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THE SEARCH FOR MORALITY IN THE WORKS
OF FRIEDRICH DÜRRENMATT

by

Richard J. Mauthe

A Thesis

Presented to the Graduate Committee
of Lehigh University

in Candidacy for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in

The Department of Modern Foreign Languages
and Literatures

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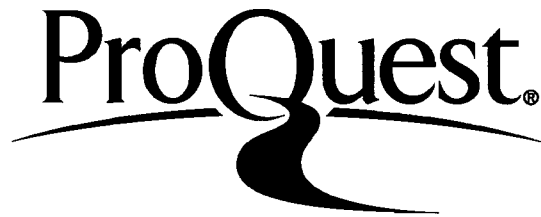
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May 9, 1970

Professor in Charge

Chairman of Department

Table of Contents

Abstract	1
Introduction	3
I. Friedrich Dürrenmatt: The Theory.	5
A. Schiller and Dürrenmatt.	5
B. <u>Der mutige Mensch</u>. . . . .	.16
C. Dürrenmatt's Concept of the Theater. . . . .	.19
II. The Dramatical Works . . . . .	.26
A. The Chaos of Society . . . . .	.26
B. The <u>mutiger Mensch</u> Reacts. . . . .	.34
C. The Fate of the <u>mutiger Mensch</u> . . . . .	.44
III. Conclusion . . . . .	.59
Bibliography . . . . .	.61
Appendix . . . . .	.62
Vita . . . . .	.63

writings that he has utilized the comic form as a vehicle for his message. Rather than confront us with the always uncomfortable naked truth of the human situation, he couches it in terms of the comedy, to have it seize us in a fit of laughter, and then make us think. This is Dürrenmatt's unhappy message: that all attempts to reach the sublime state of universal harmony will, sooner or later, be frustrated.

Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to articulate the Swiss playwright Friedrich Dürrenmatt's conception of how a particular individual, whom Dürrenmatt calls the mutiger Mensch, attempts to attain the moral harmony of the universe (die verlorene Weltordnung) which has been suffocated by society.

The starting point for a discussion of Dürrenmatt's idea of the theater as a moral institution is Friedrich Schiller's essay "Die Schaubühne als eine moralische Anstalt betrachtet," a treatise well-known to Dürrenmatt, who himself has dealt with Schiller in his theoretical writings. Schiller says that the theater can become a most beneficial purveyor of morality, since the prevailing morality of any society may be embodied in the drama. Thus, the stage serves a pedagogical function: the people are taught virtue by example.

Friedrich Dürrenmatt's conception of the stage as a school is similar in that he, too, shows us a morality, but, as we shall see in his "Schillerrede," one that is less clearly defined and not as easily attainable as that believed in by the idealistic Schiller. Study of Dürren-

matt's theoretical writings, the Theater-Schriften, reveals that he is concerned with presenting the question of morality in comic form, and that this question will focus on the mutiger Mensch.

Although reference will be made to several works, Dürrenmatt's conception of society and the immoral currents against which the mutiger Mensch must struggle are best portrayed in Romulus der Grosse, Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon, Die Ehe des Herrn Mississippi, and Die Physiker. In each play, the author depicts the reaction of the mutiger Mensch to his surroundings and his hope for a solution, the attainment of die verlorene Weltordnung. The main body of this thesis will investigate to what extent he succeeds in reestablishing this verlorene Weltordnung--a phrase which winds its way through these works, an ideal ever present, and yet never to be wholly attained.

I. Friedrich Dürrenmatt: The Theory

A. Schiller and Dürrenmatt

If one undertakes to understand a modern playwright, delving into various philosophies of the theater will not only help one to understand the differences between past and present dramatists, but also why they are different. The critical writings of the German dramatist Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805) concerning the theater provide a wealth of material dealing with an established set of ideals. Over the years his thoughts have attained the rank of almost unassailable dogma which few dispute. Indeed, critics who promulgate even a suggestion of questioning the relevance and verity of Schiller's philosophy are a rarity. One such daring critic is to be met in Friedrich Dürrenmatt (1921--), the contemporary Swiss playwright and enfant terrible of social etiquette.

In Schiller's essay "Die Schaubühne als eine moralische Anstalt betrachtet" (1784), one finds a classical interpretation of the function of the theater. Schiller's essay deals primarily with the stage as the most consequential purveyor of morality for the people in any given state. He writes of the stage as an institution which

"jeder Seelenkraft Nahrung gibt,"¹ the perfect medium in which religion and law can combine and work in unison to establish a more moral society.

The advantages of using the stage to this effect are evident. He continues in the essay: "So gewiss sichtbare Darstellung mächtiger wirkt als toter Buchstab und kalte Erzählung, so gewiss wirkt die Schaubühne tiefer und dauernder als Moral und Gesetze."² Nevertheless, Schiller does not deal with mere chimerical notions of being able to transform all men into model citizens. Not all who attend the theater will come out permanently changed for the better. The murderer will still kill, the thief still steal, the fool still act foolish if that is what his true character is. However, Schiller asserts that in viewing, among others, fools and criminals on the stage, one becomes more adept at dealing with them in real-life situations. One becomes more prepared to handle what lies in store for him in this uncertain world of ours: "Mit diesen Lasterhaften, diesen Toren müssen wir leben. Wir müssen ihnen ausweichen oder begegnen; wir müssen sie untergraben oder ihnen unterliegen. Jetzt aber überraschen sie uns nicht mehr. Wir sind auf ihre Anschläge vorbereitet. Die Schau-

¹Friedrich Schiller, "Die Schaubühne als eine moralische Anstalt betrachtet," Schillers Sämtliche Werke (Stuttgart und Berlin: J. G. Cotta'sche Buchhandlung Nachfolger, n.d.), 11, p. 89.

²Ibid., p. 91.

bühne hat uns das Geheimnis verraten, sie ausfindig und unschädlich zu machen."³

In other words, the theater becomes a guide for life; one can bear his fate better, because contact with the theater affords the opportunity to observe courageous men and women struggling with life, sometimes successfully and sometimes not. The characters' experiences within the drama itself enhance the observer's capability of withstanding the assailments of life. One cannot help feeling great empathy with Schiller's Maria Stuart as she goes to her death; feeling a new sense of pride in the noble side of man's character as the Marquis von Posa implores the King of Spain to allow freedom of thought in Don Carlos; or becoming united in spirit with Wilhelm Tell as the cantons struggle against the overwhelming odds of the Austrian oppressors.

In addition to spiritual rejuvenation, Schiller believes humanity and tolerance, once demonstrated and reinforced on the stage, will become hallmarks of the people as they reflect morals proffered in the theater. Schiller maintains that the theater is one of the true schools of life, where pleasure can be mixed with instruction, the passivity of watching productions with the exertion of the mind. The fantasy world of the theater provides relief from the toils and troubles of this world; it is good for

³Ibid., p. 94.

the soul. One can find himself again: "Wenn Gram an dem Herzen nagt, wenn trübe Laune unsre einsamen Stunden vergiftet, wenn uns Welt und Geschäfte anekeln, wenn tausend Lasten unsre Seele drücken und unsre Reizbarkeit unter Arbeiten des Berufs zu ersticken droht, so empfängt uns die Bühne--in dieser künstlichen Welt träumen wir die wirkliche hinweg, wir werden uns selbst wieder gegeben, unsre Empfindung erwacht, heilsame Leidenschaften erschüttern unsre schlummernde Natur und treiben das Blut in frischeren Wallungen."⁴ In doing so, the great goal is attained. Our humanity manifests itself, if only for a fleeting moment, and we feel ourselves to be a part of mankind again: "Und dann endlich--welch ein Triumph für dich, Natur!--so oft zu Boden getretene, so oft wieder auferstehende Natur!--wenn Menschen aus allen Kreisen und Zonen und Ständen, abgeworfen jede Fessel der Künstelei und der Mode, herausgerissen aus jedem Drange des Schicksals, durch e i n e allwebende Sympathie verbrüdet, in e i n Geschlecht wieder aufgelöst, ihrer selbst und der Welt vergessen und ihrem himmlischen Ursprung sich nähern."⁵

Friedrich Schiller's essay sets a decidedly optimistic tone regarding the function of the theater. The ideals which he puts forth in this essay are refreshing to read and hopeful in that people can be edified in the theater

⁴Ibid., p. 99.

⁵Ibid., p. 100.

and emerge as better men and women. An awakening of the humanity of all, and the instillment and reinforcement of desirable moral characteristics are some of the main thoughts contained in this discourse.

In many instances it is the kind of optimism espoused by Schiller which bears the brunt of today's reaction against the old ideals. European idealism has traditionally been a veritable fountainhead of humane and humanitarian ideals for modern times. Springing from the waters of the Renaissance, coursing roughly through the rapids of war and intolerance, often lying deceptively quiescent, yet all the time deepening and maturing, ready for one who desires to draw nourishment and refreshment from its waters. It has been dealt particularly harsh blows in the Twentieth Century, the result of new and bold directions in Science, the Arts, and Philosophy, but especially by the two devastating conflicts of this century.

The climax of centuries-old, seething enmities in the eruption of war in 1914; the dismal years of peace before the continuation of the conflict in 1939; and the final, awful denouement in 1945: who could but help to have doubts cast on the viability of Western European Civilization, on the real ability of Western man not merely to give lip service to his heritage, but to become truly cognizant of it, to become edified by and live it, such as was hoped by thinkers of the past.

