

“Blake was a phenomenon”:
Artistic, Domestic, and Blakean Visions
in Joseph Paul Hodin’s Writing on
Else and Ludwig Meidner

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1 **W**HEN Ludwig Meidner (1884–1966), the German-Jewish expressionist painter, printmaker, and writer, returned to Germany in 1953, he took what he could carry: personal belongings, books, and images, his prints, drawings, paintings, and watercolors.¹ Refugees face difficult choices; they can take only what is absolutely necessary. Meidner never adjusted during the fourteen years of exile and there is a sense that he wanted to eradicate all that

1. Meidner arrived in London with three portfolios of prints, 2500 drawings, and eighty paintings (Sander 228). In a letter of 18 June 1953, he says that he created “a few hundred interesting watercolors” (“ein paar hundert interessanter Wasserfarbenbilder”) while there (Breuer and Wagemann 2: 486).

reminded him of London—except for Blake. Thomas Grochowiak, who first noted the significance of Meidner’s encounter with “the painter, poet, mystic William Blake” (“Maler-Dichter-Mystikers William Blake”), suggests that he identified with Blake’s adverse living conditions and artistic neglect, and argues that the occult aspects and especially the Visionary Heads interested him: “For him the preoccupation with Old Testament figures and prophets, with mystical philosophers or religious ecstasies, was just as natural as the everyday, familiar dealings with ghosts.”² Meidner took not only John Piper’s *British Romantic Artists* (1942) and Ruthven Todd’s edition of Alexander Gilchrist’s *Life of Blake* (1942), but also reproductions of *William Blake* by Thomas Phillips, the large color print *God Judging Adam* (then known as *Elijah About to Ascend in the Chariot of Fire*), and James Deville’s life mask. These images were part of a selection that were to adorn his studio in Marxheim (1955–63),³ where he shared his art with a small number of visitors who came to pay tribute to the old master of German expressionism (illus. 1).

2 Meidner is known for his apocalyptic landscapes and his scrutinizing portraits and self-portraits.⁴ Hans Sahl, who visited Marxheim in 1958 and was overwhelmed by Meidner’s forgotten greatness, quotes him as saying that he could live only where people spoke German and that he hoped to spend his remaining days in Germany.⁵ Max Peter Maass, who met him around the same time, reflects on Meidner’s intense visions of 1914 and 1939. (His work had been included in the Entartete Kunst [Degenerate Art] exhibition in Munich in 1937 [illus. 2],⁶ he left Germany on the eve of World War II.) His visions, so he told Maass, returned in London.⁷ He may not have got recognition there, but he was, without doubt, productive, finding new themes in urban life and engaging with English art.⁸ Maass compares the watercolors from the years of exile in London with Blake’s and Fuseli’s representations of ghosts—“Gespenster-Darstellungen des Blake und Füßli”—and argues that they

2. “Ihm war die Beschäftigung und Auseinandersetzung mit den alttestamentlichen Gestalten und Propheten, mit mystischen Philosophen oder religiösen Ekstatikern ebenso selbstverständlich wie der alltägliche, vertrauliche Umgang mit Geistern” (Grochowiak 200-01).

3. See Erle, “Blake, Ludwig Meidner and Expressionism.”

4. For examples of his work, see the collection at Leicester Museum and Art Gallery, <<https://www.germanexpressionismleicester.org/leicesters-collection/artists-and-artworks/ludwig-meidner>>.

5. “Aber ich kann nur leben, wo man Deutsch spricht und schreibt ... und so hoffe ich, den Rest meiner Erdentage hier zu verbringen und nicht genötigt zu sein, von neuem in die Emigration zu gehen” (Sahl 35). I am grateful to Erik Riedel, who shared this article with me.

6. See Barron 53, 54, 298-99.

7. Meidner talked about new and very strong visions to Hodin in 1953 (*Aus den Erinnerungen* 121).

8. For his borrowings from Hogarth, Gillray, and Rowlandson, see Dogramaci 265-74; for Meidner and Edward Lear, see Riedel 84.



1. Ludwig Meidner in his studio in Marxheim, 1959. Film still from a documentary by the Hessischer Rundfunk. © Hessischer Rundfunk. Image courtesy of the Jüdisches Museum Frankfurt.

show how Meidner dealt with the emotional pressures of isolation.⁹ His isolation was rhetorical stance and biographical fact; as I will discuss later, he explores this theme artistically in the descriptions of his studios, allowing the visionary mode to disrupt narrative chronology.

9. “There is also psychologically important material here; it could shed light on how a creative mind of exceptional potency deflects disrespect and near-death impoverishment by locking the demons that beset him into an image and thus keeping them at a distance” (“Zudem liegt hier psychologisch wichtiges Material vor, das Aufschluß darüber geben könnte, wie ein schöpferischer Geist von ungewöhnlicher Potenz Mißachtung und todesnahe Verelendung pariert, indem er Dämonen, die ihn bedrängen, auf Distanz bringt, wenn er sie bildhaft fixiert”) (Maass 122).

3 His return to Germany, which he decided upon gradually,¹⁰ marked the breakup of his family. Son David, shocked at his father’s wanting to return to the country of the originators of the Holocaust, emigrated to Israel in May 1951 and broke off all contact. Else Meidner (1901–87), his wife, a painter¹¹ and former pupil, visited in April 1963 and stayed until May 1964 to look after her ailing husband. She re-

10. In letters to Hannah Bekker (22 May 1949) and Wolf Bergmann (25 Sept. 1949), he is weighing his options (Breuer and Wagemann 2: 478–80). His decision consolidated during visits to Germany; see letters to Ernst Buchholz (15 Dec. 1952) and Bergmann (1 Feb. 1953) (Breuer and Wagemann 2: 484).

11. For examples of her work, see the Ben Uri Collection, <<https://www.benuricollection.org.uk/intermediate.php?artistid=95>>.

menschliche Figuren zu sehen, die wahrhaftig mit Gorillas mehr Ähnlichkeit haben als mit Menschen. Hier gibt es Porträts, gegen die die ersten geschichtlich bekannten Versuche der Menschendarstellung in steinzeitlichen Höhlen reife Meisterwerke sind. Aber auch für solche Schauerstücke wurden, wie die Verkaufspreise ausweisen, noch vor wenigen Jahren höchste Preise verlangt und bezahlt.

Gruppe 8.

In einem kleinen Raum sind hier der Abwechslung halber einmal nur Juden vertreten. Damit keine Mißverständnisse entstehen, sei bemerkt, daß es sich hier nur um eine kleine Auswahl aus den zahlreichen jüdischen Machwerken handelt, die die Ausstellung insgesamt zeigt. Die großen „Verdienste“, die sich die jüdischen Wortführer, Händler und Förderer der entarteten Kunst zweifellos erworben haben, rechtfertigt zur Genüge diese „Sondererhebung“. Hier findet sich u. a. auch „Der neue Mensch“, wie ihn sich Jud Freundlich erträumt hat. Dort

Das Judentum verstand es, besonders unter Ausnützung seiner Stellung in der Presse, mit Hilfe der sogenannten Kunstkritik nicht nur die natürlichen Auffassungen über das Wesen und die Aufgaben der Kunst sowie deren Zweck allmählich zu verwirren, sondern überhaupt das allgemeine gesunde Empfinden auf diesem Gebiete zu zerstören.

Der Führer
bei der Eröffnung des Hauses der Deutschen Kunst.

Drei Kostproben von jüdischer Plastik und Malerei

Die Titel lauten:
„Selbstbildnis“, „Der neue Mensch“ und „Kopf“.

Die Juden heißen:
Meidner, Freundlich und Haizmann.



