

Chapter 4.

FROM MOON TO MADNESS: PROSE FICTION

Panizza's prose fiction is dominated by fantastic, grotesque, and bizarre elements. It is not necessarily an expression of praise to say that his tales are even more incredible than those of Ludwig Tieck and E. T. A. Hoffman, the two men easily recognizable as his German literary ancestors. Panizza's stories are not lacking in intrinsically interesting subject matter, but all too often the treatment is simply amateurish.

Perhaps he learned most from the American author Edgar A. Poe, whose biography and psychological make-up are startlingly similar to his own. Yet whereas Poe was able to sustain a suspenseful fantasy straight through to the climactic dénouement, Panizza's flights of fancy are so weighted down with naturalistic baggage and tendentious symbolism that they rarely even get off the ground. Combining elements of naturalistic social criticism, neo-romantic fantasy, and science fiction is difficult enough; but add to this a solipsistic philosophy and a venomous, tendentious satire, one that delights in the suffering of "inferior" groups (e.g., Catholics, Jews, non-whites, etc.), then often little remains but a vain ambition.

The first of his three books of prose fiction was published in 1890, one year after the third volume of poetry had appeared. The title, *Dämmerungsstücke*, had already been used twice to designate certain categories in his early poems, and is a clear allusion to Hoffmann's *Nachtstücke* (1817). Dedicated to the memory of Poe, the book contains four stories, varying in length from thirty-three pages to nearly six times as long. All four are written in the first person and

begin at nightfall, when the drab reality of day yields to dream-like fantasies of night. Although the first three open as the journeying narrator is about to stop over for the night, all four stories represent distinct "trips" of their own, transporting the reader out of external reality and into the sometimes dark caverns of the author's imagination.

"Das Wachsfigurenkabinet"

The least improbable of the four stories is the first one, "Das Wachsfigurenkabinet." It is preceded by a quote from the radical French historian Ernest Renan: "Pour bien connaître les choses divines d'une religion, il faut se les figurer dans une forme tout-à-fait humaine."¹ Panizza takes this axiom even one step further. He sets out to illustrate the human aspects of Christianity by portraying them in a sub-human form, in this instance with mechanically operated wax puppets. The story is an almost too neatly organized, too precisely detailed account of Christ's passion, as witnessed in one of the side-show stalls at a Nürnberg fair. What makes this tale stand out from the rest in the book are the several levels of reality rather finely balanced and subtly interwoven; a) the author consciously writing about b) his remembered experience of c) wax puppets reenacting d) the Gospel version of e) Christ's passion. There is little the author can directly say about the last two levels of reality, since they are fixed by religious tradition. But he can focus and comment on these religious events by juxtaposing them with the three more immediate realities. This clever literary device enables Panizza to write about Christ's life and death without ever taking us out of the Nürnberg square or resorting to literary symbols. Since a puppet of Christ is hardly a symbol of Christ, but merely a necessarily abstract representation, its function most closely approximates that of an actor, except that its head is of wax and, consequently, must be manipulated by a human operator.

The tale's structure is carefully fashioned to reinforce this "play within a story." The narrative is divided into three unequal blocks—The Last Supper (22 pp.), The Bearing of the Cross (5 pp.), Golgotha (13 pp.)—and between these three "acts" are interspersed two "intermissions" (2 pp. each). Panizza wrote several other stories which included passion plays of sorts, but none are as carefully formed as

this one. Some of his magazine articles, as well, attest to the lively impression left by the Oberammergau passion play, which he had attended just a few months earlier in 1890.² His treatment of the proper topic for a medieval mystery play is anything but traditional: Christ's passion is a seamy, miserable comedy that can only produce a violent response among the spectators. For Panizza, the passion was a vulgar Christian glorification of sacrificial blood, accomplished by hypocritically equating such violence with love, forgiveness, and eternal salvation.

The author's savage comment on Christianity begins with his description of the wax puppet representing the Son of God: he resembles an English lord with his blond wig and his blasé, expressionless face; he looks so bored that one expects his mouth to open in a huge yawn at any moment; and while he impresses one as being pious and childishly naive, his general greasy appearance does not exactly lend him a divine aura, "man meint Christus schwitze Fett, was nicht zur Heiligkeit beiträgt" (p. 7). After his announcement during the Last Supper that one of his disciples will betray him, only Christ remains calm in his "unrelenting apathy" (pp. 14, 20), which suggests the existence of a powerful death wish.

