

THE LUCID MADMAN IN CONTEMPORARY EUROPEAN DRAMA:  
An Analysis of Four Plays by Dürrenmatt, Frisch and Camus

by

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## Abstract

Although the theme of madness has been of concern to writers of all ages, there is a perceptible change in the madness of the dramatic character of the twentieth century from that of the past. This thesis is an attempt to analyse that phenomenon as it is manifested in a number of characters of twentieth century drama.

The introduction contains a brief outline of the history of madness in society, and a general discussion as to how it is reflected in literature, from Biblical times to the present. It is found that writers make little attempt to explain the madness of a literary character, other than by attributing to him specific personal reasons for his behaviour; i.e. disappointment in love.

The characters of twentieth century drama, however, are found to be not "mad" in the same way; their madness is linked to their relationship with the rest of society. Thus, a character who considers the rest of society mad, and acts in a way which counteracts that society, is considered mad by those around him. However, to the audience or reader, who are made to recognize the motives for his behaviour, the character is not necessarily mad, and in fact it may be, the playwright implies, that the people who accept the values of the society as absolute who are "mad."

By discussing principally "madmen" of four recent dramas: Romulus der Große (1956) and Die Physiker (1962) by Friedrich

Dürrenmatt, Graf Öderland (final version 1961) by Max Frisch, and Albert Camus' Caligula (1944), as well as making peripheral references to other dramas in the Conclusion, definite patterns of behaviour emerge. The "madman" is judged in ways which are not understood by his contemporaries. He is generally more intelligent, more perceptive than the other members of his society, and has perceived a truth which is hidden from others. In revolting against a society whose values he cannot accept, he is making what he considers a positive step towards improving in some way the quality of life. (In this respect he is perhaps different from "madmen" of previous literature who are presented as having chosen to opt out.) In each case the revolt fails, leading to chaos or a reimposition of the old system. Despite the failure of the revolt to achieve permanent change, each hero is found to be an idealist oblivious to the reality around him rather than a "madman."

The breakdown of traditionally accepted norms such as religion, has meant that in the twentieth century there are no absolute standards of behaviour. Sanity thus becomes a relative concept. This thesis attempts to explore that nebulous and shifting area between madness and sanity as it is reflected in modern drama.

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The Lucid Madman in Contemporary European Drama

Or perhaps they ordered me--dispatched me--forced me to do something which I couldn't bear. No, there is not a single thing which might not have happened to me--everything and even more than everything is possible. But suppose I am not in a hospital and nothing abnormal has happened to me. All right ... and yet ... Oh, how many insanities have I taken part in?

Ohhh ...

Even though I was the most healthy ... the most rational  
The most balanced person  
Others forced me to commit  
Atrocious acts, murderous acts,  
Insane, moronic, and yes, licentious acts ...

This raises a simple question: If in the course of several years a person fulfills the function of a madman, is he not then really a madman? And what does it matter that I am healthy if my actions are sick--eh, Johnny? But those who forced me to commit these insanities were also healthy

And sensible  
And balanced ... Friends, companions, brothers--so much  
Health  
And such sick behavior? So much sanity  
And yet so much madness? So much humanity

And yet so much inhumanity? And what does it matter if taken separately each of us is lucid, sensible, balanced, when taken altogether we are nothing but a gigantic madman... who furiously

Writhes about, screams, bellows and blindly  
Rushes forward, overstepping his own bounds  
Ripping himself out of himself ... Our madness  
Is outside ourselves, out there... There, there, out there.

Withold Gombrowicz, The Marriage, Act II

## Chapter One: Introduction

The man whose consciousness does not correspond to that of the majority is a madman; and the old habit of worshipping madmen is giving way to the new habit of locking them up.

G. B. Shaw

For centuries, the theme of madness has haunted man's imagination, holding a special fascination for people who recognize the fragility and vulnerability of the faculty of human reason. The concept of madness, except in cases of clinical insanity, is always relative to the society which defines it, and has changed and broadened considerably over the years, varying in degree and definition from folly or excess, to extremism of any kind. Similarly, attitudes to madmen and consequently the image of people defined as "mad" have altered a great deal. The wide range of mad figures in literature reflects the constant preoccupation with the theme by writers of all cultures and all ages.

This diversity of course also reflects the difficulties involved in trying to arrive at a conclusive definition of the term "madness." The idealistic eccentricity of Don Quixote, the blind passion of Phèdre, the gentle insanity of Ophelia, the rage of Othello are all reflections of various faces of the prism of madness. These characters are all mad; they have gone beyond the boundaries of what is accepted as "normal" behaviour. Their creators were not concerned with a clinical study, but rather their sensitive intuitive insights into human behaviour were made without the aid of

psychological apparatus, and provide perhaps a greater emotional impact on the reader.

Abnormal behaviour is almost impossible to define, as there is no clearcut definition of normal or ideal behaviour. It is especially difficult because concepts of normal behaviour change with time and the society; madness is always relative to the times and conduct of one's contemporaries. Horst Geyer, in working with the problem of insanity in literature, emphasizes this particular problem:

Zwecks Lösung unseres Problems wird gern mit dem Begriff der Norm gearbeitet; das hilft uns aber nicht weiter. Was ist denn "normal"? Der Durchschnitt einer Bevölkerung oder besser ihr durchschnittliches Verhalten? Ein solcher Maßstab wird sich im Grunde als eine petitio principii erweisen. Jaspers hat in ähnlichen Zusammenhang das Witzwort zitiert: "Normal ist leichter Schwachsinn."<sup>1</sup>

Of course this definition leaves much to be desired; deviation from the average, statistical norm could be crime or genius as well as madness. In the 20th century, psychologists have suggested several other criteria which will be useful in this definition of madness in literary characters. Personal adjustment, the degree to which a person can cope with his problems, is one indication of normal behaviour. However, it is inadequate as a definition because it does not take into account the rest of the community. James C. Coleman, a professor of psychology in Los Angeles, makes an important point:



A large part of the normality or abnormality of a person's behaviour depends on whether it furthers or blocks the needs and purposes of the society of which he is a part. The behaviour of the successful criminal is considered abnormal, since it hurts the group. So our norms must include the factor of social adjustment: individuals should fit in with and contribute to the values, purposes, and activities of the group.

But what if the group condones concentration camps, or slavery, or racial prejudice? With the increasing knowledge of group behaviour supplied by the social sciences, we have come to realize that a society can be as "sick" as an individual. But there still are differences of opinion as to what constitutes the most desirable form of social organization and what types of individual behaviour are most conducive to group well-being and progress.<sup>2</sup>

This is particularly appropriate to this discussion. A character who judges the rest of society insane, and acts in a way contrary to that society's interests is judged insane by others. But the reader and audience, aware of the character's motivation, cannot be so quick to judge him. As commonly held attitudes and opinions change, so does the line which separates those who are "mad" from those who are not; a line which is often exceedingly fine.

It is exactly this fine line with which this essay will deal. As a first step towards setting the limits of this discussion, I must state that I am not concerned with characters who are clinically mad. I do not intend to discuss psychiatric descriptions of mania, schizophrenia, paranoia, hysteria, delirium or the like. The dramatic characters in this essay are all mad in the eyes of society.

But a closer examination of them reveals a motivation that is clearly articulated, and with which the audience viewing the plays in question generally feels some measure of sympathy. Hence the term "lucid madman."

It is the question of motivation which is central to the problem as I intend to approach it; motivation on the part of the character to act as he does, and motivation on the part of the author in using that particular figure. What does the "madman" do that is so offensive or threatening to his contemporaries? What relation has his madness to what he says? And why does the author use him rather than another character to express his views?

The image of a lucid and articulate man who is either defined as mad by society, or defines himself as mad recurs again and again in literature. This is an important distinction from the manic depressive, schizophrenic, or other clinically insane individual of psychiatric studies. There are those who are a threat to society by their very perceptiveness and awareness of what is wrong with society. When society defines someone as being mad, it renders that person impotent; it invalidates his criticism and no longer has to deal with him as a viable force; hence, for example, the policy of some dictatorial governments of disposing of political opponents by imprisoning them in mental asylums. This is one of the most effective ways of silencing an individual, as those in power do not criticize his ideas as such, but rather attack his competence.

to expound them. Writers such as Anton Chekhov (Pavillon #6), Valery Tarsis (Pavillon #7), and Peter Weiss (Marat/Sade) are obviously conscious of this problem.

The other side of that coin is the character who defines himself as mad in some way, and for some particular purpose. An extension of the court jester known in history and literature for centuries, this character gains a good deal of freedom by hiding behind the mask of madness. The court fool could speak the truth to his master even when it expressed criticism, and remain completely immune to punishment. Shakespeare's Touchstone (As You Like It) is a dramatic representation of this historic character. In the two plays by Dürrenmatt discussed in this essay, the hero plays the part of the fool or madman, thereby gaining freedom to act as he wishes, without being held responsible for his actions. The self-denoted fool is not expected to obey any code, and therefore can speak and act in ways for which others would be punished.

It might be useful at this point to sketch briefly the ancestry of the figure of the madman as it appears in literature before trying further to define the figure as it appears in twentieth century literature. While fully aware of the pitfalls of generalizations, I intend to look briefly at the way various societies have related to madness, and how this relationship found expression in works of art.

Passages in the Bible reflect the attitudes of the ancient Hebrews to madness; mental disorders were attributed to possession by

demons and evil spirits. In Mark 5: 1-13, there is the story of how Christ healed a madman by transferring the evil spirits that inhabited his body to herd of pigs, which then rushed into a lake and were drowned. Madness was associated with the devil (i.e. withdrawal of God's protection), animality and uncleanness.

There is another important consideration of madness in the Bible which is more relevant to this discussion; that is, Christ's behaviour in relation to the society in which he lived. In John 10: 20, we learn that some of the Jews did consider him mad: "And many of them said, He hath a devil and is mad; why hear ye him?" His behaviour in the temple, as reported by Mark, would today certainly result in his undergoing a psychiatric examination: "And Jesus went into the temple and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of them that sold doves, and would not suffer that any man should carry any vessel through the temple" (Mark 2: 15-16). From the point of view of his contemporaries, he was mad; an understanding of the reasons for his actions now results in a different judgement. Clearly, the concept of madness is relative, depending on the society which defines it. As Nedd Willard comments in his work on genius and madness:

Le génie et la folie sont des concepts établis  
par la société en vertu seulement de la définition  
qu'elle a donné du comportement de l'individu  
vis-a-vis d'elle. Elle peut en faire des rois,

des saints, des prophètes ou bien les condamner  
à la captivité et aux chaînes; c'est toujours  
à la société et à elle seule de fixer leur rôle.  
Cependant, elle peut changer radicalement d'attitude.<sup>3</sup>

There are frequent references to madness and madmen in the Greek and Latin literatures. The general view was that madness meant possession by a higher spirit. It was common to attribute what would otherwise be inexplicable to divine or supernatural intervention. Madness was generally regarded as a punishment by the gods for those who had angered them in some way. Thus, as George Rosen points out in his book Madness in Society, Phaedra's madness is attributed by Euripides to Pan, Hecate, Cybele and the Corybantes in Hippolytus.<sup>4</sup> However, madness was also sometimes a sign of being chosen by a god to serve under him, or to have particular powers denied to others. Rosen explains:

Where madness is considered for the most part as possession by a divine power or being, it is not surprising to find the mentally disordered linked with the supernatural world and viewed with the awe inspired by the mysterious and the inexplicable. Because of its link with the supernatural, mental derangement set the sufferer apart from his fellows. The mentally afflicted individual might be considered in a sense above ordinary men, even sacred, for under appropriate circumstances he might display extraordinary powers, including the gift of prophecy.<sup>5</sup>

It is only in this light of the relationship between the gods and madness, that one can appreciate references to madness in Greek and Latin literature in their true meaning. In The Manaechmus Twins, for example, Plautus depicts the comic qui pro quos which result when

identical twins, unaware of each other's existence, are in the same town (a situation, incidentally, later to be used by Goldoni in A Servant of Two Masters and Shakespeare in Twelfth Night). In the confusion of mistaken identities, each twin is accused of being mad, while they themselves consider everyone else mad. Manacchmus of Syracuse finally feigns madness: "They say I'm insane. Well, in that case, the best thing for me to do is act the part and scare them away."<sup>6</sup> He then proceeds to call on Bacchus, God of Wine, and Apollo from whom he pretends to take orders.

During the Middle Ages, a curious dichotomy existed in popular attitudes towards the Madman or the Fool; the two were not clearly differentiated. On one hand, the medieval farces criticized human faults in a general way by denouncing the unreason (i.e. madness) which leads people astray; madness was included in the hierarchy of vices. But, paradoxically, it was often the figure of the fool himself who commented lucidly on society. In the words of the French critic Michel Foucault:

In farces and soties, the character of the Madman, the Fool, or the Simpleton assumes more and more importance. He is no longer simply a ridiculous and familiar silhouette in the wings: he stands center stage as the guardian of truth--playing here a role which is the complement and converse of that taken by madness in the tales and the satires. If folly leads each man into a blindness where he is lost, the madman, on the contrary, reminds each man of his truth.<sup>7</sup>

The medieval court fool developed from both the Roman dwarf-fool, whose physical or mental deformities were the cause of so much merriment, and the Celtic clairvoyant. He had absolute license to criticize his master, since he was not thought responsible for what he said. Barbara Swain points out that the "freedom to indulge in parody and unexpected truth-telling and the additional freedom to be wantonly licentious without incurring blame are the two privileges of the fool which made it worth the while of normal men to occasionally assume his role."<sup>8</sup> This will clearly relate to the discussion of those characters in modern drama who voluntarily don the mask of madness.

One cannot discuss the figure of the fool in literature without mentioning the great contributions made by Shakespeare. The dramatic possibilities of the fool are fully realized in the immortal figures of Touchstone, Feste, and the Fool in King Lear. Regarding the theme of wise men playing the fool, it is interesting to note that Jacques, in As You Like It, has a similar function as Touchstone, in that he is also a sensitive and perceptive commentator on the action and the other characters. It is significant that he asks the Duke to make him an official fool:

I must have liberty  
Withal, as large a charter as the wind,  
To blow on whom I please; for so fools have:  
And they that are most galled with my folly,  
They most must laugh. And why, sir, must they so?  
The why is plain as way to parish church:  
He that a fool doth very wisely hit

Doth very foolishly, although he smart,  
Not to seem senseless of the bob; if not,  
The wise man's folly is anatomiz'd  
Even by the squandering glances of the fool.  
Invest me in my motley; give me leave  
To speak my mind, and I will through and through  
Cleanse the foul body of the infected world,  
If they will patiently receive my medicine.<sup>9</sup>

At the same time, folly was a vice, and madness sometimes a comic punishment for folly. Sometimes folly was explained by excess knowledge or false learning. The link between madness and learning was not new to the Middle Ages; the same idea is expressed in the Acts of the Apostles XVII: 24: "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad." Both Erasmus and Sebastian Brant, the two best-known exponents of folly make extensive use of the problems created by too much learning.

Towards the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the Renaissance period, the theme of madness was brought to the fore. There was a feeling that the old world was disintegrating, but the shape the new order would take was still very unclear. During this period, society dealt with madmen in a variety of ways. Sometimes the cities assumed minimal responsibility for housing and feeding madmen; this was primarily to keep them out of the way of "normal" people. Until the nineteenth century the insane were displayed publically; for a fee, the public could come and see the spectacle of madmen chained to the ground. It was sometimes easier to beat them, stone them, or chase them out of the city; this was not merely



a matter of social convenience, but the enactment of a ritualistic exile. Madmen were the scapegoats of society.

Michel Foucault writes at length about the significance of embarking the madmen on ships bound for distant ports, a custom which attracted the imaginations of writers and painters. He observes that

to hand a madman over to sailors was to be permanently sure he would not be prowling beneath the city walls; it made sure that he would go far away; it made him a prisoner of his own departure. But water adds to this the dark mass of its own values; it carries off, but it does more: it purifies. Navigation delivers man to the uncertainty of fate; on water, each of us is in the hands of his own destiny; every embarkation is potentially the last. . . . Confined on the ship, from which there is no escape, the madman is delivered to the river with its thousand arms, the sea with its thousand roads, to that great uncertainty external to everything. He is a prisoner in the midst of what is the freest, the openest of routes: bound fast at the infinite crossroads. He is the Passenger par excellence: that is, the prisoner of the passage . . . . water and madness have long been linked in the dreams of European man.<sup>10</sup>

The Ship of Fools (with the tree of knowledge as its masthead), became a very popular image. Its best-known representations are paintings of Hieronymus Bosch (1450 to 1510), as well as Brant's Narrenschiff (1494), although it was a theme used by innumerable other artists. Part myth, part reality, the ship was typically sailed by a crew of stereotyped figures in society. Theirs was, of course, a symbolic voyage in search of their reason, or some

basic human truth.

For Brant, folly was simply erring from Divine law, and was therefore unequivocally culpable. His "Narrenschiff" is sailed by people who, because of their stupidity and shortsightedness, seek happiness on earth rather than in salvation. All sins such as riotous sensuality, pride, moral corruption are forms of folly; the Fool is the Wicked Man. Brant was essentially a religious moralist; he did not question existing standards of morality, but revered and defended the accepted traditions.

While madness was only one of the vices in the Middle Ages, Erasmus, the great Renaissance humanist, has Folly, personified in Stultitia, leading the dance of human faults in his famous In Praise of Folly (1512). As in the medieval farces, the foolishness of men of learning who occupy themselves more with books than with life is emphasized by the caricatures of grammarians, poets, rhetoricians, writers, jurists, philosophers, and theologians. Very different in tone from the somber, preaching mood of Brant's work, In Praise of Folly is a sensitive combination of wit, wisdom, humanism and tolerance. Erasmus managed to blend the main qualities of the fool as a sinner, merry-maker, protected critic of society and truth-teller in a magnificent work of subtle irony.

The irony arises from the synthesis of folly and wisdom, of joking and seriousness, in the person of Stultitia. By having Folly praise herself, dressed in the traditional cap and bells,

Erasmus presents his readers with what seems to be a very involved problem, which Walter Kaiser tries to untangle:

For the praise of folly, being a mock praise, is in fact the censure of folly; but if Folly is thus censuring folly, Wisdom would presumably praise folly. Or, to look at it from another angle, if the praise of folly is, by its mock-encomiastic nature, actually the praise of wisdom, Folly must be praising wisdom. But if Folly praises wisdom, then wisdom would presumably censure wisdom.<sup>11</sup>

For Brant, wisdom was preparing in an organized way for salvation; therefore, living a life in complete accord with the established social and divine order. But Erasmus' ideas were far more subtle and complex. Even those educated "wise" men such as theologians are foolish if they are motivated by petty ambition rather than a genuine search for spiritual truth. "Wise" men are foolish if they do not take joy in living, if they misuse their power or their gift of reason. According to Stultitia, it is foolish to be wise, and the truly wise are foolish. Thus, while Brant condemned folly outright, Erasmus regarded it as an inherent part of human nature. Nature, which, by definition includes folly, together with the right use of reason, form the basis of Erasmus' humanism.