However, it was particularly the years of Nazi domination of Germany which laid to rest any hope as espoused by Schiller that the theater might correct the bent of a disturbed society such as that which existed in Central Europe after Versailles. The effect upon the theater was of great importance, and represented a major shift in thinking on the part of dramatists. Whereas many dramatists previously ennobled men and sought to expound on the possibility of implementing ideals, the experiences of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries have given rise to dramatists who seek to expose men as they actually are under the façade called humanity; one need only read a few of Brecht's songs as a convincing example.

Among the dramatists of the new persuasion is Friedrich Dürrenmatt. In discussing Teo Otto, scene-painter for German and Swiss stages, and a personal friend of his, Dürrenmatt addressed himself to the fact that European drama failed for the most part to either comprehend or prevent the rise of fascism: "Der Schrei der Dichter war verhallt, ergebnislos, ihre Bücher wurden verbrannt, ihre Stücke verboten, das Theater als moralische Anstalt hatte versagt, weil die politische und kulturelle Schichte eines Volkes versagte."⁶

The theater as a moral institution: again we are con-

⁶Friedrich Dürrenmatt, "Teo Otto," Theater-Schriften und Reden (Zürich: Verlag der Arche, 1966), p. 167.

fronted with this phrase which in its most optimistic interpretation by Schiller creates in the theater a vital force in the quest for the improvement of society. Dürrenmatt, from the perspective of post-war Europe, has seen the utter failure of that institution to be a viable force in determining the direction of Western civilization in Europe.

The attempt to reconcile Schiller and Dürrenmatt on this point is a bold undertaking, yet one key to understanding Friedrich Dürrenmatt's Weltanschauung lies in his discussion of Schiller, and will be useful in unlocking the door to the former's plays as a reflection of Twentieth Century thoughts and their concomitant message to society.

To this effect, such help may be found in the "Schillerrede" of November 9, 1959, held after the Schiller Prize was awarded to Dürrenmatt. It would behoove one therefore to deal with this "Schillerrede" critically in order to shed insight on Friedrich Dürrenmatt's stance regarding the contemporary world. In doing so, the disparity of these two dramatists, one hailing from an era of enlightened thinkers, the age of the Genie, the other from a perhaps less idealistic, but more experience-hardened age, will become obvious.

Perhaps one of the outstanding features of Dürrenmatt's remarks about Schiller is that he simply refuses to be overwhelmed by the greatness of Schiller and his place in the realm of world literature. Dürrenmatt declines to indulge in a hagiolatrous lauding of this greatest of German drama-

tists, as he explains in the following manner: "Für den tätigen Schriftsteller jedoch kann nur ein menschliches Verhältnis zu den Klassikern von Nutzen sein."⁷ He prefers to consider Schiller not to be exclusively a model to be emulated, but rather to be a kind of partner in helping to smooth out one's rough-hewn thoughts: "[Der Schriftsteller] . . . will keine Götzen in ihnen sehen, keine unerreichbaren Vorbilder, sondern Freunde, Anreger, Gesprächspartner"⁸

Not to indulge in Schiller's reputation might at first seem shocking, almost blasphemous, but this is wholly in keeping with Dürrenmatt's character. Yet, as he has stated above, Schiller's usefulness for the contemporary world lies in the fact that he can become a stimulating factor for us. We are not to consider his philosophy a solution to Twentieth Century problems, but rather to use it as a starting point, a reference point to consider this world, and therefore to cause us to articulate our own philosophy. It is for reasons such as these that Schiller has not lost his relevance for Dürrenmatt and the Twentieth Century.

According to Dürrenmatt's interpretation, Schiller adhered to the philosophy, found in "Naive und Sentimentalische Dichtung," that it is the dramatist who determines the form of his dramas as a direct consequence of the

⁷Dürrenmatt, "Friedrich Schiller," Theater-Schriften, p. 215.

⁸Ibid.

influence of time.⁹ The writer becomes the custodian of nature (what Schiller calls the "naive writer"); that is, he writes under the influence of his particular time.¹⁰ If he tries to emulate a style belonging to another age, he tries to seek nature outside the limitations set by time (what Schiller terms the "sentimental writer"). This in turn leads to the center of Dürrenmatt's discussion of Schiller: the problem of how one views the world, that is, how reality, or rather the dramatist's conception of reality, can be brought onto the stage. Dürrenmatt sums up his interpretation of Schiller's conception as follows: "Das ganze Gebiet der Poesie soll durch die Unterscheidung des naiven Dichters vom sentimentalischen erschöpft und ausgemessen sein. Also auch die Dramatik, deren Grundfrage lautet, wie denn überhaupt die Welt durch das Theater wiedergegeben werden könne."¹¹

It is this dichotomy of dramatists (naive and sentimental) which predetermines the outlook of the play regarding reality. The naive playwright will see nature as an orderly system, as Dürrenmatt explains in his Theater-Schriften: "Im naiven Theater wird die Wirklichkeit nicht

⁹Ibid., p. 220.

¹⁰Aristotle, in "Poetics," Criticism: The Major Texts, ed. Walter Bate (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1952), p. 28, makes this point in XV, Point 3.

¹¹Dürrenmatt, loc. cit.

durchschaut, sondern als göttliche Ordnung erlebt, als Schöpfung, als Naturgesetz. . . ."¹²

It follows then that the naive dramatist can only deal in revelations of nature's laws; he does not try to overthrow them and establish a new society. In contrast, the sentimental dramatist must be a rebel. Dürrenmatt continues: "Für ihn ist die Wirklichkeit nicht die Natur, sondern die Unnatur, die er im Namen der Natur zu richten hat. Das Theater ist das Podium seiner Anklage. . . . Die Szene wird zum Tribunal."¹³ The sentimental writer becomes the rebel, and his hopes tend to be dashed in society. The tragedy of this situation is that the individual's sacrifice, no matter how brave or inspiring, is oftentimes useless; society remains in essence more or less the same.

Friedrich Schiller has declared that humanity can be edified to an extent regarding morals. Yet for him, the ideals of freedom and liberty, concepts going hand in hand with morality, remain just that: ideals, unattainable for the world, yet experienced by the individual in a necessarily tragic situation.

What is Dürrenmatt's stance? Is he "naive" or "sentimental," to use Schiller's vocabulary? Is he on a totally different plane? The following excerpt from the "Schiller-

¹²Ibid., p. 222.

¹³Ibid.

rede" will serve as a starting point for an examination of this question as a prelude to the dramatical theory of Dürrenmatt:

Der alte Glaubenssatz der Revolutionäre, dass der Mensch die Welt verändern könne und müsse, ist für den einzelnen unrealisierbar geworden, ausser Kurs gesetzt, der Satz ist nur noch für die Menge brauchbar, als Schlagwort, als politisches Dynamit, als Antrieb der Massen, als Hoffnung für die grauen Armen der Hungernden. Der Teil geht nicht mehr im Ganzen auf, der einzelne nicht mehr in der Gesamtheit, der Mensch nicht mehr in der Menschheit. Für den einzelnen bleibt die Ohnmacht, das Gefühl, übergangen zu werden, nicht mehr einschreiten, mitbestimmen zu können, untertauchen zu müssen, um nicht unterzugehen, aber auch die Ahnung einer grossen Befreiung, von neuen Möglichkeiten, davon, dass nun die Zeit gekommen sei, entschlossen und tapfer das Seine zu tun.¹⁴

Dürrenmatt's conception of Schiller's two possible worlds--the changeable world of the sentimental playwright and the divinely ordered world of the naive playwright--is such that he must reject the consequences inherent in each: "Ahnem wir in der einen unseren Untergang, wittern wir in der andern unsere Unterdrückung, so lassen wir sie denn beide lieber als eine poetische Welt gelten, die wir geniessen."¹⁵

Herein is to be found a rejection of Schiller's positivism, yet the tone of the whole discourse is such that we gain the impression that Dürrenmatt wishes he could believe

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 228.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 230.

in Schiller's answer. He cannot as a man of the Twentieth Century. His catchword is "untertauchen . . . um nicht unterzugehen:" survival in this difficult world. The ideals of yesterday are but poetic thoughts, unsuited for one to rely on totally for survival. Rather like Schiller's naive writer who acknowledges the unchangeable order of the universe, he does acknowledge the existence of systems, be they capitalistic or communistic, but sees no divine origin in them. On the other hand, Dürrenmatt generally avoids Schillerian heroics. To reiterate: survival is the salient term.

B. Der mutige Mensch

The Dürrenmatt critic Elisabeth Brock-Sulzer describes the author in her forward to the Theater-Schriften: "Er zeigt sich als Mensch seiner Zeit, der diese Zeit zu bestehen sucht. . . ." ¹⁶ However, it would certainly seem illogical for a man who desired to merely survive in the world to seize the pen and become a writer, always a controversial, and at times an even dangerous, occupation. One must finish Brock-Sulzer's sentence to find out what Dürrenmatt's real intention is: "Er zeigt sich als Mensch seiner Zeit, der diese Zeit zu bestehen sucht, sich mit ihr aus-

¹⁶ Elisabeth Brock-Sulzer, in her forward to the Theater-Schriften, p. 11, makes this point.

einandersetzt, sich von ihr beirren und bestärken lässt."¹⁷
Thus it becomes obvious that Dürrenmatt is not satisfied to be a complacent bystander unaffected by life. Why is this?

