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THE THEMES OF JUSTICE AND GRACE
"IN THREE OF FRIEDRICH DÜRRENMATT'S EARLY WORKS

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department
of
German

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

December, 1980

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ABSTRACT

In this study I am attempting to shed some light on the themes of justice and grace as they are expressed in three different works by Friedrich Dürrenmatt, a contemporary Swiss playwright. The drama Es steht geschrieben (1947), the comedy Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon (1953) and the radio-play Das Unternehmen der Wega (1954) were written within a time-span of approximately eight years and can therefore be counted among the author's early works (taking into consideration that his most recent play was published in 1976).

In the playwright's first drama, Es steht geschrieben, the topics of justice and grace are presented in balanced proportions, in their negative as well as positive aspects. The themes are expressed by frequent use of symbols; by parody, often of biblical revelations and events; by caricatures of certain characters; and by grotesque contrast in situations and the behaviour of the relevant types. A good deal of irony, satire and humor is explicit or implied as well. In addition, I tried to draw attention to the nature of immanent justice and grace in this drama.

In Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon, the two themes are not as evenly distributed as is the case in the first work discussed. The predominance of grace seems to have resulted in less severity in the content of this play. Although the theme

of justice clearly exists, it is outweighed here, by the impact of grace on man. I have attempted to elucidate Dürrenmatt's approach and choice of genre in conveying both of the themes in this comedy, discussing form as well as the characters employed.

In Das Unternehmen der Wega, justice and grace are almost exclusively of an immanent kind. The topics are conveyed predominantly by the attitudes, motivations and behaviour of the various individuals or groups. There is little symbolism in this play but irony and satire are implicit throughout. It is a "secular" work as opposed to the two previously discussed ones, which show a strong religious content. This makes for a different philosophical outlook in this play on basic problems and their possible solutions in human existence.

In all three works Dürrenmatt has demonstrated convincingly, I think, how justice and grace are perceived and interpreted. Acceptance or rejection of these concepts are contingent upon the attitudes and insights of the individuals or groups in question; whether for better or worse, is still up to man's free choice.

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INTRODUCTION

The themes of justice and grace can be observed in most of Friedrich Dürrenmatt's works. In some they are of a more explicit, in others of a more immanent nature. In the three plays discussed in this thesis, the topics are quite overtly expressed in the first two instances, whereas in the third one, the themes are mostly inherent in the portrayal of the characters, their attitudes and actions.

The three works in question present an interesting variety of genres. The drama Es steht geschrieben is in the style of a "Welttheater", conveying a baroque richness of images, characters and situations. For the comedy Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon the author chooses the form of an oriental fairy-tale, combined to some extent with places and characters from Old Testament times. In the radio-play Das Unternehmen der Wega we have the aural effect only where the spoken word, without any visual impact, spurs on the listener's imagination.

Certain conspicuous features are common to all three plays discussed. Irony, for instance, is noticeable in each work. In the first drama, the rich, influential and righteous protagonist becomes poor and ridiculous--by his own choice. The initially poor antagonist becomes wealthy and powerful--

solely by means of shrewdness and ambition. Ironically, though, they both suffer the same fate, a violent death.

In the comedy discussed, the naive idealist evolves into a frustrated and vengeful ruler. The innocent and loving heroine, on the other hand, is continually disappointed but maintains hope against hope. Only the poor beggar manages to avoid frustration and disappointment because he has neither expectations nor illusions about man but, surprisingly, he retains a note of optimism. Not even the angel escapes Dürrenmatt's irony in this play. Despite his essentially spiritual nature, the angel is endowed with a number of very human traits.

Irony can also be detected throughout the third play. It is ironical, for instance, that the delegation from planet Earth attempts to win allies -- from a people the terrestrials had, for two centuries, deported to another planet and left there to perish. It is ironical, too, that the so-called peaceful mission from Earth turns out to carry with it the most destructive weapons on board the space-craft.

There is wisdom and insight demonstrated in all three works. This is expressed mostly by individuals or groups of people who realize and accept an unfathomable kind of justice and mercy, whether they are perceived as being of a divine nature or based simply on the premises of humanitarian ethics. The protagonist and an old cleric excel with their insight in the first drama, the former in a more religious sense, the latter in a humanitarian way. Wisdom is shown most impres-

sively by the beggar in the second play. There are no religious connotations in his attitude but he is probably the most convincing humanist in these plays. In the radio-play, it is a former deputy of the planet Earth who chooses to become a doctor and spend his time and energy solely to relieve the suffering of his fellow-men. His wisdom and insight is based on the realization of the weaknesses of human nature. There is acceptance in his attitude but no despair.

Last but not least, there is the entertaining element in each of the three works discussed. As mentioned earlier, there is the colourful abundance of the first drama in the tradition of a "Welttheater". Grotesque contrasts are used effectively. Humor, parody and irony make for a rich variety of impressions in this play. Even the most solemn monologues and dialogues are often followed by witty discourses or comments.

In the comedy it is the style of a fairy-tale in connection with the dim past of the Old Testament time which makes for unusual effects. The combination of ordinary mortals and beings from outer space, i.e. heaven, adds to the uniqueness of this play. It is the beggar again who excels with satire and humor whereas both of these are of a more implied nature in some other characters, notably the King and the members of his court.

The entertaining element in the third play lies mostly in its science-fiction aspect. The author lets the listener

visualize the environment of a planet, thus far unknown to man. In addition, the possibilities of a space-age which had just begun when Dürrenmatt wrote this radio-play, are stimulating to the mind of modern man. There is little overt humor in the characters involved but some is inherent in situations and the reactions of certain individuals from the planet Earth.

The didactic element can hardly be overlooked in the three works in question although this aspect is not explicit anywhere. Independent thinking or the lack of it is mentioned or alluded to in each of the plays. Ready-made solutions are nowhere presented but the inevitable consequences of attitudes and actions are demonstrated throughout the works chosen here. Justice and grace are thus illustrated and made palatable while, at the same time, provoking the audiences to ponder and take a stand on these matters.

CHAPTER ONE

The themes of justice and grace in Dürrenmatt's
first drama, "Es steht geschrieben"

The content of Es steht geschrieben, Dürrenmatt's first drama on stage (première in Zürich, 1947) is predominantly religious in nature and its main purpose seems to be, as Elisabeth Brock-Sulzer points out, to disquiet the audiences and to arouse them from spiritual lethargy.¹ In doing so, the playwright has obviously succeeded in creating a drama of timeless validity, in the tradition of the baroque "Welt-theater." Timo Tiusanen aptly notes: "There is a baroque abundance and co-existence of extreme contrasts in Dürrenmatt, there is his ambition to create the whole world on stage."² The author himself, however, chooses to remain ambiguous on this. In the preface to this drama, he states: "Inwieweit sich heutiges Geschehen [darin] spiegelt, sei dahingestellt" (p. 12). In his introductory stage directions, though, he calls the happenings in the play "eine kunterbunte Welt, die gestern genau so war wie heute und morgen" (p. 12).

Whether one views it in the historical context, i.e. the rise and fall of the Anabaptist movement in Münster, Westfalia, shortly after the first upheavals of the Reformation, or considers it in the light of more recent events, such as

the rise and subsequent downfall of the Third Reich, the significance of justice and grace can hardly be overlooked.

The theme of justice in Es steht geschrieben is made evident by a number of recurring symbols, by parody, caricatures and also, at times, through stage direction. Equally important, however, is an immanent justice which is revealed in the attitudes and actions of the various characters on stage. There are relatively few symbols expressing grace as compared to the numerous ones referring to justice. Grace is the polarity of the latter which is not surprising, since Es steht geschrieben appears to be strongly influenced by the "Welttheater" of the baroque period, and Gero von Wilpert, in his definition of this time, states: "Polarität und innere Spannungen sind Grundformen barocker Welterfahrung".³

The most conspicuous symbol of justice in Dürrenmatt's first drama is the sword. The Anabaptists, for instance, regard themselves as the sword God has chosen to bring about justice amongst the condemned (in this case, the Catholics and the Lutherans). The tribulations the Baptists themselves have to suffer, are interpreted as a necessary process in becoming the sword of God's revenge. "Gott gefiel es," they say, "seine Knechte dem Bösen auszuliefern, denn so einer ein Schwert will, hält er das Eisen ins Feuer" (p. 14). The sect considers itself called upon to purge the world for the Second Coming of Christ. They reserve, however, to themselves the right to punish and even execute those who are opposed to them,

surpassing their own persecutors in cruelty and vengeance. This self-righteousness results eventually, after a brief flowering of their power, in their own destruction.

Jan Matthisson, the leader and prophet of the Anabaptists of Münster, introduces himself (in Brechtian manner) carrying a giant sword, "das Schwert der Gerechtigkeit" (p. 48). When the council members of the sect suggest that the city-walls be repaired and troops be gathered in order to defend the city, Matthisson declines their request by threatening them: "Wer mit der Absicht handelt, die Stadt wider den Feind zu verteidigen, soll durch das Schwert umkommen" (p. 52), thus assuming judicial authority over them. He himself, however, when he rushes out of the city to defeat the enemy single-handedly (assuming self-righteously that God would be on his side) cannot refrain from killing a few soldiers with his own sword before he is overpowered, thus, ironically, confirming the quotation from the Bible which he had previously used (that, whosoever shall use the sword, shall die by the sword). His interpretation of justice has become self-fulfilling prophecy.

