

IV. THE EXILE COMEDIES

The year 1933 is generally considered to mark the most important caesura in Horváth's work as indeed it was for the majority of German writers, artists and intellectuals. Even though Horváth was in no immediate danger, the installation of the Nazi regime made itself felt when the première of Glaube Liebe Hoffnung was cancelled in January, 1933 and soon afterwards his parents' house in Murnau was ransacked by the S.A. It has become commonplace in Horváth scholarship to speak of the decline in standard of his work after 1933 with the clear departure from explicitly social-critical works and the exploration of metaphysical and religious themes. The dearth of critical literature on the post-1933 period can be best explained in terms of the prevailing mood of Germanistik in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Reflecting the intellectual mood of Germany at the time, literary scholarship tended to seek the social and political relevance in any literary work. Horváth before 1933 offered a perfect example of a left-wing critic of the declining Weimar Republic depicting the rise of support for the Nazis among the petite-bourgeoisie. This analysis of the Fascist mentality as found in the Volksstücke became a valuable part of the growing 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung' which the theatres, in particular, began to focus on in the early 1970s. The post-1933 Horváth provided, however, very little explicit criticism of the Nazi régime in his drama; this became rather a subject of his later prose works.

As yet there is no full-scale study of the exile works, although a growing interest has become apparent since the mid-1970s(1). Jürgen Schröder published a challenging interpretation of the later works in 1976 where he suggests also that the apparent caesura in Horváth's work rather reflects on us, his interpreters, than gives an accurate analysis of the development of Horváth's oeuvre:

Wer sich heute also mit Horváths Spätwerk einläßt, trifft auf eine widersprüchliche, wenig einladende Situation, deren einziges gemeinsames Merkmal ein durch das Jahr 1933 zweigeteilter Autor ist. Aber gerade an diesem Befund, der ebenso viel über Horváth wie über uns, seine Rezipienten, und die gängigen Rezeptionsme-

1. Robert Herschbach's article on the exile plays follows the somewhat tenuous autobiographical thesis that all the exile works contain an implicit Wunschtraum which reflects the author's own desperate predicament. 'Horváth's plays in exile: From desperation to Wunschtraum', Deutsches Exildrama und Exilliteratur, Hg. Wolfgang Elfe/James Hardin/Günther Holst, Bern, Peter Lang, 1976.

chanismen der Intellektuellen verrät, möchte ich mit meinen Überlegungen und Thesen ansetzen(2).

Schröder's thesis is essentially an autobiographical approach. He advances the argument that Horváth's later works reflect a process of regression: "das Spätwerk greift in auffälliger Weise auf das Frühwerk vor 1930 zurück", but it also implies a deeply seated identity crisis in the author which leads him increasingly to explore: "Die Bereiche der Heimat, der Kindheit, des Märchens, des Traumes, des kindlichen und märchenhaften Glaubens und, Gespensterglaubens"(3). These all signify a desire to return to a lost paradise of mother, lover, womb and death: "alles Symbole der vermißten Geborgenheit, der Liebe und des Friedens"(4). Schröder suggests that Horváth's psyche was based on a psychological conflict cemented in his early years:

Er (the conflict) wurzelt in einer traumatischen Enttäuschung an Mensch, Gesellschaft und Staat durch den Ersten Weltkrieg und die Nachkriegszeit (...) Dem in der Ich-Bildung begriffenen Jugendlichen fielen jene Über-Ich-Instanzen aus, bzw. sie wurden verdrängt, die für den 'normalen' Übergang in den Erwachsenen-Status und ein stabilisiertes Identitätsgefühl unentbehrlich sind(5).

Although Schröder identifies important recurring themes and motifs in the exile works his attempt to subsume them under a crude psychoanalytical approach can scarcely be taken seriously. Not only are all attempts to subject a dead author to this type of pseudo psychotherapy highly dubious but in Horváth's case they must be conducted with insufficient biographical data. Although the recent biography by Traugott Krischke has supplied much valuable information it is still inadequate to attempt the type of Freudian analysis that Schröder embarked on in 1976 with even less data at his disposal.

Walter Huder's article on the exile works displays a clear desire to discover social and political comment on post-1933 Europe; even in the historical plays such as Pompeji, there is no doubt that the setting is a cipher for the Third Reich, for in

2. Jürgen Schröder, 'Das Spätwerk Ödön von Horváths', Über ÖvH 2, p.127.

3. Ibid., p.133f.

4. Ibid., p.134.

5. Ibid., p.146.

both Empires there are exploiters and exploited(6). Huder's thesis is in essence that the psychological effects of exile manifested themselves immediately in Horváth's work. He finds for example in Die Unbekannte aus der Seine: "viele Parallelen zwischen der titeltragenden Figur des Stückes, der 'Unbekannten', und dem aus Berlin geflüchteten Autor"(7). She, like the author, is "besitzlos, heimatlos, hilflos, der Welt nicht gewachsen"(8) yet displays a relaxed tolerance towards this world. The influence of emigration can be seen through a comparison with Geschichten aus dem Wiener Wald. Both plays are located in a similar milieu but in Die Unbekannte neither locale nor time is specific so that the play approaches the "Grenze des Absurden"(9). Mit dem Kopf durch die Wand testifies "zu welchem literarischen Faux Pas die Existenznot einen Emigranten bringen kann"(10) and Huder suggests that both self-propaganda as well as self-irony can be detected in his decision to refashion the theme into his later comedy.

More recently Karl Müller has attempted to chart Horváth's "Weg nach innen" in the exile works. The 'Spätwerk' is characterised in the main by a growing trust in divine 'Lösungsmodelle' although this was not an easy ideological transition: "Horváths ideologisches Problem besteht zunehmend in der Übersetzung von der Notwendigkeit christlicher Verinnerlichung, die potentiell von revolutionärer Sprengkraft sein könnte"(11). Müller finds most support for his thesis in the later prose works and the fragment 'Die Entstehung der Familie Qu.' from the planned novel 'Der Mittelstand' where it becomes clear "daß Horváth zwischen der historischen Funktion des Urchristentums und des Sozialismus Parallelen insofern sieht, als die beiden für ihn - auf verschiedenen Stufen der Menschheitsentwicklung - progressive Lösungsprogramme anbieten"(12). By the time Ein Kind unserer Zeit was written with its preoccupation

6. Walter Huder, 'Ödön von Horváth Existenz und Produktion im Exil', Die deutsche Exilliteratur 1933-1945, hrsg. von Manfred Durzak, Stuttgart, Philipp Reclam, 1973, p.242.

7. Ibid., p.234.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid., p.235.

10. Ibid., p.238.

11. Karl Müller, 'Ödön von Horváths Weg nach innen', Österreich in Geschichte und Literatur mit Geographie, 26 Jg. 5, (1982), pp.284-297, p.290.

with a 'neue Zeit' the Christian model had replaced the socialist one of the early works. This process is only really discernible in the prose and in Pompeji; plays such as Hin und Her, Himmelwärts and Figaro can be explained more simply, for Müller, in autobiographical terms(13).