2. Entartete Kunst exhibition booklet, pp. 20-21. Image courtesy of the Jüdisches Museum Frankfurt.

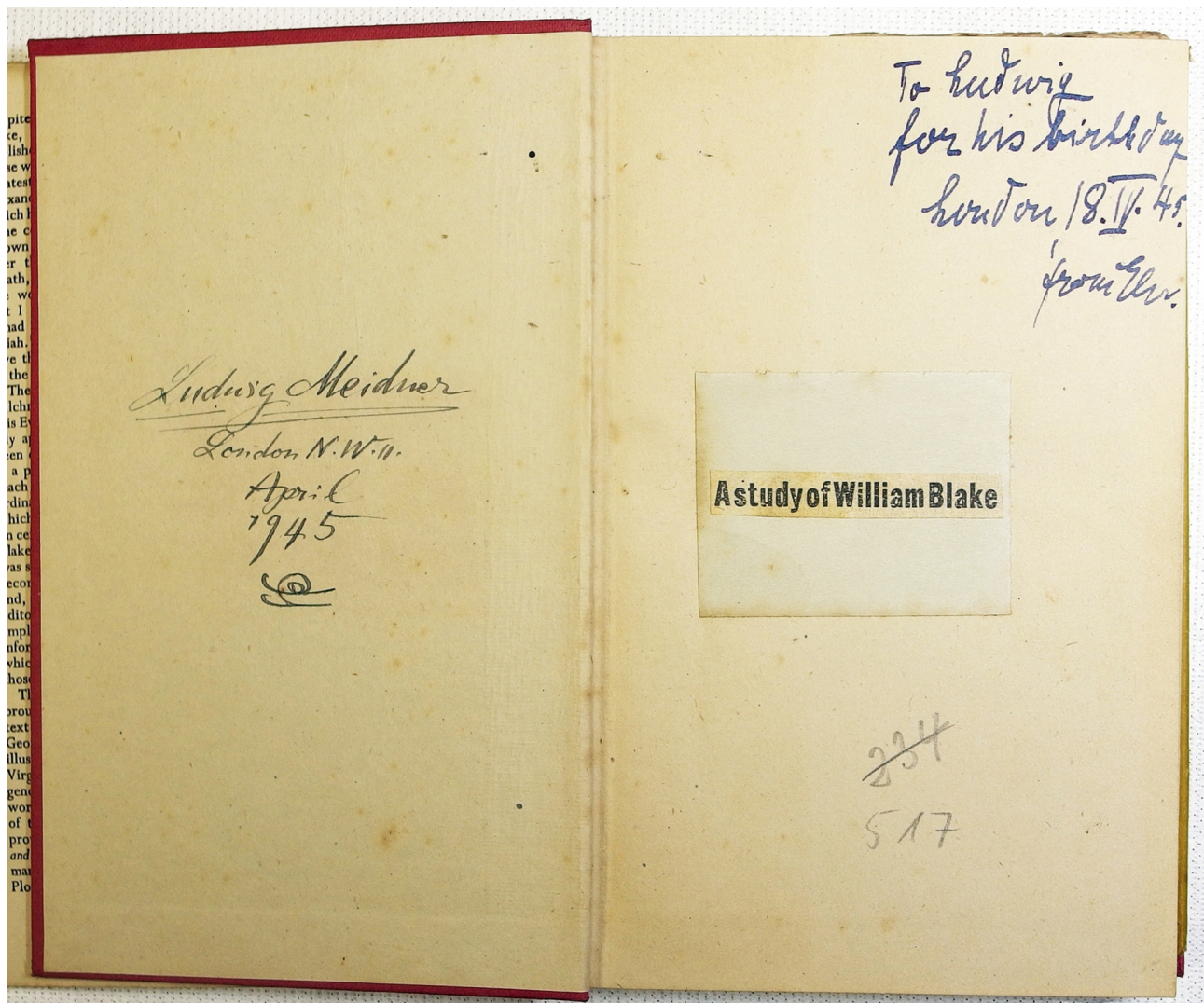
turned to London to attend a retrospective of her art at the Ben Uri Gallery and remained there, having become a British citizen in 1954. Like Ludwig, Else considered herself German, but, in contrast, she had lost most of her family in the Holocaust. Though many kilometers apart, the Meidners remained close; Ludwig tried to comfort Else, never challenging her decision and always encouraging her. Both were interested in Blake. Else had given Todd's edition of Gilchrist's *Life* to Ludwig as a birthday present in April 1945 (illus. 3),¹² and in December 1959 she put Blake's *Illustrations of the Book of Job*, the reissue (1927) of the facsimile published by Gowans & Gray, into the post. Blake's *Job* was an attempt to bridge the distance between them; in Blake's interpretation, Job's wife never leaves the side of her husband. The occasion was "Chanukah 1959" (the eight-day

12. Breuer and Wagemann 1: 180.

Jewish festival that started on 25 December in 1959), according to the inscription on the title page (illus. 4). Blake had been part of the life they had shared in London; her present was a reminder of that time.

- 4 This essay, which engages with the artistic visions of Else and Ludwig Meidner, focuses on their shared interest in Blake as mediated by fellow émigré and Czech-born art historian, art critic, and author Joseph Paul Hodin (1905–95), who managed, unlike the Meidners, to build a career for himself in England. According to his obituary in the *Independent*,

Paul Hodin encapsulated in his work the values of the past, while devoting much effort to forging novel attitudes to interpret the art of the second half of the 20th century. The corollary was a dislike of, even an angry aloofness



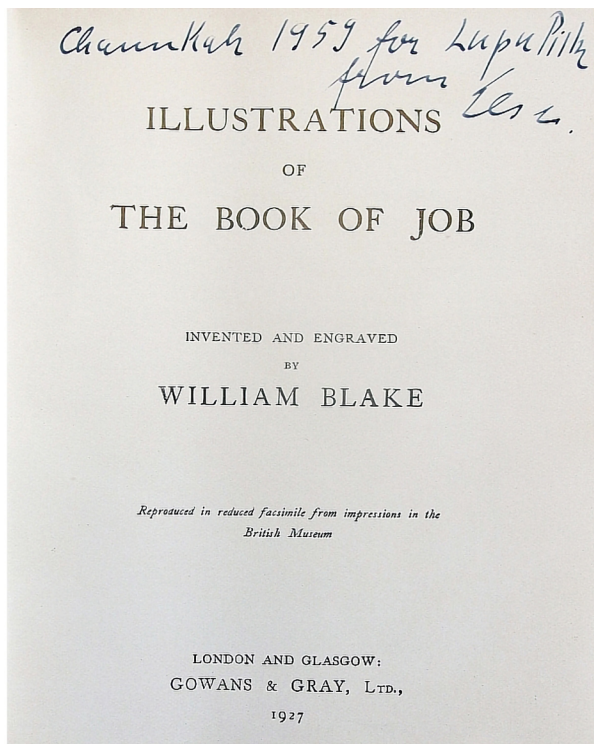
3. Ludwig's copy of Alexander Gilchrist, *The Life of William Blake*, ed. Ruthven Todd, with owner's mark and dedication by Else. Ludwig Meidner-Archiv, Jüdisches Museum Frankfurt. Image courtesy of the Jüdisches Museum Frankfurt.

from, what was ephemeral, if insistent, in the artistic movements of the post-war years. (Mullaly)

Hodin, who is principally known for his biography of Oskar Kokoschka (1966), approaches artworks through his understanding of the artist's personality. He mentions Blake three times in *Ludwig Meidner: Seine Kunst, seine Persönlichkeit, seine Zeit* (1973); Blake, as we will see, is a touchstone for his perception of Meidner's character and artistic achievements in the years in exile. The book, begun in 1953, took twenty years to complete. The men met and corresponded and Meidner, going by the evidence in the Hodin Archive at Tate Britain, took a keen interest in the manuscript. After Meidner's death, Hodin produced a se-

ries of articles for *Darmstädter Tagblatt* (1966–67), which present the material for the book at an intermediary stage, with Hodin reluctant to share all he knew about Meidner's visions.¹³ This reluctance has something to do, I believe, with Hodin's getting to terms with the nature of these vi-

13. Meidner's apocalyptic landscapes anticipate events of World War I: houses are burning and collapsing, human figures are running for their lives (Grochowiak 48-51, 64-65, 72). In his biography, Hodin views Meidner's expressionist works as testimonies of fear, emphasizing that Meidner refused to identify the exact cause or reasons for his "doomsday gloom" ("Weltuntergangsstimmung"): "Ich habe—unerklärlich—entsätzliche Angst gehabt" ("I suffered—for no apparent reason—from excruciating fear") (*Ludwig Meidner* 61).



4. Ludwig's copy of William Blake, *Illustrations of the Book of Job*, with dedication by Else. Ludwig Meidner-Archiv, Jüdisches Museum Frankfurt. Image courtesy of the Jüdisches Museum Frankfurt.

sions. His publications, primarily *Ludwig Meidner* and *Aus den Erinnerungen von Else Meidner* (1979), are inherently fragmented, as they juxtapose and combine different kinds of text, which also intertwine the Meidners' life stories. Several pages into *Ludwig Meidner*, Hodin explains that his approach is dialogic:

What is recorded below was the subject of conversations I had with Ludwig Meidner in London in 1953. ... Because the material is based entirely on the painter's personal statements as well as on the letters he sent me in the years 1953–1955 from London, Frankfurt am Main, Hofheim am Taunus, and Bad Nauheim, it is to be reprinted here as an authentic statement, as it was in my manuscript from 1953, which the artist read and annotated in January of the following year.¹⁴

14. "Was im Folgenden aufgezeichnet ist, war der Gegenstand von Gesprächen, die ich mit Ludwig Meidner in London 1953 geführt habe. ... Weil sich das Material ganz auf persönliche Äußerungen des Malers sowie auf den Briefen aufbaut, die mir dieser in den Jahren 1953–1955 zuschickte aus London, Frankfurt am Main, Hofheim am Taunus und Bad Nauheim, soll es hier unverändert als authentische Aussage abgedruckt werden, wie es in meinem Manuskript aus dem Jahre 1953

5 Else and Ludwig Meidner met Hodin in the early summer of 1953—the second part of *Ludwig Meidner*, entitled "Else und Ludwig Meidner in England," begins with the letter that Ludwig wrote to introduce himself. Hodin made Else's acquaintance on his second visit and quickly befriended her; he published two articles on Else (in 1959 and 1960) and later included a long chapter on her in *Ludwig Meidner*. In *Aus den Erinnerungen* he uses materials written by Else, dating from 1959–60 and 1969–70. For Else, 1959, the year in which she sent Blake's *Job* to Ludwig, was a time of disappointment; an exhibition at the Beaux Arts Gallery, which Hodin helped with, achieved little to raise her public profile or find buyers for her artworks. That Blake was on her mind is suggested in Hodin's preface to *Aus den Erinnerungen*, where she talks about her illustrious guests ("erlauchte Gäste"), such as Beethoven and Goethe (9), who were, of course, visions. These stories, told by a woman who professed that she did not take Ludwig's visions seriously (*Ludwig Meidner* 143), have a Blakean ring to them. Else could have read the chapter on "John Varley and the Visionary Heads" in *Gilchrist's Life*, her present for Ludwig in 1945, and Hodin mentions that Meidner was a frequent visitor to the Tate Gallery and shared his impressions with his wife (*Ludwig Meidner* 87).¹⁵ It is possible that Else invented these visions—aware of Hodin's interest in Ludwig's experience of visions, she put on a show. Her script—and this is my point—follows Blake's performance for Varley in that it imagines a visionary community of famous people.

6 There is much intertwining repetition in Hodin's writing about the Meidners, which makes it near to impossible to get a sense of chronology in his texts. Else's obituary of Ludwig comes at the end of *Ludwig Meidner* (133–34) and is repeated—twice—in *Aus den Erinnerungen* (74–75 and 123–24). "Farewell to the Master" ("Abschied vom Meister," 1966), Else's official goodbye, was first published in *Darmstädter Tagblatt*. The fragmentation of and in the texts written by Else especially creates a fascinating portrait of inner psychology. She continually tries to disentangle herself from her husband, claiming, for example, that she was self-taught (*Aus den Erinnerungen* 34).

vorlag, das der Künstler im Januar des folgenden Jahres gelesen und mit Anmerkungen versehen hat" (*Ludwig Meidner* 25–26).