In the scene between Knipperdollinck, his daughter Judith and the drunken night-watchman, the sword is again the central symbol of justice. The formerly rich merchant, who chose poverty and ridicule as his lot in order to gain salvation, and his innocent daughter who followed her father into a life of abject poverty, are the only ones able to grasp the true

meaning and implications of justice. In a highly rhetorical dialogue justice is circumscribed. "Was ist Gerechtigkeit?" the father asks his daughter, "wer ist gerecht auf dieser runden Erde?" Judith's answer: "Es kommt den Menschen nicht zu, gerecht zu sein" leads to his insight that man will never be capable of being just, and he exclaims: "Hört ihr Menschen . . . Ungerechtigkeit ist euer Los . . . und Irrtum" (p. 77). As a consequence of this realization, Knipperdollinck passes on the sword of justice to the lowliest of the Anabaptists, the stinking, drunken night-watchman, despite the latter's protest. (In Die Wiedertäufer, twenty years later, Dürrenmatt carries this topic yet another step. This time, the inheritor of the sword of justice, a butcher, does not decline the judicial authority bestowed on him but, on the contrary, menaces his fellow Baptists: "Ich bin Statthalter geworden, Ihr Täufer. Ich werde unnachdsichtig gegen jeden vorgehen, der nicht an unsere gerechte Sache glaubt".⁴ With this, the playwright evidently confirms the point he had already made in Es steht geschrieben, namely that man cannot know justice, and furthermore that as soon as he is given power to execute justice, he is liable to abuse it.)

Besides these more seriously treated instances where the sword is used as a symbol of justice, there are also some very funny parodies in connection with this symbol. One is the caricature of a city-guard, depicted in the stage directions as "ein kleines, dickes Männlein, . . . das einen mäch-

tigen Säbel am Gürtel hängen hat, der hinter ihm mit grossem Gepolter über den Boden holpert," calling: "Das Gesetz ist das Gesetz" (p. 19). It is a clumsy kind of justice represented here. The grotesque size of the sword making more of a hindrance in enforcing the law than contributing to its effectiveness. Instead of arresting Bockelson, the guard soon bows to the eloquence of the self-appointed prophet and, having been promised shared riches in the future kingdom of the Anabaptists, he decides to ignore "das Gesetz" and join the pseudo-religious leader.

Another instance of a parody of the sword of justice is the person of the vegetable-seller. This female character (who calls to mind Grimmelshausen's over-sexed and militant "Courasche") can hardly wait to lay hands on the handsome and virile looking enemies she espies from the city wall. "Der Feind! Der Feind!" she shouts, "Ich will ihn an meinen Leib pressen und ihn zerquetschen", to which one of the bystanders remarks: "Ich möchte sie mit einem zweischneidigen Schwerte vergleichen, so grausam wird sie innerhalb und ausserhalb der Mauer wüten" (p. 57), and he recommends that the city gates be bolted lest the "two-edged sword" escape. Not unlike Jan Matthisson, but without his religious fervour, the vegetable-woman wants to bring about justice by leading the poorly-armed citizenry of Münster onto the walls from where they are soon, however, ordered back into town by Matthisson who, at the time, is still in authority.

The sword, then, as a symbol of justice, whether it is used in a figurative sense as in the case of the Anabaptists or the above mentioned vegetable-seller; or as a stage requisite (mostly in disproportionate size); or as the outward symbol in a rhetorical dialogue, often appears to be the appropriate symbol of justice, aptly and effectively used by Dürrenmatt to convey this central topic.

The next most often recurring symbol of justice in Es steht geschrieben, is the sun. In the first lines of the play (a parody of the apocalyptic visions of St. John), one of the Baptists exclaims: "Gott verhüllte sein Angesicht, da erlosch die Sonne im Meer" (p. 13). A description of the chaos and the appearance of the condemned from the underworld ensues. With God ignoring his creation, justice disappears from the face of the earth and "sie [the condemned] erhoben sich, zu töten und zogen aus wider die Täufer" (p. 13). God, the sun and justice are juxtaposed: God equalling light and the disappearance of light resulting in the vanishing of justice.

In another instance, pertaining this time to the state of an individual, the sun again symbolizes the light of a higher justice. The scene takes place in the house of the wealthy Knipperdollinck whose complacency is profoundly disturbed when he reads the Bible words: "Verkaufe was du hast und gib's den Armen, so wirst du einen Schatz im Himmel haben . . ." (p. 26), and his daughter Judith's ominous remark:

"Ich will euch Licht bringen. Die Sonne ist hinter dem Dom und es wird Nacht" (p. 27), aptly expresses the encroaching darkness and despair in the rich merchant's heart. Although the innocence and love of his daughter shine like a sun in her father's life, she is unable to bring light into his spiritual anguish. Whereas the disappearance of the sun causes, in the first-mentioned instance, an outward chaos, as illustrated in the mock apocalyptic vision, the same event now symbolizes the inner turmoil and confusion in the wealthy man's heart.

Also associated with the sun as a symbol of light and justice is gold. When Knipperdollinck, roused by the written word of the Bible, decides to dispose of his riches in order to gain a treasure in heaven, he throws gold coins by the sackful among the people on the market-place, shouting: "Nehmt! Nehmt! Da und da. Gold, das rollt, das klirrt, das tanzt . . . wie kleine Sonnen. Fort damit" (p. 42). Bockelson, for his part, has no qualms about the Bible word regarding a universal kind of justice (which could be implied in "Verkauf was du hast und gib's den Armen . . ."), To him, it is obviously justified that Knipperdollinck's wealth becomes his possession, since the former had come to Münster with nothing but a torn garment on his body and an empty stomach, thereby establishing a kind of mock justice. Only the vegetable-seller, in the scene on the market-place, shows her own sense of justice. "Ich nehme kein geschenktes [Gold]", she

says to Monk Bleibeganz: "Ich bin eine klassenbewusste Proletarierin" (p. 42).

The sun is, however, not only symbolizing light or gold but is also equated with several characters in Es steht geschrieben. Johann Bockelson says, for instance, about the prophet Jan Matthisson, after the latter had walked into certain death when he was attempting to defeat the numerous enemies single-handedly: "Allzulange warst du die Sonne dieser Stadt . . . seht nun den Tod des alten Propheten, seht nun, wie sich die Sonne ins Meer der Ewigkeit versenkt" (p. 56). Bockelson now sees that the time of his rule has come. After the religious fanatic, the materialistic manipulator takes over.

In a highly comical scene, the drunken night-watchman, when suddenly faced with Knipperdollinck who carries the sword of justice, cries in fear: ". . . nur nicht das Schwert, o Sonne der Gerechtigkeit" (p. 78). Similarly, the Emperor Charles V considers himself "die Sonne, um die sich alles dreht", although his dream is to circle around a statue of justice "wie um eine Sonne, jahrelang und nichts anderes" (p. 68).

This somewhat unrealistic dream of Charles V points to yet another symbol of justice, namely the statue of justice. The Emperor makes it quite explicit what kind of statue this should be and where it should be located. He envisages an ordinary kind of "justice", blind-folded, a scale in one hand and a

sword in the other (p. 68). Justice, then, should be ordinary, i.e. applicable to everyone; blind-folded, i.e. being impartial; with a scale, i.e. weighing the good and the bad against each other; and with a sword, i.e. having the power to execute justice.

Even the most desirable location where the statue should stand, is specified by the Emperor. "Es muss ein Kloster sein," he says, "abgelegen in kahlen Bergen, mit einem kreisrunden Hof in der Mitte, umgeben von einem Laubengang antiker Säulen . . . " (p. 68). It would be interesting to know whether Dürrenmatt used the depiction of this particular architectural arrangement for the location of the statue of justice consciously or intuitively. It calls to my mind, at any rate, Carl Jung's definition of the archetype of the Mandala. He defines this as a "Kreis, [ein] speziell magischer Kreis"⁵, and then elaborates: "Die Mandalas sind nicht nur über den ganzen Osten verbreitet, sondern auch bei uns aus dem Mittelalter reichlich bezeugt."⁶ In Aniela Jaffé's essay on "The symbol of the circle", she states: "In architecture the mandala also plays an important part--but one that often passes unnoticed. It forms the ground plan of both the secular and sacred buildings in nearly all civilizations."⁷

From the above, one might well assume that the playwright, whether he was, at the time he wrote Es steht geschrieben, familiar with the concept of the Mandala or not, consciously or else intuitively chose this particularly striking archetypal

image to emphasize the central importance of justice.

Of significance is also that Charles V reserves the to him ideal state, the contemplation of justice in the solitude of a monastery, for the evening of his life. This may well express the utopian quality of the Emperor's wish for a world where justice would be at the centre of man's thoughts. His somewhat weary-sounding statement, however: "Noch aber ist es dumpfer Mittag und noch bin ich die Sonne, um die sich alles dreht" (p. 69), indicates that the ruler of the Holy Roman Empire is still in the middle of his life and has to shoulder the burden of exercising justice.

