

II. COMEDY AND COMMERCE: THE CRITIQUE OF BOULEVARD COMEDY FORMS  
IN ZUR SCHÖNEN AUSSICHT AND RUND UM DEN KONGRESS

Horváth macht seine Personen deutlich als Produkte von verkommenen Dramaturgien, und er macht das deutlich mit Künstlichkeit, mit Dramaturgie (Peter Handke) (1).

Zur schönen Aussicht and Rund um den Kongreß constitute a two-pronged attack on forms of the boulevard comedy, the dominant comedy form of the German-speaking theatres from Vienna to Berlin. The respective genres of the 'Konversationskomödie' and 'Posse' are both rooted in the 19th century and are connected with the rise of the commercial theatres. The theme of commerce in both plays relates to this mode of trivial theatre peddling superficial humour and cliché-ridden plots for an audience seeking escapism, and to the central role that money plays in influencing the behaviour of Horváth's characters. Although their composition is separated by two years Horváth evidently saw connections between the two plays as sections of dialogue have been transposed from the earlier to the later work. This establishes both a thematic link and underlines resemblances between certain characters.

In Zur schönen Aussicht, considered by one critic to be "das wichtigste Stück seiner Frühzeit" and "das grausamste Stück Horváths" (2), the comedy form employed serves as a vehicle for the conscious and unconscious games of illusion, intrigue, greed and deception which constitute the actions of the dramatis personae in the run-down hotel. Horváth betrays expectations by presenting a play in which the cruelty depicted oversteps the bounds of conventional comedy, yet the characters - aristocrats, merchants, waiters and bon-vivants - belong to the stock characters of the contemporary social comedy. He also utilises a number of devices frequently found in comedy - play within a play, appearance versus reality, servant/master conflict, role-playing and 'Illusionsdurchbrechung' - to continually stress the artificiality, the comedic nature of the action. However, such artificiality is contrasted with the contemporary social reality which impinges on the hermetic setting. This is the dialectical process motivating all of Horváth's comedies with

1. Peter Handke, 'Natur ist Dramaturgie. Beobachtungen bei den Aufführungen des Berliner Theatertreffens', Deutsche Dramaturgie der Sechziger Jahre, hrsg. Helmut Kreuzer, Tübingen, dtv. Wissenschaftliche Reihe, 1974, p.77.

2. Kurt Kahl, Ödön von Horváth, (Friedrichs Dramatiker des Welttheaters) Velber, Friedrich Verlag, 1966, p.35.

varying degrees of emphasis. Such a process results in a critique of the comedy form being used and unmasks the often false and artificial modes of behaviour in which the characters are entangled.

Horváth dispenses with such subtle use of comedy devices in Rund um den Kongreß and employs instead direct satirical attack. The element of satire is central to this play and, as satire presupposes an object of derision, the emphasis on social criticism i.e. contemporary problems, attitudes, persons and institutions, is more pronounced. Whereas in Zur schönen Aussicht a semblance of reality is maintained, it is discarded in Kongreß and replaced by the grotesque with the result that the humour operates on the level of gaping contrasts. Horváth's fictional farce world contrasts with the real world but the moments of accurate social criticism suggest that the real world may in fact not be too dissimilar from the one presented on stage.

Both plays appear to have been inspired in the first instance by a concrete situation or event: Zur schönen Aussicht by a hotel and its personnel; Kongreß by a report from the League of Nations commission into the White Slave Trade (3). Central to Zur schönen Aussicht as an example of the 'Konversationskomödie' is the 'situation'. An established, usually stable situation is presented on which intruders impinge to produce a series of comic confusions and climaxes resulting finally in the restoration of normality and its celebration by a marriage. A congress is, however, an institution, and institutions, as Aristophanes demonstrated, lend themselves to satire which attempts to alter or improve the centre under attack (4). The 'Verein für internationale Bekämpfung des internationalen Mädchenhandels' is presented as a grotesque metaphor of contemporary society which is motivated by a capitalist economy with its commercialisation of all values. The

3. Zur schönen Aussicht. "Die Anregung zu dieser Komödie fand Ödön von Horváth nach Auskunft seines Bruders Lajos in einer windigen Pension in Murnau". Rund um den Kongreß. "In dem (...) Artikel des Film-Kuriers vom 12.10.1929 heißt es: '(...) ein neues Stück Rund um den Kongreß ist inzwischen entstanden. Posse möchte er es nennen; denn es behandelt die Farce der Völkerbundkommission, die den Mädchenhandel erforschen sollte und dafür weiter nichts getan hat als - die Mädchenhändler um ihre Methoden zu befragen'" (IV, 649).

4. Dimitrij Tschizewskij, 'Satire oder Groteske', Das Komische, hrsg. Wolfgang Preisendanz und Rainer Warning, München, Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1976, p.270.

distinction between situation and institution best explains the choice of genre.

### 1. Boulevard Comedy and the 'Konversationskomödie'

The term 'Boulevardkomödie' is not precisely defined and is often used in a vague manner. It embraces a wide range of superficial comedies portraying contemporary manners and morals which provided the mainstay of the Parisian boulevard theatres in the 19th century. In the German-speaking theatre the term is understood as a "bühnensicheres Unterhaltungslustspiel ohne besondere Bemühung um gehaltliche Tiefe oder avantgardistische Formexperimente"(5). The fact that the majority of such plays performed during the Weimar Republic were translations of French and English plays has been interpreted as the inability or unwillingness of German dramatists consistently to produce successful plays of this type (Carl Goetz excepted). Alfred Doppler defines the genre thus:

Beim Konversationsstück handelt es sich um Gebrauchsdramatik für den Alltag; das Bühnengeschehen kann komisch, rührend, sentimental, spannend oder sensationell sein; seine Aufgabe ist erfüllt, wenn es das Unterhaltungsbedürfnis des Publikums befriedigt. Innerhalb der neueren deutschen Literatur haben Konversationsstücke bisweilen einen wichtigen Platz eingenommen; da man sie aber gewöhnlich zur Trivialliteratur rechnet, sind sie kaum einer wissenschaftlichen Betrachtung gewürdigt worden(5a).

The 'Konversationskomödie' or 'Konversationsstück' is a type of boulevard comedy which tends to concentrate on witty dialogue and pays less attention to character development. The model for this genre came from France and can be ascribed almost solely to Eugène Scribe (1791-1861), who produced over 400 plays in an almost assembly-line fashion. The essential components were tight exposition, clarity of plot, dialogue stripped of all rhetorical and literary devices and reduced to pure conversation. Thematically, his plays confirmed rather than questioned the

5. Gero von Wilpert, Sachwörterbuch der Literatur, p.100.

5a. Alfred Doppler, 'Das Konversationsstück bei Arthur Schnitzler und Hugo von Hofmannsthal', Sprachthematik in der österreichischen Literatur des 20. Jahrhunderts, hrsg. vom Institut für Österreichkunde, Wien, Hirt, 1974, p.69.

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values of the bourgeois audience he was addressing. Most importantly, the plays:

acknowledged the importance attached to money and social rank (...) and advocated in the light of this, a hard-headed attitude to marriage and human relationships in general that would enable people to lead, if not happy lives, then at least lives of affluence and quiet contentment(6).

The predominant position of the boulevard comedy as the most popular dramatic form on the German-speaking stage during the Weimar Republic was unassailable, although there can be few works of literary value counted among them. Thomas Koebner lists the revival of 'Salondramen' and 'Konversationsstücke' as one of the important features of the 'Dramen der Neuen Sachlichkeit' and in some cases "(die neusachliche Dramatik) kehrte auch die traditionell mit dieser Dramaturgie verbundenen Aussagen teilweise um, setzte sich parodistisch von alten Denkkonventionen ab"(7). The reference here is to Georg Kaiser's Kolportage (1925) which will be discussed later as it provides a number of useful comparisons with Zur schönen Aussicht.

Reinhold Grimm discovered in his research into the new humour of this period:

Was in den zwanziger Jahren dominiert, sind die beiden Gattungen des 'alten' Humors, Boulevardkomödie und Volksstück (...) Das harmlos-unverbindliche Unterhaltungslustspiel ist die herrschende Form der Zeit und damit, frei nach Brecht, auch die Form der Herrschenden(8).

The final statement provides possibly an insight into Horváth's intention and method. For those dramatists who wished to pursue critical and even revolutionary ends there were two paths open: create alternative forms of drama like Piscator and Brecht, divorced from the bourgeois theatre; or infiltrate the established theatres by subverting the existing dramatic forms. Horváth chose the latter course which he shared with playwrights

6. W.D.Howarth, Comic Drama, London, Methuen, 1978, p.156.

7. Thomas Koebner, 'Das Drama der Neuen Sachlichkeit und die Krise des Liberalismus', Die deutsche Literatur in der Weimarer Republik, hrsg. Wolfgang Rothe, Stuttgart, Reclam, 1974, p.24.

8. Reinhold Grimm, 'Neuer Humor', p.130.

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such as Georg Kaiser, Carl Sternheim and to a lesser extent, Brecht himself(9).

As a footnote it should be mentioned that the other expanding entertainment form of the twenties - film - had also 'overcome' its revolutionary and artistically innovative expressionist phase. After 1924 the political and economic stabilisation was reflected in the film production. The predominant forms were military costume films, Berlin local comedies and "imitations of the French boulevard comedies where the framework remained and the spirit evaporated"(10).

The subject matter of the 'Konversationskomödie' has a literary tradition reaching back to Plautus. This tradition has been examined by Hans-Peter Bayerdörfer under the motto "Non olet", a quotation taken from Plautus's Aulularia(11). Bayerdörfer isolates money as the thematic constant in this form; changing economic and social structures create naturally an altered attitude towards money which was reflected on the stage. The motifs and elements which Bayerdörfer considers central to the 'Konversationskomödie' are reworked and adapted by Horváth in Zur schönen Aussicht.

Auf der Ebene der Handlung bietet die Liebes- und Heiratsintrige die Ansatzpunkte für die wichtigsten Motive der Mitgift, der Erbschaft, des Schuldseins und des Übervorteilens (...) Geiz, Habgier, Verschwendung und Betrug bilden die wichtigsten Facetten im Spektrum der Geldmoral. Daß mit diesen stofflichen und gehaltlichen Elementen auch weitgehend das Komödienpersonal nach Typik und Rolle festgelegt ist, bestätigt die Ungebrochenheit der Tradition(12).

9. Kaiser clearly intended satirical attacks on existing popular dramatic forms in such works as Nebeneinander, Ein Volksstück aus dem Jahr 1923, and Kolportage (1925). Brecht, too, satirises the deus ex machina of Greek tragedy in the Dreigroschenoper with the arrival of the 'reitenden Boten'. Carl Sternheim's series of satires 'Aus dem bürgerlichen Heldenleben' of the pre-war years were in fact performed for the first time after the war.

10. Siegfried Kracauer, From Caligari to Hitler. A psychological history of the German film. Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1947, p.139f.

11. Hans-Peter Bayerdörfer, 'Non olet - altes Thema und neues Sujet. Zur Entwicklung der 'Konversationskomödie zwischen Restauration und Jahrhundertwende', Euphorion, 67 (1973), pp.323-358.

In each case Horváth gives the motif a new twist which results in the reversal of old values and traditions. Instead of dowry and inheritance being bestowed by father upon daughter i.e. male to female, in Zur schönen Aussicht Christine has acquired her money independently of a male from an aunt. The motif of 'Schuld' occurs repeatedly but with interplay on its double meaning of guilt and debt. Defraudation acquires a new emotional connotation as false feelings are offered to Christine in return for financial gain. The male characters between them embody all the vices: "Geiz, Habgier, Verschwendung und Betrug" which place them securely in the tradition of the 'Konversationskomödie'; all are involved in the prerequisite 'Liebes- und Heiratsintrige' but not one is seriously considered by Christine as a candidate for marriage, although each is willing.