Death was closely associated with some interpretations of madness; the grotesque and mad faces in the paintings of Bosch and Breughel the Elder (1525 to 1560) testify to that. To quote Foucault again:

Up to the second half of the fifteenth century or even a little beyond, the theme of death reigns alone. The end of man, the end of time bear the face of pestilence and war. What overhangs human existence is this conclusion and this order from which nothing escapes. The presence that threatens even within this world is a fleshless one. Then in the last years of the century this enormous uneasiness replaces death and its solemnity. . . . Death's annihilation is no longer anything because it was already everything, because life itself was only futility, vain words, a squabble of cap and bells. The head that will become a skull is already empty. Madness is the déjà-là of death.<sup>12</sup>

This link between madness and death is later represented in many of Shakespeare's dramas which involve insane or distraught characters. While the fool played a role in some of the comedies, Shakespeare's most powerful tragedies involve characters who have lost their reason; thus, for example, Lear, Ophelia, Othello, Lady Macbeth, to name only the most obvious. Their madness is beyond appeal, their reason irretrievable. The only relief for them is death.

Another essential aspect of the Renaissance attitude was the freedom that madmen had to wander about. Madness was accepted, and it pervaded all aspects of life. Cervantes' immortal Don Quixote typified this freedom; for over 450 years he has personified a gentle, idealistic insanity woven into Western man's imagination and culture.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the concept of insanity changed considerably, and the literature of that period of course reflected that change. Stripped of its mythical and symbolic significance, madness was defined as a social evil and treated as such. In 1656, the founding of the Hôpital Général in Paris marked a decisive

change in society's attitude to insanity. The Ship of Fools no longer took madmen from town to town; hospitals insured that they be confined and often chained in one place. Thus madness or unreason was shameful, something to be hidden away. It must be emphasized that madmen were confined not because they were to be treated as sick people, and perhaps cured. Rather they were imprisoned, along with the poor, unemployed and criminals, to be kept out of society. Far from being a medical centre, the Hôpital Général was an arm of the courts and the monarchy, and had a great deal of power to confine people at the discretion of its directors. Madmen were treated exactly like animals, beaten and subdued; hiding away madmen was at that point politically expedient.

Clearly the rationale for grouping these various outcast segments of society together has a lot to say about the philosophy and morality of the period. The tendency to blame social disorders arising from the poor economic conditions on begging and idleness was widespread. Since madmen were obviously unproductive, they were confined and attempts made to force them to work; idleness was the great sin of the period. Because the mad could not work, and could not adapt themselves to the social order, there was an ethical justification for confining them in the eyes of society. Foucault explains:

If there is, in classical madness, something which refers elsewhere and to other things, it is no longer because the madman comes from the world of the irrational and bears its

stigmata; rather, it is because he crosses the frontiers of bourgeois order of his own accord and alienates himself outside the sacred limits of its ethic.<sup>13</sup>

The medieval custom of displaying madmen flourished in the so-called Age of Reason. Spectacles involving the insane were common, replacing the farces in which Folly was merely portrayed. The famous plays put on by the inmates of Charenton were not therapeutic psycho-dramas before their time, but rather pure sport for spectators.

The most famous of Charenton's inmates was the Marquis de Sade who, by his life and work, illustrates the difficulties that any age has in declaring a man insane. He wrote passionately against society and particularly against religion. His characters are obsessed with physical pleasures, and love to cause suffering to others. In his writings, de Sade claims that man is basically egotistical and bestial by nature, and to try to make him obey moral codes and to have concern for others is to go against nature. Nedd Willard puts it as follows:

. . . ses personnages sont complètement fous, si on les juge d'après les critères de leur société et de leur époque (les seuls critères possibles). Ils sont outrés dans tous leurs actes et débridés dans leur sensualité. Ils sont, pour le moins, insociables, et ne partagent ni la moralité ni la conduite de la plupart de leurs concitoyens. . . . A défaut d'une société universelle, les mœurs locales déterminent la folie dans les actes des particuliers. Et si la société française du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle avait eu connaissance des idées et des intentions des personnages de Sade, elle les aurait fait enfermer comme fous

dangereux. Ce ne serait pas la première fois que la société enfermerait un homme protestant qu'il n'est pas fou, mais génial. . . .

. . . ni Sade ni ses personnages ne sont fous dans le sens vulgaire du terme, c'est-à-dire par manque du sens de la réalité ou par perte de la faculté de raisonner. . . . Ce sont des hommes très intelligents qui ont perdu la foi dans la moralité commune et qui essaient de se trouver ou de se perdre dans des ivresses que la société réproouve et qualifie de folles.<sup>14</sup>

"O que le génie et la folie se touchent de bien près!" wrote Voltaire,<sup>15</sup> thus expressing succinctly a very old idea. Men who believed so devoutly in the faculty of reason, such as Voltaire, Pascal and Diderot thought the matter very simple: the genius arrived at his conclusions through a logical process of reasoning; the madman is governed by his imagination and passion. Despite this age-old fascination with the theme, modern psychology has scientifically disproved the notion that genius and creativity are linked with mental illness.<sup>16</sup> Studies of gifted people have shown that there is no natural tendency towards mental illness.

Passion has long been associated with madness; passionate love, hate, thirst for revenge, may lead eventually to delirium. Indeed, delirium corresponds closely with a classical definition of madness. Even some of Molière's comic characters, such as Harpagon and Alceste, are driven almost insane by their obsession, contravening all laws of "proper" behaviour. Because of the intense emotional strain, these victims of their own passion, both comic and tragic, reach a state beyond reason, in which what they regard as the truth may not

correspond to reality. They are, literally, blinded to reason, dazzled by the intensity and extent of their emotions. The famous French Encyclopédie typified the current attitudes to madness when its writers attributed madness to intense passion. Nedd Willard writes:

Laisser libre cours aux passions est d'autant plus grave qu'elles risquent de devenir des formes ahurissantes de la folie. Il faut traiter toute passion exagérée comme une forme de folie plus ou moins aiguë.<sup>17</sup>

During this period there was no link between madness and healing. Doctors were involved in the care of the insane, but their role was to protect "normal" people from the inmates of the asylums, rather than to cure those unfortunates. It was not until much later that the areas of evil and mental illness were distinguished one from the other. To quote Foucault again:

It is in the realm of the fantastic and not within the rigor of medical thought that unreason joins illness and draws closer to it. Long before the problem of discovering to what degree the unreasonable is pathological was formulated, there had formed, in the space of confinement and by an alchemy peculiar to it, a mélange combining the dread of unreason and the old specters of disease. From a great distance, the old confusions about leprosy functioned once again and it is the vigor of these fantastic themes which was the first agent of synthesis between the world of unreason and the medical universe.<sup>18</sup>

In the nineteenth century for the first time there was a social outcry against the treatment of the insane, against the fact that mental illness was treated as a crime rather than as a disease.



Ironically, the outcry started among prisoners who resented being confined with madmen and epileptics. People such as Samuel Tuke and Scipion Pinel started the mental asylums which marked the beginning of a new approach to madness; chains were removed, and the patients permitted to wander relatively freely within the confines of the asylum. Religion played an important role as a cure. The physician, at the head of the asylum, was a figure of authority and of justice rather than a medical specialist. This was, however, the beginning of modern psychiatry. The physician would try to understand a person's problem and try to restore his reason; i.e. acceptance of the social and moral order. This led to the view of the physician as a very powerful figure, a concept which Freud perpetuated and developed more fully in the person of the psychiatrist.

Of course the contribution by Sigmund Freud to a modern view of insanity is incalculable. The father of psychoanalysis, he developed a new method of psychological examination by searching for unconscious motives and tendencies in the patient, and analysing them in the light of that patient's past, particularly his childhood. Finally mental illness was recognized as such and dealt with medically.

Again, literature reflects this development; in a number of dramas of the early twentieth century, the relationship between psychiatrists and patients is effectively parodied. The discussions between Dr. Grün, the Freudian, and Dr. Bidello, the non-Freudian in Stanislaw Witkiewicz' The Madman and the Nun (1923) are particularly humorous. In Pirandello's Henry IV (1922), Dr. Dionysius Genoni is

a somewhat ridiculous psychiatrist who attempts to cure Henry by reconstructing his past.

The madness of twentieth century society has almost become a cliché. Two world wars, and the failure to restore order after the chaos, shook European cultural life to its foundations; mental and spiritual stability were undermined. In speaking about the society which fostered the Theatre of the Absurd, Martin Esslin writes:

The hallmark of this attitude is its sense that the certitudes and unshakable basic assumptions of former ages have been swept away, that they have been tested and found wanting, that they have been discredited as cheap and somewhat childish illusions. The decline of religious faith was masked until the end of the Second World War by the substitute religions of faith in progress, nationalism and various totalitarian fallacies. All this was shattered by the war. By 1942, Albert Camus was calmly putting the question why, since life had lost all meaning, man should not seek escape in suicide.<sup>19</sup>

The incredible advances in science and technology have led to previously undreamed-of power in atomic and nuclear weapons, concentrated in the hands of a few men who know nothing about science, but who have the power to eliminate an entire civilisation. Man no longer feels in control of his destiny. This mass age has created new problems for the individual: there are tremendous pressures on him to conform, to be like the others, and individuals are often submerged. There seems to be no unifying, cohesive principle to guide men.

In such a society it is not surprising that the writer is drawn to the theme of madness, which he tries to redefine, assess, and illuminate. In One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, Ken Kesey presents readers with a graphic image of the anonymity of mass society. The Chief, judged mad by society, makes observations about so-called "normal" society when he emerges from the asylum for the first time in years:

All up the coast I could see the signs of what the Combine had accomplished since I was last through this country, things like, for example--a train stopping at a station and laying a string of full-grown men in mirrored suits and machined hats, laying them like a hatch of identical insects half-life things coming pht-pht-pht out of the last car, then hooting its electric whistle and moving on down the spoiled land to deposit another hatch.

Or things like five thousand houses punched out identical by a machine and strung across the hills outside of town, so fresh from the factory they're still linked together like sausages, a sign saying "NEST IN THE WEST HOMES--NO DWN. PAYMENT FOR VETS", a playground down the hill from the houses, behind a cheker-wire fence and another sign that read "ST. LUKE'S SCHOOL FOR BOYS"--there were five thousand kids in green corduroy pants and white shirts under green pullover sweaters playing crack-the-whip across an acre of crushed gravel. The line popped and twisted and jerked like a snake, and every crack popped a little kid off the end, sent him rolling up against the fence like a tumbleweed. Every crack. And it was always the same little kid, over and over.<sup>20</sup>

Like Yossarian in Joseph Heller's Catch 22, you have to be mad to accept that kind of society; and if you reject it, society defines you as mad.

Various schools of literature in the twentieth century, such as

Expressionism, and lately, the Theatre of the Absurd, are partly concerned with expressing the plight of the individual in a society whose values often seem counter to an individual's values, whose very structure seems to be without logical foundation. Expressionism, coming about the time of the First World War, explored the position of the idealist struggling against the forces of mechanized society. Dadaism and Surrealism saw all previous artistic experience as invalid, and tried to create entirely new definitions. The aim of the movement was to express pure thought, independent of all logic and moral or aesthetical laws. Some of the characters in surrealist writing, for example, André Breton's Nadja, are mad; they cannot accept society's conventions and values.

The Theatre of the Absurd expresses the image of a disintegrating world which, having lost its unifying principle, has essentially gone mad. In a sense, the medium is the message; the plays themselves, by their very structure, express the feeling of a world gone mad. In Martin Esslin's words, it "strives to express the sense of the senselessness of the human condition by the open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought."<sup>21</sup> And further, "the Theatre of the Absurd has renounced arguing about the absurdity of the human condition; it merely presents it in being--that is, in terms of concrete stage images." The Theatre of the Absurd is essentially visual. Artistically, the dramas of the Absurd illustrate the philosophy which Sartre and Camus, among others, express verbally.

In contrast to the Theatre of the Absurd, the plays in this discussion are more lucidly and logically constructed, and the arguments, implicit in the structure of the dramas about which Esslin speaks, are made explicitly by one of the characters. That central character provides the focus for this discussion of lucid madmen.

I intend to explore a variety of characters in twentieth century European drama who are defined as mad either by themselves or by the societies in which they live; yet none are insane in the medical sense. Some are in asylums, others in their normal social situation. In analysing the situations of these characters, the basic human urges for power, on the one hand, and freedom, on the other, emerge as being at the root of the problem of sanity. By examining the factors which caused each character to perceive reality differently from others in his society, I will attempt to define the "madness" of each one, and arrive at some conclusions about the nature of madness in twentieth century literature.

Footnotes: Chapter One

- <sup>1</sup> Horst Geyer, Dichter des Wahnsinns (Göttingen, 1955), p. 18.  
  
Quotes from French and German will be given in the original language; quotes from Polish and Italian will be given in English translation.
- <sup>2</sup> James C. Coleman, Abnormal Psychology and Modern Life (Glenview, Ill., 1964), p. 15.
- <sup>3</sup> Nedd Willard, Le Génie et la Folie au 18<sup>e</sup> Siècle (Paris, 1963), p. 7.
- <sup>4</sup> George Rosen, Madness in Society (Chicago, 1968), p. 77.
- <sup>5</sup> Rosen, p. 83.
- <sup>6</sup> Plautus, "The Manaechmus Twins," Six Plays of Plautus, ed. and trans. Lionel Casson (New York, 1963), p. 227.
- <sup>7</sup> Michel Foucault, Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason, trans. R. Howard (New York, 1965), p. 14.
- <sup>8</sup> Barbara Swain, Fools and Folly during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance (New York, 1932), p. 63.
- <sup>9</sup> William Shakespeare, As You Like It (1926; rpt. Cambridge, 1965), p. 35.
- <sup>10</sup> Foucault, p. 10.
- <sup>11</sup> Walter Kaiser, Praisers of Folly (Cambridge, Mass., 1955), p. 36.
- <sup>12</sup> Foucault, p. 15.
- <sup>13</sup> Foucault, p. 58.
- <sup>14</sup> Willard, p. 158.
- <sup>15</sup> Voltaire, quoted in Willard, p. 56.
- <sup>16</sup> Coleman, p. 13.

17 Willard, p. 45

18 Foucault, p. 205.

One of Foucault's principal points in his book is that as leprosy disappeared, the leprosariums had to be repopulated, and madmen replaced lepers as scapegoats.

19 Martin Esslin, The Theatre of the Absurd (New York, 1969), p. 5.

20 Ken Kesey, One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (New York, 1962), p. 203.

21 Esslin, p. 6.

Chapter Two: Romulus der Große

If a man does not keep pace with his companions,  
perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer.  
Let him step to the music which he hears, however  
measured or far away.

Thoreau

The first character in this discussion is the creation of the Swiss dramatist, Friedrich Dürrenmatt: the hero of Romulus der Große. It is Dürrenmatt's clear intention, as stated in the "Anmerkung," that the character and motivation of Romulus should not become completely apparent until the third act. He appears at first to be an urbane, witty cynic, taking incidents such as the flight of his Finance Minister in his stride. However, when he manifests more interest in the state of his chickens, which he calls by the names of emperors, than in the state of the Empire, the audience begins to feel less sympathetic and more critical towards him.

He appears to play games with the others, setting himself up in a morally superior position by doing so. When his wife Julia demands that he do something, he proposes to send out a communiqué about his health. When Zeno, the fugitive Emperor from the East pleads that Romulus believe in the political importance of the Roman Empire, the Emperor as well as his patriotic wife Julia is quite willing to oblige, . . . "alle drei sitzen gläubig da" (R 22).<sup>1</sup> But his whole attitude is one of cynicism.



The others, of course, believe that he is feeble-minded, but his acute perception in summing up people belies this, as far as the audience is concerned. Despite his polite, if a little sarcastic, reception of Zeno, it is clear that Romulus sees through the pomposity of his brother Emperor. Having previously commented that "Domitian war ein schlechter Kaiser. Er kann Eier legen so viel er will, ich esse sie nicht" (R 12), Romulus lets his guest be served that same egg, saying, "Das ist für diesen Fall schon recht" (R 43). It is demonstrated again and again that Romulus is actually far more perceptive and quick-witted than those around him.

There are several indications, before the principal discussion with Julia in Act III, as to what motivates Romulus to act in the seemingly irresponsible and unconcerned manner which characterizes him. Firstly, it is clear that Romulus does not hate or fear the Teutons, particularly Odoaker, their leader, as do the members of his court. The first indication of this is his reaction to the amazing egg-laying prowess of the hen named Odoaker. "Und in der Zukunft möchte ich die Eier der Henne Odoaker auf meinem Morgen-tische finden, die meine volle Sympathie besitzt. Es muß sich hier um eine erstaunliche Begabung handeln. Man soll von den Germanen nehmen, was sie Gutes hervorbringen, wenn sie schon einmal kommen" (R 13). When he defends Äbius, the Teutonic Lord High Steward, Julia accuses him of being "direkt germanophil" (R 15). His reaction to the declaration of Cäsar Rupf, the industrialist,

that Odoaker is willing to make a financial deal, is interesting.

"Auch er ist käuflich?" (R 27), asks Romulus rhetorically, indicating that he did not expect that the Germanic leader would let himself be bought.

Secondly, Romulus makes frequent remarks to the effect that the Roman Empire is decaying, but he seems totally unconcerned by this. In his discussion with Rea and Julia about acting, he says, "Wer so auf dem letzten Loch pfeift wie wir alle, kann nur noch Komödien verstehen" (R 17). Of course here he is expressing the philosophy of Dürrenmatt about drama. To Appollyon, the antique dealer, Romulus apologizes, "Es tut mir leid, Apollyon, daß du mitten in den allgemeinen Zusammenbruch meines Reiches geraten bist" (R 24) as though the dealer had paid a call during a family squabble. When Spurius Titus Mamma, the over-zealous messenger, finally manages to see Romulus, the Emperor is totally unimpressed with his enthusiasm:

Romulus: Du bist verwundet, erschöpft.  
Warum diese unmäßige Anstrengung,  
Spurius Titus Mamma?  
S.T.M.: Damit Rom lebe!  
Romulus: Rom ist längst gestorben. Du  
opferst dich einem Toten, du kämpfst  
für einem Schatten, du lebst für ein  
zerfallenes Grab. Geh schlafen,  
Präfekt, die heutige Zeit hat dein  
Heldentum in eine Pose verwandelt. (R 30)

Clues as to what Romulus is actually trying to do can be found in discussions prior to the main one with his wife. In Act I, Julia

asks him, "Was willst du denn eigentlich?" "Ich möchte die Weltgeschichte nicht stören, liebe Julia" (R 29) is the answer.

In Act II, Romulus forbids the marriage between Cäsar Rupf and Rea, and makes it clear that he is totally conscious of the implications of his actions. "Der Kaiser weiß, was er tut, wenn er sein Reich ins Feuer wirft, wenn er fallen lässt, was zerbrechen muss, und zertritt, was dem Tode gehört" (R 44).

Thus, in the first two acts, we see a man who seems to act on a different level of reality than the others. He is not dull-witted, as they suppose, but on the contrary is perhaps more aware of the political situation than they are. However, he accepts and even seems to welcome the events which cause the others to react in a way diametrically opposed to his. Thus, the differences are not in the manner in which they perceive reality, but in their responses to that reality.