Besides the most conspicuous symbols of justice in Es steht geschrieben, the sword, the sun and the statue of justice, it follows almost inevitably that there would also be judges and executors. And indeed, as Werner Oberle states:

Dürrenmatt's Werk erinnert an ein Gericht. Immer wieder sind Richter da, immer wieder auch Henker, und vor allem sind da diejenigen, die sich mit dem Richter oder Henker auseinandersetzen müssen, die ihre Schuld bekennen oder abstreiten, solche, die ihren Tod annehmen, und solche, die sich als nicht-betroffen erklären. 8

Among the judges in this drama, it is foremost God as the omniscient judge who is acknowledged most dramatically in the last scene of the play when Knipperdollinck, in his monologue on the torture-wheel, cries out: "Die Tiefe meiner Verzweiflung ist nur ein Gleichnis deiner Gerechtigkeit" (p. 115). By fully accepting the unfathomable justice of God he, as Murray Peppard aptly remarks, "achieves a kind of transfigura-

tion and an ecstatic vision of God's justice and mercy despite all appearances."⁹

Christ, whose Second Coming on Judgment Day is referred to early in Es steht geschrieben, is the other significant judge in the spiritual realm. The religious fervour of the Anabaptists seems to be caused mostly by the anticipation of this event which they expect to take place in the near future. Münster is regarded by them as the potential new Zion, that is, of course, after the "unbelievers", i.e. the Catholics and in particular their Bishop "mit seinen Kebsweibern und Lustknaben," as well as "die erbärmlichen Lutheraner" (p. 15) have been defeated. Only then, so they believe, "wird endlich der Tag kommen, der verheissen ist, wo er allen sichtbar, in feuriger Wolke sitzen wird, Gericht zu halten über Gerechte und Ungerechte" (p. 15). When Christ, in the final judgment, separates the lambs from the goats, the Anabaptists take it for granted that they will be among the former ones. Their self-righteousness prevents them from seeing their own hypocrisy.

Then there are other, mostly self-appointed judges in this drama. Jan Matthisson, the leader of the Anabaptists, is one of them. The stage directions for this scene are: "Matthisson wendet sich von den Zuschauern (after his lengthy self-introduction in front of the curtain) ab, und schreitet auf den mittleren, kostbaren Sessel zu, der auch etwas erhöht ist" (p. 50). The visual effect, then, is already

one of a king or a judge. His address to the council members of the sect confirms this: "Ihr Väter der Täufer, ihr, die ihr sitzt zu meiner Rechten und Linken auf Stühlen der Gerechtigkeit und der Rache" (p. 50). Here again, Dürrenmatt created a parody of the Last Judgement by letting Matthisson assume the role of Christ and his council members those of executioners.

Matthisson's religious fanaticism, his utter lack of diplomacy (he refuses, for instance, any request of the Catholic Bishop without considering it first, p. 52), and his absence of discernment as to the seriousness of the danger threatening the city, prove him to be a very incompetent judge.

Johann Bockelson, Matthisson's successor, is a judge of a different order. Realistic and shrewd, the newly elected King of the Anabaptists has the last word in matters of life and death (although he has, pro forma, invested Knipperdollinck with the symbolic sword of justice). It is he who orders that the starving women and children of Münster be killed by their own soldiers before they run into certain death at the hands of the enemy outside the city gates. He does not, however, have Knipperdollinck executed when the latter resigns voluntarily from his position as a judge and commits the unpardonable blunder of passing the sword of justice to the lowly night-watchman. Bockelson merely orders that the "offender" be removed from his sight. "Übergebt ihn den Eingeweiden der Erde, einem Ort, wie ein Grab, fern von unserem Ohr, dass wir sein

Stöhnen nicht vernehmen" (p. 85). This sentence, although praised unisono by the court as a solomonic judgment, surpasses in cruelty the penalty of immediate death.

In the first-mentioned instance of Bockelson's judgment, an appreciation of the real situation, namely certain death for the starving women and children who are attempting to flee the city and run into the enemies hands, appears to justify his order, whereas, in the second case, it is more likely insulted vanity which lets him take revenge on Knipperdollinck by removing him from the sight of the pleasure-loving court.

Knipperdollinck, on the other hand, proves himself to be a merciful judge towards Bockelson. When they reverse roles (in the scene before the dance on the roof-tops of Münster), the former now on the King's throne, it is at first a solemn reckoning. "Wer hat dich zum König gemacht?" Knipperdollinck asks. "Ich bin gekommen, Rechenschaft von dir zu verlangen, König Bockelson", and then adds the ominous question: "Wo ist mein Weib Katherina und wo ist mein Töchterchen Judith?" (p. 105). Bockelson, whose riches (which he had taken from the wealthy merchant) are now exhausted has to admit that only Knipperdollinck's possessions had enabled him to lead, for a limited time, a life of luxury and splendour. In addition, he has to confess the dreadful truth that the merchant's wife and daughter are both dead (that Bockelson himself has killed Katherina and has, indirectly, caused also Judith's

death is not elaborated upon). Knipperdollinck, however, does not condemn his opponent but proposes instead that they become reconciled and dance together. Knipperdollinck's kind of justice seems to confirm the Bible word: "Mein ist die Rache". By not taking his justified revenge on Bockelson, he transcends the merely human aspect of justice and reflects God's mercy instead.

Besides the self-appointed judges in Dürrenmatt's first drama, there are two more significant characters endowed with judicial power which both, although for different reasons, resent. The Emperor Charles V obviously detests the role of a judge. There are two main reasons given for this: the vastness of his empire, and his excessive love for order and predictability.

Charles' V statement: "Die Zahl meiner Ländereien ist so gross, dass ich sie nicht einmal auswendig aufsagen kann" (p. 68) indicates the improbability of controlling and ruling justly over so vast an empire. (The playwright seems to satirize here any over-sized empire, state or organization as he does too, for instance, in his novel Grieche sucht Griechin (1955), where the head of a large chemical combine has almost completely lost touch with the lower levels of his organization, is thus unable to effectively prevent corruption, due to the sheer impossibility of being informed, and retires into the aloofness of philosophical speculations.)

In addition, to the vastness of the Holy Roman Empire,

it is the ruler's obsession with orderliness which prevents him from being an effective and just ruler. Stage directions are that Charles V should sit "in einem Raum strengster Ordnung" (p. 68). The only indispensable person in the court is the Master of Ceremonies who looks after the smooth functioning of the minutest details in the Emperor's life. Anything intruding into this strictly regulated lifestyle, as for instance the "Reichstag" in Worms, is considered by Charles V to be a nuisance (p. 69).

Although it is the Emperor's dream to contemplate the essence of justice in his old age, he remains aloof to the urgent problems of the day. "Ich liebe nicht das planlose Spiel des Zufalls", he states, "ich bewundere die regelmässigen Bahnen der Gestirne" (p. 68), and it is in this spirit that the urgent request for troops by the Bishop of Münster is dealt with. Here, the ruler's final, unjust and unrealistic "solution" to the Bishop's dilemma is the promise of a hundred and fifty imperial soldiers of the poorest quality (p. 74).

It is only when the Bishop mentions that Johann Bockelson, the "King" of the Anabaptists, had publicly burned the portraits of the Emperor and the Pope, that Charles V is roused from his non-committal attitude and does not hesitate to condemn the offender to prolonged torture and to execution. This sentence, though seemingly just in the eyes of the world, is nevertheless based on injured pride on the

part of the Emperor and reminds one of Bockelson's cowardly disposal of Knipperdollinck.

As opposed to the other human judges in Es steht geschrieben, the Bishop is perhaps the most clear-sighted person with judicial power (and may express the playwright's view on justice best). He is, however, also the most reluctant to exercise his authority as a judge. In the dialogue with the rich merchant Knipperdollinck, he makes explicit his perception of human and divine justice. To the angry reproach of the, at that time, still rich and influential Knipperdollinck: "Ihr habt kein Recht, uns zu richten", the Bishop replies wearily: "Es geht nicht um Gerechtigkeit Vor Gott sind wir beide im Unrecht, Täufer und Bischof" (p. 37). The polemic ends with the humble admittance of the Catholic dignitary that he is no less guilty than his adversaries, the Anabaptists. "Bekämpfe ich nicht [auch] meine Feinde," he says to the parting merchant, "Bin ich nicht mehr als du, als dass ich dich segnen könnte?" (p. 38).

When Knipperdollinck's daughter tries to bring about justice in her own way, the Bishop again wants to avoid exercising his authority as a judge. Although he realizes her intention (to kill him as the Old Testament Judith had killed Holofernes) he tries to dismiss her, sensing her selfless motives. It is only after her stubborn refusal to leave that he can no longer shun his judicial duty and has to sentence her to death, a judgment she freely accepts. Perfect justice,

then, as these instances illustrate, cannot be exercised by man since his judgment will always tend to be limited by incapability, vanity or, at best, the realization of human imperfection.

Besides the judges in Es steht geschrieben, there are the executioners who have their impact as well in this drama, although not as strikingly as the judges previously discussed. The executioners have to carry out the judgments made but have no decision-making power, with the exception of Bockelson, who assumes both roles several times. In one instance, he kills the blacksmith Mollenhöck with his sword in the middle of the night when the latter waits to be hanged in the morning for attempted treason in defense of the city. Bockelson seems to commit this cruel and superfluous deed in order to emphasize his newly acquired authority as King of the Baptists. "Ich kann dich töten," he says proudly to the captured man, tied up on a pole, "ich kann dich von diesem Pfahl erlösen" (p. 67) thereby assuming the double function of a judge and an executioner.

