

COMEDY IN DURRENMATT'S WORKS

**A STUDY OF
SOME ASPECTS OF THE COMEDY
IN DÜRRENMATT'S WORKS**

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**A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree
Master of Arts**

McMaster University

May 1966

MASTER OF ARTS (1966)
(German)

McMASTER UNIVERSITY
Hamilton, Ontario.

TITLE: A Study of Some Aspects of the Comedy in
Duerrenmatt's Works

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SUPERVISOR: Professor J.B. Lawson

NUMBER OF PAGES: iv, 149

SCOPE AND CONTENTS: A critical and comparative analysis of
the comic elements in Duerrenmatt's works.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I am greatly indebted
to Professor J.B. Lawson,
who supervised this thesis,
for his helpful advice and assistance.

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this thesis is to examine several aspects of the comedy in Duerrenmatt's works. The examination will cover four chapters:

The first chapter, by way of introduction, will be an attempt to make a chronological survey of the development of Duerrenmatt as a dramatist. This chapter will also try to describe the appearance of certain forms of comedy which become characteristic of his own brand of humour.

The second chapter will have as its aim, the investigation of Duerrenmatt's theory of comedy. This chapter will be based mainly on his own theories about comedy and tragedy as expressed in Theaterprobleme and in the plays themselves. Attention will be given to the status of comedy and tragedy in the twentieth century, with particular reference to the purpose and form of comedy nowadays.

In the third chapter, the writer will endeavour to ascertain and discuss the form and styles which Duerrenmatt's comedy takes; particular attention will be paid to the methods which Duerrenmatt employs to evoke comedy; practical examples from his works will be given. Comic features which seem to be characteristic of the modern theatre, such as the

grotesque and the absurd, will be examined in greater detail.

In the final chapter, the influence of past and present dramatists and writers in general upon Duerrenmatt's work will be discussed. The authors concerned will be taken chronologically, beginning at the Greek theatre and ending with the present day.

During the course of this thesis, certain dramatic forms will be mentioned and certain terms, such as comedy, tragedy, etc., will be used to describe them. However, these terms often have, for certain modern dramatists, and for Duerrenmatt in particular, a different meaning in the theatre of today from their original meanings; or rather, one might say, the barriers between the forms have been broken down to such an extent that the traditional implications of dramatic forms are no longer wholly valid. Definitions will now be given for the traditional meaning of these terms in German-speaking countries and throughout the world in order to facilitate a comparison with the modern usage of the terms.

The first term to be discussed is comedy: The Encyclopedia Britannica says that the general term of comedy is applied to a type of drama, the chief object of which, according to modern notions, is to amuse. It is distinguished from tragedy by its happy ending. This was considered for a long time to be the essential difference between comedy

and tragedy. Comedy is also characterised by quaint situations, a lightness of dialogue and of character drawing. Pure comedy differs from the burlesque or farce through the subtlety of the plot and of the dialogue in the former. The Encyclopedia Britannica also explains under the heading comedy that the line of demarcation between comedy and farce is rather difficult to draw and states that there is a distinct tendency to combine these two forms.¹

The definition of comedy in German literature was developed by German dramatists and theoreticians from the Greek concept. Already in the seventeenth century Opitz defined the character of comedy in the following words:

. . . Die Comedie bestehet in schlechten wesen vnd personen; redet von hochzeiten, gastgeboten, spielen, betrug vnd schalekheit der knechte, ruhrrehtigen Landtsknechten, buhlersachen, leichtfertigkeit der jugend, geitze des alters, kupplerey vnd solchen sachen, die taeglich vnter gemeinen leuten vorlauffen. ²

From this quotation one can detect the tendency in former times, which still exists to a certain extent nowadays, to regard comedy as an inferior dramatic form.

Gottsched, however, saw that comedy could have a didactic purpose: He explains that comedy need not provide

¹
"Comedy", Encyclopedia Britannica, Toronto: William Benton, Vol. 6, 1953.

²
Martin Opitz, Deutsche Dramaturgie vom Barock bis zur Klassik, ed. Benno von Wiese, Tuebingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1956, p. 1.

solely entertainment; for, by the depiction of man's weaknesses and faults, the people in the audience may learn about themselves and improve their own moral character:

"Die Comödie ist nicht anders, als eine Nachahmung einer lasterhaften Handlung, die durch ihr lascherliches Wesen den Zuschauer belustigen, aber auch zugleich erbauen kann".³

Gottsched defines one difference between tragedy and comedy: He states that tragedy almost always depicts people of a socially superior class, whereas the characters of comedy are the bourgeois, servants and people of the lower classes. Lessing reaffirms the statements of Gottsched, that is, that comedy should be didactic, but stresses that its true use lies in laughter itself: "Ihr [Die Komödie] wahrer allgemeiner Nutzen liegt in dem Lachen selbst."⁴

The characteristics of tragedy, as laid down by German dramatists, are based on the theoretical works of Aristotle. Harsoerffer, Gottsched and Lessing in certain periods, are agreed upon the fact that tragedy should be like an impartial judge, who punishes evil and rewards the good. The hero should be a paragon of virtue and he must

³ Johann Christoph Gottsched, Deutsche Dramaturgie vom Barock bis zur Klassik, ed. Benno von Wiese, Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1956, p. 6.

⁴ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Deutsche Dramaturgie vom Barock bis zur Klassik, ed. Benno von Wiese, Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1956, p. 22.

prove himself magnanimous in every situation and be able to tolerate all pain with courage.

Gottsched defined the purpose of tragedy and stressed that a tragedy should awaken pity, fear and admiration. The dramatist should choose a particular moral lesson, which he then should weave into a well-known myth. Gottsched also would construct the play according to Aristotle, namely, with five acts, throughout which the unities of place, time and action are preserved.

Lessing is perhaps the most decisive influence upon the defining of the structure and purpose of tragedy in German literature. He was not afraid to reject statements made by his predecessors, and does reject for example, the maxim that tragedy should improve and reform. However, the difficulty in discussing his theatrical views lies in the fact that he changed his opinions so markedly during the years. An early Lessing definition of tragedy is: "Die Tragedie soll Leidenschaften erregen"⁵. Later, however, he defines tragedy even more strictly as a poem that excites pity.⁶ He skillfully argues that what Aristotle understood by fear is already implied by pity, so the inclusion of

⁵ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Deutsche Dramaturgie vom Barock bis zur Klassik, ed. Benno von Wiese, Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1956, p. 11

⁶ J.G. Robertson, Lessing's Dramatic Theory, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939, p. 351.

fear into the definition is redundant. He also disclaims that tragedy need be didactic: "Die Bestimmung der Tragödie ist diese: sie soll unsere Fähigkeit, Mitleid zu fühlen, erweitern"⁷.

It must be remembered also that Lessing stresses that both tragedy and comedy are essentially for purposes of entertainment. However, didactic purpose should also be apparent and the two are very closely related, so much so that the one is inconceivable without the other:

Beyder Nutzen, des Trauerspiels sowohl als des Lustspiels, ist von dem Vergnügen unzertrennlich; denn die ganze Hälfte des Mitleids und des Lachens ist Vergnügen, und es ist grosser Vortheil fuer den dramatischen Dichter, dass er weder nuetzlich, noch angenehm, eines ohne das andere seyn kann. §

In the course of this thesis, the term martyr-tragedy will be used. Martyr-tragedy differs from the ordinary tragedy in the following way: In a normal tragedy, the hero suffers as a result of the circumstances or fate which affect him personally. In a martyr-tragedy the hero suffers because he represents a belief or attitude which is contrary to the wishes or beliefs of those surrounding him. The hero of a tragedy suffers personally, the martyr-tragedy hero suffers as a representative and performs a sacrifice in

⁷ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Deutsche Dramaturgie vom Barock bis zur Klassik, ed. Henno von Wiess, Tuebingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1956, p. 13.

⁸
Ibid.

doing so.

Another form of drama to be investigated in its traditional sense is tragi-comedy. Tragi-comedy as a term was defined by Plautus. He saw the difficulty of classifying a play as a comedy when the content was humorous but the characters aristocrats, or when gods were represented in the play. According to the rules of the Greeks, the play could not be termed a comedy, because the characters were not from the lower classes, and the action was not serious enough to consider it a tragedy. Faced with these difficulties, Plautus coined a new term, "Tragi-comedy", which combines these elements.

Lessing defined tragi-comedy in the following way: "Die Vorstellung einer wichtigen Handlung unter vornehmen Personen, die einen vergnuegten Ausgang hat".⁹

From the following chapters it will be seen to what extent Duerrenmatt's conception of these terms differs from the definitions set out here and to what extent his ideas and representations of these forms in his dramas are in tune with the traditional meanings.

⁹ J.G. Robertson, Lessing's Dramatic Theory, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939, p. 393.

CHAPTER I

This chapter is an examination of the evolution and practice of comedy in Duerrenmatt's major works, and an attempt to trace the progression in his plays in respect of the predominance of tragic or comic form.

In dealing with this aspect, it must be pointed out that any attempt to define any play as pure comedy or pure tragedy is not possible in the case of this author, since Duerrenmatt introduces comic elements into his most tragic plays, and any comedy is also marked by pathos and tragic characteristics. There is, however, a general direction towards tragedy in his early plays, and away from tragedy to comedy in his middle period, from here to tragi-comedy, and finally to comedy. In fact, he gives subtitles to his plays in order to let the reader know which form he has chosen. The writer intends to examine the plays from the point of view of subject matter, ideas, recurring themes and dramatic technique. Attention will be paid to the predominance of particular forms of comedy in the light of the development of the use of comedy. These forms will be examined in detail in chapter III.

Duerrenmatt's early plays (Komodie. Es steht geschrieben), though not without literary and dramatic merit,

are, in the opinion of the writer, obviously the attempts of a beginner, experimenting with the forms open to him and trying to find the form in which he can express himself best.

The first play which Duerrenmatt wrote remained unpublished. The play had so many titles that no one could remember the proper one so it was referred to as "Komodie", which seems rather inept considering content and style. It takes the form of a horror play, and all the gruesome ideas of life are depicted; the intention is to show man in his depravity. Hans Baensiger describes the play in these words: "Ungeheurliche Hoellenphantasien mit Muren, Besoffenen, Technikern, Verstuemmelten."¹

The scenes follow one another without regard to structure and there is no division into acts. A powerful machine is invented with enormous destructive capacity, the hero Adam is put in charge of the construction of the machine but another man takes over and explodes the bomb which destroys everything. The drama could be seen as an expression of nihilistic philosophy, a portrayal of the downward path of man, who will ultimately and inevitably destroy himself. There seems to be no hope for man, at least on this earth, and there is no mention of a world beyond. This play would seem to have tragic components. Can it still

¹
Hans Baensiger, Frisch und Duerrenmatt, Bern und Muenchen: Francke Verlag, 1960, p. 122.

warrant its title? It has in a way a characteristic of comedy, anticipating one of the forms which Duerrenmatt later masters and which may be regarded as humorous, namely, the grotesque. The description of the animal-like state of man here is taken to excess, that is, it is no longer realistic; it could be regarded as comic. But here it would seem that Duerrenmatt has not yet developed it and it still remains a horrifying picture. He shows a predilection for ridiculous names for the figures of the drama to enhance the comedy; here, for instance, one character is given the name of "Nabelpfiff", he is a sex maniac.

The play which Duerrenmatt first succeeded in having published and which is often referred to as his first play for that reason, is entitled Es steht geschrieben. The author gives it the full title of Es steht geschrieben - ein Drama. The term "ein Drama" could apply to both a tragedy and a comedy which leaves the possibilities of interpretation of this play as tragedy or comedy to the audience or reader. The theme itself is a serious one, namely, the preoccupation with belief, and the interplay of the rich and the poor man in a city threatened by enemies. Historical and Biblical themes seem to have interested Duerrenmatt to a great extent, especially in his early plays. Another theme which runs through nearly all of his works is the question of justice - God's and man's. The drama is serious in subject matter and

thought. The main characters could be called tragic figures. Bernhard Knipperdolinck, an affluent citizen of Muenster, gives up his riches because it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. He leaves his home, his wife and children to practise his belief. Eventually he is killed by the enemies of the Anabaptists. He endures the death of a martyr crucified at the wheel.

The figure of Beckelsen, the man who is appointed king of the Anabaptists is also a tragic one. His tragedy lies in his inability to believe, and the poverty inflicted upon him makes his need a material one, rather than a spiritual one. In the realisation of his lack of belief he utters this cry of despair: "An den leeren Himmel, an diesen Wall, an Beine und Arme, Gesicht und Haende and an die Erde, unter alles hingelagert wie ein Frauenleib! Es gibt nichts
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anderes!"

He suffers the same fate as Knipperdolinck without the consoling hope of eternal redemption.

The language of the play also seems to point towards the definition of the work as a tragedy. The speeches are written in a style reminiscent of the rhetoric of the tragedies of previous centuries. For example, Knipperdolinck's speech on his decision to relinquish his earthly riches:

²
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Es steht geschrieben, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1959, p. 62.

"Busse, Busse, Busse. Wehe, wehe, wehe. Tut Busse und bekehret euch, damit ihr nicht die Rache des himmlischen Vaters ueber euch reinet."³

However, there are elements in this play which prove a good argument for its classification as a comedy. The play introduces a comic device which Duerrenmatt uses most frequently in the plays to follow, namely, parody. The parody of the belief of the Anabaptists, and a parody of the fundamentalist belief in the Word of God. In this respect even the title can be taken and interpreted in a parodistic sense. Beda Allemann⁴ does not consider Es steht geschrieben to be a problem play, but rather a parody of a problem play, but this writer considers the subject of the play to be serious and one could conclude from this play that, at this stage in his life, problems of faith were well-known to Duerrenmatt. He must have experienced, for at least a certain portion of his life, conflicts between his own scepticism and his religious upbringing. For he refers to himself in Es steht geschrieben through Matthison in the following way: ". . . Halten wir es fuer unsere Pflicht, darauf hinzuweisen, dass der Schreiber . . . nichts anderes ist als

³ Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Es steht geschrieben, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1959, p. 38.

⁴ Beda Allemann, Duerrenmatt: Es steht geschrieben, in von Wiene, Das deutsche Drama, Duesseldorf: August Bagel Verlag, 1958, II, 418.

ein im weitesten Sinne entwurzelter Protestant, behaftet mit der Beule des Zweifels, misstrauisch gegen den Glauben, weil er ihn verloren . . ." ⁵ In this respect the writer is in agreement with another critic, who suggests that it is just in the parody of belief that one finds belief and, in the form of superstition, a form of belief. On the other hand, the parody becomes comic when placed in the mouths of minor characters of the play, and they contribute much to the humour in the play in general. One of the best examples is the figure of the Landgraf of Hessen, who deploras the Anabaptists for their polygamy, while he has two wives himself, and seems blatantly unaware of his own hypocrisy. The Landgraf's wives are in themselves comic figures. Margareta constantly repeats the words of Christina with only a variation in syntax, not in meaning.

The scene which, according to Elisabeth Brock-Sulser, ⁷ gained the most disapproval from the first audiences who saw Es steht geschrieben, was the one in which Knipperdolinck and Bockelson perform a fantastic dance on the rooftops of

⁵ Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Es steht geschrieben, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1959, p. 44.

⁶ Hans Baensiger, Frisch und Duerrenmatt, Bern und Muenchen: Francke Verlag, 1960, p. 155.

⁷ Elisabeth Brock-Sulser, Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Stationen seines Werkes, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1960, p. 14.

the city in the moonlight, perhaps the most grotesque scene in the play.

One of the devices which has been mentioned as used in the first play Komodie can be found here again, and does not entirely disappear all through Duerrenmatt's plays, is the use of bizarre and therefore humorous names for the characters in his plays, such as the monk who is called Maximilian Bleibeganz.

The characters' speeches are often full of references to the past and the future used for a dual purpose, namely, alienation and comedy. Beckelson, for instance, does not only state the date of his birth but also the date of his death, another character refers to the author personally.

Another point must be mentioned to put the case for the comedy: Duerrenmatt often introduces death by the hand of the executioner, generally in his later play supposed to portray an arbitrary, macabre and untragic death, as opposed to the predestined cathartic death of traditional tragedy.

This play has perhaps produced the most controversial opinions in relation to its classification as tragedy or comedy, just because of the apparently almost equal number of characteristics (if one approaches it in a merely statistical way) of both forms to be found in it. Beda

⁸
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Es steht geschrieben, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1959, p. 44.

⁹ Allemann thinks that the emphasis placed on parody excludes
it from being called tragedy. ¹⁰ Baenziger appreciates the
seriousness of these and ¹¹ Waidson concludes that the play
points towards tragedy or at least that Duerrenmatt has no
intention to avoid tragedy. ¹² Truempler considers it a tragi-
¹³ comedy, and Guthke, a farce with elements of parody. In the
writer's opinion, the play approaches tragi-comedy, a form
which Duerrenmatt achieves in later years, but as yet the
balance of tragic and comic elements has not yet been achiev-
ed, so that it does not yet justify this classification.
Duerrenmatt obviously sensed this problem and this explains
his reluctance to classify it as a tragedy or a comedy, and
settled for "Drama" by way of a compromise. Perhaps for

⁹ Edda Allemann, Duerrenmatt: Es steht geschrieben, in
Benno von Wiese, Das deutsche Drama, Duesseldorf: August
Bagel 1958, II, 425.

¹⁰ Hans Baenziger, Frisch und Duerrenmatt, Bern und
Muenchen: Francke Verlag, 1960, p. 135.

¹¹ H.M. Waidson, Friedrich Duerrenmatt, in Alex Natan,
German Man of Letters, London: Oswald Wolff, 1964, III, 327.

¹² E.S. Truempler "Zur Literatur der deutschen Schweiz
von heute," Monatshefte, XLVII, 1955.

¹³ Karl S. Guthke, Geschichte und Poetik der deutschen
Tragikomodie, Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1961,
p. 381.

lack of a stronger definition, the term a tragedy with comic elements would serve to describe it.

The problems of classification do not occur in the second play to be published, Der Blinde. Again Duerrenmatt did not classify it but called it Ein Drama, but it may be regarded as his most consistent and only tragedy, and marks the first and highest climax in the progression towards tragedy. The play was in fact withheld from publication for more than ten years, and in the meantime the author was in the process of deciding whether to use the word tragedy with reference to his play. Finally, he decided for "Drama", possibly because he sensed an inclination in his dramatic thinking and technique towards comedy.

This play has very close connections with the first. The place and historical background are the same and the main issue at stake is the same, namely, the problem of belief and the contradictions between reality and illusion, belief and practice.

Only the approach is much more serious because of the lack of comic elements and because of the figure of the Duke around whom the play revolves. The play was criticized at first for failing to be what it set out to portray, namely, a pure drama. The critics suggested that it was undramatic because the conflict was not sufficiently expressed. Duerrenmatt is writing a martyr drama, but though he has

suffering heroes, there is no opposition to the villain Negra da Ponte. He is given free rein by all those around him to commit atrocities with impunity.

The tragedy lies entirely in the figure of the blind Duke, who still retains his faith in a supernatural ideal world, in face of the destruction of his outward happiness and security in a way that recalls Schiller's idea of the tragic hero in Ueber das Erhabene.¹⁴ The tragedy is enhanced by the biblical pathos of the language, which Duerrenmatt has mastered to a far greater extent than in his first play.

Some of the figures around the Duke are also tragic. His son experiences complete disillusionment with life; this leads him to exclaim that truth is as grotesque and cruel as life and he therefore prevents his father from learning the truth which he can himself not accept.

There are some farcical elements in the play, but in most cases even the farce is not humorous and turns to tragedy. Da Ponte pretends that the Duke's daughter is dead, until they find the daughter has really killed herself.

Apart from this, the play naturally abounds in irony but this can hardly be called comic as it goes at the expense of such a pathetic figure, that is, the blind Duke.

The duke at the end of the play shows his tragic greatness. In spite of the injustice he has suffered, he

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Benne von Wiese, Deutsche Dramaturgie von Barock bis zur Klassik, Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1956, p. 114.

nevertheless retains his faith and is prepared to accept all misfortune as part of his fate. Even Negra da Ponte undergoes a catharsis and finally receives a blessing from the Duke, and this catharsis is only possible because of the greatness of character and spirit which the Duke has shown, throughout the play and especially at the end.

