

Chapter 2.

JAILHOUSE, MADHOUSE

A Heavenly Tragedy

Virtually the only information we have on Panizza covering the critical period when he was writing his *magnum opus* can be found in his friend Max Halbe's autobiography. Although Halbe's facts on Panizza are not always completely accurate, they did share several summers together at the Tegernsee, and Halbe probably spent more time talking with him than anyone else during this period. The motives Halbe discerned behind the writing of *Das Liebeskonzil* are anything but flattering:

Already in those Rottach spring days of 1893, I gained the impression that Panizza was prepared to pay any human price for the fulfillment of his ambitious literary dreams—even if it meant the martyr's crown. I concluded from his remarks that he was more and more giving up on attaining the literary fame he dreamed of by normal, ordinary means. His clear, ice-cold reason—a strange addition to this baroque brain—probably told him correctly that his natural literary means would hardly suffice in attracting the attention, let alone the admiration. . . of a naturalistic age. But if he could not do it this way, if literary means failed, why shouldn't it succeed by extra-literary means? If the author smashed through the poetic barriers and rammed his lance against the religious feelings of a large group of believers, wounded them, wounded them fatally, and then succumbed to the

counter-attack of superior enemy power: if the poet became a martyr to his convictions, would not the latter receive the crown of life which was perhaps denied to the former? The poet as martyr. The martyr as poet. Was there any difference left?¹

It is certainly true that Panizza had an overwhelming ambition to attain literary glory, and yet this is probably true of all writers, Halbe not excluded. To suggest that in writing *Das Liebeskonzil*, Panizza set out to offend bourgeois sensibilities as part of a rational scheme to gain notoriety at "any price" is to ignore his entire earlier literary development as well as the problems deeply affecting him in his obscure personal life. It is evident that Panizza delighted in the offensive, but that is to be expected from any satirist. Perhaps Halbe was a bit too much on the defensive, for he admits that in his discussions with Panizza he "represented a Catholicism which had been transmitted to me through blood and training"; he also felt a sympathetic understanding for Rodrigo Borgia, the villain in *Das Liebeskonzil*.² One wonders whether Max Halbe, or, for that matter, anyone ever really knew Oskar Panizza.

Das Liebeskonzil was published in Zürich, in October 1894, by Verlagsmagazin J. Schabelitz, the same firm that had previously published Panizza's spoof on the immaculate conception of the popes.³ Subtitled "A Heavenly Tragedy in Five Acts," the play depicts the origin of syphilis as God's vengeance on his sexually overactive human creatures, especially those at the Vatican Court of Pope Alexander VI (Rodrigo Borgia). The intrigues and sexual entertainments at the court are presented on stage, although in not quite as extreme a form as they are to be found in Panizza's historical source.⁴ Far more offensive to his contemporaries was the manner in which the divinities—God the Father, Christ, and Mary—are portrayed. God is an ancient, feeble, decrepit, senile individual with a fondness for one of his cherubs. Christ appears dimwitted and consumptive, the eternal sufferer with bleeding wounds and a marked Oedipal fixation. Mary, on the other hand, plays at being very sophisticated and has no trouble running the entire show in heaven. Sex is constantly on her mind. As if that in itself were not blasphemous enough, Panizza had the audacity to conclude the first act with all three of the divinities smoking "a brown drug,"⁵ obviously some form of cannabis. One can only agree with Prescher that "this book certainly contains the

wildest rebellion against God that exists in our recent literature, and the strongest satire on those figures worshipped by Christians.”⁶

Even before the book went on sale in Germany, the author had become a literary *cause célèbre* by sending copies to friends and reviewers. For the first and last time in his life, Panizza reaped the outspokenly enthusiastic praise of his fellow German writers. Detlev von Liliencron, one of the most respected and widely-read authors of his time, wrote Panizza that “. . .the second act and Satan’s choice of women are absolutely colossal!! The ‘de profundis’ etc. smack into the orgy! Again: absolutely colossal!”⁷ O. J. Bierbaum maintained that “*Das Liebeskonzil* is your most mature, artistically best balanced work. If you can keep it up (as far as this side of your talent is concerned). . .then we may hope to view in you our Aristophanes. But you must go abroad, for now they will lock you up.”⁸ Although Bierbaum’s prophecy came to pass within a few months, Anna Croissant-Rust’s vision of an actual stage production was not to be realized for another seventy-five years: “You should know it: your *Liebeskonzil* is the most significant work you have written thus far. A work of one die, of such power and artistic unity, strutting with marvelous images and obscene audacity. . . If one could only see it! Truly, I would give much for it; to have money, actors, sets!”⁹ Maurice von Stern called it “. . .the most cynical book I have ever read!”¹⁰ Panizza’s shock waves even spread to the German community living in the United States. Writing in the Milwaukee *Freidenker*, Irma von Troll-Borostyáni concluded that “. . .the wit and massive power of Panizza’s sarcasm have not been surpassed or even equalled by the most famous satirists in world literature. . .”¹¹ Theodor Fontane, the grey eminence of German letters, discussed the play in three separate notes to the younger author Maximilian Harden.¹² He urged his younger colleague to “read it and write about it, if you can; it is very difficult (legally) but very rewarding. It is an extremely significant book. . . 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.”¹³

The Empire Strikes Back

On January 12, 1895, only a few weeks after the play had been on public sale, the *Allgemeine Zeitung* in Munich reported that the

book had been confiscated by the Public Prosecutor. This touched off a new round in the stormy controversy, for while most writers, even if they disliked the play, strongly decried the official move to suppress literary freedom, the press was sharply divided in their response along partisan and ideological grounds. The better-known publications that came out strongly in support of Panizza included the *Berliner Börsen-Courier*, *Berliner Zeitung*, *Deutsche Zeitung*, *Badischer Landesbote* (Karlsruhe), *Fränkischer Kurier* (Nürnberg), *Kölnische Zeitung*, *Neue deutsche Rundschau*, *Vossische Zeitung*, and *Vorwärts*.¹⁴ Typical of the numerous newspapers which vehemently denounced the play, usually without having any first-hand knowledge of the book, is the following comment which appeared in the *Neue bayerische Landeszeitung* (Würzburg) of January 17, 1895: "His canvas is only painted with dung, spinach, and 'rhinoceros oil.' It is no pity if such books are confiscated and burned."

Similarly biased evaluations can be found in most of the standard German literary histories, some of them written well into the twentieth century. Thus Josef Nadler claims that Panizza represents the transitional link from "good to evil, from the wrath of love to the contempt of hate, from elixir to poison, and from Munich of 1870 to the city of 1918."¹⁵ Another scholar went so far as to say that "the way he presented God, Christ, and Mary, besmirching them with filth, was irresponsible. One might perceive wit here and there, but the whole thing elicits revulsion, even from those persons who no longer possess any religious feelings at all."¹⁶ Eduard Engel simply dismissed the entire play as "wild and repulsive. . . certainly the outgrowth of insanity."¹⁷

Preparing the case against Dr. Panizza was not as simple as the Public Prosecutor's office in Munich had first believed. A mere fifteen copies of the play had been sold in Munich in the weeks prior to confiscation, and none of these readers had been sufficiently outraged to file suit against the author. The dilemma was finally solved when a complaint was received from Saxony. A police sergeant had purchased a copy of the play from a Leipzig book dealer, had read it with outrage and proceeded to show it to a higher police official; the latter was equally offended and decided to file a complaint. Panizza was subsequently charged with 93 counts of sacrilege in violation of paragraph 166 of the *Reichsstrafgesetzbuch*. A post-card written to Max Halbe on February 15 clearly reveals that he was well aware of how slim his chances for acquittal were: "My case looks pretty hopeless. . .

the district attorney will ask for one year imprisonment and immediate arrest—unless he is foiled by the fact that the book was published abroad. Legal opinion stands against legal opinion. My friends and certain lawyers have advised me to leave. But they don't know a German writer of today, they think he would miss the opportunity for a—speech to the jury. I will defend myself like a hyena.”¹⁸

The Bloody Halo

There is a crucial question arising at this point: Why did Panizza not follow the advice of his friends or legal advisors and leave the country? Why did he decide to remain and stand trial, a trial he knew he could not possibly win? Was it simply that he did not want to “miss the opportunity for a speech to the jury”? Perhaps the answer can best be found by taking a brief look at Dr. Panizza's philosophy as contained in a book written during the pre-trial months, *Der Illusionismus und die Rettung der Persönlichkeit: Skizze einer Weltanschauung*.¹⁹ Dedicated “to the memory of Max Stirner,” it is Panizza's only attempt at writing philosophy and, as such, highly deficient. What he tries to do is find a rationalization for Stirner's solipsism that will integrate the scientific and psychological data collected during the second half of the nineteenth century.