When Bockelson kills his former "Queen" Katherina, whom he has caught in an attempt at bribery as well as the intention of fleeing the city and seeking refuge with the enemy, he takes revenge by treacherously killing her, in a last passionate embrace, with his dagger (p. 98). Again, he assumes the right to make a swift judgment and to execute it without giving her a chance for flight or defense. (Criminal as this deed

may appear, Bockelson has not killed an innocent woman. Katherina has, after all, left her husband Knipperdollinck and voluntarily joined the usurper of power and wealth. Now, the same man with whom she had shared glory and luxury comes to be her judge and executioner.)

The most colourful portrayal of an executioner appears in the scene on the market-place. This sinister character is the focus of the towns people's attention and admiration. "Kolossal!" exclaims a young girl, "Diese Ärmer und Beiner!" (p. 40), and, later on: "Wie ein Gott ist so ein Scharfrichter." (p. 42). With this, she expresses the awe of the masses towards someone having the authority as well as the physical strength and skill to execute justice. (A similar character is the gymnast in Der Besuch der alten Dame (1956), by the same playwright. He too is an embodiment of brute strength.)

Towards the end of this drama, one more type of executioner enters the scene. As opposed to his predecessor this character is not emphasizing his physical prowess but is rather a caricature of a would-be-poet. To the matter-of-fact statement of the guard: "Wir müssen noch dreihundert Stück [Leichen] besichtigen," the executioner, in his turn, quotes from Schiller's Braut von Messina: "Das Leben ist der Güter höchstes nicht, der Übel grösstes aber ist die Schuld" (p. 112), thus giving an almost philosophical bent to the former's dry comment. (This type of executioner appears too in Dürrenmatt's, Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon, (1953).

In this comedy, it is Sidi, the hangman, who would rather spend his time among beautiful antiques than working on the gallows.) With the last-mentioned executioner in Es steht geschrieben, the author has endowed this otherwise sinister character with a highly comical aspect.

Justice, then, is executed by three different types of characters: the self-appointed Bockelson who appears to relish both, judging and executing; the anonymous type on the market-place of Münster, who carries out public executions to the sadistic delight of the onlookers; and the last-mentioned, the executioner who would rather be a poet. As befits the baroque richness of this drama, the colourful variety of executioners adds to the imagery contributing to the topic of justice.

Besides the symbols of justice discussed, the judges and the executioners, there is the significant aspect of an immanent kind of justice revealed by certain conspicuous traits of some of the characters in Es steht geschrieben. In the tradition of the "Welttheater", all seven deadly sins are represented in this work. The most obvious ones, however, are pride, lust and gluttony and these three may lend themselves best to illustrate immanent justice.

Self-righteousness and pride are evident in the attitude of the Anabaptists. Already in the first scene, the tone is set as to what they believe to be their mission, as well as their position on the day of reckoning. They claim to be

faultless, i.e. "reinen Leibes" (p. 13), they believe that "der Erdkreis [wird] . . . in die Hände der Täufer fallen . . . (p. 15), and that "Zum Zeichen des Bundes [wird] er [Gott] seinen Knechten eine Stadt geben, von der sie die Erde bezwingen werden" (p. 15), and that a new Solomon will rise from their midst (a role which Bockelson then assumes). As to their position on Judgment Day, the Anabaptists believe they are "erwählt, zur Rechten des Herrn zu sitzen" (p. 14). This latter, very dangerous assumption that they are the chosen race, predestined to rule over other individuals or nations who may or may not accept their "superiority", rules out any genuine justice and is possibly an indirect reference to the self-destructive pride of the Third Reich.

The downfall of the proud and self-righteous Baptist populace of Münster is dramatically presented as well. The knight Johann von Büren, one of the military commanders of the combined troops of Catholics and Lutherans, conjures powerful images of defeat and destruction. "Stadt! Stadt!", he calls out, "Deine Mauern sinken dahin, deine Türme zerbrechen. Blutige Nacht. Blutiger Mond. Du schreckliche Fackel des Sieges . . . Stunde der Menschenjagd . . . Tod! Tod! Bleiches Antlitz voll Verwesung und Mord" (p. 111). An allusion to the "ghost-towns" of Germany after the last bomber-raids in the Second World War might be seen here. Immanent justice, as pertains to the sin of pride, is impressively illustrated in the development of the Anabaptist's fate.

Pride is, however, not only evident as a collective guilt of the Anabaptists, but is even more clearly expressed in individual characters. Knipperdollinck, although presented as having achieved almost saint-like stature before his death in his unquestioning acceptance of God's justice is, before he gives up all his possessions and becomes a fool of God, not free of self-righteousness and pride himself. In his dialogue with the Bishop he too, not unlike the Baptists, quotes God and Christ as being on their side. "Gott wird uns helfen", he says and adds proudly: "Wer wider uns ist, ist wider Christus" (p. 35). The Bishop's reply: "Vielleicht wird Gott keinem von uns helfen in diesem Kampf" (p. 35), expresses not only the wisdom of old age but also the insight that God's help should not be taken for granted by any individual, group or nation. (Had not also the soldiers of the Third Reich the presumptuous claim "Gott mit uns" engraved on the belt-buckles of their uniforms!)

Since Knipperdollinck has failed, by sharing, for some time, the Anabaptists pride and self-righteousness, immanent justice lets him suffer the same fate as befalls the other Baptists, namely a slow and painful death on the torture-wheel.

Unlike Knipperdollinck, however, in whose life pride has had only a temporary influence but who then matured to true humility, Johann Bockelson expresses an evil kind of pride which manifests itself in unscrupulous and manipulative behaviour. The only aspect of redeeming grace, preventing this

character from becoming a demonic hero, is the inherent humor of most situations where his pride is concerned. His grand arrival in Münster has already a highly comical effect. When he wakes up in a dust-cart, where he has recovered from his alcoholic stupor, he proclaims, to an audience of two street-sweepers and a city-guard, that they see before them not only a Baptist but one of their greatest prophets. To the respectful inquiries of the guard as to his further plans, he states, ("mit gnädiger Handbewegung"), using already the royal third-person pronoun: "Wir gedenken uns so beiläufig zum Herrn der Erde zu erheben" (p. 22), a goal he claims to achieve "mit einer lächerlichen Leichtigkeit" (p. 22), thanks to his intimate connections with the archangel Gabriel who, he tells his credulous listeners, had carried him through the air from Leyden in Holland to Münster in Westfalen in a matter of half an hour.

The demonic quality of Bockelson's pride, however, becomes evident when he relates: "Ich werde mit den Menschen wie mit leichten Bällen spielen" (p. 23). After he has manipulated the Anabaptists to elect him as their King, his next step is "das Reich Gottes" [i.e. the kingdom of the Anabaptists] "in seiner Herrlichkeit auf Erden zu errichten" (p. 83). For this purpose, he has designed a map of the world in the middle of which, he tells his subjects, "ihr mich . . . auf einem Thron erblicken könnt" (p. 83) and he then goes on graciously to distribute the continents according to his whims and prefer-

ences (pp. 83-4).

Shortly before the defeat of the Anabaptists and his own downfall, Bockelson's pride reaches its climax in a dialogue (which actually is a monologue) with Mother Earth, where he declares:

Der Himmel wölbt sich um mich wie ein Königsmantel.
Ich trage dich, Himmel . . . Ich will den Himmel.
Ich will ihn mit meinen Händen herabzwingen, Mutter
Erde. Mit seinem Feuer und mit seinen Sternen will
ich dir einen Teppich bereiten (p. 97).

This dialogue evokes powerful archetypal images. An identification of the male with the heavenly forces can be seen here as opposed to the submissive, maternal nature of the earth.

Bockelson, at any rate, feels himself to be the ruler of heaven and earth and his pride, here, takes on almost cosmic proportions. When he makes a similar statement, however, in the night-scene before he kills the blacksmith Mollenhöck: "Ich werde Erde und Himmel beherrschen!", the blacksmith answers his executioner with the prophetic words: "Die Dinge entfliessen wie Wasser den Händen" (p. 66). By stark contrasts, then, Dürrenmatt indicates the inevitability of imminent justice which follows as a consequence of Bockelson's satanic pride. He who wants to tear down the heavens and claims to hold the earth has to suffer an equally dramatic downfall. Firstly, he becomes a madman and fool, dancing with Knipperdollinck on the roof-tops of Münster, then he has to suffer on the torture-wheel until he can exhale his last breath, and thirdly, he ends in the same kind of dust-cart

from which he started his comet-like career, without having found the insight and mercy his antagonist Knipperdollinck finds in the end.

Self-righteousness and pride, then, whether they be traits of individuals or groups of people, may temporarily lead to great success, but ultimately immanent justice will manifest itself in equal proportion. This, I think, the playwright has portrayed convincingly in these three most conspicuous examples.

Immanent justice is, however, not only demonstrated in the deadly sin of pride but also in the excessive sensuality of a number of characters in Es steht geschrieben. Even though the consequences here are not as overt as are those of self-righteousness and pride, this trait nevertheless bears its appropriate fruits, as is expressed throughout the play.

Johann Bockelson seems again to be the most obvious illustration of the sin of lechery. His sensuality is as excessive as is his pride. In his initial scene, with the before-mentioned city-guard, he unabashedly admits: "Ich lebte in Leyden in grosser Sünde des Fleisches" (p. 22), an eloquent statement the guard correctly interprets as "Ihro Gnaden liebte die Weiber" (p. 22), the guard himself being "von etwas sinnlicher Natur" (p. 24), as he later confides in Bockelson.

