

KOHELETIAN SPATIOTEMPORAL SENSIBILITY IN JOACHIM RINGELNATZ'S GEHEIMES KINDER-VERWIRR-BUCH

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Abstract: This article explicates the theistic dimension of the popular poet Joachim Ringelnatz's poetology through a spatio-temporal analysis of *Geheimes Kinder-Verwirr-Buch* (Secret Children's Confusing Book, 1931). In criticism and literary scholarship, Ringelnatz has often been criticized for his alleged superficiality and triviality. The analysis demonstrates how Ringelnatz's seemingly trivial preoccupation with profane everyday life and his supposedly naive delight in quotidian banalities manifests his specific, chronosensible and topophilic faith, which is rooted in the propaedeutics of the biblical wisdom book *Ecclesiastes*. Contrary to the alleged superficiality, his poems reveal a theological depth: echoing the preacher Kohelet, Ringelnatz emphasizes the spatial, microcosmic smallness of the reader within the macrocosm created by God, as well as their passive situatedness within the negative, earthly, and profane temporality that inevitably leads to suffering and death. Ringelnatz not only shares with Kohelet a heightened sensitivity to temporal existence and its consequent evaluation as afflictive, but also assimilates Kohelet's suggested response to this existential suffering - a call for attentiveness to the (un)ordinary spatiality of profane everydayness and consequent religious joy in the sensual pleasures mediated by space as a gift from God. While Ringelnatz's affinity for bodily profanity, which contradicts the conventional Christian sublimation of corporeality, overshadowed the distinctly Christian tonality of his work, this affinity for (through Ringelnatz's lens) God-manifesting bodily existence turns out to be consonant with the Koheletian inclinations of his subjective faith. Like Kohelet, Ringelnatz strives for the consecration of the profane everydayness. His popularity thus potentially stems not only from his distinctive humor but also from his empathetic addressing of the universal existential issue of being in time.

Keywords: Joachim Ringelnatz, *Geheimes Kinder-Verwirr-Buch*, spatiotemporal analysis, reception of *Ecclesiastes*, Koheletian intertext.

1. Introduction: On Joachim Ringelnatz's reception and faith

Joachim Ringelnatz (Hans Gustav Böttcher, 1883-1934) remains one of the most published interwar poets in Germany. Yet the author has been largely neglected by literary scholars, as Möbus critically examines in his 2000 study on Ringelnatz's scholarly marginalisation: Since 1920, Ringelnatz became known for his comic poetry, characterized by obscene humor that provoked bourgeois morals. The overwhelming critical focus on the burlesque aspect of his writing has overshadowed the nuanced layers of meaning in his work, resulting in a popularized image of the author as a trivial entertainer who lacks intellectual depth (167).

To counter such a simplistic view, Möbus underlines not only Ringelnatz's sociopolitical critique, but also his affinity for biblical symbolism (173-174). Similarly, in the only Ringelnatz monograph to date, Pape emphasizes the central role of Christian faith (290-295) for an author whose autobiography (1928) praises "gratitude and [...] fear of God" as the most cherished virtues (2022 791), whose poem *Winterflug 1929* (Winter Flight 1929) refers to God as a saving companion (2015 454), and whose personal correspondence reveals an Old Testament-like perception of a God who punishes directly in everyday life (Pape 292). It is in the context of this faith that his pseudonym takes on special significance. While *Ringelnatz* alludes to the German naval slang term for a seahorse (*Ringelnass*) and thus by analogy refers to the author's distinctive nose – his most recognisable "cliché" (Schmidt-Möbus) – *Joachim* echoes the Hebrew name *Yehoyakim*, meaning 'God will establish' (cf. Pape 292).

The following study elucidates Ringelnatz's particular, chronosensible and tophophilic modality of faith as a significant Christian depth of his poetology. While the author is known to a broad audience primarily as the subversive and profanely comic *Ringelnatz*, our analysis seeks to contribute to an understanding of the author as *Joachim*, who in his little-known drama *Der Flieger* (The Airman, 1918) articulates that "everything is created/ or tolerated by God" (1982 117) and whose personal correspondence warns of the overlooking God, against whom "all human power is nothing" (1988 86).

Ringelnatz's affinity for Rabelaisian corporeality conflicts with the biblical "your nakedness may not be exposed" (Exodus 20:26, also 3:5).¹

¹ For Ringelnatz's assimilation of Rabelaisian corporeality, see my articles "A Bakhtinian Reconsideration of Joachim Ringelnatz's Postwar Poetry: Grotesque materialism instead of disinterested unresponsiveness" (*Orbis Litterarum*, 2022, v. 7, i. 3) and "Die groteske Körperlichkeit des Joachim Ringelnatz in

In *Alte Winkelmauer* (Old corner wall, 1927), the lyrical subject earnestly experiences the divine while urinating: "Old wall, which I often wet, [...]. Heavenly sparkle is present/ In your pallor" (2015 285). Similarly, his children's prayer (1929) conjoins God with urination: "Dear God, goodnight / I just took a quick wee-wee" (405). In *Wenn ich allein bin* (When I am alone, 1920), the prayer motif merges with the act of farting (131). This linking of the sacred with profane bodily life corresponds to the author's anticlericalism (see the poem Chartres [272] or his autobiography [2017 476]).

