

Mary's, who nonetheless continues, trying to brush her son aside with a pacifying stroke of her handkerchief; he follows her every move with a languishing look. (p. 42)

Like many persons raised in the austere Lutheran tradition, Panizza was outraged by Mary's rise to preeminence in Catholic dogma during the nineteenth century. His personal feelings of inferiority and dependence vis-à-vis women would, furthermore, tend to reinforce his caricature of Mary as the sly boss of Heaven. Similarly, his view of Christ is both a projection of his own personal inadequacy as well as a reflection of the nineteenth century's more naturalistic image of Jesus. Panizza, steeped in Bible lore from an early age, was well aware that he was not deviating significantly from a literal reading of the Gospels, where the Savior himself is quoted as saying, "The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do. . . I can of mine own self do nothing."⁸ Christ's behavior throughout the play remains perfectly consistent with this statement.

Despite the fact that Mary and the Devil are the two principals in this extraordinary scene, they are by no means consistently communicating on the same level. Whereas Mary is continually leering and winking at him, the Devil remains fairly cool and is far more interested in solving the given problem than in responding to Mary's advances. To such pregnant promises as "you can be certain of our pleasure," he merely "casts a short, dry look in Mary's direction, then sinks back into his previous meditation" (p. 42). Although it might be assumed that she is simply being shrewdly diplomatic in her own feminine way, her gestures indicate genuine sexual motivation. Panizza was a master at accurately portraying an individual's true psychological state by a few unconscious but highly revealing physical movements. Thus at the Devil's first mention of the term "sexual intercourse," she quite unthinkingly "edges forward on her throne." Even more revealing is the following little exchange, where the Devil brusquely and rather indignantly rejects her not altogether subtle allusion to fellatio:

DEVIL	repeating the new-born thought, as if to lay it all out once more in his mind: One would have to poison the secretion during sexual intercourse!
MARY	You mean the semen? (Dabs her mouth with

her handkerchief, as if she were swallowing something disagreeable.)
 DEVIL impatiently: No, no!— . . . (p. 43)

While it is not completely clear from this scene why the Devil remains so aloof, one could surmise that he has been in this situation before and has found Mary, for all her coquettishness, to be physically unapproachable. Besides, as the Prince of Hell, he has all the seductive beauties he can handle down in the underworld; why trifle with a middle-aged obscenity, especially one whose “father” is famous for his violent, uncontrollable rage?

At last the Devil decides that “the culprit who indulges his instincts with a carefree abandon shall be punished by a small by-product, by a something produced simultaneously with the semen and egg. . .so that the man can infect the woman, or the woman infect the man, or, ideally, both get infected together—unsuspecting—lost in their ecstasy—in the deception of their greatest joy—so that they will stumble into the dreadful brew babbling like children!!!” (p. 44). There is much of Panizza’s personal bitterness and *ressentiment* in these lines, providing an added dimension to the character of the Devil, by far the most complex figure in the drama. In the second scene of Act III, it becomes apparent that the Devil is something of an “evil scientist,” whose creative intelligence has never been adequately esteemed in the “heavenly” Establishment. He is a wholly unprincipled medical researcher who will commit any atrocity if it offers the possibility for his own personal gain. Rather than being the incarnation of evil, Panizza’s Devil is simply a very grotesque human being, ambitious but weak.

A final problem revolves around the possibility of redemption once a person has been infected with this new disease. The Devil concedes that it will hardly be possible for people’s souls to be saved once he has poisoned them physically, since “the soul is all part of it” (p. 46). But Mary’s stubbornness prevails. “They must also remain capable of being saved!” she insists, “if we can’t redeem people anymore, what will happen to the entire institution?” (pp. 44f.) Panizza here is strongly suggesting that the only function of religion, like that of any other outdated institution, is simply to perpetuate itself. Human beings are toys for the divinities to play with, and the three stages of their game are creation, vengeance, and redemption. The Devil would also like to keep the game going, and at last he agrees

to fill the difficult order. As he turns to depart for Hell, all three divinities joyfully stand up (as best they can) and quietly applaud him: "Bravo, Devil, bravo! Bravissimo!" (p. 48). Thus the Devil emerges from the "Love Council" as the unchallenged, openly acknowledged master of the universe. With his unique vitality, independence, and intelligence, he is the prime "supernatural force" and the only one still capable of creating anything at all.

Act Three, Scene Two

The second scene of Act III is set in Hell, to which the Devil descends down a dark tunnel on "a rickety, barricaded, frequently repaired wooden staircase" (p. 49). The Devil's personal quarters are in a gloomy room resembling a cellar, furnished with a few chests and a crude couch made of wattles and rushes. It is in these generally dismal surroundings that Panizza has set what is probably the longest soliloquy in nineteenth-century drama, extending the entire length of the scene for fifteen pages. From the very first sentence of his almost lyrical monologue we learn that the Devil, too, is a lonely, miserable dog.