The only critic to have attempted a serious refutation of the "durch das Jahr 1933 zweigeteilter Autor" notion is Herbert Gamper in his influential essay on the death imagery in Horváth's work(14). Gamper demonstrates the importance of the mystic, religious and metaphysical dimensions in Geschichten aus dem Wiener Wald, Kasimir und Karoline, Glaube Liebe Hoffnung and Die Unbekannte aus der Seine, motifs and themes which have normally been relegated to the late works. He sharply questions "die Annahme eines Bruchs in seinem Werk (angeblich anzusetzen nach 1932)"(15). The late Horváth is characterised then by a change from passive to active "Anteilnahme aus dem Geist christlicher Nächstenliebe (...) Die geringere ästhetische Qualität seines Spätwerks wäre demnach nicht ein Versagen (...) sondern Ergebnis einer von Beginn an vorbereiteten ethisch-religiösen Entscheidung"(16). This explains, according to Gamper, Horváth's increasing preoccupation with the utopian realm of truth, love and justice in the later works. Whereas he had until 1932 depicted mainly the perversion and disappointment of these values under specific moral conditions, after 1933 he appears more concerned with exploring the possibility of their realisation.

The somewhat contradictory state of Horváth criticism on this period reflects quite simply the heterogenous nature of the works. The comedies span almost the whole range of genres that constitute this dramatic form: 'Posse', 'Märchen', 'Lustspiel' and 'Komödie', a variety which resists gathering them easily under one common denominator. This experimentation suggests rather a continual search for appropriate forms which could a) find a theatre and audience to guarantee the author his existence; and b) convey at the same time the highly serious thematic content of the exile predicament and a world in flux.

12. Ibid., p.289.

13. Ibid., p.291.

14. Herbert Gamper, 'Die Zeichen des Todes und des Lebens: Zu bisher kaum beachteten Konstruktionselementen in Horváths vier Fräuleinstücken', Theater Heute, 15, 1974, pp.1-6.

15. Ibid., p.5.

16. Ibid., p.6.

The frequently cited letter to Franz Theodor Csokor on the 23 March, 1938 shortly before Horváth's death encapsulates the bewilderment in face of the confusion besetting Europe: "Gott, was sind das für Zeiten! Die Welt ist voller Unruhe, alles drunter und drüber, und noch weiß man nichts Gewisses! Man müßte ein Nestroy sein, um all das definieren zu können" (VIII,680).

The comedies of this period could almost be termed comedies of literature. With the exception of Hin und Her they take as their starting point a specific motif or work from the world of literature. While it is clear from the pre-1933 works that Horváth was intimately acquainted with the European comedy tradition, its elements and conventions, his debt cannot be linked directly to a particular work or 'Stoff'. After 1933, however, his plays reveal a preoccupation with literary traditions which range from the mythic in the case of Don Juan kommt aus dem Krieg (which began life as comedy), to a specific work such as Mikszáth's Die Frauen von Selischtje or Beaumarchais's Figaro. Die Unbekannte aus der Seine and Mit dem Kopf durch die Wand draw on the famous, if trivial legend of the 'Inconnue de la Seine', whose death-mask was reproduced in countless thousands of copies, and whose fate became the subject of much speculation and many literary 'treatments', as well as on the medieval Undine legend. Even Himmelwärts, with its strong links to the baroque mystery play and the Viennese 'Zauberposse', is clearly placed in a literary tradition. The theatrical representation of heaven, hell and earth extends back to the Middle Ages, where scenes with Lucifer in particular can be found(17). Horváth's final comedy Pompeji takes him back to Plautus, in many ways one of the founders of the European comedy tradition. What then is the relationship between these literary traditions and the reality of post-1933 Europe? In the following chapters Horváth's personal situation cannot be lost sight of. In particular, the recurrent themes of honour, compromise and conscience reflect not only a universal theme but also Horváth's own struggle with his conscience. The recent revelation that Horváth joined the 'Reichsverband Deutscher Schriftsteller' (RDS), the Nazi writers' guild, has contributed significantly towards providing a biographical explanation for his preoccupation with these themes. Horváth's peripatetic existence throughout Europe is reflected in the shift away from an exclusively South German locale to settings as diverse as the sources he draws from. Fairy-tale locales and elements merge with specific allusions to the Third Reich, the contemporary theatre scene in Vienna alternates with Renaissance Hungary and Pompeii in Roman times.

17. Helmut Prang, Geschichte des Lustspiels, p.42.

1. Die Unbekannte aus der Seine and Mit dem Kopf durch die Wand

1.1 Two Versions of the L'inconnue de la Seine Legend and its Sources

Horváth's inspiration to write a dramatic version of the L'inconnue de la Seine legend may well have come from his companion Hertha Pauli who published a short story on the subject. It appeared in the Berliner Tagblatt, Nr. 521, on the 4 November, 1931. Pauli relates in her autobiography:

'L'inconnue de la Seine'. Das Lächeln der Totenmaske hatte uns beide schon lange fasziniert. Aber zu dem gemeinsamen Stück war es nie gekommen, denn Ödöns 'Unbekannte aus der Seine' besaß ein Eigenleben, wie alle seine Figuren, und ging ganz andere Wege(1).

The death mask of an unknown girl who had been found drowned in the Seine was famous throughout Europe and had been reproduced in hundreds of thousands of copies. It was included in Ernst Benkard's famous collection of death masks Das ewige Antlitz. First published in 1927, this book went through 15 impressions by 1933(2). Also published in 1933, the year Horváth wrote Die Unbekannte aus der Seine, was an 'Erzählung' by a certain Alfred Wiedemann, L'inconnue de la Seine which, despite its author's obscurity, went through three impressions in the same year(3). The 'Stoff' was clearly a popular one and Horváth no doubt reckoned on its commercial appeal despite the formal problems that his version presented as he himself recognised:

Mein neues Stück ist ein ausgesprochenes literarisches Experiment. Seine Aufführung muß für jeden Theaterdirektor zunächst als ein Wagnis erscheinen. Ich selbst bin der Ansicht, daß es höchst fraglich ist, ob das Stück im Abendrepertoire eines großen Theaters en suite gespielt werden könnte (IV,650).

Pauli's story gives an account of the legend, its creation

1. Hertha Pauli, Der Riß der Zeit geht durch mein Herz, Wien, Hamburg, Paul Zsolnay Verlag, 1970, p.60.

2. Ernst Benkard, Das ewige Antlitz. Eine Sammlung von Totenmasken, Frankfurter Verlag-Anstalt, 1927. By 1935 it had reached its 19th impression.

