



Cat. 1 / PLURALDEO, 7.4.1904 / Pencil on document paper (double sheet) / 32.6 x 21.0 cm / Inv.Nr. 1327 fol. 1 recto

Thomas Röske

Pluraldeo Rudolf Morgenstern – A Sculptor Discovers the Script Picture

On some sheets of document paper in the Prinzhorn Collection, Greek letters are arranged with an eye to ornamental effect (cat. 1–3). The writing, done in 1904 in the psychiatric clinic of Tübingen, is reminiscent of drawings and pictures by Paul Klee between 1924–28, when he often worked with textures made up out of rows of signs of the same size (ill. 1). The Bauhaus teacher was concerned with building up pictures from elementary signs, an artistic construction of a world. What is behind these singular writing designs which have survived in the Prinzhorn Collection?

On October 17th, 1903, their author, thirty-eight-year old Rudolf Morgenstern from Cologne, was compulsorily hospitalized in Ludwigsburg by his older brother Karl with the help of the police.¹ Three months earlier, he had started sending his brother letters demanding money, in which he also called him a "traitor" and "Jewish sow". Because the letters were also "larded with chunks of Latin and Greek", doubts about the sanity of the sender arose. During a visit to Cologne it turned out that Rudolf was convinced he had made "an important discovery" which "his brother out of avarice had betrayed to the French government." The family decided to act. On a pretext the brother invited him to Göppingen and arranged for his hospitalisation which eventually led to the psychiatric university clinic of Tübingen.

On his admission, the protestant whose left elbow joint had become stiff through protracted gonorrhoea reported a worldwide Jewish conspiracy. For nine years he himself had been pursued by the wealthy Jew Gustav Kunze. He, like the Jew Silberstein, had accomplices everywhere and had "been financially involved in the assassination of the Belgian king, in the Geneva Affair, in the royal assassination in Serbia² etc." All Jews had to be destroyed "together with their money, also the villains Morgenstern Karl and Emil, both Jews, who had the impudence to call themselves his brothers".

We can find out more about his inventions in the letters Morgenstern wrote to the Emperor, the King and the Chancellor from August 1903. In one of the letters³ he saw himself as "he who has been called by God to bring back the excellent weapons of the Archangels Michael, which were lost on earth during the last Flood". He had "solved the problem of the most navigable flight vehicle, this secret! finally, by 20 systems". But "Tübingen doctors, psychiatric clinic", who kept him "captured through aspersions and their interest-addiction" had villainously delayed his work already for 1 year" – and thereby "the

III. 1 / Paul Klee
A sheet of the city
book, 1928
Oil on paper on card
and picture frame
42.5 x 31.5 cm
Öffentliche Kunst-
sammlung Basel
Kunstmuseum



