

Jürgen G. H. Hoppmann

EBERTIN

Light and Shadow
of German Astrology
in the 20th century

ArsAstrologica, Görlitz 2026

Jürgen G. H. Hoppmann

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LIGHT AND SHADOW
OF GERMAN ASTROLOGY
IN THE 20TH CENTURY

arsAstrologica



to Astarte

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PROLOGUE

»Everyone is a moon, and has a dark side which he never shows to anybody.«

Quote from »The Innocents Abroad, or The New Pilgrim's Progress«,
by Mark Twain. Germany edition: »Bummel durch Europa«

The German National Library lists 240 publications attributed to »Ebertin«: mother, son, and grandson. Newspaper articles, blog posts, YouTube videos, radio broadcasts, and documentaries have been written about them, both nationally and internationally.

University professors parade thousand-page dissertations before them. Like battering rams, they push aside everything else that might be said. And the German Astrologers' Association applauds.

What else could be added?

Quite a lot, I presume ...

They have never set foot on the cobblestones of Görlitz, where it all began. This old boys' club includes a museum director who rules like a patriarch and has the audacity to forbid a university-educated historian from speaking.

The US Army actually had to come – or rather, the daughter of an Air Force helicopter pilot. From the University of California straight to beautiful Saxony to learn German and tackle the case. She scoured archives, studied the writings of the Ebertin family, translated them into English, and wrote a magnificent dissertation.

To peer behind the »darkest side of the moon«, a second historian was needed. She artfully shatters the stars on the ground of reality in a witty novel and her blog.

Last but not least, tribute should be paid to a female historian who was silenced here in the city – which enraged me so much that I wrote this non-fiction book.

Jan Böhmermann, German entertainer, satirist, podcast presenter and archorman of »ZDF Magazin Royale«, puts his finger on the sore spot.

Axel Becker, a consummate astrologer, singer, dancer, and entertainer, responds eloquently. When my old friend isn't cruising the Caribbean on a cruise ship or performing in musical and theatrical productions here in Germany (including as a permanent ensemble member at the JTB Junges Theater Bonn), he interprets celestial constellations with artful seriousness and heroically throws himself into the fray for professional astrology.

Nice! However, the TV presenter doesn't have a good word to say about the renowned German Astrologers' Association DAV, let alone its examinations and the like. Kudos to his editorial team for their fact-checking! The talented Axel, more of an artist than a club-freak, launches a brilliant counterattack.

Is it due to Böhmermann's Pisces sun, harshly illuminated by Uranus (a repressed mystic soul), or is it Astro-Becker's central star in the proud sign of Leo? See for yourself. You'll find the links in the appendix, as well as everything about Jenn Zahrt and Katja Kullmann, historians of the highest caliber, and their male colleagues.

Because nothing is more annoying than footnotes, cross-references and captions – that drive you crazy when browsing, swiping and zapping in print and ebook – I have put this (almost) useless stuff, owed to academics in their ivory towers, to the attachment.

Admittedly, this is not good news for attention-deficit hyper-activists.



ELSBETH

»Man is always prey to his truths.
Once he has admitted them,
he cannot free himself from them«.

The Myth of Sisyphus. Albert Camus, 1942

Elsbeth Ebertin was born on May 14, 1880 at 6:22 PM in Görlitz, according to her 14th yearbook, »A Glimpse into the Future«. She writes:

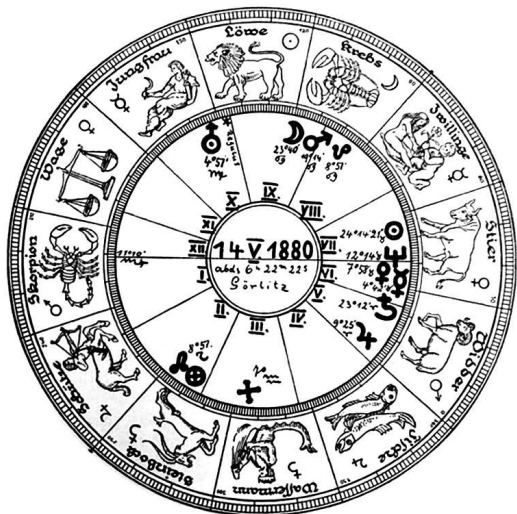
»I don't have much good news to report about my childhood. It wasn't pleasant — it was rather tragic and very eventful. Only sorrowful, painful, and harrowing scenes — serious days — have remained clearly etched in my memory, but I will try to conjure up some bright spots from the treasure trove of childhood memories«.



