

Chapter 5.

SUPERNATURAL DOGS AND BITCHES: THE THEATER OF BLASPHEMY

Der heilige Staatsanwalt

For a writer whose prose fiction was becoming more and more abstracted into pure dialogue, it would seem almost inevitable that he would try his hand at writing a drama. Thus, upon completion of the stories for *Visionen*, Oskar Panizza turned his efforts to fashioning "a moral comedy in five acts," *Der heilige Staatsanwalt*.¹ It is an awkward and highly amateurish broadside against Wilhelminian prudery, with less humor than a good tragedy. The climax of this 22-page playlet is a sermon by Martin Luther on the acceptance of sex as a natural, God-given human function. The gradual subordination of plot, often counterbalanced by an extraordinary depth of characterization, was previously noted in our discussion of the stories. Yet plotless stage presentations seem almost untenable unless the language is the quality of a Goethe or Beckett; and Panizza's play is even less carefully wrought than his prose fiction. In view of the fact that the German dramatists whom he most admired—Schiller, Hauptmann, and Wedekind—all produced masterpieces on their first attempts, Panizza must have been more than disappointed with his own first effort at dramatic writing. It is a sign of his determination that, following this initial fiasco, he proceeded within a year to complete *Das Liebeskonzil*, one of only a bare handful of German plays

written during the 1890's still considered worthy of production today.

The basic fault of *Der heilige Staatsanwalt*, and one of the principle reasons this "comedy" remains so dry and humorless, is the glaring dichotomy between medium and message, form and content. By the author's own admission, it is a "moral" comedy, a didactic play with a specifically naturalistic message: sex is a natural human activity. Consequently, prostitution, an ancient institution which enables many a man to satisfy his natural drives, should at least be tolerated as a necessary evil. The form chosen by the author to convey this modern morality is anything but naturalistic. Indeed, it has more in common with a medieval morality play than with any other dramatic form.

The play depicts the trial of Lust on charges of having created a moral offense by publicly propositioning men after the police curfew hour of 6 PM. It is a jury trial before the prosecuting District Attorney, who is thus the only court official in the absence of any judge. The seven jurors consist of the Eternally Good, True, and Beautiful, described as "concepts"; in addition to these are Custom, Morality, Man, and the Spirit of Christianity. Whereas such successfully didactic plays as Hauptmann's *Die Weber* (1892) or Wedekind's *Frühlings Erwachen* (1891) contain a brutally realistic plot to convey their revolutionary message with the greatest impact, Panizza simply dispenses with the intricacies of plot and characterization altogether. His "characters" are undisguised abstractions who merely mouth their respective moral positions for or against the condemnation of Lust.

All five scenes take place in a crowded metropolitan court-room. Compared to a Naturalist dramatist such as Hauptmann, Panizza's stage directions are extremely sparse, and it is next to impossible for the reader to visualize an actual stage presentation. The first scene contains the testimonial by Scharf, a court clerk who describes how he apprehended Lust in the act of propositioning "an elegant gentleman." Besides the offense against morality, she is also charged with obstructing a police officer in the performance of his duty and with attempted bribery. From the very first sentence, spoken by the District Attorney, the tone of the language has a hollow ring to it, lacking both distinction and authenticity: "Zum so und so vielten Male wurden Sie gestern Abend wegen einer unsittlichen Handlung aufgegriffen und auf die Polizei gebracht. Sie leugneten dort ihre men-

schenunwürdige Handlung nicht, bekannten sich als schuldig, wurden wegen Gefahr weiteren Unheils für die kommende Nacht detenirt, und erscheinen nun heute. . ." (p. 7). Lust's defense in the second scene is even more contrived and un-naturalistic:

Und doch, scheint es, bin ich der Gesellschaft ebenso nützlich und notwendig, wie irgend ein anderer Faktor, wie irgend eine Staatseinrichtung oder ein hochklingender Begriff. Zwar bin ich sehr gemein, das heißt allerorts und überall zu finden, wie Licht und Luft, Regen und Sonnenschein. Aber wäre ich deshalb der Welt etwa entbehrlich? Ist nicht Alles, was da lebt und webt, was fleucht und krecht, durch *mich* geworden? Ich bin das Feuer alles Werdens und Entstehens; der Schmelzungsprozeß für jede neue Form, jeden neuen Gedanken. Beflügle ich nicht die geniale Idee des Künstlers und bin der Hauch Eurer Dichter und. . . (pp. 10f.)

The two "experts," Man and Custom, present their testimonials in the third scene. But before Man is able to testify, he is harangued by the Eternally Good, True, and Beautiful, who entreat him with a torrent of pious words to condemn Lust. Their final threat is to completely disappear from the human realm in the event of an acquittal: "We will establish a superterrestrial realm for ourselves, where the Eternally Good, True, and Beautiful will reign forever, and where no human being will be able to enter" (p. 17). The weak-willed, dull-minded Man succumbs to such extraordinary pressure and finally states, with a deep blush, his belief that Lust is guilty. On the other hand, Custom, a female, shocks the entire court by praising Lust as a truly superior and exemplary woman: "Woman makes herself attractive; and Lust is a woman. Woman wants to seduce. And Lust is the principal seductress. Why do you chide her? She does what all the others do. And she does it better than all the others. And the others learn from her. (Great commotion among the spectators.) You practice the minor arts, and she practices the major art." (p. 19). The legitimation for Custom's unorthodox views is derived from a naturalistic appeal to the reality principal: "I am no concept. I am the real action and activity of mankind" (p. 20). Custom, a calm and dignified lady, is rudely shouted down by the outraged court-room audience.

