das Geisterreich—a kind of spiritual plane, perhaps. While caught in this realm, Stockhausen experienced a series of visions, most of which involved a terrible figure he likened to a fallen angel. This figure had an awful appearance, and seemed cobbled together from a fish, a rooster, a horse, a mollusk, and a man!

Lach nicht, mein Kapitän; I assure you that lurking beneath this strange and ungainly description are volumes of terror; Stockhausen impressed upon me the magnitude of loathing he felt gazing upon such a being. He described this entity as «ein Kriegengel,» and his visions were gracious enough to supply him with a name for the fabulous chimera: «Kithoanessel.» (I spell it as an American might have recorded it.) Orbiting this Kithoanessel, like satellites revolving around a vaster sphere, were a collection of Schreckensbilder—terrible, wicked images: war, flooding, desolation, the ruination of great nations; as you would say, all things under the influence of a Martian sphere.

Herr Stockhausen insisted that these images were not hallucinations, but glimpses through a window into the future; and indeed, he described many wondrous and yet horrifying apparitions: muskets crafted of black metal, discharging a hundred balls of leaden death in the space of a heartbeat; vast, horseless chariots of steel with cannon fixed upon their beetled tops, rolling across the land with the motions of a serpent; and strangest of all, flying barques hovering in the air like metal hummingbirds, spitting Greek fire from their iron bellies. All was smoke and fire; he likened it to the Book of Revelations, and indeed the scene was most Apocalyptic, as the seas heaved over the sinking earth. Men were stricken with terror, warring with a race of creatures boiling up from the sea, the air wild with their bestial croaking. And presiding over this chaos was this Kithoanessel. Perhaps one of the Fallen? Perhaps, If I may dare to speculate, the Antichrist? May I remind you of Revelations 13?

While he persisted in his belief that he had experienced a genuine vision—not brought on by morphia or an excess of schnapps—he willingly acknowledged that his visions are difficult for the rational mind to encompass. Indeed, he himself seemed amazed by the whole affair.

If I recollect my Faust, I believe that an acquaintance of Goethe's claimed to have been haunted by a ghost in that very part of Berlin. If I remember the story correctly, this man—a Friedrich Nicolai, or Nicholas, I believe—was an unbeliever until he was disturbed by a spectre of some kind. Supposedly, he sought a cure by putting leeches on his posterior! Gott im Himmel! Well, regardless of his bloodless bottom or no, I must not discount this so readily. Perhaps I am no longer as broad-minded as I was in my youth. What are the sacred words, my friend? Und, so wie der Meisterdichter sagt:

«Die Geisterwelt ist nicht verschlossen;
Dein Sinn ist zu, dein Herz ist tot!
Auf, bade, Schüler, unverdrossen
Die ird'sche Brust im Morgenrot!»

I must keep these words near to my heart, mein Kapitän! I believe Hamlet said something similar to his beloved Horatio. Perhaps you can look them up in your English, yes? But forgive me old friend, and excuse my rambling pedantry. I digress; it has been far too long since we have sate next to the fire and debated the stanzas of poets.

Now, I will come to the reason that I am writing you about this incident. As I have intimated, until recently, Stockhausen remained a patient of mine, although one I saw only seldomly. But sometime last year—according to my records, 7. April 1843—Herr Stockhausen saw me again, a visitation that followed upon an absence of seventeenth months. I could not but observe that the man had changed. Although it would be careless to say of such a man that his aspect was wild, his icy demeanor had thawed by several degrees, and his eyes flashed with a look I can only describe as febrile. He wanted to know if I had been keeping notes of our infrequent appointments. When I informed him that these notes were none of his concern, he demanded that I turn them over for his inspection—which I most certainly did not. Such a look convulsed his angular face that for a moment, I was in fear for my life! Rather than lash out, the good doctor turned upon his heels and stormed from my parlor, without so much a care as to close the door, leaving all of Rückestrasse to remark on the violence of his passage! He was so overcome he left behind his golden snuff-box, an item of no inconsequential value.

I heard no more from Herr Stockhausen, a condition that persists to this day. However, I am reluctant to say that last Friday, as I was attending the opera, my residence was violated and thoroughly vandalized! And what do you suppose I discovered to be missing? My notes on Stockhausen, natürlich. I notified the authorities, but it seems that our physician is no longer a resident of Berlin, and has left no itinerant address.

So there is my situation. I would be eternally grateful if you might shed some illumination on the apparitions and visions I have related in this letter. Perhaps Stockhausen's strange sobriquets are not unfamiliar to your tutored imagination—innocent words to me; but I am

unskilled in occult matters. The name Kithoanessel rings with some echo of an exotic land I cannot quite call to mind. Mesopotamian? Egyptian? Or perhaps even Judenschaft? Of course, I hasten to add that my curiosity is just that—curiosity. I would consider it, at best, a window into the mind of a very singular patient.

However—I do ask that you hold any correspondence until you hear from me again. I am considering leaving my beloved Dresden; the political situation here is fraught with peril and riddled with the corruption of libertine influences. It seems the men are taking this talk of revolution to heart—as if discourse turns into action, the Prussians will merely sit back and watch? I tell you it is serious. Only weeks ago, I attended a lecture on so-called New Politics, hosted by none other than our new Kapellmeister! Expounding for a united Germany, asking for the King to lay down his crown! Political Dreck, and from a composer of supernatural operas! And the cheering, I tell you it was the basest form of demagoguery. The men wear ridiculous red badges—perhaps symbolic of the wound they will receive courtesy of a Saxon bullet? They do not apprehend the seeds of destruction they are so fecklessly sowing, and I fear these madmen will have all of Dresden in flames. Ach, perhaps I should not invite disaster, though. Wenn man den Wolf nennt, kommt er gerennt.

I will write again soon; If the situation deteriorates, I shall leave, perhaps for Bavaria; maybe even Zürich. Until then, I trust that you may find sense in Stockhausen's visionary climax!

Until I write again, my friend, may God keep you;

Hans Kleiter