

PART I: PANIZZA'S LIFE

“Read it and write about it, if you can; it is very difficult (legally) but very rewarding. . . They ought to erect either a stake for him or a monument. Our public should finally learn that atheism also has its heroes and martyrs.”

(Theodor Fontane, Letter to Maximilian Harden,
July 22, 1895)

Chapter 1.

THE EARLY YEARS

Childhood

In an attempt to understand the strange character of Oskar Panizza, it is helpful to take a look at his family history, a history which the author considered most fateful for his later development. Oskar's mother, Mathilde, herself a prolific writer and a most important influence on the boy's life, writes that she was descended from an aristocratic Huguenot family by the name of de Meslère.¹ They emigrated to Sonneberg (Saxony) in 1685 and changed their name to Mechthold. Oskar's maternal grandmother, a descendant of these Mechtholds, married a merchant by the name of Speeth. Although she had secured a written agreement to raise their children in the Protestant faith, Speeth, after moving to Catholic Würzburg, decided to break this contract. Thus Panizza's mother, Mathilde (born November 8, 1821), was baptized a Catholic. But in 1833, two months before her first communion, her father died, and this enabled the girl to return to the Protestant fold.

Oskar's paternal grandfather, Leopold Panizza, came from a family of fishermen in Bellagio on Lake Como.² He had been a traveling salesman who settled down in 1794 and established his own business in Würzburg. Leopold married a local girl who bore him fourteen children, of whom the youngest, Karl (born September 30, 1808), was Oskar's father. Karl is depicted as a ne'er-do-well, a man of limited talents and ambitions who eventually learned enough about the hotel trade to manage several such establishments himself. Oskar describes

him as "passionate, eccentric, irate, and a clever man of the world; a poor manager of household affairs."³ A bigoted Catholic tyrant not unlike his father-in-law, Karl was an unstable character who inclined towards gambling, an undistinguished husband, and a worse father.

Karl and Mathilde met at a concert, and after a short but passionate courtship were married on April 17, 1844. Their religious arguments began even before marriage, when Karl insisted that all their children would have to be raised Catholic. The two families finally arranged a compromise, whereby all offspring were to become Catholic or Protestant depending on whether their first child was a boy or a girl. Shortly before their wedding day, however, Karl led his unsuspecting fiancée out for an afternoon stroll which ended in the Catholic parish house, where the 23-year-old girl was confronted with prepared documents authorizing a Catholic education for all her children. If she refused to sign, then the marriage was off. She reluctantly consented, and although her first baby was a girl, all five Panizza children were baptized in the Catholic faith.

Oskar's elder sister, Maria, born in 1846, outlived all the other children, married a hotel proprietor in Bad Kissingen, and died in 1925. The second child, Felix, born in 1848, became a hotel proprietor in Hong Kong and died in 1908. The second son, Karl, born in 1852, became a legal official (*Amtsgerichtsrat*) in Kiel and died in 1916. Oskar was born on November 12, 1853, shortly after his parents had moved from Würzburg to Bad Kissingen. The last child of this union was Ida, two years Oskar's junior, who became blind at the age of twenty while pursuing her studies as a singer. Like the youngest of her brothers, she had a very difficult life and died in 1922, one year after Oskar.

Family history repeated itself when Karl Panizza died of typhoid in November 1855. On his death-bed, he is said to have blessed his five children and granted their mother permission to raise them in her own Protestant faith. In spite of this, Mathilde Panizza, whom son Oskar later described as being "energetic, strong-willed, with an almost masculine intelligence,"⁴ was forced to go to extraordinary lengths to secure a Protestant education for her children. The Catholic diocese maintained it had a legal basis, in the form of the authorizations which Mathilde had signed eleven years previously, for demanding that the children be brought up Catholic. Thus she saw no alternative but to secretly leave Bad Kissingen with the children and bring them to a family in Prussia, where they were well hidden from

Catholic investigators. Frau Panizza offered to renounce her Bavarian citizenship in order to live in Bad Kissingen as an alien, outside any official Catholic jurisdiction. When her efforts met with continued hostile resistance, she journeyed to Munich with the intention of pleading with King Maximilian II for a special dispensation. But the King refused to receive her, and the only result was that the authorities threatened to send her to prison, a threat which would have been realized had it not been for her poor health. It was only after years of toil and several lost trials that Maximilian finally granted this persistent woman the permission to educate her children in the Protestant faith.

During the years that followed, Oskar's mother continued to be at odds with the law. For her charitable practice of feeding the poor, for instance, she was charged with "fostering mendicancy" and sentenced to three days in jail. This sentence was later commuted to house arrest, with Frau Panizza maintaining that it was her prerogative to serve "people in silk clothes and those without, with shoes and without."⁵ Throughout his life, Oskar was to continue these religious and legal battles, launching bitter and often savage attacks against the authoritarian dogma of the Roman Catholic Church. His literary activity can, to some extent, be understood as an attempt to avenge the sufferings and humiliations his beloved mother had been forced to endure.

One very important aspect of the Panizza family history should at least be mentioned before proceeding with a discussion of its most infamous member. As a mature man, Dr. Panizza considered the incidence of mental disease and instability on his mother's side of the family to be a decisive influence on the formation of his own character. The autobiographical sketch he wrote in 1904 begins with the sentence: "Oskar Panizza. . . comes from a genetically tainted family."⁶ One of his mother's brothers suffered from "religious madness" and died after a fifteen-year sojourn in a Würzburg insane asylum. Another uncle committed suicide at a young age. An aunt is described as having been "mentally strange and somewhat retarded." Oskar's younger sister, Ida, suffered from fits of depression at an early age and had a hysterical condition which twice led her to attempt suicide. He sums up his early home environment in the following words: "In the entire family there exists a prevalence of mental activity with an inclination toward discussing religious questions."⁷ It is also significant that his mother's books, published under the pseudonym Siona, deal

almost exclusively with religious questions.⁸

From the moment of Oskar's birth, there existed a very special relationship between him and his mother.⁹ She fell deathly ill right after giving birth, and her family expected the illness to be fatal. But this mystically inclined woman had a dream in which she was told she would indeed survive, a vision that kept her from despair and helped her pull through this difficult period. After her recovery, Oskar's baptism was celebrated with unequalled pomp and festivity; three clergymen were in attendance, two Catholic and one Protestant. Little Oskar did not remain the apple of his mother's eye for long, though; as a youth he was to cause her much aggravation, and by the time he was a middle-aged man it had reached the point where she feared the mere sight of him might be enough to kill her.

