

Darfst toben, rasen und fluchen,  
 Und leisten, was Dein Gehirn nur kann,—  
 Wir wollens dann genau untersuchen. (p. 20)

For the first fifty-eight stanzas, the poet is sorely tempted to abandon the outside world and enter the asylum. Then, suddenly, in the last three stanzas there is an abrupt reversal. Panizza twice emphatically declares that he is "still healthy" and "sane," that he still loves the world despite its woes, and that he had merely been confused by others who were out to betray him. Shades of Thetis rescuing her exhausted son come to mind when we read the concluding stanza stating Panizza's conviction that strong love can save him even from madness:

Noch hast Du die Liebe,—sie ist gewiss  
 Das mächtigste der Gefühle,  
 Sie rettet Dich vor dem rothen Haus  
 Und vor dem schmutz'gen Gewühle. (p. 22)

The transparent bravado of the last four lines is hardly capable of dispelling the omnipresent fear of madness expressed in the preceding two hundred and forty. It is a characteristic response of Panizza's to clutch at love as at some miraculous outside force which would protect him from harm and prevent him from losing his mind; but this belief was either wholly unfounded or, at best, tenuously weak. In the end, Panizza was obliged to concede that no force in the world could hinder his being drawn into the dark chambers of "the red house."

### Londoner Lieder

The poems which appeared the following year in *Londoner Lieder* (1887) represent very little in the way of a radical departure from the preceding ones. His second volume of verse contains thirty-six individual poems divided into four groups similar to those found in *Düstere Lieder*: "Twilight Pieces" (6), "Ballads and Romances" (6), "Sonnets" (9), "Lyrical and Fabulous Verse" (15). The familiar themes of hell and infidelity, sex versus religion, fear of death and insanity recur again and again. The volume's title is something of a

misnomer, since the British capital does not figure prominently in this verse. Occasionally London functions as a stereotyped background, though more frequently we find ourselves transported back to the Middle Ages or even ancient Egypt. The same formal limitations previously noted in *Düstre Lieder* are still very much in evidence here, despite a slight increase in the use of the trimeter. All in all, one gets the distinct impression that the poet was beginning to have trouble finding something new to write about.

The nine sonnets in the middle of the collection lack the depth and the driving thrust found in the "Men and Women" cycle of *Düstre Lieder*. Here he proudly proclaims, for instance, how little time it took him to locate the London whorehouses:

In London, wo die Zauberinnen wachen,  
Die kleinen Stübchen hab ich rasch gefunden  
Und fort war alle Zauberei!—sie lachen,

Sie heilen Deine grossen Weltschmerzwunden,  
Sie schau'n Dich an mit Mitleid und Entzücken,  
Zuletzt sie Dich an ihren Busen drücken. (p. 61)

All too often his verse is simply trivial, and to make matters worse, he will sometimes add an unhealthy dose of German chauvinism or self-pity. Thus he declares German prostitutes to be superior to their English sisters (p. 62); even the German trees excell because they "know everything" (p. 63). Interpersonal relationships are always inadequate: an individual is either separated from his lover in time (VIII.) or space (III., V., and VII.), or is altogether without a loved one (VI.). The final piece is another sonnet about the sonnet, which he says can assume any form from a defiant warrior to a wretched waif. The meager cycle of sonnets ends on a note of unabashed self-pity:

Oft wie ein kleines Mädchen, dem gestorben  
Die Eltern sind, mit Kleidern, die zerissen,  
An dunkler Hausthür lehnt mit Wunden Füßen

Verhungert und verkältet und verdorben;  
Die Menschen geh'n vorbei froh und beglücktet,  
Derweil ihr junges Herz hilflos ersticket. (p. 68)

A similar lack of style and substance exists in the eight pathetic love poems grouped together under the inflated title of "Troubadour Lieder" (pp. 71-77). These lyrics are superficially clothed in medieval garb, with the eternally frustrated minstrel singing to his unperturbed lady sitting up in her impenetrable castle. Panizza's choppy lines are overloaded with poetic clichés and dripping with a hackneyed bathos that could hardly appeal to anyone but the poet himself:

Wie lange vor Euren Fenstern,  
Schlossdame, soll ich auf und ab  
Noch flattern, bis Ihr von den Fenstern  
Einst schaut in mein kühles Grab! (p. 71)

.....

Ach grosse, schöne Schlossdame!  
Ach wunderschönes Weib!  
Was helfen mich Eure Augen,  
Und Euer prächtiger Leib? (p. 73)

This lady of the castle, to whom these pitiful lines are addressed, appears to possess two outstanding virtues: a beautiful body and a sense of cruel indifference which borders on sadism:

Wenn Du von Deinem Fenster  
Mitleidig mich betrachtest,  
Mit Deiner Reitpeitsch' spielest  
Heimlich mich gar verachtest,

Und hin zu Deinen Füßen  
Ein fremder Mann Dir schmeichelt,  
Und Deine Hände küsset,  
Und Liebe Dir erheuchelt,

Und ich, ich muss dann sterben,  
Vergessen bleibt mein Name,—  
So hat das nichts zu sagen  
Du wunderschöne Dame. (pp. 72f.)

