

I. Introduction

In a survey of the comedy production during the Weimar Republic, Reinhold Grimm places Horváth alongside Brecht for his innovative contribution to the comedy form in this period: "(Horváth) allein setzte gleich dem Augsburger, (...) Ende der Zwanziger Jahre die Entwicklung eines 'neuen Humors' schöpferisch fort"(1). In the light of this assertion and the considerable critical attention which has been focused on his work during the past decade, the absence of a detailed analysis of Horváth's comedy production is surprising and a manifest gap in Horváth scholarship. Although secondary literature has concentrated in the main on the Volksstücke - the core of Horváth's comedies - they constitute only one third of those plays which can be categorised as belonging to the comedy form. In addition, the studies of the Volksstücke have focused chiefly on social criticism and language. The only detailed work on humour or the comic in Horváth's work is the dissertation by Ballin, Irony in the dramatic works of Ödön von Horváth (2). However, the writer does not concern herself with the problem of comedy as a literary form but rather describes systematically the types of irony to be found in the plays. Her method proceeds from the premiss of irony as an aesthetic constant and consequently little attention is paid to either the structure of the plays or to elements particular to the comedy form. A work which lies closer to the intention of the present study is Gerhard Melzer's analysis of the elements of traditional tragedy found in the Volksstücke which, he argues, are then logically to be seen as tragicomedies. He restricts himself, however, to the Volksstücke and ignores the rest of Horváth's comedies, a practice which can almost be considered a convention in Horváth scholarship (3). However, the assumption that only these four or five works are worthy of critical attention is no longer tenable.

The purpose of the following study is to examine the multifarious functions and adaptations of the comedy form and its

1. Reinhold Grimm, 'Neuer Humor? Komödienproduktion zwischen 1918 und 1933', Die deutsche Komödie im 20. Jahrhundert, hrsg. von Wolfgang Paulsen, Heidelberg, Lothar Stiehm Verlag, 1976, p.118.

2. Dolly Elisabeth Ballin, Irony in the dramatic works of Ödön von Horváth, Ph.D University of Washington, 1969.

3. Gerhard Melzer, Das Phänomen des Tragikomischen: Untersuchungen zum Werk von Karl Kraus und Ödön von Horváth, Kronberg/Ts., Scriptor Verlag, 1976. A detailed discussion of this study will be undertaken in III, 1.

Introduction

various sub-genres that Horváth utilised. His unceasing interest in these genres, whether they be Volksstücke, 'Konversations-komödien', 'Märchen' or 'Possen', testifies to the fact that he perceived in them the best vehicles for his purpose.

It is also the purpose of this study to extricate Horváth from the critical corner into which he has been forced by the Horváth renaissance. Horváth became rehabilitated during the 1960s and 1970s by virtue of the social critical component in his work (4) which has the implied value judgement that works not containing explicit material of this nature (especially the exile plays) are unworthy of serious criticism. This critical perspective is founded on the notion that literature must above all reflect a recognisable reality in terms of real places, persons and events. This approach hardly allows a writer such as Horváth to rise above the level of a social documentarist and undervalues the dimension of the fictional which is ultimately the special preserve of literature. Certain genres such as the 'Zeitstück' or 'Historie' may perhaps have to pay more attention to representing reality in a carefully documented fashion but their resonance is correspondingly limited to their specific issues. Comedy, however, is a dramatic form with a long but remarkably intact lineage of character types, situations, conventions and therefore of expectations which confer on the comedy an aura of artificiality. But at the same time the comedy has been almost invariably linked with social criticism: the comedies of Aristophanes criticised recognisable institutions and persons in Athens of his day despite their often bizarre plots and situations. The history of the comedy form is in fact the history of a dialectical process which balances the social component against the artificial conventions of the form; it juggles recognition with disbelief to provide solutions to problems which are only soluble within its own conventions. Accordingly, the following analysis of Horváth's comedies will concentrate primarily on examining how the conventions of the various comic genres are adapted and often reversed; it is above all concerned with demonstrating how Ödön von Horváth is a critic of the comedy form and not just a critic of his time.

4. The standard work of this school is Axel Fritz's meticulously documented study Ödön von Horváth als Kritiker seiner Zeit, München, List Verlag, 1973; cf. also Jean-Claude François, Histoire et fiction dans le théâtre d'Ödön von Horváth, Grenoble, Presses Universitaires, 1978, where the emphasis is primarily on the 'histoire'; and Dorota Cyron-Hawryluk, Zeitgenössische Problematik in den Dramen Ödön von Horváths, Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis 209, Wrocław, 1974.

Genre and Genre Expectation

1. Genre and Genre Expectation

First, however, the terminology relating to genre must be clarified. While German 'Literaturwissenschaft' has produced an ever-growing body of theory on the subject, English literary criticism has apparently not deemed it necessary to define more precisely its own critical vocabulary and is distinguished by a comparative neglect of terminology and theory. A discussion of comedy in particular immediately encounters the problem of specific terms relating to genre. As recently as 1973 Klaus W. Hempfer discovered: "Überaus verwirrend ist (...) die Situation in der englischsprachigen Kritik"(5) where the kinds of literature have many aliases: genres, species, forms, types, modes, all of which appear to be interchangeable. While it would be beyond the scope of this study to attempt a general redefinition of these terms the importance of generic information in the reception of a work of literature cannot be stressed enough.