The materials he refers to are typescripts, many of which have annotations in either Hodin's or Meidner's hand.

15. Meidner knew about Blake before he came to England through Blake's early twentieth-century German reception (see Erle, "The Reception of Blake's Art in Germany"). He would have seen Blake's works at the Tate's Wartime Acquisitions exhibitions (1942 and 1945), as well as at the major Blake exhibition at the Tate in 1947 (see Erle, "Meidner und Blake").

- 7 Hodin's role as a mediator of European culture in postwar Britain cannot be underestimated.¹⁶ After settling in London in 1944, he made it his mission to challenge conservative tastes in art; he introduced English audiences to expressionism, and also wrote and lectured on contemporary British artists from a European perspective. In *The Dilemma of Being Modern* (1956), he aligns Graham Sutherland with Neoromanticism and describes this movement as "pantheistic Romanticism," a tradition he traces back to Samuel Palmer and especially to Blake, whose "mysticism and religiousness" were a major influence on Sutherland's "mystical consciousness."¹⁷ Hodin also developed a theory of art that stressed the spiritual and psychological, as well as his own unique method of "living art criticism."¹⁸ He wrote about his friends, artists whom he knew personally, so that he could interweave interpretations of art with his understanding of the person who created it.¹⁹ In "Expressionism" (1949), he insists that style and personality are connected and exist *par excellence* in expressionism: "The expressionist is an archetype in Jung's sense; that is, he possesses a collective unconscious whose content and functions are of an archaic nature. ... In expressionism we are less concerned with a school than with personality" (45). His misunderstanding of Jung speaks to his attempt to comprehend personal themes and resonances of biographical connections in works of art, rather than processes and modes of representation.
- 8 Until Hodin's biography of 1973, Meidner was mainly known in Germany through Grochowiak, who had organized a major retrospective that traveled from Recklinghausen to Berlin to Darmstadt (1963–64). Grochowiak's *Ludwig Meidner* followed in 1966; it deals primarily with Meidner's expressionist art. Grochowiak explains that Meidner wanted, with agitated lines, to open the eye of the beholder to a vision of the future (74, 120), and this evaluation applies to his painting and writing.²⁰ In his autobio-

16. See Lazar, "J. P. Hodin: A Bridge between Europe and Britain."

17. Hodin, "Graham Sutherland" 120, 123, 126.

18. See Hodin, "Problems of Living Art Criticism." I am grateful to Shulamith Behr for the opportunity to read her "Reframing Exilic Identity for a German Audience" prior to its publication. Behr writes about the meetings between Hodin and the Meidners in June 1953 and explains how Hodin used photography to document Meidner's personality.

19. See Vanek.

20. In *Im Nacken das Sternemeer* (1918) and *Septemberschrei* (1920), prime examples of expressionist book illustration, Meidner considers the effects of color and brushwork. Mid-process, it seems, he has stepped back to take stock: "My last picture is bleeding on its easel. It is like open wounds and sores. One can still see how the moist colour shines fervently ..." ("Mein letztes Bild blutet auf seiner Staffelei. Es ist wie offene Wunden und Schwären. Noch sieht man, wie die feuchte Farbe brünstig glänzt ...") (*Im Nacken das Sternemeer*, quoted in Grochowiak 77). In *Septemberschrei*, he illuminates: "Did not I always have to paint bloodstreams into my self-portrait as well as eroded [eaten

graphical works, Meidner articulates his struggles, describing the easel as a space that could contain emotional pain as well as recreate an inner state or level of consciousness at which he could see what he describes. His paintings were created in a state of euphoria, though he later told Hodin that he often painted under the influence of alcohol (*Ludwig Meidner* 83). Meidner's approach was physical but also visionary, in that his technique and description thereof reveal or evoke what normally remains hidden or is impossible to define (Grochowiak 146–48, 184).

- 9 Meidner made various attempts at writing his autobiography, but most remain in manuscript or are unfinished; the narratives tend to focus on the expressionist phase. "Dichter, Maler und Cafés" ("Poets, Painters, and Cafés," 1964), "Mein Leben" ("My Life"), and "Journal 1915" were published posthumously. An earlier version of "Mein Leben" had appeared in Lothar Brieger's *Ludwig Meidner* (1919), where Meidner explains that he started writing during World War I, as a soldier. His ambition was to become a second Byron, Heinrich Heine, or Victor Hugo.²¹ This identity theme is continued by Hodin, who refers to Meidner as a painter and an author (44). He says that on learning that Meidner was in London, he reached for his copy of *Eine Autobiographische Plauderei* (2nd ed., 1923; *Ludwig Meidner* 15). This volume, with yet another version of "Mein Leben," details how Meidner took comfort in his newfound faith.
- 10 The dramatic climax of Meidner's life story is his conversion, which, he says, took place in 1912 (Sommerfeld). This experience turned him from a revolutionary atheist into an Orthodox Jew; it, too, exists in versions. The following is from "Leben auf dem Lande" ("Life in the Country," 1958):

Raptures, visions, and ecstasies, I really experienced them, they were great and good gifts that suddenly started appearing from a day in December 1912. I was in my thirties and they always gave me incredibly outrageous experiences with such power that I learnt to curse the atheism, which I was still attached to, and recognize the truth of the belief in God with all my heart.²²

away] wounds? In those days, I was still remote from God" ("Mußte ich nicht auf mein Selbstporträt immer Blutrinnale hineinmalen und zerfressene Wunden? Gott war mir noch ferne in jenen Tagen") (quoted in Hodin, *Ludwig Meidner* 41).

21. Breuer and Wagemann 2: 361.

22. "Verzückungen, Visionen und Ekstasen, das erlebte ich wirklich, das waren große und gute Gaben, die plötzlich von einem Tage an im Dezember 1912 auftauchten und in meinen Dreißigern mir immer wieder unglaubliche unerhörte Erlebnisse schenkten und mit solcher Macht, daß ich den Atheismus, dem ich noch nachhinkte, verfluchen lernte und die Wahrheit des Gottesglauben erkannte und meinem Herzen zueigen machen konnte" (quoted in Breuer and Wagemann 2: 452).

When talking to Hodin, Meidner condenses his story into a single event: “One day the grace came, the miracle occurred. It was on 4 December 1912, when the Holy Ghost, the Schechina, visited and converted me. Then I was religious.”²³ His declaration evokes immediacy and creates a distinctive moment of no return, but also presents his Judaism as colored by Christianity. He wanted to underline the importance of religious practice for his art and needed Hodin to understand why he had visions. He alludes to an altered state of consciousness, a power within and loss of self, and an experience that dissolved the boundary between him and his art.²⁴

- 11 In the summer of 1953, Meidner, inspired by his perception of Blake, set to constructing “mystic Meidner” for what was to be Hodin’s biography. What is at stake is Meidner’s control over his telling of his life story and Blake’s function within that story. Working with Hodin gave Meidner the opportunity to help construct what I want to call a textual collage. As with the sessions in which he painted and sketched his likeness in front of a mirror, he realized that he needed an opposite in order to find his voice. His decision to approach Hodin may have originated from reading Gilchrist’s *Life*, because Gilchrist includes Henry Crabb Robinson’s conversations with Blake. I think that if the appeal of Blake is one of biography, then Meidner would have appreciated that Gilchrist took Blake’s visions seriously:

Now, in maturity, as when in youth producing the *Songs of Innocence*, or in age the *Illustrations of Job*, we see Blake striking always the same mystic chord. The bridge thrown across from the visible to the invisible world was ever firm and sure to him. The unwavering hold (of which his “Visions” were a result) upon an unseen world, such as in other ways poetry and even science assure us of, and whose revelation is the meaning underlying all religions—the habitual hold is surely an authentic attainment, *not* an hallucination. (238-39)

Hodin was wary of what Meidner was telling him, and appears to think that Meidner was prone to exaggeration. He informs readers that he interpreted Meidner’s statements as a commentary on everything that had been published about him, implying that Meidner knew the critical debate on his art, personality, and philosophy:

Of course, everything that is pronounced by an artist must be assessed objectively and psychologically, especially in

23. “Eines Tages kam die Gnade, das Wunder ereignete sich. Es war der 4. December 1912, da mich der heilige Geist, die Schechina, besuchte und bekehrte. Dann war ich religiös” (Hodin, *Ludwig Meidner* 116).

24. Meidner had always been interested in religious art, believing that true art could only be created as a devotional act. See Hille 42-50.

terms of the motives of the statement and the circumstances in which this happened. This applies both to clues concerning one’s own person, as well as to art theories and critical statements. But even here, even if there are exaggerations and distortions, the essential expression of individuality can be determined. I couldn’t publish anything about Ludwig Meidner at the time.²⁵

These comments interrupt the narrative of the biography and, as a result, position the moment of writing in the years after Meidner’s death. There is plenty of evidence for dialogue between the men, as well as for Hodin’s editing of Meidner’s life story. In the excerpt above, Hodin goes back on his previously stated intention to publish (“reprint”) Meidner’s “authentic” statements unchanged (*Ludwig Meidner* 26). The contradiction is a consequence of the fragmented nature of Hodin’s text, but it also suggests that he changed his mind. The following sections map the writing process and Hodin’s skepticism, and thus illuminate Hodin’s engagement with Meidner’s visions.

Reception: Mystic Meidner and Appropriations of Blake

- 12 Meidner’s exile began in a way typical for many German refugees; before settling in London and setting up a proper studio on Finchley Road in NW2 (1947–53), he was interned (1940–41). In a letter to Hilde Rosenbaum (6/7 Nov. 1948), Ludwig mentions that the Orthodox community had offered him the post of death watch (*shomer*) for Greater London, which he rejected, even though he and Else desperately needed a stable income, as he wanted to work in his local community.²⁶ Turning down an offer for paid work testifies to his artistic integrity. He always worked at night, forgetting everything around him, capturing the vividness of his visions (*Ludwig Meidner* 114-15). The Meidners’ efforts to get noticed by the London art world finally resulted in an exhibition at the Ben Uri Gallery: *Ludwig Meidner/Else Meidner* (5 Oct.–2 Nov. 1949). Preparations gave them a purpose, and Ludwig was content to postpone his move to Germany.²⁷ This long-

25. “Natürlich muß alles von einem Künstler Ausgesprochene objektiv und psychologisch gewertet werden, vor allem auf die Motive der Aussage hin und die Umstände, unter denen dies geschah. Dies gilt sowohl von Hinweisen, welche die eigene Person betreffen, als auch von Kunsttheorien und kritischen Aussagen. Doch wird man auch hier, selbst wenn Übertreibungen und Verzeichnungen vorliegen, den wesentlichen Ausdruck einer Individualität feststellen können. Publizieren konnte ich damals nichts über Ludwig Meidner” (*Ludwig Meidner* 80).