The poet's own masochistic fantasies dominate the imagery in the above stanzas. His lady is secretive and contemptuous, she likes to play with whips, she must be flattered and remain both physically and psychologically superior to any interested man. The only pleas-

ure the poet can derive from such a relationship is relishing the torture inflicted by a beautiful lady.<sup>9</sup> In the cycle's last poem, Panizza admits that his lady merely serves a symbolic function, she is an object to believe in and write about:

Du hast nicht Weib, Du hast nicht Kind,  
 Du hast nicht Religion noch Glaube,  
 Schlagst Menschensatzung in den Wind,—  
 So sei sie Symbol Dir und Taube.

Vergiss sie nicht;—man hört ja oft,  
 Der Mensch muss glauben, sei's ein Name,  
 Wenn denn Dein Herz nichts mehr erhofft,  
 So glaub' an Sie, an Deine Dame! (pp. 76f.)

It does not seem to have taken Panizza overly long to come to the realization that his lady was not deserving of all his faith; nor could she continue to serve as the prime subject matter for his artistic creations. These "Troubadour Lieder" are the last love poems he ever published, and in his subsequent prose and dramatic fiction he avoided the topic of love altogether.

Two of the six Ballads and Romances, "Der junge König" (p. 36) and "Der König und sein Stallknecht" (p. 40), express Panizza's omnipresent feelings of failure through almost identical metaphorical conceits. In both instances we have a young king, sensitive and apolitical, who is dethroned by traitors taking advantage of his preoccupation with art and nature. Both kings are single and display a warm affection for their stable hands; they are totally defenseless to meet the challenge posed by the treacherous princes. Since Panizza appears to have considered himself incapable of eliciting and sustaining any woman's love aside from his mother's, it is not surprising to find this sense of emotional impotence reflected in his obsession with themes of infidelity and seduction (e.g., "Der junge Jäger," "Altenglisches Diebslied," "Aus einer Ehebruchsverhandlung"). In Panizza's world, the strong, healthy individuals are out to destroy the weaker and more sensitive ones. If virtually everyone is regarded as a potential threat, then nobody can be trusted. In "Der Kutscher von London," he expresses the conviction that horses and dogs are far more reliable and sincere than any humans could be:

Unter allen Menschen allein das Pferd  
 Bricht niemals sein Wort,—die Pferdeseele  
 Ist die reinste,—dann folgt der Hund,  
 Dann kommen die Kutscher,—dann die übrigen  
 Menschen. . . (p. 28)

The fear of insanity, which might be operationally defined here as the capacity to hallucinate while awake and not under the influence of any drugs, continues to haunt Panizza and naturally remains a staple obsession of his poetry. A casual walk along the Thames through the early-morning fog can lead to visions of ghost-like monsters emerging from the depths of the river ("Der Nebel," p. 21). In another poem, "Merlin," he clearly identifies with the old magician watching the sun set on his sanity:

"Grüsst mir die Themse,—ach Gott! Gawein  
 Der Wahnsinn, glaub ich, will mich fassen,  
 Ganz London steckt in meinem Kopf,  
 Ich sehe die Fenster, die Gassen;

"Die blonden Kinder schauen heraus  
 —Ach, in mir will sich's umnachten,  
 Sie lachen so englisch, sie sprechen so fein,  
 Und ich muss hier verschmachten!"— (p. 48)

The most unusual poems in *Londoner Lieder* are the three inspired by the Egyptian mummies in the British Museum. The sight of these 3000-year-old royal corpses aroused strong feelings in the poet who had already shown signs of an intense preoccupation with hell and death. In "Die Mumien," Panizza created a fervent prayer to Osiris, the ancient Egyptian god of the lower world and judge of the dead. What the mummy's soul is pleading for is a speedy trip through purgatory, and the poet shares the travelling soul's terror of the horrifying monsters who inhabit this realm:

O grosser Osiris, wenn die arme Seele  
 An dieses Thor kommt, wo die Höllenthiere,  
 Die Bestien des Lasters und Schemen der Unzucht  
 Dort stehn mit Elefantenrüsseln  
 Und Ochsenhörnern und Geierschnäbeln,  
 Und mit ihren Rüsseln und schmierigen Schnauzen

Die schöne, feine Seele beriechen,—  
 O Osiris, lass nicht zu lange dauern  
 Die gemeine Scene. . . (p. 16)

In “Ramses der Grosse,” the poet admits that this recently discovered Egyptian king exerts an almost magical fascination on him. Ramses’ face is marked by an enigmatic expression, and Panizza devotes most of the poem to speculating about the origin and significance of this expression. The final line in the poem subtly shifts the focus of speculation away from the mummy and onto the poet himself:

Mein Gott! lieber König, was liegt Dir am Herzen?  
 Hast Du die letzte Schlacht verloren?  
 Bist Du nicht von königlichem Stamm geboren?  
 Und sind gefälscht der Hieroglyphen Berichte?  
 Gott! lieber König, ist’s die alte Geschichte? (p. 20)

The use of the phrase “die alte Geschichte” is reminiscent of Heine. It is a most clever device which succeeds in dispelling one enigma by creating another one in its place. Naturally there is no way of telling which “old story” Panizza was referring to, though it does seem likely that he was projecting his own fear of failure onto the life of this ancient king.