To ensure consistent usage the following terms will be defined thus: Mode denotes the three "Naturformen" of literature (to use Goethe's term: i.e. the lyric, narrative and dramatic mode). The latter can be divided into the forms of tragedy, comedy and tragicomedy. Comedy in turn has a large number of genres belonging to it such as the 'Posse', 'Schwank', 'Volksstück' etc.(6). This study will be concerned with the specific associations of particular genres which nevertheless have in common an overall intention of comedy.

Horváth's use of the comedy form can be best expressed by the Brechtian term 'Umfunktionierung': just as Brecht and Weill refashioned the opera for a social critical purpose that was hitherto foreign to the form, Horváth extended and refined this type of literary subversion for a diversity of comic genres. Brecht: "Was Die Dreigroschenoper betrifft, so ist sie - wenn nichts anderes - eher ein Versuch, der völligen Verblödung der

5. Klaus W. Hempfer, Gattungstheorie, München, W. Fink, 1973, p.21.

6. The proliferation of genres is a phenomenon of the 19th century. Helmut Schanze documents the following comic genres found in the repertoires of German theatres towards the end of the 19th century: Burleske, Comödie, Faschingsposse, Fastnachtsspiel, Humoreske, Lustspiel, Märchen, Märchenposse, Posse, Parodie, Scherz, Schwank, Travestie, Volksstück, Vaudeville, Zaubermärchen (Zauberposse); Drama im bürgerlichen Realismus (1850-1890), Frankfurt/M., Vittorio Klostermann, 1973, p.110f.

Genre and Genre Expectation

Oper entgegenzuwirken. Die Oper scheint mir bei weitem dümmere, wirklichkeitsfremdere und in der Gesinnung niedriger als die Operette"(7).

In Brecht's theoretical writings on Mahagonny, his second attempt to rejuvenate and modernize the opera, he addresses the problem and the necessity to reverse the audience expectation associated with a particular genre and its specific elements: "Zweifellos werden gewisse Wünsche des Publikums, die von der alten Oper ohne weiteres befriedigt wurden, von der neuen nicht mehr berücksichtigt. Wie ist die Haltung des Publikums in der Oper, und kann sie sich ändern?"(8). Brecht was keenly aware of the problem of 'Erwartungshaltung' or 'Erwartungshorizont' (to borrow a term from reception aesthetics) and in the notes to Mahagonny he insists on the need to retain "das Kulinarische" of the old form because to do without would be to destroy the old opera completely, (which is ultimately his aim), but for the meantime a balance must be found between the old and the new: "es (Mahagonny) sitzt noch prächtig auf dem alten Ast, aber es sägt ihn wenigstens schon (...) ein wenig an"(9).

Manfred Pfister has examined the importance of 'Gattungserwartung' in his structural analysis of drama under the rubric: "Vorinformation und Erwartungshorizont des Zuschauers"(10):

Es ist Teil des Erwartungshorizonts eines theaterkundigen elisabethanischen Zuschauers, daß eine Komödie per definitionem zumindest für die positiven Figuren einen glücklichen Ausgang, ein 'happy ending' bringt (...). Die Konventionen der Gattung garantieren diese untragische Lösung und erlauben es daher dem Zuschauer, die oft bedrohlichen Verwirrungen mit jener Distanz zu verfolgen, die Voraussetzung für die komische Wirkung ist(11).

However, the information connoted by the title or generic specification can also function as strategic misinformation:

7. Brecht, Gesammelte Werke 17, p.990.

8. Brecht, 'Anmerkungen zur Oper Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny, GW 17, p.1012.

9. Ibid., p.1016.

10. Manfred Pfister, Das Drama, München, W. Fink, 1977, p.68.

11. Ibid., p.69.

wenn der Autor die Konvention und die damit verbundenen Erwartungen nur anzitiert, um sie innovativ zu durchbrechen. Die Enttäuschung der Erwartung wirkt aufmerksamkeitssteigernd, erhöht den Informationswert der abweichenden Elemente und kann im Kontrast zwischen Erwartetem und Realisiertem Ironie erzeugen(12).

It is possible to proceed a step further and suggest that such a process of disappointing genre expectation can lead to a wider reflection on the nature of the play being presented and its conventions. Specific genre expectations are connected to a specific consciousness: if the former is disturbed in some way it is only logical that the latter will also undergo some change which is ultimately the hope of every serious writer and the expressed intention of Horváth.