26. Breuer and Wagemann 2: 477.

27. He wrote to Hannelore Rothschild (13 Feb. 1949): “Life here is like living in a desert, far from all people. I have also had enough of London and am determined to leave England this year” (“Man lebt hier wie in der Wüste, fern von allen Menschen. Ich habe auch nun genug

awaited opportunity turned into “ein ‘Begräbnis zweiter Klasse’” (“a ‘second-class funeral,’” *Ludwig Meidner* 67), however, because it did not attract much attention beyond the members of the Ben Uri, an organization that had been founded in 1925 to promote Jewish immigrant artists.

- 13 Hodin quotes passages from the reviews, which describe the symbolic, mystical, and religious qualities of the works. The exhibition included expressionist art, but Meidner had also been keen to show works created in London (*Ludwig Meidner* 104-05). The catalogue introduces him as “very much interested in Theosophy, Mysticism and Magic” and asserts an affinity with Blake: “Since 1939 when Mr. Meidner settled in England he has become a great admirer of William Blake.” I doubt that Hodin grasped the full extent of Meidner’s ambition for this exhibition, as well as for the works created in exile.²⁸
- 14 In London, Meidner’s strategy was to extend his audience by seizing on the Blake revival in the 1940s, propelled by the publicity around the Arlington Court Picture.²⁹ The discovery of the picture—also known as *The Sea of Time and Space* (Butlin #803)—in 1947 was spectacular in that the work had truly been lost. We cannot know if Meidner saw it, but there is enough circumstantial evidence to suggest that he was aware of its discovery. As noted above, the catalogue of the Ben Uri exhibition of 1949 emphasized Meidner’s admiration of Blake; the strategy did not pay off, however, because that exhibition was a failure.
- 15 According to a short notice in the *Times* (8 Apr. 1950), the Arlington Court Picture, “signed ‘W. Blake inventor 1821,’” was exhibited in the Blake Room at the Tate Gallery: “This is the first showing of this picture since it was recently cleaned.”³⁰ Keynes’s interpretation, published in *Country Life* (1949), might explain the appeal for Meidner:

The central group of this picture may represent Adam Kadmon, the first ideal man (personified in Blake’s own books as Albion, the ideal Briton) with his Emanation (personified by Blake as Jerusalem, or Britannia) standing beside him. Surrounding these two is a detailed sequence of symbolical figures in the mystical process of creation, beginning at the top with the “Working of the Chariot,” so called in allusion to the first chapter of *Ezekiel*. (“A Newly Discovered Painting”)

von London u. bin entschlossen England in diesem Jahr zu verlassen”) (Heuberger 78).

28. See Erle, “Meidner und Blake.”

29. See Erle, “The Reception of Blake’s Art in Germany” 288.

30. In the notice, the title of the picture is *The Circle of the Life of Man* (see “Blake Works Acquired by the Tate”).

Keynes associates the painting with the Cabbala and says that it is “unique in the whole range of Blake’s art.” Blake never commented on it and Meidner, who had read Gilchrist, would have projected his own associations. An entry point is the chariot with Apollo and the Muses in the upper left corner; the figures connect pictorially with the central female figure, but the reason for this connection is unexplained.³¹ A chariot for visionary transportation evokes the story of the prophet Elijah’s ascent into heaven and provides a link to the large color print by Blake, a reproduction of which Meidner took back to Germany. Hodin, who saw Meidner’s illustrations for the Bible, refers in his chapter on Meidner’s mysticism to a drawing that shows Elijah taking his leave of Elisha, with the heavenly chariot approaching (*Ludwig Meidner* 108).³² These charcoal drawings from the 1940s were the very kind of works that Meidner wanted Hodin to see.

- 16 Keynes’s attributions imbue Blake’s painting with status; the idea of its being the missing piece in the greater puzzle of “Blake” chimes with J. G. Davies’s approach in *The Theology of William Blake* (1948). Meidner possessed a clipping of Keynes’s review:

The author quotes an opinion that “to systematize Blake is to kill him,” and hopes that he has not been guilty of this crime. Readers of the book will at once exonerate him, and will feel grateful for what he has achieved. For it cannot be said that he has systematized Blake; rather, he has coordinated him, and thereby not only made him more comprehensible, but demonstrated his consistency and the wholeness of his theological conceptions.

Evidence for the notion of a system driving interpretations of Blake in the 1940s is also in Northrop Frye’s review, which commends Davies’s book as a comprehensive introduction to Blake and the “meaning” of his works. While Frye, responding to the chapters, acknowledges “Blake’s mysticism” and the influence of Swedenborg, the emphasis is on Christian ideas in Blake’s art. Meidner would have taken a keen interest in this discussion, as he was trying to understand his own visionary states, the outpouring of emotion into images, and how his visions changed how he perceived the world.

31. Christopher Heppner discusses the Greek-style decoration in the garment of the figure in red and claims to see Hebrew characters in the hem (242). I am grateful to Abraham Samuel Shiff, who says that there is no Hebrew anywhere in this picture. Shiff drew my attention to the symbolism of the hand gestures of the figure, identified by Heppner as Isaiah, which can be related to Jewish rituals of priestly blessing (see Shiff).

32. It is my belief that Meidner was interested in the relationship between the two prophets, as well as the journey into the world of heaven.

17 We do not know when Meidner annotated his copy of Todd's edition of Gilchrist's *Life*, which has pencil marks on pages 332 (margin), 334 (underlining), and 336 (margin). The dog-eared pages are all in chapter 36, "Declining Health; Designs to Dante; Mr. Crabb Robinson's Reminiscences; Notes on Wordsworth." It is possible that he reread the chapter when talking with Hodin. On page 332, he marked this passage: "At Mr. Aders's house the German painter, Götzenberger, met Blake. On his return to Germany he declared: 'I saw in England many men of talent, but only 3 men of Genius—Coleridge, Flaxman and Blake, and of these Blake was the greatest.'" Jakob Götzenberger, a minor painter on the periphery of the Nazarene Brotherhood, visited in February 1827. While Meidner may have compared his favorite English artists with Götzenberger's, he may also have pondered the character of Robinson, who had taken Götzenberger to see Blake at home, and his role in Gilchrist's telling of Blake's life story. Gilchrist quotes Robinson's *Reminiscences* on page 336, and Meidner made a mark against "Götzenberger" in the passage where Götzenberger admires Blake's illustrations of Dante. Above it, Meidner marked a section from *Reminiscences* that details Blake's poverty. Hodin, too, describes the simplicity of Meidner's studio in London, while focusing on his charisma: "All this was very modest, poor even, but not without hope when Meidner's low voice sounded through the room."³³

18 On page 334, which also quotes Robinson, Meidner underlined "Everything is good in God's Eyes" and "Is there any purity in God's eyes—?" His focus on purity, goodness, and Blake's question—asking if anything could ever measure up to divine standards—suggests that he is navigating the challenges of religious doubt; to be pure, something needs to be rejected. While Blake's statements may have resonated with what Meidner was thinking (regarding the consequences of decisions in his personal life), Meidner might have read to the end of the paragraph, where Robinson gives up, as he cannot see what Blake is getting at. In Robinson's eyes, Blake was confused, if not completely deluded: "My journal here has the remark that it is easier to retail his personal remarks than to reconcile those which seemed to be in conformity with the most opposed abstract systems." Gilchrist comments apologetically:

Perhaps, indeed, the attempt to methodize them into a system was so much labour lost? They key to the wild and strange rhapsodies Blake would utter can be supplied by love, but not by the intellect. To *go with* Blake, it almost required that a man should have the mind of an artist—and an artist of a peculiar kind—or one strongly in unison with that class of mind.

33. "All dies war sehr bescheiden, arm sogar, aber nicht ohne Hoffnung, wenn Meidners leise Stimme durch den Raum klang" (*Ludwig Meidner* 83).

Blake's pronouncements left Meidner unfazed; like Gilchrist, he was sympathetic and open to the possibility that what Blake tried to communicate was not easy to grasp. Perhaps reading Blake reminded him of his own expressionist prose; Hodin included long passages from Meidner's early expressionist writings in his biography, so that readers were able to *go with* Meidner. This decision is consistent with Hodin's giving Meidner the chance to express his personality freely (*Ludwig Meidner* 80). As previously outlined, Hodin's method appears to have its precursor in Robinson with Blake, or rather Gilchrist's decision to source descriptions of Blake through those who knew him.

Artistic Practice: Mystic Meidners and Mystifying Hodin

19 *Aus den Erinnerungen von Else Meidner* allows for speculation about Else's reasons for choosing Blake's *Job* in 1959. Hodin reveals themes that connect with *Job*: possibly alluding to *Job*'s despair, Else twice wonders why she is being treated like the "pariah" of mankind (20, 94). This biography relates the story of the aging Else and her suicidal thoughts and growing disillusionment with friends and neighbors—a woman who, surrounded by her paintings and books, is withdrawing from the world, as well as from Hodin. He includes in the first half of the book Else's statements about her father's continual financial support (43) and the turmoil of motherhood (44-45). In the second half, his narrative voice has all but disappeared. With Ludwig and her son in other countries, Else did not succeed in forging new intimate relationships. Ludwig, who had been keen to establish himself in England, experienced a "renaissance" and late success in Germany (*Ludwig Meidner* 88), while Else had to accept total lonesomeness ("totale Vereinsamung") in England (*Aus den Erinnerungen* 42). The loss of a close friend in 1958 is captured in the poem "Auf den Tod eines Freundes" ("On the Death of a Friend," 69-70) and developed in her imagined "Zwiesgespräch mit Tod" ("Tête-à-tête with Death," 103-06). The chapter "Aufzeichnungen von 1959" ("Notes from 1959") reveals feelings related to humiliation, shame, and the loss of self-belief: "It is not so easy to strengthen your own backbone when it is already bent and broken by all the kicks that have stamped on it"; "Why do I have to suffer like this? Why couldn't a real friend come to me again?"³⁴ Did Else perceive herself as a female *Job*?