The District Attorney's charge to the jury is contained in the

fourth scene, where he demands a verdict of guilty. The sentence he requests for the defendant could hardly be termed naturalistic: seven years in prison, a twenty-year loss of civil rights, confinement to a house of correction after serving her prison sentence, and, should she ever be released from there, perpetual parole status under strict police supervision. After a minute or so, the jury returns to affirm the verdict and sentence demanded by the District Attorney. Lust breaks into tears, as Martin Luther steps forward from the jubilant audience to deliver a sermon to the court in pseudo-sixteenth-century German.

Over three pages long, Luther's speech takes up most of the final act. The great German opponent of the Roman Catholic Church praises nature as God's creation, while criticizing those who dare to assume an anti-naturalistic position and believe: "Ich will nit, wie Natur will; Natur soll, wie ich will" (p. 26). Since man is subordinate to the Devil as well as to God, it would be a hopeless, self-deluding enterprise to try and suppress one's innate sexual desire. "Und gebrauchst Du ihrer nicht [sic], so braucht sie Dich doch, und bringt Dich in allerei Noth und Schande. Da hebet sich dann an das heimlich Fließen und die stumme Sünde und ander ärgerlich Ding, davon ich nit reden will" (p. 27).

His admonishment not only to accept sex, but also to present it in its very most favorable light, is rather curious in view of the way it had been treated in Panizza's earlier poems and stories:

"Denn sintemal doch Wollust da sein muß, und Wollust nit Enthaltbarkeit ist, wär's besser, wir ziereten sie köstlich und schmückten sie ehrbar, und gäben ihr gefällige und klingende Namen, als ehemals die Dichter gethan haben, und nenneten sie 'schöne liebliche Frau', oder 'Du rother Mund' oder 'süße Minne'; als daß wir sie mit Dreck bewürfen, und machten sie noch schmutziger, als sie ohnedem ist" (p. 27).

This last statement clearly reveals that the basic position of Panizza's Luther is not all that different from the one held by the District Attorney. Both regard sex as something necessarily "dirty"; only Luther believes that it is more desirable to clean it up than to suppress it. It certainly cannot be said of Panizza, however, that he always strove to present sex in its best light, and most readers would probably be inclined to believe that exactly the opposite had been the case. Nonetheless, the author does share with Luther the conviction that the

worst way to cope with sex is to attempt to suppress it. While some of his stories (e.g., "Ein criminelles Geschlecht," "Der Stationsberg," "Der Corsetten-Fritz") show the negative effects of such a suppression, unlike D. H. Lawrence he was never able to portray the positive effects derived from a joyous affirmation of his own sexuality.

Panizza's Luther is not quite as hollow as the eternal virtues he is setting out to debunk. After his little sermon on the proper attitude one should have toward prostitution, he physically takes the three virtues apart to show how they are nothing but robots, complete with talking machines and heads filled with scraps of paper. At this point one is reminded of stories like "Das Wachsfignrenkabinet" and "Die Menschenfabrik," where the author had depicted individuals responding to lifeless human models as if they were alive. It is easy to overcome traditional virtues when they are nothing more than puppets with stereotyped reflexes, but this does not always produce a very dramatic situation, nor would it have had any force swaying a conservative audience. Much the same way that Luther throws the "eternal virtues" into a dead heap on the stage, he chases away two groups of "extras," the "Eternal Principles of Morality" and the "Warriors for Truth and Justice." One is left with the impression that there is simply nothing Panizza's Luther is incapable of doing. As the incarnation of virtual omnipotence, he is a fanciful wish-fulfillment of the author's and a totally lifeless figure on the stage.

The "comedy" ends with Luther taking the sobbing Lust by the arm and presenting her to the wildly cheering court-room audience: "Gott und Natur sprechen sie frei. . . Hier nehmet sie und wahret ihrer" (p. 29). Luther and Lust lead the entire crowd off-stage in a grand procession. Left behind in the court-room after the mass evacuation are Scharf and the District Attorney, who sees the whole world collapsing. An apocalyptic voice from the departing crowd calls back to correct his false impression: "*Deine Welt geht unter*" (p. 30). While certainly not lacking in revolutionary fervor, *Der heilige Staatsanwalt* can only be described as a bit of naturalistic propaganda, virtually devoid of anything necessary for a successful drama. The simple idea that it is hypocritical not to tolerate prostitution can be the basis for a roaring comedy. But Panizza did not realize how absurd it was to champion reality with unreality, to plead for the acceptance of natural drives by presenting mechanical puppets on the stage. This play again reveals the author as a pseudo-Naturalist; he was incapable of putting his modern ideas into a modern literary form, choosing in-

stead to stick to the basically undramatic formula of the medieval mystery play.

