

narrative makes it clear that Christian's father was none other than the Devil, the embodiment of sensuality, impiety and deceit. His continued presence down in the pigsty indicates that his liaison with Mary is far from terminated. By the end of the evening's conversation, both narrator and reader are convinced that God is an impotent old fool, Mary an incestuous slut, and Christ a consumptive moron.

Before going to sleep, the narrator decides to take a look at the room which had been pointed out to him as the locus of Mary's "immaculate" conception. As he breaks open the door, a pigeon angrily flutters out the open window. The deserted room he enters is anything but immaculate: "A bed in the corner opposite the window, covered with a fiery red blanket, rumpled and disheveled as if someone had been lying in it; and the blanket, as well as the entire floor, was absolutely covered with pigeon shit" (p. 260). Panizza leaves it to the reader to draw his own conclusions about the Holy Ghost and his role in the "immaculate conception" of "God's" "son." A final, almost anti-climactic disclosure occurs the following morning after the narrator had hastily left the inn to continue on his journey. A local workman informs him that the innkeeper is a skinner to whom people bring their "old nags and mangy dogs" (p. 264), a stinging comment on the aged and infirm who entrust their salvation to the Christian divinities.

### "Die Kirche von Zinsblech"

"Die Kirche von Zinsblech" follows the same general formula described above. The journeying narrator finds himself lost at dusk in the mountains of Tyrolia, happens upon a darkened village, and settles down to sleep in the local church. He abruptly awakens in the middle of the night to witness two columns of strangely dressed persons filing toward the altar. On the left are the holy ones, the Christians led by the Virgin Mary. They march up to the white-robed Savior who gives them each a wafer which he pulls out of his body. The persons on the right are far more interesting to the narrator, however, since they include such luminaries as the Prussian King Frederick the Great, Princess Salome (the mother of "The Woman" in *Das Liebeskonzil*), and the historical figure whom Panizza most admired, Martin Luther. This column marches up to the right side of the altar where Satan hands them a drink from a black goblet, saying the words "Take

and drink” to every kneeling worshiper. After receiving their respective sacraments, the two columns file behind the altar in slow procession. The narrator watches with horror as the two groups collide, the candles extinguish, and a general free-for-all melee erupts. The terrified narrator runs out of the chaotic, violence-ridden church and does not stop until he reaches a friendly mountain village the following morning. A week later, in the district capital, he reads the following newspaper report:

In vergangener Nacht wurden in der hiesigen Ortskirche grauenhafte Zerstörungen angerichtet. Die Bildsäulen der Heiligen und Kirchenväter wurden von ihren Sockeln gestürzt, die Embleme ihnen aus der Hand gebrochen, Arme und Beine abgeschlagen usw.—Da die ziemlich leicht zugängliche Armenbüchse unberührt gelassen, auch sonst Wertvolles nicht entwendet worden, stellt sich das Ganze als ein Akt rohen Muthwillens und moralischer Verderbtheit dar. Verdacht richtet sich gegen einen Handwerksburschen, der spät Nachts in's Dorf kam und es gegen Morgen in her Richtung nach—\* verließ. Es wird gebeten, auf denselben zu vigiliren. Derselbe, von dem jede nähere Beschreibung fehlt, ist im Betretungsfalle festzunehmen und anher einzuliefern. (pp. 14f.)

In a review of Hawthorne's *Twice-Told Tales*, Poe wrote that for a good tale, “in the whole composition there should be no word written of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one established design.”<sup>17</sup> While Panizza's tales were crafted with considerably less care and skill than Poe's, he does rigidly adhere to Poe's edict of focusing on one point. Panizza's aim in “Die Kirche von Zinsblech” seems clear enough at first glance: to parody the Catholic notion of good and evil by presenting the strong, creative, and independent historical figures as children of the Devil, the “Black One” (p. 13). The surprising newspaper announcement at the end, however, appears to have been grafted on almost as an afterthought, for it runs counter to “the one established design.” With the revelation of the narrator as a violent psychopath, the objectivity of the central anti-Catholic sentiments is drastically undercut; the ending provides an added ounce of sensationalism while sharply weakening the impact of his allegorical fantasy.

One could, of course, maintain that the ending does not run coun-

ter to the tale's main tendency, if one assumes that the narrator is being framed by the local townsfolk, whose nocturnal mystery play resulted in widespread damage to their church. This reading can derive support from the fact that the tale is preceded by a quote from the resurrection scene of the *Lucerne Easter Play* (fourteenth century), describing the dual procession from the realm of the dead (p. 1). And yet even in this more "organic" interpretation, one must admit that the author is expressing severe paranoia by presenting his fictitious narrator as the scapegoat for an entire town, an attitude likely to reflect unfavorably on the objectivity of his philosophical arguments. Perhaps most damaging of all, "Die Kirche von Zinsblech" is lacking the one essential ingredient for a parody of any kind, namely humor. Without it, the tale never comes to life and remains tedious, tendentious fiction.