The concluding poem in *Londoner Lieder*, “Aegyptische Lieder,” consists of twelve stanzas divided into five numbered “songs.” This division is wholly arbitrary, since all twelve stanzas comprise one single narrative poem describing the voyage of a poor little Egyptian soul after it leaves the body. This trip<sup>10</sup> takes the little soul to the foot of Osiris’ throne of judgment, where it hears the dreaded condemnation: “Dein Herz war nicht wie die Sonne klar, / Die Seeligkeit muss ich verneinen!” (p. 85). The trip continues through the dark passages of an underground river, whose banks are lined with Panizza’s nightmarish monsters: “Links und rechts am Ufer stehn / Thiere mit scheusslichen Grimassen” (p. 86). Finally the purged soul arrives at the throne of the sun, which appears more like an apotheosis of Panizza’s high and mighty “Schlossdame” than any of the masculine deities traditionally associated with the sun (Amon, Horus, and Ra):

Die Sonne sitzt auf ihrem Thron  
 Von Flammen und Strahlen umschimmert

Sie beugt sich tief herab, und spricht  
Zur Seele, die zittert und wimmert:

“In Deinem ägyptischen Leben war  
Nicht alles in Ordnung, indessen  
Das ist vergangen,—weine nicht mehr,  
Alles ist nun vergessen!” (p. 87)

Following the prior evocations of a nightmarish hell, these concluding stanzas contain no small amount of wishful thinking. As a matter of fact, the last two lines are precisely the words a German mother would use to soothe a distraught son; and what greater wish could a son have than to hear these words from her?

### Legendäres und Fabelhaftes

Panizza's third volume of poetry, *Legendäres und Fabelhaftes* was published following a two-year interval in 1889. Gone are the sickly love poems and the tortured sonnets. The development and refinement of narrative technique marks a further step forward and points the way to Panizza's prose fiction, the first of which was to appear the following year. Another welcome innovation can be found in the poet's discovery and cultivation of satire, a savagely humorous irony which helps make his frequent over-emotionalism palatable, and which he later developed to the point of distinguished notoriety. Thus this last collection of early verse represents a significant turning point in the poet's career: by exploiting his early restricted themes to their limits, he was subsequently able to abandon poetry and move on to larger and more ambitious literary forms.

Like its two predecessors, Panizza's third volume of poetry is divided into four sections: "Ballads" (4), "Legends" (5), "Fall Pictures" (10), and "Free Rhymed Verse" (3). This time, however, the individual categories represent more meaningful units, since there is a certain thematic homogeneity within each group. Thus in the "Ballads" section he treats historical instances of infidelity and seduction; the "Legends" deal with the mutual exclusivity of religion and sex; the "Fall Pictures" portray life as an absurd prelude to a cruel death; the "Free Rhymed Verse" consists of three poems markedly resembling short stories in length, and all dealing with hallucinatory exper-

iences. Within the overall organization of the book, there is a dynamic thrust which moves thematically from sex to sex and religion, to sex, religion and death, to sex, religion, death and insanity. Thus the first section includes a poem simplistically treating the much belabored theme of infidelity: in "Sir Gordon und Sir Invervail" (pp. 11-14), the latter calmly slays the former and takes his young wife. A novel variation on the theme of sex can be found in "Mary und der Schotte," where the heroine performs such an impressive striptease act that William makes her his Queen of Scotland (pp. 15-23). The last of these ballads, "Thomas der Reimer," is a wishful fantasy in which the hero abandons his dog's life and rides off with the queen of the elves, but not before she impresses upon him her absolute superiority:

" "Wiss', Thomas, dieses Leben hier,  
Dein Leben hier ist reiner Schund,  
Du führst ein Leben wie ein Hund,  
Dein Leben, das beginnt bei mir!" " (p. 26)

This dog motif was picked up again in later poems and eventually grew so powerful in the author's mind, that it became the subject of an entire book published three years later, *Aus dem Tagebuch eines Hundes*.

Contrasting with the banal treatment of sex in the opening section are the bizarre fusions of sex and religion found in the "Legends." Heading this section is "Der heil'ge Antonius; ein Cyklus."<sup>11</sup> This is Panizza's longest poem, and most of the nearly three hundred lines are devoted to descriptions of the devilish monsters hallucinated by the saint/poet. Antonius confesses that the legend recounting how he was tempted by visions of a voluptuous girl is sheer fabrication, because he was too ashamed to tell the truth:

"Das Thier war's mit dem Schwefelkopf,  
Dem aus dem Maul die Zähne standen  
Wie Phosphor leuchtend, breit und gelb,—  
Ich hab' es nur nicht eingestanden." (p. 40)

Much the same way Panizza found writing to be an antidote to "all kinds of psychopathic fits," so Antonius realizes that the only way to dispel the yellow monster is to write a book about the devil. After



years of being plagued by his visions, and suffering "like a dog" (p. 47), the saint finally prevails, completes his tome, and prefaces it with the following lines which could serve as the motto for Oskar Panizza's work:

Wer Schönes hier und Zartes sucht,  
Der sei gewarnt!—in diesen Blättern  
Schläft manches Grau'n, und aus den Lettern  
Grinzt oft was scheusslich und verrucht; (p. 46)<sup>12</sup>

The Saxon count in "Die heilige Elisabet" is forced to lead a dog's life of quite a different sort. His wife Elisabet is bored with her humdrum existence as a countess and decides that what she really wants to be is a saint. Panizza's gift for satire is beginning to find its mark as he pokes fun at the would-be saint asking Mary for her advice:

Was soll ich noch thun, Maria?  
Soll ich mich auf einem Brette  
Nageln, wie Dein Sohn genagelt  
Einst ward auf der Schädelstätte?