The most marked change in the progression of Duerrenmatt's writing occurs between the two plays Der Blinde and Romulus Der Groesse. It is like a caesura marking the transition from tragedy and comedy. There is no clear indication why Duerrenmatt changes so radically from tragedy to comedy, but there are certain possibilities which might constitute the reasons for this transition. Firstly, there may be an external reason: a dramatist cannot create in a vacuum, he is dependent upon the reaction of his audience. The first two plays although now regarded as having literary worth, by reason of the amount of secondary literature being written on them lately, were not received with the acclaim which Duerrenmatt would have expected. Rather, they were criticized for what were considered deficiencies in form and for their long, lyrical passages. Thus, Duerrenmatt may have felt that they were an experiment which, since it was not completely acceptable to the audience, should be abandoned and another form should be tried.

Another reason may be that Duerrenmatt may already

have worked out the basic principles of his dramatic theory, which he published several years later under the title Theaterprobleme. In this book, which will be discussed in Chapter II, he declares that it is impossible to write a true tragedy in this day and age, that tragedy flourished in the past centuries but that the only possible form compatible with the situation of the world today is comedy.

It may have been this idea in embryo form which prompted this change. Alternatively, apart from his own theory, the modern trend is away from the strictness of classical form towards something which will have more effect today. In the writer's opinion, the tragic plays, such as those written in the past centuries, have little appeal for the majority of the public today. They accept them, and they may even be moved by them, but because they have become so conditioned to them, they no longer produce the reaction which a modern writer wants to effect through his work. Nor does the audience of today respond to them in the same way as the audience for whom they were written. The dramatists of today search for new forms of shock-effect in order to shake the public out of the complacency of this century. This can be seen in the theatre of Brecht, and the destruction of illusion which is so common today.

Duerrenmatt therefore turns away from anything approaching tragedy and turns towards comedy from this point on.

Romulus der Grosse is Duerrenmatt's first effort to enter the world of comedy. It is the first time also that he gives a definite subtitle to his play and that he writes a "Nachwort" to help the reader to understand the subtleties of his work. Duerrenmatt gives this work the subtitle eine ungeschichtliche Komödie. In his first plays he showed already an interest in history but already denied in a very short introduction his intention of writing history, that is to stick closely to historical fact. Here he goes even further by calling the play "ungeschichtlich."

This play also marks the beginning of a new kind of structure; whereas the preceding plays are virtually a collection of disconnected scenes, Duerrenmatt from this play on, divides his dramas into acts (with the exception of Frank V.)

Despite the fact that Duerrenmatt has, so to speak, turned his back on tragedy and his former plays, there are still some characteristics in his play reminiscent of the first. The main connection is probably the idea of the martyr. Whereas in his first plays the form took that of martyr tragedies, a great change can now be experienced and the work becomes martyr-comedy.

The hero alone with himself faced with a world with which he cannot communicate in the normal way, torn by a conflict within himself, has now become the subject of comedy.

Yet the possibility of detecting a tragic note behind this character is there. Duerrenmatt explains the tragic note in this way in his "Nachwort": "Menschlichkeit ist vom Schauspieler hinter jeder meiner Gestalten zu erkennen, sonst lassen sie sich gar nicht spielen."¹⁵ In depicting man in his plays, Duerrenmatt aims to be realistic to the extent that he wants his characters to live. Man is composed of tragic and comic elements and therefore the characters will be, too. It is the preponderance of either tragic or comic elements in the figures of the plays which determines the way in which the characters are to be interpreted and the judgement made in the theatre will depend on the interpretation of the role by the actor and on the reaction of the audience.

The rhetoric which was to be found in his first dramas also punctuates the comedy from time to time, and seems incongruous when spoken by Romulus - especially in the third act, because we have been accustomed to hear only witticisms and deliberate buffoonery from his mouth up till then. The incongruity of this speech contributes to the comedy and at the same time has a seriousness which is not realised until the end of the play, which will be discussed later. An example of the contrasting forms of speech can be seen by comparing one of Romulus' speeches in the first act to one in the last act:

¹⁵
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Komödien I, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1961, p. 85.

ACT I

Pyramus: Carcellia haben Sie vorgestern mit Philipus Arabs zu den Spargeln gegessen, Majestaet.

Romulus: Dann soll er meinen Amtsvorgaenger Julius Hepos nehmen, der hat auch nichts getaugt. Und in Zukunft moechte ich die Eier der Henne Odoaker auf meinem Morgentische finden, die meine velle Sympathie besitzt. 16

ACT III

Romulus: Nicht ich bin angegriffen, ich greife euch an. Nicht ich angeklagt, ich klage euch an. Wehrt euch! Wisst ihr nicht vor wem ihr steht? Ich habe wissentlich das Vaterland zu Grunde gerichtet, das ihr verteidigen wollt. 17

Parody was seen in the first two plays to be one of the devices whereby Duerrenmatt achieved comic effect. His mastery of parody is shown particularly in the language. The use of different levels of style is one of the chief sources of comedy in this play. Several examples can be found to illustrate this point. Mares, the Minister of War, uses military vocabulary for his speeches with Nazi idioms. Caesar Rumpf, the industrialist, uses a modern German businessman's expressions and Phylax the actor talks

16
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Komödien I, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1961, p. 15.

17
Ibid., p. 66.

in clichés from the language of the theatrical world. Thus each character is given the language suiting his background and occupation; each style of speech is unrelated to the other; often deliberate anachronisms can be found in the speeches. Examples will be given in another connection in the third chapter.

Comedy can also be found in the names which Duerrenmatt chooses for his characters as in his earlier plays, but there is a slight difference. The names are not only unusual but now as a further development from the earlier plays they often constitute puns or play with words. The two chamberlains are called "Sulphurides" and "Phosphorides."

Duerrenmatt introduces a new element into the play for comic effect, namely, absurdity. The figure of Remulus at the beginning of the play seems ridiculous for instance, his interest as an emperor seems to lie almost entirely in his chickens, and he seems to have no sense of responsibility for his empire or for his people.

Grotesque effects are hardly present in this play. Since it is a form which was present in the first two plays, Komodie and Es steht geschrieben, but not so much in Der Blinde, one might assume that Duerrenmatt had experimented with it in the beginning of his theatrical career and had neglected it later, but in actual fact it reappears in the play which is considered by many critics to be the most

impressive of all his creations, namely, Der Besuch der alten Dame.

Can Romulus der Grosse be considered a complete break from the tragic tradition which Duerrenmatt has set up with his first plays? It has a great comic appeal and certain elements typical of a comedy, but Duerrenmatt has not completely lost his predilection for depicting pathetic even tragic figures. For the figure of Romulus, however comic and absurd at the beginning, is intentionally made to grow in stature with every act. The first version of the play was a deliberate attempt to keep the play consistently on the level of light comedy, but in the revised edition, Duerrenmatt rewrote the last two acts; he changed the play particularly with regard to the character of Romulus and to the language. The rhetoric of the third act fits in well with the change from the farcical comedy to a more serious tone.

Duerrenmatt rewrote the last two acts in the second version of the play in order to give the figure of Romulus greater dignity and heroism, and in doing so he changed the character of Romulus from a stupid old man to a role as tragic if not more so than the figure of the Duke in Der Blinde. The tragic climax in the play, when Romulus is most pathetic, comes at the end of the play when he is not allowed to die the death of a martyr but is frustrated in

his last ambition. He becomes tragic because he is not allowed to preserve the dignity of an old but brave ruler and instead of a glorious and illustrious death he is "pensioned off." Yet Duerrenmatt by introducing the idea of Romulus' pension may be trying by very virtue of the anachronism of a pension, a product of the modern age, in Roman times, to recapture the lighter humorous mood of the first acts. Duerrenmatt himself comments on this particular part of the play, and obviously sees the danger of his comedy, which he refers to as "eine schwere Komödie", overstepping the borderline between comedy and tragedy:

Das ist das Schreckliche dieses kaiserlichen Hühnersuechters, dieses als Narren verkleideten Weltrichters, dessen Tragik genau in der Komödie seines Endes, in der Pensionierung liegt, der dann aber-und nur dies macht ihn gross-die Einsicht und die Weisheit hat, auch sie zu akzeptieren. 18

Despite the serious side of Romulus, he already shows the tendency to progress towards comedy in the plays, for if one compares him to the heroes of the first two plays, Knipperdolinck and the Duke, one realizes that what is so appealing about the Emperor is that he does not take himself as seriously as the others take themselves.

If the reader did not know the chronological development of Duerrenmatt's plays, he would be inclined at first glance to consider the play Die Ehe des Herrn Mississippi,

18

Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Komödien I, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1961, p. 86.

to have been written earlier than Romulus der Grosse. Firstly, the issue at stake is once more at least partly a religious one, and the way in which it is presented reminds one of the grotesque scenes of Komodie or Es steht geschrieben. A particular affinity with Es steht geschrieben can be seen in the surrealist touches with which Duerrenmatt introduces the play. In the first scene a curtain opens on the shooting of a man who rises unharmed from the stage and proceeds to tell the story in flashbacks. The author gives a lengthy description of the setting of the play and the room itself has a very surrealist appearance. The view from one of the windows is completely different from the view from the other: one shows a Nordic city with a Gothic cathedral, the other an ancient temple and a cypress tree. Mirrors and picture frames hang in empty space.

The characters although representative of different beliefs and political parties are united in their desire to change the world and stand together in principle like the Anabaptists in Es steht geschrieben.

However, here the similarity ends. The play is no longer set in the past of Rome or Muenster, but Duerrenmatt depicts the world of today, even if the setting is uncertain. If there are grotesque elements in the play, they have lost some of the biting cruelty of the first plays and can be

interpreted more in the spirit of comedy. The characters are themselves conscious of their own comic appearance, and are willing to be regarded as clowns on the whole, but at times their awareness of their own comic appearance and roles makes them resentful. Mississippi says: "Wie lange soll sich diese fuer beide Teile entwuerdigende Komoedie
19
noch abspielen, gnaedige Frau?"

This can, however, be interpreted in two ways: either as above, the characters are aware of their roles in the play and of the fact that they are not real, that is as a form of alienation, or perhaps Duerrenmatt is being ironic when he describes life for Mississippi and his wife as a humiliating comedy. Ueberlehe describes his appearance in this way: "Mein Auftritt ist laecherlich, unzeitgemaess,
20
wie ich selbst, wie mein groteskes Leben."

Comedy is again produced by the attitude of the characters towards the audience, addressing them, explaining the action to them, and giving stage directions.

In the opinion of the writer, the weakness of the play lies in there being for the reader no actual "hero." If the play is performed, the producer or actor may give extra weight to one part and in so doing create a "hero", or at least a main character. The characters themselves

19
Ibid., p. 103.

20
Ibid., p. 124.

are more the representatives of certain ideas, or possibly the parody of ideas, than actual individuals. So there is not as much comedy of character as in *Romulus*, but neither are they tragic characters although their lives end in disaster. Nevertheless, Duerrenmatt was obviously intent upon writing a comedy and reaffirms his belief in having written a comedy by the last lines of the play:

Eine ewige Komödie

Dass aufleuchtet seine Herrlichkeit

21

Genährt durch seine Ohnmacht.

The next play *Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon* was entitled "eine Komödie", but later the author changed the subtitle to "eine fragmentarische Komödie", the reason being that he intended to portray the tower of Babylon, an idea never completed owing to the immensity of the undertaking. As in *Die Ehe des Herrn Mississippi*, the stability of the state is threatened by revolution.

For comedy this play relies more on individual characters than the others and for the last time until *Die Physiker*, the main characters are the chief source of comedy. In the plays to follow, the stress of the humour lies in the minor characters. The comedy is often quite crude: Nebukadnesar particularly is one of the chief sources of laughter. While he is a king he can be a great man; as a beggar his efforts are clumsy and his clumsiness arouses

laughter.

In his depiction of the angel Duerrenmatt again effects comedy. The angel is no longer the conventional higher being as we would think, free from faults and devoid of the characteristics of a human being, but he presents the angel in the form of a young girl, who often tends to be jovial and is not lacking in a sense of humour herself.

This is perhaps the lightest of all Duerrenmatt's plays; the atmosphere is one of a fanciful fairy tale but not without the traces of satirical humour.

At one point the language reminds one of Remulus der Grosse, namely, the speech of Akki in which he proclaims the senselessness of all heroic deeds: "Heldentaten sind sinnlos, sie verraten die Ohnmacht des Schwachen und seine Verweigerung bringt die Macht nur zum Lachen . . ." ²²

There is, however, an essential difference between the Remulus of the second version and Akki. Akki realises the purposelessness of heroic action and accepts it as part of life. However, for him it is not a difficult task, since he is not fighting old ideologies or setting up new ones. His maxim is: "Stell' dich dumm. So wirst du alt." ²³

He cannot experience the tragic side of life because for him it does not exist.

²²

Ibid., p. 227

²³

Ibid., p. 227

The play is optimistic throughout. Even the end of the play, at which point Duerrenmatt introduces some "disaster" however small, retains the light mood of the play in its early parts. A hymn is sung about the impossibility of conquering life, those who accept this will find life easy to live and to enjoy.

The language of the play corresponds to the general attitude, witty and light. Constant references are made to the world of today; these prove humorous because of the incongruity of the situation of the play and the time in which it is set. References are made to modern advertising techniques in such phrases as: "Babylonische Patrioten trinken Keelmilch."²⁴ Or there is a touch of irony when Duerrenmatt talks of the position of the poet: "Was bleibt, stifte ich den Dichtern."²⁵ Or, "Kaum taucht diese Person auf, gehen meine Kunden dichten."²⁶

Irony as a means of producing comedy is a device which has not been used to such an extent in the earlier plays but which Duerrenmatt uses frequently from this time on.

Some of the comic devices are quite primitive: Two characters say the same thing to each other in almost the same words, but each is so preoccupied with the importance

²⁴
Ibid., p. 185

²⁵
Ibid., p. 223

²⁶
Ibid., p. 212

of his own words that he pays no attention to the other,

e.g.:

Engel: "Wenn das jetzt nicht wieder der Bettler Akki ist, werde ich konfus."

Nebukadnezar: "Wenn das jetzt nicht der Bettler Akki ist, wird auch noch der Innenminister gehaengt." 27

The angel himself is a form of parody, as is the beggar and the minister. Berghahn points out that this is so, but suggests further that all Duerrenmatt's characters are parodies. This may be true in some cases, but often there is more to a character than just a means of parody. Romulus, for instance, may be a parody of an emperor, but not the parody of an individual.

The grotesque element which has been present in most of the plays, and especially in the earlier ones, can be seen in this play in the third act, where an idiot jumps over a rope over the stage and drunken poets stumble about.

This play can be considered to be the truest of Duerrenmatt's comedies and also marks another climax, for the next play shows another change in form. It is Der Besuch der alten Dame, which Duerrenmatt subtitled a tragi-comedy. In no play since Der Blinde does he come so

27

Ibid., p. 179.

28

W. Berghahn, "Friedrich Duerrenmatts Spiel mit den Ideologien," Frankfurter Hefte 11, 1956, p. 103.

near to tragedy and in no play does he achieve it again or even strive to achieve it.

This play has something in common with Der Blinde. It is an external force which destroys the harmony of the world and causes misery to those around. In Der Blinde it is Negra da Ponte who is the external force spreading disaster and destroying the illusions of the Duke, killing his son and forcing his daughter to commit suicide. Here the external force comes in the shape of Claire whom Duerrenmatt describes as "parzenhaft", recalling the ancient Greek tragedies. Tragedy comes gradually to Ill as it did to the Duke. The character of Ill himself is in a way more tragic than that of the Duke. The Duke awakens in us pity and fear, and so does Ill, for he is powerless to act in the face of death, which awaits him inevitably like a tragic fate in classical plays, but Duerrenmatt introduces another feature in this play, namely a catharsis: During the course of the play the character of Ill develops, first he is unaware of his guilt, then loathe to recognise it. As the play progresses he confesses his guilt until his final remorse, when he is purified of his guilt through his suffering. At the same time, while Ill is shown to be a tragic hero who has to undergo a searching process of emotional purification, Duerrenmatt insists that it is

essential to recognise the comedy in the play as well as the tragedy: "Man inszeniere mich auf die Richtung . . . nicht mit Zorn doch auch mit Humor, denn nichts schadet dieser Komödie, die tragisch endet, mehr als tierischer Ernst."²⁹

The essential difference between this play and the other ones in respect of the comedy is that the main character or tragic hero, (as will be seen in the second chapter, Duerrenmatt is loathe to use this term with regard to his characters) is not endowed with any characteristics which could be taken as comic. The humour in this case lies almost entirely with the minor characters, and in the situation which is evoked by the citizens of Guelten in connection with the arrival of Claire.

The figure of Claire herself is intended to be comic. Her very appearance is so arranged to produce comic effect but, without her entourage she would produce little amusement. Duerrenmatt turns back here to his most tried comic device, namely the grotesque, and this is the most apt adjective to describe Claire's appearance and that of her satellites. Her entourage consists of husbands seven to nine, the two criminals with the appearance of monsters, Toby and Roby,

²⁹
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Komödien 1, Zuerich; Arche Verlag, 1961, p. 353.

and the two blind eunuchs Koby and Loby, the former witnesses of Ill.

Duerrenmatt also takes pleasure in being satirical about life in a small town, especially in the first scene. The preparations have been so carefully planned for Claire's arrival, but to the confusion of all the organisers Claire puts them to grief by arriving at a different time on a different train. The townspeople are overwhelmed by the influence Claire has in being able to stop the express train; an event which never occurred before in their town.

Irony, of which the audience gradually becomes aware is used to a great extent by the author in this play. Claire repeatedly drops hints about her purpose in coming to Guelien, and bit by bit her intentions are revealed to the audience, who are firmly convinced of the end of the play, while the citizens, although taking advantage of their new found prosperity, nevertheless do not face up to the future but rather avoid thinking too hard about the situation and the implications of their prosperity.

Perhaps one of the remarkable features of this play, as far as the comic aspect is concerned, is that Duerrenmatt does not make such an extensive use of one form of comedy which one would up to this point have regarded as essential for this particular comedy, namely parody. The scene which has the most parody in it is

really the last one in which the characters on the death of Ill join in a chorus which could be taken as a parody of a tragic Greek chorus. However, considering the form of the play, it is equally possible that it is only meant to be an imitation of a Greek chorus, not a parody.

Three years elapsed between the appearance of Der Besuch der alten Dame and Frank V., as much as the difference between Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon and Der Besuch der alten Dame and yet it is easier to trace a connection between the first two plays than between Der Besuch der alten Dame and the opera. It seems in several ways to be a step backwards as far as Duerrenmatt's development as a dramatist is concerned and yet at the same time it is an experiment with a new form of theatre, namely the opera.

Duerrenmatt has been criticised more for this play than any other on account of imitation. Most critics see great similarities between this play and Brecht's Dreigroschenoper. There is of course the obvious similarity: Both are operas and on this charge Brecht himself would be guilty, since he took his idea from The Beggar's Opera. But there are other features which the two dramatists have in common which will be discussed in chapter IV.

Other aspects of the play can be criticised, particularly with relation to the comedy. Duerrenmatt

often tends towards allegory in his works, e.g.: Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon, but normally he can manage to make the allegory compatible with his own brand of humour. Here the allegory gains the upper hand and the efforts he makes to keep the audience laughing seem specious. Why do they fail? Because the allegory of a bank of criminals as the world full of evil and depravity is too horrifying to be humorous. The characters are no longer human. Admittedly, they display weaknesses in their characters which show a slight touch of human qualities. Ottilie apparently loves her children, but her love displays itself towards them in an anxiety to provide for their material welfare, not to show them any maternal love. Apart from this weakness, her cruelty and lack of conscience is the lasting impression which she makes, as for example, her treatment of Boeckmann. It is also barely possible to feel pity for the victims of the band of gangsters, for one knows they are equally capable of committing the same if not even more appalling crimes.

Duerrenmatt may have been attempting to carry on in the vein of tragi-comedy, for in the prologue to the work he lets Egli say:

Heert zu erhochten Eintrittspreisen
 Teils als Tragoedie, teils als Schwank
 Die Oper einer Privatbank.

The play becomes increasingly terrifying, neither comic or tragic and reaches its climax in the revelation that the two children of Frank and Otilie are not to be the saving grace of the family or of the play, but are themselves criminals and in their attitude surpass their parents in lack of feeling and in cruelty.

The play also bears no similarity to the foregoing in its dramatic structure. The play is divided into scenes with numbers but no particular attention is given to acts.

Elisabeth Brock-Sulzer comes nearest to an appreciation of this work when she says that Duerrenmatt wanted to portray life with sinister characteristics on the stage, but ended by producing horror itself: "Er endet mit seiner seltsamen Oper in Ungeheuren, in nicht mehr Geheuren, weil ³¹ durchaus Unmenschlichen, in der Vereisung."