Karl Panizza died when Oskar was only two years of age, leaving the boy without a paternal figure whose example and authority he could emulate and respect. He developed slowly, had great difficulties learning to read, and because he displayed no particular talents was given the nickname "dummy" by his siblings. A quiet, introverted child, Oskar was a dreamer with a vivid imagination which he found difficult to harness. He came down with all the usual childhood diseases, but at the age of twelve, when he was sick with the measles, he experienced an extraordinary state of somnambulism: in broad daylight he left his bed in a deep trance, walked around his room and remained unconscious until someone found him as he knelt praying before his bed. This experience had prophetic significance for him; indeed, it is the *only* childhood incident which he bothered recounting in the seventeen-page autobiographical sketch he wrote as a 50-year-old man in 1904.

The Student Years

In 1863, Oskar followed his two older brothers and was sent to Kornthal, Württemberg, to attend a pietistic school. He had great difficulties as a student and received low grades, still being very much the dreamer who saw no purpose in applying himself to subjects he found boring and irrelevant. He was confirmed there in 1868 and discussed the typically pietistic verse from II Corinthians 12, 9: "My strength is made perfect in weakness." The following autumn, he transferred to the humanistic *Gymnasium* in Schweinfurt, where he

was forced to major in Latin, despite the fact that his Greek was decidedly better. During this period he lived at the home of a book dealer named Siegler, who conscientiously supervised the lad's academic work as well as his piano practicing. Within two years Oskar had successfully completed the *tertia* class and now expressed a strong desire to continue his *Gymnasium* studies in the far more exciting city of Munich.

Mathilde Panizza reluctantly submitted and allowed her seventeen-year-old boy to pursue his education in the Bavarian capital. She believed he would be kept under strict supervision in the parish house of her brother-in-law, Franz, and her childless sister, Maria. But the colorful metropolis proved too great a distraction for the excitable and hedonistic teenager, who discovered a host of activities far more interesting than anything to be found in his school books. His first year in Munich proved to be an academic disaster and he failed the *secunda* class. He pleaded with his mother that he was wholly unfit to realize her long-held wish that he become a clergyman; instead, he wished to be a singer or at least a businessman. But Frau Panizza, whose stubbornness had won out on many a previous occasion, firmly insisted that Oskar repeat the class while continuing his music studies. After this second year in Munich, he wanted more than ever to devote himself exclusively to a musical career, telling his mother that "at nineteen, one really ought to know what profession one wants to pursue."¹⁰ Frau Panizza saw little point in forcing her openly rebellious son to remain at the *Gymnasium*. She did, however, extract the concession from him that he at least spend part of his time getting some "practical" instruction while continuing his studies in singing at the music conservatory. Since he was too proud to attend the local trade school together with much younger boys, his mother had to pay for private tutoring in French, stenography, and business mathematics.

By the spring of 1873, it had become quite obvious to Frau Panizza that her youngest son was not destined to be a success either as a singer or as a businessman. She could no longer bear to see him frivolously wasting his time and her money on these futile pursuits; it was high time the lad stopped deceiving himself. She therefore went to Munich and resolutely brought the nearly 20-year-old boy back to Kissingen with her. But there was really nothing for him to do at home except help out in the Hotel Russischer Hof, an establishment which the family had purchased back in 1850 and which Mathilde was operating with far greater success than her late husband. The hotel

business, however, was not exactly where Oskar's ambitions lay, and he let it be known that he hated his mother for what she was doing to him; he spent most of this period loafing and generally irritating his mother with his recalcitrant behavior. She soon realized that it would be a mistake to keep him at home any longer and sent him to Nürnberg to work with his brother Karl in the Bloch banking firm. This proved to be another disaster, since Oskar Panizza displayed about as much talent and enthusiasm for banking as Heinrich Heine had a half-century before. He defiantly misbehaved until his exasperated mother allowed him to resume his studies at the music conservatory in Munich.

Hardly had he resettled in Munich when he was called to military service. Life in the Bavarian army was considerably rougher than anything he had experienced to date, and he would have followed his natural inclinations and deserted, had not his mother pointed out to him the severe consequences of such an action. His captain once remarked: "I can't figure you out, I never know where I am with you."¹¹ Military service seems to have had something of a sobering effect on young Panizza. After a grave bout with cholera in the fall of 1874, he had become decidedly more serious about life, even showing signs of remorse over how he had been treating his mother.

Following his discharge, he returned to Munich and picked up his singing career where he had left off. Although he was receiving very good grades in music, his intellectual horizons were now broadening and he began to audit lectures in philosophy at the University of Munich. It was clearer than ever to him that his unfinished *Gymnasium* training would be an obstacle in almost any worthwhile line of endeavor, and he therefore resolved to complete his secondary education at all costs. With the help of private tutors, he painstakingly reviewed his academic subjects and was readmitted to his old *Gymnasium* in Schweinfurt where, at the advanced age of twenty-four, he completed the remaining class and finally received his *Abitur* degree. This was the first major achievement in the life of Oskar Panizza; it was a turning point inasmuch as it stabilized him, creating the necessary self-confidence and discipline to undertake more ambitious ventures.

