



## German History in Documents and Images

Volume 5. Wilhelmine Germany and the First World War, 1890-1918  
Paul Boldt, "On the Terrace of Café Josty" (1912)

This poem illustrates the desire of poets to capture the rhythms of modern life. Sitting on the terrace at a Berlin café, Paul Boldt (1881-1921) allows sensory impressions to trickle into the aesthetic tableau of his poem.

---

Potsdamer Platz in an endless roar  
Glaciates all resounding avalanches  
The street complex: trams on rails,  
Automobiles and the refuse of mankind.

People trickle over the asphalt,  
Ant-like in their diligence, nimble as lizards.  
Foreheads and hands, flashing with thoughts,  
Swim like sunlight through the dark forest.

Night rain wraps the square in a cavern,  
Where bats, white, with beating wings  
And lavender jellyfish lie – colorful oils;

They multiply, dissected by the cars. –  
Berlin squirts up, glistening nest of the day,  
From the smoke of the night like the pus of a pestilence.

Source: Paul Boldt, "Auf der Terrasse des Café Josty" ["On the Terrace of Café Josty"], *Die Aktion*, Jg. 2, November 13, 1912.

Original German poem reprinted in Jürgen Schutte and Peter Sprengel, *Die Berliner Moderne 1885-1914* [*Berlin Modernity, 1885-1914*]. Stuttgart, 1987, pp. 328-30.

Translation: Richard Pettit