Because of the horror which is produced, neither tragic or comic elements are able to come to the fore. In connection with this it must be pointed out that Duerrenmatt did not subtitle it either a comic or a tragic or a tragic-comic opera, because he was aware of the inability of the work to comply with any of these forms, and by calling it simply "Eine Oper" he was not committing himself in any way.

The last work of Duerrenmatt to be published, Die

³¹
 Elisabeth Brock-Sulzer, Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Stationen seines Werkes, Zurich: Arche Verlag, 1960, p. 70.

Physiker is more in line with the progression traced before Frank V. It seems that the opera is quite out of place.

Die Physiker looks back in a way to the writer of Romulus der Grosse, but it also has similarity with Der Besuch der alten Dame.

The similarity with Romulus der Grosse lies mainly in the development of the play. In the first act the three physicists appear as complete lunatics, absurd in their speech and actions. Yet, as in Romulus der Grosse, the laughter and the comedy subside as the audience or reader gains a true insight into the sanity behind the pose of the scientists. Just as one is disposed to laugh at Romulus and his chicken-breeding at the beginning of the play so in this play one realises that the scientists are deliberately assuming a fool's cap like Romulus. The issue at hand is too serious, even more serious than in the earlier play, to cause laughter.

The humour tends in some cases to be grotesque; ³² "gallow humour" as one English critic termed it when the play was performed in London. This term could also be used to describe some of the humour in other plays, especially the two which have been mentioned in comparison to the most recent play. However humorous the characters may appear

³²
Bernard Levin, "The Physicists by Friedrich Duerrenmatt" Daily Mail, London: May 9th, 1963.

at the beginning, one is not allowed to forget very soon that these men are dangerous, murderers, or potential murderers.

The affinity of this play to Der Besuch der alten Dame, lies in the mingling of comic and tragic elements, which here again strike a balance which could equally enable it to be termed a tragi-comedy. The impression which Duerrenmatt has made outside German-speaking countries is that of a tragi-comic writer based on the success of Der Besuch der alten Dame. Thus one critic in a London newspaper writes of Die Physiker: "The play is by the author of The Visit and the author calls it a comedy, but anybody who saw that earlier play will know how much weight to attach to that description . . ."³³

As in Der Besuch der alten Dame, the heroes have to make a sacrifice. In this case, in order to prevent the destruction of the world, as Ill sacrifices himself in order to assure the prosperity of the town, so the physicists sacrifice themselves by tying themselves to the mental hospital as a gesture of heroic self-sacrifice to the world.

Dr. Mathilde may be seen to have affinity to Claire. Her entrance and her appearance in the first act make one unaware of her actual significance. As the last heiress of

³³
Bernard Levin, "The Physicists by Friedrich Duerrenmatt" Daily Mail, London: May 9th, 1963.

an old family she may be termed as eccentric but not dangerous. Her final revelation, however, that she is the only one who possesses Mobius' theories and in this possession becomes the most powerful and at the same time most dangerous person in the world makes her akin to Claire. However, the scale is greater. Claire with her riches could control Guellen and probably other small places, but her power is not comparable to Mathilde's and its destructive potential. The knowledge of Mathilde's possession comes right at the end of the play introducing a new technique of drama, but not new to Duerrenmatt's works, for in a way it is a detective story technique -- namely, a twist. The reader or audience of the plays, though perhaps not realising the significance of the characters or actions at the beginning of the play, is allowed to share in the author's perception normally long before the end of the play. Here the twist comes as a real surprise. The effect is one of complete disillusionment, the audience go away without the sense of optimism or at least good humour which one might expect from a comedy, and their hopes for the future are dashed by the line:

"Die Welt ist in die Haende einer verrueckten Irrenaerstin
³⁴
 gefallen."

What the writer has tried to point out from this

³⁴
 Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Die Physiker, New York:
 Oxford University Press, 1965, p. 89.

survey of the drama, apart from the actual progression in the plays, is that it would appear increasingly clear that the form in which Duerrenmatt finds himself most at home is in the tragi-comedy, judging by the plays themselves and by the success which that play had which was written in that form and also the popularity of those plays which tended in the direction of tragi-comedy. In other plays it seems difficult for him to keep the forms apart and in all comedy with hardly an exception there appears some tragedy.

Why did Duerrenmatt insist that his plays were comedies and defend them as such, and why did he not call them tragi-comedies or at least adapt them slightly so they would fit into that form? This can only be explained by taking a close look at his own theory of comedy, and the implications of comedy in the twentieth century.

CHAPTER II

This chapter will be an attempt to explain the reasons for Duerrenmatt's predilection for comedy and an examination of his own theory of that dramatic form with relation to its significance in the twentieth century.

It is interesting to note that in the history of German literature until the twentieth century, comedies appear only infrequently in the works of German playwrights. Those comedies which do appear, and which have survived successfully through the centuries, in the sense that they are still being read and performed today, stand out as great works, such as Lessing's Minna von Barnhelm, Kleist's Der zerbrochene Krug and Hauptmann's Der Biberpelz. However, although these works are exceptional, German literature has a rather small share of successful comedies, when compared to other European nations. In Italy, France and England, for example, comedy has taken a firm hold from the earliest times. From these facts certain assumptions may be drawn. It might be inferred: that the German public was not appreciative of comedy to the extent that other nations were; secondly, that the true merit of a dramatist for the German lay in his ability to write serious plays; that comedy by its very nature, was regarded as something

inferior -- this can be substantiated by the fact that the dramatists named above do not rely for their reputation on their comedies, but rather on their more serious works.

The twentieth century shows a marked change in the attitude towards comedy and in its presentation. Brecht, Frisch and Duerrenmatt, three outstanding dramatists choose to write comedies, or if not actual comedies, they introduce comic elements into their plays. At the same time, their comedy has often serious underlying themes; it can of course act as relief, as in Brecht's for instance. The comedy often tends to be grotesque, absurd, vulgar, farcical, and a great use is made of parody and irony. Comedy may be said therefore, to have taken a specific direction in the twentieth century.

Duerrenmatt's comedy, and in particular his theory of comedy, are essentially modern. His whole outlook on the world today, the theatre, and the forms of drama are regulated by the surroundings and thinking of the twentieth century. He is more conscious of the public for whom he is writing today and the conditions of man in the age of automation and the atom bomb, than of the tradition of drama. The example of dramatists prior to him play a great part in deciding the form which his comedy takes and they influence the dramatic structure of his works; the substance or content of the plays, however, is a product of this age.

Any writer attempting to comment on Duerrenmatt's comedy or dramatic theory has a great advantage, which he would not have with most dramatists, for not only did Duerrenmatt write prefaces and elaborate appendices to his works, but he also wrote a book specifically on these subjects, which he entitled Theaterprobleme and it is from here that the reader can gain insight into Duerrenmatt's understanding of the purpose and form of comedy in the twentieth century.

Duerrenmatt begins the portion in the essay on comedy in this work with a discussion of the role of the hero in the twentieth century. This obviously has an important reflection upon the main characters in his plays.

Duerrenmatt defines the characteristics of a tragic hero partly in the tradition of Aristotle: the hero must awaken pity and he must be credited with an equal number of good and bad characteristics. It is interesting to note that Duerrenmatt makes no mention of the fact that the hero according to Aristotle should also awaken fear in the audience. The principles of the Aristotelian theory remained, it is only the way in which pity is evoked that has changed. In the tragedy of the Ancients and Shakespeare, the hero belonged to the aristocracy or at least to the upper middle classes. The public was impressed by the hero but it

¹
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Theaterprobleme, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1960, p. 41.

could not identify itself with the problems of the characters on the stage, even if the emotions were familiar to them. With the advent of the "Buergerliches Trauerspiel" as written by Lessing and Schiller, the social position of the hero was changed. He no longer had to be a member of the nobility, but he was not yet a man like those in the audience, and it was only in the nineteenth century that the ordinary man could understand and sympathise with the hero and associate himself with the action of the play. Yet even though the hero came from a lower class, he was none the less still a hero at this stage, he could be admired, his actions and character still remained noble and praiseworthy even if his status was changed. He was victorious over evil and temptation and if his end was tragic, it was for a noble cause, it was great and illustrious and he could still be admired.

If one takes a look at comedy in times past, one finds that the comic theatre has depicted small men; peasants and beggars are popular figures. There were no great personages who appeared as the main characters of a comedy. Shakespeare, for instance, never depicted a king as a comic figure, nor were the emperors and leaders of states ever the subject of laughter in the ancient plays. The fool or clown was introduced into Shakespeare's tragedies to provide comic relief. The public could feel no fear or pity for them; their

antics and their dress and their speech made the audience laugh.

The twentieth century, however, upsets the whole idea of the hero and in so doing partly dissolves the strict barriers between tragedy and comedy. In Theaterprobleme and in his plays Duerrenmatt shows that it is no longer possible to depict a hero. The whole situation in which a hero in the accepted tradition can exist or is plausible has disappeared. Man in an age which is characterised by such features as the atom bomb and automation has lost his former significance. He is no longer capable of wielding influence, he is no longer responsible for the defining of the laws which govern the world. Society assumes both the responsibility and the guilt. Duerrenmatt sees the people of today as the product of heredity. They are visited with the sins of their forefathers. He formulates his ideas on responsibility and guilt in the following words:

In der Wurstelei unseres Jahrhunderts, in diesem Kehraus der weissen Rasse, gibt es keine Schuldigen und auch keine Verantwortlichen mehr. Alle koennen nichts dafuer und haben es nicht gewollt. Es geht wirklich ohne jeden. Alles wird mitgerissen und bleibt in irgendeinem Rechen haengen. Wir sind zu kollektiv schuldig, zu kollektiv gebettet in die Sunden unserer Vaeter und Vorvaeter. 2

Thus Duerrenmatt describes the state of man today. It is a state in which a hero cannot exist. The hero is a

²
Ibid. p. 47.

thing of the past, he has disappeared from the world in which we live and so he cannot be represented on the stage. Schiller was able to depict a hero on the stage because he saw heroes in the world round him. Duerrsmatt puts it this way:

War doch Napoleon vielleicht der letzte Held im alten Sinne. Die heutige Welt, wie sie uns erscheint, lässt sich dagegen schwerlich in der Form des geschichtlichen Dramas Schillers bewältigen, allein aus dem Grunde, weil wir keine tragischen Helden, sondern nur Tragödien vorfinden, die von Weltmetsgern inszeniert und von Hackmaschinen ausgeführt werden. Aus Hitler und Stalin lassen sich keine Wallensteine mehr machen. ³

The power which Wallenstein had was visible and representable but the power of the despot is too great and too terrible to be portrayed on the stage; today's state is anonymous and bureaucratic. This does not refer to one specific country, but it is valid for every country in the world. There are no more heroes, no true representatives of power or of heroic qualities. ⁴

Art can still reflect the sacrifices, they still occur, but if it can portray tragic situations it can no longer depict the mighty and the powerful and those worthy to be called heroes, for the true representatives are lacking and the tragic heroes are anonymous. ⁵

³
Ibid. p. 43

⁴
Ibid. p. 44

⁵
Ibid.

What is the result? The hero of tragedy becomes the hero of comedy and the fool becomes more and more a tragic figure.⁶

Thus the "hero" has found a new place where it is alone possible to portray him in the world today. He has become the object of laughter. His efforts to portray characteristics which were heroic in former centuries and under different circumstances, become laughable because they are confronted with opposition in whatever direction the hero turns. He is out of place, because he is out of date. Nowadays we laugh at heroism because of its incongruity in our time. The modern hero cannot change the world because alone, he is powerless; the opposing forces are too strong; the world is greater than man.⁷

His desperate efforts are farcical. Has the tragic hero died forever, and is there no one to take his place but this fool or clown? There is still a possibility, and Duerrenmatt points out the alternative: If one cannot portray the hero, one can at least portray what he refers to as the "brave man".⁸

The main characters of his plays, are often examples

⁶
Ibid. p. 42

⁷
Ibid. p. 49

⁸
Ibid.

of these "mutige Menschen.": "Der Blinde, Romulus, Ueberliche, Akki sind mutige Menschen. Die verlorene Weltoerdnung wird in ihrer Brust wieder hergestellt."⁹

The "brave man" is a character who is often hidden or mistaken, not recognized for what he is, fights his battles by understatement, he does not give up or despair right to the end, although his cause is a hopeless one. These "brave men" are at the same time the only enlightened men, for the rest of the characters are deceived, they act out of fear, whereas the "brave men" act out of principle. Boeckmann in "Frank V.", expresses the situation of the rest of mankind explicitly, when he says: "Alles was wir tun, tun wir aus Furcht, aus Furcht vor einer Entdeckung, aus Furcht vor dem Gefaengnis, aus Furcht vor der Schande, aus Furcht, aus Furcht, und nun stehe ich auch einmal vor dem Tod, nun hat mich auf einmal die Furcht eingeholt."¹⁰

"Brave men", according to Duerrenmatt may not be called tragic heroes. However it has been pointed out that although they often appear in the comedies, Duerrenmatt by describing them as "brave men" and portraying them as such, comes very near to portrayal of the tragic; some-

⁹
Ibid.

¹⁰
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Frank V., Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1959, p. 38.

times his characters are essentially tragic in their words and reactions. Der Blinde is, of course, the most consistent tragic character, but Remulus as the main figure of a comedy also displays tragic characteristics at the end of the play.

In Theaterprobleme Duerrenmatt makes several distinctions between tragedy and comedy and at the same time shows how comedy is the suitable form for the dramatists of today.

He defines the task of the modern dramatist as being the creation of form and something concrete out of the shapelessness of the world today. He states that this can be achieved best by comedy, because a tragic play presumes a world already formed, already moulded. The world of comedy, (when Duerrenmatt talks of the world of comedy, he makes it clear that he does not include under this heading "Gesellschaftskomödie" such as the comedy of Moliere) is very much in tune with the world of the twentieth century. It is a world in development, ready to collapse, nothing is stable, nothing is permanent.

Duerrenmatt is very preoccupied with creating what he calls "Distanz", that is to say a kind of alienation. He provides several examples (especially in comedy), of how "Distanz" can be effected,¹¹ whereas tragedy conquers

¹¹
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Theaterprobleme, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1960, p. 45.

"Distans", for it brings the myths of the past into the present, comedy creates "Distans". By transforming the action into an allegory, comedy creates "Distans" in the play itself and between the audience and action on the stage. Duerrenmatt makes use of this device frequently, it can be seen especially in the play Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon. The setting of Babylon becomes the allegory of the world. "Distans" is also often created in his plays by setting them either in a faraway country or in ancient times, for example Romulus which is set in ancient Rome, or Es steht geschrieben where the action is set in Muenster in the sixteenth century.

At the same time another means which comedy uses to create Distans is "der Einfall". Duerrenmatt points out¹² that, in general, tragedies lack "Einfall" or originality.

Duerrenmatt refers to the writers of tragedy today in particular, but shows also that the ancient tragedy writers were not original because they did not need to be. The tradition which tragedy had set up was that the material around which the play was constructed was based on the myths handed down from generation to generation, so the ancient dramatists had no need to invent, simply to improvise and adjust the legends to suit their own purposes. He cites Aristophanes, one of the first comedy writers, as the prime

¹²
Ibid. p. 46.

example of an ancient dramatist whose comedies rely for their success on originality: "Seine Stoffe sind nicht Mythen, sondern erfundene Handlungen, die sich nicht in der Vergangenheit, sondern in der Gegenwart abspielen. Sie fallen in die Welt wie Geschosse, die, indem sie einen Trichter aufwerfen, die Gegenwart ins Komische, aber dadurch auch ins Sichtbare verwandeln."¹³

Duerrenmatt takes the theory of originality and comedy further. Because of the invention and the originality in comedy, the public is presented with something new, and something at the same time with which it feels a certain association. Without realising it, it becomes involved in the play, to the extent that it will listen to things which it would otherwise ignore.¹⁴

Duerrenmatt compares comedy to a mousetrap in which the public is caught again and again.¹⁵ It is a mousetrap, because the public is unwittingly caught in the theatre and forced to associate itself with the characters and the action on the stage. There are no longer possibilities of complete detachment.

This is not the case with tragedy in our times; it does not have the power to involve the audience to the same

¹³
Ibid. p. 47.

¹⁴
Ibid. p. 50.

¹⁵
Ibid.

extent because it portrays a society which is not imaginable
¹⁶
 today.

In connection with the hero the writer has mention-
¹⁷
 ed the question of modern responsibility and guilt and has
 tried to show that this makes a tragic hero obsolete in the
 plays of this era, because tragedy represents features not
 possible today: "Die Tragödie setzt Schuld, Not, Mass,
¹⁸
 Uebersicht, Verantwortung voraus."

As he feels that there is no personal responsibility
 or guilt, pure tragedy is no longer possible and comedy has
¹⁹
 taken its place.

However, although Duerrenmatt is of the opinion that
 comedy is the form most suited to the authors of today, he
 does not exclude the possibility of including tragic elements
 in the plays of our time. It must be pointed out that he
²⁰
 makes a clear distinction between pure tragedy and the tragic.

Duerrenmatt says that a modern drama need not be pure
 comedy:

"Das heisst nun nicht, dass ein heutiges Drama nur

¹⁶

Ibid. p. 50

¹⁷

See this thesis, ch. II, p. 46.

¹⁸

Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Theaterprobleme, Zuerich:
 Arche Verlag, 1960, p. 47.

¹⁹

Ibid. p. 48.

²⁰

Ibid.

komisch sein koenne. Die Tragoedie und die Komoe die sind Formbegriffe, dramaturgische Verhaltensweisen, fingierte Figuren der Aesthetik, die Gleiches zu umschreiben vermoegen. Nur die Bedingungen sind anders, unter denen sie entstehen, und diese Bedingungen liegen nur zum kleineren Teil in der Kunst.²¹

The conditions Duerrenmatt is referring to are formed by the state of the world in which we live, and by the possibilities of tragedy and comedy in life which determine the predominance of either form on the stage.

It is possible to experience tragedy even in comedy. It can be experienced as a terrible moment or an opening abyss: "Wir koennen das Tragische aus der Komoe die heraus erzielen, hervorbringen als einen schrecklichen Moment, als einen sich oeffnenden Abgrund."²²

In the first chapter, the writer has attempted to point out how on several occasions comedy is punctuated by tragic moments in Duerrenmatt's plays. They often appear in the plays just in the manner in which Duerrenmatt has described them above, "einen schrecklichen Moment, einen sich oeffnenden Abgrund". When, for example, in Der Besuch der alten Dame, Ill learns of Claire's purpose in coming to

²¹

Ibid., p. 47.

²²

Ibid., p. 48.

Guellen he tries to board the train and escape from the terrible fate awaiting him, he is held back, he is unable to move. This could be called a terrible moment, the abyss of despair opens before Ill, Romulus experiences the same tragic despair when Odoaker pronounces his "retirement sentence" on him. It is interesting to note in this connection that Duerrenmatt has not illustrated examples of the introduction of tragic elements into comedy in Theaterprobleme from his own works but cites Shakespeare as the prime example of a playwright who lets tragedy intervene into comedy.

Duerrenmatt describes comedy as something formless and chaotic, without restraint, in fact - grotesque. Duerrenmatt asserts that the state of the world has led man to this way of thinking and acting. World and stage are related, if the world is grotesque and paradox it follows that the stage will portray just that. The dangers in the world are reflected in the drama. The threat of the atom bomb is ever present, influencing and forming our actions and thought. Duerrenmatt has a preoccupation with the atom bomb, he mentions it several times in Theaterprobleme and it is the subject of the Hoerspiel Unternehmen der Wega. Duerrenmatt therefore associates the world and the grotesque character of the present day with the modern comedy. The grotesque is the face of the faceless world. He puts it thus: "Unsere Welt hat ebenso zur Groteske gefuehrt

wie zur Atombombe . . . Doch das Groteske ist nur ein sinnlicher Ausdruck, ein sinnliches Paradox, die Gestalt naemlich einer Ungestalt, das Gesicht einer gesichtslosen Welt.²³"

In the first chapter the writer has tried to point out how often grotesque elements penetrate the plays. Duerrenmatt in Theaterprobleme points out that this is not so much a characteristic of his personal style but of the modern trend of writing. Throughout the essay, he emphasizes that his dramatic theory is to be interpreted as a product of the age in which he is living, and that there is a close connection between the world of today and the stage of today: "Die Welt (die Buehne somit, die diese Welt bedeutet) . . ."²⁴

Thought in the modern age has also become paradox and this reflects itself in art and in particular in the art of the stage. Many of the plays betray this trait: "Genau wie unser Denken ohne den Begriff des Paradoxen nicht mehr aussukommen scheint, so auch die Kunst, unsere Welt, die nur noch ist, weil die Atombombe existiert: aus Furcht vor ihr."²⁵

²³
Ibid., p. 48.