3. Alfred Wiedemann, L'inconnue de la Seine. Eine Erzählung, Breslau, Arno Ullrich, 1933.

and, like all the versions, welds together fact and fiction to offer a possible solution to the riddle of her fate. It begins:

Kennen Sie die Plastik "L'inconnue de la Seine"? Es ist die Totenmaske eines unbekanntes jungen Mädchens, das man ertrunken aus der Seine gezogen hat. Das Original der Maske, das vor vielen Jahren in der Morgue hergestellt wurde, ist nicht mehr zu finden. Aber die Abdrücke - in Wachs, Terrakotta oder Gips - sind allerorts zu haben und werden immer wieder gekauft. Neben den starren Totenmasken berühmter Männer finden wir dieses eine Mädchenbild: weich, wie mit einem Hauch von Leben(3a).

The reference to the death mask of the 'Inconnue' beside those of famous men suggests strongly that Pauli's encounter with the mask was through Benkard's popular book(4). Pauli continues her non-fictional introduction: "Man möchte das Rätsel dieses Lebens ergründen; möchte wissen, warum dieses Mädchen den Tod gesucht hat in den Wellen der Seine;" and thereupon glides into fiction: "...und die Phantasie baut Brücken zwischen Tod und Leben...". Her version tells of a young girl in a convent who meets a sculptor employed by the convent to fashion a new angel. The sculpture bears the features of the girl and she becomes his model and mistress. He tries in vain to capture her expression in stone until her serenity and purity overwhelm him. He destroys his sculpture, indulges in a drinking bout, returns to his studio drunk and, frustrated by her smile which he is incapable of reproducing, punches her smiling face and the smile freezes under the blow. She then drowns herself in the Seine and her lover finally discovers his beloved as a wax bust in a small shop next to the convent.

While there are no discernible traces of this story in Horváth's Die Unbekannte, the sculptor reappears in Mit dem Kopf durch die Wand in Bossard's explanation of the case but in a

3a. Hertha Pauli, Berliner Tagblatt, Nr. 521, 4. November, 1931.

4. Benkard's description certainly echoes and perhaps sets the tone of many subsequent evocations: "In geheimnisvolles, aber auch gnädiges Dunkel scheint alles gehüllt, was die Geschichte dieses holden, aber offenbar nicht glücklichen jungen Weibes anlangt". Although generally regarded to be a suicide victim, "Uns jedoch ein zarter Schmetterling, der, sorglos, an der Leuchte des Lebens seine feinen Flügel vor der Zeit verflattert und versengt hat". Benkard states that the mask was made in the "Morgue zu Paris", op. cit., p.51.

different guise:

Erlauben Sie, daß ich in knappen Worten den Fall skizziere: vor einigen Jahrzehnten zog man eine Mädchenleiche aus der Seine, irgend eine junge Selbstmörderin, also eine ganz alltägliche Begebenheit. Man wußte nichts von ihr (...) man hat es auch nie erfahren, und das junge Geschöpf wäre verscharrt worden, sang- und klanglos, hätte sie nicht zufällig ein junger Bildhauer erblickt, dem das unbeschreiblich rätselhafte Lächeln, das das Antlitz der Leiche überirdisch verklärte, derart anzog, daß er ihr die Totenmaske abnahm. So blieb uns dies ewige Antlitz (NB the title of Benckard's book) mit seinem zarten, göttlich-traurigen Lächeln (...) Viele Dichter hat die Unbekannte angeregt, aber alle tapen im Dunkeln (IV,332f.).

Another explanation is provided by Emil in Die Unbekannte, although with less detail, yet in a kitsch tone strongly reminiscent of Pauli's story and Benckard's introduction:

Neulich hat mal wer gesagt, diese arme Seele war wahrscheinlich nur ein Menschenkind, gut und böse, fromm und verdorben, wie das ewige Leben - aber meiner Meinung nach ist das ein Engel gewesen, der zur Strafe auf unser irdisches Jammertal hat hinabmüssen und dann durch den Tod erlöst worden ist (III,197).

The kitsch image of an angel could have been one element Horváth retained from the story. All three explanations have the same quasi-religious tone; a vocabulary most commonly associated with mysticism, the supernatural, and bordering on the numinous. It is interesting then that Horváth, himself highly superstitious, should deal with such a 'Stoff' in the form of comedy. Whereas other treatments, such as that of Hertha Pauli, attempt explanations of the riddle, Horváth, with the distance of the comedy form, speculates how the legend acts upon people. It is significant that Die Unbekannte ends with an epilogue where she is only present as an object of kitsch. The angelic or numinous qualities of the figure herself, which she exhibits in her actions towards Albert, are disregarded by the other characters but are much praised in the death mask hanging above Irene's bed. Similarly, the figure is used in Mit dem Kopf durch die Wand as a hoax to reveal the negative side of the film industry which deals on a mass scale in exactly the kitsch illusions that the death mask has come to represent.

1.1.2 Frank Wedekind's Musik

Horváth's reference to Musik (1906), made in an interview with the Wiener Allgemeine Zeitung, January, 1934, has been frequently quoted but never examined. Horváth cites Wedekind not as a direct influence but rather as a clue to the nature of his own "ausgesprochenes literarisches Experiment": the combination of a tragic 'Stoff' with a comic form, "wie die tragischen Ereignisse sich im Alltagsleben oft in eine komische Form kleiden"(IV,650).

Wedekind entitles his work a 'Sittengemälde', the subtitle implies both the sophisticated humour of the 'Sittenstück', the comedy of manners, and the social reportage of the 'Sittenbild', particularly favoured by Naturalist drama. The play depicts the descent into misery of the aspiring opera singer, Klara Hühnerwadel, whereby the nomenclature immediately gives an indication of the comic tone underlying the play. However, this tone has an overlay of resounding pathos. At first it appears the work may be intended as a 'Tendenzstück' against §218 (renamed §812), for Klara's predicament is caused by her transgression of the abortion law. She has aborted an illegitimate child, the father of which is her singing teacher, Josef Brettnr, who impresses on her to escape to Antwerp to avoid prosecution and thereby save his reputation as well as her own. The plot is absurdly melodramatic with intentional allusions to 'Kolportagen' and 'Hintertreppenromane'. Klara returns from Antwerp and is imprisoned; she is freed through the efforts of Josef's wife; she becomes pregnant to him again; finally, she retreats to the countryside to have the child, which dies of disease. The four 'Bilder' which chart this improbable progress carry suitably ironic titles: "Bei Nacht und Nebel", "Hinter schwedischen Gardinen", "Vom Regen in die Traufe" and "Der Fluch der Lächerlichkeit".

