

Erich Romberg

Circles and horizons

Short stories

Dedication

I dedicate this book to my family of almost exactly 20 years: Silvia, my daughter Sarah and my son Eric. After a long period of wandering around in the world, they have given me a firm place in this universe. Sarah taught me what makes children tick at the age of 4. Two years later, I was able to try out what I had learnt with my son Eric. I learnt that not all children tick in the same way. It's best to just let them grow and try to be a role model, which doesn't always work.

I'm no wiser now than I was before, but I can deal with the uncertainty better.

Thank you, family

Erich Romberg

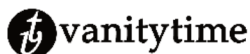
Circles and horizons

Immortality for an elite

Short stories

Motivations and explanations in the appendix

Imprint



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Foreword

In this volume I have compiled 48 short stories, tales and other short prose pieces. They date back to the beginning of the 90s of the last millennium. I welcome the 3rd millennium with a sarcastic column.

I am firmly convinced that the world does not end at the horizon. That's why I like to address my own quirks and weaknesses, which I impose on my protagonists, and then I also like to make fun of them. After all, you're no longer the guy from back then who did such strange things.

However, not all the human oddities I write about come from my own life, but from careful observations of what is happening around me. In some stories, I exaggerate human idiosyncrasies and weaknesses to the point of grotesqueness. I particularly love human idiosyncrasies because that's what humanity is all about. Let's take this story:

"The pedantic passenger." This story describes in meticulous detail the observation of a corpulent passenger who devotes himself with meticulous precision to the ritual of eating during a flight.

Sometimes there are also stories that are, on the face of it, silly, but on closer inspection are not so silly after all.

Let's look at: "From the life of a chewing gum."

A completely trivial matter is played up and dramatised here. You could say there is an importance to the trivial. That is also human.

I also like to deal with psychological or philosophical aspects in my stories, such as in "The Firebird", in which the suitability of Homo Sapiens as the crown of humanity is critically scrutinised. I don't shy away from psychologically disturbing stories either.

Anyone who reads "The Child's Grave", for example, will agree. It always becomes disturbing when human coldness or callousness comes into play.

I also give scientists tremendous possibilities and describe the excessive demands placed on people when dealing with them, e.g. in the story "Immortality for an elite" or in "End of a chromosome".

It is impossible to present the range of stories in just a few words.

In Motivations, backgrounds and explanations, an extensive appendix, I provide insight into the creation of these stories. Here the reader will also find references to the time of origin of the contributions. I have endeavoured to assess my own texts as if I were analysing other people's texts. Of course, this is not so easy, especially when a text is based on a true experience. However, the text is usually not the experience itself, but an invented story in which I use the characters and the context of the experience and often exaggerate them in a pointed way. I do not describe any actual living persons.

This appendix should enable the reader to understand the meaning of the more difficult or seemingly trivial contributions.

I invite you to scrutinise me and my stories.

Prologue

A tractate on art and THE ALTERNATE VIEWSITE

Erich Romberg, 1998

THE ALTERNATE VIEWSITE

" You are only aware of one drive;
oh, never learn to know the other!
Two souls, alas, dwell in my breast,
and each one strives to part from the other. ";

(Quote: Goethe, Faust I, Translated from German.)

THE ALTERNATE VIEWSIDE is the artist's second soul. He has experienced the polarity of his being; within him are ying and yang, maternal and paternal blood, the capacity for happiness and suffering, Abel and Cain, the divine and the diabolical. His are two beings that want to break the tight corset of the body, which he can only keep under control by learning to accept and love them as his nature, recognising polarity as an inseparable unity and not misunderstanding it as a rift. This unity manifests itself in art.

The following applies to the artist: do not deny your ALTERNATE VIEWSIDE; do not suppress the dark side in you, as the Philistines do; banish it to the canvas, hurl it onto paper or carve it into stone; shock the Philistines by putting THE ALTERNATE VIEWSIDE, their ALTERNATE VIEWSIDE, in front of their noses. Through art you can experience that darkness and shadow are only born through light. Just as ratio and irrational ratio need each other, just as space and time only gain their meaning through light and matter, so it is only through art that THE ALTERNATE

VIEWSIDE becomes apparent, that the artist can reach those of us who have also experienced THE ALTERNATE VIEWSIDE.

Art is an expression of truth and THE ALTERNATE VIEWSIDE is part of this truth.

My 2000 Column

I know it's not particularly original that I now feel the need to write a millennium column. I'm joining the thousands and thousands of columnists who are thinking about what we can expect, wish for and demand in the third millennium. This time, I am not ashamed to be part of the great herd of columnists, because experiencing this event is so incredible that it would be appropriate for anyone with even a modicum of literacy to write their two-thousandth column.

We are crossing the threshold into a supposedly modern third millennium, and there are still far more illiterates than people who can even begin to write. So I belong to an elite that can at least write its name, a special class that can do much more than that, and I distinguish myself from them by even trying my hand at a two thousand column.