Without tracing the labyrinthian course of Panizza's often grotesquely twisted logic, his conclusions can be summarized as follows: citing Descartes, he postulates thought as his ontological and epistemological point of departure (p. 14). Thoughts can only be examined by thinking. Thoughts come to us through inspiration (p. 15); the source of a person's inspiration is his daimon, his brahma, the mysterious and unknowable spring of hallucinations and creative insights (p. 25). He strongly rejects the pre-Freudian notion of a sub- or unconscious, stating that “only in the character of consciousness do we know mental activity.” (p. 17).

Dr. Panizza was well acquainted with the clinical findings of neurosurgery that cortical stimulation could elicit hallucinations in the form of sensory perception, memories, etc. But the conclusions he draws from these data are rather startling. Since there is no way for an individual to distinguish between “true perception” of the external world and his own hallucinations, there is no valid reason for separating the two—“thus the world is a hallucination” (p. 20), “the entire external

world is contained within me" (p. 28). This certainly is not an original idea of Panizza's, and he is careful to credit his predecessors Berkeley, Kant, Fichte, and Schopenhauer. However, the lengthy discussions of hashish (pp. 40ff.) and of his personal experience with hallucinations (p. 29) often appear to be part of an attempt to come to terms with what he elsewhere referred to as his "psychopathic fits."²⁰ It is almost as if he felt compelled to create an entire philosophy of life wherein his own psychological malfunctions would appear to be perfectly normal. "What is the purpose of your life? To dissolve the phantom of the world. To devour it in thought. To know that you are hallucinating. And with that to return to yourself. You don't have to escape into the woods. You may seize the world. Simply because you cannot do otherwise. Simply because your daimon forces you to phantasmagorize."²¹

The author's obvious fear of insanity grows in frightening proportions from page to page, and what had begun as an attempt to save the personality (title of book) ends with its virtual destruction :

As soon as we pull the switch and the brain begins to work, illusion is created. And the most fundamental, gruesome, and elemental illusion emerges, when the brain—for my illusion—consumes itself, melts: the softening of the brain (paralysis of the brain); where within a few months the organ loses hundreds of grams of matter precisely in those parts, which—according to our empirical conception—are the seat of (illusionistic) thought, and, while suspending all dimensions of time and space, simultaneously produces the most colossal megalomania, a hashish-like, illusionistic fireworks (sparkling during destruction).—However, there is only a gradual distinction between this combustion of brain matter—i.e., piles of illusion production—and our lucid thought. (p. 54)

The ethical system at which Panizza arrived is heavily derivative of both Socrates and Nietzsche: know yourself, find your daimon, "if there is any truth it is undoubtedly. . . your soul" (p. 58). The conclusion he derives from this, however, was one which Nietzsche had rejected: "Whoever gives his life for his idea is always a saint" (p. 60).²² He lists numerous such martyrs, among them Savonarola, Pope Alexander VI's great antagonist, who "expected nothing in his life but the bloody halo which surrounds the martyr's head" (p. 59).

Writing in his prison diary a year later, Panizza wondered “why Goethe, for all his genius, remains in our memory enveloped by the flabby vapor of stale tea and lacks the bloody halo which shines on Schiller’s temples?” The answer, “because he never dared, never risked his life,”²³ is also the answer to our original question of why Oskar Panizza chose to appear before a trial he could not possibly win.

He had been a fearless artist with the creativity and the courage to write about things never before even mentioned in literature. Was he now going to run away just because things were getting a bit rough? Savonarola was beheaded, Giordano Bruno was burned at the stake, Charlotte Corday was guillotined, Martin Luther risked the flames of eternal hell fire—how could he shrink from what would probably not be more than one year in prison? And who could overlook all the publicity that such a trial was bound to stir up? Couldn’t this be the way to earn his “bloody halo”? Panizza had always been an intellectual warrior, and he was not about to change. His decision to face a hopeless trial merely confirms what he had bravely written a few months previously: “And only then may you see your mission fulfilled at the end of your life, when you can say to yourself that you have expressed your daimon in the world. That is your categorical imperative. Act according to the dictates of your daimon. If you shrink back before the consequences in the world, then it is stronger than you. If you prevail, then you will be the victor. Perhaps you will perish. But to perish in the world of appearances is the lot of us all.”²⁴

The Trial

One of the principal reasons why Panizza had to defend himself was because he could not find anyone else to do it. On the day before the trial, the *Neues Münchener Tagblatt* reported that “Dr. Panizza has not yet been able to find an attorney who will handle his defense.”²⁵ At the last minute, a Dr. Kugelmann agreed to take care of the legal technicalities; but the author had already carefully researched and drafted his own defense plea, which he delivered himself at the trial. This speech, together with other trial documents, was published later by his Swiss publisher, Johann Schabelitz.²⁶

On April 29, the eve of his fateful trial, Panizza participated in a private performance of Strindberg’s *Creditors*, presented in the apart-

ment of the authoress Juliane Déry. Max Halbe remembered that he was “the helpfully concealed spirit behind the carpet, who gave the necessary cues. It was Oskar Panizza who was the prompter on this memorable evening. Panizza’s trial. . . began at eight o’clock the next morning. Almost straight from the theater performance—we hardly made it home that night—we went to the courtroom, which looked to all of us like a roomy but no less terrifying mortar. And high up on the ceiling was the pestle of the law, a powerful colossus which descended hour by hour, lower and lower onto all of us. And when the evening shadows appeared, one of us lay crushed under the pestle.”²⁷

The trial contained no surprises. Freiherr von Sartor, the prosecutor, charged the author with having committed sacrilege “by publicly blaspheming God with abusive statements, creating an offense, and insulting public institutions and customs of the Christian Church, especially the Catholic Church.”²⁸ He demanded that the jury, all of whom were peasants, find the defendant guilty and that the culprit be sentenced to one and one-half years in prison. Panizza began his defense by summoning an “expert,” who was none other than M. G. Conrad, and asking him to evaluate whether or not *Das Liebeskonzil* was a work of art. After a lengthy, pompous, and often patronizing testimonial, Conrad not unexpectedly arrived at the conclusion that the play was indeed “a genuine, German, modern work of art, despite individual esthetic flaws.”²⁹ What bothered him most, he admitted, was “an element which borders on the perverse, the pathological.”³⁰ But all in all, it was clear that Panizza had created “one of the most powerful and most significant works of art in modern dramatic literature, and, considering the difficulty of his topic, perhaps the very most significant [allerbedeutendste] work of the last years.”³¹ The Bavarian peasants were unimpressed.

