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Felix Hausdorff's Poem "Den Ungeflügelten"

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Synopsis

In 1900, Felix Hausdorff published *Ekstasen* (Ecstasy) under the pseudonym Paul Mongré. The book is comprised of 157 poems (70 sonnets, 32 rondels, 25 "mixed poems", where Hausdorff effortlessly combines different types of poetic styles, and 30 more poems). "Den Ungeflügelten" (To The Wingless Ones) is the first poem in this book and provides an interesting self-portrait of Hausdorff as he embraces his muse with confidence. Here I present an English translation of this poem without (much) commentary.

Keywords: Felix Hausdorff, Paul Mongré, Ekstasen, poetry

If you are reading this entry, you might already be well aware of the role Felix Hausdorff holds within the hallowed halls of mathematics. Undergraduate students of mathematics might hear of him in the context of Hausdorff spaces when learning topology, for example, but there are many other mathematical constructions named after him. The Wikipedia article on him [5] lists a whole lot of them: Hausdorff measure, Hausdorff dimension, Hausdorff completion, Hausdorff convergence, Hausdorff metric, Hausdorff maximal principle, Hausdorff-Young inequality, Baker-Campbell-Hausdorff formula, Hausdorff paradox. This is mainly because Hausdorff holds a singularly distinct role in the development of point-set topology and descriptive set theory, to name a few areas that owe their discovery to him.

But Hausdorff was also a writer and a poet, a philosopher and a welcomed participant in scholarly but non-mathematical circles as well. Moreover, toward the end of the 19th century into the very beginnings of the 20th century, he published several non-mathematical works under the pseudonym Paul Mongré. For more on Hausdorff's non-mathematical work, see [1, 3, 4].

While I was writing my master's thesis under Professor George Cain ZT"L in 1992, he gifted to me a passionate curiosity for Hausdorff's "other" works and I've spent much of the last nearly three decades tracking down and reading this unique body of literature. Hausdorff's philosophy is heavily influenced by Kant and Nietzsche; however, his poetry is all together different. It is enchanting, fantastical, and, at times, concupiscent.

Although I more regularly research, publish, and present on Hausdorff's philosophy,¹ I seem to keep returning to his more fanciful works as they provide me the opportunity to deeply engage with the human side of Hausdorff. A glimpse into the internal world of this polymath, a Renaissance man, whose seminal contributions to mathematics, I believe, have fully yet to be realized.

Here, starting on the next page, I present, without commentary, an English translation of "Den Ungeflügelten" (To The Wingless Ones), the first poem in Hausdorff's *Ekstasen* (Ecstasy) [2].² The German original is included for reference, on the following page.

References

- [1] Egbert Brieskorn and Walter Purkert, *Biographie. Felix Hausdorff, Gesammelte Werke. Band IB*, Springer, Berlin, 2018.
- [2] Paul Mongré, *Ekstasen* (Ecstasy), Verlag H. Seemann Nachf., Leipzig, 1900. Google Books version at <https://books.google.com/books?id=sTvPAAAAMAAJ>, last accessed on July 2, 2021.
- [3] Walter Punkert, "The Double Life of Felix Hausdorff / Paul Mongré," *The Mathematical Intelligencer*, Volume **30** Number 4 (September 2008), pages 36–50.
- [4] Gert Schubring, "Review of *Biographie. Felix Hausdorff, Gesammelte Werke. Band IB*, by Egbert Brieskorn and Walter Purkert," *The Mathematical Intelligencer*, 2021. Open access at <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00283-021-10083-9>.
- [5] Wikipedia contributors, "Felix Hausdorff," *Wikipedia The Free Encyclopedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Felix_Hausdorff, last accessed on July 2, 2021.

¹ I most recently presented a paper titled "Felix Hausdorff's Raumproblem in present day English" at the 2019 AMS Regional meeting held at The University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI.

² This was a volume of poetry that Hausdorff published under the pseudonym Paul Mongré, in 1900. He would have been 32 years old at this time. That's three years before he arrived at Leipzig University.

TO THE WINGLESS ONES

I am riding my happiness.
Therefore it cannot fly away from me!
 All happiness wants to fly,
Wants to glide with butterfly wings
Flaming like gold above clouds of flower scent.
Those that sing and speak and dance their happiness,
 I do not envy them.
Not their earth-bound happiness
That walks the Earth, forcibly tamed and bridled,
Harnessed with rattling chains,
With words that stomp around like horses.

 You cannot fly.
That is why you tied up happiness,
So that it shall not fly away from you.
 I am riding my happiness,
I myself am flight and storm of my happiness,
Who lashes the clouds of trembling flower's scent,
With wings flaming like gold.

DEN UNGEFLÜGELTEN

Ich fliege mein Glück,
Drum entfliegt es mir nicht!
 Alles Glück will stiegen,
Mit goldbrennenden Falterflügeln
Über Blumenduftgewölk gleiten.
Die ihr Glück singen und sagen und tanzen,
 Ich neide sie nicht,
Nicht ihr eingebundenes Glück,
Das mit zähem Zwange gezähmt und gezäumt,
In klirrende Maße und Ketten geschirrt
 Die Erde beschreite,
Mit roßgleich stampfenden Worten.

 Ihr könnt nicht fliegen,
Drum bandet ihr das Glück,
Daß eurer Haft es nicht entfliege.
 Ich fliege mein Glück,
Bin selbst meines Glückes Flug und Sturm,
Der zitternder Blumen Duftgewölk
Mit goldbrennenden Flügeln peitscht!