Pape reconstructs Ringelnatz's faith as inherently infantile (291), not only celebrating "paradisiacal" naiveté of childhood but also attributing childlike qualities to God (294), as in *Der Flieger*, where God is engaged in play, free of responsibility and therewith childish:

God
Has no duty. He has the fullest power,
From playfulness, as from righteous wrath
To torment us eternally, unthinkably hard. (1982 117)

This notion of a childlike God sheds light on Ringelnatz's pursuit of a childlike playfulness with profanity. By imagining God as a creating (playing) child, the author, who describes himself as a "too old child" (2015 131), mimics this divine childishness and plays with social norms with adult awareness but childlike unconstraint. Such playfulness is evident in his two *dual-audience* books, in which he undertakes the "crosswriting [of] child and adult", blurring the conventional boundaries between the systems of children's and adult literature with the intention of addressing both audiences differently but with equal attention through the same texts (Beckett xiv): The *Geheimes Kinder-Spiel-Buch* (Secret Children's Gamebook, 1924), which contributed greatly to Ringelnatz's fame at the period, contains explicit content and lack of moralism typical of children's literature. The Berlin police generated considerable negative publicity by requiring the publisher to label each copy with a warning that the book is suitable only for adults (cf. Büttner

Nervosipopel" (Slowakische Zeitschrift für Germanistik, v. 13, i. 2). Throughout the article, the concept of corporeality is implied in a Rabelaisian and Bakhtinian sense: As the material and bodily dimension of being that stands in opposition to the fluctuating ideational sphere of abstract thought. Ringelnatz's prioritization of body over abstract theologizing is an act of Christian materialism, congruent with the Koheletian elements of his poetics - an attentiveness to sensory experience as God-given and a foresight toward the abstracting human intellect.

123). Its narrator does not assume the role of an instructive adult but rather becomes an infantile accomplice to children in their rebellion against the adult world, as exemplified by the line "You shouldn't be afraid. Because mine and yours/parents can --- do you know what I mean?!?" (2015 198). While the children's readers are encouraged to subvert the social norms of their morally inferior adult authorities, the adult reader is made aware of his (subverted) conventional authority over his child counterpart, as well as of the fact that all children's literature must be (dis)approved by an adult reader from their position of power (Shavit 84).

The second dual-audience book, *Geheimes Kinder-Verwirr-Buch* (Secret Children's Confusing Book, 1931) has a more restrained tone and avoids vulgar language. However, it still contains anti-pedagogical elements ("Think about it: five children are enough/ to knock out a grandmother" [1985 36]) and profane moments ("the exact difference between men and women/ is visible through the keyhole" [29]). As a result, contemporary critics, in keeping with the adult authority over the child that had been the subject of the previous children's book, ascribed to it a "pathological tendency" and a decadence that posed a danger to the younger generation (Büttner 132). In contrast to the first book, however, the narrator here undergoes only partial infantilization, remaining a wise and instructive adult (uncle) figure: "That Uncle Ringelnatz has become meanwhile/a heart-drunk child" (25). Instead of engaging in subversive play alongside children, he repeatedly appeals with an ambivalent ethical *wisdom*. Particularly in the final tale, the significance of wisdom applies to every action undertaken in life, as the hero, who longs to fly and swim, learns from a bird that "flying is beautiful, but you have to learn and understand it" (2018 61), and from a fish that "swimming has to be learned" (62).²

While the humor of Ringelnatz's dual-audience books has occupied their commentators with the question of their (dis)affiliation to the system of children's literature (Detken, Büttner, Gernhardt), the second book contains Ringelnatz's hitherto unexplored propaedeutics (only Gernhardt briefly emphasizes its Christian undertones [65]), which sheds light on the authors' religious axiology: Since for Ringelnatz children are morally superior to adults, his playbook encourages their liberation from the secular system of social norms of their inferior authority. However, as the second book shows, they still need a sacred wisdom to prepare them for their transition to adulthood - a wisdom

² All excerpts from *Vom Anderen aus lerne die Welt* begreifen are from a translation by Jack Zipes.

that, with its existential angst, does not fit into the conventional system of children's literature and its adult projection of childhood as an "idyll" of a lost paradise (Nikolajeva 74). Thus, the author has the task of crossing the border into adult literature by dealing with the painful and dark themes from which adult culture conventionally protects young readers (ibid.).