So how grateful I must be, even as the millennium draws to a close, that I belong to an elite herd of columnists. It is precisely this gratitude that is scratching the surface of a problem that I am realising right now. I have unlearned gratitude, just as a large number of the many columnists almost certainly have.

We take far too much for granted, so much so that we usually don't even begin to think about how little the achievements of modern times are taken for granted by the majority of the world's population. Even the most trivial things are not the norm. The following is still considered normal today:

- Wars are being waged, even if they are not yet taking place here. Should we be happy about that?
- Millions of people live without adequate shelter, half a million in the affluent country of Germany alone.
- Millions and millions of people go hungry and starve to death every year,

- Children are exploited, abused, violated and killed, there will be, there will be, and ... and, I could continue the list indefinitely and it would certainly go on for a long time.

We are inundated with bad news, disaster reports and war reports; reports of displacement, human rights violations, the destruction of bodies and souls, and yet the public drumbeats are just the tip of a huge iceberg. Woe to all the many small catastrophes if even the loud sounds go unheard.

If I quietly and bashfully ask myself what makes me and my non-suffering comrades stand out from all these unfortunates, I have to humbly admit: I have no merit of my own, I was just brought into the world at the right place at the right time. Almost everyone around me was brought into the world at the right time and in the right place; nevertheless, my ears are ringing from all the lamentations of the unfortunate lucky ones.

So if, ignorant as we are, we leave out the street children in Romania or ignore child prostitution in the Philippines, i.e. child abuse, not least by our compatriots, we have to ask ourselves: what went wrong in the right place at the right time? It would certainly not do justice to reality if all the suffering caused by personal disasters in our affluent society were to be played down by pointing to the areas of misery in this world. So allow me for a while to ignore the misery of our own affluence. This misery is not imaginary. I realise this again and again when I see a person looking for something to eat in the rubbish, an emaciated yellow junkie huddled on a bench in a train station or somewhere else. It strikes me when I see a girl at the age at which I made my first shy eye contact with the opposite sex, a maturing child offering her childish body for sale to greedy, omnivorous men in order to earn the next fix. It makes me sick to my stomach when I have to look at the fat, fat citizens shaking their heads at this imposition,

because this misery disturbs the idyll of Christmas shopping. People had just bought themselves off by generously handing an old homeless man, who was obviously no longer able to work in his old age, with his disability, in his neglect, a fifty-penny piece, a mark or even a two-mark piece. How much better the five-mark sausage, six-mark punch or mushrooms at the Christmas market tasted to the benefactor. How ultimate the kick is when you buy the rubbish for forty-nine fifty, having just made your contribution to saving this world from misery. The intellectuals among us can then go to the cabaret at after three or four cups of mulled wine or punch to roar with laughter or smile with intelligent restraint, depending on whether or not they have understood the hackneyed social criticism, to get their virtual intelligence orgasm. Now you're ready for the new millennium. Christmas comes and goes. The ugly is out. You can wallow in a familiar, perfect world, the tears of sentimentality flow in torrents in the Christmas elation, proportional to the amount of alcohol consumed. You don't see the scum's punctured veins here, even if they are your own children - they are out of sorts. The well-behaved unwrap their presents and are happy as they should be. Politicians and the police have to deal with the misery outside.

When people ask me what I would like to see in the new millennium, I can only say:

As long as people's worries are reduced to whether or not the banks' ATMs will spit out money on the first of January because of the two thousand problem, I wish for a big wheel on which we can turn back time by a thousand years to get a new chance for the development of real humanity towards the third millennium.

The Dream Designer

In those days, when people still had dreams, there was a special kind of artist. He was the only dream designer far and wide. The fame of his art extended far beyond the country's borders, and what's more, his fame transcended space and time. So it was no wonder that this fame reached right up to the present day.

In this present, there are no more dreams, and what people think are dreams are nothing but illusions. In this dreamless present, there is a man who distrusted illusions but did not realise that illusions are not dreams. He lived in the sea of possibilities, but the pull of illusions is too strong for him to grasp any of them.

The fame of the dream designer reaches his ears. At first it is just a fleeting breeze, one of the elements from the sea of possibilities. But this gentle breeze turns into a storm and he suddenly realises that his illusions are not dreams. He decides to seize this one opportunity to create a real dream for himself. He whirled through the maelstrom of time to land where the famous artist worked. He immediately sought him out to have a huge dream created. But it wasn't that easy to hire the dream designer. When the man from the present went there, the artist was extremely uninterested.

"You are not qualified to have me create a dream for you. Go and acquire the necessary qualifications."

The man from the present asked how they could be acquired. But the artist replied:

"You have to find that out for yourself, it's part of the qualification." The man was already thinking about travelling back to his world of illusions, because you don't have to qualify for illusions. But then the man came to his senses and said to himself:

"Have I been drifting around in nothingness for so long", as the sea