Das Liebeskonzil

It is doubtful that friends like Wedekind and Halbe—young, outspoken, and successful new playwrights—would have read *Der heilige Staatsanwalt* without trying to make the author aware of the play's grave defects. Therefore, it is not too surprising to find the situation greatly remedied in *Das Liebeskonzil*, Panizza's second play, which was published later that same year (December 1894).

Though not without its serious flaws, *Das Liebeskonzil* is at the same time one of the funniest and profoundest comedies that can be found in German literature. This is all the more astonishing in view of the fact that, only a few months before, the author had written a play so totally lacking in dramatic potential. However, the road to an understanding of Panizza's *magnum opus* is to be found in his earlier prose fiction and decidedly not in his first feeble attempt at drama.

In contrast to *Der heilige Staatsanwalt*, *Das Liebeskonzil* contains no mere abstractions but real people, thirty of whom are historically documented. And what distinguishes this play from the thousands of other historical dramas is the fact that the entire panoply of specifically Roman Catholic celestial mythology is presented on the stage, complete with God the Father, Christ, the Holy Ghost, Mary, Mary Magdalene, cherubs, angels, archangels, amoretti, apostles, martyrs, Sisters of Mercy, and messengers. All of these personages are depicted in the most devastating naturalistic light, as might be expected of Panizza-the-atheist, author of "Der Stationsberg" and "Das Wirthshaus zur Dreifaltigkeit." However, Panizza goes far beyond merely presenting ideas or conceptual characters in a particular light. He has them act like real people in plausible and often highly dramatic situations. The language and plot he has tailored for his characters are uniquely Panizza and well-suited for the author's principal objective: demonstrating the absurdity of our anthropomorphic deities.

The play treats one of the author's chief obsessions, syphilis. It is dedicated to the memory of Ulrich von Hutten, who, like the author, was a victim of the dreaded "French disease." Set in the spring of 1495, date of the first historically documented outbreak of lues, the scene alternates between the choice locations of Heaven, Hell, and

the Vatican Court of Alexander VI. Following is a schematic breakdown of the five acts, which suggests that the author originally conceived of a four-act play.

Act (scene)	Length (in pp.)	Location	Original act (hypoth.)	Length (in pp.)	Action
I	23	Heaven	I	23	Report from earth; Heavenly reaction.
II	11	Earth	II	21	Vatican's degeneracy; Heavenly reaction.
III, 1	10	Heaven			
III, 2	15	Hell	III	23	Creation of Woman; Heavenly Reaction.
IV	8	Heaven			
V	5	Earth	possibly beginning of incompl. IV	?	Woman's effect on earthlings.

If our assumption is correct, then we can explain the tremendous discrepancy in the length of the various acts by the fact that Panizza completed only three of the originally projected four, and then rather arbitrarily decided to spread the completed scenes out into five uneven acts. The author was far more successful at writing the scenes in Heaven than those which take place on Earth, and this could well explain his inability to complete Act IV as originally planned. The finished product lacks structural balance, and the atrophied Act V, in particular, betrays a hasty impatience on the part of the author. Nonetheless, the successfully completed acts deliver such an impact as to carry the entire play along, minimizing any formal shortcomings.

Act One

The first scene in Heaven sets the tone for the entire play. Three angels are busy dusting and tightening God's throne, which, like everything else in his realm, is so old it is literally falling apart. These three rather sexless angels are classic domestics, gossiping, complaining, and utterly disdainful of their master: "All day long we have to face that coughing, that watery-blue stare, that runny nose, cursing, spitting—there's never a healthy moment" (p. 1).

Remarks such as these help prepare the reader for the entrance of God the Father in the second scene. The Lord is an ancient, feeble, senile, thoroughly decrepit character, quite unable to move an inch without the help of numerous angels: "Slowly and cautiously, they accompany God to the throne, help him up the two steps by grasping his legs, lift him up to the top, turn him around and slowly lower him onto the seat. . . There are two angels in front of him, two behind him and one on either side, who half support, half receive him in their arms; a final angel carries a pair of crutches" (p. 7). Once he has been placed on his throne, scores of angels scurry about to bring the Creator of Heaven and Earth his necessary paraphernalia: footrest, hot-water bottle, footmuff, quilt, bolster, backrest, armrests, and a cherry-red silk scarf which a cherub ties around his neck. A pink crystal vase serves as the spittoon into which God relieves himself. When everything is finally in place and he is as comfortable as he can be, he "lets out a hoarse, terrifying, feigned roar at the angels" (p. 9). They quickly exit, leaving the Lord alone in his throne-room with his favorite cherub.