That Horváth himself was particularly conscious of genres and their various shades of meaning can be seen in the drafts of Rund um den Kongreß where the versions carry three different genre designations: 'Volksstück', 'Komödie', and 'Lustspiel' (VIII,705). That the play finally ended up as a 'Posse' is further evidence of the differing generic intention of the play in its various stages of writing. In the 'Gebrauchsanweisung' Horváth states explicitly the importance of the generic designation in his first play Die Bergbahn:

Vor sechs Jahren schrieb ich mein erstes Stück Die Bergbahn, und gab ihm den Untertitel und Artbezeichnung: "Ein Volksstück". Die Bezeichnung Volksstück war bis dahin in der jungen dramatischen Produktion in Vergessenheit geraten. Natürlich gebrauchte ich diese Bezeichnung nicht willkürlich, das heißt, nicht einfach deswegen, weil das Stück ein bayerisches Dialektstück ist und die Personen Streckenarbeiter sind, sondern deshalb, weil mir so etwas wie eine Fortsetzung, Erneuerung des alten Volksstückes vorgeschwebt ist - (VIII,662).

This study will examine how Horváth's comedies utilise a complex dialectical process of imbuing old forms with new, often ideologically radical content: the assumption being that certain literary forms carry specific ideological connotations. They may range from the expectation of uncomplicated, crude entertainment in the case of the 'Posse' to the association of a particular political movement in the case of the link between 'Heimatlidung' and the Volksstück. In the cases where

12. Ibid., p.70.

Genre and Genre Expectation

Horváth's plays were actually performed it is possible to ascertain from contemporary reviews to what extent the conventional 'Haltung' associated with certain genres was disturbed. There is ample evidence for the Volksstücke to investigate this but where works were not performed in his lifetime a detailed analysis of structure and content can give some indication of those elements of the genre which are reversed or substantially altered to disappoint the audience's expectations.

This dramaturgical process must not be seen merely as satire or parody of a genre, a criticism which was often levelled at Horváth and against which he repeatedly protested. In the various versions of the 'Gebrauchsanweisung' found in his posthumous papers there is no doubt as to the importance he attached to rectifying this misunderstanding. In Fassung B he lists the central errors as he sees them:

1. daß Ironie mit Satire, und Satire mit Parodie verwechselt wird.
2. daß die Synthese von Ironie und Realismus, die ich erstrebe, als Zynismus gewertet wird. Oder gar als Hanswurstiade oder ungewollte Komik (letzteres sind die ganz Dummen).
3. (...) Alle meine Stücke, jedes meiner Motive, sind Tragödien resp. tragisch. (Mat KK, 111).

With reference to the form of his plays he writes:

Es sind hier in Berlin 4 Stücke (13) von mir gespielt worden. Die ersten 2 waren Versuche in puncto innerem Gehalt, die anderen 2 Versuche in puncto äußerer Form. Da ich, wie man so zu sagen pflegt, etwas "Neues" bringe, liegt die Schuld des Mißverstandenwerdens zu einem beträchtlichen Teil auf mir (...) Also: es ist vollständig falsch, daß ich Satyre (sic) geben will. Ich denke nicht daran (...) Ich bin auch kein Komiker. (Vielleicht müssen aber meine Stücke immer von lauter Komikern gespielt werden, da sie sonst zu "krass" wären.) Für mich ist die Komik etwas Tragisches. Ich schreibe Tragödien, die nur durch ihre "Menschlichkeit" komisch sind(14) (Mat KK, 101).

13. They are in order of performance: Die Bergbahn, Sladek der schwarze Reichswehrmann, Italienische Nacht and Geschichten aus dem Wiener Wald.

The Comic Versus the Comedy Form

Horváth's understanding of tragedy is to be seen in connection with his rejection of satire and parody - it is not a generic description of the form of his plays but a restatement of their fundamentally serious content which he feels was being overlooked in favour of the satirical comic elements. The underlying tone is tragic but this is relativised by "Menschlichkeit" and kitsch elements which are comic in effect. He does not, however, give any of his plays the generic designation 'Tragödie'. This would clearly disarm the complex process of genre critique at work which hinges on the discrepancy between comic expectation and the experience of tragic motifs. While such tragic motifs abound in all his plays this does not make them tragedies or tragicomedies but rather the use of such motifs imbues the comedy form with the potential for serious criticism.

2. Theory of Comedy: the Comic Versus the Comedy Form

The theory of comedy has approached its subject from two perspectives. Comedy is seen either as the sum of comic elements and humorous moments or as a literary tradition distinguished by recurring characters and conventions. In the following survey, which cannot hope to offer a comprehensive discussion of growing literature on the theories of the comic and comedy (15) the most important recent contributions on the two standpoints will be critically appraised.

In 1943 Otto Rommel pointed out that the comic and comedy have been the subject of theoretical discussion since the 17th century from philosophical, psychological and literary perspectives. He maintains that the chief cause of the confusion surrounding the use and understanding of terms such as 'Komödie', 'Lustspiel' and 'Posse' can be attributed to the "abschreckenden

14. That Horváth was still being misunderstood even in 1952 can be seen from the theatre scandal which Kasimir und Karoline occasioned on the 7th October of that year. As one spectator protested: "Es ist eine Zumutung, uns so was vorzusetzen! Das Stück steckt voll ordinärer Anzüglichkeiten und war außerdem noch schlampig und langweilig gespielt. Als Münchner braucht man sich so was nicht bieten zu lassen, denn auf dem Oktoberfest geht es in Wirklichkeit viel netter zu." Mat KK, p.144.