Panizza's description of John, Christ's favorite disciple, shows him as a pederast's delight: "Dieser Johannes war ein blutjunger, lebenswürdig-schöner Mensch mit vollen Mädchen-Wangen, blauen, unverdorbenen Augen, süßem, rotem Mund, trug ein rosafarbiges, bauschiges Kleid mit weiblichem Schnitt, das mit einem blendenweißen Kragen den jungfräulichen Hals abschloß; eine blonde Lockenfülle, die bis auf den schneeweißen Kragen niederfloß, ergänzte dieses bausbäckige Gesicht zu einer so verführerischen Erscheinung. . ." (p. 17). Continuing in a similar vein, the author takes pains to repeatedly suggest that John was the object of Christ's homosexual affections, "daß 'ihn der " "Herr" " lieb hatte',—und daß er an der Brust des 'Herrn' ruhte" (p. 20).³ Although such blasphemous innuendoes appear infantile and gratuitous today, they were an essential part of Panizza's almost systematic attempt to debunk the sacred beliefs and practices of a hypocritical religion which, in his view, was pushing the Western world to the brink of ruin.

Thus Judas, whose name has traditionally been synonymous with evil, is depicted as a noble, far-sighted, and brilliant hero. Christ's "fatalistische Schwelgerei" and "Herzenswahnsinn" (p. 23) stand in stark contrast to Judas' resolute courage: "Er war ein prächtiger

Mann, mit rassigem, scharfgeschnittenen Gesicht; eine kühne Adler-nase gab dem ganzen Kopf etwas Siegreiches, Ideelles. Zweifellos war er der Bedeutendste der ganzen Gesellschaft" (pp. 22f.). In his zeal, however, the author makes the mistake of frequently dropping his mask of objective narrator, abandoning subtle wit for heavy-handed polemic: "Gewiß hatte er [Judas] längst die jede echte Genialität erstickende Gefahr der sanften, unscheinbaren Heilandslehre erkannt, die alle Menschen gleichmachen wollte. Er verband mit der Schärfe des Denkens die Entschlossenheit des Handelns. . . Sein Plan der Unschädlichmachung der neuen Lehre was korrekt in Konzeption und Ausführung. (Die paar Silberlinge waren gar kein Gegenstand.)" (p. 23). Perhaps because Panizza was in the midst of writing numerous magazine articles at the time, he frequently lapses into a feuilletonistic style which inevitably weakens the fabric of his prose. Similarly, the content of these polemic asides is often less than satisfying, since they contain few, if any, original ideas. The passage quoted above, for instance, is little more than a paraphrase of Nietzsche's disdain for the concept of equality.⁴

A dramatic tension is created not by the ritualized action taking place on the puppet stage, but by the audience's reaction to these events. Their feelings of apprehension, sympathy, or resentment are often reflected in unconscious physiological responses, such as an increased rate of respiration: "Dieser Aktus hatte eine vehemente Wirkung auf das Publikum. An der veränderten Atmungsweise aus dem Dutzend oder wie viel Leute, die wir beisammen waren, konnte man dies deutlich abnehmen" (p. 10); ". . .Entsetzen verratende Atemzüge hörbar wurden. . ." (p. 15); "Ein einziger großer Atemzug im ganzen Publikum löste die Anwesenden wie von einem lange ertragenen Alp" (p. 32); ". . .entstand jenes fröstelnde Atmen unter den Zuschauern, welches auf eine zurückhaltende aber tiefe Bewegung schließen ließ" (p. 43). The audience eventually becomes so emotionally involved in the last scene, where live actors are used to supplement the wax puppets, that it loses all rational control and threatens to destroy everything in a free-for-all fist fight. What began as a subdued tragedy ends as a farcical and violent comedy, once the stage action has been accepted as reality by the spectators. Panizza's attitude is diametrically opposed to the Christian concept of faith: 'Believe, and ye shall be saved' becomes 'Believe, and ye shall perish.'