The author’s own defense plea was more finely tailored to the rather limited cultural background of his audience. He described the sudden emergence of the first syphilis epidemic at the end of the fifteenth century and how it was viewed as God’s punishment for man’s sexual excesses: “I was not concerned with blasphemous things and obscenities, but rather with grasping the peculiar situation in which the people found themselves at that time, a situation which especially interested me as a former physician”³² After a vivid but accurate historical description of the licentious conditions prevalent at the court of Alexander VI, he suggests for his listeners to “move this en-

tire topic into our present age filled with scepticism and disbelief. Let this configuration of historical forces as an artistic subject fall into the hands of a modern person who—perhaps to his misfortune—is inclined toward satire, and then I ask you, gentlemen, how would you have depicted the trinity, and what kind of conception of the divinities in heaven would you have presented, who under such circumstances sent venereal disease as a punishment for mankind on earth”³³ Without waiting for an answer to his rhetorical questions, Panizza plunged into the most famous of his capsule surveys of world literature in an attempt to illustrate that the divine has always been a legitimate subject for literary satire. Quoting extensively from Parny’s “La guerre des dieux” (1799) and Sebastian Sailer’s humoristic drama *Der Fall Luzifers*,³⁴ he tendenciously traces the development of sacrilegious writings from Aristophanes to Oskar Panizza. At no point does he ever deny the devastating portrait of the divine in his play, but the reasons for his choice of such a presentation are deceptively superficial: “I have degraded the Christian gods and have done so intentionally, because I saw them in the mirror of the fifteenth century; because I observed them from Alexander the Sixth’s point of view. Our concepts of the divine, gentlemen, are contained in our thinking. You know as little as I do what happens in reality up there above us. . . If I attacked the divine, then I did not attack that unearthly [überirdisch] spark that slumbers in the heart of every person, but rather I attacked the divine which had become a farce in the hands of Alexander VI”³⁵ What the author fails to mention, however, is that the “mirror of the fifteenth century” provided a convenient foil on which to project his own religious or irreligious attitudes; the jury, too, considered the caricatures of the divinities a reflection of the author’s own views.

After Dr. Panizza had concluded his presentation, Dr. Kugelman submitted a motion for dismissal on the grounds that the defendant could not be prosecuted for a crime committed outside the borders of the German Empire. The motion was denied, and after a brief recess, the jury returned a verdict of guilty. At seven that evening, the trial came to an end when the presiding Judge Quante read the court’s decision, implying that the truly divine is indeed vulnerable to human satire:

1. Dr. Oskar Panizza, for his crime against religion perpetrated in the press, is sentenced to a prison term of one year,

as well as to paying all court and prison costs.

2. The existing copies of the publication *Das Liebeskonzil* by Dr. Oskar Panizza, as well as the plates designed for their manufacture, are to be made unusable.

3. A warrant has been issued for the defendant's arrest.³⁶

Naturally part of the sentence could not be executed, since there was no way a German court could order the destruction of printing plates in Switzerland. But the rest of the decision, which certainly was not unexpected, had a crushing effect on Panizza's life. He was instantly cast in the role of a serious criminal, and was only released on bail pending appeal after he had managed to raise the exorbitant sum of RM 80,000.

Literary Responses

German intellectuals continued to be outraged. Fontane concluded that "whosoever expects me to believe the story of Christ's conception, whoever demands that I furnish my heaven in accordance with the pre-Raphaelite painters: God in the middle, Mary on the left, Christ on the right, Holy Ghost in the background as a radiant sun. . . forces me over to Panizza's side. . ." ³⁷

Contrasting sharply with the enlightened skepticism of the 76-year-old Fontane is the attitude expressed by a youthful reviewer in *Das zwanzigste Jahrhundert: Blätter für deutsche Art und Wohlfahrt*. This was a pseudo-progressive, right-wing journal edited by Heinrich Mann, and the outraged reviewer was none other than brother Thomas, a 20-year-old clerk working for a fire insurance company in Munich. Writing under the initials T.M., Mann contributed eight reviews to this outspokenly anti-Semitic publication. Curiously enough, it was Oskar Panizza's *cause célèbre* that sparked Thomas Mann's distinguished career as a critic: his review of *Das Liebeskonzil* stands at the beginning of six prolific decades and is Mann's very first work of non-fiction to appear in print.³⁸ Since he knew Panizza personally, it is probable that Mann actually obtained and read a copy of the controversial play (a practice not always followed by other critics). In line with his reactionary sympathies, he severely

denounced the “heavenly tragedy” and even went so far as to applaud the playwright’s stiff prison sentence, stating that blasphemy was to be condemned as “tastelessness.” It should not be overlooked, however, that Panizza’s dual themes of syphilis and the Devil as the source of creativity reappear, more than half a century later, in Mann’s novel of *Doktor Faustus* (1947).

Dr. Laubmann, director of the Munich Staatsbibliothek, observed that “in 300 years it will be as difficult to comprehend that someone was imprisoned for a book in our time, as it is for us today to comprehend that 300 years ago someone was burned for a book.”³⁹ Enlightened public opinion felt that the punishment was far out of proportion to any possible crime, while the most parochial law-and-order advocates felt that the author had received what he deserved. As one of the jurors remarked to a Munich journalist: “If the dog had been tried in Lower Bavaria, he wouldn’t have gotten out alive.”⁴⁰

One of the persons deeply incensed by Panizza’s sentence was the philosopher Theodor Lessing, at that time a young medical student in Munich. As a matter of fact, it was his pamphlet entitled *Der Fall Panizza: Eine kritische Betrachtung über “Gotteslästerung” und künstlerische Dinge vor Schwurgerichten*,⁴¹ that launched Lessing in the literary world. The very same night he learned of Panizza’s fate, he

. . . sat down, drunk with wine, ambition, and anger, and in one wild fury wrote a defense, without even having read the condemned play. (To this day [1935] I have not seen it.) I delivered a very general and arrogant “call to humanity.” The concept of blasphemy was senseless; certainly inapplicable to works of art, for wit, satire, and irony had to be as free as the imagination. Literary questions did not belong in civil courts.—A young book dealer, Max Wohlfahrt, published the sermon; in a few days it was already out of print. The insulted district attorney had old lady Rauh’s house searched; the police confiscated my poems. . . and I was placed under surveillance for being suspected of atheism, communism, or some other -ism. But thanks to this event, there now came offers and queries, and without having wanted or considered it, I was suddenly swimming in the fresh water of literature. Farewell, studies and medicine.⁴²

While Lessing’s passionate pamphlet was of no benefit to Panizza,

it does convey a sense of how forcefully his fate affected the other writers of his time. "The public. . . should finally learn from such trials," wrote Lessing, "that literary and artistic charges and violations ought to be outside the state's jurisdiction—artistic products should be measured by artistic standards, not by legal, medical, philological, or any other criteria—in extreme cases they should be censored by an intellectual elite—not by a jury."⁴³

Insanity Plea

On July 1, 1895, the lower court's decision was upheld by the appellate division in Leipzig. Because his syphilitic right leg rendered him unfit to stay in the main penitentiary in Nürnberg, Panizza began serving his twelve-month sentence on August 8 in the prison of Amberg. His family made one last attempt to free its black sheep with a plea for clemency on the grounds of insanity. This incident was described in the autobiographical sketch of 1904: ". . . in response to a subsequent claim of insanity submitted by the attorney (without consulting the prisoner), there followed an investigation *quoad psychen intactam*—'Are you insane?'—'No—, which led to a negative conclusion."⁴⁴

The expert testimonials offered by the consulting physicians tell a different story. Dr. Paul Ostermaier, who had known the prisoner for many years, wrote that he "is pathologically predisposed to a high degree and cannot be held responsible for all his words and deeds."⁴⁵ Hofstabsarzt Dr. Nobiling was also of the opinion that he "is genetically tainted to a high degree and has not been psychologically free for many years now."⁴⁶ The prison physician at Amberg, Dr. Schmelcher, however, did not agree, and Panizza was forced to serve out his entire sentence. The similarity and studied vagueness of Ostermaier's and Nobiling's evaluations suggest that they were written under personal or financial pressure from the Panizza family. A family history of mental pathology and the denial of free will do not constitute a diagnosis of mental disease, nor does a long personal acquaintance guarantee legal objectivity when a man's whole future well-being is at stake. Panizza did not consider himself to be insane when he entered Amberg, and there is really no evidence to contradict this.