The language is so totally overwrought - practically every sentence that Klara utters ends with an exclamation mark - that it reduces the serious content to melodramatic humour. Notwithstanding this, the role of Klara was played in earnest by actresses when the play was first performed and the key element of parody entirely ignored or overlooked as Wedekind remarked: "Die Rolle der Klara H. ist die Karikatur einer Heroine und darf nicht als sentimentaler Schmachtlappen gespielt werden, wie das bei den Erstaufführungen in Nürnberg, München und Berlin geschah"(5). He protested that the actresses enjoyed presenting the author "als einen Dummkopf, der mit Hintertreppeneffekten

5. Frank Wedekind, Prosa, Dramen, Verse, München, Langen-Müller, n.d., p.951.

arbeitet"(6) while relying on the strength of the role of Klara. However, Wedekind intentionally employed the elements of caricature and parody to adapt a 'Stoff' which was hardly suitable for a serious dramatist, indeed he termed it a "Biertischzote"(7). He refashioned the material into an anti-naturalist drama. Klaus Völker describes the play as "ein Stück in naturalistischer Manier als Polemik gegen den kleinbürgerlich verstoffelten Naturalismus. Er denunzierte das verkitschte sozialpolitische Tendenzstück"(8). Wedekind considered this blending of parodistic treatment and serious material in order to criticise contemporary dramatic forms as "eine leichte Arbeit, aber künstlerisch das Modernste, was ich geschrieben habe"(9). Wedekind achieves his effects not just by means of 'pathetische' language, but also by employing allusions to the literary forms he is parodying. For example, Else Reitner learns of her husband's involvement in the abortion case when he suddenly demands 200 marks from her while she is reading the court reports of the case in the sensationalist press. This links comic 'Zufall' with an allusion to the congruence between trivial literature and real life(10). Wedekind also uses a form of self-conscious parody in the 3rd Bild during the exchange between Josef and Franz Lindekuh, a 'Literat' intent on exposing the renewed relationship between Breitner and his pupil:"JOSEF In meinen häuslichen Einrichtungen glaubt er endlich den geeigneten Stoff für sein geplantes Sittenbild gefunden zu haben"(11).

Irony is also utilised throughout the play to subvert the overpowering emotions and reveal their 'Lächerlichkeit'. Klara is forced to leave for Antwerp just when she had been offered "am Schützenfest in Glarus die Partie der Eva in der 'Schöpfung' von Haydn"(12); ironical too is the prison director's advice and

6. Ibid.

7. Cited in Klaus Völker, Wedekind (Friedrichs Dramatiker des Welttheaters 7), Velber bei Hannover, Friedrich Verlag, 1965, p.57.

8. Ibid., p.56.

9. Wedekind, op. cit., p.951.

10. This is the same technique that Georg Kaiser employs in Kolportage (1925), where the characters state repeatedly that the events happening to them belong in a cheap novel.

11. Wedekind, op. cit., p.775.

12. Ibid., p.745.

encouragement to Klara with reference to Breitner: "Halten Sie sich immer an ihre Freunde, mein Fräulein, dann werden Sie in Zukunft vor solchen Kalamitäten gesichert sein"(13). The final irony is delivered by Klara's mother as she accuses Franz Lindekuh of bringing misfortune upon her daughter and thanks Breitner: "Aus vollem Herzen danke ich Ihnen, Herr Professor, für alles, was Sie in den drei Jahren an meiner Tochter getan haben"(14). Klara sums up Wedekind's intention in her final words: "(Sie heult in fürchterlichem Schmerz auf und sinkt zu Boden) Die Menschen bekommen Krämpfe vor Lachen, wenn sie die Erzählung meiner Qualen hören"(15).

1.1.3 The Unbekannte and the Undine Legend

Some critics have seen in the play a reworking of the Undine tale(16). Undine, the water spirit who falls in love with a human, was immortalised in the immensely popular story by Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué published in 1811, although the legend itself appears to have medieval origins(17). Undine belongs to the order of elemental spirits and in order to gain a human soul she must marry a mortal; however, she will forfeit her human existence if her husband insults or scolds her near water. Undine is found by the knight Huldbrand, who weds her and their life together appears destined for blissful happiness. The transformation from innocent and naive spirit to human being entails - in accordance with Romantic nature philosophy - a movement from innocence to guilt and suffering, from an unconscious natural state to a conscious human existence with all its earthly torment. Their marital bliss is disturbed by the presence of another woman, Berthalda, who competes for Huldbrand's affections. During a journey on the Danube Huldbrand insults his wife, who, true to the laws governing water spirits,

13. Ibid., p.763.

14. Ibid., p.788.

15. Ibid.

16. cf. Benno von Wiese, 'Ödön von Horváth', Über ÖvH 2, p.32; Axel Fritz, op. cit., p.255.

17. Friedrich de la Motte-Fouqué, Undine Eine Erzählung (1811). Frenzel cites Fouqué's source as Paracelsus's 'Liber de nymphis, sylphis, pygmaeis et salamandris', which in turn goes back to an epic poem by von Stauffenberg of 1320. Frenzel, Stoffe der Weltliteratur, p.757.

returns to her watery realm, only to surface once more to smother her spouse in a fatal embrace.

The motif of unfaithfulness leading to death is common to both, except that the Unbekannte does not seek revenge like her fairy-tale counterpart, but ends her own life. Both Undine and Horvath's Unbekannte are characterised by an impulsive spontaneity and quirkish teasing humour. For Undine, however, this aspect of her personality disappears once she has wed Huldbrand and is then imbued with a human soul. This new possession deprives her of the former freedom of spirit and she becomes a dutiful wife; a paragon of Christian virtue, as is particularly evident in her generous treatment of Berthalda, her rival for Huldbrand's affections. While Undine returns to kill her husband, the Unbekannte returns to watch over her beloved in the form of the kitschy death mask above the marital bed. Undine is also symbolically united with her beloved at the end of the story as a spring beside his grave:

Noch in späten Zeiten sollen die Bewohner des Dorfes die Quelle gezeigt und fest die Meinung gehegt haben, dies sei die arme verstoßene Undine, die auf diese Art noch immer mit freundlichen Armen ihren Liebling umfasse(18).

Water establishes the most crucial link between this fairy-tale and the Unbekannte. Throughout Fouqué's story the characters are persecuted and harried by thunderstorms, flooding streams and waterfalls. Water is both an image of a tranquil life and of potential destruction. Erotic water symbolism is without doubt an intrinsic element of Horváth's text as Kurt Kahl notes: "das Wasser ist (...) bereits ihr Element, nicht umsonst genießt sie den Gewitterregen draußen auf dem Balkon"(19). In the third act, which is overshadowed by a thunderstorm, the Unbekannte demonstrates a particular affinity for water. She likes to go walking in the rain and rejoices at the approaching storm: "Hu, jetzt hagelt! Wie das trommelt, wie das trommelt. Oh ist das wunderbar, wenn es so braust"(III,180). She appears to want to draw Albert into this mysterious fairy-tale world of childhood and water:

UNBEKANNTE Soll ich zu dir kommen - (Sie umarmt seinen Kopf).
Oh warum bist du nicht mein Kind? Ich würde dich in den Schlaf singen, aber das Fenster müßte offen sein, und wenn

18. Friedrich de la Motte-Fouqué, Undine, Leipzig, Reclam, 1937, p.109.

19. Kurt Kahl, op. cit., p.61.

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du hinausschaust, müßtest du grüne Augen haben, so große grüne Augen wie ein Fisch - und Flossen müßtest du haben und stumm müßtest du sein.