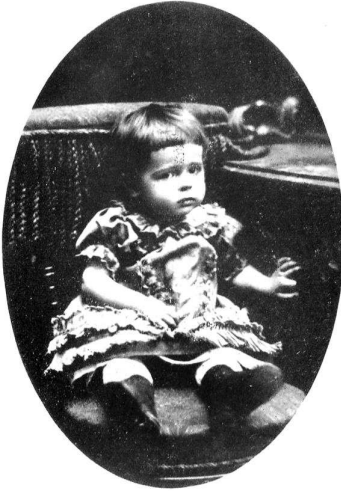
Let's focus for now on glimmers of hope. Dark shadows will gather soon enough. The flashbulb goes off and the photo is taken: Elsbeth Paula Schmidt enthroned high above her little brothers in the costume of a guards officer.

It was easy for their parents, as they professionally dressed lovely fairies, graceful ballerinas, magical sorcerers and sinister villains, powerful heroic tenors and awe-inspiring prima donnas for the theater temple.

In later years she would use the pseudonym »Elsa Gorlizia« and, after an unhappy marriage, call herself »Ebertin« by her last name.



AN ARTIST'S FAIRY TALE



»My parents owned a costume factory, where primarily historical costumes for festivals and theatrical performances were newly made — during Carnival season, they were also sent to masked balls near all sorts of cities. As a small child of 3 to 4 years old, I often sat on the footstool with the seamstresses or in the middle of the machine room. I heard all sorts of names for the changing fashions of past centuries, saw the simplest costumes from antiquity, made only of furs and belts — the existing garments of the ancient Germanic and Cherusci tribes — costumes from Babylonian times, all sorts of colorful cloaks

of the Greeks and Romans, and so on. Even as a little girl, I could clearly distinguish Empire dresses, worn during the reign of Queen Louise, from Rococo costumes, as well as King's Grenadiers or ›Old Fritz Soldiers‹ from Wallenstein's or Lützow Free Corps — I could describe all the uniforms precisely; indeed, as a child, I absorbed everything that was said about costumes or historical dress, knew exactly which uniforms were worn in 1832, during the time of the Swedish King Adolf or Wallenstein and Piccolomini, and thus playfully acquired historical knowledge in my childhood that perhaps later



proved useful to me. I must have been very precocious and lively. Whenever a child was needed for a celebration, I was ›borrowed‹ along. I still remember quite clearly that, barely three or four years old, I had to play Cupid at a large party amidst many young officers and older generals.

A lady's attendant placed me, dressed only in a white satin skirt embroidered with gold, in the middle of a wonderful floral arrangement.

I had my quiver, bow and arrow slung over my shoulder, and when the curtain was raised, I gazed with shining eyes in great wonder at the flashing uniforms and chandeliers. Afterwards, several officers surrounded me, I received a large bonbonnière — apparently I had done very well — was wrapped in a warm coat, and carried home. Whenever a large celebration took place, for example, the commemoration of the 20th anniversary of Sedan Day on September 1, 1890 — when children were also to march in historical processions, we four older siblings were dressed in uniforms — to participate or to form a guard of honor.



No one even asked whether I was a boy or a girl; as the oldest (at 10 years old), I simply had to take charge of my three younger brothers. I still have pictures from that time that I'd like to share with my readers. They are characteristic of how even in children's facial expressions, one can see what they will become or could become.

My sister Käte was too young at the time to march in the Sedan Day procession. She was placed at the feet of us siblings in a later group photograph, in which I, as a sutler, stood among the soldiers.

I wasn't very impressed by all the masquerades and usually gazed ahead very seriously and sadly — just like in the first childhood picture, as if

I wanted to ask: ›What am I even supposed to do here?‹ Even in childhood, I felt a kind of spiritual awakening or inner enlightenment. Everything around me was alien — I couldn't even connect with my school friends. It also seemed like a waste of time to occupy myself with children's toys, with inanimate objects.«



Around midnight, the Bohemian Lion roars from the town hall tower, high above the astronomical clocks, displaying the 24 hours of the day and the 30 phases of the moon. On the hour, a warrior's head sticks out its tongue and rolls its eyes.