Despite the numerous hints in the text, it is not until the third act that Romulus explains precisely what has motivated him to act in a seemingly insane way. He reveals to Julia that he married her solely for the purpose of becoming Emperor and of doing nothing. Julia, of course, has difficulty understanding this:

Julia:	Es ist doch unmöglich, die Notwendigkeit des Staates zu bezweifeln.
Romulus:	Ich bezweifle nicht die Notwendigkeit des Staates, ich bezweifle nur die Notwendigkeit unseres Staates. Er ist ein Weltreich geworden, und damit eine Einrichtung, die öffentlich Mord,

- Plünderung, Unterdrückung, und Brandschatzung auf Kosten der andern Völker betrieb, bis ich gekommen bin.
- Julia: Ich begreife nicht, warum du dann ausgerechnet Kaiser geworden bist, wenn du so über das römische Weltreich denkst.
- Romulus: Das römische Weltreich besteht seit Jahrhunderten nur noch, weil es einen Kaiser gibt. Es blieb mir deshalb keine andere Möglichkeit als selbst Kaiser zu werden um das Imperium liquidieren zu können.
- Julia: Entweder bist du wahnsinnig oder die Welt.
- Romulus: Ich habe mich für das letztere entschieden. (R 49)

According to Julia's definition of sane behaviour, Romulus is acting in an insane way. A "sane" response to the threat of being overrun by the Teutons, would be to take to heart the last words of all Roman generals when they are defeated: "Solange noch eine Ader in uns lebt, gibt keiner nach" (R 18). But Romulus, having come to the conclusion that the Roman Empire must be liquidated, considers the actions of a man like Cäsar Rupf, who wants to save the state, to be mad. "Ein Hosenfabrikant, der den römischen Staat retten will, muß wahnsinnig sein" (R 51). Insanity is thus shown to be a relative concept, depending on one's perspective of reality and one's response to that reality.

Having investigated the character and motivation of Romulus himself, it might be useful to analyse the society which defines him as mad; both in terms of the people immediately around him, and his world as a whole. It is clear from the outset that the

Roman Empire has reached a critical stage in its existence. The news brought by the zealous cavalry captain, Spurius Titus Mamma, that "das römische Weltreich kracht zusammen" (R 10), becomes totally plausible in the light of evidence of the moral and physical decay of the country. Ämilian's report of the catastrophic state of affairs does not surprise Romulus in the least:

Ämilian: Ich schlich durch zerstörte Städte  
und durch rauchende Dörfer, ich ging  
durch zerhackte Wälder und zog über  
zerstampfte Äcker.  
Romulus: Weiter.  
Ämilian: Ich sah die Männer hingemetzelt, die  
Frauen geschändet und die Kinder  
verhungert.  
Romulus: Weiter.  
Ämilian: Ich hörte das Schreien von Verwundeten,  
das Ächzen von Gefangenen, das Prassen  
der Schieber und das Gewieher der  
Kriegsgewinnler. (R 43)

It appears that love, loyalty and moral scruples have little place in the lives of the Roman citizens. Personal profit seems to be the principal motivating force. The Finance Minister runs off with the State Treasury, the antique dealer Apollyon treats the busts of the former emperors as he would any merchandise, with no respect at all for what they represent. Cäsar Rupf, the hard-headed capitalistic manufacturer of trousers, completely aware of the power his money has, makes offers to both the Teutons and the Romans. Even the two faithful old chamberlains, Achilles and Pyramus, can be bought by Cäsar Rupf.

The people who seem so loyal to Rome generally have other motives. Julia, who professes such love for her fatherland, who is so indignant at the sale of the busts, who is willing to sacrifice her daughter to save the Empire, is acting solely out of ambition, as Romulous points out to her:

Du kennst kein Vaterland. Was du liebst ist  
eine abstrakte Staatsidee, die dir die Möglich-  
keit gab, durch Heirat Kaiserin zu werden. (R 48)

Ämilian and Rea are the only two who are motivated by human feelings, and thus are the only two whom Romulus loves. Rea is willing to marry Cäsar Rupf, not so much as a sacrifice to save Rome, but ironically, out of love for Ämilian. Ämilian has been shamed, his honour lost, as far as he is concerned, and he is thus motivated by the human feeling of revenge.

The outcome of the events is important to an understanding of Romulus' feigned madness. As Romulus sees his life's work being accomplished with the disintegration of the Roman Empire, he is certain that he will be killed by the Teutons. "Die Germanen werden mich töten. Ich habe immer mit diesem Tod gerechnet. Das ist mein Geheimnis. Ich opfere Rom indem ich mich selber opfere" (R 53). This certainly enables him to carry out his plan, despite the destruction for which he is responsible. This is the only way that he can rationalize to himself the harm he causes others. His sense of justice dictates his moves. "Wir haben fremdes Blut vergossen, nun müssen wir mit dem eigenen zurückzahlen" (R 59).

When Ämilian proposes a toast to justice, he accepts. Paradoxically, they both have in mind Romulus' death, but for utterly different reasons; Ämilian because of his earlier conviction that "dieser Kaiser muß weg" (R 44), and Romulus because he accepts his death by the Teutons as inevitable and just. "Haben wir noch das Recht, uns zu wehren? Haben wir noch das Recht, mehr zu sein als ein Opfer?" (R 59). He shows no fear when, in a scene which parodies the assassination of Julius Caesar, he finds his room full of would-be murderers. But he realizes that his death at that point would have made a mockery of his grand design.

Likewise, Romulus shows no emotion at the news that his family and court have been drowned, because he is sure that it is a necessary price to pay, and that his own death will be part of that price. The tension builds up as everything seems to point to the denouement which he himself envisaged. But, as Dürrenmatt says in "21 Punkte zu den Physikern": "Planmäßig vorgehende Menschen wollen ein bestimmtes Ziel erreichen. Der Zufall trifft sie dann am schlimmsten, wenn sie durch ihn das Gegenteil ihres Ziel erreichen."

Indeed, the "Zufall" in this case makes Romulus' sacrifice absurd. In his "enemy," Odoaker, Romulus sees a mirror-image of himself; an intensely humane man, whose trepidation about the future of his country has led him to the conclusion that he must try to change the course of history. Like Romulus, Odoaker is in a position of

supreme power, and is able to do this. But when he tells Romulus:  
"Ich bin nicht gekommen, dich zu töten, Kaiser von Rom. Ich bin  
gekommen, mich mit meinem ganzen Volk dir zu unterwerfen" (R 69),  
Romulus' reaction is swift: "Das ist doch Wahnsinn." He is gloomy,  
pensive and finally desperate, as he suddenly sees the absurdity  
and futility of his sacrifice:

Ich legte mein ganzes Leben auf den Tag hin an,  
da das römische Imperium zusammenbrechen würde.  
Ich gab mir das Recht, Roms Richter zu sein,  
weil ich bereit war, zu sterben. Ich verlangte  
von meinem Lande ein ungeheures Opfer, weil ich  
mich selbst als Opfer einsetzte. Ich ließ das Blut  
meines Volkes fließen, indem ich es wehrlos  
machte, weil ich selbst mein Blut vergießen wollte.  
Und nun soll ich leben. Und nun soll mein Opfer  
nicht angenommen werden. Und nun soll ich als der  
dastehen, der sich allein retten konnte. Und  
nicht nur das. Bevor du kamst, erhielt ich die  
Nachricht, daß die Tochter, die ich leibe, mit  
ihrem Bräutigam umgekommen ist. Samt meiner  
Frau und dem Hofe. Ich ertrug diese Nachricht  
mit Leichtigkeit, weil ich zu sterben glaubte,  
nun trifft sie mich unbarmherzig, nun wider-  
legt sie mich unbarmherzig. Es ist alles absurd  
geworden, was ich getan habe. Töte mich,  
Odoaker. (R 70)

And we have the tragi-comic scene of two world leaders, kneeling  
before one another, pleading to be allowed to surrender to the other.  
In desperation, Romulus tries to awaken Spurius Titus Mamma to kill  
him as he had been wanting to do, but Odoaker points out the sense-  
lessness of that gesture: "Dein Tod wäre sinnlos, denn einen  
Sinn könnte er nur haben, wenn die Welt so wäre, wie du sie dir  
vorgestellt hast. Sie ist nicht so" (R 71).



This is a crucial point in the drama. Romulus' entire life has been based on his perception of reality. In pursuit of his goal, he has denied himself a marriage based on love and has suffered the scorn and contempt of those who could never understand what he was doing. He believed profoundly that what he was doing was right, even though he reveals at one point his awareness of the enormity of the task he set for himself. To Rea, he advises:

Dann lerne die Furcht zu besiegen. Das ist die einzige Kunst, die wir in der heutigen Zeit beherrschen müssen. Furchtlos die Dinge betrachten, furchtlos das Richtige tun. Ich habe mich ein Leben lang darin geübt. (R 53)

Odoaker's proposal that he be pensioned is the antithesis of what he had envisaged and therefore very difficult to accept.

"Die Pensionierung ist wohl das Entsetzlichste, was mir zustoßen könnte" (R 72). But he recognizes the futility of dying and agrees to go through with the comedy. As Dürrenmatt says in the "Nachwort":

Man sehe genau hin, was für einen Menschen ich gezeichnet habe, witzig, gelöst, human gewiß, doch im Letzten ein Mensch, der mit Äußerster Härte und Rücksichtslosigkeit vorgeht und nicht davor zurückschreckt, auch von andern Absolutheit zu verlangen, ein gefährlicher Bursche, der sich auf den Tod hin angelegt hat; das ist das Schreckliche dieses kaiserlichen Hühnerzüchters, dieses als Narren verkleideten Weltenrichters, dessen Tragik genau in der Komödie seines Endes, in der Pensionierung liegt, der dann aber--und nur dies macht ihn groß--die Einsicht und die Weisheit hat, auch sie zu akzeptieren.

Both men see the madness of the whole society; it is clear that Odoaker and Romulus are the only "sane" men in their world; men who prize human values above the superficial notions of valour, bravery and patriotism. They take their individual responsibility seriously, and try to alter the inevitable course of history. Each man had a carefully thought-out plan to right the wrongs which he saw about him; each was forced to accept that these plans could not be realized. The presence of Theoderich, Odoaker's war-mongering nephew, ensures that things will go on as before.

The power that Romulus has as Emperor of Rome gives him the freedom to do nothing to prevent Rome's downfall. He is mad in the sense that he pushes a logical argument to an unacceptable conclusion, but he is not a fool, as most people in his court think. George Wellwarth discusses the question of Romulus' sanity, and arrives at some interesting conclusions:

As soon as he gains absolute power, Romulus becomes, strictly speaking, insane. From the best and most reasonable motives, he calmly proposes to destroy a nation. Despite his kindness in his personal relations with his family and the members of his household, despite his strong sense of personal justice, despite his genuinely felt humanitarian impulses, Romulus suffers from the disease of all morally fervid idealist reformers; he loses the human element when applying his theories. People in the mass are not individualized for Romulus, and so he consigns the people under his care to destruction. His proposed sacrifice of his own life becomes suddenly ridiculous when he comes face to face with the German chieftain. Nor, we

then realize, would the sacrifice have been of any significance at all--certainly not as an expiation. The laughter of the gods seems to tinkle faintly through the conversation as the two old idealists, Romulus and Odoacer, sit discussing their situation amid the ruins of their grandiose plans.<sup>2</sup>

Footnotes: Chapter Two

<sup>1</sup> Quotations are taken from the Arche edition of Romulus der Große, and page references prefaced by R.

<sup>2</sup> G. Wellwarth, The Theatre of Protest and Paradox (New York, 1964), p. 145.

### Chapter Three: Die Physiker

Men are so inevitably mad that not to be mad would  
mean to be mad with some different kind of madness.

Pascal

Our century has seen an incredible expansion of scientific and technological knowledge which, on one level, has been of general benefit to mankind. But particularly when scientific knowledge is applied to making bombs and waging more efficient war, this has also created a new problem: the question of the moral responsibility of the scientist. This new problem has been examined by several authors, among them Brecht (Das Leben des Galilei), Carl Zuckmayer (Das Kalte Licht) and Friedrich Dürrenmatt (Die Physiker).

On the individual level, a scientist faces very important and basic questions. Does his responsibility lie in duty to himself, to science, to mankind in general, or to a certain group represented by a specific government? To what extent are science and politics connected? Are scientists really free?

These are among the many questions raised in Die Physiker, whose constantly shifting levels, and the recurring question of who is really mad, makes it one of Dürrenmatt's most topical plays. Like Romulus, the physicist Möbius is another of the author's idealistic heroes, who try to fight the madness of the world around them by behaving in a way defined as insane by others.

Also as in the case of Romulus, Möbius' character and particularly his motivation become apparent to the audience only very gradually. In this tightly constructed plot, the action has started long before Möbius makes his first appearance. It takes place entirely in one room of a mental asylum, although Dürrenmatt describes at length the landscape surrounding the institution. The first mention of Möbius is made when the police inspector investigating the murder of one of the nurses by another patient, following a similar incident three months previously, enquires about the third patient.

Inspektor:	Der dritte Patient?
Frl. Doktor:	Ebenfalls ein Physiker. . . .
Inspektor:	Name?
Frl. Doktor:	Johann Wilhelm Möbius . . . . er ist seit fünfzehn Jahren hier, harmlos und sein Zustand blieb unverändert. (P 302)

Möbius' background is filled in by his former wife, Lina, who arrives with her three sons and new missionary husband to take final leave of her "Johann Wilhelmlein." There is nothing in her story about meeting Möbius as a student, supporting him, and of their first difficult years of marriage, that could possibly raise the suspicions of the audience that things might be different from what they appear to be. Nothing so far contradicts the impression that Möbius, a rather bright young scientist, had a nervous breakdown fifteen years ago, and has been in treatment in the hospital ever since. If anything, one has sympathy for the long-suffering wife, and charitable doctor.

With Möbius' entrance, there is still nothing to contradict this impression. The patient seems to barely recognize his wife and be a total stranger to his sons. The first inkling of the cause of Möbius' "illness" comes in his unexpectedly vehement reply to his youngest son's assertion that he wants to become a physicist.

Möbius:           Das darfst du nicht, Jörg-Lukas.  
                  Keinesfalls, Das schlage dir aus  
                  dem Kopf. Ich--ich verbiete es  
                  dir.  
Jörg-Lukas:       Aber du bist doch auch ein Physiker  
                  geworden, Papi--  
Möbius:           Ich hätte es nie werden dürfen,  
                  Jörg-Lukas. Nie. Ich wäre jetzt  
                  nicht im Irrenhaus. (P 310)

Depending on the actor's interpretation of his lines, (a very important factor in this play), Möbius can appear quite sane and sympathetic, especially when he accuses himself of being inadequate as a father and husband. But this impression is quickly shattered by the physicist's violent reaction to the demonstration of his son's musical abilities, and his subsequent recital of an extremely grotesque interpretation of King Solomon's psalm. The audience is bound to be shocked and horrified by the violence of the images and Möbius' rudeness in dismissing his family. There is complete sympathy with the wife, and perhaps pity for Möbius, but no suspicion yet as to his real motives.

After the hasty and untidy exit of his family, Möbius, left alone with his nurse Schwester Monika, explains his actions in such a reasonable manner that the audience is disarmed, and doubts about

his insanity are raised once again. To the understanding Monika, Möbius admits: "Ich gebe es zu. Ich spielte den Wahnsinnigen."

Schwester Monika: Weshalb?

Möbius: Um von meiner Frau Abschied zu nehmen und von meinen Buben. Abschied für immer.

Schwester Monika: Auf diese schreckliche Weise?

Möbius: Auf diese humane Weise. Die Vergangenheit löscht man am besten mit einem wahnsinnigen Betragen aus, wenn man sich schon im Irrenhaus befindet: Meine Familie kann mich nun mit gutem Gewissen vergessen. Mein Auftritt hat ihr die Lust genommen, mich noch einmal aufzusuchen. Die Folgen meinerseits sind unwichtig, nur das Leben außerhalb der Anstalt zählt. Verrücktsein kostet.  
(P 315)

With this last comment, one begins to realize that Möbius is speaking about the emotional cost to himself, as well as the financial burden to his wife, and that there is some reason for him to feign madness. However, there is still no indication as to his motives and intentions. Evidence of the emotional torture endured by the physicist is given when he hears that Monika must leave:

Nun, auch diese Zeit ist vorüber. Zwei Jahre, in denen ich etwas glücklicher war als sonst. Weil ich durch Sie, Schwester Monika, den Mut gefunden habe, meine Abgeschlossenheit und mein Schicksal als--Verrückter--auf mich zu nehmen. (P 316)



The theme of freedom versus confinement is especially strong in this scene. Monika wants to escape her profession and the institution. Her action of tearing her nurse's cap from her head is symbolic of this desire. (This gesture, incidentally, is compellingly reminiscent of a similar scene in Stanislaw Witkiewicz' The Madman and the Nun, in which Walpurg, the "mad" poet, begins his seduction of the nun who is to cure him, by tearing off her wimple, the symbol of her confinement within her role.)

During the anguished and confusing love scene between Möbius and Monika the audience is strongly aware of Möbius' torment, yet puzzled as to what prevents him from leaving with her, since he very obviously loves her. The clues in Möbius' speech are not much help: "Es ist tödlich an den König Salamo zu glauben" (P 317); "Darum sind Sie in Gefahr: weil wir uns lieben" (P 318); "Es wäre vernünftiger, Sie hielten mich dafür (verrückt). Fliehen Sie!" (P 319); "Mein Gott, ich liebe Sie, das ist ja das Wahnsinnige" (P 320); "Mut ist in meinem Falle ein Verbrechen" (P 321). At the news that he is free and everything is arranged for their departure, Möbius seems to give up trying to persuade her, and the audience, instead of rejoicing, is made more and more aware of the ominousness of the situation; the lights dim and one is filled with foreboding. The murder is quick, yet shocking; the sanity of Möbius is again very much in question.

Despite the grotesqueness of the situation, this murder has quite a powerful emotional impact; this is achieved partly by the interest the character of Möbius has aroused. I have discussed at some length the changes in the audience's attitude towards him and the questions raised as to his motives. He is a tortured, rather than unsympathetic character even when he murders, because one cannot help but feel the existence of some unknown necessity for the action. If there is no motive, he is clearly insane.

At the beginning of the second act, Möbius explains his deed by claiming that it was commanded by Solomon. He has previously maintained that he deferred to Solomon's wishes and opinions, even against his own; in asking his boys to stop playing the recorder, ("Spielt nicht weiter. Bitte. Salomo zuliebe" [P 312]); in shouting at his family, ("Ihr habt den König Salomo beleidigt! Ihr sollt mit den ganzen Marianen im Marianengraben versaufen!" [P 314]); in explaining to Monika why he must stay in the asylum, ("Ich habe mein Geheimnis verraten, ich habe Salomos Erscheinen nicht verschwiegen. Dafür läßt er mich büßen. Lebenslänglich" [P 319]); and finally in killing Monika, ("König Salomo befahl es" [P 328]).

Clearly, these are the instances in which he behaves in an "insane" way; that is, each time he commits an act which is regarded as mad by others, he attributes it to the wish of King Solomon. He is caught in his own trap when he asks the Inspector in desperation to arrest him and is told that that is impossible:

Nach ihrem eigenen Geständnis haben Sie auf Befehl des Königs Salomo gehandelt. So lange ich den nicht verhaften kann, bleiben Sie frei. (P 330)

Just how free Möbius really is, becomes his principal pre-occupation in the denouement of the drama, in which the pieces of the puzzle fall into place, and the appearances of King Solomon explained. In a totally unexpected turn of events, one of Möbius' fellow patients, "Newton," reveals that he is in fact, a famous scientist, sent by his government to persuade Möbius, that genius in physics, to leave the asylum and work for that government. Dürrenmatt barely gives the audience time to assimilate this turn in events, when "Einstein," the third patient appears, and calmly declares that he too is a famous physicist, sent by an opposing government on the same mission as Newton.