### Sexual Confusions

There is no lack of surface humor in the religious farce which stands opposite "Die Kirche von Zinsblech" at the very end of *Visionen*, "Ein Kapitel aus der Pastoral-Medizin." The target of Panizza's satire here is the Christian taboo of human nudity, a subject which figures prominently in the author's fiction and his own life—it was an act of aggressive exposure, after all, which enabled him to obtain psychiatric aid in 1904 when he was at his wits' end. The tale is hardly more than an anecdote about the Benedictine priest Süppli, professor of "pastoral medicine" in Innsbruck, who delivers a lecture on the possibilities of birth without nudity. Panizza follows the general trend of Naturalism in his use of dialect and other sub-standard forms of German. Indeed, fully two-thirds of the story is written in a phonetic transcription of the ridiculous professor's Austrian pronunciation. While acknowledging that fully clothed neonates are an as yet unattainable goal, Professor Süppli cites an extraordinary instance of just such a birth which occurred in seventeenth-century Verona:

Ändli gegen Oba, as sich's Leibesthor öffnet, was meinad er, isch chumma?! E Menschle, e Bueble isch usi chomma, inema Frack, in braune, runzliche Hösli, e Schilee het's ang'het mit schöne, gliche, glanzige Knöpfli, Cylinder Manschette, und sehr zarte Stiefeli, die erscht an der Luft

hart worda sing; g'lacht hat's mit rothi Bäckli, mit freundlich blinzelnde Augli, hat sie gruseli g'freut, und isch mit sime seine Schpazierstöckli usi stapft ufem wiße Leintuch. . . (pp. 297f.)

The humor inherent in such highly idiomatic German is hardly sufficient to endure for more than a page or so. Nor is the birth of a baby in tuxedo substance enough for a work of adult fiction. Even within this limited framework, the author by no means exploits all the humorous possibilities of plot or language. The story's sole action, the birth of the tuxedoed infant, is placed all the way at the end of the story. Furthermore, this mini-plot is cut short by the bell announcing the end of Professor Süpfli's lecture. Panizza teases our fantasy by forcing the reader to imagine what happened after the baby stepped onto the sheet with his walking stick. But this notion is so preposterous that the mature reader will waste little time before rejecting it outright.

A similar broadside against Wilhelminian prudery can be found in "Ein criminelles Geschlecht." This is another non-tale, consisting of little more than a conversation between the narrator and a German criminal official. The latter had recently been transferred to the German-occupied city of Straßburg, where his mission was to uncover a mysterious French conspiracy. Throughout the story, the narrator and, supposedly, the reader are kept wondering whether these mysterious conspirators, about whom the official is so reluctant to speak openly, might not actually be Jews, Franc-tireurs, Masons, Quakers, or some other "conspiratorial" group believed to pose a threat to the national security. This "suspense" lasts for twenty-five pages until the author resorts to a device previously noted in our discussion of "Die Menschenfabrik" and "Die Kirche von Zinsblech." The "astonishing" truth is suddenly revealed in a newspaper article: "Gestern wurde eine größere Anzahl französischer *Dirnen* aus der Umgebung von Besançon und Belfort, . . . auf Grund des Niederlassungs-Gesetzes für Elsaß-Lothringen und der neuen polizeilichen Verordnungen für Straßburg, Stadt, (Sitten-Controle) von hier ausgewiesen und per Schub über die Grenze gebracht" (pp. 57f.). As in so many Panizza tales, the well-constructed plot is lacking, and the reader is never in much doubt as to the identity of the conspirators. It is a story in which the author goes through the most absurd contortions to build up to the obvious.

While the tale is virtually lacking in plot, it does contain an incisive characterization of the police commissioner. The most striking aspect of his behavior is a pathologically prudish attitude toward sex, as evidenced by his inability to freely discuss the subject of prostitution with a young medical student. Even more unusual is his lack of any conception of sexual identity. The commissioner's response to the narrator's query about the sex of the conspirators clearly reveals his own sexual ignorance:

“ “Es ist ganz gleich, ob es Männer oder Weiber sind,” ”—  
 replicirte der Commissar à tempo, sichtbar ärgerlich, über  
 diesen Punkt gefragt zu werden. . . Mir ist es überhaupt  
 unerfindlich, wie man wegen eines winzigen Anhängsels  
 solche generelle Unterschiede aufstellen kann, und die  
 Menschheit in die Zwangsjacke von Unterrock und Hose  
 einschnüren mag. . . das eine hat ein Anhängsel, das andere  
 hat keins; und da macht man einen generalen Strich durch  
 die Menschheit, und sagt: Ihr heißt Euch so, und müßt  
 Euch so kleiden, und Ihr heißt Euch so, und müßt Euch so  
 kleiden?! . . . Männer oder Weiber?!—Nach dieser Seite ist  
 mir das sonst recht rationelle Weltganze immer unverständ-  
 lich geblieben, immer als eine Tollheit, als ein Mißgriff er-  
 schienen. . . (pp. 39f.)