At his feet stands Justitia, the goddess of justice, with sword and scales, yet seeing and devoid of any sash, which gives rise to speculation. Before her, the sea god Neptune, with a mighty trident, tames the waves of a fountain in the lower market square, where not so long ago the execution site stood.

In 1527, the so-called »traitorous mob« was first broken on the wheel, then impaled and beheaded. The remains of rebellious

clothmakers, witches, and sinners were given to the executioner. The body fat, boiled down into balsam in bubbling pots right next door in the Black Alley, sold like hotcakes. Since the stench was ruining business for the wealthy merchants in the Brothers' Lane, the executioner's house was built



at the Dark Gate at the foot of Gallows Hill, a rather charming sight to behold today.

One proceeds to the Lower Market, where the philosopher Jacob Böhme had his cobbler's bench. Onward to the imposing St. Peter's Church, whose devoutly religious pastor wanted to drag him before the executioner's sword. To the right grins the terrifying head of Gobiüs, a black-magic occultist who, beheaded, once drove his cart and fire-breathing horses through Peterstraße. So the legend.

On the left, the town hall pharmacy with a display of the zodiac signs on the sundial, depending on the position of the sun. Count the planetary hours: at the beginning of the lunar day, the moon; continuing the count through the week until Saturday, dedicated to Saturn; and then the solar day. Choose the most auspicious hour. The astrological drawing is artfully crafted, called Arachne after the spider and its web. Zacharias Scultetus constructed the sundial in 1550.

Bartholomäus, his younger brother, had



studied astrology and astronomy in Wittenberg. It was the only university in the world to teach astronomy under the humanist Philipp Melancthon, a friend and companion of the reformer Martin Luther. To calculate the celestial bodies precisely, astronomers there were in contact with Nicolaus Copernicus. To interpret them, they consulted Johannes Carion, the Brandenburg court astrologer. Even the Danish prince Hamlet had studied in Wittenberg. »To be or not to be«, as seen in Shakespeare's drama.



Back in Görlitz, Bartholomäus Scultetus drew horoscopes for wealthy citizens, wrote prognostica, and published astrological almanacs. He was a cartographer, calendar reformer, and city judge. For well over a decade, he guided the city's fortunes. To the left is his magnificent city palace.



In the Middle Ages and the early modern period, the Via Regia, the oldest and longest trade route on the European continent, ran through the city. The Way of St. James, from Santiago de Compostela to Kyiv, also passed through here. It was an important trading center. Wealthy merchants built palaces with deep cellars, barn-door-sized portals, and courtyards for the exchange of goods, architecturally comparable to palazzi in the burgeoning city-states of Italy beyond the Alps.

Next, we come to the Nikolai Tower. At the corner of Jüden-gasse is the Mikveh, a ritual bath, used until the pogrom of 1389. The Görlitz merchants fought for the dubious »privilege« of making the city free of Jews: economic plunder of Jewish merchants, demolition of the synagogue, leveling of the cemetery, and confiscation of property.

Bartholomaei Sculteti Philom. Gorl.

PROGNOSTICON

Über das Jahr nach Christi Geburt
1591.

In Sechs Capitel außgetheslet.

- Cap. 1. Von einer general Ordnung / wie man richtiger wege die alten gefallenen Calendar corrigiren sol. *Ex cap. 11. de Rom. Calendaris ad Rom. Cef. M.*
- Cap. 2. Von der Mundana reuolutione / in diesem 1591. Jah- / Item / der Planeten Regiment vnd gemeinen Vtierung.
- Cap. 3. Von den vier Hauptpartheyen der zurtheilten Religions sorten in der Welt.
- Cap. 4. Von Sechs Finsternissen an Sonn vnd Mond / in diesem laufenden 1591. Jahr.
- Cap. 5. Von Krankheiten / Kriegen / vnd dergleichen Vnangefallen vnter den Menschen.
- Cap. 6. Von Fruchtbarkeit / Vtierung vnd Geweßsen.



Gedruckt zu Görlitz / durch
Ambrosium Frisch.

EFFIGIES AVTHORIS.



BARTOLEMAEVS SCVLTVS
 Gort. An. M. D. LXXII. M. Maio.
 D. & H. XIII. Astron. Noctitur ANN.
 XXXII.

Miraris faciem, lector, pectusq; manus,
 Et quae per tabulam schemata picta vides.
 Quid si animum dotesq; viri, si nobile nosse
 Ingenium, & varia quantum in arte foret?
 Hic meruit, solide quocquid divina Mathesis,
 Urane quicquid praesentia laudis habet,
 Sclator quippe assiduus peregre,q; domi,
 HOMILII, celo dum vacat ille, fuit.