The brief appearances of Einstein and Newton have given practically no idea of their disguise; on the contrary, they played their roles to perfection. Newton's exchange with the Inspector, in which he asserts that he is actually Einstein, but pretends to be Newton in order not to confuse Ernesti, (who plays Einstein), which one now realizes was nothing more than an elaborate game, was convincing enough to fool the audience as well as the Inspector. Einstein's trancelike entrances with his violin, and his dazed, "Ich bin aufgewacht," are equally unsuspecting. There is one passage, when Einstein interrupts Möbius and Monika, which might possibly

be acted in such a way as to give the audience a clue:

Einstein: Dabei geige ich gar nicht gern, und  
die Pfeife liebe ich auch nicht. Sie  
schmeckt scheußlich.  
Möbius: Dann lassen Sie es sein.  
Einstein: Kann ich doch nicht. Als Albert  
Einstein. (P 318)

But on the whole, there has been little preparation for these surprising developments.

The language of all three men has changed so that their sanity cannot be doubted. Instead of the clipped phrases and ironic questions that have marked their speech before this scene (except in the Möbius-Monika scene) all three men speak at length, rationally and lucidly. The acts which have previously assured the audience of their insanity are explained logically. The three nurses had to be killed when they began to believe that their patients were not mad after all; first of all to silence the nurses, secondly to reassure the rest of the staff of the physicists' insanity.

The spies discover to their amazement that during the fifteen years Möbius has spent in the asylum, he has solved the problems which have occupied scientists all over the world, including the discovery of the "system of all possible inventions." However, he warns, "Neue, unverstellbare Energien würden freigesetzt und eine Technik ermöglicht, die jeder Fantasie spottet, falls meine Untersuchung in die Hände der Menschen fiele" (P 338).

The question then arises, where does the duty of a scientist lie? For "Newton," alias Alec Jasper Kilton, scientific knowledge belongs to the world and a scientist should work for the country which guarantees his freedom to do research. He does not believe that the scientist has any responsibility; or rather, his responsibility is to science only: "Ob die Menschen den Weg zu gehen versteht, den wir ihn bahnen, ist ihre Sache, nicht die unsrige" (P 338).

"Einstein," alias Joseph Eisler, sees more clearly that scientific knowledge is dangerous power. While it must be made available to the world, a scientist has the responsibility to see that it becomes available to the "right" government. "Wir müssen Machtpolitiker werden, weil wir Physiker sind" (P 338). He claims that in fact a scientist is free, because politicians recognize their dependence on science; "Auch unser politisches System muß der Wissenschaft aus der Hand fressen" (P 339).

For Möbius it is the responsibility of the scientist to hide his discoveries if he has reason to believe that the world will misuse them. Society has proved itself irresponsible and incapable of handling the superior knowledge provided by scientists, particularly the bomb. Therefore a scientist must not make the results of his research public at all; it would be rather like giving a child a machine gun to play with. This is why he decided voluntarily to feign madness and to enter the asylum fifteen years ago, why he

sacrificed his personal happiness, first with his own family, then with Monika. "Ich ließ meine akademische Karriere fahren, die Industrie fallen und überließ meine Familie ihrem Schicksal. Ich wählte die Narrenkappe. Ich gab vor, der König Salomo erscheine mir, und schon sperrte man mich in einem Irrenhaus" (P 342).

However, both "Newton" and "Einstein" come to realize the irony of their positions. Each of them made what he considered a rational and humane decision to involve himself in politics, and try to entice Möbius back into the world for the good of his country or mankind. In order to do this, each unconsciously gave up his freedom and became merely a cog in the machinery of his society. In order to carry out this mission, each had to pretend to be mad, to give up his physical freedom, and to kill the nurse who cared for him. Newton had to learn German and Einstein had to learn to play the violin, ("Eine Tortur für einen völlig unmusikalischen Menschen" [P 340]). Yet both come to the realization, with the aid of Möbius, that they are in fact no longer free individuals, nor are the scientists in their countries free, and what they are offering Möbius is merely another prison.

Möbius also shows them that paradoxically, the asylum is the only place where they are free to be scientists, to be true to themselves and true to humanity. He does not suggest giving up research as a solution to his dilemma, nor does Dürrenmatt answer

the question whether Möbius is right or wrong. Möbius puts it to the other two this way:

Entweder haben wir geopfert oder gemordet.  
Entweder bleiben wir im Irrenhaus oder die Welt  
wird eines. Entweder löschen wir uns im Gedächtnis  
der Menschen aus oder die Menschheit erlischt. (P 343)

The two spies ceremoniously, (if a little unbelievably) agree to remain forever in the asylum, thus sacrificing their physical freedom, but retaining their mental freedom.

But Dürrenmatt is not content to let the drama end in harmony with Möbius' wishes and planning. The "Zufall" in this case is the revelation that Fräulein Doktor Mathilde von Zahnd is really mad, maintains that King Solomon chose her to rule over the earth, set the wheels in motion which led to the deaths of the three nurses, and to top it all off, has secretly photocopied Möbius' notes, rendering absurd his decision to burn them when the police came. More than that, the fifteen years Möbius spent in the asylum seem to have been for naught, as he has not prevented his knowledge from falling into irresponsible hands. The decision of the other two to remain in the asylum has been made equally absurd, as it is clear that they will have no freedom whatsoever. The grills on the windows, the floodlights on the grounds, the armed guards make it abundantly clear that their asylum-refuge has become a maximum security prison.

The critic Armin Arnold suggests that the doctor is not really mad after all:

Ist die Ärztin, Dr. Mathilde von Zahnd, wirklich verrückt? Es kommt darauf an, wie sie ihr Verhältnis zu König Salomo formuliert; meint sie es ernst, ist sie verrückt. Spricht sie ironisch und parodiert Möbius, dann ist sie so normal wie ihre Vorfahren--um des Geldes und der Macht willen bereit, die Welt zugrunde zu richten. Es ist natürlich ein Theatercoup, wenn sich zum Schluß herausstellt, daß die Verrückten normal und die Ärztin verrückt ist, aber die zweite Möglichkeit ist raffinierter. Sie ist so verrückt wie alle Menschen, nur drei sind normal, und diese befinden sich im Irrenhaus.<sup>2</sup>

It is an interesting thesis, but it can be disputed, especially when one examines more closely the doctor's previous references to King Solomon. For example, when the missionary Oskar Rose comments on the "traurige, beklagenswerte Verirrung" under which Möbius suffers in believing that Solomon appears to him, the doctor says significantly:

Ihr strammes Urteil erstaunt mich ein wenig,  
Herr Missionar Rose. Als Theologe müssen Sie  
doch immerhin mit der Möglichkeit eines  
Wunders rechnen. (P 306)

And when Möbius explains his murder of the nurse by attributing the order to King Solomon, Dürrenmatt's stage directions specify: "Sie setzt sich wieder. Schwerfällig, Bleich" (P 328). These two incidents suggest an interpretation that the doctor has, in fact, believed in the existence of King Solomon for some time.

In addition, there are two comments by the doctor which might leave some doubts as to their real meaning. First, in her discussion with Inspector Voss, she assures him: "Für wen sich meine Patienten



halten, bestimme ich. Ich kenne sie weitaus besser als sie sich selber kennen" (P 299). Further, when Monika tells Möbius that Fräulein Doktor had given permission for his release, she adds, "Sie selbst sei verrückter als Sie, erklärte sie und lachte" (P 321). In retrospect, both these comments are ominous.

In connection with the madness of the doctor, the critic Murray Peppard writes:

It was a theatrical inspiration to arrange that, at the conclusion of the play, the mad old maid, Fräulein Doktor Mathilde von Zahnd, exploits the discoveries which the physicist Möbius has sacrificed his life, wife and happiness to keep from the world. The effect of this seemingly abrupt and grimly comical turn is that of the grotesque in its finest form. But the general sense of the play leads inevitably to just some such conclusion, since the action is based, throughout, on the futility of individual action, the conviction that ideas cannot be hidden or revoked, that progress, even if it is progress to ultimate disaster, is inevitable, and that man, that frail creature, is not equal to the task of mastering his own ideas. The last conviction, namely that man is not as large as the thought of which he is capable, and that he falls morally behind his intellectual achievements, is the central concern of the play. . . .<sup>3</sup>

These constantly changing identities, the shifting line between reality and illusion are, as Christian Markus Jauslin points out, very reminiscent of Pirandello:

Die Frage des Inspektors: "Bin ich eigentlich verrückt?" läßt den Zuschauer allerdings nicht mehr ganz los, angesichts der ständig wechselnden Identität der Physiker. Wenn diese am Schluß zusammenbrechen, geschieht dies unter einer ähnlich tragischen Konstellation, wie sie

Pirandellos Heinrich IV eigen ist: Was bisher nur als Maske vorgegeben wurde, bleibt nun plötzlich die einzige Möglichkeit der Existenz.<sup>4</sup>

Newton and Einstein resume their masks, this time for ever. But Möbius, who until now has been claiming that Solomon appears to him, takes on the identity of King Solomon himself. As has been pointed out above, Möbius used the appearances of the King to account for his "insane" behaviour; his assumption of this new identity probably means a final rejection of his role as Johann Wilhelm Möbius, the physicist, and the end of his research work. One of the critics most familiar with Dürrenmatt's work, Elisabeth Brock-Sulzer, realizes the impossibility of trying to resolve the ending:

Irre? Endgültig ihrer Person Entfallene? Die Frage bleibt offen. Sie ist keiner Antwort mehr wert. Vorhang. Die schlimmstmögliche Wendung ist eingetroffen, die Geschichte ist zu Ende. Das Paradox voll hergestellt.<sup>5</sup>

It is perhaps more than a chance coincidence that this comment is equally appropriate to the ending of Romulus der Große. Indeed, having examined the character and motivation of both Romulus and Möbius in some detail, one can see interesting similarities between the two characters. Each is possessed by an all-consuming idea about the society in which he lives; Romulus believes that the Roman Empire is barbaric and decadent and must fall, and Möbius thinks that the world cannot handle all scientific knowledge, and therefore it must not obtain it. Each man is in a position to carry out his plan: Romulus has political power, and Möbius has the

power that comes from scientific knowledge. Both refuse to use this power in the generally accepted manner and thus are considered mad by the rest of society. During the many years during which each man plays his adopted role, he has to live without the love and respect of his wife, who would not understand his vision in any case, and he is the cause of the death of the only beings he really loves. As an emperor, Romulus sees his obligation to destroy the empire before it becomes too dangerous. As a scientist, Möbius sees his obligation to destroy his manuscripts before they reach the outside world and become dangerous weapons. The failure of their personal sacrifice becomes the ironic twist at the end of each play. Murray Peppard makes this connection between the two characters:

Romulus is a predecessor of the physicist Möbius, who resembles him even in details. In both cases, someone else takes over who continues the very madness they tried to ward off.<sup>6</sup>

Further on, Peppard, speaking about Die Physiker, draws another interesting parallel between the two men:

The larger meaning of the play lies in the demonstration of the inevitability of Möbius' failure to impose his will on the course of the world, for no individual can solve the problems of the world or change the course of history. In this respect, Möbius is akin to Romulus and, also resembles him in the futility of his end.<sup>7</sup>

The two characters, Romulus and Möbius, don the mask of madness to give them the freedom to achieve their aim. Both are thwarted by other human forces, and their sacrifices rendered absurd. But

their radical idealism is not condemned by Dürrenmatt or the audience; the question as to whether they are right or wrong remains unanswerable.

Footnotes: Chapter Three

- <sup>1</sup> Quotations are taken from the Arche collection of Dürrenmatt's plays, Komödien II und Frühe Stücke (1959; rpt. Zurich, 1963) and page references prefaced by P.
- <sup>2</sup> Armin Arnold, Friedrich Dürrenmatt (Berlin, 1969), p. 80.
- <sup>3</sup> Murray B. Peppard, Friedrich Dürrenmatt (New York, 1969), p. 68.
- <sup>4</sup> Christian Markus Jauslin, Friedrich Dürrenmatt (Zurich, 1964), p. 116.
- <sup>5</sup> Elisabeth Brock-Sulzer, Friedrich Dürrenmatt; Stationen seines Werkes (Zurich, 1964), p. 119.
- <sup>6</sup> Peppard, p. 43.
- <sup>7</sup> Peppard, p. 66.

Chapter Four: Graf Öderland

Either you are crazy, like the rest of civilized  
humanity, or you are sane and healthy. . . .  
And if you are sane and healthy you are an anarchist  
and throw bombs.

Henry Miller

The mystery and dream-like atmosphere of Max Frisch's  
Graf Öderland imbue it with a quality of strangeness quite different  
from that in Dürrenmatt's plays. Unlike Dürrenmatt's plays, this  
work of his countrymen is suspended between the changing levels of  
reality and illusion, with total disregard to the unities of time  
and space. It is a work which, in Ulrich Weisstein's words, is  
both the author's "Liebling" and his "Sorgenkind,"<sup>1</sup> having been mis-  
interpreted by theatre audiences and critics, most of whom saw in  
it a drama about Hitler.<sup>2</sup> It was rewritten by Frisch three times  
because of his evident fascination and difficulty with the theme.

The final (or at least latest) version, written in 1961, is the  
one on which this discussion will be based. The sketch of the plot  
can be found in Frisch's diary of the years 1946-1949, and in two  
newspaper clippings preceding this outline. The first one concerns  
a professor who mysteriously disappeared without a trace. A cabaret  
clairvoyant, called in after police efforts to locate him had failed,  
"saw" the professor lying beneath the surface of water. The body of  
the professor, who had shot himself, was indeed found in that  
position.<sup>3</sup> The second incident is reported just prior to Frisch's

first seven-scene sketch of "Der Graf von Öderland":

Ein Mann, der als braver und getreuer Kassier schon zwei Drittel seines Daseins erledigt hat, erwacht in der Nacht, weil ein Bedürfnis ihn weckt; auf dem Rückweg erblickt er eine Axt, die aus einer Ecke blinkt, und erschlägt seine gesamte Familie, inbegriffen Großeltern und Enkel; einen Grund für seine ungeheuerliche Tat, heißt es, könne der Täter nicht angeben; eine Unterschlagung liege nicht vor--.

"Vielleicht war er ein Trinker."

"Vielleicht . . . "

"Oder ist es doch eine Unterschlagung, der man erst später einmal auf die Spur kommt."

"Hoffen wir es. . . ." <sup>4</sup>

The main character in the play developed from the professor of the newspaper clipping, but the role of Schweiger, the murderer, (the cashier in the diary), is also extremely important and must be examined before one can really understand the Public Prosecutor, and Frisch's own philosophy. In sharp distinction to the acts of Romulus and Möbius, the murder of the night watchman at the bank seems to have no motivation at all. A recapitulation of the events that led up to the murder reveal nothing that could explain it. Schweiger spent the afternoon at a football game; depressed by his team's defeat, he went to the cinema in the evening, but was not very interested in the film; he had a non-alcoholic drink, went to the bank where he had worked for the past fourteen years, went to the washroom, as was his wont, came back with an axe and murdered the night watchman. All attempts to discover a motive or even

justification fail, and Dr. Hahn, the rather unimaginative, bourgeois defense attorney is baffled:

Doktor Hahn: Ich weiß nicht, wie ich Sie ver-  
teidigen soll. Soll ich dem  
Gericht vielleicht sagen, Sie haben  
es getan, bloß weil Sie gerade eine  
Axt hatten, bloß weil kein anderer  
zugegen war als Karl Anton Hofmeier?  
Mörder: So war's aber.<sup>5</sup> (GÖ 18)

There are certainly strong similarities between the situation of Frisch's Schweiger, and that of Meursault in Camus L'Etranger, and one might be tempted to see in this act, as Carol Peterson has, a prototype "act of the absurd"; the "acte gratuit."<sup>6</sup> But this is probably an inaccurate interpretation because there were reasons for the murder. Ironically, the public prosecutor, whose job it was to prove the prisoner's guilt, was the only one to understand the reasons, unconscious though they were, for the murder. He sees the explanation in the drab, routine, dehumanizing life style of the bank employee, and so many like him:

Hoffnung auf den Feierabend, Hoffnung auf das  
Wochenende, all diese lebenslängliche Hoffnung  
auf Ersatz, inbegriffen die jämmerliche Hoffnung  
auf das Jenseits, vielleicht genügte es schon,  
wenn man den Millionen angestellter Seelen, die  
Tag für Tag an ihren Pulten hocken, diese Art  
von Hoffnung nehmen würde: --gross wäre das  
Entsetzen, gross die Verwandlung. Wer weiß!  
Die Tat, die wir Verbrechen nennen, am Ende ist  
sie nichts anderes als eine blutige Klage, die  
das Leben selbst erhebt. Gegen die Hoffnung, ja,  
gegen den Ersatz, gegen den Aufschub ... (GÖ 11)



Without connecting his life with the murder at all, Schweiger himself is only very dimly aware of the devitalizing life which he has been living:

Mörder            Wenn ich mehr verstanden hätte vom  
Geld, meine ich, vielleicht hätte  
ich mich nicht so gelangweilt vierzehn  
Jahre lang.

Doktor Hahn:      Gelangweilt?

Mörder: Klar.