There you sit, you dog, all alone back home again; deserted and despised by everyone; back from the audience; forefatherless fellow with neither respect nor prestige; you've just had another look at the gold-panelled chambers of the high and mighty. And you remain the same old bum, the scoundrel, the crooked rogue. And up there they can do whatever they please, no matter how gross, low, or mean it is, it's always noble and refined, just because it happens in the chambers of nobility. . . . If you were a duke, then even your misshapen leg would be ducal. And if you were only a door-keeper up there, your head and even your thoughts would be as heavenly and angelic as the clothes you'd be wearing. But you will always be a dog just the way you are now. (pp. 49f.)

The playwright has skillfully projected his own self-pity onto the figure of this bitter old Devil filled with the gnawing *ressentiment* of a frustrated social climber. Like Panizza and God the Father, he suffers from painful leg trouble, repressed aggression, an agonizing sense of

isolation and rejection. Virtually every male character Panizza has created is a tragic figure cursed with what was basically the author's own plight.

There is a crude dialectical structure to this scene, so that immediately following his effusion of self-pity, the Devil once again asserts his superiority over the inhabitants of Heaven. What sets him above the celestial divinities is precisely what enabled him to dominate the preceding scene, an earthy sense of reality coupled with a fierce drive toward intellectual productivity: "You are right in the center of the world; and your head contains the thoughts of the entire earth! . . . And you are happy; happy as the others can never be! Happy with this hole in the ground, this precious tunnel, this whiff of spice and earthiness, this down-to-earth smell that strengthens and toughens you, and produces thoughts, and forces you to work" (pp. 50f.). While this is certainly more than mere bravado, the Devil is, to a considerable extent, making a virtue out of necessity, since he never fully abandons his ardent desire for "heavenly" glory. But by assuming an attitude that comes close to the Protestant "work ethic," he can at least intermittently experience the joys of productivity and creativity. These are the very activities long since denied to the "heavenly" Establishment, which has become frozen in its impotence and "slave morality." It will be recalled that for Panizza, as well, "productivity proved to be the best antidote for all kinds of psychopathic fits."⁹

Thus the Devil goes to work and begins to think aloud how he might best poison mankind. He proceeds as methodically as a professional scientist, systematically posing questions as to the physiochemical nature of this contaminating potion. He also experiences the joyous satisfaction of a scientist once he has finally worked out a solution to the near-impossible: "First you have to make the thing so mild organically that their stomachs and livers can easily tolerate it, and at the same time embody it in a being who looks just like them.—My word!—And secondly: this being must be a woman! And the poison must flow down the usual channels!—And thirdly: this woman must be beautiful; and I must be her father!—Terrific! (rubs his hands) Now it's our turn to create!— (paces up and down excitedly for a long time)" (p. 53).

Gradually, however, the dialectical movement of the scene returns the Devil to his original posture of social and material *ressentiment*. "Well, and if I pull off this work of art," he muses, "what will I get for it?—Beware, my friend. This opportunity will never recur! Now

you can pull out that list of wishes you have been storing up for so long!" (p. 53). With this list of wishes, the playwright is able to present a remarkably full portrait of the Devil's aspirations and of his psychological make-up, in general. His demands include, in the following order, the repair of his wooden staircase, replacement of the trap-door with a more dignified access to Heaven, abolition of "this audience nonsense," institution of free access to Heaven, and finally: "He must freely let me print my books and permit their broadest possible circulation in Heaven and on earth. Without this, I won't even go to work. (bursting out:) If someone is thinking and is no longer allowed to communicate his thoughts to others, that is the most ghastly form of torture" (p. 54).

Although this at first sounds like the hyperbolic overstatement of a whining poet, one should not forget that legislated "moral" censorship affected Oskar Panizza as it did no other German writer at the end of the nineteenth century, completely demolishing both his career and his sanity. When he wrote these lines, the playwright had yet to spend a harrowing year in prison or have his entire estate confiscated. Literary activity was for him a form of therapy, the only way to overcome his perilous isolation, a "drop of pleasure which makes up for mountains of bitterness, and which is derived from the simple fact that others are re-thinking what you have thought before them—is that so difficult to understand?!" (p. 54). It was, and for more than two decades he was forced to endure this "most ghastly form of torture."

The demands that follow the ones listed above seem almost petty by comparison: improved ventilation, a few medals, brighter illumination, a better wardrobe, new furniture, a few warm blankets, and the like. Without realizing it, his wishes swell to preposterous and destructive proportions as he longs for incorporation into the court hierarchy ("at least into the lowest class"), a little "von" before his name, the possibility of marrying an angel of corresponding social rank, a gold sword-belt, the title of Chamberlain, and a ducal collar. At this point, the dialectical pendulum swings back again, he "suddenly stops, clenches his forehead with both hands, and screams like an animal: "Aah!—Aah!—Stay away!. . .It's coming!—It's got me!—You dog, didn't I tell you it would get you if you tried kicking over the traces! Filthy devil! [Pfui Deifel!] (spits out as if to rid himself of something inside) Filthy Devil! It's coming!—The nausea—it's got me!" (pp. 55f.). This extraordinary sequence climaxes in the Devil

vomiting on stage, another Panizza “first.” The punishment for Satan’s sin of pride has come under his own internal control, and this self-regulating mechanism very effectively keeps him on the proper path. One could hardly imagine a more drastic illustration of Goethe’s famous dictum, “Ein guter Mensch in seinem dunklen Drange / Ist sich des rechten Weges wohl bewußt” (*Faust*, ll. 328f.). Panizza’s Devil can be viewed as a radical and naturalistic embodiment of this “gut” wisdom.