This ignorance of sexual identity is not a minor phenomenon to be casually passed over. Panizza makes it unmistakably clear that it is to be understood as the central idea of the entire story. Preceding the text is a quotation from a report on Kaspar Hauser, the “wild boy” who appeared in Nürnberg in 1828: “He knew nothing about human sexual differences and only distinguished people by their clothing” (p. 32). Again, this might be dismissed as a curiosity of only passing interest to Panizza, were it not for the fact that it plays a central role in the author's only work of book-length fiction, *Aus dem Tagebuch eines Hundes*. There the dog-narrator made a big issue of the fact that he had discovered the two varieties of human beings, “Beinzeiger” and “Beinverstecker” (pp. 12-14).

Throughout the dog's diary he is constantly revising his theories in the light of new information. After watching his master and his girl-friend undress before going to bed together, the dog is forced to radically revise his system. His new version, however, is scarcely more accurate than his previously held one: “Und diese Menschen-Race

besteht also nicht aus Bein-Zeigern und Bein-Versteckern—diese Bezeichnung hat höchstens für das Straßen-Tripp-Trapp Geltung,—sondern Beide sind vollständig gleich; beider Beine gleich lang; gehen gleich hoch hinauf; und was sie veranlaßt, sich verschiedene Bälge und Häute künstlich zu construieren, ist reine Willkür und Verstellungswut” (p. 42). Indeed, this obsession with sexual identities continues right through to the very last sentence in the story: “Ich wollte das Menschen-Geschlecht einteilen und ihre kuriosen Sonderbarkeiten untersuchen. . .” (p. 104).

One might argue that the term “obsession” is unwarranted here, since the 40-year-old psychiatrist may have merely sustained an intellectual interest in the phenomenon of sexual ignorance. But a closer look at the treatment of sex throughout the author’s career, and in “Ein criminelles Geschlecht,” in particular, indicates that he had firsthand, even intimate knowledge of the problem. Panizza’s description of the commissioner’s anxiety at having to describe the activity engaged in by the conspirators is a psychological masterpiece, which reveals a strong identification on the part of the author:

Was die Leute thun?—wenn Sie’s hören wollen, wie ich mir die Sache zurechtgelegt: sie treiben criminelle Fabrication mit ihrem Körper!” “. . .—Wir waren beide unwillkürlich stehen geblieben, hatten Front gemacht, und starrten uns nun gegenseitig an. Der Mann sah aus wie ein Schauspieler, der sein bestes Stichwort losgelassen, seinen wirksamen Coup absolvirt, und jetzt auf den Applaus der Zuschauer wartet, aber noch nicht weiß, ob es eingeschlagen hat. Fiebernd, zitternd, überhitzt, die mageren Hände noch wie zu einer pathetischen Geste erhoben, der Augenstern fibrirend und in seinem Reflex wie zerfahren, die natürliche Gesichtsfaltung vertieft und lederartig eingeschnürt, der ganze Mann das Bild der Sorge, und das Opfer eines kranken Gedankengangs,—so stand der Commissar vor mir, der verschlossene, ruhige Beamte von ehemals kaum wiederzuerkennen. Und der Grundzug, der durch diese stumme Situation ging, war der Angst bei diesem Mann, was ich, der Harmlose, der Unbetheiligte, der Gesunde, dazu sagen werde. (pp. 41f.)

This brilliant sketch of anxiety and repression is not wholly lacking in humor, for we must bear in mind that it is Oskar Panizza who is

referring to himself as "the harmless, the uninvolved, the healthy one." And the author knew, as no one else could, exactly how great his involvement and emotional distress actually were.

At this point, one can only reiterate that sex represented a distinct problem area in Panizza's life and works, and that although he continually championed sexual freedom in defiance of traditional Christian taboos, he could never portray it outside the context of prostitution. This, in turn, is certainly linked to his own problems of bi-sexual identity and ambivalence. Even for the middle-aged physician, sexual intimacy remained shrouded in secrecy; women were both desirable and physically repulsive, they were superior, invulnerable beings who filled him with envy and hatred. This chasm separating Panizza from women was often so painful that he longed for an obliteration of sexual differences, not out of any idealistic desire to liberate women, but to liberate himself from emotional isolation. While there can be no doubt that he failed in finding a solution to his emotional distress, he was able to find some temporary relief in writing about these disturbing feelings and projecting them onto his fictional characters. Indeed, prior to the twentieth century there is no German author who exceeded Panizza's candor in writing about his most intimate sexual problems which, as Freud proclaimed a few years later, were more or less universal in the Western world.