Bockelson's insatiable sensuality comes to the fore in his life-style after he has taken over Knipperdollinck's

wealth. And he not only takes possession of the latter's beautiful wife but acquires a number of young virgins as well, whose sole purpose it is to wait on him and to gratify his immense sexual appetites. As there is no limit to his pride, there is no moderation in sensuality noticeable either. Bockelson's ambition is to become "wie Salomo und die Zahl [seiner] Weiber wie der Sand am Meer" (p. 45). He also sets his eyes on Jan Matthisson's wife Divara for whom he plans to write "hunderttausend Gazellengedichte" (p. 45), in the style of the Song of Songs, a further parody of the great King Solomon.

There are victims of lesser stature too, such as the kitchen-maid Warwara of the Anabaptists' royal household with whose body Bockelson seems to be intimately familiar (p. 100), according to the accurate description he gives her admirer, a young city-guard. His offer, that they exchange roles for the night, i.e. he, the King, standing on guard and the young man visiting the kitchen-maid in the former's place, meets with little resistance on the part of the young lover.

A further conquest of this mock-Solomon is a tailor's daughter who is used by Bockelson (shortly before he becomes a king) for a double purpose. About her, he proudly relates:

Ein Mädchen erhob sich, gewaltig in der Rede, eine Schneiderstochter, noch Jungfrau vor wenigen Tagen, deren Schönheit mich erquickt, welche Gesichte sieht und mich selbst erblickt, sitzend auf dem Thron Salomos (p. 56).

Superstition and sensuality both are used by Bockelson to further his ambitions and, at the same time, satisfy his lust.

Last but not least, the King of the Anabaptists is able to seduce Judith Knipperdollinck by granting her her father's life. He shows no scruples in using blasphemy in order to gain Judith's consent, when he meets her in his moonlit garden: "Der Mond spannt durch den Park ein Band von Silber zum Palast" he starts romantically, then adds convincingly: "Gott selbst, Gräfin, hat uns diese Strasse vorgezeigt" (p. 88), and like her mother before her, she follows him into his sensual trap. With this is fulfilled one of the initial claims Bockelson had made early in the play (in the dialogue with the guard): "Ich werde seine [Knipperdollinck's] Frau heiraten . . . Oder seine Tochter . . . Oder beide zusammen" (p. 25), to which the guard can only reply with awe: "Ihro Gnaden denken grosszügig" (p. 25).

A less respectful reaction to Bockelson's great sexual appetite comes from the Count of Hessen, a virile man himself, with not only one, but two legal wives (with Luther's special permission). In this comical part of the dialogue with the Bishop, who approaches the Protestant Count for troops against the Anabaptists, von Hessen's reaction to Bockelson's "harem" is quite venomous:

von Hessen: "Wie ich gehört habe, soll der König der Täufer mehrere Frauen haben?"

Bishop: "Er ist allerdings mit fünfzehn Frauen verheiratet."

von Hessen: "Eine ungeheure Zahl."

Bishop: "Etwas viel, Hoheit."

von Hessen: (finster): "Ich werde diesen unglücklichen Narren mit eigener Hand in Stücke reißen" (p. 91).

Count von Hessen's anger, however, about the large number of wives Bockelson possesses can hardly be interpreted as envy, since the former is in a predicament already with only two wives. To the Bishop's keen observation (von Hessen having been one of his former pupils): "Ihr habt euch verändert, Hoheit", the Count answers somewhat wearily: "Ich habe zwei Frauen geheiratet, Eminenz" (p. 90). The Bishop's request for troops under the command of the Count comes to von Hessen as a welcome relief although he pretends that leaving his wives would mean a great sacrifice for him. Both of the jealous women, however, insist on accompanying him and sharing his life in camp, to which the hapless husband can only reply ("sehr dumpf"): "Die verfluchte Sinnlichkeit" (p. 92). The Count, then, is trapped, by his own choice, with two wives, each one grotesquely echoing the other in their speech (indicating that two of the same are too much of a good thing, hence the admitted weariness on the part of the husband). Immanent justice is thus subtly made visible in this highly comical interlude in Es steht geschrieben.

Another illustration of immanent justice regarding illicit sexual activity in army camps and military campaigns is revealed in the dialogue between von Büren and Mengerssen, two warriors who relate to each other the pleasures and dangers of army life. Von Büren regrets the loss of his financial means due to an affair he engaged in when fighting in Italy. "Ich fiel einer paduanischen Signorina in die Arme"

(p. 54), he tells his companion. As to the imperial troops which are to assist against the Anabaptists of Münster, von Büren notes that many of them have syphilis, colloquially depicted as "Franzosenkrankheit" and Mengerssen sums up these kinds of pleasures and their consequences: "Es ist ein entsetzlicher Fehlgriff des Himmels, die höchste Freude mit einer so kläglichen Krankheit zu behaften" (p. 55).

Two more male characters in Es steht geschrieben, may illustrate the immanent justice which is inherent in excessive sensuality: one is the tragi-comic figure of Jan Matthisson, the prophet and leader of the Anabaptists, the other the aristocratic Bishop of Münster, Franz von Waldeck. When Matthisson introduces himself to the audience, he mentions that he had just "die Arme der wunderschönen Divara verlassen" (p. 49). There is a great sensual attachment noticeable in this otherwise stern, fanatic prophet to his beautiful wife, and Johann Bockelson shrewdly knows how to exploit this weakness in Matthisson for his own ends. He counts on the likelihood that, since the autocratic leader of the Baptists has strictly forbidden his flock to prepare anything for the defense of the city such as repairing the city walls, he would not be on guard during the nights but more likely in the company of his attractive wife. Bockelson's advice to the other council members then is to take advantage of this situation, assuring them that: "Der eine [Matthisson] bewundert in den Nächten den Busen seiner Frau und der andere [the Anabaptist of the council]

füllt Löcher in der Stadtmauer aus" (p. 53).

Jan Matthisson, on the other hand, condemns the Catholic Bishop as "einer der vertrocknetsten Lebemänner . . . die je über die Erde gewandelt und der eine Konkubine hatte, die Anna Pöhlmann hiess" (p. 49). The Baptists also accuse the Bishop of having, even in his old age, "Kebsweiber und Lustknaben" (p. 15). (The perverse sensuality of the church dignitary could, however, also be an allusion to the corruption of the Catholic Church, prevalent before the onset of the Reformation.)

Among the female characters, where sensuality ultimately leads to their doom, are Knipperdollinck's wife and daughter. Katherina is depicted, by both her husband and Bockelson, as a wholesome, sensuous beauty. Knipperdollinck says of her: "Mein Weib ist schön. Ihre Haut ist wie der Schnee" (p. 26), and Bockelson compliments the rich merchant, when they first meet: "Ein Weib mit einer festen Brust" (p. 29).

Katherina is enticed by Bockelson's sensuality and is not willing to follow her first husband into his self-imposed life of poverty and ridicule. To her daughter Judith, however, she tries to justify the choice she has made: "Ich bin nur ein schwaches Weib", she cries, "und was vermögen wir gegen unser Blut . . . Er [Bockelson] hat von mir Besitz genommen und ich kann nichts anderes denken denn ihn" (pp. 46-7). In actuality, she has rather fallen a victim to her own physical passions. She is aware, though, of the possible dire consequences of her

sensuality. "Ich weiss," she says, "dass viel Unglück sein wird und viele Tränen, dass für jede Lust uns Verzweiflung wartet" (p. 47). Immanent justice ultimately leads her (in her last scene) again into the arms of her seducer who, in the disguise of the young city-guard, recognizes her intention of leaving him and fleeing the city in order to join the enemy, and kills her mercilessly.

Judith, Knipperdollinck's daughter, whom Bockelson, when he first sees her, praises as "eine Jungfrau. Wie Strahl der Sonne in Morgenwolken" (p. 29), radiates natural goodness and innocence. And yet, like Margaretha in Goethe's Faust I, she succumbs to the sensual, experienced man who steps into her life at an opportune moment. But remorse about the loss of her innocence soon torments her. Her father, to whom she confesses her predicament, consoles her with almost the same words her mother had used for her own justification (only here they are posed as questions): "Bist du nicht ein schwaches Weib? Hast du nicht deiner Mutter Blut?" (p. 93). Knipperdollinck, who, in his dark dungeon, has reached a state of acceptance and harmony with all creatures, knows that God's forgiveness is certain for Judith's human weakness (which is free of selfish motives, as opposed to her mother's failure).

When Judith, aware of her own sensual attractiveness since she became Bockelson's mistress, goes to the Bishop with the intention of using her feminine charms to seduce and then to kill him (as her name-sake in the Old Testament had killed

Holofernes), in order to save Münster from, so she believes, its arch-enemy, she is acting again for unselfish reasons. Indeed, her endeavour is heroic since she risks her own life in this venture, should it fail..The Bishop, however, not only a high dignitary of his church but also a connoisseur of women, sees through her plan and this inevitably leads to her death which she (again unlike her mother) freely accepts.

There is a basic difference, then, between the two women discussed here. Katherina represents the materially and sensually minded woman, a type who always joins the one offering the most advantages. (This character is dealt with again by Dürrenmatt in his later work, Die Ehe des Herrn Mississippi (1952), in the person of Anastasia.) Beauty and sensuality are used by this type of woman as a means to her ends.