As Faust falls asleep following the shattering insight into his ignominious limitations, so, too, does the Devil recompose himself after a similar experience by sleeping and dreaming. The words he utters upon awakening anticipate modern dream theory to an even greater extent than the passage cited by Freud from Act I. While he was asleep, a backdrop at the rear of the stage has exposed the women’s section of Hell. The Devil opens his eyes to find his wishes fulfilled: “My thoughts, you have speeded on ahead of me! . . . You have realized yourselves, my good thoughts!” His dreams have had a cathartic effect on him, and he emerges purged and ready to continue his work: “My base thoughts have gone into my stomach and made me ill.—That’s the way it should be!—You have done your penance—and now you are an honest fellow again!” (p. 56)

He proceeds to select a suitable woman from the Realm of the Dead, one who has proven herself as a paragon of beauty, seductiveness, and cruelty. The entire second half of this scene is taken up by interviews with famous ladies from history. The role assumed by the Devil appears to be a blend of personnel manager interviewing a prospective employee, and a psychiatrist going over a patient’s case history with her. This is decidedly one of the weakest segments of the play, being overly long, repetitive, and devoid of any dramatic tension. Since the entire scene is taken up by the Devil’s extended soliloquy, the interrogated women only respond to the extent of nodding or shaking their heads as he reviews their infamous lives.

The first four beauties are found to be wholly unsuitable for the mission. Helen and Phryne are too unaware, Héloïse is too loving (“I’d say you were ripe for Heaven!”), and Agrippina is obsessively ambitious (“I miss the really artistic impulse”) (pp. 59, 61). Dissatisfied with these ladies of classical antiquity, he takes another step beyond *Faust II* and conjures up a legendary seductress from the *New Testament*, Princess Salome. She is just the woman for the Devil, or rather, she is just the right combination of innocent child and savage

woman. Their child is destined to be The Woman of Act V.

It is likely that Panizza's conception of the Judaeian princess was colored by that of Oscar Wilde, whose one-act tragedy, *Salomé*, had just created a literary sensation in Europe. Denied a license in Great Britain by the Lord Chamberlain, it was printed in French (1893) and produced by Sarah Bernhardt in Paris (1894). Wilde's *Salomé* is a spoiled girl who would rather have Jokanaan beheaded than be denied the pleasure of kissing his mouth. Feelings of love are inconsequential compared with her desire to play with his body: "Ah! I have kissed thy mouth, Jokanaan. I have kissed thy mouth. There was a bitter taste on thy lips. Was it the taste of blood. . .? But perchance it is the taste of love. . . They say that love hath a bitter taste. . . But what of that? What of that? I have kissed thy mouth, Jokanaan."¹⁰ Panizza's *Salomé* attests to having much the same character, as she silently responds to the interrogating Devil:

And you had him give you a head?—(nods). . .why?—(she does not know)—To play with?—(hesitates a moment, then nods). . . His blood probably gushed out all over the platter. . . It touched your fingers?—(nods emphatically)—Did you find this agreeable or disagreeable?—(nods)—Yes, what?—Agreeable or disagreeable?—(she rubs her hands together)—It tickled you?—(nods very distinctly). . . Tell me, did you ever like or, as they say, love any of these people?— (does not know what to say, finally responds negatively)— Herod?—(negative)—John?—(negative)—Your mother?— (shrugs her shoulders; negative)—But the head you had cut off, that you liked?—(nods very distinctly). (pp. 62f.)

With this last sequence, *Salomé* has successfully passed the interview. The Devil leaps up with joy, wraps her lightly in his arms, and leads her off to his bedroom where she will "become the progenetrix of a fabulous breed, one with which no aristocrat will be able to compete!" (p. 63). He assures her that her pregnancy will not last more than a day, since his fiery temperament can compress conception and childbirth into a few brief hours. The act concludes with a naturalistic device reminiscent of Hauptmann's *Vor Sonnenaufgang* (1889). Just before the lights are extinguished and the curtain falls, "a piercing female scream can be heard in the distance," signaling to-

tal submission by the Judaeen virgin, the procreation of The Woman, and the birth of Panizza's curse, syphilis.

Act Four

The fourth act is devoted primarily to satirizing the "Virgin" Mary. The entire act consists of a brief scene set in her private pink boudoir. Surrounded by youthful angels in arty poses, she is indulging in one of her favorite pastimes: pornography. While Mary sits elegantly upon her throne, one of the angels reads aloud from Boccaccio's *Decameron*.¹¹ After listening to the first few pages, the Eternal Virgin's patience wears thin. "Aren't these two," she brusquely interrupts the reading angel, "ever going to get together?" (p. 66). After being told that there are still another twenty pages to go until the end of the story, she decides to skip over some of it and selects a passage where the angel is to resume reading. But she reveals her total illiteracy by pointing to the very passage where the angel had left off. As has been seen before, the playwright's religious satire is often simply the naturalistic portrayal of a nebulously accepted situation. Nobody would doubt that Mary was indeed illiterate, nor has there ever been any suggestion that one might find adult remedial reading classes in Heaven. But with so many educated angels in her entourage, it would not behoove her image as the Queen of Heaven to admit to her ignorance; consequently, she pretends, she plays games, she is a phoney.