Jailhouse

The long year of incarceration at Amberg, however, gradually destroyed the author's psychological equilibrium. His physical environment was oppressive, to say the least. So repulsive to him were his fellow inmates—uneducated peasants whom he referred to as “gorillas”⁴⁷—that the many hours spent in his solitary cell were preferable to those spent exercising or eating with the fifty other prisoners. He was a refined man of letters and science living in a colony of thugs. “A man like myself is considered a head-hunter here, someone who is off his rocker, a ‘professor.’ The guards can’t find the right tone to talk to me. And I am even uncomfortable for the officials, since they have to invent a new means of communication.”⁴⁸ The ingestion of food, formerly a delight to the hotel proprietor’s son, now became a daily torture: “Most of the soups taste like book-binder’s paste. And there is nothing but soup. The torture involved in swallowing it is unspeakable.”⁴⁹

Fortunately for Panizza, the prison director realized that he had a rather unusual inmate on his hands and allowed him to pursue his literary activities with a minimum of restrictions. During this year in Amberg he wrote the *Dialoge im Geiste Huttens*⁵⁰ and kept a diary which was later to have been published by Schabelitz under the title *Ein Jahr Gefängnis*.⁵¹ According to Deacon Lippert, the clergyman who conducted Protestant worship in the prison, Panizza could “occupy himself with his books however he wanted.” He does note, however, that “he turned down the beer, which he could have had. He only missed his walks through the countryside, but endured patiently like a martyr to his cause, and his behavior was impeccable.”⁵²

On the positive side of things, Panizza’s political awareness sharply increased as a result of living with “a conspiratorial society that does not reckon and speculate according to politics, flags or language, but rather from jail to jail, from prison to prison, from penitentiary to penitentiary.”⁵³ He recognized the essentially conservative nature of the proletariat, a fact that frequently seems to have eluded idealistic political organizers down to the present day:

Here, here in Amberg and the other penal institutions, this is where your social democrats live the way you imagine them, these are the revolutionaries, these are the enemies of law and order whom you are continually talking about, the

irreconcilable enemies of any culture. If, on the other hand, I take the Social Democratic Party members, the politically organized workers as we see them at their public meetings, then I inevitably reach the conclusion that. . .they are the conservatives, and that the people I see around me here are the uneducated, uneducable revolutionaries.⁵⁴

Deacon Lippert proudly reports that Panizza “attended every religious service and even went to confession and communion—what was he seeking there? The peace ‘which the world cannot give?’”⁵⁵ The author’s own explanation of these events differs markedly from Lippert’s:

Today I went to communion. Well, I must say, I too believe now that man consists of two-thirds stomach, one-third imagination, and one-sixteenth intellect. Although I am not an indifferent person, but rather an outspoken enemy of Christianity, I was powerfully shaken by the event. . . They knelt there on their communion stools like tamed Hectors, these propagandists of action. . . Isn’t that a fitting ceremony for henchmen and highway robbers? Take! Take! Take and eat! Take and drink!. . . A splendid symbolism which these people understand very well. It made a powerful impression on me. . . I went primarily to please the minister, who treats me with so much kindness; secondly, because I wanted to please myself, because I wanted to enjoy the sensation. I did not regret it. It was tremendous. And the wine was good. A swig of wine in this desert of semolina soup, oat groats, and meal-pap!”⁵⁶

Panizza’s vehement rejection of Christian ritual is expressed even stronger in another diary entry. He had just witnessed a service attended by a dozen Protestant worshippers. A famous sixteenth-century hymn they sung, which began with the words, “Oh, innocent lamb of God,/ Slaughtered on the trunk of the cross,” prompted the following outburst:

Who introduced this butcherous, bloody conception of the supernatural into the emotional realm of mankind? Who conjured up this slaughter-house odor and animal carnage as symbols for mercy and pity?! Slaughtered lambs! For whom? For me? For my sins? I will settle my sins with myself and stand accountable to society. And these hangman

songs, this complacent slaughter of lambs and men spiced with incense and rosemary, can they really be expected not to have a brutalizing effect on your feelings? Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, I call on you to help against this glorification of the slaughtering of poor animals! Are you therefore so cruel to poor people, the poor mammals called workers? Because you have drunk so much blood for 2000 years? Lord God in heaven! Never, never has Christianity appeared to me to be so wretched, so helpless, so miserable as this morning, when I heard the poor prisoners singing these verses with dried pathos. 57

These are hardly the words of a man who found his spiritual peace in Christianity, and one can only conclude that Deacon Lippert, kindly gentleman though he was, did not really know Oskar Panizza.

The Moment of Imbecility

In numerous diary entries, the author delivers a devastating critique of the penal system as one of the cruelest perpetrators of injustice. Most of what he had to say about these anachronistic institutions remains valid for today's prisons. Dr. Panizza was especially concerned with the effects of incarceration on the human mind, and his conclusions are based on observation of others as well as his own personal experience:

I can sit here for hours or days over my books and thoughts, don't miss a thing, am as happy in my solitude as I am outside. But then comes a moment when I have worked myself tired, where I want to breathe, take a spiritual deep breath, want to see horizons and then—I suffocate. And this moment is ghastly. Then the dusty cell walls collapse over my soul, and crush it. A little piece in the brain, if I may put it this way, melts, and the function is extinguished. The next time this burning thirst emerges less inflammably, it only becomes a moderate itching. And this is the moment of imbecility. 58

There are indications that Panizza's later psychological disintegration first became manifest in Amberg. Without citing any concrete examples of paranoid thought, Lippert maintains that "the sentence of one year in prison for *Das Liebeskonzil* appeared exorbitantly high

to the 'atheist' Panizza, who obviously had no feeling for how much he had offended the religious and moral feelings of others; and he saw this punishment as the result of a persecutory system directed against him."⁵⁹ Since there are no signs of a conceptualized "persecutory system" in any of his writings at this time, perhaps Lippert, writing thirty years after the Amberg episode, extended Panizza's later attitudes to this earlier period of their friendship. But while there do not seem to have been any systematic delusions of persecution in 1895/96, one does come across occasional flashes of acute paranoia. Passages such as the following are characterized by their brevity, humor, scholarly allusions, and terror:

God! What's that? What kind of shadow is that over there with the crooked legs? This twisted silhouette? God, that's you! You, too, are a gorilla. In linen overalls. And just look, the others are grinning at you. They recognized you a long time ago! For God's sake, quiet! Quiet! We are in the zoological ward here. It's a kind of primordial state of mankind. And what about him over there with the polished boots and the close-fitting slacks and the uniform jacket? Quiet! Quiet! That's Adam. We are in Paradise here. He is just counting the animals and giving them names. We are after the fall.⁶⁰

It is obvious from a comparison of Panizza's behavior and literary productivity during the five years preceding his stay at Amberg with what occurred during the subsequent years, that his confinement drastically upset his already fragile psychological equilibrium. He became permanently estranged from the entire circle of his Munich literary friends, including the man who had done so much to help him, M.G. Conrad. Lippert relates that "when Conrad sent him his *In purpurner Finsternis*, a good satire on the equality of people 'under ground,' he rejected the book as incomprehensible and smugly let himself be called an 'ass.'" Lippert also noted that Panizza "could be extremely rude in letters to people who had done nothing but good things from him."⁶¹ The following excerpt from a letter to Max Halbe, written three weeks before the author's release from prison, clearly indicates an excessive preoccupation with his "image" and an inability to relate to his former friends:

As a quiet criminal I will have to slink along the houses to Munich. Instead of with cannon fire, torch lights, and a military honor guard, as I would have liked to have done it. This

thought is terribly painful for me. You must know there are—not among us—, but in general, in the shops, stores, coffee houses, among distant bygone acquaintances many, many who do not know how they should encounter me, avoid me—out of consideration for me!!—or, if not avoid, then don't find the proper tone and “gently” walk away. Something like this is ghastly! For me, who always led his life in the form of “check the king!”, unbearable and disastrous. I would prefer that one half shouted: Look, there's the criminal! And that the other, little group would call out: He belongs to us!—Oh! to be able to be a Social Democrat and know whose sash one is wearing!—The distress about this situation is primarily what is driving me away, to Switzerland or Berlin.⁶²

Dr. Panizza was released from prison on August 8, 1896. After a brief excursion with Lippert to view a 1525 portrait of Luther by Lucas Cranach, he returned to Munich for a few months. Contrary to the fears expressed in his letter to Halbe, his Munich friends did not avoid him, and threw a lavish party to celebrate his release. But Panizza was no longer the man they had once known; the metamorphosis was readily apparent to his shocked friend Weinhöppel:

He had become somewhat pale and gaunt, yet he seemed to be cheerful and of good spirits. But talking to him alone I soon noticed the drastic change which the grey hours in the prison cell had produced. Out of the thinker had become a brooder, out of the knower a doubter, out of the laughter a grinner. His subdued voice and his tearful eyes stood in shocking contrast to the intoxicating atmosphere and noisy gaiety of these hours in the Munich Ratskeller.⁶³

Vaudeville in Bavaria

The last article of Panizza's to appear in *Die Gesellschaft* is a most interesting study of “Der Klassizismus und das Eindringen des Variété. Eine Studie über zeit genössischen Geschmack.”⁶⁴ It was written during his last weeks in Munich and represents one of the first incisive analyses of vaudeville's impact on modern German literature. Samuel Lublinski acknowledged the author's achievement

when he noted that “the ‘artistic vaudeville’ became the slogan, to which a Bavarian, the fantastic Oskar Panizza, gave the signal.”⁶⁵ Panizza discusses the historical roots of vaudeville in great detail, citing the influences of Heine, British comedians, and American (especially black) entertainers. “Naive destruction is the essence of vaudeville” (p. 1266), which is pushing neo-classical drama off the stage and simultaneously infusing literature with new life-blood. Wedekind’s *Frühlings Erwachen* is hailed as “the classical vaudeville achievement of our time,” a work from which “Germany will never. . . even in a hundred years, no matter how much it may mix with the Jews, be able to extract the sweet honey which is buried in the combs of this delightful book” (p. 1270). Noteworthy here is the radical reversal of his prejudices toward Germans and Jews, undoubtedly the result of the whole *Liesbeskonzil* affair.⁶⁶

Traces of his new socio-political awareness, previously noted in his Amberg diary entries, are also in evidence here, as when he points to “the great question which will move the rest of our century, the status of the worker, the fervent struggle for the liberation of the individual, the destruction of old hierarchic, dogmatic, and monarchic formulas. . .” Panizza was profoundly committed to the avant-garde and to what we might call “pop culture”; there are times when he comes amazingly close to sounding like a cultural revolutionary of the late twentieth century: “We will take colors, blossoms, fruits, power, and sensuality wherever we can find them. We want new life-juices, new nourishment for our nerves, new blossoms and forms, odors and intoxications, even at the risk of suffering pain and being poisoned. If nothing is there but hashish, then hashish. If nothing is there but vaudeville, then vaudeville” (p. 1268).

One of Panizza’s last literary projects before leaving Munich was to revise and expand to book-length his previously published essay on “Die Haberfeldtreiben im bayrischen Gebirge.”⁶⁷ The author had been fortunate enough to interest the prestigious publisher S. Fischer in his study of the curious custom of “Haberfeldtreiben,” a secret peasant tribunal dating back to the days of Charlemagne. Panizza presents a scholarly-detailed, comprehensive historical examination of these strange rites. The last quarter of the book consists of textual samples from *Haberer* protocols, all in thick Bavarian dialect and employing Panizza’s characteristic phonetic spelling. Since the *Haberer* primarily tried sexual offenders, the text is replete with typical peasant crudities and obscenities. At the last moment, as the page proofs

were about to be returned to the printer, “one of the most distinguished legal advisors in Germany” informed the publisher “that according to the latest legal decisions, the question of what is immoral or damaging to the public interest can no longer be answered with certainty.”⁶⁸ Consequently, the publisher felt constrained to insert a number of ellipses indicated by whole lines of spaced periods. The effect was not only a watering down of the text, but its literary and philological interest was significantly reduced thereby. Had the author been consulted by Fischer, he probably would have chosen to let the text stand as it was and risk confiscation.

Farewell from Munich

It was impossible for Panizza to remain in the city that had caused him so much grief. In a vitriolic farewell message, *Abschied von München*, he furiously poured out his hatred and contempt for the Bavarian capital.⁶⁹ This denunciation is in the usual Panizza form of a historical survey, beginning with the lynching of several dozen Lutherans between 1519 and 1521. All of his hostility toward Catholicism is directed at the city he believes to be controlled by the Vatican; it is the Roman Church which has caused Munich to sink to a level of Latin degeneracy: “And don’t you know that it is your specifically Catholic frame of mind that has brought this about? Your worshipping Jesus’ heart, your enthusiasm for Mary’s milk, your religion of bones, flesh, milk, hair, and reproductive organs? And still you don’t have enough! Are not yet satisfied! More and more bones, more and more purgatory terrors, more and more Jesuit missions and Redemptorist institutions.”⁷⁰

Renouncing his Bavarian citizenship, he left Munich on October 15th, 1896, to gain Swiss nationality in Zürich. With the publication of *Abschied von München* the following year, the second warrant for Oskar Panizza’s arrest was issued by a Munich judge; and once again the police were ordered to confiscate and destroy all copies of his latest book. The only difference now was that he became a fugitive of the law, determined never to return to the country he had learned to despise.

Zürcher Diskussionen

After settling down in Zürich, he embarked on what sometimes appears to have been a frantic attempt to continue his literary career where he had left off. In 1896 Schabelitz published a second edition of *Das Liebeskonzil*, complete with a "Zueignung" (dedication) and "Vorspiel" (prologue), which clearly satirize Goethe's *Faust*. A third edition appeared the following year with a megalomaniacal preface and a heavily rewritten fourth act. But when Schabelitz refused to publish his Amberg diary, Panizza concluded that the only thing for him to do was to become his own publisher and founded the "Verlag Zürcher Diskussionen."

The first book to be published by the author himself was *Dialoge im Geiste Huttens* (1897), "in which the discussion of public conditions was attempted in the fresh and unabashed style of the early sixteenth century."⁷¹ These five dialogues—On the Germans, On the Invisible, On the City of Munich, On the Trinity, A Love Dialogue—were all written in prison and contain much of the old Panizza wit and devastating satire. None of the works written after his stay in Amberg even approached the quality of his earlier creations.

Not only did he feel the need to establish his own publishing firm, but he also decided to found his own journal, since the leading magazines were no longer accepting his articles. Thus, in the spring of 1897, he created the curious journal *Zürcher Diskussionen: Flugblätter aus dem Gesamtgebiet des modernen Lebens*, of which he managed to publish 32 issues, mostly containing his own contributions. While a number of articles were signed with Panizza's own name, others appeared under such pseudonyms as Hans Kistemaecker, Louis Andrée, Hans Dettmar, and Sven Heidenstamm. These bizarre articles range from "A Psychopathological Discussion of Christ"⁷² to "The Pig in its Poetical, Mythological and Cultural-Historical Aspects."⁷³ As might be expected, the journal's circulation never exceeded several hundred, and its short life-span was concluded with volume III.⁷⁴ There is something incongruous about a well-known writer who feels compelled to establish his own publishing firm and found his own journal for no other purpose than to assure the publication of his own works. An undeniable alienation from his former literary contacts appears to have reinforced his latent paranoia to the point where he was compelled to "go it alone" or fail trying. One wonders whether Panizza was aware of the fact that he seemed capable of

distinguishing himself only by his failures.

Psichopatia Criminalis

It is difficult to agree with Prescher when he states that "this mind began to dissolve because it was overtaxed."⁷⁵ This explanation seems wholly inadequate in view of the fact that Panizza had been making far greater demands on himself in the years prior to his imprisonment. Nor can we go along with Prescher's tendency to imbue the author with prophetic significance: "Something of the German fate which was to lead to the catastrophe under Hitler flashed through these writings."⁷⁶ What does emerge in these writings of Panizza's Swiss period is the author's very gradual mental disintegration, resulting in a preoccupation with insanity.

Evidence of his fear of insanity can be found in the not very funny satire *Psichopatia Criminalis*, written and published in the spring of 1898, and bearing the formidable subtitle: "Instructions for psychiatrically elucidating and scientifically determining the mental diseases recognized as necessary by the court. For doctors, laymen, jurists, guardians, administrative officials, ministers, etc."⁷⁷ Panizza summoned his impressive erudition in his discussions of epilepsy, melancholia, softening of the brain, and paranoia in an effort to prove that freedom of thought is nothing but criminal psychosis and should be persecuted to the fullest extent. Thus, free-thinkers and liberal writers should be committed to state institutions where they can no longer jeopardize the German monarchy. He also suggests that these dangerous elements should be denied the right to procreate, lest the disease spread and undermine the entire nation.