.....

Sprich' was Furchbar's!—dass mit Heil'gen  
Ich dürft bluten um die Wette,—  
Denn verhasst ist mir der Trip-trap  
Dieser Welt und ihre Glätte. (pp. 65f.)

Like Panizza, the Saxon count expresses his willingness to endure the humiliation of rejection if Elisabet will only remain with him in the castle. Thrice he offers to live the role of a "quietly vigilant dog" (pp. 60f.). But the determined woman spitefully dies amid visions of her heavenly robes being readied by white angels.

The "Legends" conclude with what is Panizza's most humorous satirical poem, "Aus der Schöpfung," describing the fall and expulsion of man from Paradise. One evening an old man brings a beautiful young girl to Adam's garden. The latter's response to this feminine novelty is, quite characteristically, one of submission and impotence:

Tief im Staub das Antlitz, wie ein  
Wurm, die Zung' im Sande leckend,  
Während glotzend-weiss die Augen

Starren auf das lichte Wesen,

Adam ringt nach Ausdruck; nicht um's  
Zählen dreht sich's jetzt, und nicht um's  
Pflanzen—, Thieren-Namengeben; (p. 73)

It does not take Adam and Eve long to figure out the mechanics of sexual intimacy, but their delight is rudely interrupted by the old man who bursts in at midnight shouting hysterically:

“Undankbarer, Du hast mir mein  
Köstliches Gefäss vernichtet,  
Meinen Plan mir umgestossen,  
Den Jahrtausende gereift!

“Warum wart'st Du nicht? So war es  
Nicht gemeint; Du durftest jetzt noch  
Nicht erfahren; in die Schöpfung  
Hattest Du ja keinen Einblick!

“Alles geht conträr nun;—Alles  
ist vernichtet; meine grosse  
Schöpfung ist verloren;—beide  
Müsst Ihr morgen fort von hier!” (p. 75)

Panizza continually relished portraying the Christian deity as a dim-witted, bungling old prude. He was a master at this kind of blasphemous satire, which reached its artistic peak in *Das Liebeskonzil*, and it is one of the many ironies of the author's life that he was persecuted for the very activity in which he excelled.

## Fall Pictures

The mood of the “Fall Pictures” is one of autumnal melancholy bordering on suicidal despair. He writes of cold, hunger, loneliness, death, and the Last Judgement. Life is hell even for children and witches; the former are plagued by terrifying hallucinations (p. 93), the latter languish for the golden age before all the good old witches died out (p. 100). Six times in the course of this thirty-page section, contemporary life is referred to as “Tritsch-Tratsch” or “Trip-Trap”

(pp. 98, 99, 100, 101, and 104). Panizza does not seem to have been fully capable of taking the Nietzschean leap over the abyss to attain the heights of the "Übermensch." He never progressed beyond lamenting the ugly squalor of a cruel, senseless, lonely and boring existence, only punctuated by putrefaction in the grave. One of Panizza's most forceful comments on the absurd human condition is the wildly naturalistic gesture at the end of "Die Waldfrau":

Ist das immer noch der alte  
 Trip-trap Eurer Welt,—hat Euer  
 Kopf nichts Neues denn ersonnen?"  
 Frug's,—und räuspernd, und mit zween  
 Fingern von der Nas' abschneuzend  
 Ihren Rotz, warf sie verächtlich  
 Ihn dem Wanderer zu Füßen,  
 Und verschwand sogleich im Walde. (pp. 104f.)

Stopping for a moment to consider the significant aspects of Panizza's behavior as reflected in his poetry thus far, one might say that he saw three possible responses to the awareness that life is hell: to trust in divine salvation and become a saint, the surest path to which was martyrdom; to become a devil, attack the myth of divine salvation, and relish the joys, sorrows, delights of this earth; or lastly, to leave this miserable life altogether. Obviously the second alternative appeared the most attractive to Panizza, especially compared to the untimely deaths of the first and third. But living like a devil had its problems. What if one didn't have the strength to be a victorious devil? What if one were continually taunted by pangs of conscience and fears of purgatory? What if one were a weak and cowardly devil continually having to swallow the humiliation of being forced into submission by stronger, healthier devils? Now assuming one were this weak, cowardly person, how could one summon the strength required for an act of martyrdom or even suicide? These unrelenting questions could drive one insane. Or perhaps insanity was merely a variant of the third alternative, a physically painless escape from external reality.

Panizza is hardly trivial when his poems reflect on just such questions. Some of his most profound verse can be found in the little poem significantly titled "Die Frage." He asks himself whether ultimate wisdom might lie in the awareness that all things are followed:

Seltsam! Unter all den vielen  
 Menschenspuren, kreuz und quer,  
 Hinter jeder, klein und zierlich,  
 Folget eine, gross und schwer.