The whole scene is thrown into confusion with the sudden appearance of The Woman in the room. She is described as "a young, blooming creature dressed in an all-white gown," with black hair and eyes "that betray a consuming but still latent sensuality" (p. 67). She is a younger version of Lust, the prostitute who was so heartily defended by Luther in *Der heilige Staatsanwalt*. The Woman's dazzling presence has a thoroughly unsettling effect on the Mother of God; she begins to tremble and scream hysterically: "Who let you in?—Where are you from?—Are you from down there?—Are you a deceased?—Or something better?—A saint?—What do you want here?—Are you trying to upstage me?—Who gave you the right. . .?" (p. 67). Her initial response to The Woman is a feeling that her feminine preeminence in Heaven is threatened.

Mary's feelings of being threatened are doubly linked to The

Woman's overpowering beauty. First of all, she fears the competition. When the Devil asks her whether she likes The Woman, Mary hesitates before admitting: "Like?—No, she's far too beautiful for that. This creature beats everything in Heaven and on Earth" (p. 68). Secondly, Mary seems to be afraid of how those in Heaven might react, including herself, to The Woman's inescapable attraction. In a scene closely paralleling God's sudden display of homosexual affection in Act I, Mary "devours The Woman with hungry eyes, then goes up to her in a sudden burst of passion and kisses her" (p. 69). If we view Wilde's *Salomé* as embodying the desire to possess utterly irresistible beauty, then we can say that her child, Panizza's *The Woman*, represents the fulfillment of this wish. Thus even Mary, whose heterosexual orientation had been established during the preceding acts, inexorably succumbs to The Woman's overpowering attraction.

Mary has trouble believing that "this promise of celestial beauty, this figure of superhuman goodness and mercy. . . shall poison and ruin mankind" (p. 70). The Devil, therefore, enlightens her with a lengthy discourse on the physical and emotional effects of his new poison. His lecture is both highly poetic and at the same time clinical, a novel style which he first developed in the early "hospital poems" of *Düstre Lieder*: "After two, three years his liver and the other large glands are like rocks in his body, and his mind turns to lighter foods; then his eye begins to annoy him, in another three months it's shut; after five, six years, convulsions shoot through his body like fireworks; he still takes walks and frequently checks to see whether he has any feet left on his body. . ." (p. 71). This description affects Mary in the very same way that the dying patients had affected the poet/physician in "Das grosse Haus." She turns away in disgust, feeling both revulsion and empathy with these hapless victims.

Her concern for the future plight of mankind abruptly vanishes when she hears the sound of her son approaching. She rushes to the door shouting, "No, my son should not come in, cannot, may not come in" (p. 72). Like Wilde's *Salomé*, she disregards the suffering of others in her quest for a "perfect love." Anything would be better than to have her son see *The Woman*. In a frantic effort to get rid of *The Woman*, Mary gives the Devil *carte blanche*, permitting him to unleash on mankind the disease which only a few moments ago had evoked such revulsion in her. "Get that Woman out of the house!" she shrieks, "Do what you want with her; just get out, out!—Now!" The traditionally merciful Mary has become a rather bloody one in

Panizza's hands, with many more hideous deaths on her conscience than little Salomé ever dreamed of. From the playwright's point of view, the *mater gloriosa*, while tenderly caring for her son, had ignored the pleas of mankind ravaged by a dreadful disease for the past 400 years.

Thus the blame for bringing syphilis down upon the world is evenly shared by the divinities, the Devil, and the excesses of mankind itself (as epitomized by the orgiastic celebration of Easter at the Vatican court of Alexander VI). In effect, the author puts the principal blame on the Roman Catholic Church and its divinities; they, in collaboration with the Devil, are responsible for the vast suffering throughout the world and for the misery of Oskar Panizza, in particular. Such inordinate bias was undoubtedly the product of a disturbed individual, and even Panizza's most sophisticated readers found his anti-Catholic rage unsettling. In a discussion of his friend's savage forays against the Roman Church, Bierbaum wrote: "He is not farsighted enough. What is rebelling in him is actually the Lutheran, not the really free individual."¹² After reading *Das Liebeskonzil*, Bierbaum was even more emphatic: "We do not see a *great* person behind this work, but rather someone who is limited in more than one sense."¹³

Mary dominates Act IV from beginning to end, and even the Devil proves to be no match for her. Like a groveling dog he attempts to submit his list of wishes: "Dear Mary, Everlasting Virgin, Most Blessed Mother of God, I have a few requests, I think I deserve. . ." (p. 72). But she merely brushes him aside with the promise of a new staircase and sends him and his daughter on their way. Freedom of thought and equal rights will remain forever denied to him, while he continues to serve his degenerate masters. He politely bows before taking leave, offering no more protest than a deep sigh.