ALBERT (ganz einfach) Ich glaub, du bist der Tod (III,185).

Albert senses that the Unbekannte's erotic attraction towards him signifies in some way death, that she is seducing him into watery depths. The image of the seductress as a siren, luring men to their destruction, combines the Undine motif with that of the Lorelei, and extends back at least as far as Homer. The siren as a mythological femme fatale experienced a revival of interest at the turn of the century and fascinated such painters as Klimt, Munch, Franz von Stuck, Gustave Moreau and Burne-Jones(20). These artists were obsessed with the connex of seduction, water and death. It is perhaps this deep-seated, almost primal fear that Albert seems to sense. Water and death are linked also in the association of "ins Wasser gehen", to commit suicide. The Unbekannte takes this vow before she leaves, pledging absolute discretion regarding Albert's crime:

UNBEKANNTE Ich werd doch nichts sagen, du - eher geh ich ins Wasser, bevor auch nur ein Sterbenswörtlein -

ALBERT Ins Wasser?

UNBEKANNTE Weißt, das nehm ich mit mir hinab, als hätt ich es getan.

ALBERT "Hinab". So was sagt sich leicht (III,192).

The association of 'hinab' into water is changed by the Unbekannte into a dark word-play as she departs:

ALBERT Wohin?

UNBEKANNTE (lächelt) Hinab. Du wohnst doch im zweiten Stock - (III,193).

In accordance with his intention to explore the tragicomic nature of the grotesque Horváth concludes the third act not on a tragic note but with a joke which alludes to her impending suicide.

The similarities between the Undine fairy-tale and the play function more on the level of association than by displaying

20. For an informed and witty discussion of the mermaid and siren in art and literature, cf. Beatrice Phillpott, Mermaids, New York, Ballantine Books, 1980.

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exact correspondences; there is no evidence that Horváth was familiar with this story but his interest in and utilisation of the fairy-tale form in prose and drama is well known. The true relation between the texts is to be sought on the formal level. The novella by Fouqué, although a prototypical piece of writing of the Romantic period, steers a dangerous course towards trivial literature. It combines all the escapist elements so popular in this period: the medieval setting with its faultless 'Sitten'; the locus amoenus of the Fisherman's 'Hütte'; the fairy-tale world of nature spirits; and a strong romantic thread spiced with adventure. Walther Killy has remarked that trivial literature has replaced the fairy-tale by providing a similar illusory resolution of real problems; however, trivial literature is more insidious because it normally feigns a realistic setting:

Der Bosheit der Welt wird die Kraft eines edlen Gemüts entgegengestellt. Der Leser erhält die Möglichkeit, sich mit ihm zu identifizieren, um auf diese Weise teilzuhaben an der befriedigenden Auflösung der im Leben unauflöselichen Verhältnisse, am happy end, das märchenhaft und antirealistisch ist(21).

Trivial art and kitsch include also a fascination for the mystical and the unscientific. The mysterious smile of the Unbekannte fulfils the need to know that there is something mysterious and pseudo-spiritual in the world which technology cannot explain or secularise. Whereas Undine, the water spirit, returns from the water to exact justice and thus confirms the moral code of both the spirit world and Huldrbrand's world, the suicide of Horváth's Unbekannte in the river, denies such a trivial resolution; indeed, it ensures the continuation of injustice which contradicts directly the happy endings trivial literature and kitsch insist upon. Such a comparison reveals Die Unbekannte to be a genuine "entkitschte Komödie".

1.2 Die Unbekannte aus der Seine between Kitsch and Tragedy

The experimental nature of Die Unbekannte is reflected in an almost bewildering array of motifs and images, so interwoven that the comic and tragic can be scarcely differentiated. These motifs polarise around either kitsch or tragedy and it is the delicate balance between these poles that constitutes the experimental nature: its 'Wagnis' and 'Risiko' as a financial

21. Walther Killy, Deutscher Kitsch, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962, p.25f.

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undertaking for any larger theatre as Horváth anticipated (IV,650). The difficulty in analysing these motifs is compounded by the use of kitsch which, by its very nature, can be perceived simultaneously as serious or comic depending on the subjective standpoint of the spectator. The superficial plot - the unsolved murder of the clockmaker - places the play outside the domain of conventional comedy. Justice is provided neither legally nor morally but this tragic movement is thwarted by the epilogue with its depiction of a 'kleinbürgerliche Idylle', complete with the death mask of the 'Inconnue de la Seine' hanging in the bedroom.

The ambiguous nature of some images is seen for example in the recurrent image of the rose and the phrase "Rosen bringen Glück". When Ernst says this (III,144) to Irene, it sounds like a typical example of the cliché-ridden jargon so characteristic of Horváth's portrayal of this milieu. However, it functions also on a more complex level, as Herbert Gamper has demonstrated. This phrase and others linked to it - "Kinder bringen Glück", "Tote bringen Glück" (III,165) - reflect a chain of associations which show the rose to be in fact a flower of death: "Das Glück (...) setzt voraus, daß die Fassade (of the 'normal life' led by Albert and Irene) dicht sei: daß die Verbrechen verborgen bleiben (...) Das heißt, die Rose, die solches Glück zum Signum macht, ist in Wahrheit eine Totenblume" (22).

The play also abounds in images of death which lack the ambiguity of the rose. The 'Unbekannte' herself is immediately and continually associated with death. In her first scene she tells Albert that where she comes from, wild roses grow everywhere:

UNBEKANNTE (...) Und dann kommt der Friedhof, wo die weißen Blumen blühen. Manchmal sehne ich mich zurück.

ALBERT Nach dem Friedhof?

(Beide fixieren sich) (III,150).

The white flowers are presumably 'Astern', related to chrysanthemums, the flowers of death which also occur in Zur schönen Aussicht. The Unbekannte is thus linked with the realm of death from the outset. She also has a premonition of the murder by reporting to Albert the baker's wife's comment about him: "UNBEKANNTE Oh sie hat nur gesagt, diesem Menschen ist alles zuzutrauen, der könnt einen auch umbringen" (III,155). In the

22. Herbert Gamper, 'Die Zeichen des Todes und des Lebens. Zu bisher kaum beachteten Konstruktionselementen in Horváths vier 'Fräuleinsstücken'', Theater Heute, 15 (1974), Nr.3, pp.1-6, p.2.

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same conversation she impresses on Albert the foolishness of suicide and steadfastly denies that she could ever contemplate such a step: an example of tragicomic irony. She conjures up images of death in her attempt to dissuade Albert from this course of action (which he had never really considered):

UNBEKANNTE Überhaupt ist das Leben nicht so häßlich, mein Herr. Sehen Sie, in der Nacht denk ich oft an die armen Toten. Ihre Hemden sind vermodert, aber keiner deckt sie zu, und niemand erkundigt sich. Und dann regnet es in ihre Finsternis hinab und die armen Toten liegen allein. Und dann schmilzt der Schnee (III,156).