He wasted no time in putting his newly earned degree to use. In 1877, when he returned to his favorite city, he enrolled not in the music conservatory but in the medical school of the University of Munich. It appears to have been one of the happier periods in his

otherwise troubled life. He was almost totally absorbed by his medical studies and research, which he admits to having pursued "with great love and zeal."¹² Professor von Ziemssen made Panizza one of his assistants and supervised his fledgling's work at the Clinical Institute. This time was not, however, one clear period of unadulterated productivity, for it was during these days and nights as a medical student that Panizza contracted syphilis, most likely from a Munich prostitute. This dreaded disease, although *lege artis*, was never to leave him. It later manifested itself in the form of a mighty *gumma* on his right tibia (shinbone), which never disappeared. It later spooked through his *magnum opus* as the devilish gift of an impotent God. Indeed, there is a good chance that the state of mental derangement during the last two decades of his life can be traced back to the "sanest" period in his development.

In 1880, after slightly less than four years of intensive work, Oskar became Dr. Panizza with a dissertation entitled: *Über Myelin, Pigment, Epithelien und Micrococcen im Sputum*.¹³ This study, by the youth who only a few years previously had been single-mindedly bent on pursuing a singing career, was so well received by his professors that they enthusiastically endorsed it with the distinction of *summa cum laude*. After a few months of working in a field hospital to complete his military obligation, he was promoted to *Assistenzarzt II. Klasse* in the army reserves. The successive years of rather restricting discipline first in the army, then at *Gymnasium*, medical school, and again in the army, had their cumulative effect on young Dr. Panizza. He had become so restless that he felt he could no longer remain in Munich. Thus in 1881, armed with numerous letters of introduction which von Ziemssen had written, he set off for Paris in order to see what he could learn about French medical advances. Once in Paris, though, he hardly visited any hospitals; instead, he became absorbed in the study of French literature, especially drama, a genre in which he was later to attain his greatest distinction and notoriety.

From Psychiatry to Poetry

After half a year of somewhat surreptitiously following his literary inclinations in Paris, he returned to Munich in 1882 to assume the position of *IV. Assistenzarzt* at the district insane asylum in Munich (Oberbayerische Kreis-Irrenanstalt). It did not take long, though, be-

fore his former inability to hold down a permanent job began to manifest itself again. A combination of poor health, strained relations with his superior, Dr. Gudden, and the desire to spend more time on literary pursuits forced him to leave after only two years. The sustained exposure to psychotic patients, as well as the frustrations and confusions besetting his own life, brought upon a deep state of depression which lasted almost an entire year. But Dr. Panizza, who had never lost sight of literature since his visit to Paris, managed to pull himself out of this state by a therapeutic activity which was wholly new to him: writing poetry. This was the most critical discovery in his life, for he came to believe that the only way he could maintain his psychological equilibrium was by constantly writing. With the exception of a few minor and temporary activities as a general physician, Dr. Panizza permanently abandoned the practice of medicine and "turned definitively to literature."¹⁴

This process of turning to literature involved several aspects. It meant that henceforth all activity was to be geared toward producing literary works, even if this involved sacrificing personal comfort and security. Aside from his own creative efforts, the books of other men began to occupy more and more of his time as Panizza quickly evolved into a voracious, yet highly eclectic, reader. He went from the standard *Gymnasium* curriculum, opera libretti, and psychology textbooks, to French drama, Russian novels, German philosophy, English ballads, and American short stories. His knowledge and appreciation of German literature ranged from the works of Luther and other Reformation polemicists to those of Schiller, the Romantics, Young Germany, and his own contemporaries. Nobody who ever talked to Panizza failed to be impressed by his immense encyclopedic knowledge.

A final consequence of dedicating his life to literature was financial, although this probably had its personal implications, as well. If he was to become a creative writer, then he would need an independent source of income which would allow him to pursue his vocation without compromising his art. As he had done so often in the past when faced with a critical situation, he turned to his mother and asked her for help. Frau Panizza had since sold her hotel and was now a woman of considerable means, yet she was understandably very reluctant to underwrite an artistic career for her 30-year-old son. Oskar rarely failed to bring his mother around to his point of view, and the stakes were much too high in this particular instance for him to even consider bowing to his mother's wishes. It took months of wrangling,

but he finally succeeded in obtaining a yearly allowance of six thousand marks from his incensed mother. Having just liberated himself from the tedious chore of earning a living for the rest of his life, he naturally took great pains to soothe her with a most conciliatory letter (April 20, 1884). Glancing at Panizza's not exactly short life-span of sixty-eight years, we see that during only two of these, as Professor Gudden's psychiatric assistant from 1882 to 1884, was he entirely self-supporting. One looks in vain for another German writer who remained so utterly dependent on his mother throughout his life.

It is hardly much of a surprise to learn that Panizza's first literary effort was a poem he wrote for his mother back in 1871, occasioned by her fiftieth birthday. It is a poem filled with love and gratitude, in which he celebrates his mother's indomitable spirit and victorious struggles against overwhelming odds.¹⁵ His poetic output over the next one-and-a-half decades was insignificant, but after his major depression of 1884 and the discovery of writing as "therapy," he came to view poetic creativity as the highest form of human activity. The desire for fame and glory certainly cannot be discounted as a major factor in his decision to devote himself to literature. Writing twenty years later as a failed and forgotten poet, he curses the muse who seduced him away from the straight path with promises that remained unfulfilled:

Fluch dir, so ruft er, die auf falschen Bahnen,
Ein täuschend Irrlicht, meine Seele zog,—
Die mich verführt mit trügerischem Ahnen,
Und einst so süß mein töricht Herz belog;—
Mit falschem Locken sangest du mir Lieder,
Dem Knaben einst und sprachst von Ruhm und Glanz. . .¹⁶

The fruits of more than a year's sustained poetic productivity were collected in a 124-page book whose title, *Düstere Lieder*, reflects the somber mood of its contents.¹⁷ For the most part, the poems are rather crude constructions in jagged doggerel, consciously inspired by the much-admired verse of Heinrich Heine. Though the collection failed to sell or arouse even a ripple of critical acclaim, Panizza says he felt "substantially elevated and refreshed as a result of this literary release."¹⁸