15. For a useful summary of this discussion see Walter Hinck 'Einführung in die Theorie des Komischen und der Komödie', Die deutsche Komödie vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart, hrsg. Walter Hinck, Düsseldorf, August Bagel Verlag, 1977.

Weitläufigkeit und Unübersichtlichkeit der Literatur über das Komische"(16). To overcome this confusion Rommel attempts to elaborate a catalogue of sub-genres based on a theory of the comic. The two fundamental forms of the comic: "Komik der Unzulänglichkeit" and the "Komik des weltüberlegenen Spiels" result in the literary manifestations of the 'Komödie' and the 'Lustspiel' respectively. However, in this study there will be no attempt to investigate further the differentiation between 'Komödie' and 'Lustspiel'. Rommel, in his detailed discussion of this problem, does not extend his model to include the new 20th century "Mischspiele" as he terms them, which are apparently contrived products of a theory and have evolved from the "neuzeitliche(n) Lebensgefühl"(17). It is, however, precisely this modern world view which shapes Horváth's innovative comedies. In accordance with recent critical practice, this study will not distinguish between the two terms which have never been adequately defined and differentiated (18).

More complex is the function of humour and the comic as a constituent element of comedy. The theoretical discussion of comedy of the past two centuries has tended to approach this dramatic form from the aspect of the comic. Wolfgang Kayser has drawn attention to the seeming contradiction between the nature of the comic which is episodic and functions in short bursts and the requirements of drama for longer, more complex structures: "Es ist kein Zufall, daß das Komische im Drama jahrhundertlang nur in einzelnen "komischen" Szenen, Zwischenspielen oder in den Kurzformen des Schwanks u.s.f. gelebt hat"(19). Even though Menander introduced elements of the narrative mode to the comedy,

16. Otto Rommel, 'Die wissenschaftlichen Bemühungen um die Analyse des Komischen', Wesen und Formen des Komischen, hrsg. Grimm/Berghahn, (Wege der Forschung LXII), Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1973, p.1.

17. Rommel, 'Komik und Lustspieltheorie', Wesen und Formen des Komischen, p.72.

18. e.g. Helmut Arntzen: "Wir unterscheiden nicht zwischen Komödie und Lustspiel, da diese Differenzierungen nur Ephemeres fassen und Überdies bei ihrer Anwendung keinerlei Übereinstimmung herrscht." Die ernste Komödie. Das deutsche Lustspiel von Lessing bis Kleist, München, Nymphenburger Verlagshandlung, 1968. p.253; and Grimm finds that the authors themselves cannot be relied upon to differentiate accurately: "Unter solchen Umständen nimmt es nicht wunder, daß sich auf den Wechsel zwischen 'Komödie' und 'Lustspiel' erst recht keine Differenzierung und vollends keine sogenannte Wesensbestimmung - gründen läßt." 'Neuer Humor?', Die deutsche Komödie im 20. Jahrhundert, p.110.

The Comic Versus the Comedy Form

it is still clear that the comic itself "keine besondere Disposition zu großen geschlossenen Strukturen, zu Großformen, mitbringt"(20). Nevertheless, Kayser's discussion of comedy is dictated by the notion that all comedy is the result of the attempt to subsume the comic into three basic types, of which the comedy of intrigue is the one which most closely corresponds to the "Geist des Komischen"(21).

Helmut Prang also sees the development of comedy determined by humour and the comic. Since these phenomena are often marked by strong local characteristics and peculiarities, the history of this form reveals strong national and regional differences: "lokale Eigenarten und Stammeseigentümlichkeiten"(22). Prang's view has doubtlessly been influenced by Karl Holl, the first major historian of German comedy, who in turn owes an unmistakable debt to the dubious tradition of Nadler's Literaturgeschichte der deutschen Stämme und Landschaften. The ideological component in Holl's study manifests itself in his analysis of Grillparzer's Weh dem, der lügt whose serious thematic core testifies to the fact that "keine andere Nation kann solche tiefensten Lustspiele nachfühlen" (23).

Suzanne Langer also approaches comedy from the idea of a "Comic Rhythm" which embodies vitality and is an art form "that arises naturally wherever people are gathered to celebrate life, in spring festivals, triumphs, birthdays, weddings or initiations." She stresses the importance of the etymological significance of the word with its roots in myth and ritual:

What justifies the term 'Comedy' is not that the ancient ritual procession, the Comus, honoring the god of that name was the source of this great art form (...) but the Comus was a fertility rite, and the god it celebrated a fertility god, a symbol of perpetual rebirth, eternal life(24).

19. Wolfgang Kayser, Das sprachliche Kunstwerk, München, Bern, Francke, 1948, p.382.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid., p.383.