The 19th century added a new dimension to the theme of money and not only in the theatre: "Das Kapital im modernen Sinne hat bereits begonnen, das alte Komödiengeld, 'die todte Abstraktion des Reichtums (Hegel)', auf dem Theater abzulösen" (13). The evolution of early capitalism led to the creation of a new genre, the 'pièce bien faite', and a new theatre, the boulevard theatre which grew up as a major alternative to the established court theatres at the beginning of the 19th century. The new genre and the new theatre are inextricably linked: "Schon die Geburtsstunde der 'pièce' steht ganz im Zeichen des kommerziellen Theaterbetriebs, des Unterhaltungsbedürfnisses eines bürgerlichen Publikums" (14). If this genre and theatre catered almost exclusively to the tastes of the bourgeoisie which desired to see its own concerns presented on stage, then money logically became the central theme, for the *raison d'être* of this class lay in the accumulation and proliferation of wealth. The traditional aristocratic notions of dynastic purity and honour receded in importance and instead "wirtschaftliche Probleme (erlangen) eine auf dem Theater bis dahin ungekannte Bedeutung" (15). Since the plays reflect bourgeois concerns the action is more often than not centred around the domestic situation(16) into which an outsider intrudes. Horváth's treatment of this convention is typically bizarre. The 'domestic situation' is grotesque to say

12. Ibid., p.324.

13. Bayerdörfer, op. cit., p.326.

14. Ibid., p.326.

15. Ibid., p.327.

16. Bayerdörfer terms "gesicherte-familiäre Häuslichkeit (...) das A und O des Konversationsstücks", p.348.

the least: an aging spinster supports a 'ménage à quatre' by virtue of her financial potency and extorts sexual favours. The intruder, often a parvenu figure (a frequent character in the French tradition who seeks acceptance through newly acquired wealth) is Christine who replaces Ada in the course of the play as the financially (and sexually) more attractive person. The intruder must traditionally prove his moral worth to the bourgeois establishment; thus Horváth completes his reversal of this model by contrasting Christine's ethical integrity against the perverse domestic arrangement in the hotel.

In Zur schönen Aussicht money attains a diametrically opposite moral significance to that of its 19th century precursor. For Horváth, poverty renders moral behaviour almost impossible: "Ohne diese Summe hätte ich keine Reue empfunden" (III,73), says Strasser in a rare moment of truth, whereas for the French 'well-made play' newly acquired wealth and moral fortitude appear to be hardly consistent with one another. The shift in attitudes towards money and the accompanying question mark placed beside the genre 'Konversationskomödie' are already apparent at the turn of the century in the work of Frank Wedekind. Bayerdörfer points out that in Der Marquis von Keith (1901) the genre is so radically treated, "daß sich die Anlage der 'pièce' grundlegend verschiebt" because all values have been reduced to an economic market value:

Alle weiteren Werte und Unwerte sind ebenfalls ökonomisch zu bestimmen: Güter und höhere Güter, Sünde, schließlich auch die Wahrheit. Die gesellschaftlichen Werte sind in Geldwert aufgegangen(17).

For Peter Szondi, the predominance of the 'Konversationsstück' at the turn of the century typifies the crisis of modern drama for this form has become the "ungewollte Parodie des klassischen Dramas". The integral function of dialogue as the "Träger des Dramas" by which the "Innerlichkeit der dramatis personae sich objektiviert"(17a) has become diluted until the dialogue is reduced to conversation. Into the empty space of dramatic dialogue are loaded the topical concerns of the day which gives the appearance of modernity whereas 'true' dramatic dialogue is a tightly woven causal web in which each exchange is crucial for the progression of the action. Conversely, the arbitrary flow of conversation lacks this dynamic impulse and requires chance happenings to motivate the action.

17. Ibid., p.354.

17a. Peter Szondi, Theorie des modernen Dramas (1880-1950), in: Schriften I, Frankfurt/M., Suhrkamp, 1978, p.80.

## Reversal of Comedy Devices in Zur schönen Aussicht

Only in such plays as Hofmannsthal's Der Schwierige or Samuel Beckett's En attendant Godot where, in the former, the conversation itself is made the subject of the play, or, for the latter, the aimless talk only intensifies the metaphysical misery of modern man, do the positive possibilities of the genre become apparent.

Thus Bayerdörfer's analysis of the thematic crisis of the 'well-made play' together with Szondi's formal criticism point to its creeping paralysis as an effective dramatic form. Horváth continues then the process already begun by Wedekind and Hofmannsthal.

## 2. Reversal of Comedy Devices in Zur schönen Aussicht

Neither of the two longer studies devoted to Zur schönen Aussicht - Herbert Gamper's 70 page theatre programme, and a chapter by Winston (18) - pay much attention to the comedy aspects of the work. Reflecting the loose structure of her thesis Winston does not seek or find an overriding thematic or structural framework in which to consider the play; instead, she 'closely reads' it for whatever takes her fancy. Gamper, on the other hand, attacks the work with an intellectual and interpretive apparatus which at times appears to smother the object of investigation. He performs valuable work by gathering and linking scattered allusions into image-complexes which is then often undermined by the overly 'imaginative' interpretation applied to them. For instance, the recurrence of the phrases 'Guten Morgen' and 'Gute Nacht' supposedly symbolise beginning and end, and "Im Hintergrund steht (...) der Gedanke an Tod und Auferstehung" (19) a contention for which he can supply no convincing evidence. Nevertheless the two studies share important common ground. They both agree on the central importance of the theme truth versus falsehood, and the problem of illusion and identity which is in turn linked to role-playing.

It is, however, Horváth's consistent use of theatrical metaphors and images which has been hitherto neglected by commentators. They function partly to create a fictional world which could itself be the creation of a boulevard comedy or cheap

18. Herbert Gamper, Zur schönen Aussicht, Programmbuch 22, Württembergische Staatstheater, 1976; Krishna Winston, Horváth Studies. Close Readings of Six Plays (1926-1931), Bern, Frankfurt/M., Las Vegas, Peter Lang, 1977.

19. Gamper, *ibid.*



## Play within a Play

novel. This is suggested by the fact that the characters themselves see parallels between their own situation and such second rate literature. Müller dismisses Christine's good fortune as "der typische Roman"(III,55) and indeed her life-story contains the traits of a trashy novel mixed with socio-historical significance: her father fell at Verdun (the turning point of the German fortunes in the First World War) and her mother died during the inflation of 1923, two events which decisively influenced the course of the Weimar Republic. Strasser refers both to his own moral bankruptcy and to Christine's rags-to-riches story when he says: "Du kannst doch nicht verlangen, daß einer, der wirtschaftlich zu Grunde gerichtet worden ist, sich in eine Bettelprinzessin verliebt" (III,73). This is an oblique reference to the intact moral world of traditional boulevard comedy where such financial considerations would never impede true love, although a chance inheritance might reward their fortitude in the final scene. This is but one method by which Horváth utilises and at the same time reverses the very tenets of the comedy form.

### 2.1 Play within a Play

Rainer Warning includes the element of a 'play within a play' as one of the forms of "Implizite Fiktionsdurchbrechungen" in his detailed catalogue of 'Verfremdungsverfahren' to illustrate that alienation effects have traditionally been integral to the comedy form (20). The 'comedy' which Emanuel stages to discredit and humiliate Christine is the pivot point after which the action takes a turn for the better. The technique is as old as comedy itself. Normally, a 'play' is staged for the benefit of a particularly stubborn character to reveal what he cannot or refuses to see. Act IV, 5, from Tartuffe is perhaps the most famous example where Orgon finally recognises Tartuffe's treachery. Horváth reverses this to the extent that the play is staged with the intent of plunging Christine into uncertainty and 'darkness' rather than leading her into the 'light'. The scene develops rapidly into a process of psychological torture, reducing her finally to unconsciousness.

Horváth takes pains to emphasise the theatrical nature of this scene by employing the vocabulary of the stage. Emanuel evidently relishes his role as director:

EMANUEL (sieht sich um; flüstert) So etwas muß genau

20. Rainer Warning, 'Elemente einer Pragmasemiotik der Komödie', Das Komische, p.313.

## Christine's Dream

besprochen, daß keiner aus der Rolle fällt, und das Stichwort - Das war damals Theater, ein richtiges Theater, vom Krottenkopf raffiniert einstudiert (...) Pst! Sonst zerstört uns noch jemand die Komödie - (Er erklärt unhörbar) (III, 42).

The 'Beratungsszene' which follows fulfils the twin functions of providing disarming comic entertainment and creating tension by not revealing the 'plot' of the comedy. The idea of a theatre production is carried through by physically setting a scene and the 'actors' disappearing for their entrances. The play itself rapidly loses these comic touches. Its very function of obscuring rather than revealing the truth places the scene from the outset in a non-comic framework. Christine is the only actor who has no text and is unaware of her role which reduces her swiftly to an inarticulate puppet, able only to cry and stagger in response to the accumulating allegations, to collapse finally, bleeding and unconscious. From the time Max begins Christine does not have a single line of text until she has recovered consciousness. The role playing at this point (although it is done throughout the play as will be seen later) only highlights the brutality of the scene. After Christine has been utterly humiliated, - "kriecht zu ihm (Strasser) und küßt seine Hand" (III,48) - Emanuel still maintains the theatrical illusion by prompting Strasser in his responses. It is only when Christine's brutality in apparently killing her child (the reason for the charade in the first place) appears to surpass their own that they prove incapable of maintaining their roles:

KARL Jetzt bin ich aus der Rolle gefallen.

MAX Das Stichwort, das Stichwort. (Stille) (III, 48).

However, they gain a breathing space for Christine reveals it was all a dream, an "entsetzliche(r) Traum" which could have become reality.

### 2.1.1 Christine's Dream

Dreams in comic literature have a tradition reaching back to Plautus (Rudens) where they have either performed the same prophetic function as in the tragedy, or the dream is equated with the world of magic and fantasy e.g. Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream (21). Christine's dream, however, has no place in this tradition. Max is entirely correct when he says "Psychoanalytisch hochinteressant" (III,49). The dream which occurs during her temporary loss of consciousness has no direct

bearing on future events in the play i.e. as prophetic anticipation, nor of course is there any sense of an illusionary dream world being created. It corresponds rather to Freud's theories of the psychological components being drawn from the dreamer's immediate past experiences.

The dream of persecution for infanticide can be linked by word association to Max's preceding speech (III,47). Her moans and movements immediately afterwards indicate that Christine is in a state of half-consciousness or "Dämmerzustand" where she is capable of absorbing outside stimuli. The speech follows a string of associations linked to boxing, her awareness of which is indicated in her first words on regaining consciousness: "Wer hat mich niedergeschlagen?" (III,48). However, she evidently latches on to another set of associations: "Mörderisch. Serie. Serienmörderisch" (III,47). Christine's imagined infanticide resembles in detail the methods of the famous 'Serienmörder' Haarmann who was tried and executed in 1925: "Die Polizei behauptet ja, ich, ich hätte unser Kind zur Seite, ich hätte unser Kind erwürgt, zerstückelt und in Zeitungspapier - " (III,48). Horváth demonstrates here his psychological acuity by revealing the components of Christine's subconscious: the fragments of sensationalism and penny-thrillers penetrate into all areas of his characters' emotional make-up.

In her dream Christine transforms the men accusing her of immorality into a tribunal trying her for murder and conspiring against her: "Ich war unschuldig, aber alles schwor gegen mich, vor allem die Not" (III,49). 'Not' is a reference to her desperate predicament brought on by the pregnancy which is described in the letters to Strasser: "In den Briefen stand nichts als Jammer und Not und ins Wasser" (III,54). This feeling of despair and isolation recurs in the dream: "ich war immer allein - und dann überschlug ich mich. Stürzte. Kopfüber! Schneller und schneller! Drehte mich, wand mich - Oh, ich glaube, ich drehe mich noch! ... Ich bin das Drehen! Strasser! Wo schlag ich auf?!" (III,49). The sensation of falling is, according to Freud, usually a feature of 'Angsträume' and has a sexual motivation. This is reinforced by her focus on Strasser to whom, right until the end of the play, she is evidently still strongly attracted. Freud writes:

Die Träume vom Fallen tragen häufiger den Angstcharakter. Ihre Deutung unterliegt bei Frauen

21. For a succinct summary of the function of dreams in literature, see the chapter 'Weissagung, Vision, vorausdeutender Traum', in: Elizabeth Frenzel, Motive der Weltliteratur, Stuttgart, Kröner, 1976.

