

## FOREWORD

In the radio play Stunde der Liebe (1930) an unnamed character inquires at the cinema box office as to the type of film showing:

SPRECHER Was gibt man denn?

DIE DAME AN DER KASSE Madame wünscht keine Kinder.

SPRECHER Was ist denn das? Ein Lustspiel oder gar eine Tragödie?

DIE DAME AN DER KASSE Ein Gesellschaftsstück.

SPRECHER Aha! (VII,95f.).

The 'Aha-Erlebnis' demonstrated here, although unclear as to its positive or negative connotation, certainly suggests the importance of this type of preinformation for the prospective spectator of a film or play.

The aim of this study is to examine genre critique in the total corpus of comedies written by Ödön von Horváth. This entails analysing the structural elements and devices in the plays, their place in a literary tradition as well as their critical function in Horváth's time. A glance at Horváth's dramatic output reveals that 14 of the 17 completed plays can be included under the term comedy. In the light of his continual return to and experimentation with the comedy form the argument can be advanced that an assessment of Horváth's dramatic work is in fact an assessment of his comedies. The method will be to analyse the formal characteristics of the various genres that can be subsumed under the term comedy. While he is best known for his Volksstücke, he employs the same method of genre critique for the 'Posse', boulevard comedy and 'Märchen'.

It has been the critical practice in the past to term Horváth's serious comedies tragicomedies or even tragedies, a view which seems to negate the importance the author himself attached to the various generic designations. It also implies that the comedy form cannot be imbued with serious content without having to undergo a generic transformation, whereas the distinguishing feature of Horváth's comedies is that they maintain the formal requirements of comedy while communicating a serious critical content.

This study of Horváth's comedies concerns itself first and foremost with literary conventions which specifically constitute the comedy as a dramatic form. In consequence there is no exhaustive examination of the comic or of humour in Horváth's work, although these elements are by no means ignored.

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C.B.B.