

## Kleiner Mann, was nun?

*H.Fallada*

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I first encountered the book around 1970 in a televises version done by the East Germans. A few years later I read the book and found it quite charming. I was not the only one, in fact the book was a great success when it was published back in 1932 and made Fallada a name in Germany. After finishing the book this time around I found out that recently the original ms had been discovered in his *Nachlaß* and that was longer by a fourth and presented a fuller and more interesting picture of the Weimar Republic. Should one get it?

Johannes Pinneberg is *der Kleiner Mann* twenty three years old who met the girl Emma or *Lmmchen* by walking across the dunes along the Baltic coast. They make love under the stars and soon thereafter, and that is how the book starts, they find out that she is pregnant and they make a hasty marriage. Pinneberg has no father but a strong-willed mother of questionable virtue of whom the son is very embarrassed. He works in a small town in northern Germany, loses his job, but is invited by his mother to come to Berlin and live with her and get a job as a salesmen in a big department store.by name of Mandel. Her promise is miraculously kept due to the intervention of a male admirer of her, a certain shady character by name of Jachtmann. At the department store Pinneberg is taken under the wings of a certain Heilbutt who is an enthusiastic nudist and is eventually dismissed because of that. Eventually Pinnebrg loses his job and is reduced being on the dole and sinking deeper and deeper into poverty and despair and would certainly be lost had it not been for his resourceful wife and their son. The nadir of his life is being pushed away by a policeman from a fancy neighborhood for his unkempt appearance. Being poor is not only a deprivation but also a crime and a disease making you into an outcast.

The story is a charming one pitting the idyllic twosome (with a small child) against the harsh reality of a society in crises after the Wall Street crash back in 1929. Pinneberg himself is a weak character, thus despised by his mother, and who would have been helpless without his wife and supportive friends (it is symptomatic that the friendship with Heilbutt is not one of warmth but rather of charity).

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