Act Five

By the time Panizza had reached the fifth act, the quality of his dramatic writing had reached a definite low point. There is none of the pointed dialogue which was laced throughout the first part of the play. Nor are we treated to a spectacle such as the one in Act II. In the first scene, we see the Pope and his entourage attending a mass that is being celebrated in a dark hall illuminated only by four can-

dles. The little children are quarreling over some candy, the ladies are engaged in subdued conversations, and Alexander is busy talking to his son, Cesare. As the words, "Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi," are faintly heard from the altar, The Woman suddenly appears at the rear portal, her white gown radiating a brightness "that is independent of the candlelight" (p. 76). Sudden pandemonium breaks out, there is a free-for-all ruckus as the men struggle to capture the bright figure of irresistible beauty. With the help of a few armed associates, Alexander manages to lead her out the door and into his private chambers.

The final scene is set the following morning on a street in front of the Vatican Palace. The Woman quietly emerges looking thoroughly unkempt and disheveled, battered and exhausted. She has acquired some men's slippers on her feet and some diamond jewelry on her ears and neck. As the papal whore looks timidly about, wondering where to go next, the Devil hastily walks up to her and delivers his final orders: "Now to the cardinals! Then to the archbishops! Then to the ministers! First to the ministers of the Italian states; then to the ministers from abroad. Then to the camerlingo! . . . Then through all the monasteries! Then on to the rest of the human rabble!—Hustle along now, and stick to the proper sequence!" (p. 78). These are the only words spoken in the entire scene, and as The Woman slowly strides away to carry forth her deadly mission, the final curtain falls on *Das Liebeskonzil*. This last act is of the same inferior quality as that found in *Der heilige Staatsanwalt*, and it is especially unfortunate coming after four acts so striking for their wit and originality.

Despite its dramatic insufficiencies, the final act does reveal whom Panizza held responsible for his suffering. With the exception of the Devil, all the really destructive characters in the play are women: Mary, Salome and The Woman are all archetypal females for whom the suffering of men was irrelevant. If, for a moment, we accept the playwright's characters at their face value, then we readily find that the basic relationships between God, Devil, and man are the same as in Goethe's *Faust*. In both plays, a rather passive God exercises power over his creatures by using the Devil as an ever-present, threatening force to keep mankind on the proper path. Goethe enjoyed one of the fullest and most successful lives in history, and it would, therefore, only be natural for him to affirm human existence together with the basic life-processes. For both Goethe and Panizza, these life-forces are manifest most clearly in the effect that women

have on men. However, they are dramatically opposed when it comes to their interpretations of this effect. For Goethe, this mysterious force was heaven.¹⁴ Panizza, on the other hand, not only regarded women as a threat to his physical and emotional well-being, but also as the immediate cause of all his suffering. Consequently, his view of God the Father, the ultimate source of his misery, is simply reversed. Panizza's is a post-Nietzschean view of the Christian deity; the eternal wisdom and self-confidence of Goethe's Lord have been replaced by a vindictive old cripple, obsessed with punishing men for enjoying themselves.

Although the Devil is strongly patterned after Goethe's Mephistopheles, Panizza has considerably "humanized" him by exposing the Prince of Hell as a dog, condemned to live forever in a miserable cellar and to have his genius exploited by the "heavenly" Establishment. Like Mephistopheles, the Devil is defeated by the superior power of a woman. At the end of both plays we find Mary triumphing over the Devil, but Panizza portrays her as a heroine more to be pitied or ridiculed than envied. None of the characters in Panizza's tragedy could escape what he considered the universal condition; whether male or female, they must all lead lonely existences, all of them frustrated dogs and bitches. It is indeed a bleak picture, and one directly contrary to Goethe's joyous affirmation of life.

In his most mature works, Panizza's sense of personal failure is reflected in a ubiquitous pessimism. Both the strength and the insistence of his negativism anticipate the systematic nihilism of a twentieth-century modern, Samuel Beckett. Both writers are chiefly known for their great tragi-comedies, plays in which the characters universally lead lonely, frightened, frustrated lives. Their emotional isolation produces an almost perpetual state of boredom, and they resort to games, harmless or cruel, to help while away the eternal ennui. For both Beckett's and Panizza's characters, the dominant experience is one of mental or physical pain. Only the "highest" mental and the "lowest" physical games seem capable of momentarily extinguishing this pain; but the dominant experience remains one of suffering and emptiness. In this context, the image of an all-loving and omnipotent "God the Father" can be viewed as little more than a cruel joke.

Later Editions

To the second edition of *Das Liebeskonzil* (1896), the playwright added a verse “dedication” in the form of a parody and refutation of Goethe’s “Zueignung.” In these stanzas, he challenges the validity of the Weimar classic’s philosophy and language, suggesting that his own play is a modern “answer” to *Faust*:

“Ihr naht Euch wieder, schwankende Gestalten,
Die früh sich einst dem trüben Blick gezeigt?”—
Jawohl!—Doch sind es andere Gewalten,
Anders das Lied, das ihre Seele geigt.
Wir hüllen uns nicht in antike Falten,
Wo sich vom Wuchs der schöne Waden zeigt.
Wir springen nackig heute aus dem Bette,
Uns präsentier’nd als schlottrige Skelette.