To delve into Dürrenmatt's ancestry is to come upon an incident which he himself says influenced him greatly. His grandfather had to serve a ten-day jail sentence for writing the title poem for a local newspaper. This Dürrenmatt never has forgotten: ". . . vom Grossvater her weiss ich, das Schreiben eine Form des Kämpfens sein kann."¹⁸

Kampf: this is the word which we have been seeking, the one succinct description of this dramatist's philosophy. Does Kampf imply a struggle against the system? Is it an armed struggle, a revolution for the good of all mankind? The answer to this interpretation must be an unequivocal "No," as it has been shown that Dürrenmatt rejects the activism of the sentimental writer. "Theaterstücke können die Welt nicht erlösen," continues Brock-Sulzer in her forward to Dürrenmatt's Theater-Schriften.¹⁹ Kampf implies something more of an elementary struggle against society, than social reform through upheaval. It is the task of one man simply trying to survive the chaos of the modern world. Dürrenmatt has expressed this sentiment in his lec-

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Dürrenmatt, "Vom Anfang her," Theater-Schriften, p. 29.

¹⁹Brock-Sulzer, in her forward to the Theater-Schriften, p. 15, makes this point.

ture "Vom Sinn der Dichtung in unserer Zeit:" "Der einzelne hat die Welt zu bestehen."²⁰ Brock-Sulzer interprets this by saying that Dürrenmatt's dramas are therefore written to help the individual in a systems-plagued world: "[Theaterstücke] . . . könnten nur--vielleicht--den Menschen streitbar machen."²¹ Note the tone of caution: drama might be able to make men contenders in society.

Exactly what is expected from the individual? Dürrenmatt has chosen to call the characters seeking the lost morality of society mutige Menschen, the courageous people of his dramas. This he explains in "Theaterprobleme:" "Es ist immer noch möglich, den mutigen Menschen zu zeigen. Dies ist denn auch eines meiner Hauptanliegen. . . . Die verlorene Weltordnung wird in ihrer Brust wieder hergestellt. . . . Die Welt [die Bühne somit, die diese Welt bedeutet] steht für mich als ein Ungeheures da, als ein Rätsel an Unheil, das hingenommen werden muss, vor dem es jedoch kein Kapitulieren geben darf."²²

The mutiger Mensch is the point which the morality embodied in the Dürrenmatt character focuses on. As will be seen later during the discussion of the plays, some of Dür-

²⁰Dürrenmatt, "Vom Sinn der Dichtung in Unserer Zeit," Theater-Schriften, p. 63.

²¹Brock-Sulzer, in her forward to the Theater-Schriften, p. 15, makes this point.

²²Dürrenmatt, "Theaterprobleme," Theater-Schriften, p. 123.

renmatt's mutige Menschen appear on the stage as having undergone this change; that is, the verlorene Weltordnung which is part of the character's moral fiber is already present when the characters first appears. Others are, through the circumstances of the play, brought to this state.

This, then, is the real essence of Dürrenmatt's message as a Schriftsteller which will be pursued shortly: the world, in spite of the structured nature imposed upon it by systems, is in actuality the antithesis of order. The character tries to escape the chaos by not compromising himself, by creating in himself die verlorene Weltordnung. It is to be seen if Dürrenmatt's courageous characters can actually achieve this, and what their fates are for taking this step.

C. Dürrenmatt's Concept of the Theater

Dürrenmatt himself does not--or cannot--given an exact formula for men to follow. Rather, he wants to initiate thoughts about our existence; he wants to provide "Stoffe, aber keinen Trost fabrizieren, Sprengstoffe, aber keine Tranquillizer."²³ This is his calling as a writer: to initiate thoughts about man's place in modern society in order to prepare his audience for the Kampf of real life.

He must necessarily go about this in a circumspect man-

²³ Brock-Sulzer, in her forward to the Theater-Schriften, p. 18, provides this quotation by Dürrenmatt.

ner. On the one hand his dramas and radio plays must be enjoyable in order to attract an audience, yet on the other hand they must contain a hidden message which only later becomes apparent to the audience after they have left the theater. The drama should relay an impression of directness, of immediacy: "eine Unmittelbarkeit der theatralischen Wirkung" is the goal.²⁴ Thinking about the play should come later, as Dürrenmatt says: "Die Kunst des Dramatikers besteht darin, das Publikum erst nachträglich zum Nachdenken zu bringen."²⁵

Again, Dürrenmatt does not seek to merely entertain the public. It is only a means to an end. "Sprengstoffe, aber keine Tranquillizer" is his goal. In "Fingerübungen zur Gegenwart" he explains his decision to become a writer: "Ich bin es geworden, um den Leuten lästig zu fallen. Ob ich ein guter Schriftsteller bin, weiss ich nicht, und ich kümmere mich nicht sehr um diese müssige Frage; aber ich hoffe, dass man von mir sagen wird, ich sei ein unbequemer Schriftsteller gewesen."²⁶

Continuing this excursion into the Theater-Schriften will reveal the reason for Dürrenmatt's decision to become

²⁴Dürrenmatt, "Friedrich Schiller," Theater-Schriften, p. 221.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Dürrenmatt, "Fingerübungen zur Gegenwart," Theater-Schriften, p. 44.

a Schriftsteller and dramatist.

In "Amerikanisches und Europäisches Drama" he declares that writing is based on the concept of human freedom: ". . . die Schriftstellerei hat ihren Grund letzten Endes in der menschlichen Freiheit. . . ." ²⁷ It is this cause of humanity's maintaining its freedom which has motivated him to enter this field. One need only think of his grandfather's experience and its influence on Dürrenmatt to be reminded of this. His reason for becoming a dramatist is also of great significance. In the same essay he declares: "Das Drama ist an die Darstellung von Menschen gebunden, in jedem Drama wird eine Welt aus Leibern errichtet, die Bausteine des Dramas sind Menschen und werden es immer sein. Dramatisieren heisst vermenschlichen. . . ." ²⁸ It is in this expression of sentiment concerning humanity that Dürrenmatt and Schiller become spiritual kindred, no matter how diverse their interpretations may be.

Dürrenmatt has become a writer with a very specific purpose in mind. "Ich bin da um zu warnen," he declares. ²⁹ He has chosen to play the gadfly in Swiss society; he wants

²⁷Dürrenmatt, "Amerikanisches und Europäisches Drama," Theater-Schriften, p. 164.

²⁸Ibid., p. 161.

²⁹Dürrenmatt, "Fingerübungen zur Gegenwart," Theater-Schriften, p. 45.

to prod the conscience of his countrymen to prevent the decay of a society which, in its complacency towards human freedom and morality, sows the seed of its own destruction. Presently everything might appear to be calm, and a conscience-pricking writer superfluous: "Ich bin daher in diesem Lande Schriftsteller geworden, gerade weil man die Schriftstellerei nicht nötig hat. . . . Ich beschreibe den Untergang . . . damit Sie auf die Welt schliessen. . . ." ³⁰ Thus Dürrenmatt provides the justification for his becoming uncomfortable (unbequem) in society.

It is through his dramas that Dürrenmatt hopes to accomplish his task, as he explains in the following: "Die Literatur ist nicht für die Literatur da, sie ist in ihrer Gesamtheit das Gewissen der Menschheit. . . ." ³¹ The warning Dürrenmatt has chosen to broadcast is to be realized through the stage. Again, here the paths of Schiller and Dürrenmatt cross, in that Dürrenmatt too utilizes the stage for his purpose. Because the people of today expect the theater to be a place of enjoyment and relaxation, Dürrenmatt feels it is the most effective method of presenting his message. Art is expected to be pleasing, beautiful, and non-controversial: "Wer im schweizerischen Alltag steckt, braucht seine Ordnung, die Ideale nimmt er zwar im Schein

³⁰ Ibid., p. 44.

³¹ Dürrenmatt, "Die verhinderte Rede von Kiew," Theater-Schriften, p. 77.

der Leselampe gern zur Kenntnis, im Amt oder im Geschäft jedoch kommen sie ihm nicht ganz zu unrecht deplaziert vor; Kunst und Wirklichkeit sind getrennt; jene darf diese verschönern, doch nicht untergraben, je unethischer es in der Realität zugeht, desto ethischer und positiver soll es in der Kunst zugehen. . . . Die Welt soll wenigstens beim Schriftsteller stimmen, der Geist soll den Konsumenten bestätigen, rühren, nicht beunruhigen, er soll ein Genussmittel darstellen, nicht eine Schikane. . . ."32

It is due to this expectation that Dürrenmatt can catch his audience unawares, with his message surfacing only after the production is over. A writer, be he novelist or dramatist, needs, to an extent, to satisfy the public's demands upon him for entertainment. He must therefore "listig schreiben, das Seine unter auferlegten Bedingungen treiben."³³

Having established the fact that Dürrenmatt has chosen to utilize the drama as the most effective vehicle of his message, one must now turn to the form of drama he has employed: that of the comedy.

Basically Dürrenmatt has chosen the comic form because it, as opposed to tragedy, creates distance (Distanz) between the play and the audience. That is, the audience

³²Dürrenmatt, "Schriftstellerei als Beruf," Theater-Schriften, pp. 51-52.