What the author was sorely lacking was a sense of balance, taste, and discipline. Thus we find minutely detailed descriptions of me-

chanical apparatus and carefully wrought prose, reminiscent of some of the best writing of E. T. A. Hoffmann or Heinrich von Kleist, side by side with substandard regionalisms or downright slang: "Und diese gafften, wie das so Usus ist" (p. 4). Especially in his earliest prose, the author has a tendency to suddenly disrupt the narrative flow with romantic irony or other, more naturalistic mood-breakers. These devices can only work, of course, if they are very carefully timed, and occasionally Panizza does succeed in creating genuinely humorous moments. After Christ has just laboriously borne his cross across the stage, the audience remains transfixed in a stupefied silence. "Während noch Alles still dastand, Einige flüsterten, Niemand aber die feierliche Stille zu unterbrechen wagte, hörte man plötzlich von hinter der Bühne her einen schallenden Klatsch und gleich drauf in norddeutschem Dialekt an Jemanden zornig die Frage gerichtet: 'Wie können Se man so dämlich sein und Christus an die Wandverkleidung anrennen lassen?' " (p. 32).

All too often, however, his language is simply sloppy because it was easier to write that way. Hanns Heinz Ewers, the first man to edit Panizza's prose and hardly a distinguished stylist himself, was forced to put a considerable effort into bringing the author's language up to the minimally accepted standards of German usage. He minces no words in his blanket condemnation of Panizza's style:

No German writer since Luther has mistreated his language as severely as Panizza! His use of language is so pitiful, so devastatingly poor, that one often does not trust one's own eyes! Here—and only here—he is a "member of the school," he is the old Naturalist! He writes the way he speaks—and he speaks abominably! No other writer ever worked more sloppily than Panizza; in addition, he never proof-read, leaving everything stand exactly as his pen had written it.⁵

Ewers' remarks are in need of certain qualifiers, unless we are to assume that Panizza spoke in sentences of one thousand words. He sometimes writes the way he speaks—and he sometimes speaks abominably. But this occurs frequently enough to offset the more positive aspects of his prose. Pedantic seriousness is often easier to tolerate in the long run than poorly told jokes. Panizza's attempts at humor often miss their mark because the essential ingredient of balance is lacking. The following parenthetical aside, with its three ironical

qualifiers, illustrates his sledgehammer approach to eliciting a chuckle: “. . .dann der verwegene und zielbewußte Judas Ischariot (der, wie das gebildete Publikum wohl größtenteils weiß, der ‘Verräter’ ist)” (p. 19). The only discernable virtue of such sophomoric prose is that one comes to appreciate superior writing all the more.

“Eine Mondgeschichte”

Dämmerungsstücke also contains Panizza's longest piece of prose fiction, “Eine Mondgeschichte.” Even more surprising than its length (180 pp.) is the fact that it was so well received by some of the most respected writers of his day. Johannes Schlaf lauded it as “the strangest and wittiest of the four tales,”⁶ while Bierbaum claimed it “reveals the author as the sovereign master of burlesque fantasy.”⁷ With its endless illusion-breaking digressions in the style of Jean Paul, its lack of imagination, and its string of literary clichés, this overblown tale remains most unsatisfying, especially when read in our post-lunar-landing era.

The plot is sparse, and one often gains the impression that Panizza was determined to fill pages in any way he could. The story of a Leiden medical student who sees a little man descending a rope ladder and pulling a ball of fire behind him on a chain, who then decides to follow the moon-man back up the ladder to spend two empty months on the moon before returning to earth again, could have made an engaging tale of fifty pages or so. Yet the author's lack of balance allows him to inflate it to almost four times that length, replacing what might have been a delightful fantasy with sheer tedium. His basic conception of life on the moon is brilliantly naturalistic; the moon is a ramshackle hut about fifteen miles above the earth, inhabited by the moon-man, moon-woman, and their thirty daughters. The lunar standard of living closely approximates that of a terrestrial proletarian family at the end of the nineteenth century. Once a month the moon-man climbs down to earth to fetch miscellaneous supplies and Dutch cheeses, the family's exclusive diet. The rest of the month is spent keeping house for the family of thirty-two, replacing the roof with new tar paper, and repairing the rungs of the hemp ladder.