While working on his first collection of poems, he was also busy studying English language and literature with a Mrs. Callway in Munich. After submitting the manuscript to publisher Albert Unflad at the end of 1885, he left for England, where he remained for an entire

year. Most of this time was spent in London, studying old English songs and ballads in the British Museum while still continuing his own poetic pursuits. When he returned to Munich in the fall of 1886, after a brief stay in Berlin, he compiled his second collection of poetry which appeared the following year under the title *Londoner Lieder*.¹⁹ This proved to be no more successful than his first work, and dismay at the lack of any public response to his poetic outpourings may have contributed to the slackening of his output. His third volume of poetry, compiled in 1888 and published in 1889 under the romantic title *Legendäres und Fabelhaftes*, marked the beginning of a ten-year hiatus in poetic production.²⁰ Panizza gradually lost interest in the smaller literary forms; what he had to say now would require prose, could no longer be confined to four-beat lines. One thing remained very certain in his mind, the realization that "intensive involvement with foreign languages and literary production proved to be the best antidotes for all kinds of psychopathic fits."²¹ Towards the end of the 1880's Panizza experienced a renewed interest in his ancestral Italy, studied the language and literature with a Signora Luccioli, and made repeated trips south to the Alps.

Early Prose

A gradual diminishing of Panizza's poetic output has already been noted, but this does not mean that he was doing any less writing. What occurred during the late eighties was a decided shift from poetry to prose, the latter not only being likely to appeal to a much larger audience but also more consonant with the general tenor of Naturalism. His first book of prose fiction, *Dämmerungsstücke*, appeared early in 1890 and is "dedicated to the memory of Edgar Poe."²² It is a collection of four stories, all fairly short except for the last one, which is 180 pages in length and represents the longest work of prose fiction written by Panizza. As the book's title implies, these stories are located in the twilight zone between day and night, reality and fantasy, sanity and insanity, reverence and blasphemy. Yet Panizza transcends his obvious literary ancestors Poe and E.T.A. Hoffmann by his striking and consistent use of what can only be called the grotesque: a ludicrously realistic presentation of Christ's Passion by some wax puppets at a fair; the mass production of "perfect" human beings in a Meissen factory; a visit to the moon, whose lower-class inhabitants

dwell in a ramshackle hut and subsist on monthly supplies of Dutch cheese. Panizza revels in grotesque fantasies, but the language with which he recounts these absurdities is essentially naturalistic, casual to the point of flippancy, and meticulously accurate in detail as one might expect from a clinical psychologist. At its best, Panizza's prose anticipates the far more popular grotesque writings of such twentieth-century authors as Kafka, Beckett, Grass, and Dürrenmatt.²³

It is not surprising that *Dämmrungsstücke* received a modest amount of critical acclaim in the press and brought the author to the attention of Germany's leading literary figures. The most significant of these men in regard to Panizza's literary career was Michael Georg Conrad, who was also living in Munich at the time and had been editor of the influential journal *Die Gesellschaft* since 1885. The two Franconians became close friends, and between the years 1890 and 1896, Panizza was able to publish forty-one articles in *Die Gesellschaft* on widely varied topics ranging from theater reviews to theoretical considerations of prostitution. Their friendship, cooperation, and mutual esteem lasted exactly ten years (1890–1900), after which they became embittered enemies and wanted nothing to do with each other.

Panizza first met Conrad in the summer of 1890. As editor of one of Germany's leading avant-garde journals, Conrad's wide circle of literary friends included most of the writers who were active in Munich at the time: Frank Wedekind, Otto Julius Bierbaum, Max Halbe, Hanns von Gumpenberg, Anna Croissant-Rust, Georg Schaumberg, Julius Schaumberger, Wilhelm Weigand, and Ludwig Scharf. Berlin-based writers such as Ernst von Wolzogen and Maximilian Harden made frequent trips south to Munich and were introduced to Panizza. By the end of 1890, the obscure psychiatrist had not only gotten to know most of the Munich "Moderns," as the young Naturalists called themselves, but had begun to make quite an impression on them. Hanns von Gumpenberg writes that of the entire Munich literary circle, "probably the strangest character [was] the former psychiatrist and fledgling poet Oskar Panizza, a curious mixture of Old Franconian loyalty, theological, philological, medical, and scientific erudition, whimsical poetic fantasy, biting satire and daring exuberance."²⁴ Richard Weinhöppel, another member of Conrad's circle, was equally overwhelmed by his "eminent erudition and general wealth of knowledge."²⁵ It almost seems as if his friends considered Panizza to be a walking encyclopedia:

His stupendous erudition and his unusual memory had an amazing effect. He was one great reference book, which one never consulted in vain. He spiced his conversations with innumerable examples from the literatures of all countries and epochs; in this respect he was reminiscent of Karl Julius Weber, the author of the delightful "Demokritos." Panizza's ability to quote everything in its original language, and then to immediately render a perfect translation or comment extempore, elicited astonishment and admiration from everyone. I was soon completely under the spell of this wondrous person and sought his company wherever I could; at that time my productivity, which had begun with such vehemence and self-satisfaction, stagnated completely: I felt so retarded compared to this omniscient man.²⁶

Although his friends never tired of his staggering erudition, no one describes Panizza as having been an overly serious or even "bookish" individual. Weinhöppel recounts how Oskar's "light blue eyes would flash with a devilish slyness, and the almost uninterrupted, Jesuit smile of his mouth stood in curious contrast to the incredible crude or frank statements he would make whenever we were discussing something."²⁷ This same impression was also mentioned by Ernst von Wolzogen, who wrote that Panizza came "from an arch-Protestant Franconian family and yet looked like an arch-Jesuit."²⁸ Writing some thirty years after their first encounter, von Wolzogen echoes his contemporaries when he maintains that "Oskar Panizza was probably the strangest character" among his Munich circle of friends. He readily admits that "Panizza exerted a strong influence on me and belongs to the pacemakers of my later conversion to anti-Christianity. . ."²⁹