22. Helmut Prang, Geschichte des Lustspiels, Stuttgart, Kröner, 1968, p.4f.

23. Karl Holl, Geschichte des deutschen Lustspiels, Leipzig, J.J. Weber, 1923.

Because Langer holds to the idea of comedy being ultimately an impulse or "rhythm" she also advances the view that humour is the major determinant of the structure of comedy and is essential to any analysis of the latter. She makes the important distinction between "emotion symbolically presented and emotion directly stimulated" which is thrown into sharp focus by the phenomenon of laughter in the theatre(25). Because Langer is in the first instance a theorist of aesthetics she apparently does not see the need to demarcate spheres of interest. It is the contention of this study and its theoretical premiss that literary criticism should primarily concern itself with with the former: emotion symbolically presented; or in other words with the elements of comedy found in the text; whether they actually directly stimulate emotion is beyond the scope of literary analysis.

The most complex discussion of comedy in recent times has come from the school of communication theory. Rainer Warning observes at the outset of his study (26) that the main difficulty besetting any examination of the theory of comedy stems from the necessity to combine two incomplete theories: that of the comic and that of dramatic genre. Nevertheless, Warning states categorically: "Die Theorie der Komödie hat sich (...) zu orientieren an der Theorie des Komischen. Das Komische freilich ist (...) nicht nur gattungsindifferent, sondern ein noch vorliterarisches Phänomen der Lebenswelt"(27). However, the comic in this broad sense lacks the communicative intention which specifically constitutes the comic in comedy. It is Warning's innovation to narrow down his definition of the comic to its precise function within the dramatic form and at the same time consider its manifestation in the traditional elements of comedy. He returns to Kayser's theory (without acknowledging it as such) of the problematic relation between the episodic nature of the comic and the action of comedy. The latter is constituted on two levels: the "umfassende Komödienhandlung" and the "eigentlichen komischen Handlungen". The former is comprised of the latter, whereby, and this constitutes an innovation on Warning's part, the action of the comedy can be disassociated from the comic actions(28). The best illustration of the episodic comic actions can be found in the plays of Aristophanes which are structured

24. Suzanne Langer, Feeling and Form, New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953, p.331.

25. *Ibid.*, p.346.

26. Rainer Warning, 'Elemente einer Pragmasemiotik der Komödie', Das Komische, München, W. Fink, 1976, pp. 279-334.

27. *Ibid.*, p.279.

The Comic Versus the Comedy Form

around series of comic 'ridicula', or proven paradigms of comic effect, linked together to form a plot. The commedia dell'arte utilises a similar principle with its stereotypical plots and characters. For Warning, the major division between the Old and New Greek Comedy is "ein Schritt von solcher Reihung zur Ausbildung einer kausal durchkonstruierten Komödienhandlung", which although not intrinsic to the form has proved itself to be the most successful structure(29).

The central concern of this study is with the structures of comedy and its catalogue of conventions and elements. The most influential structural analysis of comedy is possibly Northrop Frye's theory of comedy as a mythos(30). He begins his chapter with the crucial statement: "Dramatic comedy, from which fictional comedy is mainly descended, has been remarkably tenacious of its structural principles and character types"(31). It is important to note that Frye's structural analysis is based on the comedy tradition beginning with the transition to a "kausal durchkonstruierten Komödienhandlung", i.e. the New Greek Comedy leading into the Roman comedy of Plautus and Terence, to which in turn modern European comedy owes a huge debt. Frye suggests that the 'mythos' of comedy is based on a 'ternary' form consisting of harmony disrupted by folly which is then replaced by harmony. Although many comedies begin immediately with the disturbing factor or folly "the audience simply understands an ideal state of affairs which it knows to be better than what is revealed in the play (...) This ternary action is, ritually, like a contest of summer and winter in which winter occupies the middle action"(32). Warning, however, doubts the validity of Frye's ternary model because, he maintains, only folly or confusion is intrinsically comic, harmony is not: "Tollheit,

28. Warning adopts this differentiation from E. v. Hartmann's Ästhetik (1888): "Hartmann dissoziiert also die 'anderweitige Handlung' von den eigentlichen 'komischen Handlungen', die auf jener gleichsam parasitär operieren, und er macht damit klar, daß die Handlung einer Komödie nicht vorschnell mit einer komischen Handlung gleichzusetzen ist, sondern daß die Relation zwischen beiden Ebenen als Problem zu entfalten ist." Ibid., p.285f.

29. Ibid., p.290.

30. Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism 4 Essays, Princeton, Princeton Univ. Press, 1957. The section on comedy is entitled "The Mythos of Spring".

31. Ibid., p.163.

32. Ibid., p.171.

nicht Vernünftigkeit, ist der eigentliche Spielraum der Komödie, von Tollheit, nicht von Vernünftigkeit lebt das Lachen, lebt die Heiterkeit des Publikums"(33). Warning's criticism is based on his insistence that humour is the key to the comedy, where laughter is not elicited there is no 'important' element of comedy at work. However, it is on the contrary the strength of Frye's approach that he studies the literary tradition of New Greek and Roman comedy in order to arrive at the archetypal comic characters which form the basis of European comedy. While it may be argued that such a typology, by beginning later, excludes the comedies of Aristophanes, there is no doubt that the later and not the earlier Greek tradition has proved to be the most enduring and the decisive influence on European comedy.