Preceding the story is a quote from Poe, “There are many attempts made by poetical authors to reach the moon from their writing-desk” (p. 121), and it is not inconceivable that the hemp ladder

used by Panizza to reach the moon represents some form of cannabis ingestion. In any event, the narrator remains on the moon for eight weeks, hidden under the moon-woman's bed or in the basement, constantly fearful of being discovered. The story has a Washington Irving twist at the end, for when he returns to his former room in Leiden and catches sight of himself in the mirror, he realizes that decades have passed and his entire life has been wasted up on the moon. The tale closes with what might be called a paraphrase of Otto Ludwig's novel *Zwischen Himmel und Erde* (1856):

“Ist das das Los, wenn wir aus Verzweiflung von der Erde fliehen, und andere Götter oder überirdische Gewalten aufsuchen;—zurückgekehrt, stoßen uns nun die Menschen auch von sich, und ohne einen überirdischen Besitz entdeckt zu haben, will man uns auch als irdische Bürger nicht mehr anerkennen,—und wir sind schwebend zwischen Himmel und Erde?” (p. 303).⁸

Panizza's uniqueness lies in his only partially successful attempts to combine previously unrelated literary extremes. Even the imagination of a Jules Verne, whose science fiction far surpasses Panizza's, did not envision spending one's entire adult life on the moon. But Panizza fails in making this event credible enough to be able to imagine, even for a second, what it might be like to live on the moon. One might say that he is simply not realistic enough for us to accept his fantasy. And yet the story contains a plethora of naturalistic and hyper-naturalistic elements. Feelings of the most intense hunger and thirst, heat, cold, and dizziness occur throughout the story. But the author does not stop there. Such bodily functions as urination and defecation, previously strictly taboo in literature, are casually alluded to on no less than twenty-four pages, or an average of once every seven-and-a-half pages.⁹ Fortunately, Panizza's radical realism extends far beyond this bodily sphere, encompassing scientific and even social matters. The latter are certainly the most interesting for us today, since his portrayal of the moon people is often a devastatingly naturalistic presentation of lower-class misery on earth:

So kam das Ende der dritten Woche herbei.—Das Leben wurde immer trostloser. Es war eine Qual zuzusehen, wie die Leute in der finsternen Nacht sich aus ihren Betten erhoben und zum kärglichen Mahl zusammensetzten; man

hätte glauben mögen eine Arbeiterfamilie, die vor Tagesgrauen aufgestanden, und schweigend und geschäftig den Morgen-Imbiß zu sich nimmt, um sich dann ebenso flink auf die Arbeit zu begeben. Es war ein grauenhaftes Einerlei. Der Mondmann und die Mondfrau sprachen oft tagelang kein Wort. . . (pp. 233f.)

Such stark social realism, however, hardly seems to be compatible with an almost juvenile romantic irony in the style of the young Clemens Brentano: “. . .wird der Leser auf der vierten oder fünften Seite von hier aus mit Staunen erfahren” (p. 223), or “. . .da ich schon ungefähr fünfzehn Seiten vorher die Mondfrau ausdrücklich. . .” (p. 266). This cute literary device, nothing more than a cliché by the end of the nineteenth century, can only be effective if there is some sort of illusion to be broken. In the case of “Eine Mondgeschichte,” there is no illusion whatsoever since it is obvious to every reader that the entire story has been laboriously created in the author’s mind.

As might be expected, the religious element is not wholly lacking in this tale, although it is not well integrated into the basic thematic structure. Thus we find weekly religious services conducted on the moon, complete with moon Bible, stories about the fall of the moon-man, and the like. This satire becomes more serious, however, when the author reflects on the origin of the moon-man, whether he is of divine or human descent. Either he is some kind of gypsy who has chosen to escape this wretched earth, or he is some form of god. “If that is a god,” he concludes, “then it is a sick god” (p. 267). The concept of a sick God, which remained fairly stable throughout the author’s career, is also evident in the exposition preceding the dream-vision of a trip to the moon. The young medical student is busy dissecting corpses and is about to cut into a young female, when he suddenly notices to his utter horror the startling resemblance she bears to his fiancée back home in Germany. He rushes out and gets drunk for a whole week in order to forget this terrible thought. The decay and transience of all living things continues unabated despite the alleged existence of a supposedly just and all-loving God. If there is a God, thinks Panizza, he must either be sick in the head or physically impotent. From this realization it is but a short step to an escape from the earth or an alliance with pagan deities: “Ist es zu verwundern, wenn ein solcher Student mit dem Teufel anbinden möchte, oder Einem der altheidnischen Götter sich verschreibt, oder in eine

geheime, gotteslästerliche Verbindung mit Sonne oder Mond tritt?!" (p. 125). The young student thus escapes reality by his long dream-trip to the moon, yet is ultimately forced to return to earth to conclude his wasted life with an even more senseless death.