²⁴
Ibid., p. 49.

²⁵
Ibid., p. 48.

This passage by Duerrenmatt is reminiscent of the passage quoted before from Frank V., where Boeckmann says that our actions are guided and directed by fear.

The way in which Duerrenmatt has described the substance and purpose of comedy is strange and pessimistic. It is a formless, chaotic picture of the present day; nothing has sense or purpose any longer. He formulates his picture of the world in the following words: "Die Welt . . . steht fuer mich als ein Ungeheures da, als ein Raetsel an Unheil, das hingenommen werden muss, vor dem es jedoch kein Kapitulieren geben darf."²⁶

Duerrenmatt realises that the comedy of today must present a strange and pessimistic picture and he defends it in the following words: "Nun liegt der Schluss nahe, die Komoe die sei der Ausdruck der Verzweiflung, doch ist dieser Schluss nicht zwingend . . ."²⁷

He states that this despair is not a consequence of the world in which we live but rather an answer: "Gewiss, wer das Sinnlose, das Hoffnungslose dieser Welt sieht, kann verzweifeln, doch ist diese Verzweiflung nicht eine Folge dieser Welt, sondern eine Antwort."²⁸

26

Ibid., p. 49.

27

Ibid., p. 48.

28

Ibid., p. 48.

The despair of man can be related to comedy in a new way. Romulus explains it in the beginning of Romulus der Grosse: "Wer nur aus dem letzten Loch pfeift wie wir
29
alle, kann nur noch Komoedien verstehen."

Duerrenmatt shows that there is another way in which man can face up to the seemingly hopeless situation. That is that one should not despair, but that one should try to exist in spite of the world: "Sein Entschluss etwa, die Welt zu bestehen, in der wir oft leben wie Gulliver unter
30
den Riesen."

The redeeming feature of this world according to Duerrenmatt and one of the arguments which can be made against the many critics who regard Duerrenmatt as a nihilist, can be found in that he can see something worthy of hope in this world in the shape of "der mutige Mensch". His "brave men" can see or learn to see the purposelessness of existence and of heroic action; Romulus confesses at one point: "Es
31
ist alles absurd geworden, was ich getan habe." or as Akki pronounces: "Heldentaten sind sinnlos, sie verraten die Ohnmacht des Schwachen, und seine Verzweiflung bringt die

29
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Romulus der Grosse, in Komoedien I, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1961, p. 20.

30
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Theaterprobleme, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1960, p. 48.

31
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Romulus der Grosse, in Komoedien I, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1961, p. 79.

32

Macht nur zum Lachen."

Yet in spite of this perception, "brave men" still manage to act and be men worthy of admiration; they provide hope for mankind if not for the world, and they also provide probably the only optimistic feature we can find in Dürrenmatt's plays.

Another comic device which Dürrenmatt mentions is parody. Dürrenmatt devotes a portion of his essay to a defence or rather a justification of the use of parody in the modern age. Dürrenmatt says that the general tendency of this era is to regard it as something of an inbetween stage; it is just a bridge between the glorious past and the future which in its potential has something more attractive about it. The authors of today are in a difficult situation. With such an illustrious past in the theatre, most of the famous characters in history have been built up, glorified to such an extent that it is no longer possible to equal the efforts of the past writers and the myths of ancient times have lost their meaning. For these reasons, the artist must, instead of building up his characters, reduce them if he wishes to use them in his work, that is he must make them parodies of their former selves: "Er parodiert sie,

32

Friedrich Dürrenmatt, Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon, Komödien I, Zürich: Arche Verlag, 1961, p. 227.

das heisst, er stellt sie in bewussten Gegensatz zu dem dar, was sie geworden sind.³³"

Through parody the artist regains his freedom and through the parody originality.

Duerrenmatt explains that the tyrants of today are no longer moved by the works of "serious" writers. They yawn at their laments, and laugh at their heroic epics and fall asleep while reading religious writings. The only thing they fear is their mockery. Thus parody, the only weapon left with which writing can be effective, has crept into all three genres of literature, epic, drama and lyric. Duerrenmatt goes on to say that parody has crept into parts of art and music and with it, it has taken the grotesque: ". . . Mit der Parodie hat sich auch das Groteske eingestellt, oft getarnt, ueber Nacht. Es ist einfach auf einmal da."³⁴

Duerrenmatt puts in a defence of his comedy and also shows the difficulties which he has had to encounter in writing comedy. First he explains that although he has made general statements about comedy in Theaterprobleme, his plays and his representation of comedy will reveal more personal themes than general ones and this fact must be taken into account when reading his works: "Was nun meine

³³
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Theaterprobleme, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1960, p. 55.

³⁴
Ibid.

Darstellung der Komödie angeht, so glaube ich, dass auch hier persönliche Gründe wichtiger sind als allgemeine, die ja doch zu widerlegen sind . . . Der Künstler stellt immer die Welt und sich selber dar.³⁵

He indicates some of the problems he has to face in another passage of the essay. He shows that it is not easy to introduce his type of comedy to the public. For time and convention are hard to break. The tradition of the theatre has been such that the public has been accustomed to look for certain characteristics in certain arts. The theatre has always been something holy and worthy of reverence. Comedy has always been regarded as something inferior, dubious and awkward. Now he wants to bring something new to raise the level of comedy; it has become something dangerous and revealing and this arouses the suspicion of the public: "Doch in dem Moment, wo das Komische als das Gefährliche, Fördernde, Moralische erkannt wird, lässt man es fahren wie ein heisses Eisen, denn die Kunst darf alles sein, was sie will, wenn sie nur gemuetlich bleibt."³⁶

Whether Duerrenmatt will succeed in building up a new tradition of comedy, whether his own brand of comedy will become accepted in the way the former was, is still not determined. It is too early to tell. At the moment

³⁵
Ibid. p. 51.

³⁶
Ibid. p. 56.

the audiences and readers are still too intrigued by the novelty of this new form. Only the test of time will prove whether Duerrenmatt's new approach will break through and whether it will be regarded as part of the "Uebergangestadium" which is how Duerrenmatt thinks one regards the art of the present day in general.

CHAPTER III

From the last two chapters it has become increasingly obvious that Duerrenmatt in his comedy makes recurrent use of the forms of comedy which are characteristic of the drama of today. Nevertheless, he also relies on the established devices of the comic theatre to arouse laughter. In this chapter, it is the intention of the writer to examine the different types of comedy in his works, with particular attention to those forms of comedy which have become most popular among the authors of today, and which can be called typical of this era.

One particular form of comedy is striking in Duerrenmatt's works, from early works to the last play. The writer has pointed out how often grotesque elements infiltrate themselves into the plays; they are also present to a great extent in the *Hoerspiele* and in Duerrenmatt's prose works.

The grotesque is often considered to be an artistic phenomenon characteristic of the modern age, and indeed it is very much present in plays and novels of today. But in fact it appears in works of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and appeared in other forms of art such as sculpture, painting and architecture as early as the sixteenth century; there are also examples of the grotesque in

architecture in the middle ages. It is a feature common in the works of artists of many different European countries. According to Klaus Voelker,¹ in Germany the tradition of the grotesque in literature goes back as far as Storm and Stress, and he has traced the history and recurring grotesque features in literature from then until the present day. One can, however, find examples in the Schwankdichtung of Hans Sachs' time and there is a great tendency towards this style in the late Baroque period. Similar developments could be seen in the Wiener Volkstheater and in the Commedia dell' arte. However, the main starting point and recognition of the grotesque in German literature as such can be said to start in the period of Storm and Stress. Voelker cites certain authors from different periods and different schools of writing, who represent grotesque features in their work. From the Storm and Stress period he selects Lens and Klinger. Lens, he explains, helped to promote the grotesque style of writing by his "Selbstrezension" of Der neue Manosa in 1775, where he states that comedy need not have as its sole purpose the aim of making people laugh, but it should be a presentation which is for everyone and should reflect society: "Komoedie ist Gemaelde der menschlichen Gesellschaft, und wenn die

¹ Klaus Voelker, Das Phaenomen des Grotesken in neueren deutschen Drama, Theater unserer Zeit, Basel Stuttgart: Basilius Presse, 1962, vol. III., p. 10-46.

ernsthaft wird,³ kann das Gemaelde nicht lachend werden."²

Voelker says that Klinger's work is grotesque in its paradox and in the mingling of tragic and comic form. From the later periods Voelker takes Buechner and Grabbe as his examples. Buechner even uses the word grotesque itself in his Fragment Woyzeck:

Hauptmann: Mir wird ganz schwindlig vor den Menschen. Wie schnell! Der lange Schlingel greift aus, als laeuft der Schatten von einem Spinnbein, und der Kurze, das zuckelt. Der Lange ist der Blitz und der kleine der Donner. Ha ha . . . Grotesk! Grotesk! 4

The third act of Grabbe's Schertz, Satire, Ironie und tiefere Bedeutung has a grotesque climax in the death of the character, Mordax.

Later still, authors such as Nestroy and Wedekind portray the destruction of the bourgeois in the mirror of the grotesque. Schnitzler writes a one-act play entitled Der gruene Kakadu which he subtitled Eine Groteske. But it is on the most modern authors that the grotesque made its greatest impression. Iwan Goll prophesies it: "Die Kunst soll den Menschen wieder zum Kind machen. Das einfachste Mittel ist die Groteske, aber ohne dass sie zum Lachen reizt. Die

²
Ibid., p. 12.

³
Ibid., p. 13.

⁴
Georg Buechner, Woyzeck, Stuttgart: Reclam, 1960, Scene 9, p. 18.

Monotonie und die Dummheit der Menschen wird so enorm, dass man ihnen nur mit Enormitäten beikommen kann. Das neue Drama sei enorm.⁵"

Before turning to Duerrenmatt's particular use of the grotesque, and the role it plays in his comedy, it is necessary to examine more closely the grotesque as a phenomenon in itself.

Although several critics have made clear the characteristics from which the grotesque is formed and have come close to a fairly clear understanding of the term by comparing it to other forms of comedy and showing where the differences and similarities lie, it is remarkable that no one has actually attempted a complete definition of the word grotesque as applied to the modern theatre. The Oxford dictionary gives various definitions which refer partly to the plastic arts but also bear relevance to this subject: "Figures or designs comically distorted or exaggerated. Characterised by distortion or unnatural combinations."⁶ The definition goes on, (and this refers specifically to painting but it will later be seen how much bearing it has on the meaning of grotesque in the modern literary context): "A kind of

⁵ Klaus Voelker, Das Phaenomen des Grotesken im neueren deutschen Drama, Theater unserer Zeit, Basel/Stuttgart: Basilius Presse, 1962, vol. III, p. 29-30.

⁶ "Grotesque", Oxford International Dictionary of the English Language, Toronto: Leland Publishing Company, Ltd., 1957.

decorative painting or sculpture, in which portions of human or animal forms are fantastically interwoven with foliage and flowers."⁶

Three critics have given their own interpretation of the characteristics of the grotesque: Wolfgang Kayser, who is recognised as an authority on the grotesque in art and literature gives its basic features which will be dealt with later. He also gives a definition of a certain type of grotesque which, although not covering the whole field, is accurate as far as it goes: "Die Gestaltungen des Grotesken ist der Versuch, das Daemonische in der Welt zu bannen und zu beschwoeren."⁷

⁸ Justus Moeser much earlier characterised grotesque as a special kind of laughter: He says that what is considered humorous varies from individual to individual to such an extent that one person will laugh out loud about the same thing which causes another to weep.

Willi Jaeggi who wrote the introduction to Das Groteske in modernen Drama also sees the mingling of tragedy and comedy in the grotesque.

⁶
Ibid.

⁷
Wolfgang Kayser, Das Groteske, Oldenburg: Gerhard Stalling Verlag, 1957, p. 202.

⁸
Justus Moeser, in Klaus Voelker, Das Phaenomen des Grotesken im neueren deutschen Drama, Theater unserer Zeit, Basel/Stuttgart: Basilius Presse, 1962, vol. III, p. 10.

Klaus Voelker gives further clues to this concept:
 "Das Groteske ueberschreitet den Bereich der Satire,
 Uebertreibung und Steigerung und Paradoxe finden statt.
 Groteskes Theater uebernimmt gleichseitig die Aufgaben der
 Komoe die und der Tragoedie. Das gegenwaertige Theater
 sieht sich einer grotesken Welt gegenueber."⁹

This last sentence recalls the passage already quoted in the second chapter from Theaterprobleme, namely:

"Unsere Welt hat ebenso zur Groteske gefuehrt wie zur
 Atombombe, wie ja die apokalyptischen Bilder des Hieronymus
 Bosch auch grotesk sind."¹⁰

However, these quotations are not enough to cover the many forms which the grotesque takes. Kayser while not giving a complete definition gives the best idea of the characteristics of the grotesque. He summarizes the themes which the grotesque art portrays and the forms which it takes. Generally, the ideas portrayed in the grotesque are pessimistic and negative ones. The dissolution of the static, the loss of identity, the distortion of natural proportions, the destruction of the concept of personality and the annihilation of historic order. There are certain

⁹
 Klaus Voelker, Ibid., p. 45.

¹⁰
 Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Theaterprobleme, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1960, p. 48.

recurring motifs such as: monstrosities, the mingling of the mechanic and the organic, animals particularly insects and those which appear at night, people are represented as puppets, dolls, or marionettes, dead bodies and masked faces appear frequently and often the characters portrayed are insane. As far as the structure of the play is concerned, the normal order of life is turned upside down, time and place lose their meaning. Grotesque literature is a picture of our sinister, estranged world. The atmosphere is fantastic and unnerving and the characters in the works experience not usually fear of death, but fear of life. The surprise or a sudden change in fortune or a kind of deus ex machina is another popular feature.

How does Duerrenmatt fit into the picture which Kayser and the others have conjured up? He complies very well with most of the characteristics. Kayser quotes Duerrenmatt in his introduction as one of the leading exponents of this form and says that Duerrenmatt considers the grotesque the only legitimate form of writing today. In the light of this, it is strange that Kayser does not deal with Duerrenmatt's work at any length in any chapter. He illustrates with grotesque elements from other authors in whose works the grotesque plays only a minor role.

¹¹
Wolfgang Kayser, Das Groteske, Oldenburg: Gerhard Stalling Verlag, 1957, p. 11.

Each feature of the grotesque listed above will now be considered in the light of Duerrenmatt's works. (The writer does not intend to discuss the mingling of the comic and tragic elements as a feature of the grotesque, as this was illustrated in detail in the first chapter).

The world of Duerrenmatt's work is very much the world of the grotesque. Nothing is static and nothing permanent. Life itself is something which can be lost very easily. The characters of the Hoerspiel Unternehmen der Wega do not fear death because they know life can be lost so easily: "Wir fuerchten eure Bomben nicht, weil wir mitten im Tode leben und lernen mussten, ihn nicht mehr zu fuerchten."¹²

Life can be lost so easily, as those people in Der Tunnel experienced. They only had to board a train and they found themselves on a perilous journey out of life, where time and place lost all meaning as they fell into the heart of the earth.

Die Ehe des Herrn Mississippi is the prime example of the insignificance of time and place. Saint-Claude rises after having been shot dead and takes us back in time or perhaps forward, the direction is as irrelevant as the setting of the play.

Loss of identity can be seen in the play Ein Engel

¹²
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Hoerspiele, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1959, p. 41.

kommt nach Babylon where the beggar Akki and the emperor Nebukadnesar change places and thereby lose their identity at least for part of the play. In the same play, we can see an example of the distortion of natural proportions. The town of Babylon takes on gigantic proportions. It is no longer a small dot on the map but there it is the show-place of the world. To emphasise the importance of the heaven from which the angel steps and its significance in the play, Duerrenmatt gives the following stage directions in the introduction: "So haengt ein unermesslicher Himmel ueber allem, in dessen Mitte der Andromedanebel schwebt, etwa so, wie wir ihn in den Spiegeln des Mount Wilson oder der Mount Palomar sehen, bedrohlich nah, fast die Haelfte des Buehnenhintergrundes fuellend."¹³

Several examples can be found in Duerrenmatt's plays and prose works of the destruction of the concept of personality, something to which Kayser refers. (This is not the same as the loss of identity, for the characters concerned here do not take on a new form of personality, but rather fade into the background and become puppets and marionettes, another feature of the grotesque which Kayser has mentioned). The best example can be found in Der Besuch der alten Dame. The entourage of Claire consists

¹³
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Komuedien I, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1961, p. 173.

of several characters who no longer possess personality but are just mechanical figures. Claire pulls the strings of the puppets and they perform before her. Their reduction to puppets is further increased by the fact that their names have been changed by Claire so that they each resemble each other, e.g., Koby, Loby, Roby, etc; they no longer have separate personalities in their language and expressions, but Koby and Loby speak constantly in unison and repeat their lines in a pathetic attempt to give them extra emphasis:

Die Beiden: Wir sind zur Stelle, wir sind zur
Stelle! . . . Wir haben uns veraendert,
wir haben uns veraendert. 14

Duerrenmatt undertakes a deliberate destruction of historical order by his play Romulus der Grosse. Although he takes a historical figure, he changes the character and events deliberately in order to make history, as he puts it, "ungeschichtlich". In Es steht geschrieben the historical truth is kept only as far as the characters are concerned and in respect of their deaths, but simultaneously the normal pattern of time and date is confused. The characters can look into the future and predict their own death at the exact time and the exact date.

As far as the monstrous element is concerned in the grotesque, there are numerous examples to be found in Duerren-

matt's works. The descriptions in the prose works often tend to be monstrous and human characteristics are distorted, increased or reduced; natural things assume enormous proportions. One example is the description of the arrival of Claire. Duerrenmatt often refers to his characters or the action of his works as grotesque as in Der Besuch der alten Dame: "Von rechts kommt Claire Zachanassian, zweiundzwanzig, rothaarig, Perlenhalsband, riesige goldene Armringe, aufgedonnert, unmöglich, aber gerade darum wieder eine Dame von Welt, mit einer seltsamen Gracie, trotz allem Grotesken."¹⁵

The preoccupation with machines and the mechanic mingling with the organic is a common theme of Duerrenmatt's plays. Kayser talks about machines as dangerous instruments: "Das Gerat wurde zum Traeger daemonischen Vernichtungsdranges und zum Herrn ueber seinen Schoepfer."¹⁶

This recalls very strongly the first play written by Duerrenmatt, Koncedig, in which the terrible weapon invented by man gets out of hand, that is man loses control over it and it destroys its maker and the whole world. In the same context Kayser talks about motor vehicles: "Die spitzen Gegenstaende Wilhelm Buschs sind in der Moderne von den

¹⁵
Ibid., p. 269.

¹⁶
Wolfgang Kayser, Das Groteske, Oldenburg: Gerhard Stalling Verlag, 1957, p. 197.

neuen Instrumenten der Technik abgelöst, besonders den
 gerauschvollen Motorfahrzeugen.¹⁷"

In Die Falle Duerrenmatt writes: "Von weitem
 glitten Motorraeder heran, pfeilschnell vom fernen Horizont
 her, pfeifend umhüllten ihn die Wolken der Geschosse."¹⁸

Kayser also mentions the predilection of exponents
 of the grotesque towards the use of rigid bodies or corpses.
 Certainly Duerrenmatt includes several particularly in his
 prose works, but this theme occurs in the Hoerspiel Stran-
 nitsky und der Nationalheld. Duerrenmatt shows all the
 horror of the grotesque in his description of the two
 corpses of Strannitsky and Anton: "Sie kamen vom Meer
 her, von der Flut getragen, zwei riesenhafte Wasserleichen,
 der Fussballspieler auf dem Ruecken des Blinden, Korallen
 und Tang auf den gebleichten Schaedeln und Seesterne und
 Muscheln in den Augenhoehlen."¹⁹

Duerrenmatt has two grotesque pictures of insanity.
 The one which has already been discussed is Die Physiker
 where the insanity is doubly grotesque because the characters
 are not really insane, but have to defend and preserve the
 sanity of an already chaotic world. Secondly, the insanity

¹⁷

Ibid.

¹⁸

Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Die Stadt, Zuerich: Arche
 Verlag, 1959, p. 101.

¹⁹

Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Hoerspiele, Zuerich: Arche
 Verlag, 1959, p. 152.

of Albrechtchen selig, where the horrible secret of his insanity comes to light at the end of the novel Das Versprechen only after it has already done great harm.