20 A chapter based on a manuscript that Hodin says he found in her flat, "Aus meinem Leben" ("From My Life"), ends

34. "Es ist nicht so einfach das Rückgrat sich selbst zu stärken, wenn es schon ganz verbogen und zertrampelt ist von allen den Fußtritten, die darauf gestampft sind"; "Warum muß ich so leiden? Warum konnte nicht ein wirklicher Freund noch einmal zu mir kommen?" (*Aus den Erinnerungen* 89, 94).

with two short entries that articulate what can count as her identification with Job:

1. April 1963

It was difficult enough to have to bear the general fate of the Jews, but the personal tragedy of my life was too much grief and it had to ruin me.

2. April 1963

Oh God, please deliver me from this loneliness so that I can once again feel a little *joie de vivre*.³⁵

Her identification with Job's dutiful and faithful wife, as represented in Blake's version, is not the whole story. In *Aus den Erinnerungen* Hodin shows her worried about societal expectations; she comments bitterly about the remarks of married women who put their husbands first. In her reflections Else manages to transcend the story of Job to critique traditional views of good wives. She may have sent Blake's *Job* to Ludwig as a reminder of what they had shared in life and as a peace offering, but "Aus meinem Leben" brings Else's hardships into focus. There was to be no reward for her suffering, which was quite separate from that of her husband.

- 21 Hodin's biographies are a complaint about the undeserved neglect of the Meidners. The intention—to address the marginalization of two artists—determines much of the organization and layering of the texts; Hodin starts *Ludwig Meidner* with reflections about the British reservations against expressionism ("ablehnende Haltung Londons," 15). The tone of the early chapters is typical for Hodin, who had made it his mission to educate, but since his biographies of the Meidners were written in German, for German audiences, his agenda was slightly different. Meidner had been *persona non grata* with the Nazi regime. He was deeply religious and a practicing Orthodox Jew, and his leading role in and contribution to the expressionist art movement jarred with Nazi ideology, which rejected modernist art as well as Jewish artists and advocated a cult of beauty that idealized aesthetic effects of perfectly shaped human bodies. As noted, Meidner's art had been included in the Entartete Kunst exhibition; the only reason he survived the Second World War, or rather the Holocaust, was that he had left Germany just in time. His decision to return to what he felt was still his homeland—despite all the war crimes and atrocities that came to light in the postwar years—was a remarkable step, which, though motivated by personal reasons, had political repercussions. Hodin ad-

35. "1. April 1963 / Das allgemeine Judenschicksal zu tragen war schwer genug, aber die persönliche Tragik meines Lebens dazu zuviel Kummer und mußte mich ruinieren"; "2. April 1963 / Oh Gott, hilf mir doch aus dieser Einsamkeit heraus, damit ich noch einmal etwas Lebensfreude empfinde" (*Aus den Erinnerungen* 100).

dresses this step and its significance by focusing on Meidner's suffering in exile in an attempt to allow German readers to connect and empathize with him, and by extension with the fate of many other Jewish artists.

- 22 In "Ludwig Meidners Londoner Jahre," the first of the articles for *Darmstädter Tagblatt*, Hodin is explicit, even scathing, about what Meidner had to endure in London: "To the English bourgeoisie the artist is a crank, an oddball, who cannot be taken seriously and will only impress with high prices at Sotheby's and the resulting international fame."³⁶ In the final installment of the articles, which is on mysticism, he summarizes the injustices, above all the Nazis' destruction of Meidner's reputation, to accentuate the significance of Meidner's return to Germany: "None of the artists persecuted by Hitler suffered as much as Meidner, who after [Max] Liebermann's death was the most important German artist of Jewish origin."³⁷ I think that Hodin was grappling with the significance for the Meidners' marriage of Ludwig's decision to return. Aligning the Meidners with the postwar Blake revival allowed him to pay tribute to their human complexity. In *Ludwig Meidner* Hodin presents expressionism as a European art movement but says little about Meidner's art, focusing instead on personality (28) and religion (38). He even makes appearance a matter of religion when he says that Meidner looked like a Franciscan monk (82).

- 23 In "Gruss des Malers an die Dichter," an essay first published in *Im Nacken das Sternemeer*, Meidner gives a list of authors who inspired him; it includes visionary, religious, and mystical writers, such as Jeremiah and Isaiah, Augustine and Thomas à Kempis, Jacob Boehme and Angelus Silesius (24). Hodin includes this passage in *Ludwig Meidner* (55) and comments: "Could Meidner not but feel the calling to awaking his slumbering consciousness to God, whose voice had comforted him one night so wonderfully? All mystical books opened up to him at that time."³⁸ In this section of the biography Meidner reflects that his development ought to be perceived through the prism of his library. He presents himself as a voracious reader, which suggests that in reality his conversion, dated to 4 December

36. "Der Künstler ist für den bürgerlichen Engländer ein 'crank'—ein verschrobener Kauz, den man nicht ernst nimmt und nur die hohen Auktionspreise bei Sotheby imponieren und bedingen eine Hinwendung zu international berühmten Namen."

37. "Keiner der von Hitler verfolgten Künstler hat soviel gelitten wie gerade Meidner, der nach dem Tode Liebermanns der bedeutendste Deutsche Künstler jüdischer Herkunft war" ("Ludwig Meidner—der Mystiker").

38. "Mußte sich Meidner nicht berufen fühlen, das schlummernde Gottesbewußtsein zu wecken, er, den selbst eines Nachts eine Stimme wunderbar getröstet hatte? Alle mystischen Bücher erschlossen sich ihm damals" (59).

1912 (116), was an incremental process, propelled by extensive reading.³⁹

- 24 Regarding the construction of “mystic Meidner” as a persona in Hodin’s biography, it is worth noting that Blake appears in different contexts, almost like a free-floating signifier. Hodin’s “Meidners Studio in London,” one of the articles published in *Darmstädter Tagblatt* in 1966, has a paragraph titled “William Blake.” The difference between this piece and the biography is instructive, as it tells us about Hodin’s conceptualization of Meidner’s creative practice. The passage in the article concludes: “The artist who is closest to me spiritually here is William Blake.” In *Ludwig Meidner*, this statement appears at the end of the chapter on Meidner’s London studio, with two sentences added on: “I got to know his work for the first time in 1932. Not much was known of him in Germany.”⁴⁰ I have found no evidence in the correspondence in the Hodin Archive that Meidner told Hodin that he came across Blake in 1932. He wrote to Wolf Bergmann on 25 September 1949 (ten days before the opening of Ludwig Meidner/Else Meidner at the Ben Uri) that he encountered Blake in 1922, which is when his expressionist phase is said to have ended.⁴¹ As noted, the catalogue of that exhibition creates the impression that he discovered Blake once in London: “Since 1939 when Mr. Meidner settled in England he has become a great admirer of William Blake.” The only item that sheds light on Hodin’s decision to amend Meidner’s explanation and use 1932 is a note on the folder with the manuscript for the biography: “It is impossible to encounter Blake in 1932 for the first time. (His paintings at most).”⁴² Hodin’s memo is a recognition of Meidner’s attempt to rewrite the story of his life. Hodin, who believes what Meidner says to be false, not only acknowledges the importance of Blake’s German reception but also hints at a trend in Blake’s European reception, one that focused on mystical qualities. On this occasion Hodin went with what Meidner told him. The papers in the Hodin Archive are mostly typescripts with handwritten corrections. In “Ludwig Meidner in Frankfurt” (no date, with notes by Hodin), Hodin says that Meidner found a “kindred English spirit in William Blake” (“verwandten englischen Geist in William Blake”),⁴³ and that the work of

39. Heuberger and Riedel 32.

40. “Der Künstler, der mir jedoch geistig hier am nächsten steht, ist William Blake. Ich lernte sein Werk 1932 zum ersten Mal kennen. In Deutschland wußte man nicht viel von ihm” (85).

41. Breuer and Wagemann 2: 479–80.

42. “Man kann nicht Blake 1932 zum ersten Mal kennenlernen. (Höchstens seine Bilder),” in red pen on paper attached to the folder “Meidner / I. Teil / Urmanuskript” (Hodin Archive, Tate Britain, TGA 20062 4/4 Box 102).

43. Meidner first uses this descriptor (“kindred spirit”) in a letter of 23 January 1943 to Walter and Hilde Rosenbaum (see Breuer and Wagemann 2: 474).

Hogarth provided him with insights into satire and humor (“die Kritik und die Skepsis an der Zeit”).⁴⁴ For *Ludwig Meidner* Hodin was to edit this information and separate Blake and Hogarth, though they still appear in the same chapter; there is no mention of Hogarth in what Hodin wrote for *Darmstädter Tagblatt*. We can, moreover, be certain that it was Hodin—not Meidner—who added “Blake” into the manuscript he shared with Meidner; this manuscript, which Hodin called “Urmanuskript,” has annotations by Meidner and Hodin, but the insertion regarding Blake is in Hodin’s hand. This means that the information about the year when Meidner first encountered Blake was inserted by Hodin, after Meidner’s death.