It is therefore little wonder that Albert suddenly perceives in the third act: "(ganz einfach) Ich glaub, du bist der Tod"(III,185).

Other links to tragedy can be found in the recurrence of the trinity: fate, guilt and responsibility. However, the Unbekannte can scarcely be considered a tragic heroine. Not only is practically nothing of her past known, the revelation of which is frequently an essential component of the tragic downfall, but there is no attempt made to probe the reasons for her subsequent suicide, if indeed she committed such an act. The elements of fate, guilt and responsibility are in fact often placed in a semi-comic light and function almost as parodies of their counterparts in tragic drama. For example, the policeman orders the Hausmeisterin to prevent entry to the scene of the murder:

POLIZIST (...) Hausmeisterin! Keiner betritt das Haus, und Sie tragen mir dafür die Verantwortung!

HAUSMEISTERIN Verantwortung? Das halt ich nicht aus.

KLARA So mach uns doch nicht lächerlich! (III,168).

The Hausmeisterin's response, together with her daughter's terse reply, indicates that these characters belong very much in the realm of comedy, although they have been confronted with a situation which goes beyond the bounds of comedy. Horváth demonstrates through her refusal to accept responsibility the constant tension in this play between comic character and potentially tragic situation.

Associated with guilt are the various criminal motifs running through the play, most of them associated with petty crime. Albert has been dismissed from his job for embezzlement; the student and the engineer's wife are engaged in an adulterous affair; Albert steals a rose for the Unbekannte; she leaves a

restaurant without paying. Here Horváth provides an ironic touch when Albert reproaches her for this after having himself committed a murder: "Sowas ist doch schwer strafbar"(III,182). Act three demonstrates a peculiar reversal of expectations. At the beginning of the act Albert appears quite ready to confess his guilt and turn himself in to the police, being under the impression that he has only committed armed robbery. When, however, it becomes clear that he is in fact guilty of murder, and that the Unbekannte was the only witness, all mention of guilt and penance disappears. With the appearance of Irene Albert becomes preoccupied with cementing his future marital bliss, his opportunity to find "geordnete Verhältnisse" and "Glück und Friede"(III,191f.), both cornerstones of the petit-bourgeois way of life. For this he is even prepared to risk being turned in by the Unbekannte. At no point, however, does he appear to perceive the enormity of his crime and his guilt: "Sei mir nicht böse, aber ich bin eine ehrliche Haut und es wäre gefrevelt gegen mich selbst" (III,192). Albert's lack of insight into his own guilt prevents this aspect of the play from ever attaining to tragic dimensions. His preoccupation with his own trivial 'häusliches Glück' blinds him to the wider implications of the crime which are then comfortably repressed. Albert's consciousness reflects a menacing mixture of brutality and kitsch-ridden blitheness, a consciousness which can only be adequately dealt with by comedy.

The notion of 'Fate' seems also to oscillate between the trivial and the tragic without settling definitely in one camp. The second encounter between the Unbekannte and Albert teeters on a delicate balance between cliché and profundity:

UNBEKANNTE Bei dir könnt ich alles vergessen, wer ich bin und was ich bin-

ALBERT Warum grad bei mir?

UNBEKANNTE Schicksal. (Albert küßt sie) Oh du, so schön wird es nimmer werden (III,159).

It is unclear whether she refuses to give her name out of coyness, because of a dubious past, or whether Horváth wants to imply some kind of identity crisis. It is also unclear why she should use the tragic term 'Schicksal' to describe their relationship. In this context the word has connotations of cheap love novels since their 'relationship' or better encounter is more accurately encompassed by the 'Zufall' of comedy. If there are indeed inexorable wheels turning which render their relationship inevitable, then Horváth appears not to deem it necessary to depict them. The interpretation that Horváth

himself has in fact succumbed to the temptation of portraying kitsch for its own sake, proves ill-founded if the references to trivial literature are taken into account. The play possesses a self-conscious literary layer manifested either in the use of such terms as 'Schicksal' or through indirect references to other works. Horváth's specific allusion to Wedekind's Musik suggests strongly that the play should be understood on one level as literary parody, presumably of other trivial versions of the same story. The oblique reference to Wedekind is suggested by the character Klara, the 'Hausmeistertochter' who had an affair with the student. The other echo is provided by the Unbekannte, who briefly mentions a past love affair: "Ich hab mal einen geliebt, es hat weh getan und gut. Josef hat er geheißt"(III,184). There is considerable evidence to suggest that the name is intended as a literary allusion. First, the character of the lover plays no part whatsoever in the rest of the play, so that there is little dramaturgical function in mentioning the name. Secondly, Josef is an unusual name in Horváth's normally very limited repertoire of character names. The name could be intended as a religious allusion, thereby placing the Unbekannte in the pantheon of Christian thought and action, but the suggestion that the Unbekannte had recently had an affair with a biblical Josef is little more than cheap humour which does not permit access to any rewarding image or motif in the play. It is more likely that the name is intended as a reference to Josef Breitner, the adulterous music teacher and seducer of Klara Hühnerwadel, although there are no discernible parallels between Wedekind's Klara and Horváth's Unbekannte. There are however quite striking similarities between Albert and Breitner. Both are characterised by the same ruthlessness and exploitative attitude towards their respective admirers and both manage to escape from their respective crimes with reputations unscathed.

The character of Irene provides the ideal vehicle for the critique of trivial literature; she is the figure most closely associated with kitsch and the trivial. In act three, she betrays quite innocently the extent to which her consciousness is influenced by her reading matter: "Ich habe einmal in einer Novelle gelesen, daß die Frau die Pflicht hat, die Härte der starren Paragraphen durch Liebe zu erweichen - aber das begreif ich erst jetzt, wo es zu spät sein dürfte"(III,190). It is Irene who has ordered a copy of the death mask, "weil sie so himmlisch ist"(III,196), for the bedroom. The final image of the play, Irene clutching the packaged death mask, conveys the triumph of the mediocre, the everyday, over the extraordinary. The Unbekannte, however closely she resembles the kitsch object she is later transformed into, still represents a remarkable example of spontaneity and direct emotional warmth in her relationship with Albert, coupled with the virtues of loyalty and

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self-sacrifice, qualities rare in Horváth's pantheon of characters.

In his article on the kitsch elements in Horváth's work(23), Horst Jarka ascribes to the death mask a symbolic significance:

(...) der Totenmaske, Massenartikel der Kitschindustrie, kommt in der letzten Szene durchaus sinnbildliche Bedeutung zu (...) Wie in Geschichten aus dem Wiener Wald ergibt sich die bittere Ironie des Schlusses aus dem Kontrast zwischen den Vorgängen und den kitschigen Verhaltensweisen, durch die diese Vorgänge verdrängt werden; der Kitsch macht das Weiterleben möglich(24).