Gesellschaft für Modernes Leben

In December 1890, M.G. Conrad founded the "Gesellschaft für modernes Leben" (GML) in Munich. The original members included Rudolf Maison (sculptor), Detlev von Liliencron, O.J. Bierbaum, Julius Schaumberger, Hanns von Gumppenberger, and George Schaumberg. The GML was the southern counterpart of the "Freie Bühne," which had been established the preceding year in Berlin.³⁰ The Moderns in Munich were far less revolutionary in their demands for social reforms,

and they were less consistent in their attempt to create a radical style of Naturalism in literature. They were, however, angry young men determined to "naturalize" German society and rid German culture of what they felt to be the oppressive yoke of popular epigonal literature (epitomized in the writings of Paul Heyse). The GML met periodically in the large assembly hall of the Isarlust inn, where individual members presented readings from their works, or lectures followed by a discussion with what was usually a fairly sizeable audience. What made these GML meetings such a daring and exciting venture for their sponsors was the fact that there was a stringent censorship of the press operative in Wilhelminian Germany in general and Bavaria in particular. Thus police officials could be expected to be present at every public meeting, and it was not unusual for GML assemblies to be disbanded or their publications confiscated by the authorities. It is obvious why the Bavarian "Establishment" should feel threatened by what was basically a staunchly Protestant libertarian movement. Aside from such foreigners as Zola, Ibsen and Strindberg, the intellectual roots of the GML go back to Luther, Wagner, Nietzsche and Bismarck. The latter's abortive *Kulturkampf* had merely strengthened the Catholic political forces in Germany, and they were not about to see their entire culture subverted by a group of bohemian immigrants.

One of Panizza's presentations was a lecture on *Genie und Wahnsinn* which he delivered under the auspices of the GML on March 20, 1891.³¹ It is a loosely structured historical rambling through the topics of genius, talent, and madness as they relate to art and artists. His central thesis is Lombroso's idea that genius is precariously akin to insanity; genius is frequently lonely, miserable and sick, but sustained creative productivity can restore the artist to a healthful state again (p. 32). Although this concept could hardly be termed Panizza's intellectual property,³² he had indeed already applied this insight to his own creative development and achieved moderate results. Perhaps of greater psychological interest today are his discussions of hallucinations and model psychosis (p. 22), hashish (pp. 24f.), and the hallucinatory basis of religions (p. 29).³³ His encyclopedic literary survey ranging from Alfieri to Wagner is quite superficial as a work of scholarly ambitions, although the evaluations of his artistic predecessors is revealing as far as the author himself is concerned. His decided preference for Schiller over Goethe, for instance, was certainly not unique for his time, but his individual value judgments do seem somewhat extreme. Thus he states of Schiller's *Die Räuber*: "Perhaps no litera-

ture of the world contains a bolder work" (p. 11). Panizza ended his lecture with a glorification of Martin Luther, his revolutionary hero par excellence (pp. 31f.).

A great deal of prophetic significance has been ascribed to this lecture on genius and madness. Lippert concludes his monograph with the hope that "a small stone monument to him, to 'Genius and Madness,' will be erected."³⁴ Weinhöppel flatly states that "it was his own diagnosis,"³⁵ a conviction echoed by Prescher half a century later when he wrote that Panizza "anticipated his own fate."³⁶ What seems important is whether or not Panizza was aware of the fact that he was anticipating his later madness. A strong indication that the author was indeed thinking about the possibility of becoming insane can be found in the memoirs of Max Halbe, who spent much time together with Panizza in Egern during the summers of 1892 and 1893:

This proud, secluded heart thirsted for praise, for applause and fame as one who longs for a redeeming drink. . . The 40-year-old man saw his life's goal, which he was pursuing with a passionate determination, fade further and further into the distance. He had to pursue it, whether it be on a literary path or on that of an activist or a protestor against the hostile forces of his time. He had to seize it, whatever the cost; even if he had to pay with his life or his sanity. Already at that time he admitted to me in moments of confidence that things were not quite all right with him up there and would not come to a good end.³⁷

Love Commands

"Die Unsittlichkeits-Entrüstung der Pietisten und die freie Literatur" is the title of another lecture Panizza delivered under the auspices of the GML at their seventh public meeting on December 2, 1891. It was published in a collection entitled *Gegen Prüderie and Lüge*, which includes another lecture by Julius Schaumberger, as well as poems by Maurice von Stern and O.J. Bierbaum.³⁸ The collection is part of a two-pronged protest against an increasingly prudish censorship and the appearance of Paul Heyse's play *Wahrheit?* on the Munich stage. Panizza's lecture deals with the topic of prudery. In his usual manner, he refutes the assertion that moral standards are degenerating in modern literature with a sweeping survey of German writings

from the past. Beginning with Hrotsvit von Gandersheim, he briefly discusses all the great writers from the Middle Ages through the nineteenth century who unabashedly wrote about the tempests of physical love. The point he was trying to make was simple, indeed: "Yes, ladies and gentlemen, all of German literature, which we have just surveyed, is one single chain of sensuality" (p. 22). Not only would it be a departure from the "good old times" to censor the treatment of sex in literature, but a sheer impossibility: "We cannot command love. Love commands us. It is the 'summa lex' and the 'suprema voluntas!'—German love cannot be decreed in Potsdam!" (p. 24). In keeping with his previous talk before the same forum, he ends with an admonishment for clerical prudes to bear in mind the dictum of their spiritual progenitor, Martin Luther: "Thu's Maul auf!—Hau fest d'rauf!—Hör' bald auf!" (p. 25). Four years later, Oskar Panizza was to present a similar survey of German literature in an attempt to prove himself innocent of charges brought against him for his infamous play, *Das Liebeskonzil*.