There are no actual animals which play important roles in Duerrenmatt's works, with the exception of the donkey in Prozess ueber des Esels Schatten, but the descriptions of insects appear, and he uses animal-like metaphors in order to increase the grotesque situation, the monstrous and bizarre atmosphere particularly in his prose works. In Die Falle we find this revolting description: "Hin und wieder kam der Wind, heulte von weitem und brauste durch die Baeume, jagte den Mond durch die oeden Felder, dass dieser ueber den Huegel rollte, gross wie ein Haus, als ein fahler Kopf voll Schwaeren und Loecher, aus denen Riesenfliegen und gruene Kaefer krochen." ²⁰

The metaphors serve to unite the human and the plant world, (cf. the dictionary definition of grotesque), Bockel-
sen and Knipperdolinck on the wheels at the end of Es steht geschrieben are described in the following way: ". . . Zwei Menschen, recht traurige Subjekte, welche sich auf der steinernen Flaeche dieser Mauer dem Himmel wie die Kelche einer geheimnisvollen Nachtanemone entgegenneigen." ²¹ Or a

20

Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Die Stadt, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1959, p. 101.

21

Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Es steht geschrieben, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1959, p. 108.

human emotion is compared to the plant world. At the end of Der Besuch der alten Dame we find this metaphor: "Sie [deine Liebe] ist etwas Boses geworden . . . wie die bleichen Pilse."²²

Finally, one finds so often in Duerrenmatt's works the characteristic which Kayser describes as the "Ueberraschung". In the midst of happiness and rejoicing comes the terrible moment, for example in Der Besuch der alten Dame. While the citizens of Guelten are rejoicing over their new-found prosperity, Claire reveals the payment they will have to make, and it is significant that the last words of rejoicing before the revelation of Claire's true purpose are spoken by Ill, her victim: "Die Klara! Goldig! Wunderbar! Zum Kuegeln! Voll und ganz mein Zauberhexchen!"²³

Similarly in Die Fenne, Traps learns that the game he is playing with the judges has suddenly become serious. The game has become reality -- the suddenness of this realization can also be described as a "terrible moment."

Thus Duerrenmatt's grotesque is very much in tune with the features Kayser attributes to the grotesque. However, although Kayser's work is in most respects comprehensive, and his enumeration of the themes and structure of the gro-

²²
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Komödien I, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1961, p. 338.

²³
Ibid., p. 286.

tesque is quite applicable to Duerrenmatt's work, he does not completely cover the grotesque in every feature as one can see by taking a further look into Duerrenmatt's representation of it. There are two more types of grotesque which Kayser does not mention in his work and which Duerrenmatt uses frequently in his. They are the fanciful and the idyllic grotesque. Reinhold Grimm²⁴ points this out and he also mentions parody in this context, which will be considered later.

Under the category of the fanciful grotesque one can place such characters as those in Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon, who are exaggerated and distorted, but not monstrous characters like Akki and Kurrubi. The audience can laugh at them without any feeling of distaste. Here also the cook in Es steht geschrieben and there are numerous other examples.

The idyllic grotesque which seems to be almost a contradiction in terms is a very interesting and at the same time an integral part of Duerrenmatt's works. The way in which it makes itself felt is this: Duerrenmatt describes the most terrible events in a most poetic way, so that a strange contrast arises between the content and form. There are several examples of this, but perhaps one of the best is the description of Traps after he has hung himself at the

²⁴
Reinhold Grimm, Parodie und Groteske im Werk Duerrenmatts, Theater unserer Zeit, Basel/Stuttgart: Basilius Presse, 1962, vol. IV, p. 95.

end of the Ersählung version of Die Fanna: "Im Fensterrahmen hing Traps, unbeweglich, eine dunkle Silhouette vor dem stumpfen Silber des Himmels, in schweren Duft der Rosen . . ." ²⁵ Similarly, the two tortured bodies at the end of Es steht geschrieben ²⁶ are compared to anemones.

A device which is an intrinsic part of Duerrenmatt's comedy has been included by Reinhold Grimm in his study of Duerrenmatt's grotesque as a form of the grotesque and he is supported by Heselhaus on this point: "Auch Heselhaus betont, unter Berufung auf Justus Moeser und Gottfried Keller, das "vitale Element" des Grotesken; auch er erkennt als Mittel des Grotesken die Parodie, dessen "Tarnung" ²⁷ Kayser offenbar nicht zu durchschauen vermochte."

It will be remembered that Duerrenmatt himself has shown how closely the two forms are related: "So hat sich denn die Parodie in alle Gattungen geschlichen, in den Roman, ins Drama, in die Lyrik. Weite Teile der Malerei, der Musik sind von ihm erobert und mit der Parodie hat sich

²⁵
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Die Fanna, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1960, p. 120.

²⁶
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Es steht geschrieben, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1959, p. 108.

²⁷
Reinhold Grimm, Parodie und Groteske im Werk Duerrenmatts, Theater unserer Zeit, Basel/Stuttgart: Basilius Presse, 1962, vol. IV, p. 95.

79
28

auch das Groteske eingestellt, oft getarnt, ueber Nacht."

Duerrenmatt has also pointed out to what extent parody gives the modern dramatist his freedom to use subjects which have been treated before in a serious way, without the feeling of having plagiarised or having produced a weak imitation. Also he has said that nowadays one must reduce and parody figures if they are to be original and life-like.

But Duerrenmatt's form of parody is not always just the conventional ridiculing of classical authors, history, religion, etc., by simply reducing the characters, mocking them and making them act in foolish and farcical manner. Duerrenmatt is too ingenious for that. It has been pointed out by Duerrenmatt in the chapter dealing with the theory, that one of the characteristics of comedy and one of its highest qualities is its originality. Consequently, one cannot expect from an author who makes such a statement that he will simply imitate (for parody is a form of imitation) his predecessors in a comic way simply to elicit a few laughs from the audience. Even in parody Duerrenmatt introduces something which Brecht coined as a literary form, namely "Gegenentwurf." We may infer that while Duerrenmatt imitates the characters and form of a particular play or

28
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Theaterprobleme, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1960, p. 55.

event, he gives the content a slight or even great twist, in order to introduce "Einfall", even in parody. Grimm in his study of Duerrenmatt, points out that the reader must not expect parody in the conventional form from this author:

Es handelt sich um Parodie. Aber um welche Art von Parodie? Wirklich um jene altbekannte, ueber die es sich nicht lohnen wuerde, gross Aufhebens zu machen? Geschieht auch bei Duerrenmatt nichts weiter, als dass eine beruehmte Klassikerszene auf eine weidlich billige Weise verspottet wird - weil es halt dem Autor, dem wieder einmal "nichts heilig ist", gerade einfiel? Wer so dachte, haette die eigentliche Absicht und Leistung Duerrenmatts ueberhaupt nicht erkannt. 29

Duerrenmatt himself, in Theaterprobleme gives us his own interpretation of the meaning of parody: "Er parodiert sie [the characters], das heisst, er stellt sie im bewussten Gegensatz zu dem dar, was sie geworden sind."³⁰

Where then does the parody lie? Sometimes in the names of the characters, but mainly in the form in which the events take place. The form of the original work remains the same, but the content is transformed.

Several examples can be found in Duerrenmatt's work of this type of parody. Perhaps the most salient example can be found in the scene in Frank V. entitled Goettlicher Zuspruch. This scene is a direct parody of the scene between the Grand Inquisitor and the king in Don Carlos, Act V,

29

Reinhold Grimm, Parodie und Grotoske im Werk Duerrenmatts, Theater unserer Zeit, Basel/Stuttgart: Basilius Presse, 1962, vol. IV, p. 85.

30

Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Theaterprobleme, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1960, p. 55.

Scene 10). It comes at approximately the same place in both plays. It is a question which interests Duerrenmatt to a great extent, namely justice and mercy. Both Otilie and Don Carlos have committed unpardonable crimes and both face retribution. It is only that Otilie wants justice on her own account and the king for Don Carlos. The king is still hoping for mercy for his son: "Ich lass' ihn fliessen, wenn ich ihn / Nicht sterben lassen kann."³¹ While Otilie says: "Ich will keine Gnade! . . . Gerechtigkeit, auch wenn sie mich vernichtet."³²

The twist which is an ironic one, is that the king must put his son into the hands of the Inquisitor and justice will be done: "Koenig: Kardinal, ich habe / Das Meinige getan. Tun Sie das Ihre."³³ While the Staatspraesident says to Otilie: "Nein, nein, erwarte von mir keine Strafe, erwarte von mir nur noch Gnade."³⁴

Other parodies of literature occur in the Hoerspiel Der Prozess um des Esels Schatten, where Duerrenmatt dis-

³¹
Friedrich Schiller, Don Carlos, Leipzig: Grossherzog Wilhelm Ernst Ausgabe, Insel Verlag, 1905, p. 550.

³²
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Frank V, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1960, p. 87.

³³
Friedrich Schiller, Don Carlos, Leipzig: Grossherzog Wilhelm Ernst Ausgabe, Insel Verlag, 1905, p. 554.

³⁴
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Frank V, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1960, p. 87.

closes the parody in the subtitle, Nach Wieland - aber nicht
gehr, and he changes the ending and makes his version of the
tale end in disaster.

Or he takes Schiller's work again as the subject of
his parody; the scene in which Boeckmann admonishes Frank V
for his crimes recalls very strongly the scene in which
Koser admonishes Franz Moor in Die Rauber. Again Duerren-
matt changes it by an ironical twist, for Boeckmann is as
steeped in guilt and crime as the one on whom he is pro-
nouncing judgement.

In Romulus der Grosse Duerrenmatt effects both a
parody of literature and of history. Parody lies already
in the fact that he calls the play "ungeschichtlich". He
must have intended to parody Shakespeare: First, the play
is set on the Ides of March, A.D. 476, although, according
to history, the deposition of Romulus took place in the
September of that year; he obviously set the play on that
date to establish a parallel to Caesar's death. Act III
with its conspirators' scene is an evident parody of Caesar's
assassination in Shakespeare's play. Especially effective
is the line in which Romulus turns to the cook and says:
"Koch, auch du?"³⁵, obviously an allusion to Caesar's famous
"Et tu Brute?"

³⁵
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Komödien I, Zuerich: Arche
Verlag, 1961, p. 63.

Shakespeare is again the object of both parody and irony in the opera Frank V. At the beginning of the play, the Personalchef appears like the prologue in Shakespeare's plays and explains that the "heroes" of the play will shed no less blood than Shakespeare's.

In Romulus der Grosse one finds Duerrenmatt ridiculing another classical author: the Emperor's daughter recites verses from Sophocles in the second act and utters quotations from Antigone's speech as she is led away to death in the midst of the squawking chickens and flying feathers.

Nor is Goethe spared. In Es steht geschrieben there is a marked resemblance between the Prolog im Himmel in Faust and the first scene with the Anabaptists kneeling on the stage. The parody is especially effective in the last line of the scene where they declare: "Ehre sei Gott in der
36
Hoehle."

Famous characters in history are also parodied. The death of Ill is very similar to the death of the great Swiss hero Arnold von Winkelried. Both perform sacrifices, one for his country, the other for his town. One sacrificial act occurs in a "Gasse" namely Ill's and the other by creating a "Gasse". Their modes of death are different. Ill dies of a heart attack, and Winkelried loses his life by thrusting

36
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Es steht geschrieben, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1959, p. 12.

the spears of the knights into his own body. Duerrenmatt's parodistic twist lies in the fact that Ill's is an unwilling sacrifice and not for a moral reason, simply for the greedy citizens of Guellen, in order to increase the prosperity of the town. Winkelried's act is a heroic one, which gained his country its freedom and made him go down in history as a national hero, but this heroism is not possible in the times in which we live, according to Duerrenmatt.

Similarly Herkules, whom we think of as a Greek hero, appears in Herkules und der Stall des Augias as a parody and ends his career as a weight lifter in a circus.

There are other sources for Duerrenmatt to parody. Two works are intended by Duerrenmatt to be parodies of certain types of literature. Das Versprechen which he describes as Requiem auf einen Detektivroman. The parody lies again in the twist which Duerrenmatt puts in by not allowing his detective to catch the criminal as in the conventional criminal story. Grieche sucht Griechin is a parody of a love story. Duerrenmatt wrote two endings to this narrative; one for lending libraries, since it is a happy end, and the other a not so happy end, a rather sharp slight on modern literary taste.

Certain prototypes of the modern bourgeoisie are presented as parodies in Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon. The Ersminister is a parody of a politician: for example, he

says: "Leute wie wir kommen immer wieder hoch."³⁷

Berghahn has this to say about the figures of Duerrenmatt's plays in general: "Nie sind in seinen Stuecken die Figuren sie selbst, sondern parodistische Spiegelungen ihrer Funktionen in der Welt."³⁸

This may be true of the functions of the figures, but nevertheless, the characters exist in their own right, and one is not aware that they are just representatives or prototypes. They are all as individual as the plays themselves, despite the amount of parody which Duerrenmatt introduces.

When trying to discuss the intervention or introduction of absurd elements in Duerrenmatt's works, one is confronted by a problem. In the modern theatre forms do not know the strict barriers of the classical theatre, where a writer would not stray from one form to another and each form was clearly defined. Nowadays, forms overlap, especially such concepts as grotesque, absurd and epic theatre. It is often impossible to define what is absurd or grotesque; the decision one makes will be very subjective. In Duerrenmatt's works the writer is inclined to see the predominance of grotesque

³⁷
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Komödien I, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1961, p. 250.

³⁸
W. Berghahn, "Friedrich Duerrenmatts Spiel mit den Ideologien", Frankfurter Hefte 11, Jg. 1956, Heft 2, p. 203.

over absurd, but there are definite situations in which the absurd holds sway.

Perhaps a distinction can be made between the two modes by saying that the grotesque represents life in an unreal way in order to make reality comprehensible; the absurd, however, is more defeatist. It accepts the unreal character of life and represents it on the stage without argument.

Klaus Voelker sees these difficulties in definition and points out how closely absurd, grotesque and epic theatre are related:

Alle bedeutenden Dramatiker haben groteske Mittel eingesetzt. Dennoch scheint es mir nicht gerechtfertigt, groteskes Theater zu einem übergeordneten Begriff zu machen. Grotesk wie absurd sind nicht als Formkategorie gemeint. Heute wird gern das epische Theater gegen das absurde Theater ausgespielt. Das epische Theater seinerseits arbeitet oft mit den Mitteln des Grotesken. 39

Martin Esslin writing on the theatre of the absurd shows that the absurd theatre is a product of the era in which we are now living: He says:

The theatre of the Absurd, however, can be seen as a reflection of what seems the attitude most genuinely representable of our own time's contribution.

The hallmark of this attitude is its sense that the certitudes and unshakeable basic assumptions of former ages have been swept away, that they have been tested and found wanting. 40

39
Klaus Voelker, Das Phaenomen des Grotesken im neueren deutschen Drama, Theater unserer Zeit, Basel/Stuttgart: Basilius Presse, 1962, vol. III, p. 45.

40
Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, New York: Anchor Books, 1961, p. xviii.

Camus gives the symptoms of the modern thought's turn to absurdity:

A world that can be explained by reasoning, however faulty, is a familiar world. But in a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels a stranger. His is an irremediable exile, because he is deprived of memories of a lost homeland as much as he lacks the hope of a promised land to come. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity. ⁴¹

Kayser says: "Die verfremdete Welt erlaubt uns keine Orientierung, sie erscheint als absurd." ⁴²

In an essay on Kafka, Ionesco defines his understanding of the term in the following way: "Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose . . . Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless." ⁴³

In fact, the theatre of the absurd is trying to express in its own way the purposelessness of action, the senselessness of the human condition and the invalidity of any form of thinking or of faith of former centuries. The way the theatre proves the fruitlessness of action is by banning it from the stage. The play now depends upon the characters, language and conversations which are in most cases banal,

⁴¹
Ibid., p. xix.

⁴²
Wolfgang Kayser, Das Grotteske, Oldenburg: Gerhard Stalling Verlag, 1957, p. 199.

⁴³
Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd, New York: Anchor Books, 1961, p. xix.

insignificant and often unintelligible. As can be seen in Duerrenmatt's representation of Romulus and his conversations in the first part of Romulus der Grosse the above statements are backed by facts.

Duerrenmatt also fits into the picture of the absurd as far as his theory is concerned.

G.R. Hoeks, writing of Duerrenmatt, points out that the absurd is both a form of the Baroque and a modern tendency in literature: "In der Kunst des Barocks und der Gegenwart ist der Hang zum Absurden, Alogischen zur Sensation und Schockwirkung besonders gross.⁴⁴"

He goes on to say that this tendency can be seen in Duerrenmatt's works in the following way: He says that Duerrenmatt betrays: ". . . Ein modernes und europaisches Beduerfnis, einen babylonischen Turm zu bauen, des Proble-⁴⁴ matische zu integrieren."

From Duerrenmatt's own words we find the reasons he has for writing in this way; the reasons he puts forward are closely related to his views on the world and life in general. On one occasion he offered the following defence of what might be interpreted as nihilistic and absurd elements in his works: "Ich schreibe um das Absurde dieser Welt wissend, aber nicht

⁴⁴
G.R. Hoeks in Hans Baensiger, Frisch und Duerrenmatt, Bern und Muenchen: Franke Verlag, 1960, p. 17.

verzweifelt." 45

In the introduction of his first but unpublished play, Komödie, he writes: "Wir sind vom Unraum, vom Unwesentlichen, Bedeutungslosen umgeben. Der Staat, die Religion und die Kunst sind fuer sich, ohne Beziehung zu einander, abstrakt, ueberschwaemt von Technik, dem Bild des Wesenlosen." 46

How does the absurd make itself felt in Duerrenmatt's works themselves? Mainly in what we would consider foolish and farcical and in those characters which we might regard as clowns. It is not so much the characters which incorporate absurd elements themselves but their attitudes towards situations. However, in Duerrenmatt's works the characters which appear absurd are in actual fact often the only enlightened ones. They have understood the senselessness of life. They realise their actions will be ineffective in an absurd world; they resign themselves to their fates, in such a way as to make the other characters and the audience (until the author reveals the real meaning behind their attitudes) regard them as ridiculous weaklings and (in the case of the Physicists) even as insane.

45
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Komödien I, "Blurrp" on Paper Cover, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1961.

46
Hans Baenziger, Frisch und Duerrenmatt, Bern und Muenchen: Franke Verlag, 1960, p. 122.

Romulus is, of course, an example per se of an absurd character. This emperor with his interest only in chicken breeding infuriates those around him; yet as the play moves on we gain insight into his actions or non-action. In Es steht geschrieben we find words which could be interpreted as Romulus' credo: "Der Mensch vermag nicht das Grosse, er vermag nur das Kleine, und das Kleine ist wichtiger als das Grosse. Wir koennen viel Gutes tun auf der Erde Welt, wenn wir bescheiden sind." 47

Yet, in spite of his sagacity, the world in its senselessness gets the better of him and he has to confess: "Es ist alles absurd geworden was ich tat," and Odoaker shows insight: "Die Zerstoerung Roms, dein Werk wird sinnlos geworden sein, wenn dies geschieht." 48

Baenziger, writing of Die Ehe des Herrn Mississippi, has this to say: "Es ist eine Apokalypse im kleinen Rahmen. Der Weg eines verkitschten Buergertums fuehrt ins Absurde." 49

That is the basis of Die Ehe des Herrn Mississippi. No longer is one character thought of as absurd, but here

47
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Es steht geschrieben, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1959, p. 33.

48
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Komodien I, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1961, p. 79.

49
Hans Baenziger, Frisch und Duerrenmatt, Bern und Muenchen: Franke Verlag, 1960, p. 47.

society is shown to have no real meaning. The old creeds and maxims have disappeared. Mississippi, at the end of the play, gains insight and recounts the absurdity of life in its many forms:

Dann ist das Gesetz nicht sinnlos? Dann ist es nicht sinnlos, dass ich getoetet habe? Nicht sinnlos, diese Kriege, diese Revolutionen, die sich haeuften, die sich zu einem einsigen ungeheuren Trompetenstoss des Todes verdichten? Dann aendert sich der Mensch, wenn er gestraft wird? Dann hat das juengste Gericht einen Sinn? 50

Akki in Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon in his "Pakamen" points out the absurdity of heroic action in the world of today: "Heldentaten sind sinnlos", he says.⁵¹

Nowhere does Duerrenmatt point out the absurd character of the world more strongly than in his collection of prose Die Stadt, although the characters do not act in an absurd manner but rather become reconciled and learn to accept the absurdity of existence.

The collection Die Stadt bears a certain similarity to the thought and outlook in Camus' Mythe de Sisyphe. The main purpose of our modern existence is as Duerrenmatt puts it: to create something out of a void: "Aus Nichts etwas zu machen."⁵² All man's efforts are futile, the character

⁵⁰
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Kommedien I, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1961, p. 162.