- 25 The second mention of Blake in *Ludwig Meidner* is in the chapter on English and Jewish art (“Über Englische und Jüdische Kunst”). This chapter, which is not in the “Urmanuskript,” states why Meidner found himself inspired by Blake: “Blake was a phenomenon, not just as a painter but especially and above all else as an artist, poet, and visionary.”⁴⁵ The word “phenomenon” gives expression to Meidner’s admiration of Blake but also invites the idea that his perception is rooted in an experience that is beyond explanation. The emphasis on Blake’s singular role in Meidner’s exile can also be traced in a document in the Stadtarchiv Darmstadt, a note that Meidner wrote in Germany in response to a question by Hodin about his return: “To cut a long story short, I can only say: [the reason is my own] terrible and full-of-mistakes German.” Meidner reiterates that he had always thought of himself as a writer as well as painter and that he, like most refugees, was speaking a mishmash—that is, there were too many Anglicisms in his language: “The German language owned my love, affection, admiration; it was my one and everything, my air, my innermost treasure.”⁴⁶ In this note he asserts that English art and literature held nothing for him and that he did not

44. “Urmanuskript” titled “Ludwig Meidner: Eine Würdigung seiner Kunst mit ihrer historischen Bedeutung.” For the addition of “Blake” in Hodin’s hand, see page 17. The slightly longer, earlier version, titled “Ludwig Meidner kehrt wieder nach Deutschland zurück” (crossed out and changed to “Ludwig Meidner wieder in Deutschland”), is in a folder dated to 11 August 1953. The second, edited version of the 11 August document includes Hodin’s handwritten corrections; the title has been changed again: “Ein Künstler kehrt in seine Heimat zurück. Ludwig Meidner in Deutschland [Frankfurt]” (TGA 20062 Box 140 7).

45. “Blake war ein Phänomen, nicht nur als Maler, sondern alles in allem, als Künstler, Dichter und Visionär” (86). Meidner uses the word “Phänomen” in the letter to Wolf Bergmann of 25 September 1949 (see Breuer and Wagemann 2: 480).

46. “Um Ihre Frage kurz und bündig zu beantworten, kann ich nur sagen: scheußliches und falsches Deutsch”; “Der deutschen Sprache gehörte meine Liebe, Zuneigung, Bewunderung; sie war mein ein und alles, meine Luft, mein innerster Schatz” (Stadtarchiv Darmstadt, ST 45/67 Meidner Nr. 1647).

want to open up to anything, with the exception of the “phenomenon of William Blake” (illus. 5).⁴⁷

- 26 Hodin’s *Ludwig Meidner* contains sprawling passages that originate from previously published works (such as Meidner’s *Eine Autobiographische Plauderei*), that are transcripts of his conversations with Meidner, or that are from Meidner’s letters and postcards from Germany. Hodin intersperses them with his comments, explaining, for example, about traditions in art history or speculating on whether Meidner would have agreed; the latter is an example of Hodin’s method (his “living art criticism”) because he allows his narrator persona to come to the fore. Thus he evokes the impression that the conversation with Meidner is still going on. The longest passages from Meidner are in the chapter “Der Mystiker,” where, after many pressing requests, he finally agrees to talk about mysticism, sharing his most personal thoughts and belief in the reality of his visions. Here Blake is mentioned for the third and final time, as a “visionary” rather than an “ecstatic” painter (127). Whereas the former is an intellectual experience, based on the ability of the mind to imagine and associated with seeing in a dream or trance, the latter is a sensual experience that is pleasurable and all consuming. This section, which is on the experience of ecstasy (“Ekstase”) in creative processes, can be traced back to a “conversation”; its context is a letter (25 Aug. 1953) that introduces creativity as a topic for consideration. Talking about the difference between ecstasy, trance, and vision,⁴⁸ Meidner writes: “True religious ecstasy is in the German Gothic [period], in Grünewald, Michelangelo, [El] Greco and Bernini. Blake is more visionary than ecstatic.”⁴⁹ Hodin, who marked the passage in pencil to highlight its importance, was to include it in *Ludwig Meidner* but decided to omit it when writing for *Darmstädter Tagblatt* after Meidner’s death. The mention of Blake actually reads like an addendum, suggesting that he had come up in conversation in London.⁵⁰ In the letter, Meidner underlined “Bernini” (Hodin does not in the biography) as

47. “Ich hatte keine Lust mich mit der englischen Kunst und Literatur einzulassen. Abgesehen von dem Phänomen ‘William Blake’ bekümmerte ich mich kaum ...” (Stadtarchiv Darmstadt, ST 45/67 Meidner Nr. 1647).

48. Else was to refer to Ludwig as an “ecstatic painter, draftsman, etcher and author of hymn-like prose” in her obituary (“ekstatischen Maler, Zeichner, Radierer und Verfasser hymnischer Prosa”) (*Ludwig Meidner* 133).

49. “Echte religiöse Ekstase ist bei der deutschen Gothic, bei Grünewald, Michel Angelo, Greco und Bernini. Blake ist mehr visionär als ekstatisch” (TGA 20062/4/258). See also *Ludwig Meidner* 127.

50. Meidner and Hodin, who were great friends, met often to talk and exchange ideas in coffee houses in Hampstead and Swiss Cottage, with Meidner sketching their favorite streets. I am grateful to Annabel Hodin for this information.

if to create a certain hierarchy in his now more elaborate explanation, which relegates Blake into an aside.⁵¹

Visionary Experience: Traveling through the Inner Landscape of Meidner’s Studios

- 27 Hodin’s appreciation of Meidner’s visions is guarded in the articles for *Darmstädter Tagblatt*, published between November 1966 and January 1967. In “Ludwig Meidner hatte Erscheinungen” (Dec. 1966), Hodin refers to the visions as apparitions or ghosts: “Without doubt, Meidner had visionary powers. There was a spiritistic quality in his conceptualization of ideas. Ghosts were a reality to him; they were not just psychic impulses that assume form in people’s fancies. This thought bothered me more than it heartened me, and yet at the same time it excited my imagination.”⁵² In the biography, the passage appears in a new chapter, with material also not in the 1950s manuscripts (“Parapsychologisches und Künstlerisches,” 100-01). It seems that, in the 1960s, Hodin had yet to decide how to work Meidner’s contribution into his narrative. Alluding, for example, to Meidner’s vision of the future, he admits: “I do not want to publish it at this point in time.”⁵³ Nevertheless, most of the material to go into the new chapter is already in “Ludwig Meidner—der Mystiker” (Jan. 1967), where Hodin relates how he challenged Meidner by telling him that he doubted the reality of his visions.⁵⁴ He starts the section in the biography with a teasing question: Would Meidner like to hear his first impression of the house? The second sentence is Meidner’s answer:

He nodded: “So you felt it too! This house was built for the purpose of carrying out abortions. You can also tell from the double windows that they intended to commit criminal acts against life here. The police intervened. Sometimes at night, things happen on their own here. I

51. He must be thinking of Bernini’s *Ecstasy of Saint Teresa* (1647–52), a sculpture in Santa Maria della Vittoria in Rome that embodies the religious ecstasy of Teresa of Ávila, as recounted in her autobiography in the vision of the angel who touched her heart with a golden spear.

52. “Meidner hatte ohne Zweifel eine Seherkraft. Es war ein spiritistischer Zug in seinen Ideenvorstellungen. Geister waren für ihn eine Wirklichkeit, sie waren nicht nur psychische Triebfedern, die in den Vorstellungen von Menschen Gestalt annehmen. Mich beunruhigte dieser Gedanke mehr, als daß er mich aufbaute, und gleichzeitig reizte er meine Phantasie.”

53. “die ich jedoch einstweilen nicht publizieren möchte” (“Ludwig Meidner—der Mystiker”). Hodin’s decision to publish Else’s stories in 1979 contradicts his attitude toward Ludwig’s “para-psychological Bekenntnisse” (“parapsychological confessions”). He had decided in 1955 to publish *Ludwig Meidner* after his subject’s death (*Ludwig Meidner* 80-81).

54. This section is also in the typescript—“Urmanuskript”—that Hodin shared with Meidner.

see grey masses moving along the walls.” “So,” I said with a sigh. ...⁵⁵

The dialogue meanders but eventually returns to the apparitions, with Hodin admitting that he does not know what to make of Meidner’s account; he is puzzled but also intrigued (100). Assuming he knew that Meidner had read Gilchrist’s *Life*, it might have occurred to him that Meidner was rehearsing how Blake had interacted with John Varley.⁵⁶ If there was any hesitation about Meidner’s sincerity, Hodin came round in the end, because Meidner’s vision of a great famine, caused by ecological disaster, is in the chapter “Der Mystiker” in *Ludwig Meidner*: “In 1953, a vision kept repeating itself. He was obsessed with it. ‘What I experience, I have to talk about it.’ And just as he had announced both world wars in allegories—they are often magical compositions—this time he experienced the gloomy prediction of world hunger.”⁵⁷ This chapter also has Meidner talking about death and religious ecstasy (114-33).

- 28 We know that Meidner was categorically against publishing the material on the apparitions. In his correspondence, he says that he is looking through Hodin’s manuscript (“Urmanuskript”) to indicate what needs to be cut or added. He laughs off the conversation about the ghosts; ghosts surely belong in the realm of the occult (22 Dec. 1953) and not in the biography of a painter; in a more conciliatory manner he points out that ghosts have nothing to do with his personality, only with his house. Meidner tells Hodin (11 Jan. 1954) that he intends to write a section about his religious development that ought to be included as a personal testimony.⁵⁸ Perhaps worried that these postcards had not reached Hodin, he elaborates further in a letter (24 Jan. 1954): “All my explanations about this and that ... were part of a simple and casual conversation and not intended for publication. And now that I am reading them, they are

55. “Er nickte: ‘Sie haben das also auch gespürt! Dieses Haus ist seinerzeit zu Zwecken der Abtreibung erbaut worden. Sie sehen auch an den Doppelfenstern, daß Verbrecherisches hier gegen das Leben verübt werden sollte. Die Polizei griff ein. In der Nacht manchmal, da ereignen sich eigene Dinge hier. Ich sehe graue Massen sich die Wände entlang bewegen.’ ‘So,’ sagte ich gedehnt. ...” (*Ludwig Meidner* 96).