Ist denn das die letzte Weisheit,  
 Und der Weisheit letzter Schluss,  
 Dass auf jeden kleinen Absatz  
 Gleich ein grosser folgen muss?

Ist das unser höchster Glaube,  
 Den des Menschen Hirn gereift,  
 Dass vor jedem grossen Stiefel  
 Stets ein kleines Füsschen läuft? (pp. 101f.)

On one level, of course, he is referring to the pursuit of females by males, to the powerful attraction that women exert on men; an Oedipal interpretation would emphasize Mother's decisive influence on the lives of great men. Aside from these more obvious sexual connotations, the footsteps can also be viewed as having more universal significance: is everyone seduced to follow weaker devils while being pursued by stronger ones? Is the ultimate insight an awareness of fear and desire as prime motivating forces of human behavior? Perhaps one could abstract even further and see the feet as thoughts being pursued by stronger, more militant ("grosser Stiefel") psychic phenomena, e.g., hallucinations or nightmares.

This image of the weak individual being pursued by insane visions is in line with a whole strain of Panizza's poetry, running from "Das grosse Haus" at the beginning of *Düstere Lieder* to "Die Leichenfahrt" at the end of *Legendäres und Fabelhaftes*. The latter poem follows the course of a German corpse, a Lutheran house-boy, from his coffin through funeral services, purgatory, and finally to the throne of God. No sooner has this "deutscher Michel" (p. 127) appeared in heaven when he is coarsely rebuked by the heavenly assemblage for his slovenly appearance; the final insult is being asked whether he is from Bohemia. The German house-boy replies that "Der deutsche Kopf ist sicherlich / Ein Ding separat und ganz für sich" (p. 132), and proceeds to recount what can only be termed an "alcohol trip":

. . .wenn ich oft am Fass  
 Stumm sitze,—der Krahn ohne Unterlass

Der läuft und rinnt,—und wenn so allein  
 Beim trüben, dampfendern Oellichtschein  
 Ich sitze,—auf einmal, da rührt sich 'was  
 In meinem Hirn,—als wären die Schranken  
 Plötzlich gefallen,—mit seinen Gedanken  
 Möcht' es heraus; es gährt und schürt,  
 Mein Kopf der wird wie illuminiert,  
 Die Seele reisst er aus ihrem Gehäuse,  
 Und fort geht's nun auf die weite Reise; (pp. 132f.)

The house-boy's mind-trip takes him to a hallucinated hell, an eerie variation on the "hospital as death factory" theme first sounded in "Das grosse Haus." This hell in the mind is as ghastly as the real life hell experienced daily by the house-boy and, presumably, by the poet himself. The hellish experiences one is forced to endure on earth are infinitely worse than the puny hell belonging to God's fallen angel:

Recht gern hab' ich verlassen die Welt;  
 Denn, was mich auch ferner bedroht,—die Ruthen  
 Und Peitschen der Teufel, in der Hölle die Gluthen,  
 Oder, was sonst lieber Gott Dir gefällt  
 Ueber mich zu verhängen,—mein Gott, zum Lachen,  
 Zum Lachen sind mir diese Strafen, die schwachen,  
 Deine kleinen Sträfchen. . ." (p. 135)

There is potential social criticism in Panizza's implication that life is hell for German house-boys, an assumption which is further reinforced by the poet's description of the funeral service:

Vom Pastor kurz eine Litanei,—  
 Eine Hand voll Erde;—ein Kranz oder zwei,—  
 Auch bei den Luther'schen nicht zu viel Wesen  
 Macht man mit 'nem Hausknecht,. . . (p. 127)

However, class distinctions fade away at the end of "Die Leichenfahrt" with the evocation of Goethe's "Gab mir ein Gott zu sagen, was ich leide." Christ, who has been uncomfortably embarrassed by the entire scene, suddenly intervenes on behalf of the house-boy and commands an archangel:

“Diese Deutschen mit ihren specialen Leiden! . . .  
 Man soll dem Mann eine Harfe geben,  
 Und soll ihn in Engelstücher kleiden.” (p. 136)

The early poems thus end on a rather ambitious note, with Panizza playing the unaccustomed role of martyr to the cause of art. If life was hell, then he could write about this hell as most great German writers before him had done. One should not, however, overlook the subtle irony in these last three lines. Christ's words are condescending and strongly imply that Germans are prone to a particular kind of mental anguish capable of producing great poetry out of their miserable lives. Although Panizza's life was miserable enough, he lacked the poetic gift to transform this suffering into works of wide or lasting appeal. These early poems may have been of enormous therapeutic value as a conscious working out of troubling internal conflicts, but they represented a dead-end as far as his artistic career was concerned. Following the publication of *Legendäres und Fabelhaftes*, he abandoned poetry for prose and did not return to it until a full decade later in 1899, after he had moved from Zürich to Paris.