³³Ibid., p. 55.

cannot readily identify itself with the dramatis personae. In addition, comedy does not require the necessity of having a pre-established, orderly world in which the individual, in traveling a divergent path from the established, becomes ridden with guilt: "Die Tragödie setzt Schuld, Not, Mass, Übersicht, Verantwortung voraus. In der Wurstelei unseres Jahrhunderts, in diesem Kehraus der weissen Rasse, gibt es keine Schuldigen und auch keine Verantwortlichen mehr. Alle können nichts dafür und haben es nicht gewollt. . . . Wir sind zu kollektiv schuldig, zu kollektiv gebettet in die Sünden unserer Väter und Vorväter. Wir sind nur noch Kindes- kinder. Das ist unser Pech, nicht unsere Schuld: Schuld gibt es nur noch als persönliche Leistung, als religiöse Tat. Uns kommt nur noch die Komödie bei."³⁴

By means of the concept of the Einfall, the original idea which enables the dramatist to invent the action necessary to force a change in the action of the play, the comedy creates the Distanz necessary for it to succeed. Dürrenmatt considers Aristophanes of the old Attic school of drama to be the first to utilize the Einfall: "Aristophanes jedoch lebt vom Einfall, ist Einfall. . . . Seine Stoffe sind nicht Mythen wie jene der Tragiker, sondern erfundene Handlungen, die sich nicht in der Vergangenheit, sondern in der Gegen-

³⁴Dürrenmatt, "Theaterprobleme," Theater-Schriften, p. 122.

wart abspielen."³⁵ By means of the Einfall a dramatist may couch the present in terms of the extraordinary or the ridiculous, yet it is clear who or what is meant by the author: "Diese Komödien [of Aristophanes] sind Eingriffe in die Wirklichkeit, denn die Personen, mit denen sie spielen und die sie auftreten lassen, sind keine abstrakten, vielmehr gerade die konkretesten. . . ."³⁶ The Einfall changes the present state of affairs into a grotesque form, creating the necessary Distanz for the piece to be a successful comedy in the tradition of Aristophanes.³⁷ Dürrenmatt explains the concept of grotesqueness in a drama thusly: "Das Groteske ist eine äusserste Stilisierung, ein plötzliches Bildhaftmachen und gerade darum fähig, Zeitfragen, mehr noch, die Gegenwart aufzunehmen. . . ."³⁸ Yet, he continues, one tends to be a moralist when this method is used: ". . . doch ist sie nicht die Kunst der Nihilisten, sondern weit eher der Moralisten. . . ."³⁹

³⁵Dürrenmatt, "Anmerkung zur Komödie," Theater-Schriften, p. 132.

³⁶Ibid., p. 133.

³⁷C. M. Bowra, in The Greek Experience (New York: The New American Library, 1957), p. 141, says the following: "Aristophanes' episodes draw freely on contemporary life and make more of it by transposing it to a world of impossible absurdity in which birds talk and men grow wings. . . ."

³⁸Dürrenmatt, op. cit., p. 136.

³⁹Ibid., p. 137.

II. The Dramatical Works

A. The Chaos of Society

When surveying the dramatical productions of Friedrich Dürrenmatt, one of the elements common to his works is the disturbing environment in which the main characters find themselves. The characters' reactions create the necessary tension in the drama. As has been previously mentioned, Dürrenmatt's mutiger Mensch tries desperately to recreate the lost world order, if not for the whole society, then at least for himself. This chaotic situation, the lack of moral order, is, then, the point of departure for an excursion into the dramatic works of Friedrich Dürrenmatt.

Nowhere is the turbulence of society more clearly illustrated than in the drama Romulus der Grosse, "eine ungeschichtliche historische Komödie," as the subtitle proclaims, dealing with the overthrow of the Roman Imperium by the Germanic chieftain Odoaker.

As the action commences, the prefect Spurius Titus Mamma bursts into the deceptively serene world of Romulus, destined to be the last Roman emperor, bearing the dreadful tidings that Germanic hordes have entered Pavia. The disparity of the situation bewilders him: the summer palace,

overrun with chickens, is quiet. The aged chamberlains stand at attention, blending into the surroundings. The prefect, demanding to see the emperor on whose account he has braved such an arduous ride, has his request brushed aside. To underscore the urgency of the situation, he shouts, "Das römische Weltreich kracht zusammen!"--and receives the terse answer of "Unmöglich."⁴⁰ To his confoundment, Spurius Titus Mamma is not allowed an audience with the emperor, for it seems such news is not even worth circumventing the ancient and venerable procedure of proper notification.

From the very beginning of this drama, Dürrenmatt has created a situation of almost utter ridiculousness. The very physical condition of the emperor's villa--the "unermessliche Scharen von gackernden Hühnern,"⁴¹ the run-down and worn-out appearance of the furnishings--creates a comical situation which Dürrenmatt has skillfully utilized to emphasize the absurdity of it all.

Having opened the drama with the dramatic entrance of the prefect, Dürrenmatt later exposes to an even greater extent the decadent state of affairs in the waning hours of the empire. There is, for example, the merchant who haggles with the emperor over the busts of former Roman heroes being

⁴⁰Friedrich Dürrenmatt, Komödien I (Zürich: Verlag der Arche, 1957), p. 12.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 11.

sold to raise a bit of revenue for the empty treasury. He unceremoniously and irreverently carries them out under his arms. However, the greatest contrast is drawn up as Amilian, the former beloved of Romulus' daughter Rea, and lately escapee from Germanic captivity, winds his way to the villa and is confronted with "ein schmutziger Hühnerhof. Ein verdrecktes Landhaus. Eine Kanzlei. Über dem Teich eine verwitterte Venus, Efeu, Moos, überall Eier versteckt im Unkraut . . . und irgendwo sicher ein schnarchender Kaiser."⁴²

Surrounded by all of this turmoil is the emperor himself, a model of serenity. Romulus lets the flood of events swirl about him, busying himself solely with his rather mundane (as far as royalty is concerned) hobby, that of raising chickens. That he can manage to remain so unruffled and unconcerned regarding his empire or personal safety while being engulfed by the cacophany of events effectively divides the court even further. It is all rather grotesque and mad, creating the exact atmosphere Dürrenmatt is striving to achieve.

Let us leave Romulus' world for the moment, poised at the abyss of annihilation, and turn to another of Dürrenmatt's dramas, namely Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon. From the vantage point of two extraterrestrial creations, the

⁴²Ibid., p. 41.

angel and Kurrubi, "ein Wesen in Menschenform,"⁴³ the dramatist proceeds to describe a society in which societal perfection is sought by the king, Nebukadnezar, resulting in the greatest turmoil and upheaval.

Akki the beggar is one of the few who have not been convinced of "Nebbi's" wisdom regarding his ambition to do away with beggary, which the king explains in the following manner: "Seht denn, was ich unternehme, ein makelloses Reich zu erschaffen, . . . das alle umschliesst, vom Henker bis zum Minister, und alle aufs angenehmste beschäftigt. Wir streben nicht nach Macht, wir streben nach Vollkommenheit. Die Vollkommenheit hat nichts Überflüssiges an sich, ein Bettler ist jedoch überflüssig. Ich will diesen Akki überreden, dem Staatsdienst beizutreten, indem ich, da ich selbst als Bettler vor ihm erscheine, ihm so seine eigene Not vor Augen führe."⁴⁴ Such an expounding of the reason for creating this society smacks of totalitarianism; in fact, Nebukadnezar adds the following to his discourse: "Will [Akki] aber in seinem Unglück verharren, wird er an diese Laterne geknüpft."⁴⁵

The tension created by the state (as represented by Nebukadnezar) and the individual (as represented by Akki)

⁴³ Ibid., p. 176.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 180.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

comes to the fore as the disguised monarch tries to convince Akki to give up his life as a beggar: "Eine soziale Welt darf keine Bettler kennen. Es ist ihnen unwürdig, die Armut weiter zu dulden, die das Bettlergewerbe mit sich bringt."⁴⁶

The appearance of the angel, which at first is disguised as a beggar along with Kurrubi, serves further as a vehicle to advance the proposition that the dichotomy of society is based not upon wealth, as the king supposes, but rather on human elements. He explains his mission of going to the least person in the kingdom: "Könige . . . interessieren den Himmel nicht. Je ärmer hingegen ein Mensch ist, desto wohlgefälliger wird er dem Himmel. . . . Vielleicht ist es so, dass, je ärmer ein Mensch ist, desto mächtiger die Vollkommenheit aus ihm hervorbricht, die in der Natur ist."⁴⁷

A cogent example of the internal chaos in Dürrenmatt's Babylonian society is the peculiar relationship which has developed between the two kings, Nebukadnezar and Nimrod. Each of them interchanges his role as king-footstool with comic frequency. It is described in the following manner by Beda Allemann: "Der Wechsel, der zwischen ihnen stattfindet, allegorisiert . . . die Eitelkeit der irdischen

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 184.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 197.

Macht."⁴⁸ Here are, on the one hand, two men jockeying for the dubious distinction of being in charge of such a perfect state, and, on the other, Akki the beggar who throws gold into the river so it cannot contaminate mankind any more than it already has. It is seen here that the desire of the system to impose its mores on certain characters forces them to react; in doing so, they become mutige Menschen. Akki's insistence on retaining his position in life affords him the opportunity to do, as Dürrenmatt has said, "das Seine."

Turning to the surrealist drama Die Ehe des Herrn Mississippi, we again find the attempt to transform society. Society as the backdrop for Mississippi's marriage is one state of chaos after another. Power politics--the actions of dogmatic power representatives, revolution, and political intrigue--all cause Mississippi to take upon himself the burden of revamping society, albeit according to his strict interpretation of what mores should be followed.