"Der Stationsberg"

Christian mythology plays a central role in "Der Stationsberg," a tale in which reality melts into a dream-like religious fantasy. As the motto from Lenau makes clear, it can only take place at night when people are "stoned" and stones become animated: ". . . Die Nacht, in der sich Alles seltsam verändert, Menschen müd und leblos wie versteinern, und Steingebilde zu phantastischem Leben erwachen" (p. 51). The author has stopped over for the night in a Lower Franconian village, famous for its religious processions. He is sound asleep in the inn "Zu den heißen Thränen der Magdalena" when a strong gust of wind blows open the window. Looking out, he sees scores of lights going up and down the mountainside; with the increased illumination from the moon, he can make out people dressed in white or black acting out the various stations of the cross. The obvious parallels to "Das Wachsfigurenkabinet" are anything but subtly suggested: "Mein kleiner Fensterrahmen erschien mir wie die Rampe eines Miniatur-Theaters, über dessen Bildfläche kleine, feststehende Figürchen gezogen werden" (pp. 54f.); "Spielen die Theater?" (p. 56); ". . . als wenn hinter mir ein Erklärer stünde, wie man oft auf Jahrmarkts-Panoramen findet. . ." (pp. 56f.); "Was für eine seltsame Komödie! . . . Warum nicht im Theater?" (p. 58); ". . . so marionettenhaft. . . wie Gliederpuppen. . ." (pp. 59f.); "Die Häuschen hatten so viel Ähnlichkeit mit den Puppentheatern auf unsern Jahrmärkten. . ." (p. 61); ". . . das Ganze ist ein wirkungsvolles Drama in verschiedenen Aufzügen!" (p. 64), etc.

While the principal personages of the passion play are dressed in white, the color black is worn by the common folk, whose incessant pleas, "Bitt' für uns! Bitt' für uns!" (p. 68), are incomprehensible to the naive author. "Wer soll denn für Euch bitten? Was fehlt Euch denn? Seid Ihr krank? Jetzt habt Ihr die Weißen erst aufgehängt, jetzt sollen sie für Euch bitten! Könnt Ihr ohne die Weißen nicht existieren?" (p. 69). The author's answer to all these rhetorical questions is to be found on almost every page of "Der Stationsberg." Christianity is

shown as appealing to the weak, the sick, and the simple-minded. "Belief" is based not on truth or insight, but rather on the expectation of some personal advantage, such as living forever or getting rid of an unwanted pregnancy: "Benedeite! . . . Blutige! . . . Mutter! . . . schaff' mir mein' dicken Bauch ab! . . . Ich kann jetzt kein Kind brauchen! . . . Hast ja meiner Schwägerin auch g'holfen! . . ." (p. 65).

We have already seen in his early poetry how Panizza frequently linked religion to the sexual sphere, but nowhere is this as brilliantly accomplished as in "Der Stationsberg," where the figure of Christ functions as a legitimate and accessible sexual object for old, clumsy, disfigured, or otherwise unappealing women. The scene where the mourning women are carefully preparing the Savior's body for burial turns into a necrophile's orgy:

Jedenfalls machte der weiße Mann im Bett nicht die geringste Bewegung, als die Vordersten unter den Schwarzen ihn mit Küssen bedeckten. . . Und eine unter ihnen, ein mageres, häßliches Weib, nur mit einem einzigen dünnen Rock bekleidet, warf sich in ihrer ganzen Länge auf ihn. . . sie umklammerte ihn heftig, rieb ihr runzliches, beulenbedecktes Gesicht gegen seine Wangen, und rief in einem fort eine kreischende Phrase. . . der Effekt auf die Umstehenden, die nach kurzem Erstaunen wie wütend auf die Obenliegende sich stürzten. . . aus Neid, . . . denn stets da, wo es gelang sie wegzureißen, drängten sich andere Gesichter, Backen und schwitzende Häse hin, um den weißen Mann zu berühren; . . . als man nun endlich die Spindeldürre weggezerrt hatte, warfen sich Andere, Schwerfälligere und Dickere. . . wiederum auf sie, um selbe an jenen Stellen, wo sie mit dem weißen Dortliegenden in so unflätige Berührung gekommen war, abzuküssen und abzulecken; als handelte es sich um ein Gift, um einen Impfstoff, der von dem kalkigen Menschen ausging. . . (pp. 72-74)

Christ is not the exclusive sexual property of older women, however. There is an episode where a fourteen-year-old girl steals toward the cross while everyone's attention is focused elsewhere. She deftly shinnies up the cross, "und während sie sich fest an den Stamm anklammerte, küßte sie den weißen Menschen, dem sie schmeichelnd den Hals umfaßte, auf den Mund" (p. 79). Such a radical vision of Jesus as the Redeemer of sexually frustrated females is virtually

unique in nineteenth-century German literature.