Nec studio arificum treuit monumenta miri ore,
 Seu veterum, seu quos secula nostra firmi.
 Plurima sic didicit: sed plura industria addit,
 Inventa ingenij dexteritate sui.
 Testor scriptura viri, nulli tentata priorum,
 Quae abui ille firis post modo, quaq; acat.
 Reuerate IOACHIME, Tyrringia iacet ERASMVM:
 SCVLTVTOplaudet Lusitans ora suo.
 C. Manl. L



In 1847, Jews would have been allowed to resettle in the Prussian city of Görlitz. However, the Görlitz city administration resisted.

It took two decades until, in 1869, they finally compelled King Wilhelm I from Berlin to allow this. A synagogue was built again. The city flourished – until Jewish life in Görlitz finally died out after 1933.

Via square at Nikolai Tower, fortifications and Dark Gate with executioner's house, a cemetery, which is in bloom and said to be haunted – or it's a theater troupe up to mischief again? A ring is missing from the wrought-iron gate of the burial vault. That's a long story.

Once upon a time, the blacksmith in the Upper Market had a journeyman, one-eyed, red-haired, and limping. He did all the work for him, which led to the blacksmith's downfall.

One evening, a distinguished-looking horseman dressed in black approached her, a red feather in his beret. He would reward her handsomely for the tomb gate if it was forged by midnight of the third day.

Drunk as a doorknob, the blacksmith had pledged his body and soul to the mysterious stranger. He drank away the advance payment in hard cash and left his apprentice to do all the work. But when the hour struck, a metal ring was missing. It wasn't in its place. So the devil took the foolish blacksmith. If you don't believe it, go to the cemetery and see for yourself. Then head uphill, past the charnel houses to the old funeral hall, overgrown with ivy, boarded up, and no less gruesome.

Onward, ever onward to Minna Herzlieb's final resting place. Delicate iron railings surround it. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, plagued by his infatuation in his old age, courted the beautiful young woman intensely. In 1809, she served as the model for the poet laureate's »Elective Affinities« and the inspiration for his dramatic festival play »Pandora«.



Later, she succumbed to madness and ultimately found her quiet grave here.

Did Elsbeth Paula Ebertin lose her mind in the face of this and succumb to Astro-mania? Admittedly, a bold thesis. It is more likely that she was artistically and profoundly inspired by the jumble of mysticism, cruelty, bigotry, and passion.

Almost overlooked: the repeatedly desecrated grave of Jacob Böhme, widely known as »Philosophus Teutonicus«, astrologer, and mystic. But what does being a philosopher count for in one's own country? Across the river, in the unfortified suburb, he lived as a shoemaker. With a fiery pen, he wrote cosmological works that circulated around the world, including »Aurora, or Dawn«.





At the turn of the 20th century, Görlitz expanded enormously – as already mentioned, not least thanks to Jewish immigration. Following Vienna's example, city planners laid out a spacious ring road far outside the city walls. Its construction, like the building boom itself, was abruptly halted by the First World War.



In the year of the three emperors, 1888, when Görlitz east of the river was not yet called Zgorzelec, the idea for an Upper Lusatian Hall of Fame arose. Opened in 1902 thanks to a large donation from a Jewish businessman, it did not save him and all his fellow believers from the

Holocaust.

While textile, electrical, and railway car factories sprang up and the Prussian military built barracks, the diplomat and renowned singer Bolko von Hochberg initiated the Silesian Music Festival: it opened in 1910 in the newly constructed Görlitz City Hall at the river crossing.

Nowadays, only those in the know and art lovers look up to decipher the secret message on the relief above the entrance portal. The author of these lines wrote the following in 2024 in his booklet »ETA Hoffmann und die Metamoderne«:

Since Dan Brown's bestsellers »Angels & Demons« and »The Da Vinci Code« both made into films starring Hollywood star Tom Hanks, even the so-called little man on the street knows that paintings, statues and buildings can contain secret messages.

Iconography, a central component of art history studies, experienced its greatest flourishing with Aby Warburg's legendary lecture in 1917 before the Heidelberg Academy of Sciences, just a few years after the people of Görlitz opened their town hall. To the trained observer, the thought inevitably arises that the architect must have possessed secret Masonic knowledge. Thus, he left posterity a hidden, yet all the more compelling message: a stern warning and wise advice in one, particularly regarding the hardship and suffering involved in attempting a reopening, here and now, a century later.