In addition to Mississippi, two other men, Saint-Claude the revolutionary and Graf Übelohe, a humanitarian, become embroiled with this systems-plagued world which harbors misfortune for all. Yet one should not consider this drama to contain three separate mutige Menschen in the above-named characters. Rather, one must view the first two as repre-

⁴⁸ Beda Allemann, "Es Steht Geschrieben," Das Deutsche Drama, ed. Benno von Wiese (Düsseldorf: August Bagel Verlag, 1964) II, 424.

sentatives of systems, and the third as a true human being with the potential to become a mutiger Mensch.

The alienation of the individual from society, or rather in Dürrenmatt's interpretation, the alienation of society from the individual, is the setting of the drama Die Physiker and the radio play Das Unternehmen der Wega. In the former, the renowned physicist Möbius has voluntarily withdrawn from society. Indeed, he has fled to an insane asylum, where he is joined by "Newton" and "Einstein," ostensibly insane men, but in actuality secret service agents from two diametrically opposed political systems. They attempt to lure Möbius out of his self-imposed exile to work for their particular governments.

However, they have misunderstood the reason for Möbius' withdrawal from society. He has fled from fear of what technicians can do with his potentially dangerous knowledge. "Newton" explains this danger as follows:
"Dann kommen die Techniker. Sie kümmern sich nur noch um die Formeln. Sie gehen mit der Elektrizität um wie der Zuhälter mit der Dirne. Sie nützen sie aus. Sie stellen Maschinen her, und brauchbar ist eine Maschine erst dann, wenn sie von der Erkenntnis unabhängig geworden ist, die zu ihrer Erfindung führte. So vermag heute jeder Esel eine Glühbirne zum Leuchten bringen--oder eine Atombombe zur Ex-

plosion.*⁴⁹ This is the situation which confronted Möbius. Either he could chance his theories falling into unscrupulous hands, or flee with his life's work to a place of asylum.

In Das Unternehmen der Wega a spaceship from Earth has landed on the planet Venus, which has been turned into a penal colony. The expedition has been sent to enlist, of all things, the help of the colonists in the conflict of the West with the Russians. One of the members of the mission inquires as to what type of individuals are presently inhabitants of the forlorn planet:

*Wood: Welcher Art sind die Verurteilten, die wir nach der Venus schicken?

Staatssekretär: Moralisch minderwertiges Menschenmaterial. Kriminelle und dann in erster Linie jene Leute, die kommunistische Ideen vertreten und aus Sicherheitsgründen entfernt werden müssen.

Wood: Und wen schickt Russland auf die Venus?

Staatssekretär: Auch Kriminelle und dann natürlich jene Leute, die westliche Ideen vertreten und aus Sicherheitsgründen entfernt werden müssen.*⁵⁰

As can be readily deduced from the above conversation,

⁴⁹Friedrich Dürrenmatt, Komödien II und Frühe Stücke (Zürich: Verlag der Arche, 1963), p. 297.

⁵⁰Friedrich Dürrenmatt, Gesammelte Hörspiele (Zürich: Verlag der Arche, 1968), p. 213.

the planet Venus is merely a convenient place to dispose of any particular person who becomes a threat to that society. The message is clear: societies often consider non-conformists a threat to their stability.

In each of the above representative examples of Dürrenmatt's conception of society--and it must not be forgotten that he, through the vehicle of the Komödie, is writing about contemporary society--can be found the relationship between the character, who has been designated mutiger Mensch, and his antagonist, either society impersonalized in systems or anthropomorphized, in the figure of the king, as in Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon. The reaction of the mutiger Mensch to society's demands will be discussed next.

B. The mutiger Mensch Reacts

It has been maintained in the preceding section that Friedrich Dürrenmatt has conceived of society as being in a painfully depressing state. By virtue of the fact that it is all-encompassing and everywhere noticeable, society forces a reaction out of the confronted, whether it be in the form of the activist or the lack of any action at all as in Romulus der Grosse.

Returning to Romulus' court, one would expect that news of such a devastating nature as that brought by Spurius Titus Mamma would cause the emperor to react in either one of two ways: he might make an armed stand against the invaders,

or flee and thereby save, at least for the time being, the last vestiges of imperial Rome. Romulus' reaction is startling in that he doesn't react at all! He is content to let the archives burn, spurns the attempt of a wealthy industrialist to buy off the Germanic invaders by refusing to permit his daughter to marry him, and declines then to flee to Sicily to reorganize the empire.

Astonishingly, as the drama unfolds one sees that the emperor has taken a definite course of action, and a bold one at that. He himself declares: "Der Kaiser weiss, was er tut, wenn er sein Reich ins Feuer wirft, wenn er fallen lässt, was zerbrechen muss, und zertritt, was dem Tode gehört."⁵¹ He has carefully created a plan and followed it through to its consummation. His marriage into the royal family was calculated to put him into the position where he could deliberately sabotage the workings of the Roman Empire by doing nothing at such a critical time. Romulus had recognized that the empire was at the crossroads: either it would plod along the path of history for an indefinite period, or, to hasten its demise, one could administer a relatively quick coup de grace by deliberately doing nothing.

Romulus states his case: "Das römische Weltreich besteht seit Jahrhunderten nur noch, weil es einen Kaiser

⁵¹Dürrenmatt, Komödien I, p. 52.

gibt. Es blieb mir deshalb keine andere Möglichkeit als selbst Kaiser zu werden, um das Imperium liquidieren zu können.*⁵² Romulus saw the corruption which emanated from the dying empire. He saw the murder, plundering, enslavement, and destruction wrought by the Romans upon other peoples. As an individual with moral scruples he said "Enough!" That is to say, Romulus as a moral human being made judgement upon the system, and by deliberately becoming an incompetent emperor, signed its death warrant. He himself says so:
". . . .ich bin Roms Richter!"⁵³

Romulus acted boldly and bravely. He saw the immorality of the system he lived within, and sought to stop this evil which had gone on for centuries unchecked. He became a mutiger Mensch in that die verlorene Weltordnung, those nebulous moral guidelines which held and hold mankind in check, became almost non-existent in a Rome which demanded such sacrifices of morality on the part of its proponents. To be sure, Romulus, through his sabotage of the Roman state, decided to let the Germanic chieftain Odoaker destroy the empire, rather than be personally responsible for perpetuating evil. The alternative of a Germanic takeover would not be as evil as the present state, and, hence, would be preferable.

⁵² Ibid., p. 58.

⁵³ Ibid.

Lest one be tempted to equate the concept of mutiger Mensch with "hero," one should reflect on Romulus' actions more carefully. Here is the ruler of the Roman Empire, yet he betrays it. Romulus is rather an anti-hero. He is disappointing, for one would expect heroic actions on his part. However, this would be a mistake, for Romulus is not an historical figure, but rather a toga-clothed man of the Twentieth Century. From this perspective the drama becomes characteristic of a common feature of post-war Western literature: the lack of a hero.

Beda Allemann writes about this trend which concerns Dürrenmatt in his critique of Es steht Geschrieben: "Für Dürrenmatt selbst gibt es den Helden bereits nicht mehr. Die bewusste Verständnislosigkeit gegenüber dem heroischen Dasein ist ein Grundzug der gesamten Nachkriegsliteratur. Das Verschwinden des Helden, und vorgängig der Umschlag in die Destruktion des Heroischen in ihm, bildet so einen doppelten thematischen Aspekt des Dramas Dürrenmatts: inhaltlich-thematisch kommt in ihm eine Wandlung des Weltbildes zum Ausdruck, die Müdigkeit nach all den Möchte-gern-Helden der Weltgeschichte, das Bühnenstück um eine Hauptperson, den Helden, zu versammeln."⁵⁴

To be sure, any character who might even approach the concept of hero in the traditional sense is made to look

⁵⁴Allemann, p. 427.

ridiculous, as with Spurius Titus Mamma. Dürrenmatt effectively circumvents any heroic feelings on the part of the audience towards him by having him wander around feeling deathly tired.

Any hint of "hero" which might be felt by the audience in Romulus der Grosse will most certainly not be aroused by Florestan Mississippi. The intrigue and actions of this character could arouse only negative feelings.

This drama contains not three mutige Menschen as might be supposed, only one. Each character: Mississippi, Saint-Claude, and Übelohe, portrays a different philosophy. Mississippi's desire is to mold the world according to his severe idea of justice, that of returning to a strict adherence to Mosaic law. His goal is, as he explicitly explains, ". . . .die Welt von Grund aus durch das Gesetz Mosis zu restaurieren. . . ."55 He has, in order to return the world to his interpretation of a moral milieu, taken it upon himself to become society's preacher and executioner, to be the system's judge and hangman, as is revealed in the following discourse between Florestan and his wife Anastasia:

"Anastasia: Sind Sie eigentlich Moralprediger oder Scharfrichter?

Mississippi: Mein grauenhafter Beruf zwingt mich, beides

⁵⁵Dürrenmatt, Komödien I, p. 113.

zu sein."⁵⁶ Is this not reminiscent of Romulus, who declared, "Ich bin Roms Richter!"

Just as Mississippi's attempts deal with the ethics of society, so do Saint-Claude's deal with the economic side of life. His is a special assignment: "Ich habe schliesslich den Auftrag, hier die Kommunistische Partei neu zu organisieren."⁵⁷ This is one which he takes too seriously, and which later leads to his downfall as revolutionary.