One could hardly imagine a more effective opening scene to introduce Panizza's version of God the Father. Unlike the traditional presentation of the Lord in Goethe's *Faust*, Panizza could at best only conceive of a sick God, one who had long since outlived his usefulness and was now even a burden on himself. There is, however, much more than mere contempt in Panizza's vision of a sick God. After all, the author was both a physician and a life-long patient who had plenty of first-hand experience with physical suffering. In the third scene, he gives us a glimpse of God's existential tragedy, which is not all that different from the author's own plight. Stroking his knee, he "cries softly: . . . oh, my aching limbs, they're crippled, swollen, dropsical, contracted, withered. . . My feet are afflicted with gout, cartilaginous, burning with pain, itching and torn. . . Aaah!—Aaah!" (p. 11).

But there is more than just the painful limbs which he shares with the author; there is also the inability to find any way of escaping his suffering. Like Panizza's syphilis, God's geriatric disorders are hopelessly incurable: "I'll never get well again! (Emotionally) God, is it awful to be old!—God, how really awful to have to be this old forever and ever!—It's simply dreadful being a blind God!" (pp. 10f.)

Oskar Panizza's "heavenly tragedy" involves suffering beyond the unrelenting physical pain. God is imprisoned in divine isolation. His earthly creatures despise or ridicule him, and the closest thing to love he can experience in Heaven is the tearful compassion of his favorite cherub, a "sexless angel" with a "very beautiful face reminiscent of Antinous" (p. 10). The pain of eternal sexual frustration is evident when God "feverishly seizes the boy's head with both hands, presses his wet and disheveled face against the cherub's cheeks and passionately kisses the lad's forehead, eyes, and hair, interrupted only by occasional sobs. The two are dissolved in tears and remain in a calm embrace after God's passionate outburst subsides" (p. 12). Panizza's God experiences neither pleasure nor joy nor love. His physical desires, which are clearly manifest in the preceding quotation, remain eternally unfulfilled; like the dog in *Aus dem Tagebuch eines Hundes*, he is incapable of enjoying either a hetero- or homosexual relationship. In more than one sense, the Lord represents the apotheosis of Panizza's dog motif. He is the dog to end all dogs.

The dramatic action begins to unfold in the fourth scene, when a winged messenger bursts in to tell of the rampant sexual degeneracy which threatens to engulf all of mankind, Italy in particular: "Women run through the streets seductively flaunting their exposed breasts; men flash about like stags; one depravity follows another; the sea has risen to street-level and the sun has been eclipsed, yet they ignore both terrestrial and heavenly signs. . ." (p. 13). God the Father is so incensed that he is ready to "dash them to pieces," but the thoughtful cherub is quick to point out that this would mean the end of the human race. After a long pause, God suddenly remembers: "That's right,—I'd forgotten the Creation is over. . . I'm too old, and my children can't do it" (p. 14). The has-been Creator is faced with a dilemma which is wholly beyond his means of solving. Aware of his own impotence, he decides to summon his daughter and son, Mary and Christ, to a "Love Council" for the purpose of deliberating "what is to be done in this dreadful affair" (p. 14). Thus the entire further action in the play can be traced back to God's prudishness, incompe-

tence, and ignorance—in short, his impotence.

The stage directions in *Das Liebeskonzil* are far more detailed and carefully wrought than in his first play. They are an integral part of the drama and contain some of the author's finest prose. Each character is introduced with a description just long and detailed enough to provide the reader with a visual conception of the action, while still leaving a director sufficient leeway for a wide possibility of stage presentations. A good example of this is Mary's arrival at the "Love Council" in the beginning of the fifth scene:

Mary enters with a proud and haughty air, accompanied by a group of youthful amorette scampering ahead of her and strewing petals, as well as adult-male angels carrying lily stalks. She comes through the main door wearing a small crown and a blue, star-spangled dress, open at the front to expose a white silk petticoat underneath. She makes a curt, polite bow in front of God's throne, the steps of which the cherub had previously vacated. She then goes to a second throne which busy-handed angels have placed along the wall a short distance from God's. Her throne is in the style of the Troubadourian Age, with a high back. She remains there throughout the following scene surrounded by her corps of angels. She is occupied exclusively with her make-up, playing with her little mirror, and sprinkling herself with perfumes. (p. 15)

In contrast to God and Christ, Mary is quite "down to earth." She is healthy, vigorous, and bright, while the males are sick, weary, and dull. She acts like a nouveau-riche Wilhelminian society dame, flaunting her worldliness by peppering her conversation with a liberal dose of French expletives and double-entendres. At times she lapses completely into French, as in her conversation with the Devil in Act III: "C'est glorieux!—C'est charmant!—C'est diabolique!—Mais comment? . . ." (p. 44).

Mary is the only one in Heaven who appears to have any appreciation or even knowledge of sexual matters, and it is evident that she is not altogether inexperienced. While God is fulminating about the "hideous abominations" being perpetrated on earth, Mary casually interrupts him to remark: "Yes, I know of the affair. The messenger came to me first. . ." (p. 19). The Creator's prime interest is in vindictively destroying mankind. He threatens to "beat them to

death like two lascivious dogs—at their moment of greatest delirium.” Mary, on the other hand, realizes that “we’ve got to leave copulation up to them.—You can’t begrudge them a little sex—without it they’d hang themselves from the nearest tree.” In contrast to God, who childishly whines that he would like “to have a beautiful earth again with animals in the forest,” Mary is not unaware of Darwin’s theory of evolution. In an effort to ridicule God’s ignorance, she pedantically points out to him that “if we have animals, we will also have to have people.” (p. 20). Mary is a fusion of the superior female figure encountered in so many of Panizza’s poems, with the Mary of “Das Wirthshaus zur Dreifaltigkeit,” the middle-aged, sly, sexy slut.