Ω ΚΩΟΠΦ-ΤΟΜΟΜΦΗΝ Ω
 Ω ΓΡΥΔΗΡΑΛΓ ΒΕΙ ΔΕΝ
 Ω ΑΛΕΧΙΑΝΕΡΝ ΙΜ ΛΥΣΚΩ ΒΑΣΣΙΝΩ
 Ω ΚΩΩΣΧΑΛΙΦΕΙΣΧΕ ΞΕ ΞΣΣΚΕΕΩ
 Ω ΛΕΩΝΚΑΤΖΕΝ ΤΗ ΠΠΕΡΩ Ω ΚΕΕΓΕΕΩ
 Ω ΒΥΣΧΩΦ ΙΧΛΩ ΕΡΩ ΒΗ ΕΩ
 Ω Τ ΛΥΦΤΣΧΙΦΕ ΞΣ ΚΕΕ ΓΕΕ
 Ω ΕΡΦΙΛΔΥΚΔΕΡ
 Ω ΒΕΙΛΥΔ ΗΕΙΣΔ ΒΕΙΛΑΔΕΝ ΖΥΡΩ
 Ω ΡΥΣΣΙΣΧ ΕΝΑΧΤ ΜΑΧΤΕΡ ΜΕΤΖΤΕΡΩ
 Ω ΡΑΡΣΕΤ ΡΑΧΤΕΡΩ Ω ΙΥΔΙΣΧΗΡΩ
 Ω ΘΚΥΜ ΒΕΙ ΑΝΚΕΕ ΜΕΤΖΓΕΡ ΞΣΣ Ω
 Ω ΚΛΝΣΕΡ ΚΘΩΝΓΩ
 Ω ΣΕΛΒΕΡ ΡΑΥΣΓΕΗ Ν ΝΕΙΖΙ ΡΥΔΟΛΦΩ
 Ω ΜΙΑΧ ΣΛΓΔ Ν ΓΕΨ ΜΙΛΛΙ
 Ω ΚΘΝΓ ΣΟΦΟΡΤ ΓΕΛ Δ ΣΧΙΓΕΝ
 Ω Μ Δ Ρ ΒΟΟΧ ΑΡΚΟΣΣΙ ΑΝ ΡΥΔΟΛΦ ΝΟΡΓΕΛΣΤΕΡΩ
 Ω ΚΘΚΟΕΝΓΑΙΤΕ ΚΑΙΝΙΚΕΝ ΤΥΒΙΝΓΕΝ ΞΥΤΕΝΒΕΡΩ

Ω ΙΣΣ ΤΡΕΙΒΕΙ ΗΜ ΙΣΣ
 Ω ΜΕΝΣΧΕΝ ΦΛΕΙΣΧ ΚΕΕ
 Ω ΙΧ ΔΙΑΛΛΗ ΙΣΣ ΚΕΕ ΚΕΕ
 Ω ΜΙΕΒΕ ΑΧ ΝΕΡΗΑΤΥΝ ΚΕΕ
 Ω ΒΑΧΛΒΒΗ ΜΑΧ ΚΕΕ ΚΕΕ
 Ω ΕΣΣΕΤ ΦΙΣΧΕ ΤΡΑΒΕΝ ΒΑΥΤΗΝ
 Ω ΕΡΣΧΙΕΣΩ ΡΥΝΔΑ ΜΙΔΔΑ
 Ω ΣΤΑΝ Δ ΡΕΙΧ Ω ΝΕΡΩ
 Ω ΜΑΙΣΤΑΤΩ Ω ΑΕΡΤΖΤΩ
 Ω ΑΜΑΒΧΙΣΜΥΣ Ω
 Ω ΧΛΥΤΙΒΩ Ω ΛΕΡΤΖΤΩ
 Ω ΙΡΡΕΝΑΕΡΤΖΩ
 Ω ΥΛΜΛΙΕΨΩ ΚΕΕ ΡΚΕΕ
 Ω ΕΧ ΚΕΕ ΚΕΕ Ω
 Ω ΗΑΥΣΒΥΡΣΧΗΩ

Cat. 2 / KOOPF (Head), 7.4.1904 / Pencil on document paper (double sheet) / 32.6 x 21.0 cm / Inv.Nr. 1327 fol. 2 recto.
 Cat. 3 / MENSCHENFLEISCH (human flesh), 7.4.1904 / Pencil on document paper (double sheet) / 32.6 x 21.0 cm / Inv.Nr. 1327 fol. 2 verso

success of the German armed forces in the future European war". Because the results of his inventions, which he had made "with his brother Emil Morgenstern in Süssen, Württemberg", would result in "one of the greatest decisive factors in the 1908 war, to the greatest glory of Germany [...] and here on our earth". Thus Morgenstern combines an anti-semitic conspiracy theory with the fantasy of being able to secure the supremacy of the German Empire in a forthcoming military combat with other nations, by the reconstruction of a weapons technology found in the Old Testament – a fiction which was diagnostically identified as "paranoid delusional ideas" and "catatonia" in the medical file.