⁵¹
Ibid., p. 227.

⁵²
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Die Stadt, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1959, p. 55.

in Das Bild des Sisyphus states dejectedly as he stares into the fire and reflects upon his pointless existence. The student in Der Tunnel blocks his ears in order to escape the realisation of the absurdity of the outside world. At the end of the extract, the characters also see the hopelessness of escape.

In Das Versprechen, Duerrenmatt explains the danger of the absurd, and the way in which man can overcome life even in the face of absurdity:

Wir sind Maenner, haben damit zu rechnen, uns dagegen zu wappnen und uns vor allem klar darueber zu werden, dass wir es Absurden, welches sich notwendigerweise immer deutlicher und maechtiger zeigt, nur dann nicht scheitern und uns einigermassen wohllich auf dieser Erde einrichten werden, wenn wir es demuetig in unser Denken einkalkulieren. 53

As well as these new forms, Duerrenmatt uses more traditional methods of achieving comedy such as irony and satire, both of which are also closely related to the grotesque, and often they involve parody.

Duerrenmatt probably inherited the satirical side of his nature from his grandfather, Ulrich Duerrenmatt, the revolutionary alderman and satirical writer. Duerrenmatt's satire appears in many of his works; the themes which he attacks are widespread; nothing is spared. All forms of idealism, religion, politics and society in its many forms

53
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Das Versprechen, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1958, p. 213.

come under attack.

Reinhold Grimm also points out that Duerrenmatt's work has a strong satirical streak: "Mit den daemionischen, vitalen, spielerischen und parodistischen Elementen des Grotesken, . . . verbindet sich bei ihm [Duerrenmatt] immerwieder ein starkes satirisches Element . . . Der Satiriker will aber nicht ruegen, sondern auch bessern."⁵⁴

The writer is inclined to disagree with the assertion that it is Duerrenmatt's intention to correct and improve through his satire. He never in his Theaterprobleme or in any other expression of the ideas behind his writing indicated any didactic purpose in his work. He is more inclined to present life as it is and people as they are today, if by doing so he manages to change conditions it is by coincidence, not by intention, at least not expressed intention. On the contrary, he does not want to use the stage as a means of expressing ideas and theories. As he himself said: "Die Buehne stellt fuer mich nicht ein Feld fuer Theorien, Weltanschauungen und Aussagen, sondern ein Instrument dar, dessen Moeglichkeiten ich zu kennen versuche, indem ich damit spiele."⁵⁵

⁵⁴
Reinhold Grimm, Parodie und Groteske im Werk Duerrenmatts, Theater unserer Zeit, Basel/Stuttgart: Basilius Press, 1962 vol. IV, p. 95-96.

⁵⁵
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Theaterprobleme, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1960, p. 8.

Already in Es steht geschrieben we find the beginnings of Duerrenmatt's satire. Here religion is attacked, or rather the fickleness of human nature as regards religion. Religion has become a fashion to be taken up, discarded or exchanged:

Der Mann: Die habens mit dem Glauben wie mit den Hemden. Zuerst war katholisch die Mode. Gut wir waren katholisch. Dann war Luther die Mode. Gut waren wir lutherisch. Jetzt sitzen die Tauscher im Rat und meine Frau sagt: "Ich werde taueferrisch. Ich auch, sagt sein Sohn, ich auch sagt meine Tochter." Da sag' ich: "Mir gefaellt's in diesem Hemd und ich bleibe lutherisch." 56

Religion is the object under attack again in Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon. Here the satire takes a different form. The angel is the symbol of the divine, but in this play the illusion of the infallibility of the divine is destroyed. The angel is very human; he makes mistakes. Kurrubi falls in love with the king and not the beggar and yet God intended her to marry the humblest man on earth. At one point Kurrubi accuses the angel of lying, whereupon he replies: "Der Himmel luegt nie, mein Kind. Nur faellt es ihm bisweilen schwer, sich den Menschen verstaendlich zu machen." ⁵⁷ On several occasions in other plays there is a

⁵⁶
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Es steht geschrieben, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1959, p. 26.

⁵⁷
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Komoedien I, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1961, p. 182.

reference to the irreligiosity of our time; in Der Besuch der alten Dame there is this passage:

"Der Buergermeister: Meine Herren, die Milliardaerin ist unsere einzige Hoffnung.

Der Pfarrer: Ausser Gott . . .

Der Lehrer: Aber der zahlt nicht."⁵⁸

Politics is satirised in other works. In Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon the Erzminister makes an observation about politicians to the effect that the more often a politician contradicts himself, the greater he is: "Je oefters ein Politiker sich widerspricht, desto groesser ist er."⁵⁹

In Die Ehe des Herrn Mississippi it is not politics in general, but certain ideologies and political factions which receive the scorn of satire. Sainte-Claude relates with pride the distinctions which he has received since he has been a member of the party: "Ich habe es eben auch geschafft. Ich bin Buerger der Sowjet-Union geworden, Oberst der Roten Armee, Ehrenburger Rumaeniens, Abgeordneter des polnischen Parlaments und Mitglied des Politbueros der Kominform."⁶⁰ He has been given orders to reorganize the Communist party under the name: "Partei fuer Volk, Glaube und Heimat";⁶⁰ this might be a reference to Schoenherr's

⁵⁸
Ibid., p. 266.

⁵⁹
Ibid., p. 246.

⁶⁰
Ibid., p. 116.

drama Glaube und Heimat in which the Protestant Tyrolean peasants stand up against the counter reformation.

Society is satirised in its many forms. Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon shows the anxiety of the members of different classes to better themselves or to give the impression that they are better than they are, for example by giving alms to the beggars:

"Tabtum: Wieviel geben denn die Damen der grossen Gesellschaft?"

Akki: Zwei Goldstuecke.

Tabtum: Ich kann dir drei geben.⁶¹

Her reward lies in Akki's reply: "Dann gehoerst du zur ganz grossen Gesellschaft, schoene Dame."⁶¹

When Nimrod wants to introduce the social state into Babylon, he does not meet with much enthusiasm from the others:

"Erster Arbeiter: Wir kennen diese wahrhaft sozialen Staaten.

Gimmil: Sie dienen nur der Bereicherung des Koenigs und der Beamten."⁶²

Orim considers Der Besuch der alten Dame as the point at which Duerrenmatt reaches a climax as a satirical writer. In this play, the satire is concentrated mainly on the corrupt society of today, its materialism and its

⁶¹
Ibid., p. 186.

⁶²
Ibid., p. 251.

immorality, with special regard to justice. The atmosphere of the small town is also a grateful subject for satire, with the gossip, the self-importance of its members and the pride in any of its former inhabitants who have made good, such as Claire Zachanassian:

"Der Dritte: Dabei waren wir eine Kulturstadt.

Der Zweite: Eine der ersten im Lande.

Der Erste: In Europa.

Der Vierte: Goethe hat hier uebernachtet. Im Gasthof zum Goldenen Apostel.

Der Dritte: Brahms ein Quartett komponiert."⁶³

Numerous examples can be found in Duerrenmatt's works of irony, but perhaps especially in Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon. The drama often relies for effect upon the ambiguity of language and situation; a prize example can be found when Nebukadnesar says the following words to the executioner: "Du bist der einzige in meinem Reich, der sich nicht verstellt hat, der ist was er ist."⁶⁴ But the executioner is really the beggar, Akki.

Particularly poignant is the irony in Der Besuch der alten Dame in Ill's words to the teacher talking about Claire: "Sehen Sie, Herr Lehrer, die habe ich im Sack."⁶⁵

⁶³
Ibid., p. 264.

⁶⁴
Ibid., p. 239.

⁶⁵
Ibid., p. 272.

In the end, Ill realises that it is Claire who holds the sack and he who is inside.

Irony is often used deliberately for "disillusionment" (i.e., the destruction of the stage illusion): When Saint-Claude is shot, he rises and delivers a speech in which he refers to his own death: "Meine Damen, meine Herren, ich bin eben beim Klang verhallender Kirchenglocken erschossen worden, wie Sie bemerkt haben duerfen."⁶⁶

But Duerrenmatt's comedy is not always dependant upon elements such as parody, irony and satire; elements essentially destructive. He is a master of style and vocabulary and dialogue and these are the chief sources of his humour. It is extremely witty and varied. He changes the style and vocabulary to suit his figures and they gain in character by their individual style of speaking. In Romulus Der Grosse one can find perhaps the wittiest language of all the plays, where humour depends to a great extent on the actual choice of words and their relation to the characters. Duerrenmatt goes to great lengths in the characterisation of all his characters even in the minor ones. Witticisms can often be found more in the language of the minor roles than the main characters. In Romulus the characters' names are chosen with particular attention

to their characteristics as in their language. Both Zeno, the Eastern Emperor, and Mares, the war minister, love high-flown terms suitable to their roles. Mares' vocabulary is often tinged with bellicial words: "Totale Mobilmachung ist die Bezeichnung fuer die vollstaendige Zusammenfassung aller Kraefte einer Nation zu militaerischen Zwecken."⁶⁷

The actor, Phylax, effuses theatrical language and everything is given great emphasis: "Tragischer, Prinzessin, rhythmischer, mehr Schrei von innen heraus . . ."⁶⁸

Several times the language is punctuated by puns and play on words: "Wir muessen zwischen einem katastrophalen Kapitalismus und einer kapitalen Katastrophe waehlen."⁶⁹ Or his characters pronounce certain maxims or proverbs as Romulus when he states his objections to the new fashions of trousers for men: "Wo die Hose anfaengt, heert die Kultur auf."⁷⁰

Surrealist touches are to be found in some of the plays, and they contribute also to the grotesque humour of the plays. Es steht geschrieben has both a Surrealist element in the stage settings and in the way the characters address the audience and talk about their inventor. In

⁶⁷
Ibid., p. 27.

⁶⁸
Ibid., p. 42.

⁶⁹
Ibid., p. 58.

⁷⁰
Ibid., p. 30.

particular, the surrealist touch can be seen in the stage directions in the middle of the play in the painting of the camp of the Landsknechte on wrapping paper showing a yellow three-quarter moon, the planet Saturn with its rings and Mars with its canals; later on in the play, there is a fantastic dance on the rooftops in the light of the full moon. In a later play, surrealism is present again in the scenery for instance of Die Ehe des Herrn Mississippi, with the hanging and disappearing pictures and the mirrors with their contrary views. However, the surrealist elements do not exist on their own as comedy; they only serve to enhance the comedy created by the characters and situations.

Farcical elements contribute to the comedy and they are particularly humorous when combined with the deliberate anachronisms used in his plays and prose; i.e. in works set in ancient or historical times. There are several allusions to the Nazi era in Romulus der Grosse: Romulus makes Mars Reichsmarschall -- probably an allusion to Hitler's Reichsmarschall Goering. He also mentions practices popular in modern Europe; for instance, the girl who wrote on Mars' sword was "Ein Dienstaedchen aus Helvetien"⁷¹, perhaps a reference to the many Swiss girls employed abroad as house helps.

It has now been seen that the different forms of

⁷¹
Ibid., p. 38.

comedy in Duerrenmatt's works are partly influenced by his picture of the world today. Although a master in many forms of comedy, he tends to favour those which reflect the world of today in its horror and incongruity represented in the grotesque and absurd and his satire and parody of the past.

CHAPTER IV

When a man such as Duerrenmatt in the twentieth century, with a cultured background and a vast knowledge of literature becomes a dramatist, it is inevitable that critics will examine his work from the point of view of the influence of other authors, and will point out in his plays similarities with other works and that they will go even so far as to accuse him of plagiarism, particularly in his early works. This chapter is not intended as an attempt to reduce and criticise his style, structure and content, but rather to show the influence of other authors and their works on the formation of his own individual type of comedy and on the dramatic structure of his plays.

One can distinguish in Duerrenmatt's works three kinds of influence from other authors: There is, first of all, a conscious imitation of another man's style out of a sense of admiration. This would be so in the case of many of the authors Duerrenmatt mentions in Theaterprobleme, as for instance, Wilder and Nestroy. Admiration for an author, however, does not explicitly imply that Duerrenmatt will imitate him and it would be wrong to search in Duerrenmatt's works for some slight association with a particular author, purely because Duerrenmatt happened to pay him a tribute. There must, of course, be reasonable evidence of the influ-

ence in the works themselves. Secondly, there is the unconscious imitation: Duerrenmatt may at one point have read a play or novel in which something struck him as particularly effective, and in later years he may have used this specific device in his works under the illusion that it was his own creation (or, the unconscious imitation may be such that it is really coincidental; Duerrenmatt may himself not have read the particular work, but had an idea which afterwards was seen to bear striking similarity with the work of another author). Thirdly, is that which Elisabeth Brock-Sulzer refers to in Duerrenmatt's works as an "Anti-Stellung". She says on this point: "Doch ist Auseinandersetzung, Feindschaft oft schoepferischer Anlass fuer Duerrenmatt. Sein ausgesprochen kaempferisches Temperament laesst ihn sich an der Abwehrstellung inspirieren. Duerrenmatt ist ein Anti-Schiller, ein Anti-Claudel, ein Anti-Brecht¹".

This "anti" attitude often expresses itself in the form of parody (as ridicule). What Duerrenmatt ridicules is the pertinence in the present day of the ideas concerning heroism, and the tragic presented by authors of past centuries. (As Duerrenmatt's parody has been examined by the writer in Chapter III, p. 78-85, it does not seem

¹
 Elisabeth Brock-Sulzer, Duerrenmatt und die Quellen, in Der unbequeme Duerrenmatt, Basel/Stuttgart: Basilius Presse, 1962, p. 125.

necessary to go into this aspect in any detail here).

The influence of authors and their works will be examined in the main in relation to the structure of the plays and to the forms of comedy in them.

Perhaps the most quoted source of Duerrenmatt's own brand of humour and style of comedy is Aristophanes. Certainly Duerrenmatt has a great admiration for the Greek dramatist and mentions him several times in Theaterprobleme, chiefly as one of the first dramatists who were original and who established the tradition of comedy as being based on invention and originality. "Aristophanes lebt vom Einfall"², says Duerrenmatt. At another point he mentions Aristophanes in connection with Nestroy and has this to say: "Nun hat man jederzeit nicht nur auf, sondern mit der Buehne gedichtet, ich denke etwa an die Komcedien des Aristophanes oder an die Lustspiele Nestroys, . . ."³ (We also know that Duerrenmatt had read many of Aristophanes' works he mentions specifically The Birds, The Clouds, Acharnes and Lysistrata).

In an article in Literatur und Kunst, Duerrenmatt points out that Aristophanes also creates "Distans" in his works and shows the importance of Distans in comedy: "Da

²
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Theaterprobleme, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1960, p. 47.

³
Ibid., p. 25.

sich seine Komödien in der Gegenwart abspielen, schafft er Distanz, und ich glaube, dass dies fuer eine Komödie wesentlich ist. Daraus waere zu schliessen, dass ein Zeitstueck nur eine Komödie im Sinne des Aristophanes sein kann⁴.

He also recalls that Aristophanes introduced grotesque elements into his work.

There is therefore no doubt of Duerrenmatt's admiration for Aristophanes, but what of the influence of Aristophanes on Duerrenmatt's works? There are no doubt similarities between the two authors in the form of the comedy. Both rely for comic effect on plays on words or puns and satire; the comedy in both cases is usually crude and brutal, often farcical. The surface of comedy mostly covers a bitter underlying theme.

There often is, in Aristophanes, a distinct lack of plot, something one generally finds in the play of today. By concrete illustrations Aristophanes shows how ridiculous or advantageous it would be to follow a certain policy. His plays have often the character of a pantomime, burlesque or musical farce. The characters are often caricatures framed in fantasy.

The love of play on words and puns in Aristophanes

⁴Friedrich Duerrenmatt, "Anmerkung zur Komödie", Literatur und Kunst, Die Weltwoche, 20. Jahrgang, No. 954, (23. Februar 1952), p. 5

naturally must lose in translation, but the translation is sufficient to give a general idea of the sort of puns he makes: In The Clouds, Amnyias says to Strepsiades: "By God, I have - my horses throw me down" and Strepsiades replies: "Horses? You drive, as if ass-ass-inated."⁵ Or in The Birds, Cleonymous, the glutton is transformed into a "Glut-hen."⁶

As far as the satire is concerned, Duerrenmatt's use differs from Aristophanes'. Duerrenmatt's satire is directed towards the classical authors, politics, etc., and he hardly ever refers to any of his contemporaries, whereas Aristophanes' satire is directed almost without exception at the authors of his time. Euripides and Sophocles are two of his favourite subjects but his range is very wide. In The Birds again, it is Philocles the tragic poet who is the victim of his biting satire in the assertion that Philocles plagiarised the drama of Sophocles called Tereus. It is no longer possible for Duerrenmatt to make any direct attack on a living writer in the same blatant way in which Aristophanes attacked his contemporaries; this sort of attack might easily be followed nowadays by a libel suit. Satire of this kind is today more the subject for the

⁵
Aristophanes, The Clouds, trans. F.L. Lucas, London: J.M. Dent, 1954, ll. 1269 - 1270, p. 411.

⁶
Aristophanes, The Birds, trans. Marshall MacGregor, Cambridge, Mass: Riverside Press, 1946, l. 351, p. 97.

cabaret than the stage.

In another field of his satire, Aristophanes in The Birds, deals a blow at religion, a very daring attempt in his day. He shows that Zeus is not the most helpful of gods, and depicts him as neglecting his worshippers: ". . . For you won't find us proud flying off to a cloud, / As does Zeus, there to perch, leaving you in the lurch, . . ."⁷

It has also been pointed out in Chapter I that Duerrenmatt makes certain satirical allusions to religion and the hypocrisy of believers.

In the writer's opinion, the influence of Aristophanes on Duerrenmatt has been grossly overrated by most critics. It is true that there are certain similarities between the two dramatists, but the tradition of Aristophanes' comedy has been passed down through the centuries and it is far more possible that the influence of Aristophanes came indirectly to Duerrenmatt. Elisabeth Brock-Sulzer suggests that Duerrenmatt might at times be hiding Gotthelf's inspiration behind⁸ Aristophanes.

In the opinion of the writer, the influence of Aristophanes came rather in an indirect way to Duerrenmatt, through Nestroy, who as will be seen later has a predominant

⁷ Ibid., 11. 1013 - 1014, p. 107.

⁸ Elisabeth Brock-Sulzer, Duerrenmatt und die Quellen, in Der unbequeme Duerrenmatt, Basel/Stuttgart; Basilius Presse, 1962, p. 134.

influence upon Duerrenmatt. The reason for the critics' insistence upon the influence of Aristophanes on Duerrenmatt lies, in all probability, in the fact that Duerrenmatt obviously admires him and mentions him so frequently.

Let us consider Duerrenmatt's relationship to another Greek classical author: In Theaterprobleme Duerrenmatt devotes a portion of the essay to a discussion of the use of Aristotle's unities in the structure of the Greek tragedy. Duerrenmatt points out the strict adherence of the classical writers to the rules of the unities of time and place and compares their plays to those of today where one rarely finds such a regard:

Die Einheit des Aristoteles ist die Forderung nach grösster Praezision, grösster Dichte und grösster Einfachheit der dramatischen Mittel. Die Einheit des Ortes, der Zeit und der Handlung waere im Grunde ein Imperativ, den die Literaturwissenschaft dem Dramatiker stellen muesste, und den sie nur deshalb nicht stellt, weil das Gesetz des Aristoteles seit Jahr und Tag niemand befolgt; 9

Although Duerrenmatt is no longer forced to adhere to these rules, he was impressed by the structure of the classical play, and in Romulus der Grosse and Die Physiker we find Duerrenmatt sticking closely to the pattern of ancient drama as far as the structure is concerned. Romulus der Grosse is divided into four acts and the unities of time and place are not only kept, but Duerrenmatt points

9
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Theaterprobleme, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1960, p. 11.

out especially by reference to time that the action takes place within twenty-four hours just as Aristotle directed. The introduction to the first act states: "Man saeht das Jahr 476 als an einem fruhen Maerzmorgen der Praefekt Spurius Titus Mamma auf vorerndendem Pferd den kaiserlichen Sommersitz¹⁰ in Campanien erreicht,". The second act states "Nachmittag des unheilvollen Maerstages vierhundertsechundsiebzig.", and at the beginning of the third act it is "Die Nacht der Iden des Maerz . . ." and the final act takes place on the morning of the next day. Thus the action has covered a complete twenty-four hours. The unity of place is preserved by setting the whole action in the villa of Romulus in Campania. The events move on a realistic plane. In other plays it will be seen that Duerrenmatt goes to great lengths to destroy any illusion of reality; following the pattern of modern dramatists, time and place are deliberately distorted and confused. Aristotle also comes in for parody in Der Blinde, the poet Gnadenbret Suppe explains the importance of the work he has written: "Ich habe den Tod des Nestor geschrieben, eine Tragedie in Alexandrinern, mit Choeren in asklepiadeischen Strophen, wobei die Einheit von Ort, Zeit¹¹ und Handlung aufs peinlichste gewahrt worden ist."