Like the figure of God, Jesus Christ appears as pompous, sick, impotent, and dumb. He has “the character of deepest despondency and frailty,” his head is bent down in an expression of deep sorrow. The classic young masochist, he is “surrounded by predominantly older angels carrying the cross and torture instruments. . . He strides to his throne, watched by God with indifference and completely ignored by Mary, refusing in his own passivity to take notice of anyone” (pp. 17f.). His sorrowful countenance and his tall, youthful appearance make him something of a “sex idol” for females. His retinue includes Mary Magdalene and a large number of mourning women not unlike the necrophiles who tried raping the dead Savior in “Der Stationsberg.” Being a consumptive who is prone to frequent asthmatic attacks, Christ lacks the vitality as well as the intelligence to effectively participate in the Council’s deliberations. He usually contents himself with repeating the sentence just uttered by either God or Mary. In the few attempts he makes to exceed these modest limits of self-expression, he is invariably silenced by violent fits of coughing. Mary freely admits that he “should never talk” (p. 39), and he usually is inclined to follow her advice.

The “Love Council” is on the verge of collapse when God bellows vengefully: “I will dash them to pieces—crush them—in the mortar of my wrath—smash them! (He is about to stand up and deal an almighty, irrevocable blow to coincide with the deed.)” (p. 21). This passage was singled out by Sigmund Freud in his *Traumdeutung* as an illustration of the dream process. Citing *Das Liebeskonzil* as “a strongly revolutionary closet drama,” he shows how the instant fulfillment of God’s destructive wishes parallels the immediate fulfillment of desires that occurs in our dreams.² It is only due to the quick thinking of his favorite cherub that God’s attention is diverted

from realizing his desire to exterminate mankind.

When the beautiful cherub points out that it is the day before Easter and that "they are eating the Passover meal down there," God "looks about in amazement: They are eating the Passover meal?" (p. 21). After it has been explained to him that the Last Supper means eating the flesh and blood of Christ, he gradually calms down as the entire Holy Family waxes sentimental:

GOD	thawing somewhat: My son, they are eating you!
CHRIST	wearily: Yes, they are eating me.
MARY	with affected tenderness: My dear son, whom I carried in my womb.
CHRIST	childishly: Whom you carried in your womb.
GOD	mechanically: Whom she carried in her womb.
THE YOUNGER ANGELS	whispering among themselves: The Man!—The Man!
MARY	as above: They are eating you.
CHRIST	as above: They are eating me.
GOD	as above: They are eating him. (p. 22)

Such stereotyped repetitions of vacuous sentiment are quite foreign to Naturalist drama and actually bear a strong affinity to the so-called "Theater of the Absurd." There are a number of similar passages in *Das Liebeskonzil* which clearly anticipate the highly stylized "absurd" dialogues to be found in the plays of such French-language dramatists as Samuel Beckett and Eugène Ionesco.

Panizza's image of God and Christ is heavily influenced by Nietzsche and his concept of *ressentiment*, in particular. The Lord would like to punish and destroy, precisely because he is impotent and incapable of creating. If he is unable to enjoy sex, then nobody else should, either. His "son's" *ressentiment*, beautifully revealed in the following emotional outburst, is likewise the product of an excessive, and therefore sickly, physical frailty: "It's awful! (coughs a bit) Me they eat in order to be healthy and free of sin. And we just continue to wither away. First they eat themselves so full of sin down there till they burst, and then they take a bite of me and thrive and become free of sin and fat; and We get skinny and miserable. Ah,

this cursed role! Someday I would like to turn the spit around, to stuff myself and let them starve! (Is seized by a consumptive coughing fit.)” (p. 22). Christ is so impotent that he lacks even the power to destroy. One could cite numerous passages from the works of Nietzsche where the author illustrates the subtle ramifications of his concept of *ressentiment*, but one passage from his *Zur Genealogie der Moral* is particularly relevant in elucidating Christ’s “slave morality” as depicted by Panizza: “The slaves’ revolt in morals begins with *ressentiment* itself becoming creative and giving birth to values: the *ressentiment* of those who are denied the real reaction, that of the deed, and who compensate with an imaginary revenge.”³

In Panizza’s early poems, there was frequently the yearning for a woman to console the defeated poet. In *Das Liebeskonzil*, the Oedipal constellation of Christ and Mary is even more clearly defined than it had been in “Das Wirthshaus zur Dreifaltigkeit,” where the author only hinted at any interaction between mother and son. After his seizure following his little speech about turning the spit around, Christ “sobs violently at Mary’s breast,” while “she lays his head against her breast and caresses him” (p. 23). Such maternal consolation, sensual enough to elicit excited whispering among the younger angels, is the kind of Oedipal bliss envisioned in the tenth sonnet of the cycle “Men and Women” from *Düstere Lieder*. At the same time, however, it is also a sign of weakness and failure for an adult male to be sobbing in the arms of his mother. Thus there is both profound personal success as well as failure suggested in this relationship, and from what we know of the author’s poems and prose fiction, Panizza could easily identify with both aspects of Christ’s role.