Doktor Hahn: Wollen Sie dem Gericht vielleicht sagen, dass Sie den alten Hauswirt erschlagen haben aus purer Langeweile?  
(CÖ 19)

His work was dull and routine; it was no expression of his humanity, and had no meaning for him whatsoever. Like the cashier in Georg Kaiser's Expressionist play, Von Morgens bis Mitternachts, he was, until this point, an unspectacular, hard working cog in the wheel of the bank machinery, who suddenly broke out of his routine life by committing a criminal act. Love, the force which Frisch and the Expressionists believe can sometimes restore the human element to an otherwise dehumanized and alienating existence, plays no part in Schweiger's life, his girlfriend having left him many years ago. In a revealing passage, Schweiger expresses the emptiness of his life, the lack of freedom in a bourgeois world:

Sie können sich nicht vorstellen, Doktor, wie vertraut mir dieser Anblick ist: Immer diese sieben Stäbe, dahinter die Welt, so war es auch hinter dem Schalter, als ich noch frei war ... (GÖ 20)

In speaking of the two incidents in the diary which were the roots of Graf Öderland, Helmuth Karasek refutes the idea of the

"acte gratuit":

Frisch reizte bei den beiden Vorfällen gerade die unerklärliche, die zweckfreie Tat, Aber sie interessierte ihn nicht, wie sie etwa die französische Literatur (Gide, Camus) beschäftigte: als Akt der Selbstbestimmung des Menschen, als Antwort auf die Bedrängnis der unausweichlichen Kausalität, der man im Akt gratui zu entkommen sucht. Vielmehr geht es bei Frisch darum, daß gerade die öde, gleichmäßige penetrante Ordnung zweier Leben in Mord oder Selbstmord explodiert. . . . Es ist die Erklärung politischer Gewalt, die scheinbar aus dem Nichts kommend, in Wahrheit in der Enge wohlbehüteter kleinbürgerlicher Existenzen ihre Wurzel hat.<sup>7</sup>

There is never the suggestion that Schweiger is insane, nor does that possibility occur to the audience. One is only aware that his act is out of proportion to the factors which triggered it. The effect that this murder has on the Public Prosecutor forms the basis for the main action of the play. In an analysis of Frisch's dramas, Adelheid Weise writes:

In einer absurden Welt erhält der scheinbar sinnlose Mord einen Sinn: er verneint dieses Leben, weil es keinen Wert hat. Während sich der Bankangestellte damit begnügt, "nein" zum Leben zu sagen, erkennt der Staatsanwalt, daß die Revolte nur dann einen Sinn haben kann, wenn aus der Anklage gegen die Gesellschaft eine Selbstbefreiung entsteht. Die unbewußte Tat des Kassierers wird von ihm ins Bewußtseins gehoben: er versteht den Mörder und wird sich seiner eigenen, paradoxen Situation bewußt. Als Staatsanwalt hat er die Pflicht, Klage gegen den Mord zu erheben und das Leben im Namen des Staates zu schützen. Da es aber die Gesetze sind, die das Leben töten, wird er als Anwalt dieser Gesetze indirekt selbst zum Mörder. Der absurde Mord klagt ihn an; indem er seine staatliche Pflicht tut, versäumt er seine menschliche Pflicht:<sup>8</sup>

Ich könnte tun, was immer meine Pflicht war, und ich wurde es dennoch nie los, das Gefühl, daß ich meine Pflicht versäume mit jedem Atemzug. (GÖ 26)

There are other indications that the Public Prosecutor has the constant feeling of having missed something important in his life. It is stated explicitly, but in passing in the first scene, that he feels he never had a childhood:

Elsa: . . . du bist nicht mehr jung, Martin--  
Staatsanwalt: Ich bin es nie gewesen. (GÖ 9)

Childhood being essentially a time of freedom, mental and physical, this is clearly a significant comment. Later, Elsa says to Doktor Hahn: "Plötzlich erwacht er und meint, er habe etwas vergessen. Das meint er, seit wir uns kennen" (GÖ 35). To Inge, the Public Prosecutor confesses: "Früher schon hatte ich dieses Gefühl. Immer schon. So ein hohles Gefühl, daß ich anderswo erwartet werde. Immer anderswo. Und daß ich jetzt etwas erledigen mußte" (GÖ 26). As a youth he had dreams of being captain of a ship, which sailed "ohne Ziel und Zeit" (GÖ 28); but as he grew older, he settled for a model ship which could be placed into the perfect order of his office without disturbing it, and which the maid dusted every so often. Elsa explains to Mario, the clairvoyant, that her husband never had a chance to travel:

Elsa: Ein Mann in seiner Stellung--  
Mario: Kommt nicht dazu. Verstehe.  
Elsa: Als wir heirateten, begann der Krieg--  
Mario: Verstehe.  
Elsa: Alle Grenzen gesperrt--  
Mario: Verstehe, verstehe.  
Elsa: Manchmal muß er nach London oder Paris. (GÖ 37)

These feelings of restlessness, disquiet and general "Angst" help to

explain the abrupt metamorphosis of the Public Prosecutor.

It is interesting to note the intentional parallels Frisch has drawn between the murderer and the Public Prosecutor, not only in their view of life, and violent actions, but in more subtle, physical resemblances. For example, a theatre audience would be struck by the way both men stand, with their hands in their pockets, lost in thought, at the beginning of the first and second scenes. Stage directions specify that the murderer stands looking out of the barred window at the snow; in the following scene, the Public Prosecutor is seen looking out of the small window in the cottage, saying:

" . . . überall gibt es Stäbe" (GÖ 27). Schweiger's dinner, bean soup and bread, is the fare served the Public Prosecutor in the cottage.

Although there are major differences between the two characters, which will be discussed more fully later, these small visual similarities are of course important to an understanding of the drama. Also, they provide the kind of links between scenes which create to some extent the dream atmosphere of the play. This is accomplished further by identification of other characters. Hilde, Inge and Coco are all played by the same actress and represent different aspects of the love element. Dr. Hahn and the Minister of the Interior are antagonists in the two lives of the Public Prosecutor. The Guard and the Gendarme have similar roles: both are guardians of law and order, both are bored in their profession, and to each of them, the Public

Prosecutor comments that the profession of bee-keeper would suit him. The Public Prosecutor is aware of the repetition of his experiences:

Am Ende, wenn ich mich erinnere, sind es zwei  
oder drei Gesichter, die immer wiederkehren, und  
wenn man ans Ende der Welt stapfte. Immer ist  
da ein Gesicht wie das deine, ein Kind. Und immer  
wenn man gehen will, immer ist eine Art von  
Gendarm da, der wissen muß wohin und woher ... (CÖ 27)

His sudden understanding of the man he is supposed to prosecute leads the Public Prosecutor to a clearer understanding of his own life, and, in what might or might not be a dream sequence, he burns his files, and abandons the security of his home and profession for the freedom and uncertainty of the woods. His flight from his home is thus a revolt against his world as he sees it, bound by the law and order imposed by society, and an idealistic yearning for absolute physical and mental freedom. He thinks he can find fulfillment in a new life, unconstrained by time or space. He later becomes very lucid about the alienating wasteland which he feels he has left:

Ich kenne eure Ordnung. Ich bin in Öderland geboren.  
Wo der Mensch nicht hingehört, wo er nie gedeiht.  
Wo man aus Trotz lebt Tag für Tag, nicht aus Freude.  
Aus Trotz, aus Tugend. Wo man die Schöpfung  
bekämpfen muß, damit man nicht erfriert und  
verhungert. Früchte der Arbeit, das sind die  
einzigen, die es in Öderland gibt. Es wächst uns  
die Muße nicht an Bäumen, die heitere, angstlose,  
freie, die der Anfang ist von allem, was Mensch  
heißt. Nichts ist Geschenk, alles bleibt Lohn.  
Und alles ist Pflicht. Und Überwindung ist das  
Höchste, was man sich denken kann, dort wo ich  
geboren bin. Überwindung und Verzicht. Man

macht sich ein Gewissen daraus, daß man lebt, und jeder sucht nach einem Sinn, nach Ersatz für die Freude, die im Nebel nicht gedeiht. Denn unser Sommer ist kurz, und wehe dem Menschen, der sich der Lust ergibt, wo sie nicht ausreicht, weil sie Sonne nicht ausreicht. Wehe! wenn wieder die Dämmerung kommt, wenn alles vergraut, und der Nebel, wenn alles ohne Maß ist, unwirklich, und es kommen die Gespenster der Verantwortung, es wuchert das Gewissen, bis man erstickt--oder ausbricht ... (GÖ 57)

D. Barlow, who sees this conflict between "Ordnung" and the "wirkliche Leben" to be central to all of Frisch's works, writes:

The concept of "das wirkliche Leben" signifies for Frisch a state of being in which man is able to realize his true self, to attain, that is, to the full and harmonious evolution of his personality in order that he may develop into a thoroughly integrated human being. "Ordnung," on the other hand, implies all these forces in modern civilisation and particularly in middle class society, which in Frisch's view, hinders such a development by imposing upon the individual a restrictive and artificial pattern of behaviour leading to the suppression of his essential humanity.<sup>9</sup>

Further, Barlow points out that Mario, the cabaret clairvoyant who is called in to help in the search, realizes that

the roots of the Staatsanwalt's "Angst" are to be sought in "Zivilisation," for it is "Zivilisation" with all the devitalizing influences it exercises upon the individual, which seems to the Staatsanwalt to be paradoxically depriving him of his humanity, to be transforming his life into an endless round of "Arbeit und Pflichterfüllung."<sup>10</sup>

This may be a rather simplistic approach to the problem with which Frisch is struggling. Clearly, this critic, as well as Adelheid Weise, quoted above, sees no essential difference between the lives of

the murderer and the Public Prosecutor, and thus makes no differentiation in his judgement of the two characters. But the question is not, it seems, that clear-cut for the author, who does not arrive at any definite conclusions.

Schweiger obviously had little control over his own dull life, and thus his revolt, although seemingly without motive, was valid. But the Public Prosecutor is in a very different position: economically and socially, he is in a much better position to control his life, to come to terms with the oppressive influences in it. However, he chooses to see his life as a mirror-image of Schweiger's monotonous existence. By showing his hero's extreme position, Frisch seems to suggest that there is a difference between a life of routine, which is deadening, and a life of order, which is necessary to some degree for the functioning of society, and with which one can deal effectively. Life, whether in the city or the woods, requires some order; otherwise it is chaos. But it is not necessary for it to become a deadening routine to such a degree as the Public Prosecutor imagines.

For the hero, perceiving life as he does, his escape into the woods is really no escape, for he only sees the same thing: people engaged in meaningless work, just to stay alive. Inge too, sings of her desperation:

So ist unser Leben  
Tag für Tag, und so  
würde es sein, bis ich alt bin  
und sterbe--

But she also has a dream of escaping:

Da steht er im Zimmer  
plötzlich  
der Graf von Öderland.  
Da steht er  
und hat eine Axt in der Hand. (GÖ 21)

The Public Prosecutor becomes her long-awaited Graf Öderland. The axe, which henceforth he carries with him in his everpresent briefcase is suggested by Schweiger's axe, Inge's rhyme, the charcoal burner's axe, and his own image of the barriers to freedom which he wants to smash:

Stäbe . . . wie die Stämme im Wald, die man  
fallen möchte, wenn man eine Axt hätte. (GÖ 28)

Thus, the Public Prosecutor who was "ordentlich" and "gewissenhaft," becomes the mythical Graf Öderland, who ruthlessly kills with his axe, whoever or whatever stands between him and complete freedom. Dr. Hahn hears on the radio of the murder of three country policemen who were brutally murdered by the axe-wielding count. The radio announcer surmises: "Es ist anzunehmen, daß es sich bei dem Täter . . . um einen Geisteskranken handelt" (GÖ 40).

The explanation that the Public Prosecutor has simply gone mad is the easiest one for Dr. Hahn and the Public Prosecutor's wife Elsa to make. Just before meeting with him, Dr. Hahn warns Elsa: "Möglich ist alles bei diesem Geisteszustand" (GÖ 55), and when the Public



Prosecutor calmly takes his axe from his briefcase, Elsa screams, "Er ist verrückt!" (GÖ 58).

Although Schweiger's act was unplanned and unreasoned, the Public Prosecutor was fully aware of his actions. Both men act out of the same general desperation with their lives; the murders are criminal but lucid acts. Frisch seems to have great difficulties with the problem of judging these crimes; the ethical question of guilt is far from solved. An act is an insane act if there is no motivation at all for it. And insanity releases one from guilt. But these acts are clearly not insane acts. The many endings to the play with which Frisch experimented, indicate his preoccupation with the problem, and his inability to arrive at any conclusion.

There are comprehensible and acceptable reasons, which satisfy the audience that the Public Prosecutor is not really a madman, but in a letter to Frisch, Dürrenmatt claims that the motivation is not clear enough for him:

Die zweite größere Schwierigkeit ist nun, daß der Zuschauer Öderland begreifen muß, um dem Stück folgen zu können; denn was beim Mörder ein unbegreiflicher Augenblick war, ein Mord, um so unheimlicher, weil ihn niemand versteht, aber doch ahnt, daß er nicht ohne Sinn sein kann, das ist nun bei Öderland nicht mehr ein Augenblick sondern ein Leben. Und das muß der Zuschauer verstehen, sonst wird Öderland ein bloß Wahnsinniger, ein Amokläufer, wie ihn Hahn nennt. Er sollte dieses Leben so sehr verstehen, daß er dieser Logik nichts entgegensetzen kann. Die Gründe Öderlands sollten in jedem Falle stärker als die des Zuschauers sein . . . Öderland sollte überzeugen. . . . Aber es genügte nicht, daß er wie ein Wahnsinniger erscheint (erscheint, er ist es nicht).<sup>11</sup>

It seems that this is a short-sighted criticism; that it is clear enough what the Public Prosecutor's reasons are. He comes with no ideology, no programme, but seeks to attain a Utopia of freedom by violently breaking the bonds that confine him to bourgeois society. He is an idealist, unwilling to make even basic compromises with reality.

His Utopia is the island of Santorin, described by Mario and the Public Prosecutor as

ein alter erloschener Vulkan, versunken im Meer,  
eine Insel in den Zykladen. Sehr weiß, sehr  
grell. (GÖ 37)  
Und hoch über den rauschenden Brandung: Die Stadt.  
Hoch über der schäumenden Brandung. Eine Stadt  
wie aus Kreide, so weiß, so grell, emporgetürmt  
in den Wind und ins Licht, einsam und frei, trot-  
zig, heiter und kühn, emporgetürmt in einen  
Himmel ohne Dunst, ohne Dämmerung, ohne Hoffnung  
auf Jenseits, ringsum das Meer, nichts als die  
blaue Finsternis des Meeres ... (GÖ 55)

This is what the Public Prosecutor is striving for; this is, according to Adelheid Weise, "die 'Idee' des Lebens, eine Allgegenwart des Möglichen, die das Sein nicht an Raum und Zeit hindert."<sup>12</sup> Again, it must be stressed that Frisch himself does not necessarily see this anarchic state as an ideal. He appreciates the middle class feeling of confinement and suppression. But he feels that one can cope with reality, something which the Public Prosecutor does not even try.

The Public Prosecutor wants to avoid responsibility, but immediately finds that Inge depends on him. Thus, from the beginning, he finds absolute freedom impossible to attain. Not only Inge, but

an entire rebel band of people dissatisfied with life and opposed to the system which oppresses them, looks to him for leadership. There is the implication that most people would like to break free from their routine lives, but lack the courage; the Gendarme, afraid to ask for Öderland's papers, is drawn into the dream of freedom:

Wenn man so denkt, was man anfangen könnte mit  
diesem Leben, um die ganze Welt könnte man  
segeln, und was man hier in Wirklichkeit tut. (GÖ 53)

The sign of the axe on lapel buttons becomes the widespread symbol of revolt against a society, whose laws "nicht lebbar sind" (GÖ 56).

But the anarchistic revolt leads only to more misery. Santorin turns out to be the damp, stinking underworld of sewers. Inge becomes sick, and there is generally an atmosphere of fear, mistrust and the despair that Inge expresses:

Sag nicht immer Gräfin, das ist doch Unsinn.  
Gräfin! und dabei leben wir in einer Kloake, und  
sobald einer die Tür aufmacht, stinkt es nach  
Abwasser ... Und das nennt man Santorin! . . .  
Wir sind verloren, glaube ich. (GÖ 65)

There is tight regimentation and strict order, rather than the freedom the rebels had sought, and the Public Prosecutor, having refused to give himself up as his own disillusioned followers demanded, comes to a startling decision: "Man läßt mir keine Wahl. Ich habe keinen andern Ausweg mehr, Kind, als die Macht zu ergreifen" (GÖ 68).

This conclusion is startling to the audience which never really accepted the revolt of the Public Prosecutor as being the only response to his situation. Dürrenmatt was concerned that the character of

the Public Prosecutor should be strong enough to convince the audience that his revolt is inevitable (see Dürrenmatt's quote above). But in Frisch's eyes, the revolt is not inevitable, and thus his decision to take power is a betrayal of his ideals of freedom.

The unexpected appearance of the Public Prosecutor at the party at which all the politicians, military men and journalists stand around like mannikens with a plate in one hand and a glass in the other, brings the action to a climax. The Utopian dream of freedom has turned into a nightmare. The Public Prosecutor offers an alliance to the government, but this offer is contemptuously refused; "Es wäre ein Bündnis mit dem Verbrechen" (GÖ 77). When the Public Prosecutor steps onto the balcony, the frenetic reaction of the crowd proves who is actually the stronger political force.

The circular structure of the play brings the setting back to the study in the last scene. After the atmosphere of unreality and excitement, and the threat of violence, both the audience and the Public Prosecutor are relieved at the sudden possibility that the whole sequence of events was an imaginative nightmare. But the muddy boots, the empty cigar box, Hilde's report of shooting in the city and the death of the dog belie this simple explanation. By the time the president enters, the Public Prosecutor is thoroughly confused. At the same time, the audience shares this confusion as to whether the sequence was dream or reality.

To the horror of the Public Prosecutor, the President asks him to form the next government. "Ich will nicht die Macht! Ich möchte leben!" (GÖ 91). But the President puts him into an impossible situation: "Sind Sie bereit, Herr Doktor, als Mörder gerichtet zu werden, oder ziehen Sie es vor, um Ruhe und Ordnung wieder herzustellen, die Regierung zu bilden?" (GÖ 92). This is exactly the argument that Möbius uses in Die Physiker to persuade the other two physicists to remain in the asylum: "Entweder haben wir geopfert oder gemordet." As Weisstein says:

The dialectic of freedom and power poses a dilemma from which Öderland is unable to extricate himself. At the end of the play, he is cornered and has no choice but to wake up--if indeed this has been a nightmare.<sup>13</sup>

The revolt for freedom turns into its opposite: imprisonment within a new order, not necessarily better than the old one. The president, as well as Frisch, is well aware of this paradox:

Wer, um frei zu sein, die Macht stürzt, übernimmt  
das Gegenteil der Freiheit, die Macht, und ich  
verstehe Ihren persönlichen Schreck vollauf. (GÖ 92)

In the first version, the Public Prosecutor recognizes that his revolt has been senseless, that it has led not to freedom, but to another kind of prison:

Das Leben ist ein Spuk, langsam begreife ich es--  
Wiederholung, das ist es, und wenn man durch die  
Wände geht, das ist der Fluch, das ist die Grenze,  
da hilft keine Axt dagegen. Wiederholung!<sup>14</sup>

In this version, the Public Prosecutor tries unsuccessfully to murder

his wife and Doktor Hahn (the gun does not go off: a typical dream element); and he commits suicide by jumping out of a window.

At the end of the second version, he condemns the use of force, and because he himself is in a position of power, he judges himself guilty and condemns himself to death:

Ich wählte die Axt und nun sind wir eins. Was für  
ein Sieg! Die Ohnmacht der Gewalt das ist meine  
Erfahrung, die Lächerlichkeit der Gewalt. Fluch  
über mich und alle, die meinen Weg beschreiten!  
Denn es ist kein Weg, und wer immer ihn geht, er  
wird nicht anders sein als alle, die ihn gegangen  
sind. Seht sie euch an, die Diener des Wahns,  
daß die Gewalt uns befreie!<sup>15</sup>

The Public Prosecutor is not insane, despite the common assumption within the play that he is; the Minister of the Interior tells the Murderer that the rebellion is "geführt von einem Geisteskranken, der vor nichts zurückschreckt" (GÖ 62) and later, after the appearance of the Public Prosecutor at the party, refers to him as "ein Irrsinniger! Habe ich es nicht immer gesagt? Ein Geisteskranker!" (GÖ 77). Again, referring to Dürrenmatt's letter to Frisch:

Öderland ist auch kein Narr. Kein Narr und kein  
Genie. Niemand macht es dem Zuschauer leichter  
als die Narren und die Genies; die einen bewundern  
sie, und über die andern kann man lachen. Öderland  
ist ein gewöhnlicher Mensch, der das Verrückteste  
tut. Wenn er richtig erfaßt wird, eine der  
schrecklichsten Gestalten, eine der bedrohlichsten;  
wenn man ihn nicht versteht, ein<sup>16</sup> Wahnsinniger, und  
Wahnsinnige interessieren nicht.

