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# Little Man, What Now?



## Synopsis

This is the book that led to Hans Fallada's downfall with the Nazis. The story of a young couple struggling to survive the German economic collapse was a worldwide sensation and was made into an acclaimed Hollywood movie produced by Jews, leading Hitler to ban Fallada's work from being translated. Nonetheless, it remains, as The Times Literary Supplement notes, "the novel of a time in which public and private merged even for those who wanted to stay at home and mind their own business."\*\*\*\*This is a Hybrid Book. Melville House's HybridBooks combine print and digital media into an enhanced reading experience by including with each title additional curated material called Illuminations • maps, photographs, illustrations, and further writing about the author and the book. The Melville House Illuminations are free with the purchase of any title in the HybridBook series, no matter the format. Purchasers of the print version can obtain the Illuminations for a given title simply by scanning the QR code found in the back of each book, or by following the url also given in the back of the print book, then downloading the Illumination in whatever format works best for you. Purchasers of the digital version receive the appropriate Illuminations automatically as part of the ebook edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Fallada deserves high praise for having reported so realistically, so truthfully, with such closeness to life." • "Herman Hesse" Superb. • "Graham Greene" In a publishing hat trick, Melville House allows English-language readers to sample

Fallada's vertiginous variety accompanying the release of Michael Hoffman's splendid translation of *Every Man Dies Alone* with the simultaneous publication of excellent English versions of Fallada's two best-known novels, *Little Man, What Now?* (translated by Susan Bennett) and *The Drinker* (translated by Charlotte and A.L. Lloyd). In his probing afterword to *Little Man, What Now?*, Philip Brady ponders the question of why the book isn't better-known today: "Enduring success is one thing, immediate impact is something different, and clearly the immediate impact of Fallada's novel was undeniable." Given our current economic circumstances, the book may have a second chance at impact and endurance." - New York Times Book Review

Before WWII, German writer Hans Fallada's novels were international bestsellers, on a par with those of his countrymen Thomas Mann and Herman Hesse. In America, Hollywood even turned his first big novel, *Little Man, What Now?* into a major motion picture. Learning the movie was made by a Jewish producer, however, Hitler decreed Fallada's work could no longer be sold outside Germany, and the rising Nazis began to pay him closer attention. When he refused to join the Nazi party he was arrested by the Gestapo who eventually released him, but thereafter regularly summoned him for "discussions" of his work. However, unlike Mann, Hesse, and others, Fallada refused to flee to safety, even when his British publisher, George Putnam, sent a private boat to rescue him. The pressure took its toll on Fallada, and he resorted increasingly to drugs and alcohol for relief. After Goebbels ordered him to write an anti-Semitic novel, he snapped and found himself imprisoned in an asylum for the "criminally insane" considered a death sentence under Nazi rule. To forestall the inevitable, he pretended to write the assignment for Goebbels, while actually composing three encrypted books including his tour de force novel *The Drinker* in such dense code that they were not deciphered until long after his death. Fallada outlasted the Reich and was freed at war's end. But he was a shattered man. To help him recover by putting him to work, Fallada's publisher gave him the Gestapo file of a simple, working-class couple who had resisted the Nazis. Inspired, Fallada completed *Every Man Dies Alone* in just twenty-four days. He died in February 1947, just weeks before the book's publication.

An interesting read that gives insight into what it was like to be a white collar worker in Berlin just prior to WWII. This is a fictional account of two newlyweds, but it should be noted that the author did extensive research on the subject and managed to portray an accurate picture of the struggles at the time. What makes the book so engaging is the humorous aspect that pervades the story - some

critics have compared the main character to Charlie Chaplin's Little Tramp. A series of unfortunate events are consistently cushioned by the humor in the characters and plot line. What struck me the most about this volume is how much of the occurrences taking place in this book are similar to what goes on in modern times - note the manner in which employees are told to be grateful that they have a job by employers who abuse them and create unreasonable performance standards for the current economy. Some aspects of the human experience are universal and transcend time and culture.

Some time ago I read Hans Fallada's *Every Man Dies Alone* - a brilliant novel about an ordinary working class couple who turn into anti-Nazi activists after their son is killed during the German invasion of France. Fortified by that work, which was published shortly after World War II, I expected much from *Little Man What Now?*, especially as I was aware that it had become a highly acclaimed bestseller after its publication in 1932. Regrettably, I was disappointed. In fact, I became increasingly disappointed the further I got into the book. My irritation grew all the way to the final page at which point it was multiplied because the narrative stopped abruptly, without a conclusion, pointing upward, downward, or at least hinting in the direction of some sort of future. Written about thirteen years before *Every Man Dies Alone*, *Little Man What Now?* is about as grim and depressing a story as anyone but a true masochist would wish to plunge into. Fallada does not delve explicitly into the history of Germany in the period following World War I; there is no mention of the Versailles treaty, reparation payments, inflation, or political and economic turmoil. But there is no way to read the bleak narrative as anything but a metaphor for the arid days of the Weimar republic. The story starts with Johannes Pinneberg finding to his astonishment that his girlfriend, Lämmchen, is pregnant. Despite his less than stellar upbringing (his father was absent, his mother a prostitute, the mother's partner a conman) Pinneberg is a decent enough fellow and marries Lämmchen. The two get along well enough, but in the depressed Weimar economy the hapless Pinneberg has a hard time making a living. The jobs he is able to find pay little and end precipitously. By the end of the book he has been unemployed for over a year. He, Lämmchen, and their child exist on meagre welfare payments and the pittance she is paid for sewing and darning socks. In 2017 it is fair to ask what on earth could have propelled this grim story into a highly successful bestseller. The answer must obviously lie in those who read it 85 years ago. They were understanding and sympathetic because they, too, had suffered. Many of their lives were likely

similar, or little better, than those of poor Pinneberg and LÃfÂmmchen.

Hans Fallada is often overlooked, and the reasoning for that is quite unclear. This book is just another example of Fallada's unique ability to evoke Weimar Germany -- the economic uncertainty, the tension between the Nazis and the Communists, and the hardscrabble lives of so many Berliners. If you like Christopher Isherwood's 'Berlin Stories', this serves as a worthy extension of Isherwood's work and gives additional context. There is a simplistic beauty in Fallada's writing that is well worth the effort. I'm not fond of some of the translations from German in this book, but to a non-Germanic they are of no important consequence.

My book club chose to read this book which one of us had read years ago in a college class. Written in the early 1930's, the book provides a dose of realism about lower middle class life in Germany prior to the worst excesses of the Nazis. Brown shirts are a minor presence in the story, as is the opposition Communist party. However, the book focuses on offering a very detailed picture of daily life for an apolitical young couple who constantly struggle to make ends meet, sometimes because of bad decisions on their own part but other times because of economic and social circumstances way beyond their control. One thing that struck the members of our book club was the couple's lack of contact with any institutions of civil society (churches, mutual aid societies, etc.) that might have helped them in their struggles. On the other hand, the famous German government bureaucracy is all too present at times. All in all, this is a compelling story, written as a contemporary critique of German life but now a historical novel.

Hans Fallada has created several masterpiece works of fiction and this is definitely one of them. Fallada wrote of Germany during the thirties and early forties which were trying times for everyday citizens. Little Man What Now may be a depressing narrative, but it is an accurate portrayal of the desperation many felt during the Nazi era. Reading a Fallada novel puts you into the time period of the story as the characters become familiar and their world becomes real. A great read and an excellent translation.

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