Although none of this sounds very daring today, it must be borne in mind that Panizza was writing at the very beginning of what has turned out to be a general sexual liberation movement continuing down to the present. A decade before the publication of Sigmund Freud's *Die Traumdeutung*, there were very few writers in Germany, or anywhere else for that matter, who could freely write about such topics as homosexuality, masturbation, venereal disease, and hermaphroditism. Panizza's frank discussion of sexual topics continually annoyed the guardians of public morals but deeply impressed the young Moderns, who compared him to the classics of erotic literature: "This brilliant individual with the piercing look of intellectual superiority and great worldly experience, with his vital brain, with his refined taste of a decadent *Weltanschauung* and his blasphemous audacity, had an appeal for us similar to the forbidden reading of a Boccaccio or Casanova when we were still in school."³⁹ German Naturalism paved the way for the unhypocritical acceptance of sex as a topic for discussion, literary presentation, and eventually scientific investigation. Perhaps due to his own personal maladjustments, Oskar Panizza appears to have been even more concerned with sexual topics than his writer-colleagues Halbe (*Freie Liebe*, 1890), Hauptmann (*Einsame Menschen*, 1891), or Wedekind (*Frühlings Erwachen*, 1891). He emerges as something of a pioneer in the struggle for literary freedom, a man who paid a dear price for asserting his right to uncensored

publication.

The first work to bring Panizza into direct conflict with the law was a little story called "Das Verbrechen in Tavistock-Square," which appeared in a GML anthology toward the end of 1891.⁴⁰ His bizarre tale climaxing in plant onanism was found offensive to public standards of decency. The anthologies were confiscated by the police, and Panizza, along with Bierbaum, Conrad, Brand, Scharf, and Schaumberger, was charged with violating paragraphs 166 and 184 of the *Reichsstrafgesetzbuch*. Although the Munich district attorney eventually dropped the charges, the adverse publicity certainly had its effect.⁴¹ Dr. Panizza, who had gradually risen to the rank of *Assistenzarzt I. Klasse* in the reserves, was formally admonished by the commander of his militia unit and ordered to withdraw from the GML. When he refused, the military maintained its purity by brusquely discharging the physician who had written about roses and magnolias masturbating in a London square.⁴²

Working steadily through 1891, Panizza also developed his particular talent for penning critical and polemic magazine articles. Prior to this he had only written one article, but in 1891 he suddenly published over one dozen. Three of these were theater reviews which appeared in *Die Gesellschaft*; the others helped fill the pages of the GML's journal, *Moderne Blätter*.⁴³ Characteristically, we find the author writing on numerous different topics ranging from Wagner and literary criticism to suicide, sacrilege, and capital punishment. Although he could write reasonably well on a wide variety of literary or social topics, Panizza did not require many years to develop a distinct preference for the religious polemic. By 1893, he had developed his expository style to the point where he was writing both articles and books on one of his very favorite topics, the Roman Catholic Church.

Whorehouse, Doghouse

Only one article for the entire year of 1892 can be found, a highly progressive study of prostitution which appeared in *Die Gesellschaft*.⁴⁴ Not unexpectedly, the author begins with a fairly well-documented historical survey of his subject, including the usual references to Martin Luther. Far more indicative, however, of the tremendous influence this Protestant reformer had on Panizza is the zealous tone with which he vehemently condemns the hypocrisy of German mo-

rality. Although he views Woman as the great seducer and temptress, he claims that prostitution "is as natural and necessary as marriage, and certainly older" (p. 1180). Panizza appears to have had a special fondness for prostitutes, who may well have been his only heterosexual partners. Nonetheless, few authorities on the subject today would disagree with most of the fifteen programmatic theses paraphrased below:

- a) Men, not women, are the prime cause of prostitution.
- b) Prostitutes are human and should be treated humanely.
- c) The differences between wife and prostitute have been exaggerated.
- d) The term "Freudenmädchen" is the most appropriate one for a girl who elicits physical joy in a man.
- e) Men have no right to disparage prostitutes whom they have enjoyed.
- f) Christian morality is the basis for the inhumane treatment of prostitutes.
- g) Sex is not immoral.
- h) People who make laws and wield authority have diminished sex drives.
- i) If the institution of marriage had been persecuted as vigorously as prostitution has, it would have disappeared long ago.
- j) Women who take care of men's intellectual and physical needs should be freely permitted to exist, even if they are doing it in return for money.
- k) Prostitutes do not find anything unnatural about their job.
- l) Prostitutes prefer their occupation to other jobs.
- m) Paradoxically, those who are most tolerant of prostitution are also most zealous in their attempt to reform the girls.
- n) The existing laws governing prostitution are unjust, ineffectual, and unenforceable.
- o) Prostitution must not merely be tolerated, but expanded to serve even greater segments of the population.

Panizza's progressivism is apparent even down to his spelling, which here for the first time begins to deviate from traditional German orthography. Although only one word has been "liberated" from the conventional spelling in this article, it certainly was a fateful one in

the life of Oskar Panizza: *Sifilis*.⁴⁵ As a constant source of physical discomfort, as the principal theme of his *magnum opus*, and as a probable cause of his later insanity, it is likely to have weighed more heavily on his mind than almost any other word.

Most of the year 1892 was spent writing fiction. Besides preparing the stories which appeared the following year in the collection *Visionen*, he produced the delightful little Hoffmannesque animal diary, *Aus dem Tagebuch eines Hundes*.⁴⁶ What begins as the harmless chronicle of a country dachshund adjusting to a new master and the often absurd complexities of modern urban living, ends with a howl of profound existential despair. The book achieves its unsettling effect not just by criticizing human foibles and ridiculing grotesque philistines, but through the gradual shift of focus from man to dog, i.e., from other to self, he is able to present an uncomfortably penetrating look at man—and himself.