“Ihr bringt mit Euch die Bilder froher Tage?”—
Behüte!—In die *Zukunft* schau’n wir aus.
Was *kommt*—das ist uns heut’ die nächste Frage;
Mit Elegieen bleibt uns hübsch zu Haus.
Was soll um das Vergangene die Klage,
Und ähnliches Gesäusel und Gesaus?
Heut’ helfen nicht Sentimentalitäten!
Was tot, ist tot!—Was Leben hat, soll reden!

“Sie hören nicht die folgenden Gesänge,
Die Seelen, denen ich die ersten sang?”—
Nein, nein!—inzwischen gab’s ein arg’ Gedränge,
Das Harfenton und Lyraschlag verschlang.
In dem entsetzlich blutigem Gedränge
Hinfiel, wem Obenbleiben nicht gelang.
Da starben Dichter, Bücher unter’m Schlachthauch;
Verleger selbst wie Cotta sind verkracht auch!

—Wie? sprecht Ihr nicht die Sprache mehr von
Goethe?—
Nein! eine andere Sprache kam herauf.
Der Goethe ist uns heute zu Götede,
Zu weichlich seiner Aeolsharfe Lauf.
Minister nicht—das Volk führt heut’ die Rede:
Am Himmel stieg ein Flammenzeichen auf:

Wir wollen heute schreien, rufen, klagen,
Und uns'rer Seele tiefsten Jammer sagen! (p. 7)

As this poem clearly shows, Panizza was well aware of the fact that he had created a truly revolutionary psychological drama, and it is thus all the more surprising that he never again attempted to write another play in a similar vein.

Right after the dedication, Panizza added yet another parody of *Faust*, a prologue based on Goethe's "Vorspiel auf dem Theater." As a parody it is distinctly inferior to his other attempts in this direction, primarily because he seems to have difficulty in attacking Goethe's point of view. His "Direktor" is just as materialistic as Goethe's, and both "Dichter" are reluctant to present their literary creations to the devouring masses. A direct comparison of these parallel passages is illuminating.

Goethe:

DICHTER

O sprich mir nicht von jener bunten Menge,
Bei deren Anblick uns der Geist entflieht. . .
Ach! was in tiefer Brust uns da entsprungen,
Was sich die Lippe schüchtern vorgelallt,
Mißraten jetzt und jetzt vielleicht gelungen,
Verschlingt des wilden Augenblicks Gewalt. (ll. 59f., 67-70)

Panizza:

DICHTER

Muß, was der Dichter schaut in ernster Stunde,
Wenn er erschüttert, fiebernd und allein,
Denn auf die Bühne gleich, in aller Munde,
Und ausgeschrien auf dem Markte sein?
Die Masse, mit dem Bösen stets im Bunde,
Bläst gleich den Funken auf zum Feuerschein. . . (p. 13)

While Panizza's Poet uses the same meter to express a like sentiment, he has been given an added political dimension. He is a reactionary, staunchly opposed to the slogan expressed in the "Zueignung": "das Volk führt heut' die Rede."

What Panizza has done is to retain the basic constellation of

Goethe's "Vorspiel auf dem Theater," while adding certain political overtones to give the prologue a more revolutionary thrust. In other words, Panizza was not thinking of himself when he wrote the lines for the Poet, but rather of Goethe, the conservative who ultimately sided with the monarchists after the French Revolution. Panizza's Direktor is also cast in a political mold by presenting him as an entrepreneur who collaborates with a corrupt and repressive legal apparatus.

Auch der Zensur muß ich's noch unterbreiten,
 Sonst streicht sie mir die besten Stellen fort.
 "Umsturz" und "Engelsturz" zu unterscheiden,
 Ist auf der Polizei just nicht der Ort. (p. 14)

For the most part, however, Panizza's prologue is a poorly reworked version of Goethe's, and might just as well serve to introduce *Faust*. Conversely, Goethe's "Vorspiel auf dem Theater" could function equally well as a prelude to *Das Liebeskonzil*. A detailed discussion of this curious correspondence is not within the scope of this study, and only the last four lines of the "Vorspiel auf dem Theater" will be cited as an illustration:

So schreitet in dem engen Bretterhaus
 Den ganzen Kreis der Schöpfung aus
 Und wandelt mit bedächt'ger Schnelle
 Vom Himmel durch die Welt zur Hölle. (ll. 239-242)

Other than these rather substantial additions at the beginning of the play, the second edition includes a slight strengthening of the Pope's last speech in Act II, and minor changes in the Devil's scene in Act III.¹⁵ A third edition of *Das Liebeskonzil* was published in 1897, and contained more extensive textual revisions, as well as an introductory note. This preface, written by Panizza in Zürich on September 4, 1897, tells us more about the author's state of mind than it does about the play which it precedes:

The author owes a few words of explanation in regard to this third edition. The public may have already wondered about the fact that this book, though confiscated by the district attorney, continues to be published again and again. It probably has already assumed that the author is crazy.