### Parisjana

The poems in *Parisjana*, the last book ever published by Panizza, were written in the spring, summer, and autumn of the year 1899. Whereas the early poems have been glossed over or completely ignored, Panizza critics have tended to view this later collection of verse as a work of almost monumental proportions. Thus Prescher writes, “Since Heine, who also found refuge in Paris, there has probably not been any political-satirical poetry that approaches Panizza's ‘German verses from Paris’—if not in their form, then in their prophetic content.”<sup>13</sup> Elsewhere he commented that “despite all formal shortcomings these poems are among the most biting, the most prophetic political verse to be published here since Heine.”<sup>14</sup> Writing almost a half-century earlier, in the first years of the Weimar Republic, Kurt Tucholsky hailed Panizza as “the freshest and bravest, the wittiest and most revolutionary prophet of his country.”<sup>15</sup> Tucholsky frequently quoted from Panizza's Parisian poems which he characterized as “astoundingly prophetic verses.”<sup>16</sup> It is indeed a sad comment on German literature of the past century when a man of Paniz-

za's caliber is acclaimed as "the most prophetic," "the wittiest and most revolutionary" poet since Heine. If these evaluations are anywhere near accurate, then one can only conclude that German poetry has been almost totally barren of wit or revolutionary spirit, and that a near madman's desire for vengeance represents "the most prophetic political verse" since Heine.

Preceding the poems in *Parisjana* are the dedication to "Michael Gorg Conrad dem Franken," untranslated quotes from Etienne de la Boétie and Jules Michelet, and a preface in the form of an open letter to Conrad, praising him as the most influential German stylist (p. XIII). The volume's 99 untitled poems begin with an "Einführung," followed by 97 numbered poems, and concluding with a "Geleit." All stanzas have the identical form: ten lines of fairly regular iambic tetrameter, with the rhyme-scheme abababcdcd. From the frequent meteorological and seasonal references within the poems, one can conclude that their sequential arrangement is roughly chronological.

Certainly there can be no doubt that these poems are revolutionary.

Hier hat doch nur die eine Frage  
noch Sinn, ob Du ein Kämpfer bist,  
dann zieh' Dein Schwert heraus, und wage,  
als Anarchist, als Sozialist. (#39)

Glaubt Ihr, es sei'n die Bataljone  
zum Schuze für den Fürsten nur:  
macht einmal Kehrt und zeigt dem Trone  
die Front, und sagt: *choc en retour!* (#40)

Although only about one-fifth of the total are specifically concerned with the need for a popular German uprising,<sup>17</sup> virtually all ninety-nine are staunchly anti-German and bitterly denounce the failure of the German people to free their fatherland from its oppressive ruler, Wilhelm II:

ein Volk, das sich zum Henkersknechte  
für einen dummen Jungen macht,  
verliert zum Herrschen seine Rechte,  
und sinkt vergessen in die Nacht.

Ein Volk, das im Lakaientume  
 sich wolfült als gebor'ner Knecht,  
 verliert die Kraft zum Fördertume,  
 verliert zur Existenz das Recht. . . (#9)

There is a healthy strength and freshness to this verse which was totally lacking in the often sickly, self-pitying early poems. During the ten intervening years, Panizza had become one of the most aggressive anti-Establishment polemicists in Germany, a warrior who had fought hard and been beaten severely. Yet the dozen months of incarceration and the years of exile had in no way diminished his crusader's zeal, and this militancy is perhaps the most essential ingredient of his new poetry. His savage hostility toward supposed enemies is anything but subtle: "pak Deinen Feind nur flott beim Kragen, / und rei' ihm dann die Hoden aus!" (#74).

The poet no longer tries to evoke feelings of poignant ambiguity. His message is clear, his thrust unequivocal, his language direct and unabashed: "Ihr habt 'nen Gott mit richt'gen Drmen und Euer Gott, der macht Kaka" (#8). These poems are liberally sprinkled with scatological and animal imagery. The animal most often mentioned is the horse, to whom the Germans allegedly have a particular affinity:

Du solst nicht um Dein bischen Leben,  
 das diffiil und nervenkrank,  
 in Deutschland stets Dich bergeben  
 vor Kavall'rie und Pferdsgestank. (#23)

komm nicht als "Gott" und nicht als "Denker"  
 mit Dingen, die kein Mensch erhrt,  
 la alles Wiehern und Gestnker  
 und werde Mensch aus einem Pferd! (#25)

Den Feind des deutschen Vaterlandes,  
 von meinem Patmos in Paris,  
 seh' ich als ein dem Pferd Verwandtes,  
 Verkoppeltes, mit Schaum-Gebi;  
 aus Pferde-Hurerei entstand es,  
 und ist des Stammbaums sich gewi;  
 nicht, da ich es Zentaure heie—  
 so nobel ist nicht dieser Gaul—  
 Robollen hinten aus dem Steie,  
 Robollen vorne aus dem Maul! (#42)



It is obvious that this language was offensive to nineteenth-century standards of decency. But this was precisely Panizza's intention: to attack the middle-class German morality which held, for instance, that the desire for sex was less decent than the desire for military expansion or internal repression:

Sitzt Du nicht an dem Ort, ich wette,  
des Lasters, wo die Dirne schweift,

.....

und doch ein hochanständ'ges Viertel,  
wo alles sich noch sittsam regt,  
verglichen mit dem Eisengürtel,  
Den Ihr um Eure Völker legt;

verglichen mit den blei'rnen Kappen,  
die Ihr den Hirnen umgeschnalt,  
dem Pferdsgeruch von Schimmeln, Rappen,  
die ihr anpreiset mit Gewalt— (#5)