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keiner Schwierigkeit, da sie fast regelmäßig die symbolische Verwendung des Fallens akzeptieren, welches die Nachgiebigkeit gegen eine erotische Versuchung umschreibt (22).

It is naturally tempting to ascribe the aspect of falling to the physical act of fainting but, as Freud also points out, physical sensations can be considered as part of the content, not as the source of a dream (23). Christine's fall carries rather the symbolic connotation of a 'fallen woman' which is in fact what the others in the conspiracy accuse her of being.

The dream leads as well to a profounder search for truth, the central theme of the play, for the psychoanalytic interpretation of dreams reveals those unpleasant truths (often of sexual origin) which the conscious psyche suppresses (verdrängt). The link between Max's appearance with the bouquet of artificial chrysanthemums and Christine's collapse is reinforced when Strasser says to her:

STRASSER Du hast das Bewußtsein verloren, weil du ausnahmsweise der Wahrheit begegnet bist.

CHRISTINE Was ist die Wahrheit? (Sie erblickt Max; starrt ihn ängstlich an) (III,49).

The connection between truth and Max bearing flowers which symbolise death should be understood as Christine's confrontation with the truth of her previous suicidal tendencies and perhaps the contemplated murder of her child (24). The chrysanthemum also carries the secondary meaning of the flower of truth (25), to which Max is presumably referring when he lies to Christine: "Laßt also Chrysanthemen sprechen. Blumen lügen nämlich nie. Auch Chrysanthemen lügen bekanntlich nie" (III,50). The primary

22. Sigmund Freud, Die Traumdeutung, Frankfurt/M., Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1977, p.326.

23. Ibid.

24. Winston emphasises the artificiality of the 'Kunstchrysanthemen' which she sees as an example of the "kitsch motifs that attest to Christine's susceptibility to pretty illusion", op. cit., p.73.

25. The Dictionary of Myths and Symbols by Gertrude Jobs, New York, Scarecrow Press, 1962, lists three symbolic meanings for this flower according to colour: red for love; white for truth; and yellow for dejection and slighted love, p.333f.

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significance "als die Blumen, die zu Allerheiligen und Allerseelen auf die Gräber gestellt werden" (26) accounts for the psychological affect on Christine: her collapse and the motif of infanticide which occurs in the dream. The secondary meaning lies in their artificiality which symbolises then a perversion of the truth for they are not real and, as Gamper points out, is reflected "in der marionettenhaften Verbeugung von Max (...), aber auch im Cliché des Liebhabers mit Blumenstrauß"(27).

The dream makes clear to Christine the truth of her situation: her guilt complex, and the conspiracy against her. The repetition of the word truth by the men indicates a determined effort by them to pervert it. Strasser clearly misunderstands the connection between Christine's dream and the truth, for he longs to experience a similar 'Ohnmacht' in order to distort the truth of his existence ("einmal so sich drehen, hindrehen, herdrehen, herumdrehen" (III,49)), which he is otherwise condemned "bei Bewußtsein zu verdauen".

## 2.2 Role-Playing

Deception in some form afflicts all the characters in Zur schönen Aussicht, whether as an act of deceiving or as self-deception, to which end they all, save Christine, assume a different role. This is the second important metaphor of theatre that Horváth employs as a means of stressing the idea of comedy and comedy conventions. The notion of role-playing (or at least the role) is a complex one and its clarification has been rendered more difficult because of its application in the disciplines of literary criticism, sociology and psychology. The concept of social roles has recently gained currency in the work of Dahrendorf and Habermas (29) and has become central in the modern social sciences but is considered to be of restricted use because of a tendency towards too broad an extension and inaccurate application(30).

It is not the intention here to become involved in the discussion on the various types of 'role', 'role behaviour' etc.

26. Gamper, op. cit., p.62.

27. Ibid.

29. R. Dahrendorf, Homo sociologicus, (1959); Jürgen Habermas, Theorie und Praxis, (1963). The term began to be discussed seriously in sociology after the publication of R. Linton's The Study of Man, (1936).

## Role-Playing

but attention will be focused rather on the problem of role-playing in drama. Modern literature parallels modern psychology in its concern with role-playing as a psychological and social phenomenon. This is most evident in the work of Max Frisch for whom role-playing, and the identity-crises resulting from it, are central to an understanding of the modern human condition. In a comparative study of role-playing in the works of Frisch and Jean Anouilh, M.J. Herd (31) differentiates between two types of role-playing: the 'scenic' statement, which reminds the audience that they are watching a theatrical performance, and the 'intellective' statement that "points to the susceptibility of individuals to adopt behaviour inconsistent with their real personalities" (32). Role-playing of the intellective type has been defined in two ways: the role can be a 'persona', a Jungian term denoting a conscious mode of behaviour, a type of mask the individual assumes to impress the outside world and conceal his own true nature (33); and it can be a 'Bildnis', Frisch's own term, which: "emanates from a personal relationship which entails one partner being forced to conform to an oversimplified or idealized image made of him by the other", or by society (34).

Although noting the occurrence of scenic statements in the work of both authors, Herd concentrates his analysis on the intellective statements. Scenic statements such as overt 'Aus-der-Rolle-Fallen' and asides, do not occur in Zur schönen Aussicht.

There is, however, a third form of role-playing which has a long genealogy in the comedy tradition. This is the dramatic device of impersonation whereby a character assumes another role within the fictionality of the action. Impersonation forms the basis of all 'Verwechslungskomödien' and is particularly evident in Shakespeare's comedies where most often the sex of a character is disguised, e.g. As You Like It, Twelfth Night, and the

30. cf. Manfred Sader: "So wird vor allem der zentrale Begriff der Rolle in Sozialpsychologie und Soziologie in verwirrend vielfältiger Weise teils definiert, teils ohne explizite Definition verwendet", 'Rollentheorie', Handbuch der Psychologie, Bd.7, p.204.

31. M.J. Herd, Role-Playing in the Plays of Max Frisch and Jean Anouilh, Ph.D. Dunedin, University of Otago, 1977.

32. Ibid., p.33.

33. Ibid., p.43f.

34. Ibid., p.70.

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role-playing is directed towards a clarification of truth and justice (Portia in The Merchant of Venice). This can be termed 'fictional role-playing' because it maintains the fiction of theatrical illusion and does not approach the psychological complexity of intellectual role-playing and identity crises. If one accepts that role-playing as a scenic statement - ie. direct communication with the audience over and above the acted role - constitutes an essential difference between comedy and tragedy as Rainer Warning maintains (35), then fictional role-playing can be seen as a dramatic device which also emphasises the intrinsic nature of comedy. Manfred Pfister shares this view in relation to Shakespeare's comedies where fictional role-playing carries over into the convention of the 'Spiel im Spiel' to accentuate the dramatic illusion:

Reflektiert schon das bewußte oder unbewußte Rollen- und Verkleidungsspiel den Spielcharakter der Komödie selbst, so wird diese Potenzierung der dramatischen Illusion oft noch durch die elisabethanische Bühnenkonvention des 'Spiels im Spiel' betont, in dem Zuschauer auf der Bühne theatralische Aufführungen ihrer Mitspieler kommentieren(36).

Thus, the dramatic illusion is consciously utilised by creating an illusion within an illusion, or a fiction within fiction. It has already been shown that the play within a play in Zur schönen Aussicht is intended to create a 'fiction' in the most pejorative sense of the word as a fabrication of deceit and thus forfeits its playful character. The role-playing in Zur schönen Aussicht links the modern, psychological notion of role-playing as a personality dysfunction with the ancient comedy tradition of fictional role-playing and once more contrasts a serious problem with a comedy convention.

The assuming and discarding of roles occupy a pivotal position in the development of a comedy plot: descending into the darkness of comic (or sometimes tragic) confusion followed by the emergence into light and truth once the roles have been discarded. In Zur schönen Aussicht Horváth alludes to this pattern but, as usual, reverses the order of things. His deviation from comic convention, and innovation, is to combine the traditional fictional role-playing with the modern intellectual statement. This is evident in the fact that the roles are already assumed at the start of the play and, as

35. Warning, op. cit., p.314.

36. From Ina Schabert (Hrsg.) Shakespeare Handbuch, Stuttgart, Kröner, 1978, p. 440.

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mentioned already, all characters participate in role-playing, in one form or another, with the exception of Christine.

Even Müller, although outwardly an example of middle-class respectability and an outsider like Christine, briefly assumes another role during the 'play' and proves himself very adept. His readiness to accept other roles, or at least a willingness to compromise the very principles he most fervently espouses is revealed in a conversation with Emanuel who tells how he was converted to pacifism by a charming person with exquisite hands. Müller, in order to flatter his aristocratic superior, immediately changes his attitude:

MÜLLER Herr Baron! Ich hasse den Militarismus! Mit meinem Bruder, dem Rittmeister, habe ich mich noch nie verstanden (III, 36).

Emanuel's intellectual role-playing is seen as an inability to come to terms with his new role: that of an impoverished aristocrat in the new world order. His threatened suicide, if it is meant seriously, is a response to an outdated code of honour, or if not, just underlines his facility at play-acting. Emanuel attempts nevertheless to assert the values and behaviour of a by-gone era when he refuses to drink at the same table with waiters and chauffeurs. Emanuel's role-playing, like that of Müller, is reflected in a lack of any ideological principles which allows him to convert to pacifism or 'generously' to offer his hand in marriage to Christine, a person of low birth, if any sort of self-interest can be discerned.

Max, Karl and Strasser share a common type of intellectual role-playing. They hark back to previous employment and professions and see their positions at the hotel as unsatisfactory or ill-suited to their abilities. This state of affairs is signalled immediately the curtain rises: "(Max in Hemdsärmeln; sein Kellnerfrack liegt neben ihm auf dem Pulte der Portierloge)" (III, 9). The waiter's uniform is Max's costume which he dons only reluctantly in consonance with his negative attitude to this role:

STRASSER Zieh dir doch den Frack an! Das will Kellner sein!

MAX Erstens: will ich ja gar nicht Kellner, und zweitens: eigentlich bin ich ja -

STRASSER (...) du bist Kellner! Daß du ursprünglich Plakate entworfen, Kunstgewerbler oder dergleichen Schnee warst, geht uns hier nichts an! Erwähne ich denn mein Vorleben?



## Role-Playing

(...) Kehre ich jemals den Offizier hervor? Betone ich jemals, daß ich eine Hoffnung, ja mehr als das, eine Erfüllung der europäischen Filmindustrie war? Daß ich ein Bonvivant, einmalig! (III,12).

It is ironical that Strasser claims he had to give up a career in the film world because of the 'Jupiterlampen': (This occupation being of course a symbol for superficial roles). The irony becomes evident during the 'play' when he demands from Emanuel "Mehr Licht" (III,52) in order to provide more deceit and lies.