Gamper too perceives the central importance of the notion of 'Verdrängung' in the ending. Little Albert is afraid of dark doorways, a vague premonition of his father's crime, and so the door is shut and this immediately pacifies him: "Früh wird Verdrängung eingeübt, damit auch sicher aus dem kleinen Albert nichts anderes werde als - Irene konstatiert es am Ende - "ganz der Herr Papa", und Zukunft nichts anderes sei als Reprise der Gedankenlosigkeit und Verbrechen der Vergangenheit"(25). Thus, Irene's comment "Kinder sind doch die Zukunft"(III,198) implies yet another circular ending as encountered in the Volksstücke(26). The outward accoutrements of comedy are supplied - a double marriage with children ensuring the continuance of the society -, yet it ensures that the values of Albert and not those of the Unbekannte are passed on.

1.3 Mit dem Kopf durch die Wand as Parody

Horváth's own admission of failure in regard to this comedy has functioned to prevent serious critical attention and the play has been universally ignored or granted dismissive comments in passing. The reasons for failure have, however, never been closely examined, nor has there been any attempt to identify

23. Horst Jarka, 'Ödön von Horváth und das Kitschige', Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie, 91, (1972).

24. Ibid., p.580.

25. Gamper, 'Die Zeichen des Todes und des Lebens', p.2.

26. This idea is developed more fully in Figaro läßt sich scheiden, cf. 3.2.

critical perspectives in the play. The absence of any real threat to its comedy world and thus the lack of an averted tragedy, which characterises the acknowledged canon of German comedy, probably accounts for this notion of failure. If there is no potential tragedy a comedy must then rely on brilliant dialogue or complexity of plot to substitute for this tension. The complete critical condemnation suggests that the play fails on both counts. Gisela Günther is representative of this view and is exceptional only in the length of her denouncement: "Mit dem Kopf durch die Wand vereinigt alle Schwächen eines Unterhaltungstückes in sich", by linking the aristocracy with the new idols of the film world, but without the:

Aufhebung und Entlarvung des Idols (...) Hierin beruht die Realitätsferne des Stückes. Weitere Unterstützung erfährt das schwache Stück durch die Überbetonung der winzigen Rolle der 'Unbekannten' (in the original production 10/12/1935, Vienna) (...) Dem alten Komödien-Muster und dem Unterhaltungs-Bedürfnis wird demnach in einem breiten Maße Genüge geleistet (...) alles kreist um billigste Unterhaltung, um Identifikation mit dem mondänen Leben, das für kürzere Zeit das des Zuschauers wird(27).

Günther justifiably attacks the play for providing the spectator with the possibility of escapist identification without a corresponding critical perspective. However, one wonders at the critic's own familiarity with Mit dem Kopf durch die Wand when she accuses Beer's production of over-emphasizing the 'winzige' role of the 'Unbekannten'. This is in fact one of the four major roles with prolonged appearances in every act and furthermore it constitutes the romantic interest. Günther also questions Wera Liessem's statement that she, as the original Unbekannte, played one of the main roles, "die im Stück eher einer Episode gleichkommt"(28). This misreading of the play is anomalous in an otherwise perceptive and meticulously documented study.

Contemporary reviewers perceived in the play a cheap and tasteless misuse of the apparently sacrosanct 'L'inconnue de la Seine' legend: "Die Totenmaske, die 'Inconnue' wird ihm Anlaß zu einer grotesken Komödie"(29); or it is an "ordentliches Stück Kolportage" to which the author adds "Groteske" and "möchte

27. Günther, p.101f.

28. Günther, op. cit., Anhang I, p.27.

29. Richard Götz, Der Wiener Tag, 11/12/1935; reproduced in Günther, Anhang II, p.191.

tragisch drapiertes Unheimliches mit Gelächter mischen"(30). Only the critic for the Neues Wiener Tagblatt could discern any potential literary value in the play: "Horváth hat gewiß keine alltägliche Komödie geschrieben, sie darf sogar Anspruch auf literarische Wertung erheben"(31). Dieter Hildebrandt has indicated in which sphere this literary quality may be found: "Horváth's Zitierlust hat hier beinahe banausische Dimensionen angenommen: denn der Filmstoff, von dem hier die Rede ist, geht zurück auf ein eigenes Stück, Die Unbekannte aus der Seine"(32).

Although Horváth may have in the first instance been writing an entertaining comedy for quick financial gain, utilising comedy techniques he had so subtly reversed in previous works, he managed nonetheless to include a level of literary parody in the mould of Wedekind's Musik. Whereas literary allusion was a minor strand in Die Unbekannte aus der Seine, in Mit dem Kopf durch die Wand it becomes a central aspect combining self-quotation with self-criticism. The main difference between the two authors lies in the fact that Horváth is parodying himself, and to a lesser extent, the many versions of the 'L'inconnue de la Seine' legend, whereas Wedekind's play is a polemic against a certain literary fashion.

Krischke has speculated that there may be an element of self-portraiture in the character of Huelsen, the secretary to the film producer Semper:

Und Autobiographisches?

Da ist Dr. Peter Huelsen, "ein Literat Mitte Dreißig mit resigniertem Blick, doch zu guter Letzt praktischer Lebenseinstellung; überzeugt, daß die Welt von Plebejern terrorisiert wird, überschätzt er dennoch das Gewicht der schönen Literatur. Ein anständiger Mensch." Dieser Peter Huelsen, der Sekretär von Alexander Semper, hat ein "Fräulein Braut", eine junge Schauspielerin. "Sie war ein Jahr in der Provinz engagiert", aber Dr. Huelsen ist überzeugt, "daß sie ungewöhnlich begabt ist".

Ödön von Horváth und Wera Liessem? (32a).

This thesis is supported by the fact that Huelsen recognises his

30. Unsigned, Neue Freie Presse, Günther, p.192.

31. Cited in Krischke, p.207.

32. Hildebrandt, Horváth, p.95.

32a. Krischke, p.206.

own ideas in Prof. Bossard's statement: "Ich bin nur ein bescheidener Diener am Werke des menschlichen Geistes, der in das Rätselhafte dringt, immer in der edlen Hoffnung einen kleinen Baustein zu liefern, auf daß die Vernunft die Welt einst beherrschen möge" (IV, 334f.). Huelsen reveals in an aside: "Das Wort zuvor, das er sprach, von der ersehnten Herrschaft der Vernunft, dies Wort hat mich verwandtschaftlich berührt" (IV, 335). It is little wonder: Bossard's speech has been scripted by the Unbekannte, Huelsen's fiancée, who is acquainted with his work, and the passage probably stems from his novel. It is also very reminiscent of Horváth's many statements regarding 'Dummheit' and 'Lüge' and the absolute necessity of 'Vernunft'. In a speech entitled 'Was soll ein Schriftsteller heutzutage schreiben?', written after his Berlin film work period in 1934, he states: "Die vornehmste Aufgabe des Schriftstellers ist vernünftig zu sein" (VIII, 669). This form of self-parody is employed again in the same act during the *séance* when the Unbekannte appears in her role and speaks softly: "Ich warte - mit grünen Augen im grünen Meer" (IV, 339). She is again quoting from Huelsen's novel who, not surprisingly, recognises the passage:

HUELSEN (To the Unbekannte)...Du hast die Stirne besessen, den Satz mit den grünen Augen zu einer elenden Scharlatanerie zu mißbrauchen! Was ich schreibe, ist meine Seele, und du hast meine Seele degradiert! Ach, das hab ich ja jetzt ganz vergessen! Wie gut, daß es mir eingefallen ist (IV, 355).