Thirdly is the Graf Übelohe, who unwittingly was connected with the murder of Anastasia's first husband, as he provided her with the poison to do so. Thereupon he fled to the jungles of Borneo to open a hospital for the natives. As Florestan tried to change the world through the imposition of a strict moral system, and Saint-Claude through revolution, so does Bodo try to change the world through love:

"Mississippi: Als Vertreter eines der ältesten Adelshäuser unseres Kontinents finde ich Sie in Lumpen. Darf ich fragen, weshalb Sie Schloss Zabernsee verlassen haben, um in eine für Sie unbekannte Welt hinauszuziehen?

Übelohe: Mich jammerte der Menschen.

Mississippi: Sie liebten sie alle?

Übelohe: Alle.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 104.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 118.

Mississippi: In ihrem Schmutz, in ihrer Gier?

Übelohe: In allen ihren Sünden.

Mississippi: Sie sind ein Christ?

Übelohe: Ich bin ein Christ.*⁵⁸

By virtue of his own compassion, Graf Übelohe has initiated an individual attempt to better the world, unconnected with any particular system. He is motivated only by compassion, the greatest of virtues.

The philosophies adhered to by these three characters provide one with the opportunity to see if men could actually succeed in their different ambitious manners. It becomes clear, then, that their ideals become a proving grounds for themselves as men.

As in the above-mentioned dramas, so does society in Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon test the mettle of Akki. He too seeks in his own manner to reinstitute that lost world order of morality which has been prostituted by systems. Speaking to the hangman sent to execute him, Akki explains his attempts to do so in the following discourse:

In der Blütenpracht einer Maiennacht, um Mitternacht, erbettelte ich mit Kunst und Schlich von einem Milliardärstochterlein seines Papas Milliarde ein. Unverdrossen, war ich entschlossen, in einem Kampf auf Brechen und Biegen, den frechen Dampf des Reichtums zu besiegen. Höre nun, was der Weise tat: Früh bis spät machte ich Schulden, vertrank die Gulden, verstank die Wälder und Schlösser, die Kälber und Rösser, verspielte selber die Kunstgegenstände,

⁵⁸
Ibid., p. 147.

die goldenen Spiegel, die Tiegel, die Wände, verprasste die Schreine, verschasste die Steine, verjasste alleine zweitausend Schweine, und so, in unwiderstehlichem Trott, war ich in einem Jahr bankerott, ganz und gar, ohne Sou in der Tasche, ohne Wein in der Flasche, und im gleichen liederlichen Tritt zog ich weitere fünf Milliarde mit samt Aktionären und Banken; das Land kam ins Wanken. Dies, mein Henker, tat ich als Denker, um einen bösen Beruf zu erlösen. . . . Da ich nun in meinem Sarkophag, Nacht und Tag denkend lag, warum die Menschheit in Krämpfen liege, warum Gemeinheit im Kämpfen siege, suchte ich mit Geisteskraft und Feuer, meiner Leidenschaft ein neues Abenteuer: Mit Hofieren und Scharmieren . . . erbettelte ich von einem siechen General den Titel. Nun hatte ich Mittel, den Krieg zu bekriegen, und den Sieg zu besiegen. Ich erreichte mit kühnen Systemen, dem Krieg die Mühen und Schrecken zu nehmen. . . .⁵⁹

Again we see Dürrenmatt placing against society an activist, much in the vein of Romulus who participates in the sabotage of the system. Akki destroys wealth on the one hand, and undermines the military system on the other.

However, it is the intervention of Heaven in the form of the angel which makes Akki's position in Babylon untenable. The appearance of the angel in a world not ready to receive it finally causes a rebellion among the people. Through its unangelic conduct (*Jetzt, zum Beispiel, schwebt er über die hängenden Gärten und taucht südwärts kopfvoran ins Meer,⁶⁰) it becomes a threat to the establishment, as the Erzminister explains:

⁵⁹Ibid., p. 229.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 250.

Meine Kritik richtet sich nicht gegen den Engel, sondern gegen dessen Erscheinen. Es ist reines Gift. . . . Ein Staat, eine gesunde Autorität ist nur möglich, indem die Erde Erde und der Himmel Himmel bleibt, indem die Erde eine Wirklichkeit darstellt, die von den Politikern zu gestalten ist, und der Himmel eine holde Theorie der Theologen, über die sonst niemand klug zu werden braucht. Wird jedoch der Himmel Wirklichkeit, wie nun durch das Erscheinen eines Engels, fällt die menschliche Ordnung dahin, denn angesichts eines sichtbaren Himmels muss der Staat notgedrungen zu einer Farce werden, und das Resultat dieser kosmischen Schlamperei haben wir: ein Volk, das sich gegen uns erhebt.⁶¹

The dramatic appearance of the angel bearing Heaven's gift to mankind, Kurrubi, the symbol of grace, is unacceptable; indeed, it is threatening to the system. It must be destroyed. "Geh mit dem Mädchen in die Wüste, Henker. Töte es. Verscharre es im Sand," exclaims the 'king'.⁶² It remains now for Akki to take action again, for he has become the executioner of the court. Kurrubi is handed over to him.

Leaving Akki and his terrible mission for the moment, let us consider the predicament of Hercules in Herkules und der Stall des Augias. The traditional myth concerning the cleansing of the Augian stable takes on a different twist under Dürrenmatt's pen. Here the mythological Hercules becomes hopelessly embroiled in the petty politics of the island Elis. He has gone there to cleanse it from the

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Ibid., p. 260.

overwhelming amount of dung which chokes all of Elisian society. However, human nature again fights against the initiative taken in favor of this labor.

From the initial joyful prospect of having their island cleansed, the politicians squabble about committees which should or should not be created to study the whole affair. This progresses to a point where the question of the possible destruction of their unique culture, the vestiges of former civilizations which might be buried under the manure, would become forever destroyed: "Dieses Kulturgut nun, mistet man aus, könnte durch die Wasserfluten beschädigt, ja, wie zu befürchten ist, zerstört werden, und da unser Patriotismus . . . weitgehend auf diesen kulturellen Gütern ruht, läuft auch er Gefahr, bei einer allgemeinen Ausmistung, fortgeschwemmt zu werden."⁶³

Faced with financial ruin due to the endless bickering going on in the government, Hercules leaves the island. Once more society destroys a positive initiative.

Perhaps Hercules is not even the mutiger Mensch of this drama, in spite of his willingness to undertake such a loathsome task. One must turn to Augias, President of Elis, for an example of what the individual can do in a positive manner to rectify for himself the conditions of existence in the system. He alone is dissatisfied with the life style of

⁶³Dürrenmatt, Komödien II, p. 411.

the Elisian folk; he alone, in his garden, does take positive action. He works and changes the dung into humus, thereby creating the possibility that something could finally be made to grow on the island. He creates something positive: the hope for the future. As he explains to his son Phyleus:

Ich bin Politiker, mein Sohn, kein Held,
und die Politik schafft keine Wunder. Sie ist
so schwach wie die Menschen selbst, ein Bild
nur ihrer Zerbrechlichkeit und immer wieder
zum Scheitern bestimmt. Sie schafft nie das
Gute, wenn wir selbst nicht das Gute tun. Und
so tat ich denn das Gute. Ich verwandelte
Mist in Humus. Es ist eine schwere Zeit, in
der man so wenig für die Welt zu tun vermag,
aber dieses Wenige sollen wir wenigstens tun:
Das Eigene. Die Gnade, dass unsere Welt sich
erhelle, kannst du nicht erzwingen, doch die
Voraussetzung kannst du schaffen, dass die
Gnade--wenn sie kommt--in dir einen reinen
Spiegel finde für ihr Licht.⁶⁴

C. The Fate of the mutiger Mensch

The mutige Menschen portrayed above have all taken a course of action which has placed them in direct opposition to the society in which they are living. Either through an obvious effort to change society, such as the attempts of Romulus and Übelohe, or by less obvious means, such as the withdrawal from society as practiced by Möbius or the quiet labor of Augias, each individual, in the face of society's pressures, has tried to seek die verlorene Weltordnung

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 428.

against overwhelming odds. It remains to be seen exactly to what degree they are successful in the face of adversity. Their success or failure contains the message which Dürrenmatt endeavors to convey in his dramas and radio plays.

Romulus, for example, finds himself confronted at the end with Odoaker. Expecting and even desiring death at the sword of the chieftain, he is astounded to learn that his adversary is also an enthusiastic breeder of chickens--"ein Hühnerzüchter von Format."⁶⁵ Yet the most astounding revelation is to follow: Odoaker wants to surrender not only himself, but his entire people to Romulus! Odoaker has understood what the future will be. His nephew Theoderich will create a new Rome at least as bestial as the old Rome. This cannot be avoided if Romulus submits to his authority. If Odoaker kills his nephew, a thousand others will surely take his place.