### "Der Corsetten-Fritz"

Sexual ignorance is also the topic of "Der Corsetten-Fritz," one of the author's most engaging stories. This largely autobiographical tale depicts the perplexing trials of the narrator's youth, his discovery and absurd explanation of sexual differentiation, his initiation into sexual "reality," and his unsuccessful attempt to repress these sexual drives. His fears and desires so closely parallel everything that has been learned thus far about Panizza, that the entire story can be viewed as an incredibly honest self-revelation, with details masked as if by dream-work. It is from stories such as these that we can imagine the tremendous cathartic effect that writing must have had for this troubled author.<sup>18</sup>

Fritz is the son of a small-town Protestant minister, a wish-fulfillment on Panizza's part, who saw in Martin Luther something of a substitute for his missing father. But Fritz's father was no Martin

Luther, and he hates the preacher as much as Oskar hated his own father. Fritz's hatred of the pastor also extends to his father's religion, and he can barely survive his sermons: "Die sicherste und intensivste Erinnerung, die ich aus dieser Zeit habe, ist ein gewisser Zustand, eine Disposition meines Kopfes, eine Art psychischer Anfall, der mich jedesmal in der Kirche überraschte" (p. 59). Similarly, Oskar loathed Catholicism, the religion of his father, with passionate vehemence that betrays extra-theological roots. The most obvious reason for such hostile feelings toward father is the Oedipal envy of the role he plays in the life of mother. Oedipal feelings are subject to the most severe repression, and it is highly significant in this connection that Fritz's mother is not mentioned once in the entire forty-page story.

Instead, the narrator describes the object of his most secret desires as a vague and nebulous unknown: "Dieß ist die intensivste Erinnerung aus meinen Kinderjahren: dieses Davonlaufen der Seele bei jeder günstigen Gelegenheit; dieses Herumsuchen nach etwas Unbekanntem, nach etwas Aufzustoberndem; und dieses Nichts-Nach-Hause-Bringen" (pp. 60f.). Some years later as a *Gymnasium* pupil, Fritz formulated this search as a pursuit of what Goethe called "das Ewig-Weibliche":

Das ist unsere Bestimmung, das ist unser Fluch, zu grübeln und zu spintisieren, die Schliche und Verhüllungen unserer Nebenmenschen aufzudecken, den Kern aus der Schale zu brechen, die Panzer abzureißen: ein Geschlecht läuft neben uns her, seltsam gebildet, mit ausladenden, outrirten Formen; die Blicke dunkel und verzehrend, die Haut schneeweiß, fuchtelnde Arme, auf der Brust zwei ungeberdige Ballen, die seltsam in der Kleidung versteckt werden; über Hüfte und Leib schillernde, seidene, farbige Ueberzüge von unbekannter, geheimnißvoller Herkunft; weiterhin sonderlich gebildet, alles glatt und weich, zart und behext; das einmal gesehen, die Phantasie nicht mehr losläßt, die Gymnasiasten verwirrt, ihnen das Gedächtnis auslöscht, sie dem Verderben zuführen will. Löse diese Räthsel, zerreiße die Schleier, decke Alles auf—das ist die Bestimmung des Menschen. . . (pp. 83f.)

For Fritz, the image that "once seen will not let go of his imagination" is an orange corset. It will be remembered that Oskar first



began attending out-of-town schools at the age of ten, and ended up going to a Munich *Gymnasium* while living with the family of his mother's sister. Similarly, the 15-year-old Fritz is sent away from home to attend *Gymnasium* in a large city, where he stays with an aunt and uncle. But despite their pious efforts to protect their fledgling from the unholy realities of a modern metropolis, one evening Fritz finally manages to take a stroll alone through the downtown area. The over-protected, naive lad is drawn to a shop-window displaying lingerie, and one corset, in particular, captures his entire attention: "besonders ein orangegelber Leib nahm meine ganzen Sinne gefangen; er war schwarz gerändert; die Hüftenschwingung zart; die dünnste Stelle zum mit Knabenhänden umspannend ergötzlich; die Ausladung der Brust kühn und gewaltig; das ganze eine hoheitvolle Figur, ein Ideal-Wesen" (p. 65). The boy is completely captivated by this orange corset, in which he sees a form of separate but higher human race. As his eyes are feasting on this most delectable sight he has ever seen, his bliss is traumatically shattered by the intervention of an adult male:

In diesem Augenblick geschah etwas Entsetzliches. Zwischen meinem Orangen-Menschen und seinem dunkelblauen Kameraden nebanan erschien plötzlich ein schwarzbärtiger, gelockter Judenkopf, der mich mit einem ausgestopft-süßlichen Lächeln angrinzte, und unversehens von Hinten mit zwei Armen mein Orange-Bild umfaßte, und es liebkosend nach hinten trug. Ich war außer mir vor Wuth. Und eben wollte ich mit gebällter Faust die Glasscheibe zerschmettern, um das Ideal meines Lebens zu retten, als ein brauner, eiserner Vorhang zwischen mir und der Glasscheibe mit schrillum Geräusch niederging. . . (p. 67)