There are several indications that the Public Prosecutor regards the rest of the world as mad; principally when he refers to society as

an "Irrenhaus der Ordnung" (GÖ 57); In his study, when he tries to wake up from the nightmare: "Sie wollen mich irrsinnig machen" (GÖ 86); and when he thinks he has woken up: "Ich habe geträumt eine unsinnige Welt" (GÖ 89).

Just as in the case of Möbius and Romulus, the hero's idealism, when put into action, turns back on him, and he is unsuccessful in reaching his goal. Frisch shows that absolute freedom is illusory, but he does not totally condemn the attempt of the Public Prosecutor, futile though it seems, to break out of his routine. Although Frisch indicates the deadening aspects of modern society, he also shows how a violent revolt against the society involves criminal acts, and is self-defeating in the end. He suggests that a certain amount of order in society is necessary, and that one can learn to cope with it, without losing one's humanity. In Karasek's words:

Öderland wird jetzt das Stück von den geträumten Sehnsüchten, die sich in Wirklichkeit umsetzen. Aber nicht mehr ist der Traum nur der Wunsch, dem eng umgrenzten, von der Ordnung wie von Wänden umgebenem Alltag zu entkommen, sondern er wird auch, in die Wirklichkeit umgesetzt, zur chaotischen Gefährdung, zum Ursprung des Bösen in der Welt.<sup>17</sup>

Max Frisch thus poses the problem as he sees it, but presents no definite answers, and no solutions.

Footnotes: Chapter Four

- <sup>1</sup> Ulrich Weisstein, Max Frisch (New York, 1967), p. 136.
- <sup>2</sup> Hans Bänziger, Frisch und Dürrenmatt (Bern, 1962), p. 74.
- <sup>3</sup> Max Frisch, Tagebuch 1946-1949 (Frankfurt am Main, 1960), p. 23.
- <sup>4</sup> Frisch, p. 70.
- <sup>5</sup> Quotations are taken from the Suhrkamp edition, and page references are preceded by GÖ.
- <sup>6</sup> Carol Peterson, Max Frisch (Berlin, 1966), p. 39.
- <sup>7</sup> Helmuth Karasek, Frisch (Velber bei Hannover, 1966), p. 47.
- <sup>8</sup> Adelheid Weise, Untersuchungen zur Thematik und Struktur der Dramen von Max Frisch (Göppingen, 1969), p. 72.
- <sup>9</sup> D. Barlow, "'Ordnung' and 'Das wirkliche Leben' in the work of Max Frisch", German Life and Letters, vol. XIX 1965-1966, p. 52.
- <sup>10</sup> Barlow, p. 55.
- <sup>11</sup> quoted in Bänziger, p. 211.
- <sup>12</sup> Weise, p. 74.
- <sup>13</sup> Weisstein, p. 132.
- <sup>14</sup> Bänziger, p. 70.
- <sup>15</sup> Karasek, p. 54.



<sup>16</sup> Bänziger, p. 215.

<sup>17</sup> Karasek, p. 49.

## Chapter Five: Caligula

In our time there are only two places for metaphysical individuals, prison or the insane asylum.

Witkiewicz

The Roman emperor Caligula is one of history's most famous madmen; many of the actual details of his brutal reign, as recorded in Suetonius' De Vita Caesarum have been adopted by Camus in his first great drama, Caligula. But whereas Suetonius attributes the emperor's erratic and cruel behaviour either to epilepsy or a potion given him by his wife Caesonia, Camus attempts to explore the motives for the acts of the emperor and to explain them philosophically. Caligula is a very modern figure in Camus' play, and very much a part of the author's thought and writings. Interestingly enough, this play shares with Graf Öderland the dubious honour of being misinterpreted by the public and critics as an allegorical play about Hitler and political tyranny.<sup>1</sup>

The problem of Caligula's madness is more complex and difficult to approach than the same problem in the other plays already examined. Some critics accept the analysis that Caligula is clearly mad,<sup>2</sup> and others have a different interpretation. One of these latter critics is Francis Ambrière, who writes, "Le Caligula de M. Camus n'est pas un dément, . . . mais un esprit hanté d'absolu."<sup>3</sup> It is therefore advisable to reexamine the concept of madness and perhaps to redefine

it when dealing with this many-layered drama.

In the case of each drama in this discussion, the society represented in the play has certain expectations as to the behaviour of the main character, based on his actions in the past or on his position in society. In each case these expectations are not met; Romulus does not fit the image of a Roman emperor, Möbius does not fulfill the promise to become a brilliant and famous physicist, and Öderland does not continue to carry out his duties as Public Prosecutor. Before his mysterious disappearance, Caligula was a model emperor with respect to his subjects and well-loved by his friends, and people expected him to continue as before. The sensitive poet Scipion recalls Caligula's ideals at that time:

Il me disait que la vie n'est pas facile, mais  
qu'il y avait la religion, l'art, l'amour qu'on  
nous porte. Il répétait souvent que faire souffrir  
était la seule façon de se tromper. Il voulait  
être un homme juste. (C 31)<sup>4</sup>

In the first scene, in which the patricians are discussing Caligula's disappearance, the first patrician says confidently, "Rien ne l'empê<sup>^</sup>che de continuer" (C 19), assuming that once he returned, things would continue as before and all would be well.

Cheréa, longtime friend of the emperor's, is the only one to sense any threat to this ideal state, anything ominous about Caligula's disappearance. "Je n'aime pas cela. Mais tout allait trop bien. Cet empereur était parfait" (C 19), and suggests later, "et s'il revient mal disposé?" So even before Caligula appears for the first time,

the audience is absorbed in a situation which has a vague feeling of classical tragedy about it: a strong, young emperor and forebodings of a fall, or a drastic change in the ideal situation.

When Caligula does return, dirty and exhausted, his first comments to his friend Hélicon, a former slave, reveal that he has certainly undergone profound changes. One is reminded of Hamlet's sudden transformation, described by the King: "nor the exterior nor the inward man/resembles that it was" (Act II, scene ii). The death of Drusilla, Caligula's sister and mistress has sparked a chain of thought which will alter his life style completely, and make any return to the former peaceful state totally impossible. Like Frisch's Public Prosecutor, Caligula has become the opposite of what he was before.

"Je voulais la lune" (C 24), Caligula says. The relationship between the moon and madness has always been very close in man's imagination; both linguistically (lunar-lunacy) and in symbolic meaning. Webster's New World Dictionary defines "lunacy" as follows: "originally intermittant insanity, formerly supposed to change in intensity with the phases of the moon." Literature is full of references to the moon and madness,<sup>5</sup> and this relationship was clearly also in Camus' mind. Caligula immediately has to assert that he is not mad:

Mais je ne suis pas fou et même je n'ai jamais été aussi raisonnable. Simplement, je me suis senti tout d'un coup un besoin d'impossible. Les choses, telles qu'elles sont, ne me semblent pas satisfaisantes. . . . Ce monde, tel qu'il est fait, n'est pas supportable. J'ai donc besoin de la lune, ou du bonheur, ou de l'immortalité, de quelque chose qui soit dément peut-être, mais qui ne soit pas de ce monde. (C 26)

Caligula's obsession with the moon is a detail which Camus borrowed from Suetonius' work.<sup>6</sup> But clearly, for Camus the moon has further significance than to suggest madness. The phrase "etre dans la lune" means to be distracted. And "désirer la lune" means to desire the impossible. The significance of the moon as a symbol for something inaccessible to man has clearly diminished in the light of recent space exploration, but retains poetic significance. The critic Carina Gadourek, maintains that "la lune symbolise les moments hors du temps. Si Caligula avait la lune, la marche du temps serait arrêtée, la mort abolie."<sup>7</sup> Raymond Gay-Crosier sees the moon as representing "sa soif d'absolu"<sup>8</sup> and regards this as part of the influence of Nietzsche on Camus. All in all, the moon is a very appropriate symbol in this situation.

Totally new realizations have struck Caligula with astounding force and devastating results. The finality of death, the feeling that nothing lasts, occur to him with all their implications for the first time. His discovery that men die and are not happy seems to him to make a mockery of life. If men live without the constant awareness of the absurdity of life, they are living hypocritical lives, and lying to themselves. Caligula can no longer identify with the

natural, repetitious rhythm of life, since he is aware now of the omnipresence and imminence of death and thus the seeming senselessness of life.

In Le Mythe de Sisyphe, Camus writes about this state of unconsciousness, which is, incidentally, strongly reminiscent of the lives of the Public Prosecutor and the murderer in Frisch's Graf Öderland before their acts of revolt:

Avant de rencontrer l'absurde, l'homme quotidien vit avec des buts, un souci d'avenir ou de justification. Il évalue ses chances, il compte sur le plus tard, sur sa retraite ou le travail de ses fils. Il croit encore que quelque chose dans sa vie peut se diriger. Au vrai, il agit comme s'il était libre même si tous les faits se chargent de contredire cette liberté. Après l'absurde, tout se trouve ébranlé.

Having recognized the presence of the absurd, an individual is faced with several choices; he can either resign himself to it or he can rebel. His reaction can take the form of suicide, (a solution rejected by Camus), hope, (which Camus also rejects), or, as in this case, murder. Free from guiding influences which the "unconscious" man thinks shape his life, but which turn out to be mere illusions, the individual has total liberty to create his own being. It is a frightening sort of freedom in many ways.

A revealing excerpt from the Carnets indicates Camus' preoccupation with this theme of freedom which comes from understanding:

La seule liberté possible est une liberté à l'égard de la mort. L'homme vraiment libre est celui qui, acceptant la mort comme telle,

en accepte du même coup les conséquences--  
c'est-à-dire le renversement de toutes les  
valeurs traditionnelles.<sup>10</sup>

Caligula does demonstrate his freedom by the negation of all the qualities which, according to Scipion, (see Scipion's quote above) he valued most highly: religion, art, love and justice. Let us start with the last part of Scipion's statement: "Il répétait souvent que faire souffrir était la seule façon de se tromper. Il voulait être un homme juste." Caligula sets out deliberately to make men suffer. He taunts them unmercifully, orders arbitrary executions, decrees famine in the empire, sleeps with the wives of the patricians, confiscates people's property and personally tortures and puts to death his defenseless subjects. He acts in what seems to be an absurd, illogical way, but which follows in a grotesquely logical way from the conclusions he has reached, to make men see the absurdity and irrationality and arbitrariness of life itself. In reversing traditionally accepted values, he sees that cruelty is the opposite of justice, and thus his cruelty is not chaotic but logical. "Tu avais décidé d'être logique, idiot. Ils'agit seulement de savoir jusqu'où cela ira" (C 109), Caligula says to himself. He offers a decoration for the man who visits the public brothel most often, and he rewards a slave who did not admit to a theft even though he had committed it. In rewarding both social and moral crimes, he is the antithesis of a just ruler.

The scene in which Caligula appears as a grotesque parody of Venus is particularly striking in its blasphemy of all things religious. Hélicon, who with Caesonia aids Caligula in all his dramatic acts, announces the presentation:

Une reconstitution impressionnante de vérité, une réalisation sans précédent. Les décors majestueux de la puissance divine ramenés sur terre, une attraction sensationnelle et démesurée, la foudre (LES ESCLAVES ALLUMENT DES FEUX GRÉGEAIS), le tonnerre (ON ROULE UN TONNEAU PLEIN DE CAILLOUX), le destin lui-même dans sa marche triomphale. Approchez et contemplez! (C 92)

The solemn repetition of the obsequious prayer by the frightened patricians, led by the ever-faithful Caesonia is humorous to the audience at first, but becomes deadly serious in its implications. Caligula makes them pray to an arbitrary, unfeeling and cruel goddess; ironically, Venus, the goddess of love:

Comble-nous de tes dons, répands sur nos visages ton impartiale cruauté, ta haine tout objective; ouvre au-dessus de nos yeux tes mains pleines de fleurs et de meurtres. (C 94)

To complete the sacrilege, he insists that they all deposit a financial contribution into the collection box ("Adorer, c'est bien, mais enrichir, c'est mieux"). This almost whimsical comment on the role of the church is made more explicit by the non-believer Caligula in his conversation with Scipion:

J'ai prouvé à ces dieux illusoire qu'un homme, s'il en a la volonté, peut exercer, sans apprentissage, leur métier ridicule. . . . J'ai simplement compris qu'il n'y a qu'une façon de s'égaliser aux dieux: il suffit d'être aussi cruel qu'eux. (C 98)



Years after the completion of Caligula, Camus wrote: "La situation de l'incroyant moderne est provisoirement la folie"<sup>11</sup> and that quote seems to apply very well to this play.

Again referring to Scipion's comments, Caligula used to love art and particularly poetry. Cherea recognized that quality, and felt it to be a danger. "Ce garçon aimait trop la littérature. . . . Un empereur artiste, cela n'est pas convenable" (C 21). True to his plan, Caligula is irreverent of art in the same way as he is of religion. Again he stages a drama in which he is the central figure, and performs a brief, extremely grotesque dance. Again he demands obeisance from his patricians whom he degrades by insisting that they admire and praise this "emotion artistique." They all lack the courage to defy their emperor openly. Thus he mocks the art form itself and the public reaction to art.

The other "artistic event" is the poetry competition, which again makes a complete mockery of serious appreciation of art. Poetry, in Wordsworth's words "the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge," is reduced to a crude sport, each poet trying desperately to finish his poem before Caligula blows his whistle. This scene might be pure slapstick, if it weren't for the fact that the topic assigned by the emperor for the poems is Death. After the cliché lamentations of the hack poets, which show a total lack of understanding of the real meaning of death, it is Scipion's turn. Recited in a completely indifferent manner, Scipion's poem is surging with a joy of life,

emanating from a consciousness of the imminence of death ("mon délire sans espoir"), and is even too powerful for his kindred spirit Caligula to endure.

As for loving others, and being loved himself, Caligula does everything possible to negate those feelings. He has Scipion's father put to death and takes advantage of Scipion's sensitivity and love to play with his feelings like a yoyo. He forces Caesonia to be a party to his actions, giving her little in return and testing her love for him to the limit. A clue to his behaviour, totally opposed to what Camus believes, is given in an early conversation with Caesonia: "L'amour, Caesonia! J'ai appris que ce n'était rien, . . . Vivre, Caesonia, vivre, c'est le contraire d'aimer" (C 42).

The concept that love negates life comes directly from Nietzsche; the influence of Nietzsche on Camus is considerable and is discussed at some length in Gay-Crosier's Le Théâtre d'Albert Camus. In this author's words:

Caligula n'est pas, à proprement parler une application des canons nietzschéens, mais une réaction contre leurs formules extrêmes et leurs conséquences absurdes.<sup>12</sup>

Caligula's negative view of love as a life force is anti-Christian and totally opposed to what Camus himself believed.

Cherea expresses views closer to those of Camus when he explains his opposition to Caligula. Apart from Scipion, he is the only one who really understands the emperor, and for that reason, sees that

he has to be stopped. Cherea is not motivated by a desire for revenge, self-aggrandizement or pure hatred, but simply a desire for happiness:

J'ai le goût et le besoin de la sécurité. La plupart des hommes sont comme moi. Ils sont incapables de vivre dans un univers où la pensée la plus bizarre peut en une seconde entrer dans la réalité. . . . J'ai envie de vivre et d'être heureux. Je crois qu'on ne peut être ni l'un ni l'autre en poussant l'absurde dans toutes ses conséquences. (C 113)

This is perhaps a good definition of madness, but it is a madness born of deep understanding and lucidity about the human condition.

Caligula's goal in his campaign is to replace nature, or the gods, or fate, or whatever it is that decides people's destinies. He wants people to be continually reminded of the fragility and tenuousness of life. However, one is constantly aware that Caligula is playing a role, and that he is putting on a mask of cruelty and madness to force his subjects to fear death constantly and thus have new reverence for life. The original subtitle of Caligula, as recorded in Camus' Carnets, was "Le Joueur," with its various connotations of gambling, game-playing and role-playing. The stage directions when Caligula receives Cherea in Act III, scene vi, insist that the emperor be "naturel, il semble, pour la première fois depuis le début de la pièce," implying that he has been acting a role until then. He is constantly using language which suggests his conscious acting; i.e. "Couvrons-nous donc de masques" (C 111), "J'ai joué" (C85).

His theatrical representations discussed above are part of this elaborate role-playing.

Just as Möbius plays the madman and Romulus plays the fool, Caligula too wears a mask. But whereas Möbius and Romulus have social reasons for acting as they do, Caligula's motives are philosophical and ideological. Like the Public Prosecutor, Caligula becomes the reverse of what he was before.

One is inevitably reminded of Romulus in the way he plays games with those less intelligent people around him, his total indifference to affairs of state and in particular, his remarks about the State Treasury, his preoccupation with details (Romulus raises chickens, Caligula is absorbed in painting his toenails), and his complete unconcern for maintaining the Roman Empire for its own sake. This scene between Caligula and Scipion could have come straight from the conversation between Romulus and Æmilian in Act III of Romulus der Große and indicates both the logical and paradoxical nature of the emperor's thought:

Caligula: Sais-tu combien de guerres j'ai refusées?  
Scipion: Non.  
Caligula: Trois. Et sais-tu pourquoi je les ai refusées?  
Scipion: Parce que tu fais fi de la grandeur de Rome.  
Caligula: Non, parce que je respecte la vie humaine. (C 100)

However, while Romulus wanted to destroy a warring civilization, Caligula acts on the basis of his abstract, philosophical ideas.

Romulus' quarrel was with men, Caligula's with the gods.

Like Romulus, Caligula acts in such a way as to earn the hatred of his subjects who do not understand him and who plot to assassinate him. Both men count on their deaths; Caligula by his subjects, and Romulus by Odoaker. Romulus wants to buy peace with his death; Caligula wants to make his death his decision, rather than that of fate or the gods. The twist of fate in Dürrenmatt's play has Romulus pensioned off, while Caligula at the end realizes that his campaign was wrong, and he savours life to the bitter end.

Both Romulus and Caligula can follow through with their plans because, quite simply, as emperor of Rome, each has unlimited power. Near the beginning of the drama, Scipion is aghast at the steps Caligula has taken to confiscate goods and to execute people:

Scipion: Mais c'est un jeu qui n'a pas de limites. C'est la récréation d'un fou.