The spatiotemporal analysis of Ringelnatz's 'wisdom-book' reveals his faith as characterized not only by an affinity for childishness (Pape), but also by the resonance of *Ecclesiastes* and the subsequent temporal sensibility and topophilism, demonstrating an appreciative attentiveness to the mundane and present space as God's gift and creation: Explicating earthly existence to children as marked by transience, suffering, and incomprehensibility, Ringelnatz, echoing Kohelet, encourages readers to reciprocate the sorrowful human condition with a "joyous reveiling in the sensory details of commonplace joys" (Duncan 148-149).

2. The spatially insignificant subject within the profane temporality

With the phrase "under the sun" (*Ecclesiastes* 2:14), Kohelet reminds the reader twenty-nine times of their microcosmic insignificance before God (Crenshaw 70). The sun serves as a spatial (distant and unreachable) reminder that the subject represents only a peripheral part of the world, while God's act of creation encompasses its macrocosmic entirety. A similar use of the sun motif as a reminder of the subject's spatial diminutiveness is evident in *the Book of Hiob* and its allegory of an inaccessible way, with which God emphasizes man's lack of knowledge of "the way to the dwelling of light" (*Hiob* 38:19) and "the way to the place where the light is distributed" (*Hiob* 38:24). In *Bist du schon auf der Sonne gewesen?* (Have you been to the sun yet?), the narrator encourages to embark precisely on such an impossible journey: "[...] walk slowly and calmly/ Always directly towards the sun" (1985 38). But instead of the desired reach, the reader is implicitly reminded of his inability to transcend the God-imposed spatial limits: "And if you can no longer reach the sun,/Then it's better for now,/That you sneak home again" (ibid.). Like *Ecclesiastes* and *Hiob*, Ringelnatz underscores the earthly dwelling within the vastness of the cosmic realm as confined by God-ordained spatial boundaries.

God admonishes Hiob that He has enveloped the world in an incomprehensible "thick darkness" (*Hiob* 38:9) over which he has stretched a "gate" (*Hiob* 38:17) inaccessible to mortals. In allusion to this passage, *Die neuen Fernen* (The new faraways) describes the vastness of

cosmos and presents the reader with such an incomprehensible “darkness” that governs the universe and possesses a “gate”:

In the stratosphere, to the left of the entrance,
there is a gate,
[....]
There you can see far and wide
nothing. Because darkness reigns there.” (1985 49).

Kohelet's phrase “under the sun” serves not only as a spatial but also as a temporal (rising and setting) reminder of the subject's insignificance (Crenshaw 70-73), i.e., it emphasizes one's total immersion “in the grip of profane time” (Janzen 474), moving toward inevitable death and, governed by the unattainable sun (macrocosm), radically beyond human control. Likewise *Emanuel Pips* underscores the fact that no one “has power over the day of death” (Ecclesiastes 8: 8) and that its radicality cannot be influenced even by one's moral qualities (Ecclesiastes 9:2): The poem culminates in the sudden and succinct (one-verse) death of the amiable (“modest and kind” [1985 31]) figure who “ate potato chips once a day,/drank alcohol-free saltwater flips,/became sick to his stomach despite it all/and died of tipsiness” (ibid.).

Similarly, *Hexenkind* (Witch child) tells of the death of an amiable blind orphan girl. However, while the Old Testament presents death primarily as an absurdity to be countered by placing trust in God's incomprehensible plan (Weaver 15-32), Ringelnatz, as a Christian, imbues death with the New Testament's mortal optimism (Weaver 38; Jenks 2-5), i.e. with Paul's “you may not grieve as others do who have no hope” (Thessalonians 4: 13b) and his exhortation to “give thanks in all circumstances” (5:18), which follows his appeal to see death in a redemptive light: The poem's heroine dies with a smile and gratitude. Ringelnatz centralizes the motif of the physical touch of the blind, alluding to Jesus' miraculous healing of the blind (Matthew 20:30-34), echoing the “metaphor for the gift of new sight that people sought and received from Jesus” (Weaver 33). In intertextual juxtaposition with Christ's ministry, this *sight* enables the dying heroine to accept death with gratitude, in keeping with the Christian ideal of surrender to God's will:

Pale and weak in her little bed
Lay to die one day, the sick
And silent, blind Ilse Watt
Smiled as if from another world
And spoke to a nurse,

Who stroked her hair,
Still loud and happy: 'I am thankful'". (1985 28)

Overall, Ringelnatz embraces the Koheletian centralization of death, but proposes a joyful Christian response to this underscored existential fact.