Whereas Christ’s revenge on a hedonistic world will remain an eternally frustrated wish, God’s revenge is only postponed as he decides to “take another look at it.” Mary is delighted at this diplomatic solution to the impasse, especially since it is one that will allow her to indulge in a bit of voyeurism together with her beloved Jesus: “Come, my son, let’s go take a peek, it will amuse you” (p. 23). It is obvious from the divinities’ reliance on messengers that they are incapable of directly seeing what is happening on earth. Oskar Panizza’s ultra-modernism is once again in evidence as he depicts the Holy Family ceremoniously “turning on” and taking a good look at terrestrial events with a little help from “a brown drug”:

(All medicinal paraphernalia are removed. In their place,

apostles, martyrs, angels, and Sisters of Mercy file out in solemn procession. At last, only the three divinities, the cherub, and a few older angels remain.)

GOD comfortably bedded down and reclining in his throne; with a sonorous, solemn voice: Bring in the smoking racks and coal trays, and produce in Us omniscience and omnipresence!

(The tripods are placed in the middle of the hall, fueled with a brown drug mixed with sandalwood, and then lit. The doors are shut after the servant angels leave. The last to go is the cherub. The three divinities can be seen slowly sinking back and closing their eyes as clouds of smoke spread through the hall.—Curtain.) (pp. 23f.)

While providing both a highly suggestive and effective ending for Act I, this scene with its radical anthropomorphism also underscores the author's central thesis that any human concept of supernatural beings is absurd. In *Genie und Wahnsinn*, he had previously discussed hashish and the hallucinatory origin of religion (pp. 24, 29). In *Das Liebeskonzil* the process is merely reversed, with the hallucinogenic drug functioning as a means for the divinities to establish contact with man. Panizza, however, was a confirmed solipsist. The main theme of his philosophical sketch, *Der Illusionismus und die Rettung der Persönlichkeit*, is that all perceptions, and certainly drug-induced hallucinations, are products of the individual's own mind. Consequently, Act II, with its orgiastic activities at the court of Pope Alexander VI, can be viewed on one level as a projection emanating from the minds of the three divinities. As a result of their decrepitude, impotence, and the ensuing "slave morality," their lives in Heaven are eternally sterile. Thus the orgiastic fantasy of their drug trip is a wish-fulfillment, a transient escape from the "heavenly" frustration and boredom so apparent in every scene. It must be emphasized again, that while Panizza's savage humor is unsparing in attacking the entire concept of supernatural beings, he nonetheless identifies with them, imbuing them with a psychologically-motivated tragedy that was fundamentally his own. The end-result is the curious "heavenly tragedy" of perhaps the most consistently anthropomorphic God in modern literature.

Act Two

The high quality of Act I is by no means continued into Act II. Gone are the carefully constructed plot, the complex characters, the clever dialogue, and the wry humor. Instead, we are presented with a static panorama of the Vatican Court. The principal focus is on the intrigues and diversions of Alexander VI, his family and retinue. With its scholarly footnotes, on the one hand, and its plethora of nude performers, on the other, this second act was probably what prompted the author's contemporaries to refer to the play as a closet drama. Actually, it is hardly effective *unless* performed, and Panizza's highly elaborate stage directions would indicate that he did, indeed, envisage its eventual performance. The action is all of a spectacle nature, having only marginal links with the central plot, but shockingly entertaining when performed live. This elaborate pageant, set in a large, ornate hall in the Vatican Palace, involves over one hundred persons ranging from the Pope's family and friends to his mistresses and advisors, Cardinals, Archbishops, soldiers, servants, and a throng of "common folk" crowded into the galleries overlooking the hall. While Act II is not formally divided into scenes, the action is nonetheless scenically structured by loosely-connected, discrete episodes in which different characters assume a dominant role.

The first such episode (pp. 26-28) shows the Pope discussing with his family and friends a sermon which has just been concluded. Alexander's first words—"Awful, I simply couldn't listen to it" (p. 26)—introduce him as a man little concerned with the spiritual side of religion. The persons surrounding the Pope, as well, are only concerned with earthly pleasures on this evening before Easter in 1495. Thus Alexander describes his great antagonist, Savonarola, as a man who "doesn't allow you to eat candy and wear pearls" (p. 28). Panizza has gone to pains to depict the Christian leader as an arch-villain, a man utterly ruthless in his pursuit of wealth, power, and sexual diversions. For the Pope, truth is an offensive sign of bad taste. "Honesty is always awkward," he explains to his assembled guests (p. 27).