Caligula: Non, Scipion, c'est la vertu d'un empereur. Je viens de comprendre enfin l'utilité du pouvoir. Il donne ses chances à l'impossible. Aujourd'hui et pour tout le temps qui va venir, ma liberté n'a plus de frontières. (C 36)

And later, when it is clear that Caligula is serious, Cherea recognizes that being emperor does give Caligula complete freedom to use his power as he wants:

Les empereurs fous, nous connaissons cela. Mais celui-ci n'est pas assez fou. Et ce que je déteste en lui, c'est qu'il sait ce qu'il veut. . . . Sans doute, ce n'est pas la première fois que, chez

nous, un homme dispose d'un pouvoir sans limites, mais c'est la première fois qu'il s'en sert sans limites, jusqu'à nier l'homme et le monde. (C 53)

Closely connected to his absolute power is the freedom Caligula has to behave as he wants. Besides that kind of physical freedom, Caligula is free in a philosophical sense; having recognized the absurdity of life, he is free from illusions; he is in fact forced to create his own life consciously. The others, still living without that consciousness, are not free:

Ce monde est sans importance, et qui le reconnaît conquiert sa liberté. Et justement, je vous hais parce que vous n'êtes pas libres. Dans tout l'Empire romain, me voici seul libre. Réjouissez-vous, il vous est enfin venu un empereur pour vous enseigner la liberté. (C 38)

Is that madness? Yes, but it is madness in the sense of fanatic idealism such as has been discussed in Öderland, Romulus and Möbius. Germaine Brée, a well-known Camus scholar, analyses the difficulty of pinning such a label on him:

Caligula, Cherea warns, is a man moved by the highest and most mortal passion, a "philosophy without objections", negating man and the world. And Caligula is "the only artist who has brought his thought and his action into harmony." Therein lies his power, the attraction which emanates from him and his significance. He is the mad emperor who, in Camus' eyes, holds sway over a time--our time--which tends to consider an individual life as nothing compared to the moon, that symbol of any ideal state lying beyond the limits of our present lives.<sup>13</sup>

After his first encounter with Caligula, Hélicon remarks to Caesonia, "Caius est un idéaliste, toute le monde le sait" (C 29),

and Caesonia's diagnosis is that Caligula has "trop d'âme" (C 138). Cherea and Scipion, both idealists, recognize in the emperor a kindred spirit and therefore are the only ones really to understand him. They understand him, and reject what he has done. In Cherea's words, "on ne peut aimer celui de ces visages qu'on essaie de masquer en soi" (C 112). Similarly, Scipion recognizes that "la même flamme nous brûle le coeur" (C 123). But whereas Cherea leads the assassins, Scipion, the artist, cannot have any part of it. The differences between Caligula, Cherea and Scipion are explained by Gay-Crosier:

Evidemment, on ne peut identifier Camus à un des personnages de la pièce. Caligula n'est pas l'auteur, mais une tentation qui menace à une certaine époque de prendre le dessus. Scipion et Cherea symbolisent les deux penchants de l'âme camusienne. Scipion est l'artiste qui cède de temps à autre à la griserie littéraire et qui ne sait s'élancer que vers un acte verbal. Cherea apparaît en homme d'action qui néglige quelquefois ses scrupules pour s'approcher un peu de ce qu'il appelle bonheur.<sup>13</sup>

Each of the characters in this discussion is an idealist in an almost fanatic sense, but in the course of pursuing his idea to the bitter end, each neglects responsibility to those around him; this is largely what constitutes his "madness." Romulus permits the suffering of his entire empire and specifically the avoidable death of his family; Möbius kills the kind nurse Monika; Öderland, as head of a rebel band, puts them in an untenable situation, and Caligula humiliates, tortures and kills. Each is in a position to prevent the suffering, but the one lucid and logical idea behind the actions of

each "madman" blinds him to reality. Caligula, whose acts are the most repugnant, is the least blind to what he is doing: "Après tout, je n'ai pas tellement de façons de prouver que je suis libre. On est toujours libre au dépens de quelqu'un. C'est ennuyeux, mais c'est normal" (C 68).

Camus himself saw more clearly than any critic the "tragic error" that motivated his hero:

Si (la) vérité (de Caligula) est de se révolter contre le destin, son erreur est de nier les hommes. On ne peut tout détruire sans se détruire soi-même. C'est pourquoi Caligula dépeuple le monde autour de lui et, fidèle à sa logique, fait ce qu'il faut pour armer contre lui ceux qui finiront par le tuer. Caligula est l'histoire d'un suicide supérieur. C'est l'histoire de la plus humaine et de la plus tragique des erreurs. Infidèle à l'homme, par fidélité à lui-même, Caligula consent à mourir pour avoir compris qu'aucun être ne peut se sauver tout seul et qu'on ne peut être libre contre les autres hommes. Il s'agit donc d'une tragédie de l'intelligence.<sup>14</sup>

As Camus points out, Caligula did work towards his death; he counts on it in much the same way as Romulus does. He knows about the conspiracy against his life, even before Hélicon tells him, as does Romulus, and dreams about the way he will be attacked. When the moment comes, Caligula suddenly becomes aware of the tragic error which he has made, minutes before his death, and desperately fears his death. "Je n'ai pas pris la voie qu'il fallait, je n'aboutis à rien. Ma liberté n'est pas la bonne" (C 154). Just as Romulus and Möbius find a twist of fate has negated their sacrifice, so does Caligula suddenly see his life objectively and understand that his ideals were not realized as he had planned. That is his tragedy and his madness.



Footnotes: Chapter Five

- <sup>1</sup> Germaine Brée, Camus (New Brunswick, N.J., 1959), p. 149.
- <sup>2</sup> Carina Gadourek, Les Innocents et les Coupables (The Hague, 1963), p. 39.
- <sup>3</sup> Francis Ambrière, "La Galerie dramatique," Revue de la Société d'Histoire du Théâtre, IV, 1960, p. 81.
- <sup>4</sup> Quotations are taken from the Livre de Poche edition of Caligula, and page references are preceded by C.
- <sup>5</sup> For example:  
It is the very error of the moon.  
She comes more nearer earth than she was wont  
And makes men mad.  
Othello, Act V, scene ii  
  
Demoniac frenzy, moping melancholy,  
And moon-struck madness.  
Paradise Lost, Book XI line 485
- <sup>6</sup> Ilona Coombs, Camus, Homme de Théâtre (Paris, 1968), p. 73.
- <sup>7</sup> Gadourek, p. 42.
- <sup>8</sup> Gay-Crosier, p. 72.
- <sup>9</sup> Albert Camus, Le Mythe de Sisyphe (Paris, 1942), p. 80.
- <sup>10</sup> quoted in Gadourek, p. 35.
- <sup>11</sup> quoted in Gadourek, p. 227.
- <sup>12</sup> Gay-Crosier, p. 61.
- <sup>13</sup> Brée, p. 166.
- <sup>14</sup> quoted in Gay-Crosier, p. 57.

## Chapter Six: Conclusion

Much madness is divinest sense  
To a discerning eye;  
Much sense the starkest madness.  
'Tis the majority  
In this, as all, prevails.  
Assent, and you are sane:  
Demur,--you're straightway dangerous,  
And handled with a chain.

Emily Dickinson

In an essay about the study of themes in literature, the French critic R. Trousson writes:

toute étude composée d'une juxtaposition  
d'oeuvres, toute étude qui n'est qu'un assemblage  
de monographies sans relief, sans arrière-plan et  
sans lien, qui groupe des oeuvres sur la seule  
parenté artificielle de leurs titres sans chercher  
à découvrir les réalités multiples qu'ils  
recouvrent, ne saurait être admise comme une  
enquête thématologique bien comprise ni bien  
menée.<sup>1</sup>

Although the previous chapters have dealt with the theme of the madman in drama more or less in the vein which Trousson indicates, and only the most obvious parallels have been drawn, the conclusion will proceed to isolate and analyse the principal themes as they emerged from the four dramas. By discussing these themes in relation to the four dramas as well as making references to other twentieth century dramas about men who are considered mad, it is hoped that some revealing observations can be made about the nature of "madness" in modern drama.

One of the most obvious signs that someone is mad is that he insists that he is someone else. Thus, one of the easiest ways for a man feigning madness to persuade others that he is mad is to assume an entirely ludicrous identity. The two spies in Die Physiker assume the identities of Newton and Einstein, and have no difficulty persuading even the audience of their insanity until their true identity is revealed. This device is used with great effectiveness in Pirandello's Enrico IV. A man falls from his horse in a historical pageant in which he is playing the role of Henry IV. After the accident he insists that he really is Henry IV, and his friends obtain period costumes and furnishings to permit him to live out his madness. After twelve years, he inexplicably regains his memory but chooses to continue consciously playing the role of Henry IV, without revealing that he is no longer mad. As he explains:

I preferred to remain mad, since I found everything ready and at my disposal for this new exquisite fantasy. I would live it--this madness of mine--with the most lucid consciousness.<sup>2</sup>

The scientists who call themselves Newton and Einstein disguise themselves as madmen so that they can pursue their particular aims without being suspected. In the case of Henry IV (whose real name is never given), madness is a refuge, because he cannot bear to face the changes which twelve years have inevitably wrought.

Giraudoux' La Folle de Chaillot introduces four charming elderly ladies who are certainly "mad" in the eyes of the world.

But their madness, like that of Henry, is a conscious escape from the reality of the modern world. They choose to ignore the aspects of life that they do not like. Thus, for example, Aurelia pretends that her former lover Adolphe Bertaut is still in her life, although he left her many years ago. Constance had a dog named Dickie, which she loved dearly. When the dog died, she chose to pretend that he still accompanied her everywhere. An old woman who talks to her imaginary dog, or to an imaginary lover does seem eccentric, at the very least, probably mad. In the case of these characters, however, we realize that it is not delusion, a mild form of insanity, but conscious pretense.

For the scientist Möbius in Dürrenmatt's Die Physiker, madness is also a refuge, of a slightly different nature. It is a refuge from responsibility. Only by feigning madness, by maintaining that King Solomon appears to him, is he free to carry out his scientific research, without having to answer to the world for his discoveries. By hiding his discoveries from the world, he protects it from destroying itself.

Madness as a refuge from responsibility is also the explanation for the behaviour of Frantz in Sartre's Les Séquestrés d'Altona. The eldest son of a powerful German industrialist, Frantz was groomed from childhood to succeed his father. When the war came, Frantz, in his capacity as lieutenant, captured peasants and tortured them. In retelling the story to his sister-in-law Johanna as he would have

liked it to have happened, he claims that his error was in doing nothing to prevent Germany's defeat. On his return from the war, he locked himself into an upstairs room, and has remained there for thirteen years, so as not to witness the rise of Germany from defeat. He makes daily recorded tapes of his "testimony" before an imaginary tribunal of crabs which, he is convinced, will succeed man as rulers of the earth. He is mad in the sense that he refuses to face reality. "Déjà ma folie se délabre; Johanna, c'était mon refuge; que deviendrez-vous quand je verrai le jour?"<sup>3</sup> Like Möbius, he does not want to answer to the world for his actions.

It is interesting to see how Dürrenmatt's Romulus reacts to a similar situation. Faced with seeing his country grow barbaric and imperialistic, he does exactly what Frantz would have liked to have done: that is, nothing. At one point, Frantz says to Johanna: "Rassurez-vous Johanna, vous avez affaire à un puceau. Innocence garantie. Vous pouviez bien me sourire. J'ai tué l'Allemagne par sensiblerie" (Sd'A 301). This is of course all untrue. Neither did Frantz refrain from participating in the war, nor was Germany permanently destroyed. But it is the case of Romulus, who, as Emperor of Rome, played the part of the madman by not fulfilling the role of Emperor. By doing nothing, he destroyed Rome by permitting it to be overrun by the Teutons.

So far, we have discussed characters who have feigned madness either by assuming an impossible identity (Newton, Einstein, Henry IV),

or by pretending to believe in the existence of something which simply does not exist. Constance of La Folle de Chaillot has Dickie, while Aurelia has her Adolphe Bertaut; Möbius pretends to believe that Solomon dictates to him; Frantz makes daily confessions to his Crabs. Romulus wears a mask which hides his true feelings and motives and enables him to present the image of a fool or a madman to the world. The idea of the characters consciously assuming masks or costumes is certainly central to Henry IV (everyone on stage is in period costume and has assumed the identity of a historical figure), and Die Physiker ("Newton" and "Einstein" are dressed as those two scientists) as well as La Folle de Chaillot in which Aurelia and her friends dress very deliberately in the style of old-fashioned elegance. In Caligula there is an emphasis on costumes and playacting, but of a much less superficial significance. Caligula puts on the costume of a ballet dancer, and wears a mask of madness and cruelty to frighten his subjects.

The concept of a sudden change in identity is somewhat different in Max Frisch's Graf Öderland. The Public Prosecutor does not assume the identity of the mythical Graf Öderland for the express purpose of convincing people that he is mad. Rather, he switches over into his opposite, thus radically changing his life-style, and so fundamentally he is not the same person he was before. Again as in the other plays, it is the abrupt change in his character and activities that convinces other characters that he is mad.

Roles and playacting make Peter Weiss' drama, Die Verfolgung und Ermordung Jean Paul Marats dargestellt durch die Schauspielgruppe des Hospizes zu Charenton unter Anleitung des Herrn de Sade one of the most complex contemporary dramas. The actors in the Marquis' play are all inmates of an insane asylum; they are thus madmen acting "sane" men, rather than "sane" men acting the role of madmen. At least one patient, playing the radical priest Roux, has a role completely suited to his personality, as he is also in the asylum for his political beliefs. Some play roles which contrast sharply with their sickness; (i.e. Charlotte Corday, the Joan of Arc-like murderess of Marat is played by a girl suffering from melancholia and sleeping sickness). The dramatist has used the idea of madmen playing other roles to very good effect in this many-layered drama.

Closely related to the concept of identity is the idea of mirrors, which reflect the viewer and brings him face to face with himself. Mirrors have played an important part in legends, fairy tales and folklore. From Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs to Alice Through the Looking Glass, the theme has undergone countless variations. It is not surprising that the mirror is an important motif in Camus' Caligula; the emperor talks to his reflection, and at the end, in a gesture of despair and rejection of himself and what he has done, he smashes the mirror. The theme of mirrors is particularly well developed in Henry IV. When the new courtier "Berthold" is being shown around the rooms, he sees the paintings of Henry IV and Donna Matilda twenty years

ago, and is told by Landolph, one of the other valets:

Landolph: Well, it's as if there were two mirrors there, which cast back living images in the midst of a world which, as you will see, when you have lived with us, comes to life too.

Berthold: I say, look here . . . I've no particular desire to go mad here. (H 145)

The doctor's scheme for curing Henry is to make the pictures "come alive" by dressing Frida as her mother in the picture, and Charles de Nolli as his uncle, Henry IV, exactly as they were twenty years ago. Again we have the idea of mirrored images.

The critic Thomas Bishop writes about Henry IV in a way which is relevant to all the characters we have mentioned, who have assumed new identities:

The problem of personality is complicated by the individual's attitude to himself. Often as a result of shattering experiences in the world, a person is so disillusioned with himself that he can no longer bear to live with the image that he sees of himself. At this point he begins a process that Pirandello terms "construirsi," to construct oneself. This process involves adoption of a new personality that henceforth will be presented not only to society but to the individual himself, thereby enabling him to live with himself. It is pure deception, yet a very necessary one, for no one who considers himself too base can endure life. Thus people don masks whose dual function is to offer a pleasing aspect to others and to give a mercifully deluding reflection to the mirror that the wearer must often hold to his face.<sup>4</sup>

Of course, some of the masks adopted by characters in this study (i.e. Caligula), do not present "a pleasing aspect" to others, but



rather a hideous one. In either case, it happens in several instances that the masks become the reality; or at least that the masks become permanent. Thus, at the end of Die Physiker, the three physicists agree to remain in the asylum for the rest of their lives and retain permanently the identities that they had merely assumed to convince others of their insanity. The twist of fate which reveals that Fräulein Doktor Mathilde von Zahnd is actually mad, means that they would have been forced to remain there in any case. "Newton" and "Einstein" will always act those characters, and Möbius now assumes the identity of King Solomon. Exactly the same pattern is followed in Henry IV. When it is revealed that the hero is merely acting the role of Henry, he kills his rival, and is forced to retreat into his insanity and continue his masquerade forever. He surrounds himself with his valets: "Now, yes ..., we'll have to ... here we are... together ... forever!" (H 208).

The borderline between crime and madness is not always clear. Justice decrees that a man is not responsible for a crime if he is certifiably insane. It seems that if a crime is committed unconsciously, the author of the crime is judged insane. If the crime is motivated and committed in total lucid consciousness, the courts generally decree that the person responsible be punished. The same problem arises in Stanislaw Witkiewicz' drama The Madman and the Nun. The poet Walpurg has been committed to an asylum by a society which forces even a creative artist to conform to its rigid laws, but he has been "cured" (if he

ever was sick) by the tender loving care of Sister Anna. Freed from his straitjacket he kills his old enemy, Dr. Bidello, by tapping him on the head with a pencil. Sister Anna's superior, Sister Barbara, exclaims: "You are an utter madman. And if not, you are an ordinary criminal!"<sup>5</sup> If Walpurg was sick when he murdered Bidello, then he is not responsible for his actions. If he was cured, then he is responsible. But the clever Walpurg claims that the act of killing Bidello cured him. "That blow on the skull cured me. That's why I'm not responsible for the murder, but from now on I will be responsible for everything I do in the future."

Similarly, Dürrenmatt's three physicists, having each murdered a nurse, recognize "entweder haben wir geopfert oder gemordet," and decide to continue feigning insanity. And Henry IV resumes his madness rather than face a twentieth century murder charge. Either they face the consequences of their acts, or they remain sick in the eyes of the world.

Both Caligula and Frisch's Public Prosecutor are considered mad partly because of the murders they commit. To the other characters in the plays, these murders seem entirely unmotivated, and thus totally insane acts. But the audience is aware of the underlying humanity and idealism of both men and can understand the reasons for the atrocities they commit, without necessarily condoning those atrocities. Romulus too, is held responsible for the defeat of the Roman Empire by the other characters in the drama who cannot understand

his reasons. Again, the audience, while not totally sympathising with him, at least sees the principles which guide his behaviour and acknowledge them to be humane, even if the method he uses is not.

A somewhat similar case, in Giraudoux' La Folle de Chaillot provokes an entirely different audience response. Again the author presents a situation in which one person, judged feeble-minded or insane by her contemporaries, initiates and carries out a scheme to destroy all the people whom she judges dangerous to her notion of civilised humanity. But this time the author has created a totally sympathetic character, and the audience is in gleeful, unequivocal support. Rather than the Roman Empire, Aurelia is bent on destroying those powerful members of the social structure who oppress the little people, i.e. her and her friends. So she calmly ushers those self-important oppressors down a deep hole from which they are unlikely ever to emerge.

The duality of crime and madness in Les Séquestrés d'Altona is much more difficult to discuss. In writing the play, Sartre was talking primarily about French war crimes in Algeria, and only secondarily about the Nazis in the Second World War.<sup>6</sup> Although he depicts Frantz as essentially a sympathetic character, Sartre is absolutely and unambiguously opposed to torture. Therefore, since Frantz has committed war crimes, it is impossible for him to live a normal life, and sequestration is the only solution. When he does emerge from his room and cannot return to it, he takes the final escape: suicide.

Closely allied with the idea of crime is the theme of power; Frantz began his career as "boucher de Smolensk" because, as his father points out: "une fois dans ta vie, tu as connu l'impuissance" (Sd'A 351). He refers to the fact that despite Frantz' efforts to save a Polish rabbi, his father denounced the prisoner, and Frantz had to be restrained and watch the Nazis disembowel him:

Frantz: Vous m'avez fait Prince, mon père.  
Et savez-vous qui m'a fait Roi?

Le Père: Hitler.