Both men find themselves in sad predicaments. Romulus, because Odoaker needs and loves him, will not be put to death but sent into retirement; Odoaker cannot avoid the creation of another stifling society by eliminating his successor. As Romulus says to Odoaker after both have realized what their fates will be:

Mein lieber Odoaker, ich wollte Schicksal spielen, und du wolltest das deine vermeiden, nun ist es unser Schicksal geworden, gescheiterte Politiker darzustellen. Wir

⁶⁵Dürrenmatt, Komödien I, p. 77.

glaubten, die Welt aus unseren Händen fallen lassen zu können, du dein Germanien und ich mein Rom, nun müssen wir uns mit den Trümmern beschäftigen. Die können wir nicht fallen lassen. Ich richtete Rom hin, weil ich seine Vergangenheit fürchtete, du Germanien, weil es dich vor seiner Zukunft grauste. Wir liessen uns von zwei Gespenstern bestimmen, denn wir haben keine Macht über das, was war und über das, was sein wird. Macht haben wir nur über die Gegenwart, an die wir nicht gedacht haben und an der wir nun beide scheitern.⁶⁶

It is the element of chance that has ruined Romulus' grand idea. He desired to dissolve the empire and then die at the hand of his conqueror. Instead he is sent into humiliating retirement, with his family forever on his conscience. The attitude of Odoaker completely stuns him. It is only one other indication that the world in general is chaotic. It is supremely illogical, for one would expect Odoaker to be solely a fierce warrior and not also a breeder of chickens.

Romulus, in his desire to return humanity to its lost moral harmony, has tried to turn society upside down. It is obvious he has failed. In the play Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon we find that the mutiger Mensch has also attempted to change his world. As Akki dons the executioner's garb, he relates his philosophy:

Die Welt zu bestehen, muss der Schwache sie erkennen, um nicht blind einen Weg zu gehen, der sich verliert, in eine Gefahr zu rennen, die zum Tode führt. Die Mächtigen sind mächtig; es ist niederträchtig, diese

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 83.

Wahrheit zu missachten, und Narrheit zu trachten, die Mächtigen zu besiegen. . . . Heldentaten sind sinnlos, sie ver-raten die Ohnmacht des Schwachen und seine Verzweiflung bringt die Macht nur zum Lachen. . . . Begreife, was man muss und ziehe den Schluss: Stelle dich dumm, nur so wirst du alt. Von innen greife an. . . . Schleiche dich ein, demütigen Gesichts, als Saufkumpan, als Sklave, Dichter, Schulden-bauer, erniedrige dich und du brichst jede Mauer. Ertrage Schmach, geh jede Pfade, vergrabe, wills die Zeit, wilde Hoffnung, heisse Liebe, Leid und Gnade, Menschlichkeit, unter einem roten Henkerskleid.⁶⁷

The secret of Akki's will to survive in this world lies in the phrase, "Von innen greife an." He has realized that "Heldentaten sind sinnlos," that is, heroics cannot change anything, but can only lead to the sure destruction of the individual attempting to challenge established authority. Therefore he feels the way to create change is through a rather slow process: penetrate the body of the system to its core and destroy it from within. A parallel to this is found in Romulus' tenure as emperor: he managed to infiltrate the ruling circle, married a woman to gain the throne, and von innen changed the system. The resulting attitude of Odoaker was, to be sure, unforeseen, and in effect cancelled out Romulus' efforts.

Just as Romulus was frustrated in the end by the Germanic takeover, so too is Akki frustrated and unable to really effect any permanent change on Babylonian society.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 232.

He must flee from the court with the girl Kurrubi, instead of executing her as ordered. In this act of defiance he does manage to enjoy a small triumph. Fighting his way through a desert storm with the girl struggling to keep up the pace, he flees from the society which is faced with certain ruin: "Babylon, blind und fahl, zerfällt mit seinem Turm aus Stein und Stahl, der sich unaufhaltsam in die Höhe schiebt, dem Sturz entgegen; und vor uns . . . liegt fern ein neues Land, voll neuer Verfolgung, voll neuer Verheissung und voll von neuen Gesängen."⁶⁸

Again the tone at the end of this drama is rather pessimistic: the future of these two refugees can only be a repetition of the past. The land to which they are traveling is, just as the previous one, a land of promise and of tribulations, for it, too, must be contaminated by the cancer of systems which men have built through the ages, all the same in their identical disapprobation of the moral individual.

Three further victims of frustrated ambitions are the three main personalities which have been identified in Die Ehe des Herrn Mississippi. When one considers their contributions towards the improvement of society--through the Law, through revolution, and through love--one would expect at least one of these to strike a harmonic chord in the minds

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 262.

of men. Failure and frustration are their rewards; death comes to two of them.

Mississippi, the hangman par excellence in the confused and turbulent society portrayed in this drama, finally reaches, to use a colloquialism, the end of his rope: the State needs him no longer:

*Mississippi: Die Regierung braucht mich.

Minister: Brauchte dich. . . . Deine Amtsführung hat uns zwar einmal gerettet, aber nun bedroht sie uns. Ein Staatsanwalt, der dreihundertfünfzig Todesurteile durchgesetzt hat und öffentlich zu erklären wagt, man sollte das Gesetz Mosis wieder einführen, ist nicht mehr tragbar.*⁶⁹

Thus becoming embroiled in a struggle with the State, facing the violence of a mob attack upon his residence, Mississippi dies at the hand of his wife. Both poison each other, and yet this act was, before the marriage, foretold by Mississippi as he informed Anastasia of the impending act of matrimony: "Doch bin ich gezwungen, in dieser unwürdigen Zeit, selbst mein Richter zu sein. Ich habe das Urteil gefällt. Ich habe mich verurteilt, Sie zu heiraten.*⁷⁰ Mississippi, the proponent of Mosaic Law, condemns himself, knowing full well that the woman who poisoned her previous husband would no doubt eventually try to eliminate

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 115.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 109.

him too. Thus ends Mississippi's campaign rather ingloriously as he slumps over the coffee table in his parlor.

Saint-Claude also becomes the victim of the ideal to which he became wed, that of revolution, here clothed in the red flag of communism. Just as Anastasia turned against Mississippi, so did the Communist Party turn against Saint-Claude: "Die Partei hat mich ausgeschlossen," he explains to Anastasia. "Aus dem untrüglichen Instinkt, dass sie nur jene zu fürchten hat, die den Kommunismus ernst nehmen, wird die Partei alles unternehmen, mich zu töten."⁷¹

To be sure, the executioners of the party do trap him in Mississippi's apartment, and murder him. The system has swept away these two characters. Graf Bodo Übelohe is the mutiger Mensch who finds that his attempts to do das Seine tapfer are also thwarted. Having fled to Borneo, he opened a hospital for the natives in the best tradition of Christian missionaries. Instead, he found ruin: "Die einheimische Medizin erwies sich als stärker. Ich wollte der Menschheit mit meinen sozialen Liebeswerken helfen, und bin dabei zum Bettler geworden."⁷² Again, the unexpected in the form of the native medicine has emerged to ruin his plans.

In the final scene of this macabre drama, Mississippi, Anastasia, and Saint-Claude arise and speak after their

⁷¹Ibid., p. 156.

⁷²Ibid., p. 138.

deaths. They declare that men will again and again arise to try to reach the unattainable, whatever their interpretation of that is:

*Saint-Claude: Immer kehren wir wieder, wie wir immer wiederkamen.

Mississippi: In immer neuen Gestalten, uns sehnd nach immer ferneren Paradiesen. . . .⁷³

What Dürrenmatt is saying is reinforced by the appearance of Übelohe, who takes on the form of Don Quixote. The parallel is clear: those who yearn for and strive to attain their particular goals will only be tilting at windmills, again and again being frustrated in the "ewige Komödie"⁷⁴ which is this world.

The crushing frustration of experiencing the failure of one's sincere attempts to counteract the whims of a society run wild are nowhere more apparent than in Die Physiker. Möbius, carefully shielding his sanity from even his family, is known by the two agents to be perfectly sound of mind. In their attempt to convince him to join their respective employers, Möbius defends the position which has led him to murder in order to keep his secret sacrosanct: *Jeder preist mir eine andere Theorie an, doch die Realität, die man mir bietet, ist dieselbe: ein Gefängnis. Da ziehe

⁷³Ibid., p. 167.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 168.

ich mein Irrenhaus vor. Es gibt mir wenigstens die Sicherheit, von Politikern nicht ausgenützt zu werden."⁷⁵ His reason for remaining hidden is compelling: "Entweder bleiben wir im Irrenhaus, oder die Welt wird eines. Entweder löschen wir uns im Gedächtnis der Menschen aus, oder die Menschheit erlischt."⁷⁶ He convinces the agents to stay.

It is, however, all for naught. Möbius, in order to prevent his manuscripts from falling into the hands of the agents, destroyed them. Then falls the thunderbolt: the manuscript was destroyed--but only the original. The Fräulein Doktor Mathilde von Zahnd, director of the asylum, had photocopied them meticulously. In triumph she appeared before the three and declared: "Ich werde das System aller möglichen Erfindungen auswerten. . . . Mein Trust wird herschen, die Länder, die Kontinente erobern, das Sonnensystem ausbeuten, nach dem Andromedanebel fahren. Die Rechnung ist aufgegangen. Nicht zugunsten der Welt, aber zugunsten einer alten, buckligen Jungfrau."⁷⁷

To the horror and astonishment of the physicists, their resolution to remain in the asylum is an exercise in futility, the murders and time spent there for naught, for the

⁷⁵Dürrenmatt, Komödien II, p. 341.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 343.

⁷⁷Ibid., pp. 348-350.

theories and formulas of the brilliant Möbius have fallen into the hands of a madwoman bent on world domination. They have become her prisoners, with no hope for escape. Again, utter frustration of the mutiger Mensch is the result, all of the sacrifice and careful planning useless.