It is interesting to note how in this obviously Oedipal fantasy the role of Panizza's Italian father is assumed by a swarthy Jew. Since Oskar grew up during a period of intense anti-Semitism in Germany, a sinister Jew would be the "natural" substitute on whom to focus his displaced Oedipal hatred. The suspicion that this entire episode originated in Panizza's dream-world is further confirmed when we learn that Fritz was obsessed with the orange corset day and night, that it was the subject of his most intense dreams, which would always become nightmares with the appearance of the hated Jew (p. 69). This same basic Oedipal nightmare was most likely at the base of so much

of his poetry dealing with infidelity and the sudden disappearance of the bride just before the wedding. A classic example of this is "Die Dirne und der schwarze Junker" from *Düstere Lieder*, where the beautiful girl is calmly but forcefully abducted by the dark knight to the horror and shame of her impotent lover (pp. 53-55).

Fritz's assumption that corsets represent exotic human skins is, of course, wildly unnaturalistic. His further deduction that "it is the Jews who have these distant human races shot, who import and sell the skins and earn their money from this" (p. 73) is simply crude anti-Semitism on the part of the author, and wholly unbelievable as the conjecture of a 15-year-old *Gymnasium* student, no matter how sheltered his life may have been. Panizza is far more realistic when he abandons this cheap humor and focuses on Fritz's attempts to further his sexual education. Thus he describes in considerable detail a voyeuristic episode where the young hero spies on the household's attractive cook: "I wanted to look through the keyhole into the cook's room in order to see what she looked like and what she was up to" (p. 71). Quite predictably, he is disappointed by what he discovers; the cook is wearing a drab-colored corset which simply cannot compare to the "ideal" orange one of his dreams.

Like Panizza, Fritz had been instilled from an early age with the notion that "the purpose of existence was to become a Doctor of Divinity" (p. 61), and both boys grew to hate religion. Thus Fritz was delighted when his religion class was cancelled one fine afternoon, and he set out with a classmate to take a look at a local lingerie shop. Although the assortment in the display window was disappointingly drab, he remained standing with his nose pressed up against the pane, as if mesmerized by the sight of ladies' underwear. When he finally turned around to go, his friend had disappeared in the crowd of bemused onlookers:

In diesem Augenblick empfing mich ein höllisches Gelächter, in dem Hohn, Spott, Mitleid, Verachtung, Schadenfreude, Alles durcheinander klang. Ich blickte in lauter geöffnete Mäuler mit faulen Zähnen und dampfenden Schleimhäuten. Die ganze Straße war vollgekeilt mit Weibern, die keuchend ihre Armkörbe emporhielten und mich mit winzig zugekniffenen Augenspalten ankiekten. Eine Menge von Stimmen und unartikulirter Laute drang auf mich ein. . . Ich wurde blutrot im Gesicht. Und. . . lief, so schnell ich konnte, davon . . . (p. 80)

This same humiliating scene is repeated the following morning when he enters the classroom and is greeted with derision by his classmates, who have been informed of the previous day's incident. "Corsetten-Fritz" becomes his odious nickname, which he must bear through the end of his days at the *Gymnasium*.

One year later, as a nineteen-year-old theology student, Fritz is taken to a brothel by another student. Since prostitutes played such a vital role in the life of Oskar Panizza, it is not surprising that Fritz should find the incarnation of his cherished orange corset in a house of prostitution. But his initial response to the pretty girl who takes him up to her room is anything but physical:

"Du unvergleichliches Wesen!"—rief ich, und stürzt mit einem Schlag auf die Knie',—"Dich kenn' ich. . . Du erscheinst mir im Traum und bei Tag in einsamen Stunden. Du warst im Besitz eines ekelhaften, schwarz-geschniegelten Juden! Wie bist Du aus jenem Schaufenster herausgekommen. Wo hast Du diese wunderschöne, orangene Hülse her? Du bist ganz Duft, Kolibri und Goldhaar. Kann man Dich kaufen? Du bist der Inbegriff alles meines Glücks auf dieser Erde. Ich würf' die ganze Theologie zum Teufel, wenn ich Dich besitzen könnte; einerlei, kommst Du aus dem Himmel oder aus der Hölle. . . ."—Ich weiß nicht, wie lange ich so gesprochen; noch, was ich gethan; noch, was mit mir geschehen ist. (pp. 88f.)

The reality of the sexual experience proved to be too overpowering for Fritz, who frankly admits that he "must have fainted" (p. 89). After finally coming to and leaving the brothel, he continues to flee from the external world, especially the reality of the nude female body: "Ich lebte ganz meinem Innenleben, und baute dort aus den wenigen farbigen Bausteinen, die ich der Außenwelt, die ich meinen paar Erlebnissen, entnommen, eine phantastische, gelbe, corsettirte Welt auf, an der ich mich fabelhaft ersättigte" (p. 90).