The recurrent references to Max's 'Frack' and then later to his lost black shoes suggest that his role is an ill-fitting one: "zieht sich unter allerhand Faxen langsam den Frack an und lächelt gelangweilt" (III,14). However, he recognises the transforming effect of a costume change, in this case his black shoes, when he says to himself: "Ich bin nur froh, daß ich endlich meine Schuhe wieder habe. Man ist ja sogleich ein anderer Mensch" (III,24). There is, however, evidence that Max ought to be separated from the disreputable trio. Ada maintains, according to Strasser: "er hätte eine reine Seele" (III,14); and his reluctance in participating in Emanuel's 'Komödie' both point to a certain degree of integrity. At first, he refuses outright: "Halt! - Ich tu nicht mit" (III,43) and remonstrates against Emanuel's story: "Sie, das ist Meineid!" (III,41). It is little wonder then that he proves scarcely capable of acting out the fictional role apportioned to him. The stage directions for Max highlight his confusion: "unsicher", "verwirrt" (III,44), "schwätzt nervös vor sich hin" (III,47). Gamper interprets this behaviour as a "spontane(s), in ihm nicht abzutötende(s) Verlangen nach Wahrheit. Er ist aus diesem Grund ein schlechter Spieler (ist 'untalentiert' so Strasser) und fällt mehrfach aus der Rolle"(37). He also points out that "Max versucht, nachdem die 'Komödie' platzte (...) auf Christine wirklich einzugehen"(38). Gamper suggests then that role-playing is directly linked to an inability or unwillingness to face the truth.

Karl too resists his role as Ada's chauffeur and 'Herkules' but at the same time will not be reminded of his dubious past as a business-man in Portugal and his conviction for man-slaughter. He too proves himself to be a poor actor and his brutality manifests itself immediately in the 'play':

KARL (reißt sie an sich und küßt sie) (...) Die Erotik, Sie

37. Gamper, op. cit., p.61.

38. Ibid., p.65.

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Herr Baron, kennt keinen Standesunterschied, vorausgesetzt, daß ein Auto vorhanden ist (III,46).

In the final act, where he is able to change his costume, Karl's militaristic leanings become apparent: "Karl tritt aus zehn in goldbestickter Paradeuniform mit Handschuhen" (III,60).

Ada explains to Emanuel that misfortune is the reason for the trio's change in social roles:

ADA Das ist kein Kellner! Das ist kein Chauffeur! Das sind standesgemäße Personen! Die scheinen nur zum niederen Volke zu gehören, weil sie Unglück hatten (...) Die zählen nicht zum Volke, zur Masse, zum Plebs! Die gehören in die Salons! (III, 34f.).

Ada stresses their former, more illustrious roles in order to justify her relationship with them, for she too is striving to maintain another identity. According to Gamper, this is symbolised by certain repeated gestures: "Identität ist Kostümierung (Mantel an- und ausziehen) und Maske (Puder, Schminke)"(39). It is given a more concrete manifestation by her explicit aping of male behaviour and dress. Ada's first appearance in a car-coat and cap, brandishing a riding-crop, suggests a parody of a femme-fatale figure, especially when her age and Horváth's description are considered: "... ein aufgebügeltes, verdorrtes weibliches Wesen mit Torschlußpanik" (III,15). She states herself that she was born into the wrong sex and with it the wrong social role: "Ich hätte ja ursprünglich ein Mann werden sollen, ich wäre ein Cäsar geworden, ein Nero" (III,33). Her choice of cruel and tyrannical 'Vorbilder' testifies to a negative but in Horváth's world quite normal male role. In Act III, once Ada's financial hold over her 'harem' has been broken, she slowly comes to realise and accept the truth of her age and tarnished sexual allures. This entails admitting her role-playing:

ADA Wie einfach sich das sagen läßt: eine alte Frau -

CHRISTINE Es ist doch so.

ADA Ja. Man sollte jung sterben.

(...) Ich bin nämlich eigentlich ganz anders, aber ich komme nur so selten dazu (III,66f.).

Ada's final words are: "Lachen Sie mich nur aus" (III,67), a

39. Ibid., p.22.

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phrase repeated by a number of the other characters. It is used by them to designate the loss of their protective role together with a recognition of truth. Christine first uses the phrase in Act II when Strasser uncovers her somewhat fanciful delusion that she would be accepted back by him without having to mention the 10,000 M:

STRASSER Du! Du wolltest als Bettelkind gefreit werden, du Kitsch!

CHRISTINE Ja, das wollte ich (III,55f.).

She is of course at this point completely disillusioned and her dreams of renovating the hotel and supporting Strasser have been destroyed: "Jetzt ist es mir, als hätte ich nie daran gedacht, diese schöne Aussicht neu zu möblieren. Jetzt lach ich mich selber aus!" (III,56). Christine has come to the realisation that she had nourished herself over the past year on the illusion that Strasser still loved her.

Max's clumsy attempt to win over Christine in Act III is couched in a declaration of love laced with contradictions and fabrications: "Ja. Das heißt: nein. Sicher. Ich habe mich geirrt. Vielleicht. Apropos Irrtum: auf mein Ehrenwort: wahre Liebe gibt es nur einmal" (III,68). He suggests indirectly that the whole speech is intended to veil rather than reveal the truth when he pleads: "Lachen Sie mich nicht aus, bitte!" (III,68). Max realises he has exposed himself not only as deceitful but has revealed his true identity minus the protective role: "Ich bin nämlich kein Kellner, sondern Kunstgewerbler" (Ibid.). This revelation is designed also to impress Christine but at the same time evidently makes Max feel vulnerable. Karl's confession too, which is presumably the truth, is preceded by the expectation: "Lach mich nur aus" (III,71). The confrontation with truth by the removal of their protective roles to reveal the genuine character, signals for Ada, Max and Karl their exposure to punishment by laughter. This expectation is itself a reversal of norms for it is the role itself, the stock figure which is usually the object of derision rather than the individual beneath. It is the inability of these characters to come to grips with their own social roles that bestows on the play a psychological and social complexity which removes it from the realm of simple 'Verlachkomödie'.

### 2.3 Servant/Master Relationship

The European character comedy has relied to a large extent on the social constellation of master and servant for an essential ingredient of its humour and action. The wily servant who intrigues and schemes to help or often delude his or her master is essential to Molière and can be found in Lessing's Minna von Barnhelm. Hofmannsthal makes a servant the central figure in his comedy Der Unbestechliche (1923). In this play and in Hofmannsthal's other comedy of this period Der Schwierige (1921) the central theme is the decay of the aristocracy where the servants appear almost as usurpers: in the latter, Vinzenz is an arrogant new servant who tries to choose his own master; and in the former, Theodor actually does hold the household together in which he is a servant. These two plays can almost be seen as a symbolic gesture of farewell to a 2,000 year old comic tradition which came to an end in 1918 together with the aristocracy: severely shaken by war, revolution, inflation and new-found democracy, the servants triumph and the masters decline. The servants, Max and Karl, deny their status as has been demonstrated already. Their position is the result of financial dependence rather than class division. Horváth effects the most astounding twist to the comedy norms through the figure of Emanuel, Freiherr von Stetten. Here an aristocrat plans the intrigue for his 'lessers' and not with the intention of enlightening but, as has been shown, of deceiving Christine. It is thus ironic when Ada makes an appeal to those by-gone aristocratic values which Emanuel displays no evidence of having retained: "Emanuel, ich appelliere an dein Standesbewußtsein, an Ritterlichkeit und Christentum" (III,35). The final irony is seen in Emanuel's status as the most destitute and powerless among the characters. There is a further suggestion that both Ada and Emanuel are in some way mentally debilitated. Emanuel is apparently susceptible to sleep-walking by moonlight and is described as "mondsüchtig" (III,57). Ada's despairing yet tyrannical speech in Act III where she threatens her 'servants' with mutilation if they refuse to obey leads Karl to suggest: "Man sollte das Irrenhaus anrufen" (III,62). Ada's relationship with her 'harem' is intended too as a parody or perversion of the servant/master constellation. On the one hand she attempts to 'normalise' this relationship by insisting that Emanuel treat her men as relatives, brothers-in-law in fact, and on the other, she calls them her slaves when she feels her position is threatened. The fact that this bond is held together by money and is not based on any form of social hierarchy suggests that this is the only way the servant/master relationship can be presented in the modern comedy: a purely financial arrangement.

## 2.4 Parody of Tragedy

Again, the allusion to tragedy in comedy is not an invention of Horváth's but can be found in Aristophanes; Kleist's Der zerbrochne Krug draws on the parallel with Oedipus Rex for one of its comic strands. Horváth does not allude to a specific work or 'Stoff' but to elements or concepts of the tragedy such as guilt, fate and anagnorisis (40). The concept of 'Schuld' is used as a word play on its twin meaning of indebtedness. Not only are practically all the characters guilty in some respect but many are also in financial difficulties. In this way the comic theme of money is connected to the tragic theme of guilt.

Emanuel, whose first entrance is accompanied by a symbol of death, 'einem Trauerflor' intended to signal his impending suicide, attempts to elevate his gambling debts to the level of tragedy: "Ada, es dreht sich um ein Menschenleben. Ohne mein Verschulden hat mich das Schicksal in eine vernichtende Situation hineinmanövriert" (III,16). He evidently associates his aristocratic status with tragedy when attempting to convince Christine to marry him: "Es ist immer tragisch, wenn solch glorreiches Geschlecht erlischt" (III,69).

Strasser confers on his encounter with Christine a solemn and tragic tone: "Das Schicksal ließ mich ihren Weg kreuzen", to which Max replies, recognising the hollowness of the phrase: "Wie hochdeutsch" (III,40). To ascribe chance encounters to fate is yet another form of 'Bildungsjargon' or kitsch-conditioned consciousness. Winston sees the fate motif as being indirectly related to the theme of truth and falsehood for "no genuine belief informs Strasser's or Emanuel's invocation of the concept." She also points out that fate "is one of the favourite principles invoked in German kitsch literature" and is used by Horváth's characters "always in the evasion of responsibility" (41). Integral to tragedy is the acceptance of guilt and responsibility by the tragic hero.

All the male characters are guilty in some way at the beginning of the play: Max and Strasser for dealing in blackmarket automobiles; Karl has had a conviction for man-slaughter; Emanuel has gambling debts; and Müller too has been involved in illegal dealings with automobiles which enables Strasser to postpone payment of his 'Schulden' to Müller. However, neither Ada nor Christine can be considered guilty

40. Warning lists three types of 'Tragödienparodie' as examples of 'implizite(r) Fiktionsdurchbrechung': "Parodie direkter Vorlagen, Parodie des tragischen stilus sublimis, Parodie typischer Handlungselemente", p.312.

52. Winston, Close Readings, p.77f.

## Parody of Tragedy

unless delusion and reluctance to face reality are in some way culpable. The men add to their burden of guilt by connivance to humiliate Christine. The 'tragic' acceptance of this guilt is parodied in Act III when they decide to accept collective responsibility:

MAX Jeder von uns trägt die gleiche Schuld.

(...)

MÜLLER (...) Wir alle fühlen uns verantwortlich (III,72).

It is a parody because there is no underlying fundamental moral recognition and it is merely a tactical ploy to win Christine's respect.

The plot of Zur schönen Aussicht hinges on a parody of anagnorisis. This concept, while determined by Aristotle as one of the constituent elements of tragedy, is also integral to comedy with its recognition scenes. In tragedy the recognition may be the realisation of a crime e.g. Oedipus Rex, The Bacchae, or in comedy it leads to the clarification of confusion. In both forms the recognition is often contingent on some mark or sign, (cf. Aristotle's Poetics, Chapter 16). In Emanuel's 'Komödie' the men all claim to 'recognise' Christine, and furthermore, Emanuel reminds her of a non-existent 'Muttermal', an error which breaks the illusion and leads the play back to clarity. That such a perversion of comedy can also have tragic consequences is admitted quite openly by Emanuel when he relates that one of the girls whom they had deceived in this way killed her child afterwards - a preparation for the potentially tragic situation with Christine.

Anagnorisis has links with the dionysiac rituals which culminated in the death, resurrection and recognition of the godhead (42). It is perhaps not surprising then that Christine establishes a connection between her inheritance of 10,000 M and "dem lieben Gott". The other characters recognise this revelation almost as a type of deus ex machina for their attitude and with it the action undergo a radical change. Max interprets Christine's good fortune as "Zufall" and as "komisch" (III,56), which further supports the idea that Horváth intended to parody serious drama. Fritz Martini maintains: "... der Zufall in Komödie und Lustspiel ist eine Parodie des Schicksals in der

42. cf. Northrop Frye, op. cit.: "The ritual pattern behind the catharsis of comedy is the resurrection that follows the death, the epiphany or manifestation of the risen hero", p.215; cf. also pp.35f., 43.