It is hardly a coincidence that the closest Panizza ever came to writing a novel was from the point of view of a dog. Strange as it may sound, he felt like a dog, and the subsequent chapters dealing with his poetry, prose fiction, and drama offer numerous examples of this in his various writings. Not only did he feel like a dog in the metaphorical sense, but he also felt a kinship with actual canines. During the first half of the 1890's, Panizza lived in an apartment in Munich on Nußbaumstraße 5, and his only steady companion was his pet terrier, Putzi. In a letter written to his wife early in 1894, Max Halbe commented: "Panizza has not changed a bit! He is still living in his bachelor's abode, and Putzi keeps him company."⁴⁷ There exists at least one formal portrait of master and dog,⁴⁸ as well as a woodcut depicting Panizza and Putzi in an affectionate embrace.⁴⁹

Despite his fondness for Putzi, Panizza did spend most of his time with his human friends. According to Gumpfenberg, their three favorite cafés were Stadt London (Frauenplatz), Parsival (Herrenstraße), and the Arabische Café (Müllerstraße), where the Moderns would regularly meet and spend their afternoons.⁵⁰ Theodor Lessing, writing his autobiography forty years later, remembers Panizza's apartment as a rather wild place. "Every young girl without a home or a place to stay was invited in by Panizza; and every young writer without discipline or future could dump his emotional garbage there."⁵¹ While he could scarcely be termed wealthy, Panizza was far better off financially than most successful writers of his time, and he distinguished himself by his repeated generosity toward his less fortunate col-

leagues.⁵² Among his many beneficiaries was Ludwig Scharf, who was able to publish his first volume of poetry thanks to a sizeable contribution from Panizza.⁵³

Martin Luther and Anti-Semitism

The figure of Martin Luther emerges again and again in the writings of Oskar Panizza, and one can scarcely escape the conclusion that this German reformer represented to him something of a heroic father-figure, a towering symbol of Teutonic bravery, intelligence and virility. He seems to have been the only man whom Panizza could never view critically. Luther embodied all virtues and evolved a profound personal happiness despite, or perhaps because of, his courageous opposition to established social and cultural values. Luther was not only a personal model for manly conduct, he was also a glorious German hero to be championed in public. Thus when a passing remark in his previously discussed essay ("Prostitution"), concerning Luther's pre-marital sexual activity, was attacked and denounced as wholly unfounded in an official Protestant publication, Panizza vigorously defended his initial assertion with an eight-page rebuttal in *Die Gesellschaft*.⁵⁴ Calling him "our greatest German intellectual hero," Panizza cites a mass of inferential material in a somewhat frenetic attempt to prove that Luther was not a celibate during bachelorhood.⁵⁵ He lambasts the Protestant clergy for its prudery and contrasts this attitude with the robust virility of Luther, "the Rousseau of religion."⁵⁶ One gets the distinct impression that the "Rousseau" in Luther had a far greater impact on Panizza than did his religion.

This view is further corroborated by the atheistic hedonism expressed in an article on eugenics, which had appeared somewhat earlier in 1893, "Prolegomena zum Preisausschreiben: Verbesserung unserer Rasse."⁵⁷ Although Panizza continually championed the anti-Catholic cause and its early leaders, Luther in particular, he appears to have been motivated by anything but theological considerations: "Sun, air, wind, forest and sea, these are what we should be concerned with. Our own joy. No transcendental god should keep us from our . . . daily joys. If he is omnipotent, why did he create us so critical and contemptuous of HIM?!—No! To be born, struggle, enjoy, and then die, that is what we should care about, and how best to do it. The rest does not concern us."⁵⁸ Unless one accepts Panizza's glorification

of Luther as being primarily motivated by extra-religious considerations, it would be impossible to reconcile his fervent anti-Catholicism with his equally consistent anti-religious hedonism.

Panizza's ideas on racial questions are both interesting in themselves and symptomatic for German intellectuals at the end of the nineteenth century. He speaks out very forcefully against the notion of eugenics as a means of "purifying" the race, and yet the worshiper of Luther and Wagner eagerly embraces his masters' racial prejudices. His bias is especially evident when discussing the Jewish "race": "With their decided ugliness and their decrepitude, they are undoubtedly inferior. . .to the Teutonic race. But their mind is so much better developed, especially in one direction, the mercenary one."⁵⁹ Panizza was a vociferous, though relatively mild, anti-Semite, a circumstance which accounts in large part for the few futile attempts to revive him as a cultural hero during the Third Reich.⁶⁰

His anti-Semitic prejudices did not leave his fiction entirely unaffected; the clearest example of his bias can be found in the story "Der operirte Jud," one of ten novellas⁶¹ included in the collection entitled *Visionen*.⁶² There is much hatred and little humor in his tale of the Jew who goes to ridiculous lengths to rid himself of all "Semitic" physical and mental characteristics, only to have the deception uncovered on his wedding night with a Protestant bride. Although it is not possible to disregard his blatantly derogatory remarks about Jews, the story must also be seen as a satire on self-negation. The affirmation of self, so forcefully enunciated in the writings of Nietzsche, was a concept which Panizza wholeheartedly embraced and with which he concluded his article on eugenics: "We cannot be anything other than what we are. And as we are, so we want to be."⁶³

There are other instances of eclectic sensationalism in *Visionen*, "dedicated to the memory of Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann." Aside from the obvious hallucinatory nature of these stories implied in the title, there is the element of the grotesque and fantastic which stamps them as the products of Oskar Panizza's imagination. Hermaphroditism, genocide, prostitution, cannibalism, lesbianism, church desecration, and insanity are but a few of the more sensational topics which the author chose to explore in his novellas. This tendency of Panizza's runs counter to the dominant trend of Naturalism, which was to dwell on the everyday and ordinary things of life. Sexual ambivalence, religious hatred, and psychological disintegration were, however, of great personal importance to Oskar Panizza, and he ex-

ploited them with a frequency that anticipates the numerous twentieth-century writers who have utilized similar obsessions for literary subjects.