¹⁰
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Komcedien I, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1961, p. 11.

¹¹
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Der Blinde, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1960, p. 12.

The influence of Shakespeare comes mostly under the category of "Anti-Stellung", that is, as has been stated, his work is for Duerrenmatt mostly the object of parody (as ridicule as has been seen in Chapter III, p. 78-85). Shakespeare's influence can also be seen to a slight extent in the way in which Duerrenmatt portrays in detail the minor characters; in them the most pure humour can often be found, without the touch of pathos with which the other characters are tainted. This is reminiscent of the minor characters in Shakespeare's comedies. A similarity might also be found between the appetites of Hockelson in Es steht¹²
geschrieben and of Falstaff in King Henry the Fourth during the eating scenes.

As Molière is regarded as one of the greatest protagonists of comedy, one would expect to find that his style had made itself felt in Duerrenmatt's works. However, Duerrenmatt clearly regards Molière as a representative of "Gesellschaftskomoedie" with which he himself is not concerned, as he points out in Theaterprobleme; he does not feel that Molière fits into his own pattern of comedy; for comedy represents in Duerrenmatt's words: "Eine ungestaltete, im Werden, im Umsturz begriffene, eine Welt, die am
¹³
Zusammenpacken ist wie die unsrige."

¹²
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Es steht geschrieben, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1959, p. 75-76.

¹³
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Theaterprobleme, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1960, p. 45.

Molière's world is too orderly, too much the society of the seventeenth century, too much a portrayal of the ideas of that time to be compared with Duerrenmatt's. The comedy is often bound to the time in which it was written to the extent that the true sense is lost in this century; the main characters such as the miser, the misanthropist, etc., are mostly representatives of certain vices rather than individuals as in Duerrenmatt's works. For Schiller, Duerrenmatt has admiration, and an "Anti-Stellung" towards his heroic figures; an "Anti-Stellung" because the theatre of Schiller's time presents the tragic hero (in its true sense), a presentation no longer possible in the literature of today. Again the "Anti-Stellung" takes the form of parody of the heroic situation. Nevertheless he sees affinities between Schiller and himself in Schiller-eine Rede. Often his words on Schiller might be equally applicable to himself. Both Schiller and Duerrenmatt are concerned with the dramatic theory and its relation to creative writing. Strikingly similar is the way in which Duerrenmatt describes the downfall of Schiller's heroes, the description could be a comment on his own plays: "Der Mensch scheitert am unnatuerlichen Zustande der Welt . . . Der Mensch geht schuldlos zugrunde. Sein Opfer bleibt nur in einer inneren Weise sinnvoll."

¹⁴
¹⁴ Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Schiller-eine Rede, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1960, p. 26.

The possible influence of Gotthelf, Duerrenmatt's compatriot, has been indicated by both Elisabeth Brock-Sulzer and by Hans Baensiger. Duerrenmatt himself does not mention Gotthelf, although he usually mentions the names of the other authors he admires. The influence would therefore possibly be an unconscious one. However, the influence of Gotthelf is in the opinion of the writer a rather superficial one and based mainly on the fact that both writers originate from the same town, and therefore their national and civic background would be comparable. The influence of Switzerland itself will be discussed at a later point. Baensiger tries to draw a parallel between Die schwarze Spinne and Der Besuch der alten Dame. There is of course a similarity in situation. Both works turn on a setting in a small community; the question in both is whether the soul of one person can be sacrificed for the well-being of the community. There, the similarity ends. Die schwarze Spinne is a definite threat to the town, an impending danger, which takes lives; a sacrifice of a child, although it does not take place, would be plausible. In Quellen the question is one of prosperity. The promise of money although the town is in a financial depression, does not warrant the sacrifice of a human life and Ill's death is not a necessity. The Gotthelf tale is romantic and fantastic in character and at the same time it has a moral which is made very clear. The author shows

quite clearly his Protestant background. Duerrenmatt has no didactic purpose, but wishes to reflect in a realistic manner the moral degradation of the people of his time. He does not present a solution. Despite the loss of life the ending of Gotthelf's story is a happy one, whereas Duerrenmatt's lets the victim die without showing any sense of guilt or remorse in the other townsfolk. Der Besuch der alten Dame has more in common with an ancient tragedy in which tragic fate comes to a person or a place and the audience and the readers know that there is no escape. Duerrenmatt has given an indication at the end of his play that this is the way in which he intended the character of Claire to be interpreted: "Die reichste Frau der Welt, durch ihr Vermoegen in der Lage, wie eine Heldin der griechischen Tragoedie zu handeln, absolut, grausam, wie Medea etwa."¹⁵

On one point all critics seem to agree. Namely that Nestroy has had a decisive influence upon the style and the forms of the comedy in Duerrenmatt's works. This can be ascertained not only in the form of the plays themselves but also from Duerrenmatt's comments about the plays in Theaterprobleme. At one point when he is commenting about one of his comedies, he even urges critics to regard

¹⁵
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Komoedien I, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1961, p. 352.

him as a twentieth century Nestroy and therefore one cannot go wrong if one looks for similarities between the two authors. At the end of Der Besuch der alten Dame Duerrenmatt says this: "Man inszeniere mich auf die Richtung von Volkstuecken hin, behandle mich als eine Art bewussten Nestroy, und man wird am weitesten kommen."¹⁶

Though Duerrenmatt makes several statements about the Viennese theatre in general,¹⁷ he makes it clear that he does not have the same admiration for other representatives of the Austrian theatre; he thinks far more highly of Nestroy and Raimund than of Hofmannsthal.¹⁸

Baenziger points out that the Volkstheater style is most suitable for Duerrenmatt's style of humour: "Die Poesie, duerfte man oft konstatieren, war Duerrenmatt immer lieb gewesen; denn auch im Wiener Volkstueck gab es viel Sinn fuer die Parodie, Einfaele, Gesang, Narrenfreiheit, gab es jenen unerhoert aggressiven und doch nicht bitteren Humor, der noch naeher zum Theater gehoert als die Zeitkritik des Kabarets."¹⁹

¹⁶
Ibid., p. 352.

¹⁷
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Theaterprobleme, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1960, p. 20.

¹⁸
Ibid., p. 15.

¹⁹
Hans Baenziger, Frisch und Duerrenmatt, Bern und Muenchen: Franke Verlag, 1960, p. 186.

To show how similar are the styles of these two authors one must examine more carefully the style of Nestroy. Nestroy relies for much of his humour on "Zeitkritik" and satire, parody, farcical elements, play on words and puns. He portrays the bourgeois life with a realistic touch. His language is often ironic and then crude. Behind his wit, his light approach, lies a cynical streak which one might ignore on first reading his plays and which differentiates him from the other authors of the Viennese Volkstheater. His cynicism is directed towards ambition in careers, material greed, striving for social position. His parody is often un pitying. Hans Weigel quotes Karl Kraus writing of Nestroy: "Nestroy ist der erste deutsche Satiriker bei dem sich die Sprache Gedanken macht ueber die Dinge."²⁰

His parody is often directed as in Duerrenmatt's towards classical authors and authors of former centuries in general. He rarely attacks his contemporaries - which brings him closer to Duerrenmatt than Aristophanes. Nestroy's play Judith und Holofernes is a deliberate parody of Hebbel's Judith. The early play Der boesse Geist Lumpazivagabundus is a parody of Grimmelhausen's Simplicissimus, in the form of three "Schelme" and their fates and fortunes. It could also be interpreted as a parody of the Romantic

20

Johann Nestroy, Ausgewahlte Werke, ed. Hans Weigel, Wien: Brukner und Rommel, 1960, p. 20.

"Taugenichtssehnsucht". In another play Der Talisman, when Titus the main character sees his pose has been discovered and his career and hopes will be smashed he lets out a cry: "Das ist Ottokars Glueck und Ende"²¹, a reference to Grillparzer's play.

In Der boese Geist Lumpasivagabundus again, the first scene takes the form of a parody of the "Prolog im Himmel" in Goethe's Faust. It takes place in the "Wolkenpalast des Feenkoenigs" and is a similar wager for the salvation of the souls of men, this time between the evil spirit Lumpasivagabundus and the queen of the fairies Stellaris and Fortuna. It is interesting to note that Duerrenmatt used the same parody of "Prolog im Himmel" in Es steht geschrieben (as has been shown in Chapter III), although not to the same extent. It is very likely that Duerrenmatt admired the parody in Nestroy and used it in his own work. Der boese Geist Lumpasivagabundus could also be interpreted as a protest against higher powers; it takes the form more of parody and satire than of protest. Duerrenmatt's Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon, is similar: the representative of the heavens is represented as fallible, absent-minded and often not entirely aware of the situation around him.

21

Ibid., p. 252.

Satire is common to both authors and it often takes the same forms.

In Der boese Geist Lumpasivagabundus the representatives of the bourgeois society are satirized, just as the representatives of certain professions are the objects of parody and satire in Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon. Society and the superficial conventions of it, leading to hypocrisy, come in for a great deal of attack in Nestroy. The importance of class structure is revealed in Fruehere Verhaeltnisse where Scheitermann lives in constant fear lest his wife should discover his own humble origins and background. Often the satire is not so obvious but Nestroy makes certain remarks to show his contempt and cynical attitude to the customs of the time. In Der Talisman Emma wants to persuade her mother, Frau von Cypressenburg to let Titus grow a moustache and beard because he would look fashionable on the
 22
 coach.

Duerrenmatt's similar attitude to the hypocrisy of society has been pointed out previously and illustrated from Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon.

Both dramatists have a brilliant command of language and punning or playing with words is a favourite device in the plays. Many of the puns are dependent in Nestroy's

works upon Austrian dialect, take for example Titus' pun in Der Talisman: "Ich bin herbstellt"²³ (herbestellt, that is ordered, commanded, and the other, phonetically identical, alternative, is herbstelt - from the verb herbsteln, to become like autumn). The punning feature of Duerrenmatt's comedy has also already been pointed out and illustrated but the writer will give another example here in order to show the similarities with Nestroy's works. In Romulus der Grosse the emperor makes this pun: "Wir haben uns an der Grosse unseres Vaterlandes wie mit Wein berauscht, aber nun ist Wermut geworden, was wir liebten."²⁴

Nestroy often makes puns in "hochdeutsch". Particularly effective are the puns in his Der Talisman: For example, the wigmaker threatens Titus: "Vergessen Sie ja nicht, dass Ihr Schicksal am Haare haengt - Ihr Kopf ist in meiner Gewalt."²⁵

Behind this joviality and merriment lies the disillusionment of life which Nestroy seemed to experience despite his sense of humour. For despite the "Lebensfreude" which the characters of Lumpasivagabundus his lightest play

²³

Ibid., p. 268.

²⁴

Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Komödien I, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1961, p. 59.

²⁵

Johann Nestroy, Ausgewählte Werke, ed. Hans Weigel, Wien: Brukner und Rommel, 1960, p. 235 - 236.

evidenced we find the fear of the threat of the destruction of the world through a comet, and Knieriem is convinced of this: "Aber auch der Mindergebildete kann alle Tage Sachen genug bemerken, welche deutlich beweisen, dass die Welt nicht lange mehr steht, kurzum oben und unten sieht man, es geht rein auf'n Untergang los."²⁶

Similarly the characters of Das Unternehmen der Wege fear for their eventual annihilation and the destruction of the world.

Nestroy sees man's cause as a hopeless one, and it is perhaps just because of his disillusionment that he flees into the "Posse" or farce, as a form of escape. The elements of absurdity in Duerrenmatt's plays can also be interpreted as the flight of the characters from reality. Absurdity and farce serve as a superficial cover for the tragic quality of life. Nestroy's plays often run the risk of becoming so sceptical and bitter that the author has to introduce a "deus ex machina" in the form of a happy resolution to save the plays from tragedy and preserve the comedy. Duerrenmatt's plays also often start in the comic vein and progress into bitterness and disillusionment and the light fanciful mood of the beginning of the play is rarely recaptured. The farce and humour dissolve finally into

seriousness often verging on tragedy as for example Romulus der Grosse or Die Physiker; and the mood of the beginning of the play is not recaptured. It must be pointed out that in the case of Nestroy the above does not apply to his early play Lumpazivagabundus for Nestroy's cynicism breaks through increasingly during his development as a dramatist in his later years.

The optimistic resolution of Nestroy's plays may be viewed in a different way: the "Happy End" also becomes questionable. His plays often end in the union of two people in marriage; on the surface this provides a satisfactory end for a comedy. However, if one is aware of Nestroy's attitude to marriage, the whole picture is changed. His own disillusionment with his first marriage determined his attitude to marriage in general and he sums up marriage in the following way according to Weigel: "Auf jeden Fall ein Trauerspiel, weil der Held oder die Heldin sterben muss, sonst wird's nicht aus."²⁷

Nestroy makes use of the chorus in one of his plays, namely Lumpazivagabundus where there is a chorus of old conjurers and also a chorus of society. Duerrenmatt also uses the chorus in Der Besuch der alten Dame for instance, and both Duerrenmatt's and Nestroy's uses of the chorus

²⁷
Johann Nestroy, Ausgewahlte Werke, ed. Hans Weigel, Wien: Brukner und Rommel, 1960, p. 15.

can be interpreted as parodies of the classical chorus.

Another feature of Nestroy's work which may very likely have influenced Duerrenmatt, is the intermingling of farcical and witty language with rhetoric and tragical style. This has been seen in Duerrenmatt's works; in Nestroy often the rhetoric style can be seen in the monologues of his characters. In Der Talisman for instance Titus says: "Das stolze Gebaeude meiner Hoffnungen ist assekuranzlos abbrennt, meine Gluecksaktien sind um hundert Prozent gefallen . . . Welt schicke deine Waelder ueber mich, Waelder lasst eure Raeber los auf mich . . ."²⁸

The mixture of comic and serious elements which sometimes lightens the humourous effect can be seen in both authors: with Nestroy, in the song of the "Weltuntergang" which is written in a "Laendlertakt" and in Duerrenmatt's opera Frank V. where Boeckmann sings the gruesome song of Herbert Molten:

Als aus Olten
Herbert Molten
Buchexperte kam gefahren
Musst ich schicken, grau von Haaren
In die Hoelle diesen Narren
²⁹
Gnade meiner Tat.

28

Ibid., p. 253.

29

Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Frank V., Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1960, p. 53.

A further similarity between Nestroy and Duerrenmatt is the fact that both authors choose names for their characters of their plays which indicate their particular profession or trade. This has been seen in Romulus der Grosse for instance, where the war minister was called Mares, to quote just one of the numerous examples. This feature is particularly characteristic of Nestroy's play Lumpasivagabundus. The carpenter's apprentice is called Lein, Knieriem is the cobbler's apprentice, Fassel is the Oberknecht in the brewery, and Hackauf is the butcher.

So far attention has been paid only to the influence of Nestroy on Duerrenmatt's comedy as far as various stylistic devices are concerned. He has also had a certain influence on the dramatic structure of Duerrenmatt's plays. In Theaterprobleme Duerrenmatt admires the use of the possibility of experimenting with the time element: "In der Zauberposse 'Der Tod am Hochzeitstag' von Nestroy aber, um ein Beispiel zu nehmen, gibt es zwei Akte, die gleichzeitig spielen und mit Geschick ist diese Gleichzeitigkeit dadurch vorgetauscht, dass die Handlung des zweiten Aktes die Geraeuschkulisse fuer den ersten und die Handlung des ersten die Geraeuschkulisse fuer den zweiten Akt bildet."³⁰

Duerrenmatt did not use this exact technique himself,

³⁰
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Theaterprobleme, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1960, p. 30.

but he did experiment with the use of the time element in his plays. It would not be correct to say that this is the only influence, for it will be seen later that several dramatists had an important influence upon the dramatic structure of Duerrenmatt's plays.

Duerrenmatt talks in Theaterprobleme of the Wiener Volkstheater in general; it is therefore highly likely that he was also an admirer of Raimund. Most of Raimund's plays are far more idyllic, often fantasies set in fairyland. Nestroy's and Duerrenmatt's plays generally move on a more realistic plane and in the case of the latter do not indulge, in the main, in the fantastic. There is however one exception in Duerrenmatt's works and in this play theme and plot are so similar to one of Raimund's that it is difficult to believe that it is pure coincidence. Raimund's play is Der Bauer als Millionaer which bears a marked similarity to Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon. A very brief outline of the plot of the play by the Austrian author will be sufficient to show the similarity. The play is a "Rahmenstueck" and it is the frame which is so similar to Duerrenmatt's. The fairy Lacrimosa has taken upon herself a duty imposed by the Queen of the spirits to put her child on the earth in order that the child will marry a poor man, because in this way she will experience true love. The parallel is obvious. In Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon Kurrubi is set on earth by the angel to

search for the poorest man.

Frank Wedekind must be considered one of the more modern authors whose example Duerrenmatt can be seen to have followed. The whole atmosphere of the grotesque may have come from Wedekind, particularly the surrealistic depiction of characters. It is interesting to note that the first act of Die Ehe des Herrn Mississippi was so similar to Schloss Wetterstein that Tilly Wedekind accused Duerrenmatt of plagiarism.³¹ The similarity is quite apparent. Both plays have as the subject a marriage which for both marriage partners is a torture. While in the first act of the plays each married couple is having a discussion, tea is served in Wedekind's play, coffee in Duerrenmatt's. In reply to the accusation Tilly Wedekind made, Duerrenmatt wrote Bekenntnisse eines Plagiators in which he explained the significance of the coffee, and showed how the two characters are really progressions of the figures of Romulus. This similarity between Wedekind's play and Duerrenmatt's is noted by Baenziger and he quotes Duerrenmatt's defence: "Der Staatsanwalt Mississippi sei eine Weiterfuehrung der Gestalt des Romulus, der sich auch damit rechtfertige, dass er ein Richter sei . . . Aus dem Verhaeltnis Romulus - Julia das ebenfalls eine Ehe mit einer bestimmten Absicht sei, habe

31

Hans Baenziger, Frisch und Duerrenmatt, Bern und Muenchen: Franke Verlag, 1960, p. 148.

sich folgerichtig die Ehe Mississippi Anastasia entwickelt

32
 . . ."

In the light of this defence it seems quite plausible that Duerrenmatt was guilty here of an unconscious imitation, of the kind mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. There are other similarities between Duerrenmatt and Wedekind. Wedekind was satiric, ironic and anti-social, and he was a member of one of the first literary cabarets in Germany. But there the similarity ends. There is nothing in Duerrenmatt's works of the erotic and the sexual depravity which appears in Wedekind's works.

If there is any influence of Kafka on Duerrenmatt it is concentrated more on the prose works with the sinister, horrifying atmosphere as for instance in Der Tunnel.

Baenziger points out the strong resemblance between Duerrenmatt's Komödie and Kafka's short prose work Vor dem Gesetz. Adam stands before the entrance of the castle and is trying to get in. He meets the same opposition as the man in Kafka's version. Both authors portray the helplessness of man in situations which get the better of him. In another play Der Besuch der alten Dame the figures of Koby and Loby part of the grotesque entourage of Claire, bear a certain similarity to the "Gehilfen" in Das Schloss. Both couples talk at the same time and both look similar in

appearance. Their personalities seem to be so closely related that one would be inconceivable without the other.

Again in his prose work, Duerrenmatt reminds one also of Ernst Juenger. In Die Falle the outlook and the personality of one of the characters seem to be the ideas and philosophy of Ernst Juenger in human form. Duerrenmatt seems to have woven the ideas of Waldgang into a narrative. Duerrenmatt shows the fear of a man before the threat of death in the world of today. Fear is the leading thread of his life, it is responsible for all his actions including crime. Juenger says in Waldgang: "Menschliche Furcht zu allen Zeiten, in allen Raemen, in jedem Herzen ist ein und dieselbe, ist Furcht vor der Vernichtung, ist Todesfurcht . . . Der Waldgang ist daher in erster Linie Todesgang. Er fuehrt hart an den Tod heran - ja, wenn es sein muss, durch ihn durch."³³

The man in the prose work Die Falle goes through the wood, his thoughts are on death and there he experiences death; he sees a man die and we see the impact of the man's death upon him: "Er lag dann als eine dunkle unfoermige Masse . . . und er wusste nun, dass, wo der Unglueckliche lag, mitten durch dessen Leib die Grenze verlief, durch den blutigen Kreis sichtbar geworden, der

³³
Ernst Juenger, Der Waldgang, Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1922, Vol. V, p. 342.

den Toten umgab."³⁴

Three dramatists have had a profound effect upon the formation of Duerrenmatt's style as far as the structure of his plays is concerned. All three are mentioned in Theaterprobleme and their example can be seen to have been followed in the works of Duerrenmatt.