2.1 Comedy as Intention and Tragicomedy

In this study comedy will be viewed as an evolving literary tradition, which nevertheless returns to certain elements and archetypes, and not as an aesthetic constant reducible to universal comic elements. If the conventions of comedy such as anagnorisis, the father/son conflict or the flawed personality are scrutinised more closely it becomes apparent that these so-called comic elements are equally at home in the tragedy and cannot therefore be considered intrinsically comic. They are far more structures of drama which, depending on the underlying intention of the form, can function in both a comic and tragic manner. The next problem to be addressed then is the function of serious content in the comedy. To what extent can this form successfully incorporate serious issues and predicaments without becoming a tragicomedy?

The perception of the problem has been influenced to a large extent by the traditional tragedy/comedy hierarchy. There has been a tendency to interpret serious elements, in German comedy in particular, as manifestations of the tragic and thereby accord the 'lower' form some attributes of the 'higher' tragedy.

Heinz Kindermann betrays such hierarchical notions in his essay 'Grundformen des komischen Theaters' by maintaining that "in jedem Lachen ein geheimes Weinen verborgen ist und weil auch hinter jeder heiter befreienden Lösungskraft wenigstens der stillschweigende Zweifel aufsteht an dem "was nachkommt" (Schopenhauer)"(34). Both "ein geheimes Weinen" and that which "nachkommt" suggest the impingement of threatening reality into the comic interlude, and that this manifests itself as the tragic

33. Warning, op. cit., p.299.

Comedy as Intention and Tragicomedy

is implied by the framework of his whole argument: the tragic and the comic are "komplementäre Größen" yet, in the final analysis, comedy is but an instrument to illuminate the (superior) tragedy: "Und doch verstünden wir erst die letzten Beweggründe und Wirkformen des Tragischen, wenn wir uns klarer wären über die Lebenselemente und Gestaltungskriterien (...) des komischen Theaters"(35). In contrast to this type of outmoded value judgement which has its roots in the formalising prescriptions of professor Gottsched, any discussion of modern German comedy must liberate itself from these hierarchical notions for, at least since the Wiener Volkskomödie, comedy has surpassed its former status as a satyric interlude in the canons of the great tragedians(36).

Helmut Arntzen takes issue with the tragedy/comedy hierarchy and its inherent problems in the discussion of comedy in Die ernste Komödie. Das deutsche Lustspiel von Lessing bis Kleist:

Seit der Romantik haben drei Prämissen vor allem die Beschäftigung von Forschung und Kritik mit der deutschen Komödie bestimmt:

1. Tragödie bzw. Trauerspiel unterscheiden sich von der Komödie dem Range nach, wobei mehr an eine Differenz der metaphysischen als der ästhetischen Qualität gedacht wird.

2. in der deutschen Literatur gibt es nur wenige auf längere Zeit lebendig gebliebene Komödien.

3. diese wenigen deutschen Komödien sind bei genauer Prüfung in Wahrheit Tragödien oder Tragikomödien oder Dramen, die nicht näher zu charakterisieren sind(37).

34. Heinz Kindermann, 'Grundformen des komischen Theaters', Wesen und Formen des Komischen, p.100.

35. Ibid., p.93.

36. C.P. Magill observes that the great German comedies of the last two centuries have been 'oncours' by otherwise 'serious' dramatists - forays into comic drama as a sort of respite from tragedy which is the proper stuff of drama. He cites Brentano, Grillparzer, Lessing, Büchner, Hauptmann, Kleist and Brecht as examples of this practice. 'Der Groß-Cophta and the problem of German Comedy', German Studies, presented to W.H. Bruford, London, Harrap, 1962, p.106f.

Comedy as Intention and Tragicomedy

Thus comedy is inferior qualitatively, quantitatively or finally is non-existent. Arntzen argues that the tendency to judge the value of a comedy not by its comic elements but by its proximity to tragedy and to interpret its serious content as elements of the tragic is too restrictive for a consideration of the comedy form. Instead of seeing comedy as the lower side of the same coin, or as a superficial specification of genre, he suggests a more complex approach based on the idea that all comedy has a common intention:

Wenn der Begriff (Komödie) vielmehr Chiffre einer dichterischen Intention wäre, die erst in der Betrachtung der Dialektik von Einzelwerk und Geschichtsgang sich erhellte, dann würde eher verständlich, warum immer noch und immer wieder Autoren sich um die Komödie bemühen(38).

Thus comedy is not to be examined according to categories of the comic content but rather within the framework of the interaction of a particular work and its specific historical context. The intention of comedy manifests itself in a dialectical process of 'Kritik' and 'Utopie': "Doch drängt das konkrete Kritische (in Aristophanes) zum Verändern und auf ein Verändertes, zur Darstellung des Utopischen also, das aber immer die Umwendung des kritisierten Problematischen, nie ein Nirgendwo ist"(39). The critical component or intention of comedy enables it to deal with serious problems within the framework of its conventions without the latter having necessarily tragic implications. That this resolution is itself often revealed to be problematic is inherent in the critical nature of comedy which points to utopian continuation, represented on the symbolic level by the marriage (fertility) feast, in contrast to the finality of tragedy.