The second episode (pp. 28-30) is a subdued conversation between three noblemen about the murder of the Duke of Bissaglie, Alexander's son-in-law who was found dead in the Tiber. Naturally the Pope is implicated, although officially he will have nothing to do with such intrigues: "Alexander VI knows nothing; Rodrigo Borgia knows everything" (p. 29). With this little conversation, Panizza is

trying to show how violence was daily perpetrated by the representative on earth of the Prince of Peace. In none of these scenes, however, does the Pope appear as anything worse than a lecherous man in his sixties, a father primarily intent on enjoying himself in the bosom of his family (two mistresses and nine children). When the actors, Pulcinello and Colombina, present a pantomime with obvious allusions to the recent murder of the Duke, Alexander has only to raise a finger to make them desist (p. 30).

An active attempt to combat boredom dominates the entire second act, and most of the background activities, such as dancing, eating, drinking, and intriguing, are conventional and socially acceptable diversions. The more unusual antidotes to boredom, the mildest of which is the pantomime play, all take place in the stage foreground, producing a dynamic tension between stage front and rear. In the midst of the pantomime, yet a third element is added. Vesper services are being held in the chapel connected to the galleries by open windows, and the melancholy strains of a gradual can be heard wafting down from above, curiously mixing with the sounds below. Musically, this produces an extremely interesting effect, since the events on the stage are multi-faceted, and the gradual is explicitly described as being "polyphonic" (p. 32). The combination of these two polyphonies is as jarring emotionally as it is acoustically. The common folk up on the galleries immediately withdraw from the windows, cross themselves, and turn around to face the chapel. Although a few persons down below are struck with embarrassment, the Pope and his family maintain their gaiety, if somewhat forced. A final element of contrast is provided by the gradual's text, "de profundis clamavi ad te Domine; Domine exaudi vocem meam. . ." (p. 32), which Panizza chose to translate in a footnote to make his point unmistakably clear. Throughout Act II, the absurdity and hypocrisy of these words is heightened from one episode to the next.

After the pantomime, the Pope claps his hands, and there immediately enter "twelve courtesans of exquisite beauty" who "place themselves on exhibition upstage." Upon removing their clothes ("light, diaphanous gowns"), they proceed to entertain guests and spectators by fighting for chestnuts thrown into the center of the hall by servants. The Pope claps anew, and the spectacle continues with *battaglie d'amoro*, wrestling matches where the victorious male is sexually rewarded (offstage) by the courtesan of his choice. Throughout these games, the Church dignitaries excitedly follow the

action with shouts of encouragement, joking, and general laughter; their involvement, however, is never more than vicarious.

Panizza obviously felt that this was one of the play's more risqué scenes. In a footnote to the words "Second Act," he cites as the historical source for the entire act the diary of Alexander's Master of Ceremonies, Burchard.⁴ Actually, the historical evening on which Act II is based (October 31, 1501) contained far wilder events than those presented in the play. According to Burchard's diary, prizes were awarded for a different kind of love match, where the object was to copulate with a particular girl the greatest number of times.⁵ In *Meine Verteidigung in Sachen "Das Liebeskonzil,"* Panizza explained the alteration with words that clearly show he intended the play to be performed: "I softened the scene, not out of consideration for the popes or the feelings of Catholics, but rather out of artistic considerations; because I always had the theater in mind, because I was always thinking of the possibility of a performance; and because the above scene [i.e., the one with the wrestling matches] was, with certain reservations, conceivable as a performance. The real scene, as depicted by historical accounts, would have been an impossibility even in a closet drama."⁶

The wrestling matches at the end of Act II are interrupted twice. As the fifth victor is in the process of making his choice from among the remaining courtesans, the "deep, tragic tones of the vesper's final chorus" can be heard from the interior of the church: "Veni sancte Spiritus et emitte coelitus lucis tuae radium" (p. 35). The crass incongruity of these words, a celestial invocation while selecting a sexual partner for the night, once again highlights the discrepancy between words and deeds at the court of Alexander VI. "Visibly annoyed at the disruption," the Pope signals for the games to continue, although the original turbulent mood in the hall does not return until the choir has finished singing. The second interruption occurs during the ninth match, when word arrives that the French King, Charles VIII, is on the march toward Rome only a few miles away. Alexander orders his entire court to ride on horseback to Orvieto, and everyone leaves in a great fluster.

This abrupt ending is wholly unmotivated dramatically, but the playwright obviously felt that Act II had gone on long enough. With no more than 75 sentences of dialogue in the entire act, it remains a heavily slanted and sketchy portrait of life at the Vatican Court in 1495. But the redeeming qualities of this act—the discordant musical

elements, the nude scenes and wrestling matches—are precisely what make it important from the point of view of literary history. Panizza was among the first playwrights to introduce vaudeville elements into German drama; and while it cannot be said that he was influential in this regard, he did anticipate developments that were to come only several decades later.⁷

Act Three, Scene One

The central action is once again resumed in the first scene of the third act, by far the best in the entire drama. It is a continuation of the “Love Council,” but with one important addition, namely the Devil. It is really his scene, beginning with God’s words, “Friend, we have summoned you. . .” and ending with the three divinities giving the Prince of Hell a standing ovation. Many of his traits are freely borrowed from Goethe’s Mephistopheles, but he has been radically “humanized” in the hands of Panizza. His face has “a weather-beaten, worn-out, yellowish, and annoyed look about it. His gestures are reminiscent of an upper-class Jew” (p. 38). And like his colleagues in Heaven, he too bears the signs of age, though he has generally fared far better in this respect.