A fourth tale to begin with the journeying narrator looking for a place to spend the night is "Die Menschenfabrik." As the name implies, the story concerns a factory where people are made. The narrator enters a large grey building to ask for lodging; what he receives is a personal tour through a "people producing plant" by the factory's director. Only it soon becomes clear to the reader that these "people" are some kind of ornamental figures, and consequently the responses of the overly naive narrator, who does not catch on until he is told by a peasant the following morning that he had spent the night in the royal Meissen porcelain works, are more than a little annoying. Naturalist Schlaf took little pains to hide his displeasure with this flimsy story:

It is most irksome that the narrator behaves so completely duped until the thirty-seventh [last] page, and acts as if he were suddenly destroying I don't know what kind of illusion when we finally learn we had been in a Saxon porcelain factory. The satirical parallels drawn between these porcelain people and the real ones are quite nice and witty, even though somewhat drawn-out and occasionally somewhat cheap; their effect is diminished, however, since the all too transparent fantasy is embarrassing.¹⁰

The tale, moreover, lacks a clear focus and briefly touches on a wide variety of fashionable late nineteenth century topics, such as the Nietzschean "Übermensch" (p. 93), free will vs. determinism (p. 98), Marxist economic theory (p. 107), art vs. reality (p. 114), and fixed response psychology (p. 108). The whole story might have been a clever little satire on the prudish Wilhelminian morality, demonstrating the possibility of procreation without sex; or he could have shown how these porcelain figures were more "natural" than humans. Again, it was the author's basic lack of balance which prevented him from rising above an amateurish level.

The Diary of a Dog

The closest Panizza ever came to writing a novel was from the perspective of a dog, *Aus dem Tagebuch eines Hundes* (1892). Undoubtedly the author was inspired by the animal tales of E. T. A.

Hoffmann,¹¹ his "Nachricht von den neusten Schicksalen des Hundes Berganza" and the much longer *Lebensansichten des Katers Murr*. . .¹² However, as Bierbaum points out, "the manner of his treatment and the tone of his execution are completely his own, so completely Panizza." And he hastens to add: "Whether it is a good Panizza, appears doubtful to me."¹³ The author acknowledged a second obvious source of inspiration by dedicating the book "to the memory of Swift." Like *Gulliver's Travels*, Panizza's book represents a venomous attack on mankind. Another obvious parallel between the man generally considered the greatest satirist in the English language and Panizza, is the fact that both men suffered from incurable madness during their last years, a development not wholly unrelated to their earlier literary production.

In the discussion of his poetry, it was pointed out that Panizza had frequently used the dog-motif to describe himself. From such a dog's point of view, humans are unnatural, vain, unaware, and cruel comedians. To top things off, they display an insufferable arrogance: "To think that people could believe we had left our forests in order to chase hens for them and be taught not to piss indoors!" (p. 29). People are not just contemptible, though; they are also mystifying. Throughout the story, the naive dog feels compelled to ask a number of penetrating socio-psychological questions concerning clothes, language, inhibitions, arbitrary sexual division, and other unique features of human behavior. Thus he gradually learns to divide mankind into "Beinzeiger" and "Beinverstecker" (pp. 12-14), without really understanding the anatomical differences between male and female. Panizza's sexual confusions are further reflected in the personal habits of his fictitious dog, who leads a chaste life and gets sick at the sight of his master and mistress having intercourse. The mere sight of a woman's body is sickening: "And finally. . .there appeared a glassy-yellow, smooth, disgusting body, something between cheese and flour, slimy to the touch, steaming like a kettle, smelling of rotten eggs, silently rocking back and forth like a ghost." (p. 41).

On the other hand, an obviously homosexual but potentially rewarding affair is abruptly ended when a crisis of identity threatens to disrupt his life: "I must know whether I am I, or whether I'm supposed to be a part of that bushy little dog" (p. 82). He never falls in love, he never has a friend, he is an impotent victim condemned to a cruel life, without a chance of escape, not even through self-inflicted death. It is possible that insanity provided the escape from such a life

for Oskar Panizza. There are certainly distinct traces of feigned paranoia in the dog-author's reasoning: "And I could come to the conclusion that this squirming [human] race slides around and carries on insanely, according to a prior arrangement, in order to make me, old dog that I am, trying to put the whole thing together into a system, lose my mind" (p. 58).