A virtually impossible Sisyphean task: to bring the imposing temple of the muses, languishing in a deathly, Sleeping Beauty-like slumber, back to life. (It was said in public discussions) that the new town hall had to have an international impact, transcending three national borders, or its demise was certain. The meeting adjourned, perplexed despite many insightful contributions. (...) Afterwards, in a pub conversation — the author, as a

witness, is prepared to testify — one or two citizens of this forgotten little town at the end of the world whispered that, given the perpetually empty city coffers, they should let the building languish — until the bitter end, so that a wrecking ball could clear away the remains. Times weren't getting any better, experience taught them.

Artists, they disdain the power of the factual. They see the world with different eyes, remembering recently filmed here, Oscar-winning movies. Of legendary rock concerts and dance competitions in the 1980s in the GDR, of grandiose singing festivals in the Kaiser's time and ... well, and ... studiously gloss over a limping man who, in 1945, croaked his slogans of perseverance in the packed town hall. The audience enthusiastically applauded the self-chosen twilight of the gods. It should be added that many who didn't want to participate in the spectacle back then were hanged from lampposts in Postplatz. The spectacle is well documented by the newsreel of the Third Reich, probably the most watched film when »Görlitz Goebbels« is googled.

Truly genuine artists, however, don't remain stuck on the internet. Instead, they want to explore the secrets of the city hall live, in real time, unpixelated, in total. This can be daunting at first. The visitor, battered by the drab reality, hangs his head in front of the city hall's entrance. He gazes down into the abyss. A terrible horror fills him. Here, decay is celebrated, mercilessly and relentlessly.

But then he takes a few steps back, looks along the facade, higher and higher, almost to the sky, squints his eyes and adopts the look of a researcher, like Tom Hanks in »Angels & Demons« when he embodies a symbologist from the USA who deciphers hidden messages and strange signs in Old Europe, in the aforementioned Hollywood blockbuster.

The secret code

Directly above the main entrance of Görlitz's town hall, flanked by gleaming white sphinxes, stands a Greco-Roman relief, veiled by a century's worth of grime, a replica from the Albanian Villa in Rome. Its iconographic program carries a message so hauntingly beautiful and fitting to the tragedy of this architectural monument that conspiracy theorists might suspect the architect was a member of a secret society, a clairvoyant, an Illuminati member, or something similar.

Coincidence or fate? At the very least, the artistic depiction fits the current drama surrounding the town hall like a glove. Three figures in Greek robes. In the center, the lovely river nymph Eurydice. To her right, the gifted singer Orpheus, whose song could soften the hearts of the Olympian gods. They caress each other, full of longing, almost pleadingly, as if in a long farewell. She is held back firmly by the messenger god Hermes. A moment that sends a chill down the spine of anyone with a discerning eye.



A fatal mistake

The ancient Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, the tragic lovers. A son of the sun god pursued the river nymph, and in her flight, she was bitten by a poisonous snake. The singer sang laments, making the animals of the forest weep. Even the gods of the underworld took pity on her. They allowed Orpheus to descend into the underworld, accompanied by the messenger god Hermes. If he found Eurydice, he would be allowed to lead her to life. But if he looked back at her before the gate to the upper world, she would be lost to him forever.

A cool head, Hermes, the messenger of the gods, wanderer between the worlds, always neutral, never taking sides – perhaps that's why he's known as the god of merchants and thieves. He helped the master singer find the shadow of the beautiful nymph. All was well. The three of them walked towards the upper world, and if they haven't died, they're still living today. But wait! Unlike Hollywood, Greek drama has no happy ending!

On his way up, Orpheus hesitated, lost his faith, and was driven by doubt and pessimism. Was his beloved truly following him? He looked around. There she stood, his Eurydice. With tears in her eyes. By looking back, he had broken the law of the underworld. But now it meant saying a final goodbye. Soon Hermes would lead her back to the realm of the dead – forever and ever.

The relief on the attic of the town hall depicts precisely this moment.



In 1888, the so-called Year of the Three Emperors, little Elsbeth was a groupie, or follower, as it's called in modern parlance. She collected the birth and death dates of stars and starlets, tsars, emperors, and kings. After Görlitz was connected to the railway network thanks to a Prussian concession, such people became commonplace here.