Dürrenmatt has again written of the unsuccess of the mutiger Mensch in attempting to stave off the certain ramifications of the repudiation of the moral world. Dürrenmatt's astute conception of this is reiterated in his Hörspiele.

Die Panne ist an articulate example of what happens when a man does attain, if only for a moment, die verlorene Weltordnung. Alfredo Traps, compelled by an automobile malfunction to overnight in a village, is forced to the realization that he was the (indirect) cause of his former employer's death by his rendezvous with the latter's wife. The mock jury of the Stammtisch customers achieves this. At the end of his "trial," in a moment of self-understanding, he blurts out, "Ich bin ein Mörder. Ich wusste es nicht, als ich dieses Haus betrat, wollte es nicht wissen, nun weiss ich es. Ich wagte nicht daran zu denken, ich war offenbar zu feige, ehrlich zu sein, nun habe ich den Mut dazu. Ich bin schuldig. Ich erkenne es mit Entsetzen, mit Staunen. Die Schuld ist in mir aufgegangen, kommt es mir vor, wie eine Sonne, erhellt mein Inneres, verbrennt es.

Ich bitte das Gericht um das Urteil."⁷⁸ The sentence is death. Indeed, so overwhelmed is Traps at the realization which has finally dawned upon him, that he begs the appointed "executioner" to carry out the sentence. He sleeps.

Upon awakening, he is indeed a changed man again; his former self has asserted itself once more, as can be inferred from his monolog: "Muss komisches Zeug zusammengeredet haben letzte Nacht. Was war denn eigentlich los? So was wie eine Gerichtsverhandlung. Bildete mir ein, einen Mord begangen zu haben. So ein Unsinn. Ausgerechnet ich. Kann ja keinem Tierchen zuleide tun. Auf was die Leute kommen, wenn sie pensioniert sind. Na, vorbei. Habe andere Sorgen, wenn man so mitten im Geschäftsleben steht. Dieser Wildholz! Rieche den Braten. Fünf Prozent will der abkippen, fünf Prozent. . . . Rücksichtslos gehe ich nun vor, rücksichtslos. Dem drehe ich den Hals um. Unnachsichtlich!"⁷⁹

The about-face done by the businessman Traps after he had become cognizant of his guilt is disappointing. Having acknowledged die verlorene Weltordnung in his moment of exclaiming, "Ich bin schuldig," this only proved to be a fleeting moment of reckoning with one's soul. After a night's sleep, the inner emptiness of the man took hold

⁷⁸Dürrenmatt, Hörspiele, p. 282.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 287.

again. So strong is the grip of emptiness on the man, that he totally refused to even admit to himself that wrongdoing had been done on his part. He dismisses the previous evening's experience with "Na, vorbei," and proceeds to continue his ruthless pursuit of profit. In light of the fact that he had momentarily come to realize the truth, his behavior is more pitiful, for he remains unchanged.

Fruitless struggle seems to be the message Dürrenmatt brings to us through his dramas and radio plays. Is there any hope at all for the man who desires to do das Seine tapfer? Apparently not on this Earth, according to Dürrenmatt. He has created an extraterrestrial society, if it may be called one, on the planet Venus. Here one is free from the bonds society in the traditional sense imposes upon one, be they in the form of social constraints or in the emasculation of one's morality.

Das Unternehmen der Wega exemplifies one of the many instances where men articulate the true temper of mankind. The constant battle for survival in a primitive, hostile environment is the means by which the condemned of the penal colony learn that which is unlearnable on Earth, as the prisoner Bonstetten says to the expedition member Wood: "Bonstetten: Der Mensch ist etwas Kostbares und sein Leben eine Gnade.

Wood: Lächerlich. Diese Erkenntnis haben wir auf der Erde schon lange.

Bonstetten: Nun? Lebt ihr nach dieser Erkenntnis?

(Schweigen.)⁸⁰

It is to avoid the contamination of the mother planet that the various spokesmen for the prisoners refuse to deal with the emissaries. They refuse to give up their freedom, an astounding statement when one considers that they are in constant danger of succumbing to the elements. However, this freedom is not obtainable on Earth, for it is "die Freiheit, recht zu handeln und das Notwendige zu tun. . . . Die Erde ist zu schön. Zu reich. Ihre Möglichkeiten sind zu gross. Sie verführt zur Ungleichheit. Auf ihr ist Armut eine Schande, und so ist sie geschändet. Nur hier ist die Armut etwas Natürliches. An unserer Nahrung, an unseren Werkzeugen klebt nur unser Schweiss, nicht noch Ungerechtigkeit wie auf der Erde. Und so haben wir Furcht vor ihr. Furcht vor ihrem Überfluss, Furcht vor dem falschen Leben, Furcht vor einem Paradies, das eine Hölle ist."⁸¹

The bare struggle for survival on Venus is highly preferable to the climate on Earth which prevents men from being moral men. This is not what the emissaries wish to hear. It is another threat to their system. Venus is thus marked for destruction. It perishes in the mushroom cloud with a callous disregard of the beings who were, in spite of their pitiful existence, proud men who had won their way

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 237.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 238.

back to that ephemeral lost world harmony.

At the end of his drama Die Physiker, Dürrenmatt, in the "21 Punkte zu den Physikern" has given the ultimate formula applicable to his dramas and radio plays. He makes a succinct statement of his concept of the fate in store for the mutiger Mensch: "8. Punkt: Je planmässiger die Menschen vorgehen, desto wirksamer vermög sie der Zufall treffen."⁸² It is this Zufall which is the result of the dramatist's Einfall, the twisting and turning of fate and reality which is manipulated by the dramatist's pen as a force for the characters to reckon with. It most always contains the element of surprise. Consider the astonishment of Romulus at Odoaker's offer, and the end of Die Physiker as Möbius discovers the truth. It is in the above mentioned plays that this element is most evident.

In the 18. Point, Dürrenmatt for all practical purposes excludes the possibility of the individual person experiencing a successful conclusion to his endeavors: "Jeder Versuch eines Einzelnen, für sich zu lösen, was alle angeht, muss scheitern."⁸³ He is predestined to failure, just as Romulus, Graf Übelohe, Möbius, and all of the rest of the stage world of Dürrenmatt is predestined to failure.

Dürrenmatt has succeeded in becoming unbequem, for a

⁸²Dürrenmatt, Komödien II, p. 354.

⁸³Ibid., p. 355.

myriad of questions arise in one's mind after contemplating this philosophy: Is man always doomed to failure in his quest for that elusive universal harmony? Would the Dürrenmatt characters have undertaken their various endeavors knowing they would be but frustrated in the end? Is the mutiger Mensch truly an exception among men, or can each and every man succeed in becoming one?

"Sprengstoffe, keine Tranquillizer:" this is the raison d'être of this dramatist's legacy to a world which, in spite of its material progress, seems ever more the poorer with its problems which beset mankind.

Conclusion

The concept of using the theater as a means to purvey a sense of morality to the people is an element common to both Friedrich Schiller and Friedrich Dürrenmatt. However, it seems that just as the span of many ages separates these two dramatists, so has time created a great gap in the interpretation of exactly what kind of morality is being shown. As has been seen, Schiller conceives of the stage as the means to raise the moral level of the people by showing the best and worst attributes of men and women as they react to the forces of life. Dürrenmatt, too, in the same vein has created dramas which show the reactions of men and women, yet his conception of the morality experienced on stage is quite different than that which Schiller believes attainable.

Schiller believes in the uplifting element, in the educative value of the theater as a means of bettering society, whereas Dürrenmatt has gone beyond that positivistic viewpoint. The dramatis personae of the Dürrenmatt stage are the victims of a fait accompli, the condition of society. Society has long been established along guidelines which can only be called an anti-morality. Man has totally divorced himself from the inner harmony of nature's

mores.

Such is the poisonous seed to be found in any and all societies, for such is the nature of man: to misconceive the natural (or divine) order of the universe, and to try to set himself up as independent of, and not subservient to, this harmony. Indeed, man has so totally removed himself from this concept that he cannot, for the most part, even recognize that it does exist. It is only in the breast of the mutiger Mensch that some individuals do become cognizant of this damaging loss of nature's essence. It has been seen that they have been frustrated in the attempt to reinstate these immutable laws. Dürrenmatt has told us that men must rise up against society's disregard of nature and not become overwhelmed by the technology and grandiose achievements of which men have become enamoured.

Although Dürrenmatt paints a basically pessimistic viewpoint of the strivings of the mutiger Mensch, one must not take this as a call for men to simply stop their striving and to lose themselves in the orgy of society. His dramas are all the more reason we as members of the human race should strive to regain that lost paradise, if only in ourselves. Although most of our attempts will end as true Komödien, the fleeting encounter with die verlorene Weltordnung which is granted to so few must not be ignored.

Appendix

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Vita

Richard J. Mauthe was born on June 20, 1948 in Elizabeth, New Jersey. He attended the Cranford, New Jersey public schools, and upon graduation entered Muhlenberg College in 1966, where he majored in German. The academic year 1968-1969 was spent at the University of Munich in conjunction with Wayne State University. In 1970 he was granted a B. A. degree from Muhlenberg College and entered the Allentown, Pennsylvania school system as a teacher of German. In 1971 he enrolled in the graduate program at Lehigh University. This master's thesis represents the culmination of his work in the Department of Modern Foreign Languages and Literatures at Lehigh.