Arntzen's criticism of the term tragicomedy is also convincing and is equally applicable when considering Horváth's comedies:

Der Ernst der Komödie und ihre Versöhnung sind freilich keine Anzeichen von Tragik. Bedeutet Tragikomödie anderes, als daß in die Komödie Momente aufgenommen werden können, die innerhalb der Tragödie tragisch funktionieren, bedeutet der Begriff nichts(40).

37. Arntzen, Die ernste Komödie, p.9.

38. Ibid., p.12.

39. Ibid., p.13.

This formulation finds a close parallel in a comment by Horváth on his play Die Unbekannte aus der Seine, published in the Wiener Allgemeine Zeitung in January, 1934, which contains expressis verbis the desire to continue in an even more radical fashion his experiments with the comedy form and a rejection of the term tragicomedy:

Mein neues Stück ist ein ausgesprochenes literarisches Experiment (...) Das Experiment aber besteht in der Form des Stückes (...) Es ist der Versuch, das Komische und Grotteske der Tragik aufzuzeigen. (...) Ich werde keineswegs verwundert sein, wenn das Publikum bei den erschütterndsten und tragischsten Stellen in Gelächter ausbricht. Es soll eben gezeigt werden, wie die tragischen Ereignisse sich im Alltagsleben oft in eine komische Form kleiden. Das Stück repräsentiert aber keineswegs das was man eine Tragikomödie nennt. Es ist ein ganz und gar tragischer Stoff und die Komik, die ihm das Alltagsleben verleiht, kann beispielsweise darin liegen, daß ein Dialog erschütterndsten Inhaltes in Unterhosen geführt wird (IV,650).

This short article contains Horváth's clearest and least ambiguous statement on the nature of his drama. The important points to note are: the linking of "das Komische und das Grotteske" as closely related aesthetic concepts. This affinity has occasionally been noted in Horváth's work but there is as yet no detailed study. Furthermore, he considers these elements to be constituents of the tragic which are, he stresses, the 'Stoff' or the 'Ereignisse' of his drama. But his concept of the tragic is considerably different from that of the classical dramatic tradition: the 'tragedies' of daily life constitute the material of his plays which are best communicable in a comedy form because presumably the form highlights the tragic content through contrast. His expressed repudiation of the notion of tragicomedy underlines the fact that Horváth saw his plays having clear and opposite lines of movement: the genre designation - comedy - to create a specific expectation, and the contradictory thrust of the serious content, albeit spiced with comic and grotesque moments. It is precisely the concept of genre expectation which the modern theorists of the tragicomedy, particularly Karl S. Guthke, consciously ignore. Guthke looks instead for the tragicomic in any play which falls into the epochs conducive to this phenomenon, irrespective of its generic intention:

Zum anderen wird es lohnen, jedes Drama, heiße es nun Komödie, Tragödie, Schauspiel oder sonstwie, auf seine

The Comedy of Modernism

mögliche tragikomische Qualität hin zu untersuchen, denn seit Sturm und Drang und Romantik (...) wird der genrebestimmende Untertitel weithin nichtssagend und suspekt(41).

The term 'tragicomedy', although used widely by the naturalists, could not be considered a firm convention with clear expectations and associations. Thus it produces a confused and diluted expectation on the part of the audience which undermines a central intention of the author to unmask the thought processes of both the characters portrayed and of the audience observing. For this reason only those plays which Horváth himself clearly designated as comedies (and which can be said therefore to convey the intention of comedy) will be examined. This necessarily excludes those works carrying other generic designations such as Sladek, Don Juan kommt aus dem Krieg and Der jüngste Tag from detailed analysis although they may be referred to for comparative purposes.

3. The Comedy of Modernism

Before an analysis of the individual works can begin it would be useful to sketch the dramatic context in which Horváth was working, especially with regard to comedy. The impulses which he received had already commenced before the turn of the century. Peter Haida, in his study of the comedy of this period(42), outlines the major changes and experiments taking place and provides useful categories for the consideration of modern comedy. For example, the positive ending is placed increasingly in question:

In bezug auf die Versöhnung in der Komödie treten von etwa 1890-1914 entscheidende Veränderungen so gehäuft ein, daß die Gattung in Frage gestellt wird, so fern man den positiven Schluß als den Angelpunkt der Komödie und als konstituierendes Moment der Gattung betrachtet(43).

The positive ending receives the main emphasis in Haida's survey.

41. Karl S. Guthke, Geschichte und Poetik der deutschen Tragikomedie, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961, p.26.

42. Peter Haida, Komödie um 1900 Wandlungen des Gattungsschemas von Hauptmann bis Sternheim, München, W. Fink, 1973.

43. Ibid., p.12.

The Comedy of Modernism

It is a constitutive element of comedy, more crucial than the comic which: "in der Komödie funktioniert, sie aber nicht konstituiert und sogar gelegentlich fehlen kann"(44). He demonstrates that the happy endings in the comedies of this period may seem to resolve all conflicts and effect a restoration of harmony but this is purely a "Versöhnung ästhetischer Natur"(45), which has no bearing on reality. The endings can be grouped into four sub-categories:

1. The true positive ending is "seit der Jahrhundertwende fast identisch mit dem reinen Unterhaltungsstück"(46).

2. The open ending is in fact a contradiction of the comedy form and intended to disappoint the spectator's expectation of a happy ending. Instead it requires the spectator to continue to reflect on the action and its possible consequences.