To cultivate the reader's sensitivity to his profane temporality, Kohelet emphasizes not only the inevitability of death but also the burdensome reality of aging (cf. Crenshaw 77-79), advising to "[r]emember your creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come, and the years approach when you will say, 'I find no pleasure in them'" (Ecclesiastes 12:1). Ringelnatz also urges recognition of one's (potential) temporal position in youth. In *Geplapper an Grosspapa* (Babbling to Grandpa), the child narrator remains oblivious to life's transience, engaging his grandfather in a conversation about physical suffering and impending death in an inappropriately cheerful tone, his blissful ignorance underscored by his comically unwavering self-assurance:

Grandpa, oh, you're stupid!
Because you don't understand anything.
Grandpa, how crooked you are,
When you walk!
And you tremble all the time
Like a cardboard forest.
Grandpa, when are you going to die?
Will you die soon? (1985 48)

However, in *Doch ihre Sterne kannst du nicht verschieben* (But you can't move their stars), such childlike ignorance of profane temporality figures as a temporary state, inevitably disrupted as children gradually become aware of their surroundings. Initially, "Children buzz through their years like flies. - Not knowing where they are" (65). But as they gradually come to realize the sufferings of mortal and transient existence - recognizing the central Koheletan premise that "it is an unhappy business that God has given to human beings to be busy with" (Ecclesiastes 1:12) – a painful realization dawns upon them. As the futility of human existence derives not only from its brevity but also from its intellectual inarticulacy (cf. Crenshaw 99) – "no one can comprehend what goes on under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 3:9) – the second verse of the following excerpt also highlights the distressing realization of life's absurd incomprehensibility:

The child must learn, must experience bitterly.

Does not know what is it good for.
 Just hears: that's the way it has to be.
 And one pain after another comes
 Into the floating little chest.
 Until the breast lowers
 And the child thinks. (1985 65)

The adolescence as an initiation into a conscious relationship with the afflictions of mortal existence is so life-defining that it leads Kohelet to conclude that being "stillborn" is preferable to a life of sorrow (Ecclesiastes 6:3). The state of blissful ignorance of infants in *Babies* contrasts precisely with such existential awareness:

You [babies] are travelling like passengers.
 And if the ship drowns with you,
 Then you are baptised deep into heaven,
 Innocent, happy animals. (1985 14)

The primary virtue attributed to prematurely deceased infants is their innocence, a state that is inevitably lost in the transition to conscious adult life (Ecclesiastes 7:20). Particularly the last verses emphasize the poems' biblical referentiality:

That your nappies are like sails,
 You children don't know that yet.
 You don't care about your own wind,
 For the foreign wind, for the foreign light. (ibid.)

Ringelnatz's affinity to the Old Testament is evident in his incorporation of the wind motif, which also finds resonance in *Ecclesiastes*, where, as the Hebrew term *ruah*, it encompasses the intertwined meanings of material "wind," "breath," and "spirit" (Crenshaw 35, 45). Ringelnatz alludes to *ruah* as the life (breath) that God breathed into man (Genesis 2:7a), but also to the wind as a determinant of existence in the context of Kohelet's perspective, since *Ecclesiastes* characterizes existence as "chasing after wind" nine times (e.g., *Ecclesiastes* 1:17). Hence, the deceased infants are not concerned with the *wind* as the futility inherent in transient ambitions with which mortals occupy their earthly time (ibid.). Parallely, the light-motif refers to the New Testament. While Jesus brought humanity "the light of life" (John 8:12) as a way out of darkness, the prematurely deceased infants do not have to exert themselves to follow Jesus, but enter directly into redemption, symbolized by their baptism deep into heaven. Ringelnatz not only aligns with Kohelet in emphasizing the conscious relationship

to profane temporality as burdensome (Ecclesiastes 9:2), but also in viewing the state of unconsciousness as potentially more positive.

3. Gods all-seeing gaze

Kohelet emphasizes that human existence takes place within the framework of God's omniscience, "[f]or God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether good or evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:14). *Nie bist du ohne Nebendir* (You are never alone) echoes this sentiment by stressing the futility of hiding anything from God's all-seeing gaze:

You are seen and overheard everywhere.
[...]
What you conceal,
What you do not show to others,
What your mouth speaks
And your hand does,
It all comes to light.
You should behave good regardless. (1985 20)

This propadeutic passage underscores the importance of thoughtful speech in a morally governed (divine) world, echoing the Kohelet's admonition: "Never be rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be quick to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven, and you upon earth; [...]" (Ecclesiastes 5:2). Moreover, the light allegory in the penultimate verse alludes to the similar admonition in Luke 8:17, where "nothing is hidden that will not be revealed, nor is anything secret that will not become known and come to light" (Luke 8:17).

The emphasis on God's all-seeing nature culminates in *Kind, spiele!* (Child, play!), in which Ringelnatz recontextualizes Koheleth's allegory that all human actions are "in the hand of God" (Ecclesiastes 9:1). The playing child, in accordance with Ringelnatz's subjective *childlike God* (Pape 291), becomes a toy – an object held in the hand – of the playing God:

Play! – But always remain
Kind to everything you play with.
Because everything (even dead objects)
looks at your heart more than your hands.
And because all people (including you, my child)
are toys of the dear God. (1985 16)

In stark contrast to the decadent tendencies attributed to the book by contemporary criticism, it presents not only a theistic perception of

the world as inherently ethical (subject to God's judgment), but also, as the poems alluding to *Genesis* show, an optimistic view of temporality as conducive to divine forgiveness. Pape astutely observes that Ringelnatz's subject is not a plaything of the demonic but a familiar God (Pape 294), whose forgiveness correlates with his childlike qualities. In *Schlängelchen* (Little Snake), the biblical serpent enters the heavenly realm. The 'childish' diminutive recontextualizes the archetypal sinner into a positive "Schlängelchen", resulting in his infantilization, forgiveness, and ascent:

The little angel liked the little snake
and wanting to help,
said piously:
Come! (1985 19).