The deliberations have been moved from the main throne-room to “an intimate blue council chamber,” away from the public eye of angels, martyrs, apostles, and the like. The three divinities are at a total loss as to how mankind should be dealt with, and God begins by trying to explain to the Devil the nature of the “special mission” for which he has been summoned. But the Lord is too much of a simpleton and a prude to be able to express the problem and, after frantically searching for the proper words, turns to Christ: “My dear son, you tell him;—I can’t handle words properly;—I have always simply acted—never worried much about words” (pp. 38f.). Panizza here is ridiculing the popular notion that Christ functions as a kind of spokesman for God, a public relations expert who can project a popular image for mass consumption. In Christ’s longest speech of the entire play, Panizza has him carefully choosing his words and using the language of a seasoned diplomat:

We would like to utilize your assistance—in a matter—which is designed to provide as many benefits for you as for us—I

mean—which shall in no way alienate mankind from you—in respect to its worldly sphere,—I say this purposely in order to allay, from the very outset, any suspicion you may be harboring in this regard. . . on the contrary, which,—in a more comprehensive manner than ever before, will place this sphere—under your control:—We are dealing with a compromise—an agreement concerning the adjustment of the border—between our mutual, hitherto existing powers—which shall not infringe on either of the two contractual parties—and for which we are counting on your proven skill, your cunning, your tact, your—conciliatory solicitude, your—education, your—your—(begins to cough and lose his breath, moans and groans, falls back into his seat gasping; his eyes bulge out and his forehead perspires as he suffers an asthmatic attack.) (p. 39)

The author is usually inclined to view Christ in much the same manner as he regarded himself, namely as an utter failure at virtually everything, except martyrdom.

Thus it remains the task of Mary, the superior woman, to negotiate with the Devil and try to devise a means of punishing mankind for its rampant lust. She skillfully begins by attacking the Devil, blaming him for mankind's degenerate state of affairs, then throws him off guard by little flirtations that suggest he will be sexually rewarded for his efforts (p. 40). Her delicate diplomacy is almost undone by God's boorish tactlessness, for at the mere mention of Alexander's Easter supper, he suddenly bursts out in a thick Bavarian drawl, "Pfui Daifel!—Pfui Daifel!—Pfui Daifel!" (p. 40). Panizza's Devil, being far more emotional than Goethe's Mephistopheles, is on the verge of tears.

DEVIL very confused, angry, and hurt: . . . Please . . . under these circumstances. . . there is no point . . . in my remaining here. . . (stepping back, about to leave.)

GOD turning to the Devil and trying to salvage the situation: My God!—No!—No one was referring to you. . .

DEVIL piqued: Ah, *yes*. . .

GOD No, No!—And no again!—It wasn't so; . . . it just slipped out. . . the old habit. . . I forgot. . .

DEVIL returns, reserved but conciliatory, smiling bit-

terly as he nonchalantly flicks a speck of dust off his sleeve: Please, . . . please. . . (pp. 40f.)

Panizza's linguistic sensitivity is evident in his characters' use of names. Throughout the play, a number of the angels, divinities, and God himself casually swear by invoking the Lord's name in vain, implying that the word itself is quite meaningless. Significantly, it is the Devil who still strongly identifies with his name and who is justifiably piqued when it is invoked to express disgust. His strong sense of self-importance enables him to make the best of the situation, and he deftly forces God into the role of a guilty child.

Once Mary and the Devil have resumed their dialogue on an adult level, both God and Christ are unable to follow the conversation which is laced with sexual and often extremely subtle innuendoes. God characteristically stares bleary-eyed into space, while Jesus keeps his gaze fixed on his coquetting mother. The dialogue is skillfully structured to reveal the dominance relationship of these four individuals. While the Devil is clearly in command and makes most of the suggestions, they are subject to Mary's approval. God routinely agrees with all of her decisions, and Christ does his very best to second his father. This formalized pattern, repeated numerous times throughout the scene, is so rigid that the playful playwright need only vary it slightly to sustain the humor.

- DEVIL upon brief reflection: Should it be very sensitive?
- MARY pointing her handkerchief at the Devil, nodding forcefully to include the others: Indeed, it should be very sensitive.
- GOD stares bleary-eyed into space; he does not quite seem to have understood; finally croaks his assent in a thick, rasping voice: Yes, yes!
- CHRIST still gradually recovering from his attack, whispering: Yes, yes!
- DEVIL has been reflecting the whole time with his head lowered and two fingers on his lips: Should the thing be triggered by the deed?
- MARY Of course, of course it should!
- GOD still bleary-eyed: Of course!—Of course!
- CHRIST wants to say his two "of courses" but is too late and collides with the following speech of