Panizza was painstakingly tracing the etiology of his own mental illness as he described how Fritz's repression began to mold a schizoid personality. He feels a sharp dichotomy between the spontaneous sphere of his imagination, on the one hand, and the sphere of reason, on the other, where he "memorized the dull, pale external world with its appearances" (p. 91). What Panizza is describing here is the

emergence of his own solipsistic way of experiencing the world. In order to maintain a modicum of equilibrium, he would have to suppress the disturbing truths of the outside world while repressing the dark urgings of his own subconscious mind. Thus he tries to evade the lure of sensuality by plunging into his theological studies “with a terrifying energy” (p. 91). He succeeds in passing his examinations brilliantly, but his “alter ego was dissatisfied. And I felt a mocking voice inside me which ridiculed my external success” (p. 91).

Fritz’s terror of losing control of himself mounts steadily as he prepares to deliver his inaugural sermon in his father’s church: “I was seized by the fear that there could occur inside of me something over which I would no longer have any control” (p. 93). Like a man struggling to suppress the effects of an ingested hallucinogen, Fritz frantically fights to keep his mind from “tripping”—“aber meine Seele hatte ihre Tour schon begonnen. Und nun mußte ich mit” (p. 94). In the midst of his sermon, images begin to gush forth from his subconscious as he hallucinates the dark Jew floating above the congregation and waving Fritz’s beloved orange corset. Suddenly the galleries are filled with a horde of jeering *Gymnasium* classmates, laughing and screaming “Corsetten-Fritz! Corsetten-Fritz!” (p. 95).

What began as an attempt to assert himself in the face of his despised father, ends with Fritz being committed to an insane asylum, that both dreaded and yearned for escape from reality. This shattering story does more than simply anticipate the author’s own psychotic breakdown. Although perhaps not fully aware of what he was doing, Panizza brilliantly portrayed the brutal Oedipal conflict with the most astounding functional clarity, including displaced father hatred, repression of female nudity and consequent inability to experience sex, recurrent nightmares, fetishism, voyeurism, and the suppression of external reality leading to paranoid delusions and eventual full-fledged schizophrenia. While Panizza rather defensively denied the existence of the subconscious,<sup>19</sup> he succeeded years before Freud in elucidating obscure areas of the human mind. Despite its severe esthetic flaws, “Der Corsetten-Fritz” will remain an impressive testimonial to Panizza’s psychological genius.

## Scandalous Stories

In stark contrast to the aggressively permissive attitude toward sex expressed in the author's speeches, essays, and to a certain extent also in his plays, his poems and prose fiction reflect physical intimacy as being exceedingly problematic, if not altogether impossible. One simply cannot overlook the fact that in the more than twelve hundred pages of Panizza's poetry and prose, there is not one instance of romantic love. Nor can one find a single mention of any successfully consummated physical union between a man and a woman. The closest Panizza ever came to writing about love of *any* kind is appropriately titled "Ein skandalöser Fall." This scandalous story is set in a French convent school in the 1830's, where the brilliant young teacher Alexina is discovered one morning in bed with Henriette, one of her students. In the course of seventy pages the author meticulously documents the day's drama acted out by the two lovers, the abbot, the Mother Superior (Henriette's aunt), teachers, pupils, and assorted folk from the local Normandy village, Beauregard. Bierbaum termed it "a virtuoso piece in the art of describing the very most unusual phenomena [Allerungewöhnlichstes]." <sup>20</sup> The story is not lacking in suspense which gradually builds toward the climactic ending, when a doctor is summoned from the village to examine Alexina. The medical report he submits to the abbot the following morning contains anatomical descriptions more explicit than anything previously conceived in German literature:

Der *mons veneris* ist stark behaart und bedeckt auf den ersten Blick die eigenliche Bildung der Genitalien. Diesselben zeigen wenig klaffende *labia majora* von wulstigem, faltigem Charakter, hinter denen die kleinen, wenig ausgebildeten *labia minora* sichtbar werden; keine Spur von *hymen*; der *introitus vaginae* ist so eng, und das versuchsweise Eindringen so schmerzhaft, daß es keinen Zweifel unterliegt, daß derselbe als blinder Sack endigt. . . Dagegen unschließen die *labia minora* in ihrem oberen Theil einen succulenten Körper, der vorne perforirt ist, und sich als wohl characterisirtes *membrum Virile* erweist; dasselbe ist der Erection fähig. . . Somit ist Alexina Besnard ein Zwitter; und, da derselbe während der Untersuchung, offenbar durch die augenblickliche psychische Erregung hervorgerufen, auch eine unwillkürliche *ejaculatio seminalis* hatte, deren Bestand unter

dem Mikroskop das deutliche Vorhandensein normaler, beweglicher Spermatozoen ergab, so muß Alexina als männlicher Zwitter angesprochen werden; somit ist Alexina ein Mann und zwar ein zeugungsfähiger Mann. (pp. 179f.)