Corresponding to this divine forgiveness is the appeal to individual empathy in *Beinchen* (Little Legs), which ends with an ethical plea for compassion toward the legless serpent, thus echoing God's punishment of the serpent by reducing it to a crawling creature (Genesis 3:14): "All legs are happy/poor, poor snake!" (1985 17). While human life is characterized by the eventual attainment of divine forgiveness, the reader is urged to imbue their earthly time with empathy in the image of the 'childlike' (ultimately empathetic) God.

3. Rejoicing as a religious response to the afflictive temporal being

Koheleth's recognition of life's absurd incomprehensibility results into critical attitude toward mortal intellect (Ecclesiastes 3:9): "The more words, the more vanity" (Ecclesiastes 6:11; 2:16-18). This anti-intellectual sentiment finds resonance in *Kinder weinen* (Children cry), which asserts that "Stupid know/[...]/Wise go into the garden" (1985 41). While both Ringelnatz and Kohelet associate a fixation on the human wisdom with stupidity, Ringelnatz's wise individuals seek solace in the garden as a biblical topos of creation that facilitates the enjoyment of world as God's creation. Thus, Ringelnatz parallels Koheleth's call to find joy in the surrounding space rather than distancing oneself from God's creation by relying too much on one's limited intellectual capacities (Lee 110).

Kohelet's recognition of the futility of human intellectual pursuits serves as an invitation to cultivate a theological awareness that embraces the attentiveness to being in the present moment as a "religious responsibility" (49): Mortals are incapable of comprehending the God's creation but can only experience it in the present moment (43). It is a God-given capacity for perception that compels them to

appreciate their surroundings as a “gift of God” (Ecclesiastes 5:19), that is, to rejoice in the fact that “[l]ight is sweet, and it is pleasant for the eyes to see the sun” (Ecclesiastes 11:7). Such revelry in God’s space through sensory experiences is exemplified by the narrator in *Kindersand* (Children’s sand). The recurring biblical motif of the nose as the organ through which God breathed life into humankind (Genesis 2:7) alludes to the Genesis creation narrative.:

The best thing for children is sand.
[...]
Because you keep your nose,
When you fall on it,
It’s so soft.
Children’s fingers feel it,
When they dig in it,
Nothing and the kingdom of heaven. (1985 39)

The child in this subject-object (human-sand) relationship possesses an intuitive ability to experience God’s creation (the kingdom of heaven) through their receptive senses (touch). God’s syncretic and perfect design, alluded to not only by the *nose* motif but also by the *sand*, which symbolizes the immanent God-created world and its abundant splendor (Psalm 140:18, Jeremiah 6:22), allows for a harmonious connection between the subject and the spatial surrounding. The perceptual and sensory nature of this relationship with the divine but mundane space is emphasized by the motif of touch: “There’s always plenty of it [sand]/ It runs incomparably /Tenderly through the hand” (1985 39). The God’s design, which makes the human-object contact possible, represents the embodiment of His *power* (“Macht”, [ibid.]). In accordance with Ringelnatz’s reverence, this power is no laughing matter. While the narrator in the religiously non-appellative poems encourages children to laugh (“And if it succeeds,/You will laugh” [24]), the recognition of God’s power represents, in contrast, a serious moment of humility: “For no child laughs / Over grinding power “ (39).

Following Kohelet, Ringelnatz correlates humility and the fear of God with the religious duty of an appreciative enjoyment stemming from the attentiveness to profane and non-intellectual sensual pleasures, thus recontextualizing Ecclesiastes 11:9 (Lee 127):

Rejoice, young man, while you are young, and let your
heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Follow the
inclination of your heart and the desire of your eyes, but know

that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.
(Ecclesiastes 11:9)

In *Kind, spiele!* the cautionary acknowledgment of God's providence is preceded by an exhortation to a joyous play:

Child, play!
Play coachman and horse!
Play the drums! - Build lots of
houses and cars! - (1985 16).