Judith, on the other hand, represents the woman who is virtuous by nature. She is a portrayal of the untainted character, attracting its opposite. A union between such contrasting poles (Judith - Bockelson), however, almost inevitably leads to the sacrifice of the virtuous one (thereby maintaining the basic unchangeability of this character, as is also depicted in the fate of Margaretha in Faust I). Judith, too, despite her "downfall" from innocence, remains unchanged in her true nature as is expressed by her tears of remorse (in the dialogue with her father in the dungeon, p. 93). In her encounter with the Bishop in the army camp she laments: "Mein Leib ist zerbrochen und meine Seele erloschen" (p. 98). By

her humility, though, in admitting her weakness and her willingness to risk her life for the sake of others, she maintains her basic wholeness, while her mother, who tries to save her own life (in the last scene with Bockelson), loses it.

Immanent justice is revealed in the mother's and daughter's fate, and the results are, in both instances, of compelling logic: Katherina dies at the hands of her seducer and sinks into oblivion, Judith finds justice and mercy in her acceptance of death.

Closely related to excessive sensuality is another human weakness, namely gluttony. The most conspicuous character representing this vice is again Johann Bockelson. He is not only excessive, as previously discussed, in his pride and sensuality but also in his culinary demands. One of the first things he compliments Knipperdollinck on is the well-fed appearance of the latter: "Du hast einen runden Bauch," says Bockelson admiringly, "mit einem grossen Magen und gefüllten Därmen. Gesegnet sei dein Bauch, gesegnet sei dein Appetit!" (p. 29). Greed, then, not just for the wealthy merchant's house, gold, wife and daughter, but also for his rich supply of good food, is revealed here.

In the grotesquely funny banquet scene, Bockelson enumerates a long list of mouth-watering dishes he has just gorged himself on. The astonishing number and haphazard combination of the courses and assorted beverages range from the elegant "Austern mit Champagner" to the strange "Bries vorzeitig ge-

borener Kälber, samt dem schweren Burgunderwein", to hearty game-dishes such as "Bärentatze, köstlich gewurmt", to "exquisite Erdbeeren . . . in Quittenmark mit Schlagsahne, Kirsch dazu" and many other, equally interesting items (pp. 79-81). This whole list, however, may also be an outpouring of Dürrenmatt's own culinary imagination rather than a carefully planned banquet. The theme of the banquet, incidentally, recurs in several of his later works, notably in Die Panne (1956), where a delicious gourmet meal, tastefully put together this time, serves as a background for a rather sinister trial.

The exaggerated number and variety of dishes in Es steht geschrieben, however, tends to reinforce the grotesque contrast of Bockelson's insatiable gluttony as compared to the starvation prevalent in the besieged city of Münster. The pious exclamations throughout the banquet scene in the form of parodies of Old Testament psalms such as: "Gepriesen sei . . . der Schweinebauch im Gelee", or, "Gesegnet und gebenedeit sei, was ich eben genossen" (p. 80) are, regarded in the light of the dire circumstances the Anabaptists outside King Bockelson's court find themselves in, more of a blasphemy than genuine gratitude toward the giver of all good things. Sexual connotations too such as: "Wie brünstig war ich nach Froschschenkeln . . . (p. 79), or, "Gepriesen seien Nacktarsch und Liebfraumilch" (p. 80), stress again the close relationship between gluttony and lechery.

In the context of the sin of gluttony, an interesting

aspects in the two main characters of the drama can be noticed. Knipperdollinck, who has, with the renunciation of his worldly possessions, also shed any previous tendency to gluttony, and Bockelson, who has taken over the former's wealth and subsequently became a glutton, are in stark contrast to each other. While at their first meeting, Bockelson perceived himself as being nothing but "ein leerer Magen" and depicts himself as the poor Lazarus in the rich man's house (p. 29), the situation, later in the play, becomes reversed. Now Knipperdollinck is the poor Lazarus on the doorsteps of the King's court, calling out to Bockelson: "Ich habe Hunger" (p. 102). The King's reply that he had, unfortunately, just finished the last dish of beans and sausage, indicates the purely materialistic assumption that the poor man outside could only be calling for tangible food. Knipperdollinck, however, contradicts Bockelson's assumption, shouting: "Mich hungerts nach dem Reich Gottes" (p. 102). His hunger for spiritual food is thus strongly contrasted to the other's one-sided concern for sense gratification only.

Lust and gluttony, then, as expressed by certain characters in this drama, are shown to have a destructive effect, just as self-righteousness and pride lead to intolerance and cruelty. Immanent justice leads in all these instances discussed to self-destruction, defeat and ultimately, death.

The topic of justice, be it overtly presented through the use of symbols or be it implied through the subtle laws

of cause and effect, can be traced in most of Dürrenmatt's works. His latest novel (still in progress) will, according to Urs Jenny's chronology, bear the title, Die Justiz.¹⁰

For the purpose of this study, however, I feel that a significant theme such as justice needs the consideration of its opposite pole as well, namely the nature and impact of grace on man, as is shown in Es steht geschrieben. Kurt Fickert observes that: "Dürrenmatt proceeds in play after play . . . to portray the tension between "Gerechtigkeit", the judgment of man's sinful nature, and "Gnade", God's forgiveness."¹¹

There are, as indicated earlier, few symbols in this work, pertaining to grace. This abstract concept is mainly expressed as a state of mind, motivating the actions of the characters concerned. In a negative sense grace is, in some instances, self-rigtheously assumed as a prerogative; in others, it is bestowed on the powerless by the ones wielding power. In a positive sense, grace comes to man from God and manifests itself as an inner experience. It is often revealed in the interaction of the individuals or groups in question.

Since one of the basic tenets of the Protestant faith is that man is sinful and without God's grace he can do nothing (Luther's concept of "sola gratia"), it is perhaps not surprising that Dürrenmatt, himself a Protestant minister's son, tries to come to terms with this view in many of his works and notably in his first drama (although he depicts himself

"als ein im weitesten Sinne entwurzelter Protestant, behaftet mit der Beule des Zweifels, misstrauisch gegen den Glauben, den er bewundert, weil er ihn verloren" p. 48). Fritz Buri's point, however, that practically all of Dürrenmatt's works revolve around the theme of grace,¹² represents a rather one-sided interpretation. Grace needs to be considered in contrast to its opposite pole, justice. A natural state of grace is possible only before the Fall, as is alluded to in Judith Knipperdollinck's state of innocence. In any other instance in this play, grace appears to be generated through the tension with its opposite pole.

The only conspicuous symbol pertaining to grace in Es steht geschrieben, is the moon, in contrast to the sun as a symbol of justice. Bockelson, for example, likes to perceive himself as being a merciful king and repeatedly associates the gentle light of the moon with his influence, as opposed to Matthisson whom he likens to the scorching sun, accusing him: "Unter deiner Glut verdorrte das Leben," whereas, "unter meinem Schein wird sich der milde Zauber der Nacht über die Stätten der Menschen breiten" (p. 56). When he seduces Judith, pretending to have mercy on her father, the scene takes place in a moonlit garden. Even when Bockelson realizes that he is doomed, he grandly declares: "Seht meinen Untergang im schimmernden Lichte des Vollmondes" (p. 103).

In the dialogue between Knipperdollinck and the drunken night-watchman, the latter, when he sees the formerly rich

merchant, dressed only in a shirt but carrying the sword of justice, cries out in fear: "O Sonne der Gerechtigkeit, Mond der Gnade und Blitz der Rache . . . Gnade! Gnade! Greift nicht zum Schwert" (p. 78), thus making evident the polarity of justice and grace. Sun and moon, however, are mentioned throughout the play, as Jenny observes, often in contrast to each other,¹³ but are not exclusively symbols of justice or grace.

Grace, then, is rarely expressed by symbols but more often by the attitude and behaviour of groups or individuals in Es steht geschrieben. Before we take a closer look at these characters, however, a few statements on the nature of grace may be enlightening. According to the wise and sceptical Bishop, human happiness, if man possesses such at all, should be regarded as pure grace. "Das Glück wurde ihm [dem Menschen] nicht gegeben," he states in his self-introduction, "und wenn er es hat, ist dies eine grosse Gnade" (p. 33). Not only in happiness, though, but also in abject misery can man experience grace. To Count von Hessen's rather self-righteous remark, when he points to the defeated Anabaptists on the torture-wheels: "Weh ihnen, sie haben Gott verloren", the Bishop wisely puts the issue into the right proportions: "Wohl dem, der ihn am Rade wiederfindet" (p. 114). With this, Dürrenmatt may convey that for man to be in a state of grace, neither personal happiness (as Knipperdollinck enjoyed when he was still in possession of his health and riches), nor

success and power (as Bockelson's career illustrates), and not even a life free of sorrow and suffering (as is shown where the blacksmith Mollenhöck is tied to a pole, or Knipperdollinck to a torture-wheel) is necessary, but that it is an inner state of being.