Such sensationalist prose is obviously a product of Panizza-the-voyeur, who can all too easily identify with the inquisitive physician from *Beaugard* (literally, a "good look"). Aside from its heavy-handed shock value, though, the story stands out as yet another example of how he viewed love as an impossibility. Love and sex seem most palatable to the author when manifested in perversions such as fetishism, lesbianism, and hermaphroditism.

It is true that there had been authors with similar feelings in the past, and yet prior to Naturalism and Oskar Panizza no German writer had dared express them so openly in his writings. Frank Wedekind had first begun to treat the theme of awakening adolescent sexuality in his drama *Frühlings Erwachen* (1891). It was Panizza, however, whose radical realism and psychological insight paved the way for such twentieth-century treatments of the subject as Robert Musil's masterpiece, *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törleß* (1906).

The least successful stories in *Visionen* are those dealing with members of minority groups. There are two about Jews, one is about a black Sudanese, and the hero of a fourth is a Sioux chieftain. Panizza is still writing about his own problems, but he has projected his personal dilemma onto individuals who, like himself, feel that they are outcasts. His spiritual kin, they feel inferior to the "normal, healthy, average" people around them, but, despite their most strenuous efforts, are unable to assimilate and thus obliterate their deviant traits. He expresses no small dose of hatred for these poor fellows, but his venomous invectives are little more than displaced self-deprecation. It is difficult, however, for the reader of today, who has been so thoroughly sensitized to the plight of Jews, Blacks, and Indians, not to be offended by these stories; little remains of the humor obviously intended by their author. More than any others, these tales are "dated," all too typical products of late nineteenth-century German culture reeking with racism, religious bigotry, and chauvinism.

It was not until the medieval crusades that the ugly stereotype of the Jew emerged in German literature.<sup>21</sup> Probably the most famous nineteenth-century example of this is Veitel Itzig in Gustav Freytag's novel *Soll und Haben* (1855), who appears as Itzig Faitel Stern in

Panizza's tale about "Der operirte Jud'." Itzig is a truly miserable human specimen, ugly, malformed, clumsy, and generally offensive in everything from his gait to his speech. But he has an abundance of intelligence and money which enable him to do something about his problems. Thus he has an orthopedic surgeon fracture his bones and set them to grow back in a more esthetically pleasing form. He has his hair straightened and dyed blond. Professional actors teach him how to walk gracefully and to talk High German. A transfusion of Aryan blood and the conversion to Protestantism complete the metamorphosis of Itzig Faitel Stern to Siegfried Freudenstern.

Panizza's message is a simplistic truism: once a Jew, always a Jew; people may superficially look or act transformed, but they are basically incapable of change. On the night of Itzig/Siegfried's wedding to Othilia Schnack, the anti-hero gets drunk on champagne and experiences a disastrous wedding night in the tradition of Panizza's early poetry. The true, miserable Itzig is revealed as he begins to talk and act like the lascivious Jew he has always been, "schnalzend und gurgelnd und sich hin- und herwiegend, und mit dem Gesäß ekelhaft lüsterne, thierisch-hündische Bewegungen machend, sprang er im Saal herum" (p. 226). His bride and all the guests flee in horror, the groom regurgitates his meal and wallows on the floor in his own vomit, "ein vertracktes asiatisches Bild im Hochzeits-Frack, ein verlogenes Stück Menschenfleisch, Itzig Faitel Stern" (p. 227). Thus ends what Bierbaum called "the only anti-Semitic work of art I know. The eminent art causes one to forget the brutality of the bias."<sup>22</sup>

The other anti-Semitic piece is "Der Goldregen," a less hate-filled parody of the legendary Jewish greed for money. The plot is bone-bare, characterization almost non-existent: a miraculous shower of gold from heaven gladdens the hearts of everyone except for a few Jewish financiers, who sit around gloomily trying to decide with which new metals they might profitably speculate:

" "Gott, wie reden Se daher? Was helfft mich das Silber? Mer brauche neue Metallicher!" "—\*Nu, haben Se neue Metallicher?\*"—" "Ob mer haben neue Metallicher?! Mer haben das Platiin, mer haben. . . . ." "—\*Krause, sehen Se mal nach, wie Platin steht?\*"—\*\*Platin steht 2039 das Kilo\*\*—" "Gott, meine Herren, es helfft Ihne nix, wann Se das Platiin so erufftreibe. Es gibteres nit genug!"—"Platin genuch, um en Mond drauß zu mache, und Ihren dumme Kopp dazu!"—

\*Ka Beleidigung!—Ich hab 50 Pud Platin bei meim Schwager Salomon in Odessa liche. Ich gäb's um zwatausend un sechzig!\*—“Ich nähm's; ich nähm's.”— . . .(pp. 285f.)