Anti-Catholicism

With the publication in 1893 of *Die unbefleckte Empfängnis der Päpste*, Panizza embarked on a path of militant anti-Catholicism, which landed him behind iron bars within two years.⁶⁴ In his own confused words, the book represented “an attempt, in what appeared to be the most serious style, to extend the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin, proclaimed by Pius IX in the year 1894 [1854], to the popes, with all embryological, anthropological, and theological consequences. . .”⁶⁵ According to the title page, which bears the papal coat of arms, the Vatican imprimatur, and a dedication to the fiftieth bishop’s anniversary of Leo XIII, the book was authored by a Spanish Friar Martin O.S.B. and translated into German by Oskar Panizza. Although a number of readers took it to be the work of a Jesuit priest,⁶⁶ it was clearly the type of monumental spoof of which Panizza was so fond. Summoning an immense wealth of scholarly minutiae from church history to support his imaginative thesis, the author cites 101 proofs in 108 pages to demonstrate the immaculate conception of the popes. His irreverence is not confined solely to the popes, but is also aimed at the Virgin Mary and even the Trinity.

As was to be expected, there were few Catholics who considered the book to be very funny. A stern memorandum was circulated through the Catholic press of Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, warning that “from beginning to end, this brochure is a blasphemy surpassing any and every concept. A Christian cannot possibly have written it.”⁶⁷ The Protestant press, as well, was equally quick to condemn the booklet as the outpouring of a madman, although there were some independent thinkers who were able to appreciate the biting satire. Irma von Troll-Borostyáni, writing in the Milwaukee *Freidenker*, stated that “the work is a satire, one of the bloodiest and wittiest that has ever been written.”⁶⁸ Bierbaum characterized it as “perhaps the most frightful and daring work ever written against Catholicism,” and went on to praise it as a “perfect work of art” and “one of the most significant works of art that we possess.”⁶⁹ The

criminal court in Stuttgart considered the book significant enough to order all unsold copies confiscated and permanently banned from the entire German Empire.⁷⁰

Buoyed by the controversial attention he had managed to elicit, Panizza resumed his anti-Catholic campaign in a discussion of “*Die Monita secreta der Jesuiten*.”⁷¹ In this lengthy article, he takes great pains to show how the allegedly authentic, secret Jesuit code of instructions reflects the deception and decadence inherent in Roman Catholicism. The entire undertaking is not without a chauvinistic slant, and he concludes by admonishing his Catholic enemies to “beware of German conscientiousness.”⁷² Throughout 1893, Panizza was busy delving through mountains of church lore and penning his most tendentious book, in which the differences between Germany and the Vatican are seen as irreconcilable.⁷³ Reading through this weighty volume with its hundreds of scholarly references, one gets the impression that Panizza would like to “replay” the Reformation, so that he can assume the lead role of Martin Luther. The only problem is that, unlike the sixteenth-century reformer, the twentieth-century psychiatrist is not the slightest bit concerned with God. Nationalism and a fierce desire for independence are what motivate this broadside against Vatican dogma, history, and politics. There is also a trace of megalomania in his casual observation that religion has taken a back-seat to psychology in our age: “Today we know from case histories in insane asylums and from the psychosexual investigations of Moll, Krafft-Ebing, Tarnowsky, et al., how fundamentally significant the structure of one’s sexual drives is for the intellectual development of a human being. In this respect, the psychiatrist is a more important person for us today than the Pope.”⁷⁴ *Der deutsche Michel und der römische Papst*, despite its respectable scholarly apparatus, met the same fate as the author’s previous book on the subject; it was confiscated and banned throughout Germany. A half-century later it earned the dubious distinction of being his only book to be republished during the Third Reich, though in abbreviated form and without footnotes or the original phonetic spelling.⁷⁵

Dramatic Awakening

Oskar Panizza’s literary career reached its peak in 1894. By this time he had already published three volumes of poetry, the “tragi-

humoresque"⁷⁶ diary of a dog, two collections of stories totaling six hundred pages, and two substantial polemics against the Roman Catholic Church. He had gained a reputation in Germany as the odd-ball of the Munich Moderns, an apolitical avant-garde writer who had gone from poetry to prose to polemic in what appeared to be an attempt to win shocking publicity. In early 1893, he had taken the decisive step that anyone would take who wanted to join the really greats—Sophocles, Shakespeare, Molière, Schiller—he turned to the theater. Not that the stage represented a wholly alien world to him, for he had been an avid theater connoisseur since the days he dreamed of being an opera star. But writing for the theater was a different matter, something Panizza had shied away from in his eight years as a full-time author. Perhaps the fact that the main emphasis of Naturalism was on the drama prompted Panizza to try his hand at this genre. His close friend Max Halbe, twelve years Panizza's junior, literally reached the pinnacle of his fame overnight with the first public performance of *Jugend* in 1894; Frank Wedekind, another friend who was also more than a decade younger than Oskar, had created a minor storm with the publication of his *Frühlings Erwachen* in 1891 and was busy completing work on *Erdegeist*. What is surprising is not that Panizza turned to the theater, but that he did not do so sooner.

The forty-year-old author's first attempt at dramatic writing was a less than mediocre little piece called *Der heilige Staatsanwalt*.⁷⁷ Panizza's two main fields of interest, sex and religion, are fused together in this morality play dealing with the trial of a prostitute. Eternal Goodness, Truth, Beauty, and even Morality herself come forth to testify against the accused prostitute, Lust. The only real action occurs in the last scene, where the trial is decided by the miraculous appearance of Martin Luther. He gives a hearty sermon in defense of Lust, then leaves the courtroom with her amid cheers from the public. The play has deservedly never been performed; its only merit is that it provided the author with a modicum of experience in dramatic writing and in many ways anticipated his most important work, *Das Liebeskonzil*.