In *Nie bist du ohne Nebendir*, the warning of God's omniscience and final judgment is preceded by an invitation to observe the remarkable microcosmic details of God's corporeal design:

Gonococcus tick.
Small morels echo.
Pores are just ears.
All vesicles look. (20)

In *Beinchen*, alluding to the Genesis creation narrative, the reader is encouraged to appreciatively embrace their corporeal existence – to rejoice in the sensual pleasure of having legs:

Little legs want to stand.
Little legs want to walk,
Twist and turn in dance.
Little legs want to rest.
Little legs want to spread,
Want to spread their charms
Every chance they get
[...] (1985 17)

Such encouragements to enjoy sensory experiences are also present in poems without explicit religious appellation or biblical intertextuality. *Kinder, spielt mit einer Zwirnsrolle!* (Kids, play with a roll of twine!) invites children to play with their buttocks, while *Unter Wasser Bläschen machen* (Making bubbles under water) invites the pleasure of farting. In his focus on the spatial microcosm of the human body, the comic *Ringelnatz*, a celebrant of bodily profanity, intersects with *Joachim*, a celebrator of God's manifestation in the God-created *small worlds*, as he programmatically calls them in his first book from 1910:

Hand nestles against hand in a tight circle,
And the old song of God and Christ

Trembles through souls and softly proclaims,
That the smallest world is the greatest. (2015 51)

Ringelnatz's mindful enjoyment of the small worlds of sensory experiences also applies to the act of eating, which Kohelet promotes as an exemplary sensual pleasure, since "it is God's gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil" (Ecclesiastes 3:13, also 9:7). In *Silvester bei den Kannibalen* (New Year's Eve with the cannibals), where cannibals feast on children, the sensory nature of consumption is emphasized through olfactory imagery ("Smells almost like Borchardt cuisine/only more of coconut fat and palmin" [1985 45]) and corporeal references ("The bellies rolled,/The cheeks breaded " [ibid.]). However, in keeping with the books' ethical and admonitory nature, the cannibalistic feast does not result in lasting pleasure. A sense of compassion, previously conveyed in the poems *Nie bist du ohne Nebendir*, *Beinchen* and *Schlängelchen*, awakens in the cannibals after the satisfaction of their instinctual urges: "Then they think of the slaughtered little ones/with melancholy and then start to cry" (45).

4. Learn to Grasp the World from Others as a cautionary tale

The book's concluding fairy tale, *Learn to Grasp the World from Others*, in which Ringelnatz processes his autobiographical trauma of estrangement from father (Pape 84-87), functions as a cautionary recontextualization of Kohelet's teaching. Building on the preacher's notion of happiness as a religious duty, achieved through a sensitive engagement with the world as God's creation and a profound awareness of life's brevity, Ringelnatz creates a narrative warning of the detrimental consequences of living without these essential insights. While Kohelet warns against the "seductive lure" of constantly striving for something better while disregarding the pleasures of one's immediate surroundings (Lee 127), the protagonist Schelich remains oblivious to the transient nature of life and severs ties with his father, intending to reconnect only after he can impress him with his social and financial achievements. According to Kohelet, appreciating the presence of a loved one is an indispensable element of joyful attention to the present moment (Ecclesiastes 9:8). Schelich's decision to separate himself from his father deprives him of this profoundly important source of earthly joy: His father dies before he can achieve his validation-seeking goal.

In an attempt to dispel his father's skepticism about his aspirations to become both a pilot and a sailor, Schelich embarks on two travels to earn his father's admiration: "Within a few years he became an

esteemed pilot. [...] But he never sent his father the slightest sign that he was alive. He only wanted to contact him when he had amassed a fortune through his own efforts" (2018 61). Likewise, after his second departure, Schelich "didn't send a single message home, even though he had an even greater longing to see his father than he had when he had been a pilot. He wanted to be regarded as missing and simply wanted to work hard until he could return to his father as a captain" (62). Schelich's desire to impress his father constitutes his seductive lure that draws his attention away from a relationship in the now-time and here-space. The finite nature of earthly existence is underscored through a recurring motif of time, which first appears when the father discourages Schelich from pursuing his desired profession, saying: "I'll give you as much time as you want to reflect" (ibid.).

When Schelich's returns from his first journey because he "yearned to see his father," the Koheletian theme of aging becomes apparent: "Meanwhile Schelich was quite shocked to see how much his father had aged. Indeed, he became more serious and pensive" (61). After his second departure, Schelich does become a successful captain, but the Koheletian theme of the brevity of earthly life permeates the story with the fathers' death. The existential sense of being trapped in a concrete, vividly felt, and profane temporality is underscored by the explicit specification of the time lapsed from passing:

On the day that he [Schelich] received his promotion to captain, a young boy from his home town reported to him. [...] [H]e brought Schelich the news that Emanuel Assup [the father] had died six months ago. Suddenly a painful feeling overcame the son. [...] When he reached his father's grave, he fell to his knees and sobbed bitterly. (62)

Schelich's desire to impress his father upon his return as a highly accomplished individual remains unfulfilled due to the passing of time, leaving no one to impress. Consequently, the story ends not only with the protagonists' poignant realization of the fleeting nature of earthly existence, but also with an acknowledgement of the human inability to exert control over the future, respectively the fact that "[n]o one knows what is to happen, and who can tell anyone what the future holds?" (Ecclesiastes 10:14). The tragic final scene accentuates the Koheletian theme of the passage of time in space. Whereas Schelich previously used to visit a particular place to feed a pet turtle, he now encounters its lifeless remains "on its old spot" (2018 62).