Tragödie" (43). The divine interference of Greek tragedy as fate is indeed parodied by Christine's chance succour through her 'lieben Gott'. In a modern world without metaphysical certainty the gods of tragedy have been replaced by the money of comedy, the dominating force in a capitalistic society.

Max goes so far as to theorise on the nature of 'Zufall': "Der Zufall ist eine eigenartige Einrichtung. Eigentlich undramatisch, aber man trifft ihn trotzdem. Ab und zu" (III,57). It is interesting to compare this with Dürrenmatt's concept which he sees as fundamental to his comedies. According to the '21 Punkte zu den Physikern' 'Zufall' functions to frustrate the goals of "planmäßig vorgehende(r) Menschen" and appears once a story "ihre schlimmstmögliche Wendung genommen hat"(44). It provides the necessary ingredient of uncertainty in a technological world which is gradually eliminating chance from as many human spheres as possible. For Dürrenmatt then, 'Zufall' is the very pivot point of his drama.

Dürrenmatt's theoretical remarks on tragedy and comedy illustrate interesting parallels with Zur schönen Aussicht:

In der Wurstelei unseres Jahrhunderts, in diesem Kehraus der weißen Rasse, gibt es keine Schuldigen und keine Verantwortlichen mehr (...) Wir sind zu kollektiv schuldig(45).

Comedy is for Dürrenmatt the only dramatic form which can deal with this confusion in a confused world - "eine ungestaltete, im Werden, im Umsturz begriffene, eine Welt, die am Zusammenpacken ist wie die unsrige"(46). Horváth suggests that the world is in just such a state in Aussicht: the seasons are upset, it rains in summer and is warm in March; Max has heard: "Die Erdachse soll sich ja verschoben haben" (III,13). Max's comment has clear connotations that the moral, political and social order is also in flux which is borne out in the course of the play. The criminal dimension is in fact quite clearly indicated by the use of the word 'verschoben' in connection with automobiles. Strasser reminds Max of his doubtful past: "Ob du noch vor einem

43. Martini, op. cit., p.21.

44. Friedrich Dürrenmatt, Die Physiker, Zürich, Arche, 1962, p.77f.

45. Dürrenmatt, Theater-Schriften und Reden, Zürich, Arche, 1966, p.122.

46. Ibid., p.120f.

Jahre Autos verschoben hast -" (III,13). But as Dürrenmatt might suggest, the petty crimes and guilt of Strasser and his associates are not the fit stuff of tragedy, only of comedy.

### 3. Social Criticism in Zur schönen Aussicht

It has been demonstrated that Horváth has created a self-conscious theatrical world by underlining the 'comedy' taking place and contrasting it with the highly brutal behaviour of the characters. The hotel is, however, still situated in a world linked to contemporary social and political events and there is no attempt to create a fantasy, or unreal world as in Rund um den Kongreß. Commentators such as Axel Fritz and Jean-Claude François have already examined the social criticism contained in the play although neither accords it detailed attention. François goes so far as to maintain that the social criticism in fact redeems the play from being a mere comedy of manners in the style of the 19th century: "Si la pièce se réduisait à l'intrigue sentimentale, on n'aurait qu'un mélodrame larmoyant (...) Ce qui en fait pour nous un document historique, ce sont les allusions à la société allemande de la République de Weimar" (47).

Their attention is focused not surprisingly on Müller who represents a position approaching "Rechtsfanatismus" (48) with its inherent nationalism, imperialism and militarism: "Ordnung fehlt. - Und Zucht" (III,41). Some of his comments anticipate quite clearly the Nazi mentality: "Man könnte doch ruhig einige Millionen Menschen vernichten! Wir haben ja Übervölkerung, nicht? (...) Wir brauchen einen neuen Krieg. Und Kolonien!" (III,42). He also admits indirectly that he had been involved in the suppression of the 1918/1919 revolution:

MÜLLER Seinerzeit, da haben es auch die Weiber am tollsten getrieben! Aber ich gab kein Pardon! Ich nicht! Hoho, ich habe selbst drei dieser Furien niedergeschossen!

MAX Im Kriege?

MÜLLER Nach dem Kriege! (III,41).

Just prior to this speech Müller complains bitterly of the

47. Jean-Claude François, op. cit., p.140.

48. Axel Fritz, op. cit., p.51.



new position of women in the postwar society - "Frech und faul. Lauter Gewerkschaftler!" (III,40) - but the play suggests quite convincingly that such attitudes have not disappeared with the old political system. Christine represents an early example in Horváth's work of the exploited woman who remains until 1933 the central figure in his drama and prose. According to Axel Fritz the woman is predestined to be a victim:

(...) durch die wenn auch zerbröckelnde, aber im Bewußtsein der Männer noch festverankerte Familienideologie einerseits, die Frauen als verfügbare Objekte betrachtet oder in sentimentaler Verklärung auf den Piedestal der Mutterverehrung hebt, und andererseits durch die Bedingungen einer kapitalistischen Gesellschaftsordnung, die auch der Sexualität den Stempel des Warencharakters aufdrückt(49).

The full spectrum of these attitudes finds expression in Zur schönen Aussicht, ranging from sexual exploitation:

EMANUEL Für ein warmes Abendessen war alles zu haben! Hernach lüftete man das Baret: mein Liebchen, adieu! (...)

MÜLLER Und damals waren sie noch dankbar dafür (III,40).

to social oppression disguised as mother worship:

STRASSER Ada. Du hast kein Recht, eine Mutter zu beschimpfen. Das Weib erfüllt durch die Geburt eine göttliche Funktion (III,65).

This oppression carries with it, however, the seal of bourgeois approval and respectability which Müller generously offers to Christine:

MÜLLER (...) du wirst noch eine rechtschaffene Hausfrau mit Gefühl für das Familienleben. Oh, das hast du, kleiner Blondkopf! (...) Ich sehe mich schon im eigenen Geschäfte und sehe dich schalten und walten in Küche und Keller (...) Arme Kleine! Bist ein gefallenes Mädchen aber ich leite dich retour in die bürgerliche Atmosphäre (III,69).

These attitudes represent one side of the constellation of ideas surrounding the position of women in the Weimar Republic. Christine represents the other side in what was then an extremely hotly debated issue:

49. Axel Fritz, op. cit., p.184f.

## Social Criticism in Zur schönen Aussicht

CHRISTINE Man müßte ein anderes Gesetzbuch schreiben.

MÜLLER Das wäre das Ende der Familie.

CHRISTINE Wenn schon.

EMANUEL Und das Ende des Staates.

CHRISTINE Wenn schon! (III,73).

This is a laconic summary of the debate which raged until the Nazi takeover when the ideals of 'Kinder, Küche, Kirche' were rapidly cemented. It also implies that only through radical change can the situation of women be improved, for the very institutions of family and state are designed to support a male-dominated society(50). Christine liberates herself only by the means of her financial independence but is embarking on a life as a solo mother which must place her, according to Müller, beyond the pale of bourgeois respectability. She also supports her ideas of change with something approaching a utopian vision where economic exigencies are no longer the dominating influence on human behaviour: "Es gibt einen lieben Gott, aber auf den ist kein Verlaß (...) Man müßte den lieben Gott besser organisieren. Man könnte ihn zwingen. Und dann auf ihn verzichten" (III,73). The utopian concept of a society in which money as the capitalist god can be dispensed with, together with her criticism of the state and family suggests very strongly that Christine has been reading Marx. This is yet another example of how Horváth had his finger on the pulse of the time. The thematic complexes of fascism and the exploitation of women and their interrelationship, outlined as early as 1933 by Wilhelm Reich (51), constitute the central thrust of the social criticism in Zur schönen Aussicht. It is not however the intention of this study to provide an exhaustive discussion of social criticism but to indicate the importance of the social component in any analysis of comedy. The success of this dramatic form has always

50. This is exactly the thesis Friedrich Engels proposes in his essay 'Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigentums und des Staats' (1884). The family is based on the institution of monogamy which is in turn a mechanism evolved to ensure male dominance. The growth of private property and the concentration of wealth in a few hands - male hands - which had to be passed on to an indisputable heir, is the central reason for the creation of monogamy.

51. Wilhelm Reich, Mass Psychology of Fascism, trans. Vincent Carfagno, London, Penguin, 1970. A revised version of W. Reich, Massenpsychologie des Faschismus, Kopenhagen, 1933.

drawn on a productive dialectical tension between the need to depict the recognisable social reality of the audience and the tradition of artificial conventions examined above.

#### 4. Rund um den Kongreß and its Antecedents

##### 4.1 Definition of the Posse

When Horváth subtitles Rund um den Kongreß a 'Posse' it is difficult to establish the exact type of 'Posse' intended and what this genre signified to an audience of the late 1920s. When the 'Vertreter des Publikums' stumbles up on to the stage at the end of the play and accuses the actors of betrayal and deceit, "weil auf dem Theaterzettel stand, hier steigt eine Posse in fünf Bildern!" the question must be examined in what way this spectator's expectations have been disappointed and even radically reversed. His own definition: "Betrug ist eine Posse anzukündigen und derweil mit einem tragischen Klamauk zu enden" (III, 137f.) merely suggests that a 'Posse' must end happily, nothing more.

It is not necessary to trace the development of this form back to its baroque beginnings as a 'Stegreifposse'. The modern understanding of the genre has been determined by the 19th century 'Posse'. Eckehard Catholy states categorically: "Spricht man heute von Possen, hat man mit gutem Grund dabei die Possen des 19. Jahrhunderts im Auge" which can then be divided into four subgenres: "Lokalposse, Zauberposse, parodierende oder travestierende Posse, Liederposse", all of which distinguish themselves from other comic genres "durch die Tendenz zu größeren komischen Effekten, die dem Text vor allem durch mimische und musikalische Ausgestaltung abgewonnen werden"(52).

The nature of the 'Posse' in the 19th century was determined by two traditions: the Viennese Popular Comedy and the French Vaudeville. The former developed quite unique subgenres such as the 'Zauberposse' which combines the fantastic, fairytale world inhabited by spirits and fairies with local settings and characters. The interaction of the two worlds provided for the main dramatic interest. The 'Lokalposse', however, or at least its Berlin variety, was derived from the "damals beliebtesten komischen Theatergattung Frankreichs, dem Vaudeville"(53). Volker Klotz, in his study Bürgerliches Lachtheater, concentrates on the 'Lokalposse' as the representative 'Posse' of the 19th

52. Eckehard Catholy, 'Posse', Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturgeschichte, Bd.3, p.221.

## Musil's Vinzenz und die Freundin bedeutender Männer

century. Indeed, he argues that it assumed the function of dealing with social and political problems (in a local context), a responsibility which the serious theatre of Grillparzer, Grabbe and Hebbel abnegated and "zur selben Zeit sich immer mehr aus der aktuellen Gegenwart hinwegstilisierte"(54). Klotz observes that the influence and popularity of this form was restricted to the 19th century between 1819 and 1870 when it was replaced by the 'Schwank' as the dominant comic genre of the boulevard theatres.

Grimm found also in the survey of comedies written between 1918 and 1933 that "simple Namen wie 'Schwank' oder 'Posse' (...) gar nicht sehr häufig sind" (55) but the 'Possen' of Nestroy had been rediscovered and were being performed regularly in Vienna, Munich and Berlin. In 1928, in his review of the Brecht/Weill Dreigroschenoper, Herbert Ihering confirms Nestroy's place as a serious dramatist: "Seit Nestroy sind hier wieder Ansätze zu einer tragisch grundierten, in großen Typen abgewandelten Posse; auch bei Nestroy waren die Grenzen zwischen 'Humor' und 'Tragik' aufgehoben"(56). The process of Nestroy's reception and evaluation (begun by Karl Kraus in his essay 'Nestroy und die Nachwelt' (1912) and by Max Reinhardt in the theatre) was evidently well entrenched by the 1920s. However, Nestroy's 'Possen mit Gesang', despite their satirical and critical stance, are Viennese 'Lokalpossen' and cannot be considered as models for Horváth's Rund um den Kongreß. Nevertheless Nestroy's evident popularity would suggest that the sophisticated German audiences were prepared to accept the 'Posse' as a vehicle for serious comment.