56. Meidner’s explanations about ghosts appear to follow the episodes with Varley and the pencil drawings that came to be known as the Visionary Heads (see *Ludwig Meidner* 96, 98, 100-02). For Meidner’s engagement with Blake’s nightly drawing sessions with Varley, see Erle, “Blake, Ludwig Meidner and Expressionism.”

57. “Im Jahr 1953 wiederholte sich eine Vision immer wieder. Er ganz besessen davon. ‘Was ich erlebe, davon muß ich erzählen.’ Und so wie er beide Weltkriege in Allegorien angekündigt hatte,—es sind magische Kompositionen oft—so erlebte er diesmal die düstere Voraussage einer Welthungersnot” (121).

58. “Anstatt der Darstellung von Geister-Erscheinungen ... möchte ich einen kurzen Abriss meiner religiösen Entwicklung einfügen, den ich selber schreibe ...” (TGA 20062/4/258).

really ... getting on my nerves ...”⁵⁹ Stressing that their chat is lacking in literary form, he says that he has no time to convert their conversation into “prose.” The ghosts have to go. In the manuscript in the Hodin Archive, we can see that Meidner crossed out long passages.⁶⁰ Hodin had the last word, however; he included the story about the apparitions that Meidner thought irrelevant. I think that what was most likely humorous repartee sheds light on Hodin’s skepticism about visions peculiar to Meidner. He may have doubted their reality, believing that they were mere products of Meidner’s imagination. Meidner claimed that he could see into the future, as well as into another world, which suggests the enhanced alertness of his mind. His visions were genuine in that they created a different kind of “real”; by including the story about the ghosts, Hodin therefore pays tribute to Meidner’s creativity, presenting all his experiences as equally valid for the telling of his life story.

- 29 Meidner had conversed with Hodin many times and needed to navigate common prejudice about visionary experiences, as well as Hodin’s skepticism toward what appeared to be paranormal. To give an example of Meidner’s treatment of visions, this essay now turns to the prose descriptions of his studios in London and Marxheim. While the composition “Beschreibung eines Malerateliers in Marxheim” (“Description of the Studio of a Painter in Marxheim”) is dated to the spring of 1962,⁶¹ we can only speculate that Meidner wrote “Kleine Reise durch mein Wohnzimmer” (“Short Journey through My [London] Living Room”) in the early 1950s. Each studio is a space that contains images, books, papers, personal belongings, painting supplies, and knickknacks, while accumulating rubbish, leftovers, and dust.

- 30 In “Kleine Reise durch mein Wohnzimmer,” he transcends the physical confines of the studio by transforming his isolation, which goes hand in hand with feeling trapped, through an imaginary journey. The traveling motif chimes with an aphorism, written around the same time, that refers to Blake: “William Blake, millionaire with a round-trip ticket through all regions of the universe and the imagination of ‘the unknown world.’”⁶² Meidner says that he has what it takes to be a “globetrotter,” but has been condemned to stay put. Talking about the expectations imposed on refugees, he mocks:

59. “Die ganzen Ausführungen von mir über dies und jenes ... waren in reinem u. lässigen Plauderton u. nicht für Publikation gedacht. Und nun, da ich sie lese, gehen sie mir ... mächtig auf die Nerven ...” (TGA 20062/4/258).

60. “Urmanuskript,” TGA 20062 Box 140 7.

61. Breuer and Wagemann 2: 453.

62. “Millionär mit einem Rundreisebillet durch alle Regionen des Weltalls und der Phantasie ‘der bekannten Welt’” (Breuer and Wagemann 2: 454, “Aphorismen über Künstler” [“Aphorisms on Artists”]).

He should be modest and for heaven's sake stay at home, because there is a lot to be admired there and the wisdom that he would have brought back from the South Pole would in the end be no more comprehensive than, for example, that he collects on a single long evening, if he searches creeping around in his hermitage.⁶³

By comparison, in the description of the studio in Marxheim, he accentuates real over imagined space and actual over imagined movement, while also blurring the boundaries between them; he says that he goes for a walk to keep fit: "Every evening I make my way through the newspaper pile, and even though my riding boots whirl up the dust, I march as if in a cloud of dust."⁶⁴ In London, his eyes move across the room, and yet this mode of transport transcends the space whenever he forges a connection with the world beyond. Whereas in London, Meidner is surrounded by his paintings (in Hodin's words, "Meidner sometimes used to open up his large portfolios, which otherwise stood leaning against the walls, silently concealing their wealth—drawings, pastels, watercolors, old and new") (illus. 6 and 7),⁶⁵ in Marxheim the portfolios appear untouched, stacked in a corner. Meidner also distances himself from his paintings on the walls in Marxheim. They "do not count" ("zählen nicht mit"): his "masterpieces" ("Meisterwerke"), he writes, are "elsewhere; mostly wrapped up and also of course covered in dust, waiting, near the eastern wall, for their resurrection ("woanders; meist eingepackt und freilich auch verstaubt, harren sie, an der Ostwand, ihrer Auferstehung").⁶⁶

- 31 His works, on display or wrapped up, as mentioned above, play an important part in the descriptions of his studios. He always chose to decorate his room with images that were meaningful to him. One, the reproduction of Phillips's *William Blake*, is a physical connection to his living room in exile and to London itself. In his narrative, Meidner never leaves the comfort of his own four walls. Each studio space is a fluid backdrop for the rendering of the isolation theme, expressed through images that become part of a text

63. "Er soll sich bescheiden und um Himmels Willen zuhause bleiben, auch dort ist allerhand anzustauen und die Weisheit, die er vom Südpol mitbrächte wäre am Ende nicht umfassender als etwa jene, die er an einem einzigen langen Abend einheimst, wenn er duckmäuserig in seiner Klause umherspäht" (Stadtarchiv Darmstadt, ST 45/67 Meidner Nr. 1547).

64. "So bahne ich mir jeden Abend einen Weg durch den Zeitungshaufen, mögen auch meine Reiterstiefel den Staub aufwirbeln, daß ich wie in einer Staubwolke marschiere" (Breuer and Wagemann 2: 453).

65. "Meidner pflegte manchmal seine großen Mappen aufzutun, die sonst gegen die Wände gelehnt standen, stumm ihren Reichtum verbergend—Zeichnungen, Pastelle, Aquarelle, alte und neue" (*Ludwig Meidner* 83).

66. Breuer and Wagemann 2: 453.

that Meidner orchestrates from his writing table. In "Kleine Reise durch mein Wohnzimmer," the description of the London studio, he starts his journey in the eastern corner and moves along the wall. The furniture regulates both his movement and narrative chronology. He passes a bookshelf, full of books from Germany, without resting his eyes on a single volume, dismissing all of them as second rate. Next, he approaches his bed, where he pauses to look at his "hero," who was to emigrate with him to Germany:

But whom does an émigré-painter from Germany hang over his bedstead? William Blake, of course, who else?! You need to notice just a little bit in this room that you are in the British Isles. And then Blake is one of those you can truly lean on. And if you hang Jakob Boehme next to him, that's fine and also a reminder of Germany.⁶⁷

Meidner's language slips; it moves from designating Blake's portrait to Blake the person and to an imagined juxtaposition with Boehme, again via a portrait, then person, and possibly book. Blake, who initially serves as an anchor, gets associated with prewar Germany, which allows him to join Meidner's list of mystical writers. What Meidner constructs through his thinking on his imaginary journey is reminiscent of Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History"; Benjamin argues that "when thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallizes into a monad" (Thesis XVII). This "monad," for Benjamin, is the "Messianic cessation of happening."⁶⁸ Thinking accordingly alternates between "flow" and "arrest," which is what Meidner achieves; he moves through his studio but never abandons his vantage point. Blake stops Meidner in his tracks, but also "crystallizes" what can never take place in Meidner's lifetime. Blake represents England and is a connection to the world outside and the Blake revival, but as a stopover on the imaginary journey he causes Meidner not to connect with London but to think of Boehme and of Germany, which in Benjamin's terms is part of his "oppressed past." Meidner, to put it simply, uses Blake to communicate a moment of recognition.

- 32 There is no mention of the Phillips portrait in the account of the Marxheim studio, where Blake appears in a pile of books on mysticism and theosophy: "W. Blake, [Johann Joseph]

67. "Wen aber hängt sich ein Maleremigrant aus Deutschland über seine Schlafstelle? Natürlich William Blake, wen sonst?! Man muss auch in diesem Raum ein bisschen merken, dass man auf den britannischen Inseln ist. Und dann ist Blake wahrhaftig einer von denen an dem man sich aufrichten kann. Und wenn man daneben Jakob Boehme hängt, so ist das ganz in Ordnung und überdies ein Gedenken an Deutschland" (Stadtarchiv Darmstadt, ST 45/67 Meidner Nr. 1547) (illus. 8).

68. Benjamin 254.



6 and 7. Two views of the Meidners' living room in London, taken by a photographer hired by J. P. Hodin in the early 1950s. Hodin Archive, Tate Britain, TGA 20062. M05216 and M05217. Photos: Tate. Reproduced by permission of Annabel Hodin.



7

ein Ochse hineinlegen könnte.
Über diesem Bette aber hängt ein be-
scheidenes schwarzes Rähmchen und darin
hineingeklemmt ein Bildnis, ein bis'chen
zerknüllt, zwar aber das ist ein grosser
Mann - behüte nicht Karl Marx oder Le-
nin, obwar ich Maler kenne, die sich solche
Heroen-Photos über ihre Bettstatt nageln,
weil sie meinen, dass dies jüst auf der Linie
liege, ihrer Erwartungen und künftigen
Glorie. Nein, jene gewiss nicht - wen
aber hängt sich ein Maleremigrant aus
Deutschland über seine Schlafstelle? Na-
türlich William Blake, wen sonst?!
Man muss auch in diesem Raum ein bis'-
chen merken, dass man auf den britanni-
schen Inseln ist. Und dann ist Blake
wahrhaftig einer von denen an dem man
sich anfrichten kann. Und wenn man da-
neben Jakob Boehme hängt, so ist das
ganz in Ordnung und überdies ein Ge-
stirten an Deutschland.