He mentions Pirandello in connection with the modern form of presenting characters on the stage in such a way that the spectator becomes involved with their situations and conflicts: "Hier ist endlich Pirandello zu erwahnen, der den Helden, die Person auf der Buehne, als erster soweit ich sehe, entstofflicht, transparent machte . . . wobei das Publikum solchen Szenen gegenueber seiner eigenen Zergliederung beiwohnt, der Psychoanalyse seiner selbst, und die Buehne zum Innenraum, zum Weltinnenraum wird."³⁵

It is also possible that Pirandello influenced Duerrenmatt in other ways. Pirandello, as one of the proantagonists of the theatre of disillusionment, used the breakdown of stage rules and conventions in Six characters in Search of an Author whereas the characters born of a playwright's imagination, then sidetracked came upon a stage where a

³⁴
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Die Falle, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1959, p. 83.

³⁵
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Theaterprobleme, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1960, p. 42.

group of actors are in rehearsal. The six characters proceed to enact the drama for which they were conceived and insist that the company rehearse it after them. The actors endeavour unsuccessfully to play the six characters, until the unexpected suicide of one of the characters stops the rehearsal. Duerrenmatt's characters are often aware that they are playing a part and that they are in a theatre. The above mentioned play by Pirandello introduces one of the central themes in his work; a theme which also makes itself felt in one of Duerrenmatt's plays: The variation on the theme of illusion versus reality. The play in which Duerrenmatt deals with this particular theme is Der Blinde. Again in Pirandello's Naked, people constantly hide behind illusions to avoid unpleasant reality. The leading figures Ersilia, Laspiga and the consul try to cover the "naked" truth by lies about their actions and their characters.

In Duerrenmatt's play, blindness is the means by which a man can continue to live in illusion. Palamedes, the son of the duke, wants his father to remain under the illusion because he knows the truth is too cruel. He says to his father: "Euch, Vater, wird meine Wahrheit zu einem Standbild erstarren lassen."

³⁶
Luigi Pirandello, Naked, in Chief Patterns of World Drama, Cambridge, Mass.: Riverside Press, 1946, p. 995.

³⁷
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Der Blinde, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1960, p. 53.

The Duke is called "Der Glueckliche" and his happiness depends on the illusion which the children can preserve because of his blindness: "Ich bin der Herzog, den man den Gluecklichen nennt. Es gehoert mir alles, was Euch umgibt und was Ihr seht."³⁸

Another modern author greatly admired by Duerrenmatt is Thornton Wilder. It is in his works that one finds the best examples of the disillusionment of the stage through the representation of place and setting:

Die beiden Theaterstuecke der letzten Jahre, die am deutlichsten die Moeglichkeit illustrieren, die ich Entstofflichung des Buehnenbildes und Entstofflichung des Ortes nennen will, sind Wilder's "Kleine Stadt" und Wir sind noch einmal davongekommen. Die Entstofflichung der Buehne in der "Kleinen Stadt" ist diese: Sie ist leer, nur die Gegenstaende stehen da, die man zur Probe benoetigt, Stuehle, Tische, Leitern usw., und aus diesen Alltagsgegenstaenden entsteht der Ort, der dramatische Ort, die kleine Stadt, allein durch das Wort, durch das Spiel, das die Phantasie des Zuschauers erweckt. 39

Duerrenmatt admires Wilder as an exponent of the epic theatre in which no curtain is needed because the characters talk directly to the audience and the narrator in the form of the stage manager in Our Town explains the change of time and setting: "Jedermann weiss, dass sich in ihm [Our Town] verschiedene Personen ans Publikum wenden und von den Noeten und Sorgen der Kleinen Stadt erzahlen. Damit erreicht Wilder, dass er keinen Vorhang mehr braucht.

39

Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Theaterprobleme, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1960, p. 24.

Der Vorhang ist durch die Anrede an das Publikum ersetzt. Zu der Dramatik tritt die Epik, die Schilderung, Daher nennt man diese Theaterform episches Theater."⁴⁰

It is very likely that Duerrenmatt saw a production of Our Town in Zuerich as it was produced there in the Schauspielhaus in 1939. If one examines the play one can find several parallels with Duerrenmatt's works. Before dealing with the structure which Duerrenmatt admired so much one must point out also a parallel between the content of Our Town and Der Besuch der alten Dame. Duerrenmatt creates the same atmosphere of the small town in his representation of Quellen. We may cite two incidents from the two plays, which show the pride of the people in the significance of their respective towns.

The Stage Manager says while describing the town: "Bryan once made a speech from these steps here"⁴¹ (referring to the politician) and in Duerrenmatt's play one of the townsfolk says: "Goethe hat hier uebernachtet."⁴²

The stage manager says in Our Town: "Hawkins is

⁴⁰

Ibid., p. 31.

⁴¹

Thornton Wilder, Our Town, New York: Coward McCann Inc., 1938, p. 10.

⁴²

Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Komoedien I, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1961, p. 264.

getting ready to flag the 5:45 for Boston."⁴³

The same knowledge of trains and train times is displayed in Quellen:

Der Erste: "Die Gudrun: Hamburg Neapel."

Der Zweite: "Um elfuhrsiebenundzwanzig kommt der Rasende Roland Venedig-Stockholm." 44

In Our Town can be found similarities with some of the theatrical devices which Duerrenmatt uses in his plays. Perhaps the best example for Duerrenmatt's use of the disillusionment of time on the stage is in Die Ehe des Herrn Mississippi (which has been quoted several times for this reason). Sainte-Claude takes us back in time at the beginning of Die Ehe des Herrn Mississippi. He plays the same role at the beginning of the play as the stage manager in Our Town. Duerrenmatt describes him in the following way: "Sainte-Claude kehrt sich zum Publikum und spricht das folgende, teils wie ein Theaterdirector eines ziemlich verschmierten Theaters, teils wie ein Mephisto."⁴⁵

The sequence of the events is turned upside down just as it is in Our Town where the stage manager takes us

⁴³
Thornton Wilder, Our Town, New York: Coward McCann Inc., 1938, p. 12.

⁴⁴
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Komödien I, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1961, p. 263.

⁴⁵
Ibid., p. 92.

backward and forward in time. For example his introductory speech: "There's Doc Gibbs comin' down Main Street now . . . Doc Gibbs died in 1930."⁴⁶

Later on in the play the stage manager says: "There are some more things we've got to explore about this town. This time we're going to go back on it from the future."⁴⁷

Sainte-Claude acts as the narrator but he does not stand apart from the play; he takes part in it and a very active part. The character in Duerrenmatt's play addresses the audience in the same way as the characters in Our Town address the stage manager. In Duerrenmatt's play there is no actual curtain, but a sort of "Tafel" or "Leinwand" takes its place and Duerrenmatt adds an extra touch by letting the characters prevent or engineer the raising or falling of the cloth.

Brecht is a modern German dramatist who has had a part in developing Duerrenmatt's techniques.

Hans Mayer has pointed out the similarities between Brecht and Duerrenmatt as dramatists and has made clear especially the concept "Zuruecknahme", an idea which makes itself felt in Brecht's Galileo and Duerrenmatt's Die Physiker. Mayer quotes as an illustration in Mobius'

⁴⁶
Thornton Wilder, Our Town, New York: Coward McCann Inc., 1938, p. 12.

⁴⁷
Ibid., p. 38.

speech: "Wir muessen unser Wissen zuruecknehmen. Ich habe es zurueckgenommen. Es gibt keine andere Loesung, auch fuer euch nicht."⁴⁸

The similarity of ideas lies not only in the concept of "Zuruecknahme", but also in the idea that the hero is not possible in the world today. Mayer quotes Brecht's Galileo: "Ungluecklich das Land das Helden noetig hat."⁴⁹

Brecht avoids the tragic death on the stage, in fact he avoids stage death, in contrast to Duerrenmatt, as much as possible. Mayer points out that St. Joan's death is intended as a parody.

Hans Mayer gives a new solution to the similarities between Frank V. and Die Dreigroschenoper: "Frank V. diese Oper einer Privatbank, die nicht wie prompt behauptet wurde, ein Plagiat an der Dreigroschenoper darstellte, sondern eine Neufunktionierung des Brechtthemas aufstrebte. Bei Brecht auch Gangster sind eigentlich Buerger. Bei Duerrenmatt Buerger sind eigentlich Gangster."⁵⁰

It is also possible to interpret Frank V. as a parody on the part of Duerrenmatt of Brecht's opera. There are

⁴⁸
Hans Mayer, Duerrenmatt und Frisch, Pfuellingen: Neske Opuscula 4, 1963, p. 5.

⁴⁹
Ibid., p. 8.

⁵⁰
Ibid., p. 15.

naturally similarities sometimes quite striking which explains the outcry after Duerrenmatt's opera appeared. Such maxims as for instance: "Wer da hat dem wird gegeben, / Wer nichts hat, der stiehlt dann eben."⁵¹

The songs of Frieda Furst in Frank V. are very similar to those of Jenny and each has the same profession; Frieda could also equally well be a character in Brecht's Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny. Duerrenmatt's opera recalls Mahagonny in other ways. Frieda and the others sing of the evil which money or lack of money can bring about:

Und in dieser rohen Welt
 Hat der Arme zu lachen
 Fuer sein Geld.⁵²

In Mahagonny Begbick, Willy and Moses sing:

Wegen Mangel an Geld
 Was das gressste Verbrechen ist
 Das auf dem Erderund vorkommt.⁵³

"Gerechtigkeit" is a recurrent and central theme in most of Duerrenmatt's works; it also appears in Brecht's

⁵¹
 Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Frank V., Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1960, p. 20.

⁵²
Ibid., p. 21.

⁵³
 Bertolt Brecht, Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny, in Brecht, Stuecke III, Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1958, p. 246.

Mahagonny. Otilie's plea in Frank V. for justice is not heard but in the Brecht opera Dreieinigkeitsmoses says: "Darum beantrage ich, der Staatsanwalt / Der Gerechtigkeit freien Lauf zu lassen."⁵⁴

In the Dreigroschenoper Brecht reiterates one of his favourite themes, namely that man is good but that the circumstances of life force him to be evil: "Doch die Verhaeltnisse, die sind nicht so."⁵⁵

In Mahagonny we find the recurrent song: "Aber dieses ganze Mahagonny / Ist nur weil alles so schlecht ist."⁵⁶ Pauli in Frank V. has the same idea:

Schoen

Ich gebe nach

Der Mensch ist gut, wohl moeglich, doch

Die Erde, die dreht sich ja leider.

Was am Morgen du warst, bist du abends nicht mehr

Was du Gutes auch planst, es kommt anders nachher. . ."⁵⁷

⁵⁴
Ibid., p. 240.

⁵⁵
Bertolt Brecht, Die Dreigroschenoper, in Brecht, Stuecke III, Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1958, p. 61.

⁵⁶
Bertolt Brecht, Aufstieg und Fall der Stadt Mahagonny, in Brecht, Stuecke III, Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1958, p. 172.

⁵⁷
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Frank V., Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1960, p. 48.

Both Duerrenmatt and Brecht make use of the "Verfremdungstechnik" and in such plays as Duerrenmatt's Es steht geschrieben the distance between the players and the play is emphasised; the players take on the role of narrator. This may have been partly influenced by Brecht but Wilder must not be forgotten in this context.

Although Duerrenmatt dislikes to be mentioned in one breath with Frisch, which is often the tendency today, writers persist in doing so not purely because they are both Swiss dramatists and writing in German, but also because their work is similar in several ways. Particularly in one play Die chinesische Mauer which Frisch produced a year before Duerrenmatt's Es steht geschrieben one can see features which Duerrenmatt uses in his plays. The prologue of Frisch's play with Der Heutige is an attempt at disillusionment. The "Vorspiel" introduces the characters of the plays. It also has something very akin to the comedy or comic device which Duerrenmatt used in Romulus der Grosse, namely deliberate anachronisms, or with Frisch deliberate introduction of historical figures from all ages into one play. The deliberate distortion of time is similar to Es steht geschrieben and Die Ehe des Herrn Mississippi, in Die chinesische Mauer Der Heutige says: "Ich will es Ihnen melden Excellenz, dazu bin ich gekommen. -Sie starben, wenn ich nicht irre,

im Fruhjahr 1821."⁵⁸

The characters are also aware that they play parts and are in the theatre. Mee Lan says: "Ich bin nicht bloed. Ihr meint, ich merke nicht, dass alles hier (zum Beispiel dieser Thron, das merkt man auch als Backfisch) Theater ist?"⁵⁹

There is also a similarity between the emperor Hwang Ti and Romulus. Both appear as incompetent old rulers, although Hwang Ti is more brutal than Romulus. Both seem to be reluctant rulers and it is interesting to note the confession which Hwang makes to Cleopatra which also reminds one of Romulus: "Ich werde mich zurueckziehen . . . und ich werde Bienen suechten."⁶⁰

Often Frisch uses parody, perhaps to an even greater extent than Duerrenmatt. Most of the characters in Die chinesische Mauer are parodies for example, Romeo, Juliet, Columbus, etc. Frisch also parodies the great classical writers of German literature, Goethe and Schiller in particular. One of the parodies comes from the same play as

⁵⁸
Max Frisch, Die chinesische Mauer, in Frisch, Stuecke, Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1962, p. 159.

⁵⁹
Ibid., p. 175.

⁶⁰
Ibid., p. 197.

one of Duerrenmatt's parodies: namely, Schiller's Don Carlos. The monarch in the third scene in Frisch's play says to the man from today: "Ich habe das Meinige getan."⁶¹ Later Frisch turns to Goethe when in Die chinesische Mauer a parody of the famous lines from Faust is pronounced:

Mee Lan: "Und was wisst ihr vom Menschen?"

Der Heutige: "Dass er irrt, solange er misst."⁶²

Finally, the writer would like to mention an influence upon Duerrenmatt which does not come from a prominent author of our times or from former times; it comes in the form of his heredity and environment. It has already been mentioned that Duerrenmatt probably inherited his talent for satire from his grandfather Ulrich Duerrenmatt; but he also probably took an interest in religious issues because of his father who was a "Pastor". The Swiss environment in which he lives does not play a predominant role in his works, but nevertheless one finds touches of Swiss life and local colour here and there in Duerrenmatt's work. The setting of the plays and "Ersaehlungen" sometimes betray Swiss characteristics. The place where the train disappears into the earth in Der Tunnel is "Burgdorf" in the Bern canton,

⁶¹

Ibid., p. 169.

⁶²

Ibid., p. 179.

Guellen is unmistakably Swiss in atmosphere and the name itself is Swiss. The names for the characters are very often Swiss. In Frank V., for instance, the characters Pauli and Egli and in Der Besuch der alten Dame Ill and Klaeri could be nothing else but Swiss.

The writer has tried not to read influences into Duerrenmatt's plays and has wherever possible shown that Duerrenmatt was interested, and admired the particular author with which his works have similarity. It would not be in accordance with Duerrenmatt's own ideas to see him as part of any movement, for he says himself: "Dann moechte ich bitten, in mir nicht einen Vertreter einer bestimmten dramatischen Richtung, . . . zu erblicken, oder gar zu glauben, ich stehe als ein Handlungsreisender irgendeiner der auf den heutigen Theatern gaengigen Weltanschauungen vor der Tuer, sei es als Nihilist, als Expressionist oder als Ironiker . . ."⁶³

It is obvious that Duerrenmatt wishes to be an individual and he remains so despite the influences which sometimes penetrate his work.

⁶³
Friedrich Duerrenmatt, Theaterprobleme, Zuerich: Arche Verlag, 1960, p. 8.

CONCLUSION

During the course of this thesis, the writer has tried to explain and illustrate certain features of Duerrenmatt's work. They were: The line of progression in his dramas; what Duerrenmatt understands by the term comedy, the forms his comedy takes, and the influence of other authors upon his own works.

Duerrenmatt is one of the leading modern dramatists writing in the German language. By way of conclusion, the writer wishes to point out to what extent features of his plays can be considered characteristic of the stage of today.

Duerrenmatt himself asserts that his plays are, (or rather comedy as he sees it is), the reflection of a formless chaotic world which is only the image of the world today. The characters resign themselves to the hopelessness of existence. Duerrenmatt's characters show the anonymity prevalent in our time, a time in which the individual has lost his importance; the individual no longer has the power to change or correct. Heroic action is no longer possible, and the hero is completely out of place. Tragedy is out of date like the tragic hero, because trag-

edy is something complete and formed and presumes a world which is ordered and arranged. This cannot apply to our present day and age where nothing is stable, nothing permanent.

Comedy is the only form suitable for today, but this does not imply that everything will be depicted in a gay, lighthearted manner, or that the resolution of the play will be a happy one; Duerrenmatt tells us that the term comedy has lost its meaning. It has become broader and has taken on some of the more serious aspects, which in former times would have been impossible for comedy and more likely have been found in tragedy.

Duerrenmatt makes considerable use of forms which in the past were unfamiliar in comedy, but which are now typical of it. He seems most at home in such forms of comedy as the grotesque. It has become increasingly clear to the writer, that the characteristics of the grotesque which were related in Chapter III, are in almost complete harmony with his outlook. The grotesque can be considered a salient feature of his work. It enables him to portray the horror and incongruity of modern life and thought. It portrays abnormities, unnatural proportions, insanity and the monstrosities of an estranged world. Life is a terror and because of this, death is no longer to be feared. However, in the opinion of the writer, the most important

feature of the grotesque with reference to Duerrenmatt's work, is that the grotesque is the means by which Duerrenmatt can combine two forms which otherwise would be considered contradictory, namely the forms comedy and tragedy. The writer defined the mingling of these two elements as tragi-comedy in the first chapter, because Duerrenmatt himself calls one of his most popular and characteristic works, Der Besuch der alten Dame, a tragi-comedy. It is only possible to think of Duerrenmatt's works as tragi-comedies, if the traditional sense of tragedy and comedy is broadened and changed. With a closer examination of the nature of the grotesque, the writer has come to the conclusion that what Duerrenmatt himself understood under tragi-comedy, is really only a mingling of tragic and comic elements as a characteristic of the grotesque.

The writer has also pointed out that Duerrenmatt makes recurrent use of another modern form of comedy, namely the absurd, which enables him to express the incongruities of our time and of the human condition; it fits in well with his representation of passive characters who resign themselves to the irrational world in which they live.

Another feature of Duerrenmatt's comedy which classifies him as a modern writer is the lack of plot in his plays. Because of this, more emphasis is placed upon the

characters in the plays and in particular, upon the manner of speaking. This enables him to display his mastery of words and his ability to adopt a wide range of styles of language. Language itself, rather than character delineation or plot situation has been seen to constitute a considerable part of the humour of the plays, but the humour in the language is in the main based on the pattern of traditional comedy: the only exception to this is the use of anachronisms.

The characters in Duerrenmatt's plays are also very modern. There are no real heroes, and many of the minor characters are not so much individuals, but rather representatives of certain classes, professions or merely the bearers of philosophies and beliefs.

The structure of the plays is both modern and traditional, depending on the play. Very often Duerrenmatt relies on the example of former dramatists so that such plays as Romulus der Grosse, Die Physiker or Der Besuch der alten Dame are divided traditionally into acts and the events move on a realistic plane. This tends to give extra weight to the ideas and the characterisation. In other plays the structure is as revolutionary as possible, (e.g. in Es steht geschrieben or in Die Ehe des Herrn Mississippi) a structure which makes one aware of stage devices and stage action irrelevant to the plot and

the characters take second place.

The characteristics listed above are all innovations of the modern age, Duerrenmatt does, however, very often evoke laughter by the traditional rather than the modern forms of comedy. The traditional forms are the farcical elements, the dialogue with its many witticisms and satire and irony.

In this brief summary, the writer has attempted to indicate some of the salient points of Duerrenmatt's works as they have been treated in this thesis. It has become clear that there is a preponderance of modern elements and forms in Duerrenmatt's plays; this alone is one of the ways his plays are so interesting, but they are of special interest to the reader and audience because of the combination of modern and traditional methods which they betray.

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