

Spark's subject lends itself perfectly to her distinctively realistic surrealism, as it builds to a bizarre conclusion. Her ironic ending is worthy of the brilliant British comic novelist Evelyn Waugh himself. *Aiding and Abetting* is detection with a difference.

Alfred Doebelin

Berlin Alexanderplatz. The Story of Franz Biberkopf

Trans. from the German by Eugene Jolas

New York: Continuum International, 2003. Pp. 635. \$25.95

Reviewed by Margaret Heukaeufer

In nine parts Alfred Doebelin (1878–1957) narrates the story of Franz Biberkopf, which takes place in Berlin in the 1920s. As Alexander Stephan says in the foreword to the novel—first published in Germany in 1929—it “ranks among the masterpieces of modern literature.”

This reprint of the 1961 English version of the novel could hardly have been translated by a person more competent and knowledgeable than Eugene Jolas. Jolas not only had first-hand experience of the hectic, yet fascinating life in big European cities, but he also knew James Joyce and edited his works, and was acquainted with many avant-garde writers of the 1920s. In addition, Jolas had ample experience as a translator and journalist, which enabled him to grasp the atmosphere of Berlin's underprivileged society in detailed descriptions as well as in dialogues, interior monologues, and general quotations. The latter in particular prove Jolas's thorough knowledge of both languages, as proverbs and word puns, being extremely difficult to transfer from one language into another, are very well captured and translated.

Worthwhile mentioning are a number of illustrations from Rainer Werner Fassbinder's film version of the novel, which are grouped in the center of the book, making this edition especially attractive. Due to the poor quality of the paper of the book, however, the film stills, unfortunately, are of poor quality as well.

When Alfred Doebelin wrote *Berlin Alexanderplatz. The Story of Franz Biberkopf* during the 1920s, he was still practicing medicine in a working-class area of Berlin, and thus had a thorough knowledge of the activities around Alexanderplatz. He also was acquainted with the prison director of the penitentiary Tegel, which he visited on several occasions. The novel proves Doebelin's strong interest in an authentic setting and his concern with a realistic picture of the acting characters, whose innermost feelings and emotions appear primarily through interior monologues, thus expressing the isolation in an

industrialized mass society and conveying a picture of working-class life in the big cities of the Weimar Republic.

The novel starts out with Franz Biberkopf being released from prison and returning to his fellows in the Alexanderplatz area: His reaction at the prison gate—only hesitantly does he step away from the safe gate out into the city and its many streets—indicates his fear of not being able to stay out of trouble in the future; yet, he is determined to return to his working-class neighborhood and never again get in trouble with the law. This is what the book is all about: the constant struggle and being overwhelmed by fate. Biberkopf's good intentions are boycotted again and again, and in over six hundred pages the reader experiences how fate tosses "our man" around. At the end the author tells us that "the old world must crumble" and that while "for one the road goes straight, for another it goes to the side" (635). Franz Biberkopf tries very hard to lead a decent life, yet he stumbles again and again in a scary, dangerous, and rapidly changing world that seems to be determined by fate, which tyrannizes Biberkopf.

At the end of the novel, Doebelin comments on Biberkopf's destiny and the society in which he lives. His story is embedded in a modern, hectic society that overwhelms and dominates people whose only choice is to trudge along. The novel provides the reader with a deep insight into life in the mass society of the Weimar Republic.

Margaret Laurence

Long Drums and Cannons: Nigerian Dramatists and Novelists, 1952–1966

ed. Nora Foster Stovel

Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2001. Pp. lxiii+270. \$29.95

Reviewed by Laura Strong Davis

Margaret Laurence's *Long Drums and Cannons* is an important book of criticism that takes up the work of Nigerian writers such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, and John Pepper Clark. As Douglas Killam and Nora Foster Stovel explain in their forward and introduction to the new edition, respectively, *Long Drums and Cannons* is the first full-length study of Nigerian literature. As such, it seeks to demonstrate, as Laurence herself puts it in the preface to her work, "that Nigerian prose writing in English has now reached a point where it must be recognized as a significant part of world literature" (13). The book was first published in 1968, but at that time it did not sell out and was rarely reviewed. Focus on its publication was, perhaps, overtaken by the eruption of the Nigerian civil war. In a note written in January of 1968 and added to her preface for the book, Laurence states that Nigerian writing might "provide some clues to the present tragic situation" (13). She also points to the cruel irony that