The core of this tale is made up of dialogues such as the one above, which, with its ingenious punctuation to distinguish the various speakers, clearly points ahead to the author's first dramatic efforts of the following year. Other dialogues, like the one between the socialist and the maid, reflect Panizza's growing social awareness:

“Sie dummes Luder!”—sprach Einer dieser Roth-Geschlipsten zu einem feinen, eben herzugetretenen Dienstmädchen, —“Sie werden doch nicht für Andere sammeln. Geht Ihnen noch kein Licht auf? Jetzt ist's Zeit, für sich zu sorgen!”—  
 ““Ach Gott,”” antwortete diese, fast eingeschüchtert,  
 ““die Gnädige hat mich doch herunter geschickt!””—  
 “Was, ‘Gnädige’,” glotzte der Soci das zarte Mädchen an,  
 “scharren Sie für sich zusammen, was's Zeug hält, dann brauchen Sie keine Gnädige!”—““Ach Gott,”” rief das arme Ding, ““meine Herrschaft schaut doch von oben zu!””  
 (pp. 277f.)

Had “Der Goldregen” been written with greater care, objectivity, and balance, it could have been a veritable gem of a farce. Instead, the reader is left with a jumble of unfulfilled possibilities.

The last two tales in our discussion are little more than dramatic sketches consisting of conversations between Dr. Panizza and his patients. In “Indianer-Gedanken” the patient is a Sioux chieftain, the leader of an Indian troupe appearing in European vaudeville shows. Claiming that the palefaces are systematically strangling the Indian tribes out of existence, he requests a sufficient amount of strong poison so that the Sioux, Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Dakota nations may die an honorable, self-inflicted death. Like Panizza, the Indians are outnumbered and physically overwhelmed by the healthier, more aggressive majority. One could hardly imagine a more powerful expression of the author's death-wish than the fantasy of maladapted Indians, entire nations of them, exterminating themselves to preserve their honor and escape a wretched, unfulfilled existence.

When the horrified Dr. Panizza rejects this chemical genocide as a possible “final solution” to the Indian problem—“an act of cruelty bordering on madness!” (p. 108)—the chief suggests an alternative



method: "Aber wir könnten unsere jungen Mädchen und Jünglinge sehr sorgfältig braten und mit Kräutern und Lorber geschmückt den Pferdsleuten überschicken,—unser Fleisch gilt höher als das des Ebers,—und die anderen würden sich inzwischen im tiefsten Wald aufhängen; und die Blaßgesichter würden erkennen, unsere Religion erlaubt uns, großmüthiger zu sein, als ihr an einem Balken aufgehängter, todter Gott!" (p. 110). Such grotesque fantasies are reminiscent of Poe's bizarre expressions of the death-wish. But whereas Poe's heroes actually experience these nightmares, Panizza's narrator merely discusses them, a far less rewarding technique from the reader's point of view.

Probably the most uncomfortably realistic of all four "minority" tales is "Eine Negergeschichte," in which a black Sudanese bursts into the physician's office demanding a written certification of his imagined whiteness. As a black entertainer in a white, wealthy, Western Europe, he was forced into the awareness that being black was the epitome of ugliness. As a result of this insight, he stopped performing and wandered around aimlessly without eating or sleeping.

"...endlich, Docter, nach βuai Monate,—nachdem ich uar wie ein Hund,—konnt' nicht mehr reden, nicht schlucken, aber immer noch in mein Kopf das helle Bild von mein Gesicht, das wunderschöne uaiβe Negerbild. . . ."—  
 "Nun?" frug ich voller Erwartung.—"Well, Docter,—nach βuai Monat, eines Tags, plötzlich,—it was a wonderful sight! —ich bin geworden uaiβ. . ." (p. 28)

When the psychiatrist refuses to acknowledge his whiteness, the Sudanese becomes enraged and grabs Dr. Panizza by the throat in an effort to strangle him. The *deus ex machina* is provided by two attendants in white coats, who subdue the berserk patient and cart him back to the insane asylum from where he had escaped. His final, pitiful plea, "Doctor, help me against the black devils!" (p. 30), expresses the same terror of internalized demons which figured prominently in so much of the early poetry. For Dr. Panizza as well as his fictitious black patient, insanity provided the ultimate escape from an unbearable reality.

The author's prose fiction reveals his two principal concerns, the total destruction of Christian mythology and an obsession with sexual ambivalence. The last category of "minority" tales deals with individuals who refuse to accept themselves as they are, a projection

and refreshing extension of the author's personal madadjustment. It was not until Panizza turned dramatist, however, that the dual strands of religion and sex were successfully entwined to produce what M.G. Conrad hailed as "one of the most powerful and most significant works of art in modern dramatic literature," *Das Liebeskonzil*.<sup>23</sup>