The booklet concludes with the sarcastic warning: "The danger is here. It is imminent. And with the constantly progressing tendency of political mental disease in the Western World it will soon become even clearer that we are faced with one of the most dangerous and far-reaching mass epidemics, and that it is time to call out to the monarchs: 'Princes of Europe, guard your most holy possessions!'"⁷⁸ It is difficult to escape the conclusion that behind this awkward political satire lurks the author's obsession with his own "constantly progressing tendency" toward mental disease.

Further evidence of this tendency can be found in Panizza's last

drama, *Nero*, a tragedy in five acts.⁷⁹ In a quite superfluous, fifteen-page historical appendix, the author stresses the fact that Nero cannot and should not be judged by Judaeo-Christian moral precepts. He was, the dramatist points out, the most brutal and the most popular of all Roman emperors, a psychopathic ruler who can only be judged from a “world-moralistic” point of view. In this respect, he compares his drama to Goethe’s *Iphigenie* and Dürer’s portrayal of the Passion. But behind the author’s pseudo-historical interest is the obsession with the psychotic breakdown of a great immoralist, the mental disintegration of a daring man who considered himself to be a great artist.

Expulsion from Switzerland

Very little is known of Panizza’s personal life during his two-year stay in Zürich, which came to an abrupt end late in 1898. His expulsion was prompted by the complaint of a fifteen-year-old prostitute, Olga, whom he had used as a model for some nude photography. The second time she came to see him at his home on Turnerstrasse 32, he showed her his

...collection of partly anatomical, partly artistic nude pictures, such as can be found among our art dealers, and among which were two nude male photographs, one with the *membrum virile in statu erectionis*, the other with the *membrum virile in statu relaxationis*. For such representations the artists of anatomical folios used to rely solely on their memory, while instant exposures now enable photographic representations to be made directly from nature. These art pictures actually have nothing at all to do with our matter at hand here; but I must bring them up, since Olga casually mentioned these pictures to the police, and because it is important to me that the reader learn everything, even the most minute detail, in order to form an opinion of the true reasons for my expulsion.⁸⁰

Although the Canton of Zürich had outlawed prostitution, Panizza was not charged with any specific crime. He was merely declared an undesirable alien by the Zürich police, which amounted to a pronouncement of *persona non grata* and expulsion from the entire country. Panizza did not deny his own actions, but, in his paranoid frame of mind, challenged the German Kaiser, “the great unknown

person who in reality had caused my expulsion from Zürich, to declare himself.”⁸¹ Wilhelm II remained silent, and Panizza was forced to repatriate himself for the second time in two years. From Zürich he moved westward to France, the country that had held such a strong attraction for him as a young man. Surely the Kaiser would be unable to reach him here in this land which was Germany’s traditional enemy. As so often before, his plausible assumptions were again to prove totally false.

The six years which Panizza spent in Paris were not nearly as productive from a literary point of view as the preceding six. He continued to publish his *Zürcher Diskussionen* for another few years, having decided to retain the title which by this time had become a glaring misnomer. Understandably enough, the number of subscribers diminished with the quality of this little publication, and the editor/publisher was not able to make ends meet without the continued financial support of his family. Toward the end of 1902 he addressed his readers with a “Notgedrungene Erklärung” and was forced to admit yet another defeat.⁸²

Final Poems From Paris

It was probably inevitable that a writer of such unorthodox persuasions, forced to live in a Parisian exile after having been consistently persecuted in his beloved fatherland, would conceive of himself as a spiritual kin to Heinrich Heine. Indeed, it was here in Paris that Panizza, in the spirit of Heine, returned to writing poetry after having neglected this genre for virtually a decade. The French capital obviously had a liberating effect on him, and he revelled in the enlightened atmosphere which stood in such sharp contrast to the censorship of Germany and Munich, in particular. A year of relative seclusion in his new “home” at 13 rue des Abesses enabled him to pen what may well be the most vitriolic anti-German verse written by a German poet in the nineteenth century. By December 1899 he had completed 97 poems in doggerel. These were collected in a little volume entitled *Parisjana*, which he himself published and of which a thousand copies were printed.⁸³ This was Oskar Panizza’s last book, and it certainly fared no better than any of his previous literary efforts. Dedicated to his old friend M.G. Conrad in “cordial admiration,” the volume contains a foreword in which he apologizes fo hav-

ing “stolen” the latter’s title (Conrad had published a collection of essays, *Parisiana*, in 1880) and lavishly praises him as the father of modern German literature. The recipient of this touching dedication expressed his due appreciation in an announcement published in *Das litterarische Echo*: “Dr. Oskar Panizza in Vienna [sic] has, without my knowledge or consent, dedicated a little volume of poetry to me. I herewith reject this dedication.”⁸⁴

The poet himself characterized this volume as a work, “in which the author’s personal opponent, Wilhelm II, is portrayed as the public enemy of mankind and culture, and in which the acuity of the train of thoughts and their form of expression were pushed to the extreme limit of the esthetically permissible.”⁸⁵ As the author had anticipated, all unsold copies of this work were confiscated by the German authorities, and another warrant for his arrest was issued in Munich. What he had not anticipated, however, was that his entire estate in Germany would also be confiscated, since he was now considered a fugitive from the law (March 1900). After a year of barely being able to survive in Paris without adequate funds, Panizza was forced to return to Germany in the spring of 1901 and surrender himself to the court in Munich which had issued the warrant for his arrest. Once more, Panizza had to endure imprisonment, this time for four months. Finally, he was sent to a psychiatric clinic for a six-week period of observation. This must have been a truly nightmarish “homecoming,” for the clinic was the very same one in which he had worked as a psychiatrist from 1882 to 1884.

These procedures, needless to say, hardly had the effect of alleviating his conviction that he was being systematically persecuted. The results of the psychiatric examinations clearly showed that the patient was suffering from chronic paranoia.⁸⁶ After a few more weeks spent in the Munich prison, he was released without any explanation, although he subsequently learned from friends that all criminal charges had been dropped against him as a result of the psychiatric evaluation written by Dr. Ungemach of the Munich Kreis-Irrenanstalt. On August 28, he left Munich and returned to Paris, having obtained the necessary funds from his family for a continued sojourn abroad.

Once in Paris, he issued the last few numbers of his *Zürcher Diskussionen* before finally ceasing all his publishing activities. It was not that he had stopped writing, but he was no longer able to secure a printer for his works.

Rising Paranoia

The years spent in Paris, especially those following the publication of *Parisjana*, appear to have been filled with solitude and very little social intercourse. He saw a few old friends from time to time, but the occasions for these encounters would seem to have been progressively infrequent. Frank Wedekind, an acquaintance from his days in Munich, is one of the few writers who made a point of seeing Panizza whenever he was in town. In a letter to Richard Weinhöppel, Wedekind tells of dragging Panizza around Paris "with super-human effort."⁸⁷ In a later letter to the same friend we read the sentence: "Panizza is perfecting himself more and more in his madness."⁸⁸ There is no evidence, nor is it very likely, that this "madman's" path ever crossed that of Rainer Maria Rilke. He, too, was leading a life of painful solitude in Paris, not many blocks away from Panizza; but even if they had met, it is very doubtful if the life of either man would have been significantly altered.

The vacuous two years from November 1901 to November 1903 are referred to in the author's autobiographical sketch of 1904 by a dash: —. About the only knowledge that can be gleaned from this period is that he wrote his sister Ida in June 1903 asking her for money to buy a villa in France. The family in Germany, however, was in no position to indulge their black sheep in such an extravagance.