While the storyline of the father-son relationship thematizes life's transience, Schelich's dialogues with anthropomorphic animals emphasize the importance of filling temporal life with a sensory

awareness of space. Happiness, often depicted as attained through marriage or wealth, is a pervasive theme in classical fairy tales (Rölleke). Similarly, Ringelnatz's cautionary tale depicts a quest for happiness: Following his father's instruction, Schelich explicitly strives to "find a [...] secure happiness" (2018 60). However, despite the recurring motif of happiness and its explicit pursuit, the conventional fairy-tale happiness remains elusive, because Schelich fails to attend to his immediate surroundings in the present moment. Throughout his pursuit, Schelich asks anthropomorphized birds and fish if they are happy, and the animals consistently answer in the affirmative, implicitly attributing their happiness to their sensory engagement with their surrounding spatiality:

Schelich asked the birds, 'Are you happy?' 'Yes! Yes! It's wonderful to fly and hunt over high towers, tree tops and mountain peaks, through the bright changing clouds, to climb against the wind, to be carried by the gales, to stop and sway, to let yourself fall from steep heights, and then right before crashing, to spread your clutching wings and to sing freely.' (60).

Schelich asked the fishes: 'Are you happy?'/ 'Yes! Yes! It's wonderful to be washed so gently and softly by the cool tides, to be carried by the currents and to dive deep into a dark realm where wonders glitter, to travel without drowning through high waves, through whirlpools and sizzling squalls, to dart ahead and to enjoy the cool flow of the water.' (61-62).

In contrast to Schelich, the anthropomorphic animals "take pleasure in all their toil" (Ecclesiastes 3:13) because they are not burdened by self-centered goals, nor by preoccupation with the past (conflict with the father) or the future (desire to impress the father). According to Kohelet, the ability to remember the past and focus on the future is one of man's major burdens bestowed by God (Ecclesiastes 3:10). The animals in the story represent a perceptual ideal because they are freed from these burdensome temporal fixations and thus fully embrace the sensory experiences offered by the present space in the current time: They engage wholeheartedly in soaring through the air and feeling the water, surrendering to the wonder of God's creation, as indicated by the biblical motif of *wonder* in the fish's utterance.

Schelich's endeavor to imitate the animals, symbolized by his role as a pilot and sailor, underscores his yearning for happiness. However, his failure to grasp the significance of being attentively present in the wondrous spatial existence, advocated by the anthropomorphic

animals, renders his imitation futile. Rather than focusing on the present joys, his desire to impress his father diverts his attention from the fundamental Koheletian notion of the world as a divine gift to be cherished through attentiveness. His internal struggle hinders his ability to be fully present in here-space, whether it is his father's house or the skies through which he flies: "Sometimes he thought he would die because he yearned to see his father so much. Moreover, he began to lose interest in his profession which didn't satisfy him anymore" (62).

While the anthropomorphized animals remind Schelich that happiness can be achieved through proper *understanding* (61, 62), he has squandered the temporally limited opportunity to attain the Koheletian, mindful approach to existence - experiencing spatial joys and cherishing the presence of a loved one. His missed opportunity for happiness is allegorically reflected in the silence of the animals upon hearing the news of his father's death - the happiness promising fairy tale is deactivated, and happiness is thus unattainable:

Now Schelich wandered about in despair. He asked the birds and the fishes why they were so happy and why he wasn't happy. However, the birds and the fishes didn't answer him anymore. So he finally set about ordering his father's estate and felt immensely lonely. (62)

The tale concludes with a poignant pre-death letter from the father, who imparts his advice to Schelich: "Learn to grasp the world from others" (2018 63). In the context of the story, the *others* are the anthropomorphized animals who articulate the wisdom of attentiveness to here and now. Their ultimate lack of response after Schelich's time lost, symbolizing the unattainability of happiness, underscores the urgency of Koheletian message: The sooner one realizes the importance of attention to time and space, the sooner one can use one's limited earthly time for productive (attentive, appreciative and relationship-focused) engagement with the spatial existence (Lee 62). Interestingly, Ringelnatz's juxtaposition of the fish and bird motifs can be read as an allusion to Kohelet's pronouncement on fate's brevity and unpredictability - themes central to Schelich's ending: "Like fish taken in a cruel net, and like birds caught in a snare, so mortals are snared at a time of calamity, when it suddenly falls upon them" (Ecclesiastes 9:12).

