

Döblin

The Three Leaps of Wang Lun: A Chinese Novel

Here for the first time in English is Alfred Döblin's astonishing epic of eighteenth century China, hailed on its publication in 1915 as a master-piece of Expressionist prose, and since recognized to be the first modern German novel. The Three Leaps of Wang Lun is the story of a doomed sectarian rebellion during the reign of Emperor Ch'ien-lung (1736-1796). It is also the most sustained evocation, in any European language, of a China untouched by the West. Döblin's imagination, almost hallucinatory in its intensity, brings this China to vivid life. Teeming cities and Tibetan wastes, political intrigue and religious yearning, life at Court and the fate of wandering outcasts are depicted in a language of enormous vigour, unfolding the theme of meekness against force, a mystical sense of the world against the realities of power. This translation for the first time presents the whole work as Döblin wrote it. The inclusion of the Prologue, dropped from the first German edition and never replaced, restores a unity of structure and theme missing from previous editions. The Introduction places the novel in the context of Döblin's life and work, the Expressionist movement and the historical background, and discusses its theme and style.

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