Nachts, wenn ich langhingestreckt
liege, und seltsamer Landschaften gewahr
werde im Halbschlaf, lassen sich kleine
Wesen herab an einem härichdünnen Seil.

8. Ludwig Meidner, "Kleine Reise durch mein Wohnzimmer," p. 7. Stadtarchiv Darmstadt, ST 45/67 Meidner Nr. 1547. Image courtesy of the Stadtarchiv Darmstadt.

Görres, [Gershom] Scholem.⁶⁹ Meidner, again, immediately distances himself, saying that his pupil assembled the books. Distance from London has perhaps given him a new perspective on what he saw when he looked at Blake close up. In the narrative of the imaginary journey, Blake was presented as particular; in the context of the account of the Marxheim studio, Blake has all but disappeared—he is one of many images, high up on the wall. He is now literally with the mystical writers of Meidner’s library, but also surrounded by growing piles of papers. If we take the descriptions together, the portrait of Blake merges with the book about Blake to reveal the changing contours of Meidner’s inner landscape. This landscape, a metaphor for his life, is filling up with dust, signifying approaching death:

I must not forget the dust that envelops everything, no ordinary everyday dust but a grayish millennium dust, thick, sticky, you dare not touch anything anymore. The dust, the newspapers, the pots, plates, and cups rule the room, and where is the art?⁷⁰

As an Orthodox Jew, Meidner could engage with his future only by breaking the chronology of the present, according to Benjamin’s argument;⁷¹ only by noticing the absence of his paintings can he anticipate or *envision* their afterlife in museums and galleries. He, by extension, will not be forgotten. While Blake in London may have been looking over Meidner, like Paul Klee’s *Angelus Novus*, in Marxheim, where Meidner lived and worked unrecognized from 1955 to 1963, Blake is part of the “piling wreckage” of Meidner’s life.⁷² Even though Phillips’s *William Blake*, with its unfocused eyes, no longer has prime position—it is now part of a wall covered in images, three of which are Blake related—and the book about Blake no longer sits on an easy-to-access bookshelf, there is going to be a future. The anecdote about the discovery of Meidner in Germany during a public lecture best speaks to his patient endurance. When the speaker paused to wonder what had happened to Meidner and whether he had survived the Holocaust, “Hesitantly, a little old gentleman rose from amidst the audience, raised his finger, and in a voice barely audible said: ‘I am here—Meidner!’”⁷³

69. Breuer and Wagemann 2: 453.

70. “Vergessen darf ich nicht den Staub, der alles einhüllt, kein gewöhnlicher Alltagstaub sondern ein gräulicher Jahrtausendstaub, dick, klebrig, man wagt schon gar nichts mehr anzufassen. Der Staub, die Zeitungen, die Töpfe, Teller und Tassen regieren den Raum und wo bleibt die Kunst?” (Breuer and Wagemann 2: 453).

71. I am referring to Benjamin’s concluding remarks: “We know that the Jews were prohibited from investigating the future. The Torah and the prayers instruct them in remembrance, however” (255).

72. Benjamin 249.

73. “Da erhob sich zögernd inmitten der Zuhörer ein kleiner, alter Herr, hob den Finger, und man hörte, kaum vernehmbar: ‘Hier bin ich—Meidner!’” (Grochowiak 7).

Conclusion

33 Meidner continually bemoaned that he was either not painting or not writing.⁷⁴ In a newspaper article of 1964 on the rediscovery of Meidner in Germany, Ernst Buchholz quotes him as saying: “I am convinced that if I had not been a painter and if Hitler had not come, I could have improved my writing and would have become a good writer.”⁷⁵ In fact, Meidner differentiates between reading, writing, and speaking. While in exile, his spoken English prevented him from making friends beyond the community of Jewish refugees.⁷⁶ He never regretted his return to Germany; writing to Franz Landsberger in June 1960, he acknowledges that he feels a little lonely (“etwas verwaist”) but is pleased with “the late flowering of my work as a painter” (“die Spätblüte meiner malerischen Arbeit”).⁷⁷ In 1963 he moved to Darmstadt, where Else came to visit him, as mentioned above. She joined Ludwig to support him and perhaps to witness the Meidner revival, hoping that she too would receive the recognition she was due. When this hope didn’t materialize, she decided to return to London to attend the retrospective of her works at the Ben Uri.

34 Hodin, who tried in vain to place some of the material in England with the *Jewish Chronicle* or *Arts Review* (Ludwig Meidner 80), ended up preparing Meidner’s biography in German and for a German audience after Meidner’s death. A review, which Hodin kept, overlooks tributes to Blake and art produced in London. It commends the biography as “true to life” (“lebensecht dargestellt”) and affirms that Meidner’s return to Germany allowed him to realize long-postponed plans (“lange aufgeschobene Pläne”).⁷⁸ Ignoring the nuances of Meidner’s life in exile makes perfect sense, because his return to Germany was remarkable; it came at great personal cost and must have tested Meidner’s patience. The discovery that he was still alive, related in the anecdote above, appears to have been a lucky coincidence.

74. See, for example, the letter to Hilde Rosenbaum (6/7 Nov. 1948) where he reflects that he ought to have returned to Breslau, where he had attended the Royal School of Arts and Crafts (1903–05), and that the years in Berlin, where he studied and worked until 1935, had wasted his talents (Breuer and Wagemann 2: 477–78).

75. “Ich bin überzeugt, daß, wäre ich nicht Maler und wäre nicht Hitler gekommen, ich hätte mein Schreiben steigern können und wäre ein guter Schriftsteller geworden” (see Buchholz).

76. “I can read and write but cannot hold a proper conversation; from the beginning I felt a deep antipathy toward this language and when I talk with English people I speak a mixture of French, German, and English” (“Ich kann lesen u. schreiben, aber schlecht konversieren; ich hatte von Anfang an eine tiefgehende Antipathie gegen diese Sprache u. rede mit Engländern ein Gemisch von Französisch, Deutsch u. Englisch”) (letter to Wolf Bergmann, 20 Mar. 1950, Stadtarchiv Darmstadt, ST 45/67 Meidner Nr. 113).

77. Breuer and Wagemann 2: 487.

78. See “Erinnerungen an Ludwig Meidner.”

According to Grochowiak, Meidner was there only because two friends from Recklinghausen, who were collecting his works (“zwei Recklinghäuser Freunde, die Bilder von Meidner sammelten”) had given him a lift so that he could attend. Similarly exceptional is perhaps the fact that Hodin reduced the fourteen years in England to the topics of isolation and poverty. The perception of Meidner as neglected and uncompromising does not do justice to his productivity in the 1940s; newly invigorated creativity was, in fact, the impetus for contacting Hodin in the first place.

35 As argued above, Blake was part of Meidner’s strategy for getting noticed in London; in Meidner’s collaboration with Hodin, however, Blake became shorthand for “mystic Meidner.” Meidner was interested in satire and humor and was certainly inspired by Hogarth and Rowlandson, but in Hodin’s writing (and especially his biography, as I have shown), the English influence is reduced to just Blake. Hodin’s tailoring of references to suit Blake’s German reception also needs to be contextualized more broadly; in 1975, shortly after the publication of *Ludwig Meidner*, Werner Hofmann organized a major Blake exhibition at the Kunsthalle in Hamburg. Following the German tradition of understanding Blake as a mystical thinker rather than just a visionary artist, Hofmann included Henry Crabb Robinson’s essay from 1811 in the catalogue. He introduced Blake as a follower of Boehme, and in the reviews and publicity surrounding the exhibition emphasis is put on the mystical and religious themes in Blake’s art. In the 1970s, attempts to see Blake as a radical and political thinker were almost nonexistent in Germany.⁷⁹

36 I first came across a connection between Meidner and Blake in Dieter Hoffmann’s review of the 1975 Blake exhibition.⁸⁰ Tracing Meidner’s relations with Blake in the context of both Blake’s German reception—before and after Meidner’s exile—and the Blake revival in England in the 1940s has been a fruitful endeavor in that this case study has allowed for unraveling the intertwining strands in his reception of Blake.⁸¹ Meidner understood, of course, that Blake was not a mystic, and yet it was this quality in Blake’s works that appealed to him. He could have read about Blake in Rudolf Kassner’s *Die Mystik, die Künstler und das Leben* (1900) and Adolf Knoblauch’s *William Blake: Ein Umriss seines Lebens und seiner Gesichte* (1925) and would have honed his understanding when he had the opportunity to

79. For the perception of Blake in the context of exhibitions in Germany, see Erle, “The Reception of Blake’s Art in Germany” 261, 281-84.

80. Erle, “The Reception of Blake’s Art in Germany” 284.

81. Meidner was not the only refugee from Nazi Germany who was inspired or influenced by Blake. See Erle, “The Reception of Blake’s Art in Germany” 269-70, 275, 287-89.

see original artworks at the Tate Gallery in London.⁸² Another matter is that Meidner kept abreast of Blake studies while in London. He read Todd’s edition of Gilchrist and there are two Blake-related newspaper cuttings of his in the Jüdisches Museum Frankfurt, one of which is an announcement of a radio program that included commentary by Jacob Bronowski, author of *William Blake: A Man Without a Mask* (1943).⁸³ In effect, Dieter Hoffmann’s claim that Meidner was influenced by Blake cements the idea, whereas the reality is slightly more complicated. The 1975 exhibition, part of Werner Hofmann’s “Kunst um 1800” series, changed the perception of Blake in Germany: “Though not all commentators recognized it at the time, the very presence of Blake on an equal footing with the most important Romantic artists made it clear that he was a serious artist in his own right, and that his art was as significant in its own way as his poetry” (Bindman 259). It marked the shift to more interest in Blake’s political and radical ideas. The stories of Ludwig and Else Meidner, as presented in Hodin’s biographies of 1973 and 1979, bear testimony to how two artists who lived in England and Germany in the mid-twentieth century talked about Blake and his visions.

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82. Erle, “The Reception of Blake’s Art in Germany” 263-64, 288.

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