The last phase of his Parisian exile began in the fall of 1903 when Panizza, who was now living in the strictest seclusion, began to be tormented by acoustic hallucinations. It was obvious to him that the German government was conspiring with a large number of French detectives to make his life miserable. The French government had shown such tolerance to him that they were free from any suspicions. The following excerpt from the author's tortured prose gives a vivid picture of his acute paranoia:

Da derselbe [Panizza], wie bereits erwähnt, seit 2 Jahren nichts mehr publiziert hatte, so mußte mit der Möglichkeit gerechnet werden, daß von anderer Seite, die den Ansichten des Pazienten mehr weniger [sic!] freundlich gegenüber stand, dessen Manuscripte heimlich überwacht, vielleicht kopiert und, soweit sie den Ansichten der neuen Partei entsprachen, schließlich publiziert wurden, am Ende gar unter Benützung von Titel, Firma, Druk und Papier der eingegan-

genen Zürchen Diskussionen. Nur so waren die neuen Feindseligkeiten gegen den Pazjenten, den man an gewisser Stelle jedenfalls für den Autor und verantwortlichen Herausgeber der sponirten Publikationen hielt, zu erklären. Denn daß die 2 Jahre vorher in München erfolgte Irren-Erklärung für ernst zu nehmen sei—so daß jedwelcher, freundlich oder feindlich ihm gegenüberstehende politische Partei sich gehütet hätte, sich um dessen Manuscripte zu bemühen— daran dachte Pazjent um so weniger, als auch in seiner Umgebung weder Franzosen noch Ausländer im Entferntesten daran dachten, ihn nicht für völlig geistig gesund zu erachten.⁸⁹

Panizza mentions minor chicaneries such as a temperamental fireplace, the cutting off of his water supply, and tampered apartment locks. But these were trifles compared to the shrill, high-pitched whistling sound which painfully stimulated his auditory nerve. The instruments which produced this whistling were everywhere. When he sat at home, he could hear the sound coming from a house across the street on the rue des Abesses. When he went for his weekly Sunday walk in the Bois de Montmorency, the whistling mysteriously followed him. Panizza-the-psychiatrist was sure that these sounds were not psychogenic since they disappeared when he covered his ears. The whistling tormented Panizza in Paris for more than half a year, and as the months passed, so did any last doubts that the hellish noises might actually be auditory hallucinations. During most of the spring of 1904, he was forced to forego exercise and fresh air, remaining locked in his little apartment where the noises were not as severe as outside.

Another conspiracy, which the author felt might be linked to the above-mentioned one, was believed to be directed by his aging mother in Munich and aimed at forcing the fifty-year-old bachelor into marriage. He saw this plot being carried out by local *concièrges*, *femmes de chambre*, and other gossips. Once he realized that these intrigues were under foot, he wrote his mother telling her that he had neither the desire nor the time to think about getting married. This letter seems to have done the trick, for shortly thereafter this second conspiracy came to an abrupt end.

In his autobiographical sketch, Panizza devotes a considerable amount of space to a justification of his refusal to even seriously consider matrimony. He begins with the rational argument that there are

numerous hereditary defects in his family, especially on his mother's side, which would endanger the health of any offspring. Furthermore, he still had a manifest form of syphilis in the form of a *gumma* on his right leg, and in view of the fact that psychotics and syphilitics were being urged to refrain from marriage, it would be almost criminal for him as a physician "to frivolously procreate decrepit offspring."⁹⁰ The other reasons he adduces are less than convincing, namely that his literary activity forced him to spend the greatest part of his days writing in absolute isolation, the rest being devoted to extended solitary walks outdoors, a life-style wholly incompatible with marriage.

And even if the products of this literary creation are minimally esteemed by the public and critics, they are not an expression of the patient's whim or caprice, but absolutely essential in relieving his brain. Thus he must take the safer way and continue in the old, proven track in order to maintain his psychic balance and not chase after phantasmata, which are perhaps most useful for others, but which appear as a health hazard to him.⁹¹

It is certainly not hard to understand why a fifty-year-old bachelor, suffering from syphilis which he had contracted as a student and undergoing a severe psychotic breakdown, would shy away from the thought of being forced into marriage. It would be a more fruitful question to ask why, in the preceding decades, he remained single despite his preoccupation with sex and his liberal-permissive attitudes on this subject.⁹² As far as one can judge such things a full century later from a few scraps of biographical sources, it would appear that Oskar Panizza was bisexual with latent homosexual preferences.⁹³ The only females to whom we know he had any emotional ties were his mother and sisters, and this would seem to fit the classic Freudian pattern for a fatherless son. One need not belabor this point any further, although it should be noted that if Panizza did indeed believe his rationalizations for shunning marriage, it is a good indication of how limited his awareness had become.

The Successful Coup

Plagued by marriage conspiracies and the incessant whistling,

which continued unabated despite resolute attempts to distract himself by writing, he was literally at his wits' end by the early summer of 1904. On May 21, he wrote the first really alarming letter to his mother, and a second one followed a week later. Frau Panizza thought a sanitarium in Boll might be the right place for her son to find a cure, and she dispatched a granddaughter, Mathilde Collard, to fetch her uncle in Paris. But he had since moved to a shabby rooming-house on Montmartre and stubbornly refused to see his niece. Panizza simply could not yet admit to himself that he was a very ill individual, and accepting his family's mercy mission would have been tantamount to surrender.

During the following few weeks, the whistling became sharply intensified, and the agony of remaining in Paris was approaching the unbearable. On the evening of June 23rd, he rather abruptly fled Paris by taking an express train to Lausanne. There he still perceived the annoying sounds, albeit at diminished intensity, but they completely disappeared once he began to rest at Lake Geneva and stroll in the nearby woods. After an unsuccessful attempt at obtaining a modest country home in these pleasant surroundings, he left the following week for Munich via Bern, Zürich, and Lindau.

Since his hallucinations began to recur in Munich, he saw no other alternative but to request admittance to the Kreisirrenanstalt München; not that he was crazy or anything, he simply wanted to prove to himself and everyone else that he was the unfortunate victim of external persecutions. He was not committed, however, supposedly due to lack of space. Instead, he was directed to the private asylum Neu-Friedenheim, an institution which, if anything, only heightened his paranoid feelings. After a few brief weeks there, Panizza left, allegedly at the insistence of the director, Dr. Rehm; he still refused to accept the fact that he was insane.

Oskar Panizza's last quarter-year as an uninstitutionalized citizen was spent in a modest room at Feilitzschstraße 59/II. He cautiously avoided the city and his old friends, preferring instead to take long walks in the refreshing parkland of the *Englischer Garten*. When he asked to see his 84-year-old mother, he was informed that this was impossible, since the feeble woman feared the sight of her son might precipitate a stroke. As the summer passed and the days became cooler, he began to spend most of his mornings sitting in the *Staatsbibliothek*, either reading or filling his notebooks with poetry and prose. Yet not only had the whistles not disappeared, but they were

now augmented by flutes of a distinctly metallic character. Panizza had previously experienced suicidal inclinations in Paris, Lausanne, and Neu-Friedenheim, and on October 9th, after having gone without food for over a day, he felt the time was ripe to extinguish his suffering. In a fit of despair, he hastily wrote a will and proceeded to a secluded spot in the *Englischer Garten* in order to hang himself. But once he had climbed the tree, he was overpowered by fear and failed to successfully complete the project. He returned to his room even more dejected and "deeply ashamed."⁹⁴

On October 19th he seized upon a less desperate course of action, an eccentric measure which was more in keeping with the true Panizza style. On this day he had been "whistled at" six times on his way to the library and again on his solitary walk through Oberföhring. Taking advantage of the mild afternoon temperature, he returned home briefly and at 5 PM strolled down the Leopoldstraße wearing only his shirt. Naturally he did not get very far on this walk. Outraged citizens apprehended and dragged him into the nearest house, where they awaited the arrival of a policeman. Panizza stated his identity as Ludwig Fromman, stenographer from Würzburg. He was taken by ambulance to police headquarters, given a brief medical examination and transferred to the municipal mental clinic. Writing his autobiographical sketch four weeks later, Panizza notes with a certain satisfaction: "The coup succeeded."⁹⁵

The Psychiatrist As Patient

Dr. Panizza gave a fluent and lucid oral account of his case history closely paralleling the previously-cited written one. This time he added a few more details, however, such as the fact that the Kaiser had died and was being played by an extra, and that Chancellor Bülow was conspiring with the French Minister Delcassé against Panizza. His former colleague, Professor Gudden, in charge of examining the patient, was quite unambiguous in his psychiatric testimonial:

Dr. Panizza's behavior over the past years has sufficiently proven that all his actions and activities have been guided by systematized delusions of persecution, that as a result of these delusions he repeatedly changed his residence, transformed his lifestyle into that of a homeless, hounded refu-

gee, who hardly dared to eat and viewed everyone as his enemy, who perceived and processed all phenomena in a pathological manner. 96

He concludes his lengthy evaluation with the verdict that his patient is incapable of forming judgments (about anything) which are free of delusions, that in accordance with civil law he is therefore insane. His colleague, Dr. Ungemach, is in complete agreement when he states that the patient had been suffering from "chronic madness for many years." 97 Another psychiatrist who confirmed this diagnosis was Hofrat Dr. Würzburger, to whose asylum, "Herzogshöhe" (near Bayreuth), Panizza was voluntarily committed on February 5, 1905. And he had ample opportunity to observe the patient, since Panizza lived out the last sixteen years of his life confined in this institution.

