

Eckbert the Fair. From **Six German Romantic Tales**, trans. Ronald Taylor. Dufour Editions.

Here is my own more literal translation of the poems as they appear on pp. 21, 27 and 32.

Waldeinsamkeit, Die mich erfreut, So morgen wie heut In ewiger Zeit, O wie mich freut Waldeinsamkeit.	Woodland solitude I rejoice in thee Tomorrow as today Forever and ever Oh how I enjoy Woodland solitude
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Waldeinsamkeit Wie liegst du weit! O dich gereut Einst mit der Zeit.- Ach einzge Freud Waldeinsamkeit!	Woodland solitude Now far away You will regret In time There is no joy but Woodland solitude
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Waldeinsamkeit Mich wieder freut, Mir geschieht kein Leid, Hier wohnt kein Neid. Von neuem mich freut Waldeinsamkeit.	Woodland solitude I again enjoy No harm comes to me No malice resides here Once again I enjoy Woodland solitude
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Take a good look at the reference to "reading" on pp. 23/4. You might consult Alberto Manguel's **History of Reading** in this context. We'll talk about the subversive nature of literature and view some prominent book burnings.

P. 24. The old woman talks about the "path of righteousness" and the punishment that follows if one strays from it. A paragraph later Bertha comments on the birth of intelligence, consciousness might be a better word here, the German text has "Verstand." Let's consult **Genesis** 2,16 - 3,24 in this context. We'll define myth here as a condensed version of many similar human experiences. This story, then, is not "the first story" but an "explanation" of, or stand-in for, many like ones.

If you have the time, please consult, for a variety of reasons (including simple curiosity):

Elaine Pagels, **Adam, Eve, and the Serpent**.

Ellen Key, **The Century of the Child** (1900). This pioneering book by the Swedish feminist draws heavily on Rousseau and Goethe and devotes a chapter to "The School of the Future".

Daniel C. Dennett, **Consciousness Explained**.

Julian Jaynes, **The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind**.

In this context see Michael S. Gazzaniga, "The Split Brain Revisited" in [Scientific American](#), July 1998. 51 ff.

The story within the story begins as one of child abuse*). Poverty, economic factors, not innate human cruelty, serve as an explanation. The child flees from an oppressive environment, her first step into a life of her own, the beginning of the process of emancipation. The horror of her wanderings, landscape as a projection of her terror.

Bread and wine (!) offered by the old woman. The idyl. The next step in the process of emancipation, another separation, deserting the old benefactress and her dog, taking the bird and some jewels. What is the nature of "guilt" here? Particularly since successive "separations" are necessary for the sake of emancipation (?). Biting the hand that fed you? Where did she go wrong, and how? For recent work on the question read "Incriminating Developments. Scientists want to reform the study of how kids go wrong." [Science News](#) 9/5/98, and again most recently in the September 12, 2009 issue in an essay called *Morality Play*. That issue, incidentally, has an interesting piece on "Why people go round" and end up at the spot where they had started. Bertha, leaving the old woman's hut, find herself back in her old village from which she had fled many years earlier.

*) As the adult remembers it! An interesting piece appeared in [Scientific American](#) (September 1997): **Creating False Memories**. "Memory can be treacherous, not only because forgetting is so easy but because the mind can mistake imagined scenes for reality." Read it and draw your own conclusions.

Killing the bird. Does she actually strangle it? "It looked at me imporingly. I let go, but it was dead."

Killing Walther. "Without realizing what he was doing, Eckbert took aim. ... the arrow sped on its way and Walther fell to the ground."

The very thought seems to suffice. Let's check this against the religious background of the contemporary audience and remember that "religion" is to this very day, whether we like it or not, the most consistent and pervasive form of continuing adult education. Our audience and author are steeped in Christian doctrine. Our moral code, the criteria by which we judge ourselves and others, are derived from it or in opposition to it.

Read the **Sermon on the Mount**, Matthew 5, 27-28: "Ye have heard that it was said by them in old time, thou shalt not commit adultery. But I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart."

What do you think? What standards are those? And how are they applied, or judged between the lines, in our story? What are the implications? Must we embrace the paralyzing sense of guilt or discard it?

What kind of a righteous avenger, monster or wrathful deity does the old woman turn out to be?

What form of justice reigns here? Are the children punished for the sin(s) of their father(s)? Let's look at the concept of **original sin** (inherited guilt), St. Paul invents it in **Romans** 5, 12 ff.

Is it fair or just, in our everyday understanding of these adjectives, to burden the innocent with the guilt of others, including their fathers and forefathers? "I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me" (**Exodus** [2 Moses] 20, 5).

If it is indeed unfair and unjust "here", in our story, is it not unfair and unjust everywhere? And the cruel notion should simply be disregarded (?). A subtle liberation of a guilt-plagued and anxiety-ridden community: revealing the absurdity of a doctrine by removing it from its ideological context and placing it into a human one? Let's talk about it. And about "free will" in this context.

And about Eckbert's part; what did he know and when did he know it? How do you explain his obvious loyalty to a woman with a criminal past? **Milton's** (1608-1674) Adam is similarly loyal to Eve: "And me with thee hath ruined, for with thee / Certain my resolution is to Die; ... I feel the link of Nature draw me: Flesh of Flesh, / Bone of my Bone thou art, and from thy State / Mine never shall be parted, bliss or woe" (**Paradise Lost** [1667] IX, lines 906 ff.)

Where does the tragedy begin, and what triggers the catastrophe? The father's adultery? The incestuous marriage? Theft and desertion? Killing the bird? The story telling, i.e. surrendering to the impulse to confide and confess? The resulting anxiety?

In whom can we trust? Who are we?