However, that is not the case. The public simply has no idea of the circumstances under which an author produces and publishes the contents of his inspiration. It simply does not know that the jewel which he alone possesses, and which enables him, independently of all other factors that might come into consideration, to follow only his inspiration and bring it to full expression: *the divine right of poets*. The divine right with its weighty obligations, its never-ending, continuous efforts and labors, with its terrible responsibility to God alone, from which no human being, no district attorney, no parliament, no *Volk* can absolve him. It is this jewel, which certainly was more or less known before, but has only recently been comprehended in utter clarity by authors, as well as explained to the people. It would, therefore, be good if the public, the Reichstag, the ministers, the princes, the Kaiser, and the district attorney accepted our writings for what they are, as something willed by God, and not waste time asking questions and grumbling.

Respectfully,

Oskar Panizza,
Poet by Divine Right

While the divine right of poets is an obvious spoof on the Kaiser, Panizza's playful megalomania is but a product of his colossal paranoia: his constant fear that higher authorities were everywhere out to catch and punish him. Perhaps even more revealing, his mental stability has deteriorated to the point where he feels constrained to convince people that he is really not crazy.

Besides the addition of a foreword, the third edition contains four new pages preceding the reading of Boccaccio at the beginning of Act IV. The scene shows Mary listening to her angels, all young pupils from Tyrolia, reciting the Ave Maria for her in a thick Bavarian drawl: "Gä-grüßt saist du Marea, Du best voller Gnaden, der Härr ist mit Dir, Du best gebenedaiet unter den Waibern, und gebenedaiet ist die Frucht Deines Laibes, Jäsus Christus—Hailge Marea, Mutter Gottes, bett für uns arme Sündärr, jätzt und in der Stunde des Abstärbens" (p. 81). Mary is aghast at the way these pupils are mechanically reciting the prayer with an eye to "getting finished as quickly as possible" (p. 82). A tall, emaciated, bitter-looking teacher responds that their throats have been definitively shaped as a result

of one thousand years' practice. The narrow-mindedness of this under-fed teacher and his empty-headed pupils appalls Mary to the point of making her sick: "God, I'm up to here with this Catholicism!" (p. 83). The entire little scene seems quite gratuitous and too specifically anti-Bavarian within the context of the whole drama.

The last edition of *Das Liebeskonzil* to appear during the author's lifetime was published by the Gesellschaft Münchner Bibliophilen in 1913. Based on the text of the third edition, this private printing was a very exclusive issue limited to only fifty copies. What makes this edition even more of a collector's item than the previous three combined is the fact that it includes nine pen-and-ink drawings by the noted artist Alfred Kubin. It is questionable whether the author ever saw or was even aware of this deluxe, bibliophilic edition of the work that had contributed so heavily to his fame and ruin.

Ein guter Kerl

Early in 1895, soon after the first publication of *Das Liebeskonzil*, Panizza wrote a "tragic scene in one act," *Ein guter Kerl*. He sold the play for a thousand marks to a producer in Munich, Emil Meßthaler, whose ensemble first presented it on October 11, 1895, at the Corona Theater in Leipzig. The author was incarcerated in Amberg at the time, and was understandably disappointed at not being able to attend his own first premiere. According to Lippert, the production of this playlet had a great impact on the playwright, who "now believed he had attained the highest peak as a dramatist."¹⁶ Though it received mildly favorable notices, the play faded quickly and does not seem to have been produced in the twentieth century.

Ein guter Kerl is a dialogue between a middle-aged mother, Frau Soltenbank, and her eldest of two sons, Gustav. Gustav has been seeking the dominant role in the family ever since his father committed suicide. He is an aggressive man of affairs, a businessman who would like to be able to invest his younger brother Hermann's inheritance in his own business. Hermann plays the Tasso to his older brother's Antonio. Hermann's speculations have nothing to do with money; he has a passionate interest in astronomy and has already made minor contributions in the new field of solar photoanalysis. Hermann resembles his late father, while Gustav is more like his mother, whom he adores: "You recognize your flesh and blood in

me. . . Let them be with their marriages!—it's all phoney!—it's nothing but copula" (p. 15). Gustav's possessive love for his mother simply will not tolerate the competition of his younger rival; one mother should have one son: "We belong together—I am you, and you are I—but he (pointing to Hermann's room) is a stranger" (p. 16). According to his plan, Hermann should either get a job with Boch & Co. or emigrate to America.¹⁷ Frau Soltenbank is not inclined to oppose her eldest son, but merely sighs and calls Hermann "a good fellow." Before long, Hermann comes home, finds a threatening note next to a pistol on his desk, and kills himself with the same weapon his father had used. Gustav is the obvious victor.

There is nothing revolutionary about the ancient topic of sibling rivalry, and the play's fateful ending is in the worst tradition of Zacharias Werner and the *Schicksalsdrama*. Nevertheless, the play is something of a novelty in several respects. First of all, it is unique among Panizza's plays in that it is the only one dealing with characters taken directly out of his own life. Lippert knew his ward well enough to recognize Panizza's eldest brother Felix in the portrait of Gustav, while Hermann and Frau Soltenbank correspondingly resemble Oskar and Frau Panizza.¹⁸ Secondly, the basic theme of the play anticipates the Oedipal patricide which dominates so much of Expressionist drama. Because the playwright lacked the experience of having a father, Panizza's hero is thwarted by a father surrogate, a brother who strongly resembles the despised father. The end-effect is the same—the father or father surrogate must be forcefully removed before the son can seize the dominant position. In German drama before Panizza, sons did not kill their rivals in order to assume virtual possession of their mothers. The conception of *Ein guter Kerl* is more than a casual novelty: the playwright anticipated aspects of post-Freudian Expressionist drama by roughly twenty years.