Sometimes the animal imagery is used to signify filth and revulsion, such as when he exhorts the muses, "werft Perlen nicht vor diese Säue, / nicht Verse den Barbaren hin!" (#1). Panizza's ultimate target is always the moral hypocrisy of Wilhelminian society: "'nen Spruch zu seinem Vorteil sagen / kann jeder Hahn auf seinem Mist" (#25). Aside from being arrogant, smug, and dishonest, Germans are also more servile and enjoy less freedom than the other technologically advanced nations of Europe. Panizza depicts his compatriots as living a "Hundeleben" in a "Negerstaat" (#1). Throughout the poems, canine references are employed to signify a lack of freedom, a dependence on a master (##1, 3, 51, 70, 72). To remain in the oppressive Germany of Wilhelm II is to be a dog: "ein Hund, wer nicht bei dem Verfahren sein Vaterland dann bald verließ—" (#1).

Panizza had nothing but praise for France, which he viewed as the perfect antithesis to Germany. In the *Einführung*, he expresses his sense of liberation at being in Paris, the city of Voltaire, rationalism, and freedom. He feels that Paris represents a harmonious fusion of the "Glut des Südens und Verstand vom Norden" (#54). The French further distinguish themselves by their healthier blood, which is freer and wilder than the German variety (#33). The Parisians surpass the German barbarians in lightness of spirit, liberal politics, and

even girls (#76). Parisian nights are filled with sexual adventures, not fairy tales and romantic castles (#77). As a matter of fact, just about everything is better in Paris, and Panizza is forced to agree with Villon: “man lebt nur glücklich in Paris” (#76). Occasionally this Francophilia is so strong, that one gets the impression he is trying to either flatter or assuage the French.

Aside from obvious feelings of gratitude, what would prompt a man like Panizza to flatter the French? The realization that France was Germany's most formidable enemy, and any force that threatened Germany was automatically Panizza's potential ally? Certainly political motives were involved, though they could hardly be termed realistic. Acknowledging the fact that Frenchmen are superior revolutionaries (#49), he expresses the sincere hope that France will awaken to liberate Germany as Napoleon had done at the beginning of the century (#60). Panizza is optimistic that the Marseillaise and similar revolutionary songs will someday be sung in Germany:

Wann wird man einmal zu der Garde  
die im Kasern'-Hof aufgestellt,  
so sprechen: Diese Reichsstandarte,  
sie ist des Volkes Schuz und Zelt,  
ein Hundsfott! wenn durch falsche Warte  
ein einz'ger Mann des Volkes fält?—  
Wenn einmal auf die Schlößer springen,  
und in der Spree fließt roter Wein,  
dann wird man solche Lieder singen,  
dann hört man solche Melodei'n. (#19)

Several of the poems in *Parisjana* offer substantial clues to a possible explanation of why Panizza might have been trying to assuage the French. There is a definite streak of paranoia throughout this volume, which is sometimes only barely suggested by the language and the imagery. His descriptions of nightfall are a good example of this:

dann plötzlich wie mit Geier-Schwingen  
auf uns hernieder stürzt die Nacht  
erdroßelnd—. . . (#84)

A strikingly similar turn of phrase occurs several poems later:

doch plötzlich dann zur Abendneige

wird Schwarz auf Schwarz hereingebracht,  
wie Riesenvögel, rabengleiche  
auf uns hernieder fält die Nacht  
erdroßelnd— . . . (#89)

Such instances of a generalized paranoia are only to be found in the second half of the book, and one could, therefore, assume that his mental state was rapidly deteriorating in the course of the year 1899. He seemed to be growing more fearful and feeling himself increasingly isolated. He admits, for instance, that he has only enemies, that he is without a single friend in the world: “und Freunde, hast Du keine Freunde?— / nein, Leser, ich weiß keinen schier!” (#74). Panizza’s delusions of persecution begin to assume a concrete form with the mention of imagined agents who are hot on the trail of the hounded poet: “seit Wochen hat nicht mehr gemieden / Dich ein *agent provocateur*” (#63). At times he views himself as a helpless pawn in some elaborate power struggle:

Man sieht, wie Alle spielen laßen  
mit ihrem bischen Stolz und Ehr’  
und heimlich Nachts sich dann befaßen  
je nach Gelüste und Begehr,  
will es die Not auch schließlich paßen  
noch zum *agent provocateur*— (#71)

Occasionally, he believes the most advantageous course for him to take would be to stay on good terms with the police (#79), but by the end of the book law enforcement officials have assumed the proportions of treacherous henchmen:

Und Häscher und Schandarmen aller Orten—  
zum Henker auch, was treibst Du Politik?—  
kaum sitzt man wo, ist warm noch nicht geworden  
kommt so ein Kerl mit seinem schiefen Blick,  
der für ein Geldgeschenk, für einen Orden,  
Dir heimlich schon drehte einen Strik— (#93)

It is not difficult to understand why Panizza was so fearfully suspicious of the police. For the preceding five years they had proven to be decisive determinants in his fragile life. In 1895, he had been charged, tried, and sentenced to one year in prison. As a result of the

year spent in Amberg, he felt he could no longer remain in Germany and had emigrated to Switzerland in 1896. After less than two years in Zürich, he had been expelled from Switzerland as an “undesirable alien.” Once in Paris, Germany’s historic enemy, he had at last reached a safe haven. But this sense of security lasted less than a year; the poems in *Parisjana* clearly show that Panizza was terrified of once more being forced to leave the country:

Wer weiß? Dein Loos ist schon gefallen—  
die Sonne steht jetzt im Zenit—  
eh’ noch die Blätter ringsum fallen,  
bist Du des Lebens hier schon quitt,  
und Du mußt Deinen Koffer schnallen  
der eilend folgt nach England mit; (#63)

Hat jemand Lust, mich auszuweisen—  
wohin?—das weiß ich selbst nicht wo? (#97)

Panizza’s persecutory delusions are most clearly focused on the figure of Wilhelm II, whom he described as his “personal adversary” and later claimed to have “exposed as the public enemy of mankind and its culture.”<sup>18</sup> The Kaiser represented someone sufficiently important to be worthy of Panizza’s hatred, and he regarded the monarch as the source of all his public and private misery. Wilhelm II also functioned as a figure on whom he could project his own mental deterioration; the Kaiser was the “crazy dog” (#72), not Panizza. And naturally Germany was nothing but a herd of dim-witted buffaloes for following the mad leader:

Du Büffelherde, trozig-ungelenke,  
die durch die Wälder raset mit Gestank,  
folgst heute einem eint’gen Stier zur Tränke,  
und dieser eine Stier ist geisteskrank. (#47)

Other instances of similar projections are not difficult to find, and they are usually an essential ingredient of his most profound poems. In the following stanzas he is attempting to analyse the German character in a most critical vein:

Der Männer-Kohr—o wie fantastisch  
der schwarzgefunkte Männerbrauch,

wie glasig schön und wie bombastisch  
 das aufgeschlag'ne Männeraug'—  
 vielleicht ein Bischen päderastisch  
 der weichlichen Tenöre Hauch—  
 . . . . .

Denn eigentlich, bei Licht betrachtet,  
 was, Deutsche, ist denn Eure Lust?  
 Materje habt Ihr stets verachtet,  
 Ihr schwärmt nur, wenn in Eurer Brust  
 ein riesiges Empfinden nachtet,  
 das zu Musik wird unbewußt.  
 Ließt Ihr Euch nicht absichtlich treten  
 von Euren Fürsten Tag und Nacht,  
 und habt aus Euren Schmerzens-Nöten  
 dann einen Männer-Kohr gemacht?— (#37)

The curious thing is that the ten traits which he lists as a reprehensible sign of weakness are also shared by the poet himself: Germans *and* Oskar Panizza were fantastic, bombastic, romantic, effeminate, masochistic, over-emotional, wallowed in their own *Weltschmerz*, loved music and singing, in particular, had a poor sense of reality, and used art as a means of escape from an all-too-painful reality. In the best poems of *Parisjana* there is always this fusion of personal confession, paranoid hostility, and political propaganda. Since all three tend toward their radical extremes, it makes for a very spirited collection of ninety-nine poems. Both Tucholsky<sup>19</sup> and Prescher<sup>20</sup> mention Panizza's savage hatred of Germany, and yet no one, least of all the poet himself, seems to have noticed that this anti-Teutonism was to a large measure propelled by a maniacal hatred of himself, the eternal failure. His own life, like that of Wilhelminian Germany, was nothing but a cruel and senseless bad joke: "Denn was ist Deutschland?—was ist Bayern?— / das ganze nur ein schlechter Witz!" (#2). To be sure, much of *Parisjana* reads like a bad joke, but this is hardly enough to make him "the wittiest and most revolutionary prophet of his country," as Tucholsky regarded him. Neither wit nor revolution were served with the hysteria of a disintegrating mind, a mind which saw insanity as the ultimate means of combating failure:

Habt Ihr erst hinter Euch die Schwelle,  
 wo man noch logisch denkt und mißt,

der Wahnsinn dann die einz'ge Quelle  
von großen Heldentaten ist. (#62)

“Das rothe Haus,” the dreaded insane asylum for persons who were failures at life, stands at the beginning and end of Oskar Panizza’s poetry; its ominous shadows darken much of his verse, reminding us continually of how difficult it is to leap beyond a shadow which is one’s own. His poems remain crude artifacts to the end, and yet their awkwardness conveys a truth that is not lacking in sincerity. Like Goethe’s Faust, whose “obscure urge” and tireless labor prevailed over the forces of darkness, so Panizza struggled to liberate himself from the elusive shadows plaguing his own miserable existence. His anguished wrestling with himself, his women, his religion, and Wilhelminian Germany, gradually wore him down, producing nothing but a sense of bitter defeat. In his last book he attempted, occasionally with success, to incorporate his new socio-political awareness gained in prison into his more general struggle to avoid ubiquitous failure. This last and greatest effort was brusquely rejected by the once revolutionary M. G. Conrad, to whom it had been so affectionately dedicated. All available copies of *Parisjana* were confiscated, and the issuing of another warrant for the poet’s arrest relegated Panizza’s name to the roster of wanted criminals. With the confiscation of his entire estate in March 1900, it was clear that he had lost the last decisive round in his fight against overpowering adversaries, be they God, women, or Wilhelm II. The victor, of course, was the Devil, once again demonstrating that life is hell, as Panizza slipped deeper and deeper into madness.