5. Concluding remarks

The popularity of Ringelnatz's works and their easy accessibility in commercial bookstores throughout the German-speaking countries can be attributed not only to his distinctive and obscene humor, but also to

his affinity for and congruence with the extraordinarily famous biblical book of wisdom, whose fame derives from its empathetic portrayal of the universal existential experience as well as its ability to address the innate anthropological need to face the hardships of existence with a mindful joy of attentiveness and acceptance (cf. Christianson 256-258). Ringelnatz's concentrated delight in small to microcosmic pleasures - his "childlike amazement at things of the world" (Pape 147) - has often been characterized in criticism as his personal and trivial 'philosophy' (ibid.). For example, Colin Butler characterizes Ringelnatz's poetry as a compendium of banalities and uncomplicated sentiments (164-166). However, recognizing Ringelnatz's joy in the world as a religiously motivated response to its burden, inseparable from his specific chrono-sensitive and topo-philic faith, reveals the profound theistic complexity of his joyful and Koheletian admiration of everyday profane spaces. The allegedly *depthless* author (Butler 1970) is, in fact, a religious dialogue partner whose work is not superficial (ibid.) but possesses a theistic depth. His playfulness is not self-intentional and thus superficial, but a recontextualizing continuation of Kohelet's call to enjoyment, in which, as in *Ecclesiastes*, the joy is simultaneously trivialized and elevated to allow for the consecration of the profane everydayness (Lee 129).

Ringelnatz's poems cannot be dismissed as negatively meaningless, as suggested by Colin Butler with regard to *Die neuen Fernen* (162), because they derive their meanings from the conveyance of an unconventional call for a theistic sensibility toward temporal and spatial being, in the scope of which especially the mundane existence is positively experienced as the greatest gift of God. Ringelnatz's provocative nature, his challenging of bourgeois society, and his effort to transfer faith from abstract dogma to the actually lived (spatiotemporal) reality position him as a religious avant-gardist whose simplicity correlates with Kohelet's skepticism towards the human intellect.

From numerous historical caricatures to contemporary book covers, Ringelnatz's depictions are inseparable from exaggerated nasal features. Yet the biblical dimension of the author's affinity for the nose, also evident in *Sand*, has remained largely concealed. By emphasizing the body part through which God breathed life into man, Ringelnatz's famous nose – a motif associated with his pseudonym – is not only a source of corporeal humor, but also signifies his self-identification as God's creation. All in all, the jovial and joy-seeking *Ringelnatz* is inseparable from the manifestation of God that *Joachim* perceives.

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KOHELETISCHE RAUMZEITLICHE SENSIBILITÄT IN JOACHIM RINGELNATZ' GEHEIMES KINDER-VERWIRR-BUCH

Die Studie untersucht die theistische Dimension der Poetologie des populären Dichters Joachim Ringelnatz anhand einer raum-zeitlichen Analyse dessen *Geheimes Kinder-Verwirr-Buch* (1931). Ringelnatz wurde von der Literaturkritik und -forschung häufig für seine vermeintliche Oberflächlichkeit und Trivialität kritisiert. Die Analyse zeigt, wie Ringelnatz' scheinbar belangloses Interesse am profanen Alltagsleben und seine vermeintlich naive Freude an Alltagsbanalitäten Manifestationen seines spezifischen, raumzeitlich sensiblen und tophilen Glaubens sind, der in der Propädeutik des biblischen Weisheitsbuches Kohelet verankert ist. Im Gegensatz zu ihrer vermeintlichen Oberflächlichkeit offenbaren seine Gedichte eine theologische Tiefe: In Anlehnung an den Prediger Kohelet betont Ringelnatz die räumliche und mikrokosmische Kleinheit des Lesers innerhalb des von Gott geschaffenen Makrokosmos ebenso wie seine passive Verortung in der negativen und profanen Zeitlichkeit, die unweigerlich zu Leid und Tod führt. Ringelnatz teilt mit Kohelet nicht nur eine gesteigerte Sensibilität für das zeitliche Dasein und dessen Bewertung als leidvoll, sondern übernimmt auch die von Kohelet vorgeschlagene Reaktion auf dieses existenzielle Leiden – einen Appell zur Achtsamkeit gegenüber der (un)gewöhnlichen Räumlichkeit des profanen Alltags und die damit einhergehende religiöse Freude an den sinnlichen

Genüssen, die der Raum als Gabe Gottes vermittelt. Ringelnatz' Vorliebe für körperliche Derbheit steht im Widerspruch zur konventionellen christlichen Sublimierung der Leiblichkeit und überdeckt so den eindeutig christlichen Ton seines Werkes. Diese Affinität zu einer (aus Ringelnatz' Sicht) Gott manifestierenden körperlichen Existenz erweist sich jedoch als konsonant mit den koheletischen Neigungen seines subjektiven Glaubens. Wie Kohelet strebt Ringelnatz nach der Konsekration des profanen Alltags. Die Popularität des Dichters mag daher nicht nur auf seinem ausgeprägten Humor beruhen, sondern auch, in Anlehnung an Kohelet, auf seiner Auseinandersetzung mit der universellen negativen existentiellen Erfahrung des Zeitseins und deren Bewältigung durch ein achtsames und optimistisches Verhältnis zum umgebenden diesseitigen Raum.

Schlüsselwörter: Joachim Ringelnatz, Geheimes Kinder-Verwirr-Buch, raumzeitliche Analyse, Rezeption von Ecclesiastes, Koheletischer Intertext