The Hirschberg Valley at the foot of the Giant Mountains, where Schneekoppe and Rübzahl are located, became a recreational area for Berlin's high society. Anyone who was anyone made a stop in Görlitz on their way to their summer residence or private castle in the mountains and



stayed in princely style at the Hotel am Postplatz. In the evenings, the gentry visited the theater, a miniature version of the Dresden Semperoper. From Elsbeth Ebertin's Regulus publishing house at Demianiplatz 12, one could look directly at the stage entrance. But by then, the planets had orbited many times.

Elsbeth Mutter grew up at Sagan Castle, once owned by the astrologically obsessed general Wallenstein, who had set half of Europe ablaze. He made it available to his astro-

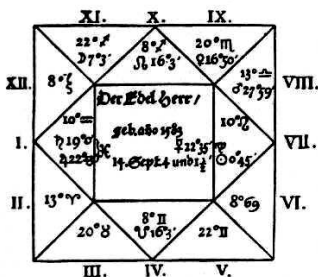
rologer — not Seni, the Italian court astrologer who betrayed him and handed him over to assassins, but Johannes Kepler, the mathematical genius. His laws of planets form the basis of modern astronomy, and his theory of aspects, in turn, forms the basis of modern astrology.

Before their stay in Sagan, Johannes Kepler and Tycho Brahe, to whom his horoscope-obsessed Danish king had bequeathed the island of Hven (Venus) in the Øresund, had remained



*Johann Keplerer gebore
den 27. September 1571
zu Weil Denelstadt
gestorben zu Regensburg
den 8^{ten} November 1630.*

**Horoscopium gestellet durch
Ioannem Keplerum
1608.**



silent at the court of the horoscope-believing Emperor Rudolf II at Prague Castle. Each waited for the other to reveal the latest planetary theories.

Tycho's bladder burst from waiting at the drinking table. His ornate coffin, complete with a copper nose, can be touched in Prague Castle. It is likely that Brahe and Kepler made a stopover in the astrological and astronomical

center of Görlitz on their way to and from Prague.

Sagan Castle was completely looted after 1945. If you follow in Kepler's footsteps in aga, as it is now called, you inevitably end up at the bar of the well-run Kepler Bar. It is recommended to sample at least three full glasses

of good Polish beer and additionally a few glasses of Polish vodka before heading to the Augustinian Canons' Monastery. The displayed bones, skeletons, skulls, and relics of supposed saints — in reality, probably executed men or relics that came into church possession through other forms of desecration — are truly gruesome. Suppress your gag reflex and then make your way purposefully to the monastery library. A globe on which Kepler conducted planetary studies is preserved there in its original form.



Elsbeth's mother, who grew up in Sagan amidst gruesome skeletons, suits of armor, and mountains of books, processed her childhood traumas artistically as a theatrical seamstress. In Görlitz, she and her husband ran a costume and prop company with numerous employees, supplying theaters throughout Germany.

Little Elsbeth mingled with acting and singing greats, collecting birth and death dates of famous contemporaries in her autograph book and adding short biographies. She grew up on the threshold between dream and reality, just like those stars and fans in today's social media age.

Through her dressmaking skills, she immersed herself in the world of theater and costume parties. She also undoubtedly glanced at the illustrated family magazine »Die Gartenlaube« and read novels — probably by Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach and Wilhelmine Heimburg. The latter had settled in Radebeul, in the vicinity of Karl May, the Saxon bestseller author, amidst the vineyards of the Elbe Valley.

»Incidentally, my mother, who was born on February 3, 1850, in Sagan in Silesia (see illustration), must not have had much of a sense of toys either, and her thoughts were always ahead of their time; for she often told the following story when asked how she actually came to found a theater and mask costume factory — from which I conclude that I was perhaps quite unintentionally and unknowingly influenced by my mother prenatally.

— ›When I was a little girl, the beautiful Duchess Dorothea of Sagan, who was my godmother, often came onto my lap and cuddled me. I was also named after Duchess Dorothea and, as a second name, after Princess Pauline of Hohenzollern-Hechingen. I was a beautiful, blond-haired child‹ — (my mother had naturally curly hair — even in old age — I often envied her for that) — and Mother continued, ›Even as a schoolgirl, I was often allowed to come to the castle and watch when, at Christmastime, the ladies-in-waiting, under the Duchess's guidance, made delightful Rococo costumes for dolls — I always said then: ›Why do they always dress the dolls so beautifully? When I grow up, I'm going to sew all sorts of beautiful dresses like the ones worn here in the castle, for adults too‹.