Part of the demonstrative audience that attended the premiere in Leipzig had come expecting a sensational play on the order of *Das Liebeskonzil*, and was consequently disappointed to find what was little more than a 23-page dialogue between a mother and her son. From a dramatic point of view, Panizza's "tragic scene" is just that, it is only the final scene of a tragedy, and nothing more. Had Panizza written a full-length drama instead of merely the final scene, he might have created a literary sensation of more lasting import than *Das Liebeskonzil*. But despite the play's insufficiencies, its unique and novel conception did not go unnoticed by the critics. The *Berliner*

Börsen-Courier, for instance, wrote that “this little work is a genuine ‘Panizza,’ original both in form and content.” The reviewer went on to praise this singular play as “a work. . .which. . .can only be found in the realm of one of those rare people, whose paths never and nowhere touch those of other people, one of those ‘Sirius’ people, who so often on our planet are forced to atone for the fact that—they are simply different from the others.”¹⁹ The following year, Meßthaler published *Ein guter Kerl* as the second volume of his modern drama series. On the book’s cover is a signed photograph of the author, but that added feature does not seem to have helped the play, which has never since been republished.

Nero

Panizza’s last drama, *Nero* (1898), is a disappointment in every respect. The playwright did not continue in the new directions he had charted for himself in *Das Liebeskonzil* or *Ein guter Kerl*; instead, he tried to write a historical drama that is reminiscent of Hebbel more than anyone else. *Nero* was Panizza’s attempt to outdo the great German tragedians at their own art, and represents his one and only effort at writing “high” tragedy. The play deals with the last year of one of Rome’s most infamous emperors, whose political, emotional, and physical downfall is depicted in five weighty acts. The script calls for close to fifty speaking roles and a plethora of lavish sets; of Panizza’s four plays, this one would seem to have had the least chance of ever being produced.

There are so few laudable aspects of *Nero*, either as dramatic writing or as a potential theatrical experience, that even the author himself was forced to admit the impossibility of ever writing a successful play. However, this stale historical drama acquires a certain psychological fascination when viewed not as the decline and fall of a Roman emperor, but as the disintegration of Oskar Panizza. *Nero* is depicted as a man of inordinate ambition and an insatiable hedonist. At times he is a radical idealist with dreams of transforming the Empire into a paradise. But more often he seeks to feed his ego with vain artistic ambitions. A rank dilettante who fancies himself to be the poet laureate of Rome, he is a man perpetually out of touch with reality. *Nero*’s passions are both powerful and uncompromising. He feels threatened by his mother and has her put to death. He loves

men, women, and children with a passion that camouflages his emotional uninvolvedness, almost preferring the company of courtesans; he blindly hates the Christians, whose numbers are multiplying and thus threatening the very foundations of his Empire. Like Panizza, Nero attempted to fashion his life as if it were a work of art, and met with disaster. Superficially, both men were betrayed by hostile powers, nebulous forces which opposed them for either personal or ideological reasons. Even more important, however, were the personal shortcomings which led to their demise. These personal "flaws" are most clearly manifest in their extreme isolation (fear of others) and their intimations of insanity (fear of self).

Nero is depicted as a man plagued by insomnia, headaches, general pains, hallucinations, and an overpowering fear of being ridiculed. In terms closely paralleling those used in Panizza's autobiographical sketch (1904) to describe his own auditory hallucinations, the terrified Nero recounts how he is being tormented: "I hear myself cursed, my name besmirched as even the lowliest slave would not call me!—(covers his head) 'Fiend!' [Scheusaal!]—it shrieks through the whole palace—through all the rooms—through the gardens—out of every hole—every flame cries 'Dog!'—" (p. 72). Panizza's view of the world is still from a dog's perspective, and by 1898 he was beginning to be hounded by madness. At the end of Act IV, after repeatedly hallucinating loud curses directed at himself, "Nero stares at the wall with wide-open eyes, staggers backwards, suddenly turns around, covers his head, and finally collapses in the middle of the hall, whimpering loudly" (p. 80). Nero's life comes to an end because he has lost control; forces both from the outside and from within conspire to rob him of his sanity. Once his sense of reality has become sufficiently impaired, he is suddenly as vulnerable as any mad dog. It is hardly a coincidence that several years later, Oskar Panizza was committed to a mental hospital after having been "molested" for months by auditory hallucinations of a similar import.

The total literary and theatrical failure of *Nero* is only fitting, for the work deals with the utter failure of Panizza, the man and the artist. Whether or not this represented a successful fusion of form and content, was likely to have been of little concern to the author at this point. Nero's fate clearly pointed in the direction toward which the hellish nightmare was beckoning him, a vision whose clarity and insistence suggest that the playwright was no longer able to fully distinguish between reality and paranoid fantasy.