A negative aspect of grace is mirrored in the Anabaptist's conviction that they "have" God's grace (pp. 13-15). Based on this assumption, they take it to be their task to build God's kingdom on earth. The wise old Bishop, however, realizes their motivations. Knipperdollinck's proud, self-assertive statement: "Wir kämpfen für das Reich Gottes", is deflated by the Bishop's revealing answer: "Ihr kämpft für das Reich der Täufer . . . Weil ihr euch nicht besiegen könnt, wollt ihr die Welt besiegen" (p. 37). Münster's Anabaptists, in their defeat, experience God's justice but, because of their hypocrisy and misguided ambitions, they do not achieve a true state of grace.

As an individual character in Es steht geschrieben, it is Johann Bockelson who expresses grace in its negative aspect. The adjective "gnädig" in connection with him, mostly with an ironic overtone, recurs several times. Already early in the drama, he claims "mit gnädiger Handbewegung" (p. 22) that he will become lord of the earth within the near future. After his lavish, solitary Banquets, he is usually "gnädig gestimmt" (p. 81), i.e. approachable. The noun "Gnade" is frequently used by the presumptuous Bockelson. As soon as he rises from

the dust-cart he is, thanks to his eloquence, addressed by the city-guard as "Ihro Gnaden" (pp. 21-3). When Bockelson is King of the Anabaptists he claims, before the assembled court, to be "gewappnet mit der Gnade des Himmels" (p. 82). Knipperdollinck, on the other hand, is in "Ungnade" when he appears before the King after he has made the unpardonable blunder of passing on the sword of justice to the lowliest of the Baptists. In this particular discourse, King Bockelson repeatedly uses the term "Gnade". To the former merchant's request to leave him in his state of poverty, the King "generously" concedes: "Wir wollen euch diese Gnade zugestehen", not without reminding him that only his "übergrosse Gnade" prevents him from punishing the blunders Knipperdollinck has committed (p. 85), and the King, as well as his subjects, state that it is they who are chosen by the grace of God to rule the earth.

To the blacksmith Mollenhöck, tied to the torture-pole, awaiting his execution, the King of the Baptists holds justice and grace in his hands. When Bockelson gives the condemned man the "coup de grace", demonstrating his power over life and death, Mollenhöck perceives it as an act of mercy. Instead of protesting his death, he cries out: "O Macht der Hände, in denen Barmherzigkeit wohnt" (p.67). What was intended as a demonstration of a mock-divine justice on Bockelson's part, is to the doomed man delivery and grace.

Another instance where grace is negatively expressed is

in the character of Charles V. In his dialogue with the Bishop, the Emperor seems neither willing to execute justice as befits the dangerous situation the Anabaptists have created in Münster, nor prepared to act as a merciful ruler. He does condemn Bockelson for his affronts to his majesty, to torture and death but grants the Bishop only a token allowance of imperial troops. At the end of the audience, Charles V dismisses the high cleric with the formal, but in this context highly ironical: "Wir entlassen eure Eminenz in höchster Gnade" (p. 74), thus mocking the concept of royal grace.

The Bishop himself, however, is willing to show mercy and, on occasions, is able to recognize the impact of God's grace on man. When he has, for instance, clearly seen through the scheme Judith Knipperdollinck had devised to kill him, he is ready to show mercy instead of justice, since he realizes her unselfish motivations. Kissing her on the forehead, he says: "Geh nun!" (p. 101), thereby foregoing any claim to take just revenge. It is only after Judith insists on staying and facing the consequences of her intended murder, that the Bishop has no other choice left than to deliver her into the hands of justice. In a last touching gesture, however ("Er reisst sich das Kreuz vom Hals" (p. 101), as stage directions indicate), he offers her this sign of divine mercy for the hour of her execution.

In the somewhat macabre scene, where the Bishop addresses the severed head of Jan Matthisson, he still finds words of

compassion instead of triumph. "Ich habe von deinem Tod erfahren," he says, "und ich weiss, dass der Herr dich gesegnet hat, denn du fandest ihn in der Stunde des Todes" (p. 64). A similar recognition of the state of grace in man is demonstrated by the humble Bishop when he encounters Knipperdollinck on the torture-wheel. Here the Bishop admits that there are no victors in this war and adds: "Ich wollte dich widerlegen, [aber] du hast die Welt widerlegt" (p. 114), thereby acknowledging the victory of God's grace in man as the only valid one.

In the character of Knipperdollinck, a continuous progression towards an inner state of grace can be observed. From his generously cancelling the enormous debts of the Catholic Church (p. 34), to the voluntary disposal of all his worldly possessions, to his forgiving attitude toward the sensual weakness of his wife and daughter (p. 93), to the renunciation of his authority as a judge, to his showing mercy instead of revenge to Bockelson (p. 106), he continually grows in God's grace. The poorer and more abject Knipperdollinck becomes, the clearer the light of grace radiates from him until, on the torture-wheel, by fully accepting the unfathomable justice of God, he is filled with "Gnade bis zum Rande . . ." (p. 115), as opposed to his antagonist who, believing only in visible phenomena such as "den leeren Himmel . . . und an die Erde . . ." (p. 66) sinks, without further utterances, back into darkness.

It may be interesting to add, in the context of the above, that Jan Matthisson's and blacksmith Mollenhöck's deaths foreshadow Knipperdollinck's experience of divine mercy. Matthisson, by trusting without reservation in God's help, throws himself into the hands of the enemy and, according to the Bishop's words, finds God's grace in doing so. Mollenhöck, for his part, admits: "Ich muss an meinem Galgen finden, was ich in meinem Leben gesucht habe" (p. 67). He too finds God's mercy by accepting his fate. Ironically, all of the recipients of God's grace share one common fate, they all suffer a violent death. The feature which distinguishes them from the others who are equally defeated and condemned (i.e. the Anabaptists of Münster, and Bockelson, their King) is, that they yield to and accept God's justice and thereby achieve an inner state of grace. Oberle notes that "die zustimmenden Opfer sind auch die Empfänger der Gnade. Die Gefolterten, die Zerbrochenen, die Lächerlichen, die Demütigen sind Gefässe, bereit, die Gnade Gottes zu empfangen." ¹⁴

In Knipperdollinck (who embodies each of the above types Oberle mentions), as expressed in his last monologue, the dramatic finale in Es steht geschrieben, the two opposite poles of justice and grace come into harmony, demonstrating vividly that only from a divine (or divinely inspired) level can justice and grace be given and experienced.

ENDNOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

¹ Elisabeth Brock-Sulzer, Dürrenmatt in unserer Zeit (Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt, 1968), p. 27. Brock-Sulzer states: "Dürrenmatt ist kein Quietist, er sieht und sah es als eine der Aufgaben des Schriftstellers an, zu beunruhigen, "Protestant" zu sein in einer Welt, die von geistiger und seelischer Trägheit immer wieder bedroht wird."

² Timo Tiusanen, Dürrenmatt (Princeton: Univ. Press, 1977), p. 43.

³ Gero von Wilpert, Sachwörterbuch der Literatur (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner, 1969), p. 69.

⁴ Friedrich Dürrenmatt, Komödien III (Zürich: Arche, 1970), p. 143.

⁵ C.G. Jung, Erinnerungen, Träume, Gedanken (Zürich: Ex Libris, 1961), p. 413.

⁶ Jung, p. 413.

⁷ Aniela Jaffé, "Symbolism in the Visual Arts," Part 4, in Man and his Symbols (New York: Doubleday, 1964), p. 242.

⁸ Werner Oberle, "Grundsätzliches zum Werk Friedrich Dürrenmatts" in Der unbequeme Dürrenmatt (Basel: Basilius Presse, 1962), p. 18.

⁹ Murray B. Peppard, Friedrich Dürrenmatt (New York: Twayne, 1969), p. 10.

¹⁰ Urs Jenny, Dürrenmatt (Velber bei Hannover: Friedrich Verlag, 1965), p. 10.

¹¹ Kurt Fickert, To Heaven and Back (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1972), pp. 12-3.

¹² Fritz Buri, "Der 'Einfall' der Gnade in Dürrenmatts dramatischem Werk", in Der unbequeme Dürrenmatt (Basel: Baskilius Presse, 1962), p. 39.

¹³ Jenny, p. 19.

¹⁴ Oberle, p. 19.

All quotes from the text Es steht geschrieben, are from Friedrich Dürrenmatt, Komödien II und Frühe Stücke (Zürich: Arche, 1963), with the page-numbers given parenthetically.

CHAPTER TWO

The themes of justice and grace in the comedy

"Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon"

In Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon (first performed in Munich, 1953), the theme of justice and grace is expressed in a very different vein than was the case in Dürrenmatt's stage-play, Es steht geschrieben. The latter is defined by the playwright simply as "ein Drama" whereas he calls the former a "fragmentarische Komödie". Armin Arnold feels that the form Dürrenmatt chose is indeed the only appropriate one in our time to convey an essentially religious theme such as the loss of divine grace. He states:

An sich wäre der Verlust der göttlichen Gnade kein Thema für eine Komödie. In unserem Zeitalter kann aber ein solches Thema nur noch unter der Maske der Ironie, der Parodie, der Satire, kurz: der Komödie, dargestellt werden. 1

The author himself seems to confirm this, in his essay on "Theaterprobleme" when he says: "Die Komödie . . . setzt eine ungestaltete, im Werden, im Umsturz begriffene, eine Welt die am Zusammenpacken ist wie die unsrige [voraus]." ² (His view on the state of our world is, then, a rather pessimistic one and this trend appears to increase in his later works.)