My mother, as a young woman, soon put this idea into practice with my father. Even as a child, she spent a lot of time in the French library of the castle, was allowed to enter the Wallenstein Room, and admire the magnificent portrait of Adelaide of Savoy, as well as other art treasures and paintings. Indeed, she even adopted the airs of court society, and we children were only ever allowed to speak to our mother in the third person: ›Is Mama going to the theater tonight?‹ and so on.



All these were appendages of the influence of traffic in the famous castle, which my mother absorbed until the beautiful lady of the castle, Dorothea von Sagan, died on September 19, 1862. The famous castle, in which my mother had spent so much time as a child and which she had gazed upon with such admiration, had been sold by Emperor Ferdinand II to Wallenstein in 1627. Yes, even the room into which Wallenstein had the Imperial Mathematician and Court Astrologer Johannes Kepler come so that he could read the stars for him, my mother entered as a child and absorbed it mentally. [...]



My father's parents owned a wallpaper factory in Eilenburg, and my grandfather was also said to have been a good portrait and landscape painter, though he never achieved particular fame. Family history was not kept in our family, so only these accounts have remained in my memory — which may at least shed some light on a karmic connection with historical events that took place in Sagan«.

Is it coincidence or karmic fate that the photograph of Elsbeth Ebertin's father is so reminiscent of portraits by Johannes Kepler?

»While my mother constantly created new costumes, cut them according to historical models and at times employed up to thirty seamstresses, my father often went on journeys, established new connections everywhere in the Rhineland, negotiated with theater directors and took new orders.

He possessed a very vivid imagination and a wealth of ideas, but his capacity for enthusiasm was often brought down by bitter disappointment and setbacks, and he took everything very much to heart.

When the business was to be expanded, and he acquired a neighboring house for 80,000 marks, he suddenly discovered that the property contained dry rot, which had been concealed from him, and the purchase agreement could no longer be reversed. I only vaguely remember that from that time onward, my father was extremely nervous due to significant financial losses.

As it happened, the people who had harmed or cheated him were Catholic, and now he projected a subtle bitterness onto all who belonged to that religion. He would always say: ›Remember this, children, for the rest of your lives: Catholics can never be trusted; their dogma, their religious concepts, their compulsion to confess often lead to hypocrisy and falsehood. Today their sins are forgiven, tomorrow they fall into the same errors — or sin anew ...«

Elsbeth Ebertin calls her beloved father a highly sensitive Cancerian, someone for whom it could be said that the step from genius to madness was but a small one. In 1893, he was committed to the municipal almshouse due to a nervous breakdown. Mistreatment and being placed in a padded

cell for the slightest provocation were commonplace. His daughter secretly conversed with him through his cell window until he died a few months later. Traumatic for the thirteen-year-old:

»Barely 14 years old, having just left school, I had to learn double-entry bookkeeping immediately in order to take over the management of the business in place of my deceased father. The other young women were all over 20, and I must confess that this course was more of a punishment than a pleasure for me, but — I had to believe in it and was immediately placed at my father's writing desk.

Among his ledgers, I also found many a poetic note, many a poem in progress, so that I said to myself: »My father also had to completely suppress his individuality, had to be a businessman, while in truth he was much more of a philosopher and thinker, which is so clearly evident from his fine, high, clear brow«.

He was basically kind-hearted, perhaps too soft and sensitive, unlike my mother, who was averse to all tenderness, often even domineering, and only became gentler in her old age. She was a strict, but so hardworking woman that no one dared to sit idly in her presence for even a moment«.

It is assumed that the literary journal mentioned below is the monthly publication of the Breslau School of Poetry. Crucially, Elsbeth succeeded in transforming her personal pain into collective drama during this difficult time – an alchemical process characteristic of many important artists, be they poets, painters, actors, filmmakers, and the like.