### 4.2 Musil's Vinzenz und die Freundin bedeutender Männer

The possible sources and influences for Kongreß must be sought among Horváth's more immediate contemporaries and their more radical dramatic experiments. In a diary entry from 1924 Robert Musil indicates that the sources for his 'Posse' Vinzenz und die Freundin bedeutender Männer (1924) are not to be found in an established playwright such as Wedekind (as the contemporary critics suggested): "eher kommt die Linie über Morgenstern, Dada

53. Ibid.

54. Volker Klotz, Bürgerliches Lachtheater, München, dtv, 1980, p.89.

55. Grimm, 'Neuer Humor?', p.109.

56. Theater für die Republik, hrsg. Günter Rühle, p.582.

Musil's Vinzenz und die Freundin bedeutender Männer

bis Ringelnetz und in gewissem Sinne die Lausbübereien von Brecht und Bronnen"(57). This lineage, which may be grouped under various rubrics: absurd, grotesque or even revolutionary literature, can stake a strong claim to the paternity of Horváth's 'Posse'.

Musil's play itself deserves closer examination: not only is there a similar ironical use of the subtitle but thematic affinities can also be discerned. The subtitle has been interpreted variously as "kokettes understatement"(58), or "eine Satire auf das Handlungs-drama und dessen Wirklichkeitsverständnis aus der Perspektive der Schwärmer-Thematik"(59) but the tragic elements apparent in the characters of Vinzenz and Alpha(60) push the play beyond the bounds of the "Gesellschaftskomödie" and the 'Posse' (61). Wolfdietrich Rasch has also termed it "die österreichische Variante eines grotesken Komödienstils"(62), and W.Berghahn finds a "Satyrspiel zu den Schwärmern" combining elements of passiflage, irony and Musil's first attempt at satire(63).

The contemporary critics also understood the play as a

57. Robert Musil, Tagebücher, Aphorismen, Essays und Reden, p.290. For similarities between Ringelnetz and Horváth's 'Sportmärchen' cf. Uwe Baur, 'Sport und Literatur in den Zwanziger Jahren. Horváths Sportmärchen und die Münchener Nonsense-Dichtung'. In: Horváth-Diskussion. Hg. Bartsch et. al.

58. Wolfdietrich Rasch, 'Robert Musil's Komödie Vinzenz und die Freundin bedeutender Männer', Das deutsche Lustspiel Zweiter Teil, hrsg. von H.Steffen, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969, p.159f.

59. Helmut Arntzen, Musil-Kommentar, München, Winkler, 1980, p.123.

60. cf. Musil, Tagebücher, p.945, and his own description of the play as "ein Jux, der Versuch, den Blödsinn des Theaters so auszudehnen, daß er Löcher reißt, durch die es einige ernstere Ausblicke gibt", from a letter to Arne Laurin, 18/1/1924, Musil-Kommentar, p.123.

61. Grimm, op. cit., p.112.

62. Rasch, op. cit., p.160.

63. W. Berghahn, Musil, Reinbek bei Hamburg, Rowohlt, 1963, p.85.

parody of expressionist literature, "die das Lachen verlernt hatte"(64). The 'Posse' as a literary parody has a long and established tradition e.g. Nestroy's Judith und Holofernes as a parody of Hebbel's Judith, so Musil was in no way innovative in this function of the genre. In terms of construction, dramatis personae and comic techniques, Musil is far more securely situated in the 19th century 'Lokalposse' tradition than Horváth, and he only rises above it by virtue of the intellectual jokes and literary bons mots which were clearly addressed to a different audience than the 19th century model. A critic at the Berlin première wrote: "Es ist eine intellektuelle Harlekinade, die mit Pointen blendet, in Anspielungen brilliert, blasierte Romantik mit dem kranken Tempo unserer Zeit. Ein literarischer Bluff"(65).

As mentioned above, the affinities with Horváth's play lie in the thematic content, and indeed it is for reasons of content rather than form that modern commentators have rehabilitated Vinzenz together with Georg Kaiser's Nebeneinander (1923) and Kolportage (1925) as examples of comedies which take literary genres as a theme(66). However, in place of the usual serious drama as an object of persiflage, contemporary trivial literature and theatre with its trivialisation of the consciousness of the consumer becomes the subject of genre critique. For example, in Musil's play Alpha ('die Freundin bedeutender Männer') derides Bärli, the successful businessman, for his "literarische Unbildung" which reduces his emotional responses to the level of a "Familienblattroman"(67). Feelings are determined then by literature and art which are not independent but an integral part of a commercialised world in which goods, people, art and emotions have an economic equivalent. Vinzenz, the con-man, believes that money can influence all facets of human activity: "Wir können ja mit unserem Geld in der Politik, in der Kunst, in der Moral, in allen Angelegenheiten des Lebens uns wirklich zu allem erheben lassen, was wir wollen, und vernichten, was uns nicht gefällt"(68). Money is then the final arbiter of taste and values.

64. Theater für die Republik, p.493.

65. Ludwig Sternaux, Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger, 5.12.1923. Quoted in Theater für die Republik, p.496.

66. Arntzen, 'Wirklichkeit als Kolportage. Zu drei Komödien von Georg Kaiser und Robert Musil', DVjs 36 (1962), pp.544-561.

67. Vinzenz in Musil, Gesammelte Werke 6, p.411.

68. Ibid., p.431.

The difficulty with the play lies in its contrived artificiality. All the characters - especially the nameless functionaries - but also Bärli, Halm, Alpha and Vinzenz have a haze of unreality about them. This is particularly pronounced in the latter who are either staging or performing 'scenes' and plots. This results in a situation whereby all statements are relativised, for the characters lack any substance or credibility. Vinzenz sums up his own artificial nature at the end of the play: "Findet man sein eigenes Leben nicht, so muß man hinter einem fremden dreingehen. Und da ist es das beste, es nicht aus Begeisterung zu tun, sondern gleich für Geld"(69). In Rund um den Kongreß too, named figures are contrasted with the anonymous representatives of the congress. Both plays have prostitution as a theme, (although Alpha never accepts money from her gentlemen-callers but manages nevertheless to use them to her own financial advantage). There is tacit or open approval of prostitution by both groups of society's official representatives: in Vinzenz by the very fact of their relationship with Alpha, and in Kongreß by the determined stance not to take concrete action against the problem, "da (sie) bekanntlich unausrottbar, ja kaum bekämpfbar ist, weil das Prinzip der käuflichen Liebe zu tief in uns verankert ist"(III,102). This standpoint allows the members of the congress themselves to be involved in the trade: "Ich kenne jedes Bordell in meinem Vaterlande" (III,123) says the 'Sanitätsrat' advising Alfred to invest in the business.

#### 4.3 Dadaism, Goll, Grosz, Brecht and Bronnen

To return now to the genealogy suggested by Musil. The line via Morgenstern, Ringelnatz and Dadaism leads, according to Martin Esslin, eventually to the modern theatre of the absurd. Morgenstern's nonsense poems contain a "grotesque mixture of punning and cosmic fear" motivated by a metaphysical impulse "anticipating Heidegger's philosophy of being"(70). While it is unlikely that Horváth was intimately acquainted with the main representatives of Dadaism - Tzara, Arp and Hugo Ball - whose direct influence was already waning by the early twenties and became centred in Paris, "other members of the Zürich circle went back to Germany, transplanting the movement to Munich and Berlin, where it merged and coexisted with the powerful stirrings of German Expressionism"(71). Esslin finds traces of these impulses

69. Musil, op. cit., p.452.

70. Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, London, Penguin, 1968.

in the dramatic work of Ivan Goll, especially in his Methusalem oder Der ewige Bürger. Ein satirisches Drama (1922) which uses mask, film and other modern technological gimmicks for grotesque effects. Goll's foreword to the play reads almost like a manifesto for the theatre of the absurd and parallels also Horváth's techniques of grotesque satire in Kongreß.

Der moderne Satiriker muß also nach neuen Reizmitteln suchen. Er fand sie im Überrealismus und in der Alogik. Die Wirklichkeit ist die stärkste Negierung des Realismus. Die Wirklichkeit des Scheins wird entlarvt, zugunsten der Wahrheit des Seins. "Masken": grob, grotesk, wie die Gefühle, deren Ausdruck sie sind (...) Alogik ist heute der geistigste Humor, also die beste Waffe gegen die Phrasen, die das ganze Leben beherrschen(72).

Goll's satire was directed against the German 'Spießbürger' embodied by Methusalem, a bloated, bald, gouty and avaricious 'Ur-Bürger' (to use Goll's term). To find a visual correlative for Methusalem one needs only to glance at the work of Georg Grosz who designed the masks for the 1924 production and illustrated the published text. The similarities between Goll's creation and Horváth's congress members are obvious. The congress's 'Fressen und Saufen' is paralleled by Methusalem's repeated calls for 'Gulasch'. It is also interesting to note that one of Goll's characters, like Schminke in Kongreß, experiences a resurrection.

Grimm finds in the concept of the grotesque the most important stylistic innovation of the comedies of the 1920s. He lists a number of works, including Goll's play, which combine satire and the grotesque. Without exception the authors were expressionists who had turned their backs on their own previous often turgid work and even indulged in self-persiflage. Plays mentioned are Ernst Toller's Der entfesselte Wotan. Eine Komödie (1924), Arnolt Bronnen's two comedies Die Exzesse (1923) and Reparationen (1926), and Bertolt Brecht who belongs "wenn irgendeiner (...) zur Groteske der zwanziger Jahre". His earlier plays border on the grotesque and span a range from the "konstruktivistischen" tendency of Mann ist Mann, "zur brutalen, blutigen, bewußt schockierenden Gestaltung" of the farce Das Elefantenkalb and finds most extreme expression in the "frühen

71. Ibid., p.360.

72. Ivan Goll, Methusalem, in: Schrei und Bekenntnis. Expressionistisches Theater, hrsg. Karl Otten, Darmstadt, Luchterhand, 1959, p.426f.



## Rund um den Kongreß as Grottesque Satire

Grotesken" - Die Hochzeit and Der Bettler oder der tote Hund which "fast ans Absurde (streifen)"(73). This type of drama suggests an active preoccupation with styles and techniques of the grotesque in the years immediately prior to the writing of Rund um den Kongreß and it points to possible influences on Horváth.

This excursus has attempted to outline the possible precursors and sources of influence for Rund um den Kongreß and in particular that a tradition of mixing satire and grotesque elements had sprung out of the reaction by expressionist writers against the overly earnest aspects of their own movement. In addition, these writers appear to have seized on the 'Posse' or farce-related forms as a vehicle to convey the image of an absurd world because of its indifference to the rules of logical causality and traditional appeal for the suspension of belief.

### 5. Rund um den Kongreß as Grottesque Satire

The stylistic influences on Rund um den Kongreß have been suggested in 4.2 and 4.3 to indicate the direction of Horváth's experiment: the work of Musil, Goll, Brecht and Bronnen to name the four most acclaimed exponents of grotesque satire in the early 1920s. The comedy form of the 'Posse' or farce which these writers use bears little resemblance to its 19th century antecedents. The term was not intended to specify an exact genre but rather as a reference to the ridiculous and unrealistic content. However, the genre expectations associated with the 19th century forms were probably still paramount even in an educated audience since the experiments of the above-mentioned writers remained isolated and lacked an overwhelming public resonance.