Huelsen's final statement renders the emotional value of his previous outburst of course null and void and, at the same time, demonstrates the trivial consciousness on which the supposed inseparability of his life and art is based. Horváth has also quoted himself, for the image occurs in Die Unbekannte ("Und wenn du hinauschaust, müßtest du grüne Augen haben, so große grüne Augen wie ein Fisch" (III, 185)) so that the suspicion arises that Horváth is on a second level parodying himself.

In Die Unbekannte Horváth appears to have taken the mysterious seductive smile of the death mask seriously in his depiction of the central figure and her fate. In Mit dem Kopf durch die Wand, the plot element of the Marquis's terrible secret is a parody in the style of Musik. His turgid language resembles that of Klara and Breitner in its excess of complex formulations and exclamation marks: "Wir drei sind die einzigen, die jene tragische Verkettung alltäglicher Umstände - doch nein - nein! Ich will mich nicht freisprechen! Es war und bleibt meine Schuld" (IV, 370). The story itself, and his telling of it, possesses all the qualities of a hilarious 'Kolportage'. The supposed 'Inconnue de la Seine' came from the "Heim zum guten Hirten (...)" das ist eine Korrektionsanstalt für verwahrloste

weibliche Jugendliche"(IV,375) and took her own life when the Marquis accused her wrongly of theft:"Als ich dann jene Totenmaske erblickte, erkannte ich sie sofort (...) Ja es ist das Lächeln eines Engels, das Lächeln der Unschuld. Und ich bin ihr Mörder"(IV,375). She even left a suicide note announcing her intention to drown herself in the Seine. When it is revealed that the Marquis's 'Schicksal', as he terms her, in fact swam out the other side and is now a somewhat senile old lady, he experiences a total disenchantment of his secret:"Sie war es.- (Er liest ihren Abschiedsbrief nochmals genau durch und blickt dann vor sich hin, als würde er sein Leben abrollen sehen; er nickt.) Das war mein Leben. Aber die Schrift gefällt mir nicht - (Er grinst und zerreit ihren Abschiedsbrief)"(IV,383). It is ironical that the collapse of the Marquis's world is the direct result of his innocence and freedom from guilt. A more extreme interpretation, but in keeping with Horváth's previous portrayal of aristocrats, would suggest that the meaningless existence of an anachronistic class can only be given meaning by clinging to an imaginary crime.

Literature and life are juxtaposed again in the same act, when the Unbekannte fears to be discovered by Huelsen. She begs for a hiding place - the most popular of all farce techniques is employed: "Rettens mich, rettens mich! Der glaubts mir ja nie und nimmer, daß ich nur wegen Ihnen bei Ihnen bin! (...) Der bringt mich noch um!"(IV,376f.). The Marquis and Jean receive this claim with some scepticism to which she replies:"Sie kennen seine Novellen nicht!"(IV,377). If one assumes that both Die Unbekannte and Mit dem Kopf durch die Wand are experiments based on Wedekind's model of literary parody, a more complex reason for Horváth's vehement rejection of the latter work may be found. The two plays are related to Musik not just through the common elements of literary allusion and esoteric jokes. The character of Huelsen, the 'Literat', has a close parallel in the figure of Franz Lindekuh, also described by the pejorative term 'Literat'. Both characters are modelled on Ibsen's life-lie destroyers, dedicated to fulfilling the demands of absolute truth and unrealistic ethical ideals in themselves and those around them. Although Huelsen is deliberately overdrawn for comic effect, Horváth, like many artists, publicly espoused similar ideals: "Es gibt für mich ein Gesetz und das ist die Wahrheit", ('Gebrauchsanweisung',VIII,662). Huelsen is, however, from the outset a compromised figure because he is employed by the film industry. Film represents the world of commerce, continually in search of material, "was sich verwerten lät"(IV,331). With Wedekind's example still in mind Horváth may have quite seriously set out to write a parody of his own serious play as well as to satirise the film industry. In so doing he was breaking his own golden rule of eschewing parody which he expressed in the

Cronauer interview: "Die Parodie lehne ich als dramatische Form ab. Parodie hat meines Erachtens mit Dichtung garnichts zu tun und ist ganz billiges Unterhaltungsmittel"(I,13). From the reviews it is clear that the clever allusions were not recognised and thus the parody element failed completely. This raises the important question: must the parodied work be recognised for the parody to function or can the parody retain its intrinsic value without this recognition. Ulrich Scheck, in his reassessment of Nestroy's Judith und Holofernes(33), argues that, while familiarity with the parodied text is not an absolute precondition for parody, as Röhrich claims(34), it does dictate the success of parody. The parody in Mit dem Kopf durch die Wand is only one element in the play and does not reflect the true parody which requires a detailed imitation of the form of the parodied work together with usually comic content.

The production itself was evidently not in accordance with the author's conception, as both Csokor and Wera Liessem report(35). Here Horváth had abandoned his innovative approach to comedy. Instead of reversing conventions and disappointing expectations to bring the audience to a new critical standpoint, he utilises the techniques of comedy as the very "billiges Unterhaltungsmittel" he abjures, in the hope of commercial success. The subtle allusions cannot in themselves suffice to elevate the work to the same level of complexity of his previous comedies.

33. Ulrich Scheck, Parodie und Eigenständigkeit in Nestroys 'Judith und Holofernes'. Ein Vergleich mit Hebbels 'Judith', Bern, Frankfurt/M., Peter Lang, 1981, p.10.

34. Röhrich, Gebärde-Metapher-Parodie, Düsseldorf, Schwann, 1967: "(...) die allgemeine Kenntnis und Verbreitung der parodierenden Vorlage ist ja die wichtigste Voraussetzung für jede Parodie", p.215.

35. Csokor to Bruckner: "(...) Übrigens, ein neuer Horváth, nicht sein bester, die Komödie Mit dem Kopf durch die Wand fiel an der 'Scala' sanft durch, weniger des Autors wegen als dank der Bearbeitung des Direktor-Regisseurs Rudolf Beer. Egon Friedell spielte mit und trieb schon bei den Proben Unfug aller Art, während Ödön, resigniert an einer rohen Zwiebel kauend, Beers 'Verbesserungen' über sich ergehen ließ, des üblen Ausgangs sicher"(IV,652). cf. Wera Liessem, 'Erinnerungen', Mat ÖvH, p.83.