3. The carousel ending is by its structure negative or it implies a return to the circumstances already depicted. Thus the problems, obstacles and conflicts implicit in all drama have not been resolved as comedy sets out to do.

4. The parody ending sees usually the triumph of negative characters which forces the spectator to consider the reasons for their success with obvious social and political implications.

These endings are, according to Haida, "Ausprägungen jener Kategorie der Normabweichung, die (...) eine zentrale Darstellungskategorie für die gesamte Dichtung der Jahrhundertwende ist"(47). The deviation from the norm indicates the evolution of a dramatic form which is marked by the replacement of the positive with the negative ending. He attributes this ending to the total transformation of society, the aesthetic theory of naturalism which demands an exact representation of reality, and to the "innerliterarische(n) Dynamik der Form"(48) - the flexible comedy form contains within itself the seeds of its own evolution.

Haida's analysis suggests that the comedy form is

44. Ibid., p.21.

45. Ibid., p.22.

46. Ibid., p.53.

47. Ibid., p.154f.

48. Ibid., p.156f.

The Comedy of Modernism

considerably more elastic and adaptable than tragedy which, according to some critics, was, if not dead by the end of the 19th century, certainly moribund(49). This catch-cry became increasingly sounded during the Weimar Republic, especially as a reaction against the highflown sentiments and excessively emotional style of the late expressionist drama. Walter Hasenclever, himself a representative of the latter movement, proclaimed in 1927: "Wir sind reif für die Komödien geworden"(50). This insight had already motivated and had been clear to younger dramatists some years before. Robert Musil, in 1923, thought to perceive the development of a new type of humour - the proof of which he found in the works of new dramatists such as Brecht and Arnolt Bronnen(51). Günter Rühle selects the première of Carl Zuckmayer's Der fröhliche Weinberg, in December, 1925, as the auspicious beginning of comedy as the supreme dramatic form during the latter years of the Weimar Republic. It signalled the end of Expressionism and the beginning of a new optimism which could be seen in the political and economic sphere. It was the start of a brief respite for the new republic: "Das Lachen bestätigte die Zäsur. Es enthielt die Freude über die Rückkehr der Dichter aus ihren literarischen Visionen in die Realität"(52).

The returning dramatists who followed this path from Expressionism to comedy included Georg Kaiser, Arnolt Bronnen, Walter Hasenclever, Ernst Toller, Bertolt Brecht and Paul Kornfeld. With the exception of the work of Brecht and Kaiser, these comedies cannot be considered especially innovative; many

49. This was a popular catch-cry from the turn of the century onwards. cf. Hofmannsthal's essay 'Die Ironie der Dinge' (1921). George Steiner relates the decline of the tragedy to the loss of a genuine mythology in the 20th century, The Death of Tragedy, London, Faber, 1961; Walter Müller-Seidel also pinpoints the opening decades of this century as marking the decline of the classical tragedy which has been permeated by tragic satire: "...tragische Satire bei Shaw, Wedekind, Sternheim, O'Casey, ein Zeichen der Distanz, die das Ende der klassischen Tragödie besiegelt.", 'Dramatische Gattungen', Das Fischer Literaturlexikon II, 1. Teil, Frankfurt/M., 1965, p.181.

50. Walter Hasenclever, Gedichte Dramen Prosa, Reinbek bei Hamburg, Rowohlt, 1963, p.508.

51. Robert Musil, Tagebücher Aphorismen Essays und Reden, hrsg. von Adolf Frisé, Reinbek bei Hamburg, Rowohlt, 1955, p.270.

52. Günter Rühle, Introduction to Zeit und Theater 1925-1933, Bd.III, Frankfurt, Berlin, Wien, Ullstein, 1972, p.9.

The Comedy of Modernism

in fact parody the Expressionist drama which their authors previously espoused (53) but do not manoeuvre the form itself in new directions. Rühle writes:

Diese Komödien entstehen zwischen 1922 und 1926, um die Überspannungen des Expressionismus abzubauen (...) Diese Komödien sind die Form des Übergangs, der Rückführung. Darum gewinnen sie noch keinen neuen entwicklungsfähigen Ansatz innerhalb der Gattung und keine neue Perspektive auf die Realität, die in Sicht kommt (54).

Although this judgement appears to be far too sweeping in its generalisation 1926 was the year Ödön von Horváth wrote Revolte auf Côte 3018 and Zur schönen Aussicht both of which provided the comedy form with fresh dimensions and possibilities.

53. Examples include Kaiser's Nebeneinander (1923), Hasenclever's Ein besserer Herr (1927), Kornfeld's Kilian oder die gelbe Rose (1926).

54. Rühle, op. cit., p.12.