Morgenstern rebelled obstinately against clinical accommodation and legal incapacitation (in March 1904). Several attempts to escape had already failed when he finally succeeded in October 1904. The Tübingen file closes on that note; the later stages of Morgenstern's life are unknown.

More mysterious is the fact that documents relating to Morgenstern's earlier life, before his stay at the clinic, are largely missing. Because he didn't have a regular profession. He proudly signs his letters in the clinic with "Acad. Sculptor", in line with the advertisement with which he is listed in Cologne address books from 1901 to 1904: "Rudolf Morgenstern, acad. sculptor, execution of artistic modelling and stone work, grave monuments, architectural decorative work, portraits" (ill. 2).⁴ Until now, it cannot be proved that he studied at a German Academy of Arts, nor has a sculpture by his hand been discovered. The aforementioned financial demands point to the fact that at least he didn't have any success in his profession latterly – in part because of the impairment of his left arm, which must have curtailed his art practice. A sudden break in his career which was related to this may even have been the trigger for his psychic crisis.

Only the Prinzhorn Collection keeps three drawings by Morgenstern, together with some texts by him. They stem from the months of his psychiatric treatment in 1903/04. The low case number (74) points to the possibility that they were sent from Tübingen to Heidelberg early, perhaps even during Morgenstern's stay there.⁵

The sheets with text are mostly designed with Greek characters which, however, don't form Greek words. Morgenstern has written German words with the capital letters of the Greek alphabet, like a code. Because he didn't proceed consistently, invented additional signs, used meaningless "filling characters", hardly followed any obvious sequences of meaning and didn't always observe the rules of spelling either, deciphering is difficult. Comprehensible sequences of meaning are found for example on cat. 1 above: "PLURALDEO/RUDOLF/MORGENSTERN/GOTT SELBER" ("Pluraldeo/Rudolf/Morgenstern/God himself"), or on cat. 2 below: "KONIG SOFORT GELD SCHIGEN/HEUTE NOCH [...] AN RUDOLF MORGENSTERN/KOENIGLIGE KLINIKEN TUBINGEN WURTEMBERG" ("king immediately sending money / today still [...] to Rudolf Morgenstern/royal clinics Tübingen Wurtemberg"). Other decipherable words also echo what we know of Morgenstern, for example. "IRRENAERTZE" ("mad doctors"), (cat. 3, fourth line from

III. 2 / Advertisement of Rudolf Morgenstern in the address book of Cologne from 1901 to 1904
Historisches Archiv der Stadt Köln



below), "TRIPPER" ("gonorrhoea") and "LUFTSCHIFFE [...] ERFINDUNG DER" ("airships [...] invention of") (cat. 2, fifth line from above and middle). Did the author of these sheets test a secret code and did he choose words which just came into his head for this? Added lines in old German hand writing also seem to follow a predominantly phonetic interest; so one reads for example in cat. 1 below: "Solida, Solida, love aa / throw the screws away right / if you have nothing to eat rather eat / swimming fish". Perhaps we find here an example of the stream of consciousness similar to that which the Surrealists discovered later, in 1919.

Morgenstern's three drawings also look like conceptual design thanks to their hints and overdrawings. The more complex sheet with several scenes (cat. 4) again contains some lines of Greek characters at the top. Here they could refer to antiquity, which the representations seem also to point to. In the upper scene three figures, some with cloven feet, restrain a strong creature, a chimera or a monstrous insect. Two men with hats bring in a large scythe from the right. On the left, three animals, probably lions, squat on the ground. A mountain chasm bridged by a gate with columns can be seen in the distance. Another lion camps on the right. In the middle of the sheet a figure rides on a loaded pack animal through a mountain pass, under a creature which squats above on a rock to the left. Above (behind?) them, an adult with a child moves away; below them two men with Greek helmets kneel or lie; a sphinx looms to the left. At the bottom of the sheet is a gate with columns between rocks, similar to the one on the scene above, but this time we look down onto it from a flight of stairs.