It is, of course, difficult if not impossible to determine at this point exactly what brought about Panizza's state of insanity. Writing some fourteen years after the author's death, Max Halbe rather unconvincingly argues that it was his friend's medical practice which precipitated his disintegration: "From everything that he himself told me and from what I, as an observer, know about him, it seems to me beyond doubt to have been precisely his psychiatric activity which was fateful for Panizza and which contributed not insignificantly to his later descent into the realm of insanity. It was one of those not infrequent cases of mental infection by the object under treatment, perhaps only the transference of pathological germs from the patient to the physician. . ." 98 If this were indeed the case, then we would expect pathological symptoms to manifest themselves much earlier in the author's life, and not fifteen years after he had abandoned the medical profession.

To be sure, Dr. Panizza was intimately acquainted with, and acutely aware of, the problems of mental illness. As his early study *Genie und Wahnsinn* demonstrates, he was convinced that genius could easily transform itself into madness. And yet none of this appears to be a sufficient cause for progressive paranoia. A more plausible explanation can be found, I believe, in organic causes. First of all, there is the widespread history of mental disease in the patient's family. Even if this meant a genetic predisposition to mental illness, or only a strong expectancy on the part of the patient, it would go a long way in helping to explain his condition. Then there is the indisputable fact that Panizza was never able to rid himself of syphilis, a

disease which frequently affects the brain over a period of years. And finally, there is the myriad of serious psychological problems which remained unresolved: Panizza's frenetic but unsuccessful attempt to achieve fame as a creative writer; the cruel punishment of incarceration for his most daring and creative artistic efforts; his incapacity to form close emotional ties to other individuals, male or female; his defensive loneliness which caused him to drift further and further from reality. These forces, acting together in indeterminable degrees, gradually produced a man who required institutionalization.

Madhouse

Panizza's derangement, which progressed over the years, was always interrupted by long periods of apparently normal lucidity. Thus after informing the court that it should decide whatever would be in his best interest, he vigorously protested when he lost his legal rights and was relegated to a ward of his brother Felix and *Justizrat* Popp in Munich (March 28, 1905). He alternated between considering himself mentally ill and perfectly sane. When a professor from Erlangen visited him in "Herzogshöhe" and inquired what was bothering him, he replied, "I have hallucinations." Asked to explain his condition in greater detail, Dr. Panizza replied caustically, "You can read about it in any textbook!"⁹⁹

In October 1907, the Panizza family asked Deacon Friedrich Lippert, the clergyman who had befriended Panizza during his imprisonment in Amberg, whether he would be willing to care for the patient in the privacy of his own home. He wisely declined, stating that he felt the patient's mental condition required professional care. However, when brother Felix died in March 1908, Lippert accepted the responsibility of functioning as the patient's co-guardian; he took this job very seriously, and when he retired in October 1915, he moved to Bayreuth in order to better serve his ward. Lippert appears to have been truly devoted to Panizza, as close a friend as he ever had. The following quotation, though not without a trace of vanity, offers us a glimpse of how this kind and selfless man tried relating to his insane ward:

I performed my duty all the more gladly, since Oskar greeted me as an old friend at our first reunion, and his words,

“Now I’m in the insane asylum,” moved me deeply. But I also knew that he liked to hear the comfort of the gospel, and I held worship services at least once a month. . . during which Oskar joyfully sang along the hymns and devoutly prayed “with his better self.” After all, these patients are often like children, who feel the divine drive toward religion the strongest. . .my most beautiful reward was when he kissed my hand after services.¹⁰⁰

Besides being a loyal guardian and friend to Panizza, Lippert has performed an invaluable service to posterity by providing us with virtually the only information about the author’s last years. He describes how Panizza was unable to complete his ultimate book with the envisioned title “Die Geburtsstunde Gottes, ein mitologischer Ziklus im Sinne des Sonnen- und Mondlaufes.” Panizza’s notebooks degenerated into “a witch’s brew of Bible, myth, sagas, ghosts, pornography, philosophy, Wagner, murder, and manslaughter in German, English, French, and Italian.”¹⁰¹ Whenever he was hallucinating, he only spoke French; even the daily newspaper he read was French. As the years passed, his hallucinations became more prevalent and his notebooks grew more confused and lascivious. It was only in the last few years, however, that he ceased writing completely.

There does not seem to have been any great effort made to cure the patient, obviously because he was, or at least was considered to be, incurable. Lippert recounts how he progressively withdrew from everyone around him, how he refused to talk to the doctors and only occasionally spoke with his fellow patients, preferring the company of the hopelessly incurable to those who had the potential of being rehabilitated. He drifted further and further away from his family, and only reluctantly did he receive any visitors. He was untouched by the death of his brother Felix in 1908 and displayed no reaction to the death of his 93-year-old mother in 1915.¹⁰²

Other accounts of Panizza’s years in “Herzogshöhe” differ sharply from the one given above. Walter Mehring, in a highly inaccurate discourse on Panizza, offers the following conspiratorial version:

An alleged fit of insanity resulted in his being sent to a private sanatorium. His Munich coffeehouse colleagues claimed he was sent there because his uncle, a Jesuit, intervened at the request of his family, as the Marquis de Sade’s mother-in-law had done. He remained in the sanatorium for twenty

years, shut off from the outside world and continuing to write until his death in 1922. Like the Marquis de Sade at Charenton, no one was permitted to visit him. I tried in vain to do so.¹⁰³

Unless one assumes a full-fledged conspiracy involving scores if not hundreds of apparently unrelated individuals, then Mehring's account must be regarded as little more than unfounded gossip. Of far greater interest is Max Krell's report of a visit by Frank Wedekind to "Herzogshöhe": "In the Torgelstube one evening, Frank Wedekind said, 'I visited Panizza yesterday. He is in excellent shape. He is the most rational person on this earth. And he's working!'"¹⁰⁴ Krell goes on to relate that "when Wedekind, the only acquaintance from his past, visited him, he showed him what he was working on: he was translating Aristophanes into German, and he engaged his guest in astonishing discussions concerning dramaturgical craft. Wedekind considered the renditions to be excellent, he showed portions of them to Greek scholars at the university who admitted: simply brilliant. Later these texts disappeared, as did Panizza's earlier publications. . ."¹⁰⁵ Wedekind's visit occurred during the first few years of Panizza's sojourn in "Herzogshöhe," when he enjoyed long periods of complete lucidity; whereas by the time Mehring tried to visit him in 1915, his condition had vastly deteriorated. According to Lippert, World War I was a fact the author could no longer comprehend.

The last years of his life appear to have been completely devoid of any rational activity. He tore up books that displeased him, smashed windows when he wanted to have fresh air in his room, dispensed medical counsel to his fellow patients, and generally behaved in a deranged manner. A stroke suffered on the evening of September 28, 1921, put an end to Oskar Panizza's miserable life. He was buried two days later by Deacon Lippert in the Bayreuth municipal cemetery, following a funeral attended exclusively by asylum personnel.