There is no question here of Horváth subtly manipulating the elements of a conservative tradition as in Zur schönen Aussicht; his approach is rather a headlong assault which implies that the 'Posse' in its old form is based on simplistic notions so divorced from reality that it borders on the grotesque. Thus, the subtitle 'Posse' functions on three levels: in a figurative sense, it is a reference to the 'farce' of the League of Nations Commission into White Slave-Trading; it is intended to upset audience genre expectations because it bears no resemblance to either the 'Lokalposse' or the 'Zauberposse'; the combination of grotesque satire and social criticism suggests a rejuvenation and

73. Grimm, op. cit., p.115f. These Brecht plays are also cited by Esslin as precursors of the theatre of the absurd.

remodelling of the 'Posse' that prefigures the modern theatre of the absurd which draws together notions of black humour, grotesque stylistic elements and absurd situations.

It is not the intention here to attempt yet another all-embracing definition of the grotesque, an ancient yet frustratingly intangible aesthetic phenomenon. It must suffice to find and isolate those elements that apply to drama. Recent critical interest was initiated by Wolfgang Kayser's study(74). He differentiates between the three manifestations of the grotesque: in the creative process; the work of art itself; and in its reception(75). Among the recurrent motifs and stylistic devices of the grotesque, Kayser lists the following: madness, "human bodies reduced to puppets, marionettes and automata"; and "suddenness and surprise"(76). These elements can be found in either of the two basic types of the grotesque: "the 'fantastic grotesque' with its oneiric worlds and the radically 'satiric' grotesque with its play of masks"(77). He also asks to what extent the ridiculous ('Lächerlichkeit') and with it laughter are structural elements of the grotesque - "the most difficult question that arises in conjunction with that phenomenon"(78) - and suggests that it emerges from a satiric world view but concludes that a "clear-cut answer is impossible"(79). Two issues are raised here which Kayser does not deal with adequately. He implies that laughter must proceed from the ridiculous although this is by no means the case in the perception of the grotesque. It is the particular quality of the grotesque that the ridiculous is conjoined with the horrific so that the laughter which is perhaps stimulated is stifled at the outset. His misunderstanding on this point results in a question mark beside the second type of the grotesque - the radically 'satiric' which works with the tools of ridicule and laughter. This issue is not satisfactorily resolved, for Kayser's final

74. Wolfgang Kayser, Das Groteske: seine Gestaltung in Malerei und Dichtung, Oldenburg und Hamburg, Gerhard Stalling Verlag, 1957. All quotations are taken from the English edition translated by Ulrich Weisstein, Indiana University Press, McGraw Hill Paperback Edition, 1966, first published in 1957.

75. Ibid., p.180.

76. Ibid., p.183f.

77. Ibid., p.186

78. Ibid., p.187.

79. Ibid., p.186f.

definition of the grotesque moves into the realms of the supernatural: "(An) attempt to invoke and subdue the demonic aspects of the world"(80).

The most recent attempt to define this phenomenon is Holger Sandig's book Deutsche Dramaturgie des Grotesken um die Jahrhundertwende. Sandig introduces his study with a detailed examination of the theory of the grotesque and includes a detailed critique of the shortcomings of definitions hitherto attempted. Although he evolves an extremely complex series of categories for his own analysis(81) he insists that there are two very basic constituent elements: "Grauen und Lächerlichkeit". Each manifestation of the grotesque emphasises these poles differently but they must be present both in the work and in its reception(82). This is certainly no original insight on Sandig's part but is a reiteration of the nearest thing there is to an aesthetic absolute in the theory of the grotesque. This notion will be taken as a basic frame of reference with which to examine Horváth's play: the satiric elements in the work suggest there will be a greater emphasis on the ridiculous than on the horrific. The grotesque in drama has traditionally tended towards the satiric rather than the fantastic for clear reasons of physical representation. The satiric, as has been pointed out earlier, is normally directed against a society or world which is always recognisable whatever the extent of distortion and disorientation. Once the element of recognition has been removed the work enters the realm of the fantastic or, if there is an underlying nihilistic metaphysical world-view, the theatre of the absurd.

The grotesque is not immediately evident in Kongreß; instead it manifests itself through a process of intensification which Sandig characterises as the crucial difference between the grotesque in the visual arts and in literature, summarising Karl Scheffler's distinction:

Da das Steigerungsphänomen für die groteske Kunst von

80. Ibid., p.188.

81. Holger Sandig, Deutsche Dramaturgie des Grotesken um die Jahrhundertwende, München, Wilhelm Fink, 1980. The two categories are the "Empirisch Groteske" and the "Ästhetisch Groteske": the former is the direct experience or perception of powerlessness caused by some apparent compulsion which oscillates between horror and stifled laughter. The latter describes the same reactions with reference to works of art, pp.60-62, 75-77.

82. Ibid., p.35.

großer Bedeutung sei, lasse sich in der grotesken Wortkunst, die eine sich zeitlich und kausal entwickelnde Handlung aufweisen könne, im Gegensatz zum grotesken Bild, das den Höhepunkt treffen müsse, die Wirkung schrittweise intensivieren(83).

Precisely this phenomenon can be observed in the construction of Rund um den Kongreß.

The first 'Bild' introduces the main characters in a fairly conventional manner. The only indication given of the bizarre course the play will take is in the dialogue, where the slightly absurd exchanges between Ferdinand and Luise Gift (III,78) function to unsettle expectation and suggest an element of unpredictability at work. The second 'Bild' opens in 'Café Klups', renamed 'Viktoria' as the owner is in jail for procuring. The juxtaposition of the name 'Viktoria' with its connotations of respectability and moral fortitude and an establishment linked to prostitution hints already at the grotesque depending on the spectator's subjective standpoint. In any case, a gap between appearance and reality which is steadily to widen becomes evident. This contrast is alluded to by Ferdinand when he reminds his brother Alfred of their family history: "als ich zur ersten heiligen Kommunion schritt, hatte Papa gerade den Pelz gestohlen" (III,91).

However, it is not until the third 'Bild' that the grotesque elements reach the balance between 'Grauen' and 'Lächerlichkeit'. The Secretary General threatens Schminke with execution by firing-squad if he does not desist from criticising the Congress but it is Schminke who carries out the threat by counting to ten himself. The following images which Horváth conjures up are both horrific and ridiculous as well as distortions of reality: soldiers appear in gas-masks; the commanding officer alternates between an Austrian and a Prussian accent, whereby the change carries the grotesque element of suddenness: "er spricht plötzlich preußisch" (III,104); Schminke continues his demands to be executed. The manner in which the 'Hauptmann' alternates between two linguistic personae - a drawing, gossipy Austrian and the harsh Prussian officer with a clipped accent - produces a mild comic effect on the one side which is then immediately stifled by the knowledge that he will carry out the execution whichever accent he uses. The allusion to the crucifixion by the Secretary General - "Ich heiße Pontius Pilatus und wasche meine Hände in Unschuld" (III,105) - emphasises the incongruence of statement and situation. The 'Hauptmann' too performs the task

83. Ibid., p.134. Scheffler's essay 'Vom Wesen des Grotesken' appeared in Die Neue Rundschau, July 1906.

"in Gottes Namen" (III,105) and the soldiers pray before shooting. The execution is punctuated by enthusiastic applause and the strains of the 'Donauwalzer' coming from (foreshadowing Geschichten aus dem Wiener Wald) "einer kleinbürgerlichen Wohnung" (III,106). Schminke remains standing and lives on as an idea. The allusions to the crucifixion are further underlined by puns: "SCHMINKE Ich bin kein Herr. Ich bin eine Idee" (III,106), and parallels to the Gospels. Schminke refers to the "römischen Hauptmann" who recognises Jesus's divinity which establishes an obvious connection between the two 'Hauptmänner'. Here Schminke compares his immortality as an idea (presumably the Marxist utopia) with the Christian faith ("die neue Welt, des warn die Katholiken" says the Hauptmann) and thus the scene becomes a grotesque caricature of the crucifixion.

The juxtaposition of the sacred and profane is apparent too in 'Bild' 4 when Luise Gift appeals to the 'lieben Gott' to answer her question, whereby the phrase carries exactly the same meaning as in Zur schönen Aussicht i.e. money: "Lieber Gott, was hast du mit mir vor, lieber Gott?" (III,112) (84). As if by divine intervention the scene changes before her eyes into Café Klups complete with jazz band, prostitutes, book-makers and pimps. The fact that the transformation is effected by theatre machinery underlines Horváth's intention of using the means of theatre illusion to intensify the grotesque. The fact also that such ostentatious use of theatre machinery to achieve spectacular scene changes is an integral part of the world of operetta and the 'Zauberposse' with their 'heilen Welten' makes his 'sacrilege' all the more acute. This step into the fantastic culminates with the appearance of a policeman growing out of the floor. An additional incongruity is provided by the abundance of flags "zu Ehren des Kongresses" in a centre of prostitution.

The grotesque reaches a peak, logically, in the final 'Bild' where Horváth employs all the stylistic means at his disposal to intensify the bizarre and often cruel contrasts presented by the sight of the Congress at 'work'. It is signalled immediately by the first stage directions - "diskrete Tafelmusik von Mozart" accompanies the "Fressen und Saufen" (III,119). The Congress functions always as a body and not as a collection of individuals which is indicated in the stage directions by the use of the third person singular: "Der Kongreß zuckt; erhebt sich; starrt" etc. (III,119f.). The depersonalisation is further underlined by the fact that the delegates lack names and respond to stimuli by mouthing an assortment of clichés and prejudices, resembling strongly the marionettes and automata that Kayser

84. This same phrase is repeated by Marianne in Geschichten aus dem Wiener Wald (I,217).

speaks of. While this has a predominantly humorous effect, the depersonalisation shifts to brutality, reflected in their disinterest in the 'Fräulein's' fate, mixed with hostility towards her. This image of collectivised human degeneracy and brutality has a visual representation in the work of George Grosz as mentioned earlier in connection with Ivan Goll. His grotesque and satirical portrayals of a decadent German bourgeoisie during the twenties earned him not only a reputation as a leading exponent of grotesque satire but also prosecution for pornography. His fusing of animalistic with human features places his work in almost a 'classical' grotesque tradition(85). It is not difficult to discern similarities between the avaricious and drunken members of the Congress and the bloated, distorted shapes of Grosz's well-dressed citizens who are often portrayed frequenting prostitutes. There is even an illustration in Ecce Homo (1923) entitled the 'White Slave Trader'(86). The titles of the other illustrations indicate parallels with the characters in Rund um den Kongreß: 'Well-bred people', 'The Burgher's World', 'The Man Responsible', 'High Finance', 'The Absolute Monarchist', - and refer to important representative groups in the Weimar Republic. The titles connoting respectability contribute to the grotesqueness by contrasting so vividly with the actual portrayal.

A similar form of effect caused by gaping contrast, characteristic for the overall portrayal of the Congress, is expressed by the Secretary General in his opening speech: "Das unselbstische unserer Arbeit bietet die beste Gewähr für den endlichen Sieg unserer Ideale, den Triumph des An-sich-Seelischen über das An-sich-Körperliche" (III,119). In the course of the scene the Congress demonstrates itself to be devoid of ideals and obsessed with corporal pleasures. It is certainly grotesque that it is not only resigned to prostitution and White-slave trading but actively encourages and thanks Alfred. This combines the ridiculous (because the situation seems so absurd and unlikely) with the horrific owing to the seriousness of the problem. The final stroke is the forced happy-ending because it is only by employing the techniques of trivial boulevard comedy (the world of illusion) that the fate of the 'Fräulein' can be resolved in a positive manner. The argument that this is a fictional world totally divorced from reality which bears no relation to the

85. See Kayser, p.19f. The ornamental paintings discovered in Italy in the 15th century depicted strange combinations of human, plant and animal forms and gave rise to the adjective 'grotesque' after the Italian 'grotta' meaning cave.

86. George Grosz, Ecce Homo, New York, Grove Press, 1966. This is a facsimile of the original 1923 edition.

audience's actual experience will now be examined in the following analysis of the objects of satire. As mentioned earlier, satire can only function if it is directed against recognisable targets. Thus, the fate of the 'Fräulein' must be seen to be contrasted against the audience's society and its unwillingness to aid her. This contrast forms the grotesque framework of the whole play.