The second drawing (cat. 5) also shows animals and assorted creatures in a sketchy mountain landscape. We look down on two goats climbing a rocky pathway, the front animal ridden by a fidgeting satyr. He seems to react to somebody at the top of the sheet who threatens to drop a stone on him. To the right, drawn less assertively, the profile of a cloven-footed figure carrying a hooded boy can be seen.



Cat. 4 / Untitled, 2.4.1904 / Copy pencil on document paper / 32.6 x 21.0 cm / Inv.Nr. 1326 fol. 1 recto

None of these representations is suitable for realization as sculpture. They could be illustrations of mythological or Classical subjects, although one thinks more of the satirical magazine "Jugend" than the visual world of Arnold Böcklin. Despite rough drawing, the figures are often caught in lively, dynamic poses. Some are reminiscent of Max Slevogt's masterly impressionistic imagining of literary scenes.

Morgenstern's third, largest drawing (cat. 6) only shows one subject. A slim young man, naked except for a fantastic helmet, is swathed halfway up his thighs in heavy fabric. The curves and head of a serpent peer out from behind him, a naked child kneels on the right, its back to the observer. The youth has turned from a slightly backward-looking profile and moves his head in the opposite direction to look over his shoulder to the right, out of the picture. His right arm is stretched out; his concealed left arm, at an angle, holds a sword in front of his chest. Below his arm we see the shaft of a spear, which probably impales the monster. Does this represent St. George or Siegfried just before he bathes in the blood of the slayed dragon? Despite unclear masses in the lower part of the composition, a realisation in plastic material is very conceivable, particularly since the helmeted juvenile nude is reminiscent of Donatello's David with sword. The s-shaped curve of the androgynous body is a signature of Art Nouveau. Following contemporary taste, the draftsman may have thought about making it in silver or porcelain.

The medical file reports that Morgenstern wrote and drew a lot, occasionally even on the wall. Besides studies of patients, the file also mentions a "sketch for a group" (the sheet with St. George/Siegfried?) and drawings based on historical representations from a book. Once the artist reproached the doctors for having stolen drawings from him. He must have attracted the attention of male nurses and doctors with sovereign representations and portraits. Classic and mythological subjects helped him to escape intellectually from the psychiatric routine.

Above all, however, these sheets emphasize his education and his profession in the real world outside the asylum walls.

The sheets of text are Morgenstern's most unusual heritage. Their singular appearance probably developed from the desire to encode messages in scholarly form. However, the preserved examples are addressed to nobody. By disassociating the Greek alphabet from the Greek language, dispensing with word separations and using almost only letters of the same size, the artist discovered the graphic, ornamental qualities of the characters. Inserting filling elements, using rows comprising only two different letters and starting and ending of most lines with Ω was probably the result of a new understanding of what was emerging as he worked. The parallel to Klee's pictorial inventions mentioned earlier is to be found in the balance between apparently readable and purely ornamental rows of signs. Klee, however, starts with single elements devoid of meaning, the arrangement of which suggests the text-like legibility of an artificial world, whereas Morgenstern increasingly removes the original meaning of the signs as he works on them.

1 The facts about Morgenstern's life before and during his stay at the clinic are taken from the Tuebingen medical file which today is at the university archive of Tuebingen, Sign. 309/2245.

2 In November 1902 the anarchist Gennaro Rubino tried killing the Belgian King Leopold II in Brussels; in June 1903 the Serbian King Aleksandar Obrenović and his wife were murdered in Belgrade by rebellious officers.

3 Letter of Rudolf Morgenstern to the "Ministerpräsident von Bülow Reichskanzler, Comthur pp.pp. Berlin", Tuebingen, September 12th, 1904, medical file Tuebingen.

4 I thank Thomas Deres of the historical archives to the city of Cologne for his help with the enquiry on Rudolf Morgenstern.

5 Cf. Morgenstern's complaints about "stolen" drawings mentioned below.