»So, in the first third of my life, which was under a dark star, I truly didn't experience maternal love and tenderness, and thus it's understandable that in this emotional loneliness — thinking that I was an unwanted child — perhaps merely the result of so-called marital duties — I wrote a poem at the age of 17, which I called »A Child of Duty«:

*I can't boast of a single kiss,
The one my mother gave me as a child
Only rarely did a faint smile appear,
Say a kind word to me.*

*I also can't remember anymore,
That she played and laughed with me,
As mothers of other children used to do,
And lovingly put me to bed.*

*Even when I had grown older,
I remained loveless at all times, —
Without a father, without a mother's love
I bore my suffering silently and without complaint.*

*Now I can truly appreciate everything.
Because an inner voice is speaking:
You were not a pledge of blissful love,
No, just a poor child of duty«.*

The preceding poem earned me the first praise from the editor-in-chief of a Silesian poetry journal, was printed, and the inclination that I, for years as a young girl, composed many folk songs, which were published in all sorts of newspapers and entertainment magazines, even in distant cities, some also under some pseudonym, since I feared that songwriting would be forbidden to me just as, in my 13th year, secret meetings with my father — who was cut off from the world and martyred to death — had been.



ASCENT TO THE STARS

Parallel to Hedwig Courths-Mahler, a Saxonian bestseller author, Elsbeth Ebertin launched her writing career in 1904. This offered intelligent and daring women the chance for financial independence, beyond forced marriage, prostitution, or factory work.

Her childhood dream ended with puberty when her father died and, as the eldest, she had to manage the family costume business. Nevertheless, she wrote her first newspaper article: »Der hundertste Geburtstag von Charlotte Birch-Peiffer«, an successful actress and writer with an astonishing biography. Positive feedback encouraged her to continue. She also possessed entrepreneurial talent.

But besides working in her parents' business and doing housework for the family, she had little time. She encountered resentment and incomprehension, both from her mother and from her future husband, a respectable insurance accountant. The same obstacles that initially stood in Hedwig Courths-Mahler's way. But unlike her, Elsbeth was braver, more radical. She pulled the emergency brake early on.

»I had to hide my appreciation for poetry, art, and science from those around me – I could only read and continue learning in secret in order to get ahead.

However, since I had to be involved in the business from the age of 14 to 19 – until my marriage – not only in bookkeeping but also in selecting historical costumes for all kinds of plays by Schiller, Goethe, Lessing, Kleist, it was part of the business – and here I can say thank God – to also read these plays in order to see which historical costumes were necessary for the performance.

I believe that this need to read the classics is to blame for the fact that I retained the old forms in my own poems and was less able to warm to the later emerging Expressionism and modern style ...

What I always found dreadful was the hustle and bustle of Carnival season, because that's when I had it hardest of all. Our staff finished work at 7:30 a.m. – except for the week before Carnival, when they always worked late into the night – because back then the eight-hour day was unheard of.

But I often had to help until 10:00 a.m., packing baskets full of costumes that were sent out that very night to other cities for theatrical performances or masquerade balls ...

*And while I often had to wait alone in the offices until porters or porters had collected the giant baskets filled with theater and makeup costumes, I studied costume history or read the works of the classics: *The Robbers — Intrigue and Love — Don Carlos — Nathan the Wise — Kätchen von Heilbronn and the like*, unaware that even after three decades I would come to love the city of Kätchen von Heilbronn dearly and, after many, many struggles in my life, only in my 49th year — albeit not yet without worries — find here, near the Church of Peace, the first peaceful time, where I can work and create unhindered and undisturbed, sometimes practically, sometimes intellectually, from morning till night«.*

At 17, she left home. At 20, she became pregnant and was forced to marry Fritz Ebertin, who was ten years her senior. Their son Reinhold was born. Then came their second child. Death after a tragic accident. Deep depression. The marriage didn't last long.

*»At first, it really did seem as if my fiancé was proud when I wrote poems for the clubs and when favorable reviews appeared in the newspapers. I was also overjoyed when, at Christmas before my wedding, he gave me not only an opal necklace (opals are stones that bring misfortune in love) but also a large work: *Otto von Leixner's History of German Literature*. My joy was inward; I couldn't show it outwardly because no one around me shared my appreciation for poetry. The necklace didn't interest me much. But my mother immediately said: ›Opals bring bad luck — and how can you give a young girl such a large history book?«*

That was precisely the most beautiful gift I received as a bride and wife, and I still cherish it today.

Fritz Ebertin's accommodating gesture towards my wish to give me a major literary work that would allow me to further my education reinforced my belief that we could also harmonize well intellectually and emotionally in marriage, and even made me forget my stepbrother. At first, Fritz and I did harmonize well, but — I think I was too serious and philosophically inclined and not cut out to be a tender bride and wife.