Being an intellectual dog is, of course, a difficult and immensely frustrating avocation. But he resolutely ignores the advice of a fat, self-contented hound who tells him to settle down, become a middle-class mutt, and no longer bother to question and examine everything so carefully. Unfortunately, there is insufficient linguistic consistency for us to be able to accept this fiction of an intellectual dog. Even the greatest intellectual has gaps in his vocabulary, but Panizza expects the reader to be able to identify with a dog who is ignorant of the word 'Fenster' and must therefore use the childish composite 'Guckloch' (p. 9). When we come across such sophisticated words as 'Gestikulation' (p. 26) and 'vis-à-vis' (p. 43), it becomes utterly impossible to reconcile this incongruity of language: the illusion of reading a dog's diary is replaced by the awareness of a mediocre artifact. This does, to be sure, support the dog/author's contention that canine communication is superior to that of humans, that sniffing genitals is more enlightening than a verbal exchange (p. 19). From the title to the very last page, this book is filled with not just contempt for mankind, but the most uncompromising self-contempt. The dog's verdict of humans, "poor species!" (p. 21), can be applied with equal validity to the entire human race and to its representative whom the author knew best, Oskar Panizza. His early self-hatred had, not unexpectedly, evolved into a hatred of mankind.

Religion is one of the principal themes of the book, though it has nothing to do with the anti-Catholicism so often associated with Panizza's religious outbursts. In the beginning of the story we see a good "Lutheran dog," fervently worshiping the moon-god, as is the custom among dogs. It does not take long, however, for the experiences of life to destroy that faith. His prayer is a declaration of profound insecurity, as he wonders "whether Your stern and kindly dog-face which You show us is really mercifully directed toward us, Your poor battered and beaten brethren? Or are what we see in You only ugly holes, cartilage, and outgrowths of a wrinkled old Dutch cheese hurled through space?" (p. 67). One is reminded at this point of "Eine Mondgeschichte," where the moon functions as a temporary escape

from the horrors of terrestrial existence. Moon, intoxication, religion, and madness, all are functionally related in Panizza's mind, each providing an alternative to the hell on earth. The author clearly implies that the "far-out" escapes of moon and religion are less effective than those provided by the dog/human mind itself. Thus the sight of another dog's corpse, lying in the snow and being devoured by ravens, forces upon him certain theological conclusions: "Moon, have You done this or tolerated it? Then get lost! If that's the way You take care of us! What are You our God for? Letting us perish this way?" (p. 102). If there is a God, he is sick or impotent and thus irrelevant. *Aus dem Tagebuch eines Hundes*, a little book spiced with humorous wit and 36 amusingly obscene illustrations by Reinhold Hoberg,¹⁴ ends on a note of abject depression: "I wanted to classify mankind and examine their curious idiosyncrasies and ridicule them and am only a poor little dog who may soon drop dead" (p. 104).

Visions From Trinity Inn

The last collection of Panizza's stories, *Visionen*, was published in 1893. The book, "dedicated to the memory of Ernst Theodor Amadeus Hoffmann," contains ten tales, ranging in length from seven to seventy pages. Bierbaum is correct in pointing out that Panizza was "no imitator" of Hoffmann, that although they were spiritual kin, he would have written much the same way even if he had not read his illustrious predecessor's books.¹⁵ For better or for worse, the ten tales of *Visionen* are all unmistakably Panizza both in their style and subject matter. Three of them are religious parodies, three deal with taboo sexual topics, and four are about members of minority groups trying unsuccessfully to adjust and assimilate to the dominant white Protestant society.

Two of the religious parodies, "Das Wirthshaus zur Dreifaltigkeit" and "Die Kirche von Zinsblech," are "twilight pieces" and follow the same formula already established in his collection of *Dämmerungstücke*. Like "Der Stationsberg," they begin at dusk as the journeying narrator is seeking a place to rest his weary head for the night. After he finds some form of lodging, the narrator experiences a bizarre chain of events in the course of the night. Shortly thereafter, usually the following morning, he learns some new bit of information that throws the strange nocturnal experiences into an altogether different light,

like the revelation at the end of "Die Menschenfabrik" that the narrator had spent the night in a porcelain factory. Panizza wrote five tales that fit this formula, but only two of them appeared in *Visionen*. Thus the title is somewhat misleading, since the other eight stories have little, if anything, to do with this kind of psychedelic night vision.