### 5.1 Commerce, Communism and Comedy: the Objects of Satire

Christine's positive demonstration of will in evading the traditional comedy marriage - which affirms the health of the domestic and, by inference, the social status quo - and even in invoking Marxist ideas by rejecting the family and state, can be interpreted as a positive ending, although a central expectation of comedy is reversed in her escape from marriage. Rund um den Kongreß, however, marks a progression into pessimism. Money acquires in this play too a metaphysical quality and is revered as 'der liebe Gott', as in Aussicht its ability to effect simultaneous changes in attitude (cf. Alfred towards Ferdinand (III,92)) testifies to the influence of money on human behaviour and actions.

The commercialisation of all values is represented by prostitution as the most radical manifestation of this phenomenon. In Rund um den Kongreß prostitution stands not only for the most extreme form of the exploitation of women but signifies that the laws of commerce and capitalism have intruded into all spheres of human activity. Even human beings have a market-value and must respond to the vagaries of a free market economy, as Luise points out to the 'Fräulein' after the latter has admitted to having accepted money for her 'services' for the first time:

LUISE Du Kind. Kindchen. Zwölf Mark sind Henry Ford. Für zwölf Mark verlangt man schon was Elegantes (...) Wie du jetzt so wirkst, kostest du nicht mehr als zwo.

FRÄULEIN Ich bin doch kein Tier (III,82f.).

Henry Ford connotes not only wealth but also is synonymous with capitalism of the 1920s. In the price difference of 2 to 12 marks Luise indicates to what price fluctuations a 'product' like the 'Fräulein' will be exposed.

All the characters in the play are influenced by and connected to prostitution in some way, either as practitioners, opponents or, in Ferdinand's case, through family ties. Prostitution, as an extremely ruthless form of commercial enterprise, has clearly a destructive effect on human relationships, even between brothers:

FERDINAND Auch wenn wir keine Brüder wären, hätt ich mich gefreut, wenn du freudig überrascht gewesen wärest. Rein menschlich.

ALFRED Wenn du mich anpumpen willst, muß ich dir leider eröffnen, daß ich pleite bin.

FERDINAND Du warst noch nie menschlich.

ALFRED Ich bin pleite (III,92).

Alfred's irritated reaction to the word 'menschlich' suggests that the property of humanity is not only clearly dependent on pecuniary considerations but has forfeited its quality as the embodiment of man's highest ideals. The Goethean notion of 'Menschlichkeit' is thereby negated by Alfred (who need not necessarily be aware of the concept's intellectual heritage) for whom it apparently implies freedom from financial interests and thus engenders suspicion of poverty. However, Ferdinand's invocation of the concept is also ironical in the light of his treatment of the 'Fräulein', his former wife. The confluence of commerce and dishonesty with the rejection of 'Menschlichkeit' is alluded to by the Secretary General when he admonishes Ferdinand for wanting to remarry her: "Sie mit Ihrer Menschlichkeit haben kein Recht den geschäftsordnungsmäßigen Gang der Bekämpfung des Mädchenhandels zu durchkreuzen" (III,136). Alfred emphasises too that the illegal White-slave trade is subject to normal commercial law and business ethics: "Abgesehen von der Konventionalstrafe würde auch mein kaufmännisches Renommee beträchtlich leiden" (III,136). He also justifies breaking his word to Luise by recourse to his status as a business-man: "Ich bin Kaufmann. Mit Leib und Seele" (III,94).

Horváth's juxtaposition of the idealistic notion of 'Menschlichkeit' with a world in which all values have a financial equivalent is a confirmation of Schiller's definition that satire exposes the discrepancy between the ideal and reality(87). The shortcomings of the reality Horváth satirises are embodied in three main groupings: the collaboration of business interests and the Congress to promote prostitution and the White-slave trade; the overt association of the Congress with nationalist-militarist elements; and the Marxists,



represented by the journalist Schminke. These groups represent some of the key power factions in the Weimar Republic.

As was indicated in the theoretical discussion of the grotesque, the Congress is closely identified with the ruling middle-classes and thus capitalist business interests. This is seen immediately in 'Bild' 3 when Schminke begins to lay the blame for the causes of prostitution at the feet of the "bürgerlichen Produktionsverhältnisse" to which the Secretary General replies: "Lassen Sie die bürgerlichen Produktionsverhältnisse in Ruhe, Sie Kommunist!" (III,102). The irony on which the play is based, and consequently its pessimistic outlook, is the indifference of both sides regarding the actual victims of the White-slave trade. For the Congress, the problem is ostensibly too deeply rooted in human nature to be influenced in any way; for Schminke, individual cases constitute a distraction from the 'idea' that economic hardship resulting from capitalism determines prostitution.

The collusion between the Congress, capitalism and the White-slave trade itself is seen in 'Bild' 5 when the 'Sanitätsrat' advises Alfred to export to Santa Fé de Bogota: "Leider Gottes sind derlei Geschäfte ungemein vorteilhafte Kapitalsanlagen" (III,123). In 'Bild' 4 the Congress is identified with the dealers themselves. The 'Fräulein' asks Alfred what Herr Ibanez, the White-slave trader, looks like, to which he replies: "Er könnt Generalsekretär sein" (III,116) at which point the Secretary General enters. The fourth delegate proposes and welcomes the cooperation between the Congress and commercial circles: "Wer würde sich nicht freuen über das völkerversöhnende Hand-in-Hand-Arbeiten des Kapitals, wo es gilt Kulturgüter zu schützen" (III,127). The Congress has been described as "society in miniature"(88) for there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the Congress can be either directly equated with society or, at least, with the most important power structures operating within it. The Congress is ubiquitous: its flags and sounds even penetrate the Café Klups; the ships in the harbour, some of which are presumably involved in the White-slave trade, fly flags in its honour; the police enforce the display of these flags for it is a political decision from the cabinet:

87. "Satirisch ist der Dichter, wenn er die Entfernung von der Natur und den Widerspruch der Wirklichkeit mit dem Ideale (in der Wirkung auf das Gemüt kommt beides auf eines hinaus) zu seinem Gegenstande macht." Schiller, 'Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung', Gesamtausgabe 19, München, dtv, 1966, p.143.

88. Joan Neikirk, The role of women in the works of Ödön von Horváth, Ph.D, The University of Wisconsin, 1971, p.69.

"Laut einem Erlaß des Gesamtkabinetts und einer ortspolizeilichen Vorschrift muß alles beflaggt werden. Zuwiderhandlungen werden strafrechtlich verfolgt" (III,97).

The Congress is also directly associated with the conservative forces in German society. The first appearance of the Congress's flags is accompanied by martial music which recurs a number of times; the compulsion to honour the Congress by means of a cabinet decree has strong connotations of dictatorial rule which is mirrored by the Secretary General's denial of Schminke's right to criticise. This could be a thinly veiled allusion to the political tensions between the new Republic and the German Communist Party, the KPD: "Der Kongreß streitet Ihnen das moralische Recht zur Kritik kraft seines guten Willens glatt ab, und Ihr politisches Recht verstößt gegen die Verfassung" (III,103). This presumably is a reference to the ultra-liberal Weimar Constitution which renders the accusation quite absurd but should be understood as a reflection of the Secretary General's anti-democratic tendencies(89). The alliance between the Congress and the army, a powerful anti-democratic force in this period, is hinted at by the 'Hauptmann' who addresses the Secretary General in a familiar tone and relates the latest gossip circulating at the Congress. He is also present later at the banquet as the representative of the Ministry of War to which the President accords a special welcome: "Hoffen wir auf die tatkräftige Hilfe der beteiligten Ressorts. Dann bin ich überzeugt, daß wir bis zum nächsten Kriege gewaltige Fortschritte erzielt haben werden" (III,120).

Another issue which divided the liberal and anti-liberal camps at this time was the debate surrounding the abolition of the death-penalty. This is alluded to when the 'Hauptmann' asks the Secretary General if he is against capital punishment to which the latter replies emphatically: "Oh, nein!" (III,105). The issue was so contentious at the time Rund um den Kongreß was written(90) that any reference to it was sure to evoke a strongly emotional response according to clearly demarcated political

89. See Kurt Sontheimer, Antidemokratisches Denken in der Weimarer Republik, München, dtv, 1978, for a discussion of this widespread movement which embraced the full spectrum of political persuasions from the ultra-left to ultra-right. However, the virulent criticism of the Weimar Constitution was a preserve of the right, pp.187-192.

90. Norbert Jaron, Das demokratische Zeittheater der späten 20er Jahre, Frankfurt/M., Bern, Peter Lang, 1981, writes in his analysis of this debate: "Die Todesstrafendebatte erreichte in den Jahren 1928-1929 einen Höhepunkt", p.77.

groups. The Communists, Social Democrats and the left-wing intellectuals supported the abolition of the death penalty and they were opposed by all factions to the right of the SPD and the DDP(91). By alluding to the debate Horváth demonstrates clearly the Secretary General's political leanings and sharpens the satire against the conservative groups by showing him as having too weak a stomach actually to observe the execution.

Horváth includes other passing references to contemporary right-wing slogans and propaganda. Delegates of the Congress pass anti-semitic comments (III,121) and the much published Jewish-bolshevist conspiracy, particularly favoured by Hitler, is alluded to when Schminke is accused of being both a Jew and a Bolshevist:

HAUPTMANN (...) (er deutet plötzlich auf Schminke) - dort!  
Jenen! Mir scheint gar, des is a Jud.

(...)

PRÄSIDENT Wie kommt hier der Jud herein.

DER GENERALSEKRETÄR Er behauptet, daß mit der Aufhebung der bürgerlichen Produktionsverhältnisse auch die aus ihnen hervorgehende Prostitution verschwinden wird. Schrecklich!

PRÄSIDENT Ein Bolschewist! (III,126)

Horváth does not reserve his satire just for right-wing elements. Schminke, as a representative of the Marxist position, is the object of more discriminating satire. Firstly, Schminke's treatment of Ferdinand's sister discredits his claim to be an "ausgesprochener Moralist" (III,80) and reveals him to be just as exploitative as Alfred. His obsessive preoccupation with the idea and principle behind prostitution combined with overt disinterest in combatting the problem itself can be interpreted as Horváth's criticism of the ideological rigidity of the Marxists. Marxism implies a certain ruthlessness towards the individual: "Ich muß Ihnen leider sagen, daß ich mich für Einzelfälle nicht interessiere. Prinzipiell nicht" (III,99). Yet Horváth evidently shares to some extent the Marxist analysis of the causes of prostitution. Schminke's claim that prostitution is a result purely of economic hardship caused by capitalist means of production is in fact confirmed by the 'Fräulein' before the Congress. She states laconically that her path to prostitution was the result of unemployment: "Ich hatte

halt nichts (...) kein Geld" (III,130) (92). The notion that the Marxist attitude is in some way dehumanising is represented bizarrely by Schminke's continued existence as an 'idea', a mouth-piece for political slogans.

Horváth's cynical satire on the Marxists culminates in the final scene when Schminke unmask himself - "Schmink dich ab! Schmink dich ab!" says Alfred (III,138) - as a closet capitalist by reading the stock-market results. The image of removing make-up points to an interpretation in theatrical terms, as a satire on the relationship between commerce and boulevard theatre. Schminke's recitation from the share-market resounds in accord with the phony happy ending which the boulevard theatre demands. Thus, even a convinced Marxist is defeated by the ubiquitous, overwhelming commercialisation of all spheres of life. By having a member of the audience demand a happy ending, a comedy marriage when the characters themselves have been shown ill-suited to one another, Horváth highlights the audience expectations of this type of theatre: The theatre should provide escapist fantasies which ignore the realities in the outside world. This is the bleak message concealed beneath the strains of the wedding march.

92. However, Horváth also indicates that there are important psychological factors, especially the process of emotional hardening - 'Gefühlsroheit' - which the women experience through a series of exploitative relationships.