Frantz: Oui. Par la honte. Après cet ...  
incident, le pouvoir est devenu ma  
vocation. . .  
. . .le rabbin saignait et je découvrais,  
au coeur de mon impuissance, je ne sais  
quel assentiment. J'ai le pouvoir  
suprême. Hitler m'a fait un Autre,  
implacable et sacré: lui-même. Je suis  
Hitler et je me surpasserai. Plus de  
vivres; mes soldats rôdaient autour de  
la grange. Quatre bons Allemands m'écras-  
eront contre le sol et mes soldats à moi  
saigneront les prisonniers à blanc. Non!  
Je ne retomberai jamais dans l'abjecte  
impuissance. Je le jure. Il fait noir.  
L'horreur est encore enchaînée ... je  
les prendrai de vitesse: si quelqu'un  
la déchaîne, ce sera moi. Je revendiquerai  
le mal, je manifesterai mon pouvoir  
par la singularité d'un acte inoubliable:  
changer l'homme en vermine de son vivant;  
je m'occuperai seul des prisonniers, je  
les précipiterai dans l'abjection: ils  
parleront. Le pouvoir est un abîme  
dont je vois le fond; cela ne suffit pas  
de choisir les morts futurs; par un  
canif et un briquet, je déciderai du  
règne humain. (Sd'A 351)

This whole situation, including Frantz' passionate statement:

"j'irai jusqu'au bout. Au bout du pouvoir" (Sd'A 350), is remarkably

similar to Caligula's position. A main difference is that Frantz' decisions were practically predetermined by his father, who tried to create his eldest son in his image, while Caligula's decisions are entirely his own. But Caligula too was devastated at his own impotence in the face of Death: the death of his sister Drusilla, while Frantz found himself impotent to stop men from behaving brutally. Caligula too, decided to carry the power he as Emperor possessed to the extreme. But while Frantz is thinking in terms of power over men's lives, Caligula wants power equal to that of the gods:

de quoi me sert ce pouvoir si étonnant si je ne  
puis pas changer l'ordre des choses, si je ne puis  
faire que le soleil se couche à l'est, que la  
souffrance décroisse et que les êtres ne meurent  
pas? (C 41)

As well as torturing people physically, as Frantz does, Caligula teases and mocks his subjects and their beliefs as Romulus does, because, as Emperor of Rome, he has that all-encompassing power. But whereas Romulus is merely being cynical, Caligula desperately wants his subjects to fear death constantly and to become aware of the devastating truth which he has learned. He also tortures them mentally, by making them do things which he knows to be mad, in much the same way as Henry IV. Caligula's demand that the patricians prostrate themselves before him as Venus has much the same effect as Henry's demand that his four courtiers kneel and touch their heads to the floor before him:

Down, down! That's the way you've got to be before madmen! (THEN ANNOYED WITH THEIR FACILE HUMILIATION) Get up, sheep! You obeyed me, didn't you? You might have put the straitjacket on me. (H 190)

The boys are terrified and confused as to whether or not he really is mad, but, as in the case of Caligula's patricians, succumb to his sadistic orders out of fear. As their master, Henry has that power over them to make them obey.

Aurelia, in La Folle de Chaillot, gets her power not from wealth or a title, but from an idea, a naturally superior view of humanity which makes people follow her. Her friends respect her and obey her because of her fundamental belief in the basic goodness of humanity, and freedom for the individual. Similarly, the mob in Graf Öderland makes the Public Prosecutor its leader because the people share his basic belief in freedom. Granted, he uses his axe to quell opposition, but his power comes less from physical force than from the fact that he stands for total freedom.

In discussing freedom, there are several different but related aspects to this concept: physical freedom and psychological freedom. Möbius, by feigning madness, sacrifices his personal freedom. But he retains his psychological freedom, and integrity, which would have been impossible had he been "free" in a conventional sense. Romulus also uses the mask of madness to gain a freedom to act, or rather not to act, in order to ensure that a certain chain of events be followed.

In another asylum, Walpurg of The Madman and the Nun is even more confined than Möbius by the fact that he is in a straitjacket, in a small

cell with barred windows. He feels terrific pressure from society to conform; his refusal to do so is the reason for his being committed. His personal and psychological confinement are further aggravated by the fact that he is an artist, accustomed to total freedom. Walpurg's only desire now is to escape to mental and physical freedom from the "benevolent" society and its stifling rules. Witkiewicz was particularly concerned with the role of the creative artist in a society which enforces conformity by declaring insane those who presume to disagree with it.<sup>7</sup>

Physical and psychological as well as political and social freedom are at issue in Marat/Sade. The repeated interruptions of Coulmier, the director of the asylum, emphasize the constant threat that the players will stage a revolution against him under the guise of enacting the French Revolution. The madmen in the asylum are oppressed as the French before the Revolution. Freedom is a dominant theme in all the songs and chants which particularly point out the oppression of the actors both in the mental asylum and in the social order. However, it must be kept in mind that Weiss treats the subject of freedom with a great deal of irony.

The theme of physical confinement is clear even in the title of Les Séquestrés d'Altona. As in the case of Möbius, it is a voluntary loss of physical freedom on the part of Frantz. But in exchange, he does not gain mental freedom. The freedom he has is merely freedom from responsibility for his former actions. It transpires that Frantz

has never been free in the idealistic existential sense, to make his own decisions, since his father had determined the course of Frantz' life. As he explains perceptively to Johanna, "Mais je ne choisis pas, ma pauvre amie! Je suis choisi" (Sd'A 181).

Both Caligula and the Public Prosecutor, on the other hand, do make their decisions in total physical and psychological freedom. Yet both finally find that this freedom is illusory, as they are controlled and manipulated by the actions they have already taken. They have set wheels in motion which they cannot control. The Public Prosecutor is obsessed with the idea of freedom from routine and social duty; Caligula is more concerned with freedom from myths and illusions about the nature of life and death. Both are defeated by the consequences of their own actions: the Public Prosecutor is forced to assume power, the opposite of freedom, and Caligula realizes: "Je n'aboutis à rien. Ma liberté n'est pas la bonne" (C 154).

In the course of following the paths they have chosen, each of the characters which have been discussed here has neglected a certain responsibility which is his either by virtue of his position, or merely because he is a member of the human race. The fanatic idealism of Romulus, the Public Prosecutor, Caligula and Möbius leads to loss in lives for which they are responsible and which they could have prevented. But when they consider their motivating idea in a vacuum, they ignore the consequences of their actions, and in that sense they are all mad.



However, there is another sense of responsibility which these men do have, which distinguishes them from those around them: they perceive certain aspects of life as they affect their entire society, not just them personally. They want to alter that existing reality for everyone, not just themselves, and take the responsibility for changing things on themselves. That is, Romulus and Möbius put on the mask of madness to prevent certain developments from taking place: developments which would have given more power to their own society which they consider untrustworthy. If they considered themselves in a vacuum from the rest of society, as so many people do, they might act "normally."

The Public Prosecutor and Caligula work actively to impose change for the rest of society. The Public Prosecutor's revolt is at first personal, but he takes on the responsibility for others when he sees how popular his cause is. Similarly, Aurelia, in La Folle de Chaillot, sees her responsibility to others to rid society of those people who oppress and exploit others.

These characters all see further than their own particular situation, try to improve the state of society, and therefore are considered mad by the others. They are all basically idealists, whose ideas, considered in a vacuum, are humane, but when put in the context of the existing reality, are unrealistic and essentially unworkable.

A notable exception to this is Henry IV, whose motives in feigning madness were purely personal. The critic Francis Jeanson makes this

point in a discussion of Henry IV and Caligula:

De Henri IV (1922) à Caligula (1945), on conviendra que les préoccupations et les thèmes essentiels ne sont pas devenus foncièrement différents. C'est bien la même dénonciation de ce monde qui n'est pas ce qu'il devrait être; le même mépris à l'égard de ceux qui s'en accommodent; le même sentiment de la solitude; le même pessimisme; le même recours au choix de l'absurde contre l'absurdité même de l'existence; la même frénésie de nier et de détruire, de faire chavirer le monde sous les pieds de ceux qui ont pris des assurances. "Se trouver devant un fou ... cela veut dire: se trouver devant quelqu'un qui ébranle jusque dans leurs assises toutes les choses que nous avons construites en nous, autour de nous..." Caligula jouait de son pouvoir impérial pour nier toute vérité--mais les fous, ou du moins ceux dont on croit qu'ils sont fous, disposent d'un pouvoir peut-être supérieur: "quand ces hommes-là se mettent à parler, ils cassent tout, les conventions volent en éclats ... on décide que je suis fou; mais tout le monde m'écoute pourtant avec épouvante ..."

Une différence, qui paraît fondamentale, risque toutefois de contester ces frappantes analogies: elle est due à l'intervention dans Caligula du thème de la responsabilité, absent des préoccupations d'Henri IV. Ce dernier, en effet, ne se pose à aucun moment un problème humain d'ordre pratique: à partir de la vision du monde qui est la sienne, il a adopté et il maintient une attitude qui ne concerne que lui-même--et c'est de façon bien négligente qu'il lui arrive de la préconiser à ses quatre "conseillers". Ce n'est pas pour que le monde soit meilleur qu'il se révolte, c'est simplement parce que le monde est mauvais; et s'il en conteste la loi, ce n'est pas dans l'espoir de lui en substituer une autre, c'est seulement en choisissant de ne plus vivre désormais que sous la sienne propre. Ce qui donne à cette contestation et à cette révolte un sens de passivité et de démission qu'elles n'ont point chez Caligula.

It is interesting to note that almost all the characters in this study have sacrificed personal love to their ultimate goal. Romulus married, not for love, but for the position which the marriage would open for him. The only person he really loves is his daughter Rea, and even her death does not make him question the validity of his plan. Möbius gave up his wife and children for the asylum, and when he falls in love with his nurse, he strangles her rather than giving up his plan. Giving up his relationship with his wife was probably not as great a sacrifice for the Public Prosecutor, but even when a pretty young girl like Inge falls in love with him, he devotes more time to the revolution than to her.

The problem of love and human relationships is far more complex in Caligula. R.W.B. Lewis points out the fact that Caligula rejects, or is disappointed in, all types of relationships after Death ended his incestuous relationship with his sister Drusilla. He forces Caesonia to obey his cruel whims, harshly stops the intimate conversation with Scipio, is forced to realize that Cherea was not being totally frank and that an open discussion was after all impossible, and finally confronts himself in the mirror, only to smash it and the hope of ever coming to terms with himself with it.

The absolute solitude arrived at in the closing instant is then, dramatically speaking, altogether appropriate: the end towards which the play and its hero have been determinedly moving from the outset. In pursuit of his negative ideal, Caligula must explore the varieties of possible personal

relationships, if only to demonstrate the fragility or fraudulence of all of them: the heterosexual relation (with its portion of mother-son involvement, and a hint of further incest); the relation of masculine love (with its portion of father-son involvement, for Caligula curiously but understandably replaces for Scipio the father he has murdered); the intellectual companionship of equals; and the relation of the psyche to itself. All are experimented with, undermined and rejected; and the action fulfills itself--with a burst of horrified enthusiasm--in the established fact of utter and permanent alienation.<sup>9</sup>

Alienation, isolation, and failure mark the end of each attempt to create a better world in these dramas. By the end of Caligula, the hero is totally alone, having just strangled Caesonia, the last person with whom he could have a relationship. When his attackers come, he faces them entirely alone; the only person who might have defended him, Hélicon, has been murdered. It is this solitude which makes him realize, "Si j'avais eu la lune, si l'amour suffisait, tout serait changé" (C 154). Camus obviously strongly disagrees with Caligula's method, although he sympathises with his awareness.

Before the arrival of Odoaker in Romulus der Große there are a few moments when Romulus also is sitting alone and awaiting his expected death; the Empire is in ruins, his wife and child and the rest of the household drowned, and even his two faithful servants have abandoned him for more lucrative positions. With the appearance of Odoaker and the subsequent conversation comes the realization that

it has all been in vain; because the next ruler will inevitably be Odoaker's imperialistic nephew Theoderich, Romulus has not succeeded in saving the world from barbarism. In a similar twist of fate, Möbius, abandoned by his family and having sacrificed Monika, realizes that his sacrifice too has been in vain; he has not succeeded in keeping his scientific discoveries out of the hands of irresponsible people seeking power. But it is important to realize that the ultimate failure of the heroes in Dürrenmatt's plays resulted from something external to them. The twist of fate, the "Zufall" of which Dürrenmatt speaks in the twenty-one points is beyond their control.

Dürrenmatt's ambiguous attitude to the reformer is evident in these two instances. By making them both recognize their failure to change things, he seems to indicate that they are presumptuous in expecting to change the existing reality by means of their idea put into action. However, he creates very sympathetic characters. Thus Odoaker, the mirror-image of Romulus in his intentions and the results of his actions, points out, "Dein Tod wäre sinnlos, denn einen Sinn könnte er nur haben, wenn die Welt so wäre, wie du sie dir vorgestellt hast. Sie ist nicht so" (R 71). And Romulus expresses the same idea in some of the wisest and most important words in the drama: "Die Wirklichkeit hat unsere Ideen korrigiert" (R 73).

The failure of the Public Prosecutor to gain a psychological freedom has already been discussed at some length. In all the endings with which Frisch experimented, including the last one, the hero is

totally alienated from the rest of society. Even if the whole experience were to be interpreted as a dream, the audience is bound to be profoundly aware of the alienation which the Public Prosecutor feels from his wife and his work. Like Dürrenmatt, Frisch's attitude towards his hero is ambivalent. He recognizes the desire of the bourgeois citizen to escape from the constraints put on him by society. However, he indicates in this play that total freedom leads first to chaos and anarchy, and then to a perhaps more structured society than before. Like Peter Weiss, he believes that new freedom brings new oppression.

A similar pattern of isolation and defeat is followed in Henry IV and Les Séquestrés d'Altona. It is Henry's love for Donna Matilda and the distress at losing her, that led him to feign madness in the first place. For twenty years he has led a fairly solitary life. When she comes back, in his eyes out of pity, he gets his revenge by killing his rival. With that gesture, he destroys any chance of re-establishing a friendship with her. The last image is of Henry, protected from the world by his four valets, permanently alienated from the rest of society. Similarly, Frantz has shut himself off from all human contact except that with his sister for thirteen years. The one hope he has of rejoining society is, as in Henry's case, in a woman's love. But Johanna is repelled by his past actions and rejects him. The only way out for him is suicide.

From this discussion a pattern emerges of characters whom modern writers see as "madmen." None of the characters behave in the illogical, unreasoned manner that is typical of the medically insane. However, all are possessed; not by the proverbial Devil, but by an idea, lucidly and logically expressed, which blinds them to reality. This idea, if considered in itself, is positive. But the fanatic's "madness" consists in his not taking other people and factors of the existing reality into account when trying to change humanity to fit his vision.

In each case, the "madness" of the main character results from his deep awareness of his situation in society, and his rejection of the values of that society. His revolt against the social order is idealistic; he wants to bring about a new, more meaningful world. But in each case, the revolt fails, leading either to chaos (in the cases of Caligula and Öderland) or to a reimposition of the old system in a new, more dangerous form (in the cases of Romulus and Möbius). The "madman" brings about the precise situation which he tried to avoid.

Despite the failure of the revolt to bring radical change, the ideals espoused by the "madmen" are positive, especially when contrasted with those of the "sane" members of society. Indeed, each of the dramatists explicitly indicates the possibility that it is the "mad" who are sane, and the "sane" who, in accepting the traditional order, are actually mad.

The twentieth century writer is more concerned with this idea than writers of past ages for one principal reason: there has never been a period in which ethical norms have so completely broken down. With the absence of religion as an ethical standard, there are no absolutes and everything becomes relative. Sanity too becomes relative. In previous literature, it was generally personal reasons that caused a character to become mad; the main reason being disappointment in love. But now writers are concerned less with man's personal relationships, and more with his relationship to society. As that relationship becomes more tenuous, so does man's sanity.

Drama is probably the art form that most faithfully reflects any given social situation, because it is intended for public performance. It exists fully only in relation to its audience, and, on a broader scale, in relation to the entire social and political community. Readers and audiences are inevitably bound to recognize that the "madmen" face problems that are extremely relevant to our time. They are also likely to be sympathetic to the ideals espoused by the "madmen" in their pure form: ideals of freedom, happiness, humanity. But they will also recognize the impossibility of fulfilling that dream, and the "madness" of those who try. Idealists who are oblivious to reality will always be considered mad by the society which they are trying so desperately to reform.

The dichotomy between the "madman" and society, between the fool and the establishment,<sup>10</sup> between the radical and those who wish



to preserve the existing order is summed up by the Polish philosopher Leszek Kolakowski in the metaphor of the priest and the jester.

The priest is the guardian of the absolute who upholds the cult of the final and the obvious contained in the tradition. The jester is he who, although a habitué of good society, does not belong to it and makes it the object of his inquisitive impertinence--he who questions what appears to be self-evident. . . . The philosophy of the jester is a philosophy which in every epoch denounces as doubtful what appears as unshakable; it points out the contradictions in what seems evident and incontestable; it ridicules common sense and reads sense into the absurd.<sup>11</sup>

This is precisely the situation of the four "mad" dramatic characters in this discussion. The magnitude of this problem for the modern creative mind is evidenced by the fact that a philosopher such as Kolakowski is as concerned with it as are dramatists of the twentieth century. The philosopher expresses in theoretical terms the same problems that the dramatist develops in the characters and action of a play. It is significant to recognize that similar conclusions are reached by both paths.

We declare ourselves in favour of the philosophy of the jester, that is, for an attitude of negative vigilance in the face of any absolute. This we do not because we want to argue; in these matters, a choice is an appraisal. We declare ourselves in favour of the nonintellectual values inherent in an attitude the perils and absurdities of which we know. It is the option for a vision of the world that provides prospects for a slow and difficult realignment of the elements in our human action that are most difficult to align: goodness without universal toleration, courage without fanaticism, intelligence without apathy, and hope without blindness. All other fruits of philosophy are of little importance.<sup>12</sup>

Footnotes: Chapter Six

- <sup>1</sup> R. Trousson, Les Études de Themes (Paris, 1965), p. 30.
- <sup>2</sup> L. Pirandello, "Henry IV," in Naked Masks, ed. Eric Bentley, trans. Edward Storer (New York, 1952), p. 204. Hereafter cited as H.
- <sup>3</sup> J.P. Sartre, Les Séquestrés d'Altona (Paris, 1960), p. 279. Hereafter cited as Sd'A.
- <sup>4</sup> Thomas Bishop, Pirandello and the French Theatre (New York, 1960), p. 28.
- <sup>5</sup> S. Witkiewicz, The Madman and the Nun and Other Plays, trans. and ed. Daniel C. Gerould and C.S. Durer (Seattle, 1968), p. 24.
- <sup>6</sup> Oreste Pucciani, "Interview with Jean-Paul Sartre," Tulane Drama Review, V,3 (March 1961), p. 13.
- <sup>7</sup> Witkiewicz belonged to the Dada generation, which had a deep awareness of the crisis in occidental literature.
- <sup>8</sup> Francis Jeanson, "Pirandello et Camus à travers Henri IV et Caligula," Les Temps Modernes, no. 61 (Novembre 1950), p. 952.
- <sup>9</sup> R.W.B. Lewis, "Caligula: or the Realm of the Impossible," Yale French Studies No. 25, p. 57.
- <sup>10</sup> The title of a forthcoming book by the critic Jan Kott is to be A Fool Against the Establishment, in which he argues that Greek heroes were "mad" in the sense of not accepting the norms of their society.
- <sup>11</sup> Leszek Kolakowski, "The Priest and the Jester," The Modern Polish Mind, ed. Maria Kuncewicz (Boston, 1962), p. 323.
- <sup>12</sup> Kolakowski, p. 326.

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