"Das Wirthshaus zur Dreifaltigkeit" is a masterful religious parody and can be viewed as a character study in anticipation of his most famous work, *Das Liebeskonzil*. The curious "Trinity" Inn where the narrator spends the night is operated by Panizza's conception of the three divinities, God the Father, Christ the Son, and Mary the Whore. The Father is an ancient old man on crutches, with snow-white hair and trembling hands (p. 232). His "dear son," Christian, is a pale, consumptive young man with "strikingly beautiful features; but timid and with an almost girlish reserve" (p. 233).¹⁶ This shy, effeminate youth runs around in white robes, exuding love and humility wherever he happens to be. He seems to have an almost Oedipal attachment to his mother, Mary, whom the old man refers to as "my daughter" (p. 237). Mary is in her mid-thirties, but unlike her blond, blue-eyed son, has marked Semitic features which prompt the author to continually refer to her as "die Jüdin" (pp. 241, 249) or "die schlaue Jüdin" (pp. 246, 257). Her black eyes and fleshy lips "decidedly reveal sensuality," while her manner and attire are characterized as being slovenly in the extreme (p. 238). The old innkeeper is less than satisfied with her: "Oh, God, these females, they are all that way; if they are a bit attractive, they've got the Devil in their bodies!" (p. 239). At these words, as at every remark concerning sex or the Devil, a diabolical laughter can be heard emanating from the pigsty outside, where a fellow who "wants our destruction" is confined (p. 234). This constellation of the three divinities and their hellish adversary remained basically intact in *Das Liebeskonzil*, and it is somewhat surprising that this story was allowed to be published and republished in Germany unchallenged, while the play's appearance in Switzerland earned its author such an inordinate punishment. One can only conclude that Panizza's thinly veiled symbolism here eluded the narrow-minded Bavarian guardians of propriety.

There is very little plot in this irreligious allegory, which in some respects resembles an analytic drama. The revelations which are gradually uncovered do not, however, actively involve the narrator the way they do the heroes of *Oedipus Rex* or *Der zerbrochene Krug*.

It is the reader who is supposed to discover the shocking reality behind the respectable facade of his traditional divinities. The narrator is simply the catalyst, the probing naturalistic scientist unearthing the facts piece by piece. Thus he calmly decides to learn as much about this strange family as possible, especially who the father of Christian is. Soon after dinner, the youth and his mother go off to bed upstairs; the author strongly hints that it is to the same bed:

“ “Potztausend nein!” ”—replicirte der Alte,—“ “nun ja, dann können wir uns auch nicht ungestört unterhalten.— Die Zwei gehen so wie so bald zu Bett. Es ist schon um die dritte Stunde!” ”—In der That kam bald darauf der junge Mensch herein, und indem er verzückt die beiden Arme ausbreitete rief er, seine leuchtenden Augen über Alle im Zimmer gleiten lassend: “Seid begrüßt und gesegnet für den Rest des Abends, seit [sic!] behütet und bewahrt während des Dunkels der Nacht! Ueber uns Alle wache der Engel des Friedens!”—Während dem stand die schlaue Jüdin hinter ihm, und beobachtete, welchen Eindruck seine Worte machen würden. Dann zog sie ihn von hinten am Kleid hinaus; und beide, hörte man, verließen dann die untere Partie des Hauses über die Treppe, und begaben sich nach oben. (pp. 246f.)

The humor in passages such as these goes far beyond the simple debunking of traditional Christian mythology. Panizza often ironically juxtaposes several different styles of language, whose intentional incongruity can produce grotesquely humorous passages such as the one quoted above with its combination of slang, Luther's Biblical German, and psychologically precise descriptive prose.

After Christian and Mary have gone off to sleep, the narrator continues his conversation with the old innkeeper. Disregarding his doctor's orders, the “father” brings out a bottle of wine and begins drinking heavily in order to drown his misery (p. 247). It soon becomes clear that he feels his “children,” Christian and Mary, are conspiring against him to seize control of the inn. He tells the narrator how he had taken Mary in as a little waif of fourteen, and how “the snotnose, who was barely marriageable according to local custom, produced the boy. . .whom I incidentally have become very fond of and regard as my own son” (p. 249). The old man, of course, believes Mary's little story about her “immaculate” conception, although the