In the comedy we are about to discuss, there is a difference noticeable in the distribution of emphasis as pertaining

to the topics of this study. In Es steht geschrieben, the theme of justice is most conspicuous and grace is shown as the outcome of a humble acceptance of justice. In Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon, the order of these poles seems to be reversed. Here, God's grace, as personified by the beautiful and innocent Kurrubi, is predominant. She is offered to mankind as a free gift, but only to those who accept her unconditionally, i.e. without preconceived standards of justice, does she become grace from heaven.

Also, a difference in genre can be seen in the forms Dürrenmatt employs in each of these plays. Whereas his first work on stage is, to some extent, a historical drama, in Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon, the author chose the framework of an oriental fairy-tale which seems to allow for greater artistic freedom in regard to the concept of time. The nature of the fairy-tale enabled the playwright to reach back to time immemorial, to allude to present-day conditions, and to point forward to possibilities of the future. In this sense, then, this comedy has a timeless quality about it as well, perhaps even more so than the first drama which was inspired by the "Welttheater" of the Christian tradition.

The timeless element, permeating Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon, is intimated already by the era and the location during and in which the action takes place. The play is set in Old Testament times but no specific historical information is provided, save a few "milestones", such as the mention of

ancient cities like Babylon and Ninive, the river Euphrates, the mountains of Lebanon; and a few significant personalities such as: Gilgamesch, Nimrod and Nebukadnezar. With this "raw material", Dürrenmatt may have aimed at re-creating a world and providing a possible reason "weshalb es in Babylon zum Turmbau kam, der Sage nach zu einem der grandiosesten, wenn auch unsinnigsten Unternehmen der Menschheit; umso wichtiger," the author adds, "da wir uns heute in ähnliche Unternehmen verstrickt sehen" (p. 263). (The author possibly alludes to modern-day space research and space projects, keeping in mind, however, that the final version of this comedy was written before 1953.) Again, the nature of the fairy-tale seems to be well-suited to link the dim past with the present, with its similar temptations for dominion over the planet Earth and the ensuing consequences, those of self-destruction looming over man; a topic which is dealt with even more forcefully in the radio-play, Das Unternehmen der Wega, which I shall discuss in Chapter Three of this study.

The concept of time, as expressed by the main characters in Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon, is of little significance. The angel, for instance, admits knowing not much about creatures called human beings since he had heard, once only, several thousands years ago, a lecture on this topic (p. 168). The first minister of Babylon implores the King to exempt him from having to spit in his conquered opponent's (Nimrod's) face since he had had to perform this irksome duty for the

last ninehundred years (p. 170). Akki, the beggar, relates that he acquires a different name every century or so (p. 174), and Sidi, the hangman, keeps a diary on world events, taking place over millenia. "Weltreiche gehen, Weltreiche kommen, habe alles notiert", he boasts (p. 216). Last but not least, the kings Nebukadnezar and Nimrod express the cyclic up and down of their respective position of power in rhythmic language:

Nebukadnezar: "Wir sind aneinandergekettet, ich und du."

Nimrod: "Immerzu, immerzu."

Nebukadnezar: "Seit all den Tausenden von Jahren, die waren."

Beide: "Oben ich, unten du, unten ich, oben du, immerzu, immerzu" (p. 225).

The genre of the fairy-tale, then, seems to lend itself well to this liberal use of time, as the various characters illustrate.

Besides the timeless element, there is yet another conspicuous feature in this comedy, namely the medium of dance and movement. This delightful quality does not diminish the basically serious mood of the play but rather enriches it. Brock-Sulzer thoughtfully comments: "Dürrenmatt hat hier neben aller Grösse, aller dramatischen Handfestigkeit, etwas Neues erreicht: tänzerische Anmut, Grazie. Und nicht als Gegensatz zur Grösse, sondern als eine ihr innewohnende Kraft."³ The author, perhaps quite intentionally, portrays divine grace in this work, as being of an ethereal nature and therefore able to move wherever it will. Akki's farewell to Kurrubi, before the mob carries her off to the King, seems to bear this out.

The wise beggar, here, conceives of the young girl as "ein Faden nur seiner [Gottes] Gnade, schwerelos und heiter," and adds with regrets, "und nun trägt ein Windstoss dich weiter" (p. 212).

Significantly, the attributes of dance and movement apply mostly to the extra-terrestrial beings: the angel and Kurrubi. The angel flies from outer space to the planet Earth with a double mission, namely to bring God's grace to man and, at the same time, to explore this tiny planet in the solar system. During his sojourn, the angel is in constant movement. He flies from heaven, he floats or hovers over Babylon, he descends and ascends, he dives into the oceans and, in the city-gardens, he hops from palmtree to palmtree. He only walks when he is changed, in the beginning of the play, into human form, to introduce Kurrubi to the poorest of men.

Kurrubi's native element of movement appears to be the dance. As soon as she is created by the Lord of all things (God here evoking the image of a master-magician or toy-maker), she dances on His hand, resembling a doll on a music-box (p. 168). Later on, when she has become subject to human joys and suffering, Akki, the beggar, manages to cheer her up by stomping a rhythm and clapping his hands, until she dances around him (p. 212). In the final scene of the play, she hurries with Akki through the sand-storm, chased by the King's men, fired on by the optimistic beggar, still in search of her beloved, followed by a few poets, who skip after them (p. 251).

A rather grotesque form of movement is displayed by the mentally retarded heir to Babylon's throne. Several times, he is mentioned in the stage directions, as for instance: "Von links hinten tanzt stutzerhaft ein Idiot grinsend und seilhüpfend über die Bühne" (p. 225) or, "von rechts hinten seilhüpft der Idiot im Bogen über die Bühne" (p. 228), the imbecile's childish rope-skipping symbolizing the potential powerlessness and weakness of the Babylonian empire. Both the kings, Nebukadnezar and Nimrod admit: "Wir schlichen beide betrunken zu seiner Mutter" (p. 225), with the dancing idiot being the result of their uncontrolled passion. In the first two instances, then, the angel's constant moving about and Kurrubi's joyful dancing reveal a delightful, positive quality, whereas the idiot's dancing and skipping expresses a negative and grotesque aspect.

In Dürrenmatt's first drama, Es steht geschrieben, there is already the element of dance, namely in the unique scene on the roof-tops of Münster, with Bockelson and Knipperdollinck.⁴ The dance-scene here, too, has a grotesque and, at times, even lewd quality about it but expresses, in this instance, more of a "dance macabre" indicating that approaching death will be the great equalizer for both, the protagonist and the antagonist.

In Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon, however, dance and movement pervade the whole play and this is expressed not only by the previously mentioned characters but also through the use

of language. Brock-Sulzer aptly notes "die immer zum Aufflug bereite Sprache, die sich an der Grenze zwischen Poesie und Prosa hält durch die Makamenform und durch die hymnischen Worte des Engels"⁵, and Dürrenmatt himself is quite explicit on this as well. He is of the opinion that the language on stage cannot do without exaggeration. He states:

Der Engel etwa, der nach Babylon kommt, wird von Akt zu Akt über die Schönheit der Erde begeisterter, seine Sprache muss diese steigernde Begeisterung ausdrücken und sich bis zum Hymnus steigern. ⁶

The author must have been aware too, of the origin of the term "Makame" which, according to Gero von Wilpert, derives from the Arabic "makâmeh" denoting a gathering of philosophers, scholars and those with literary interests, "bei deren Disputationen . . . Schlagfertigkeit, witzige Wortspiele und Einfallsreichtum den Sieg über die Gesprächspartner davontrug."⁷ Dürrenmatt successfully employs the form of the Makame. "Damit versuche ich," he says, "das Arabische dieser Gestalt, die Freude am Fabulieren, am Wortgefecht, am Wortspiel auszudrücken."⁸

In addition to the above mentioned two instances of movement as expressed through language, a third feature is worthwhile considering, namely the one that Kurrubi inspires most men in Babylon, from the poor poets by the riverside, to the wealthy banker, to the old Chief-theologian, to the King's page, to write and recite poetry, lauding her beauty and virtues. This, too, can be seen in the context of the immer zum Aufflug bereite[n] Sprache" and adds to the grace-

ful movement permeating this comedy.

Dance and movement, then, whether expressed in a literal sense or through the medium of language, is an integral part of this play, adding rhythm and a quality of lightness to it which is, at least to this extent, quite unique in Dürrenmatt's work.

The contrast, the author creates between the scenery in the foreground of the stage and in its background is quite out of the ordinary as well, surpassing perhaps the scope of most fairy-tales realized as stage-plays. With artistic mastery, Dürrenmatt sets the world of ancient Babylon against a background of the Andromeda Nebula: a galaxy similar to the Milky Way, consisting of hundreds of millions of stars.

By investing, however, an immense galaxy with the function of heaven out of which descends an angel, bringing God's grace to the inhabitants of the planet Earth, makes for a "Ausweitung der Welt"⁹ as Brock-Sulzer formulates it. Dürrenmatt himself, already as a young boy, realized: "Die Welt ist grösser als das Dorf. Über den Wäldern stehen die Sterne", and he further relates, "Ich zeichnete ihre Konstellationen Ich war nie ein Ptolemäer."¹⁰ This great interest in astronomy seems to have remained with him throughout his career and comes to the fore in many of his works. In his first drama, for instance, we hear how Bockelson in his pride likens himself to the image of a meteor, when he boasts: "Das ist mein Gefälle, . . . dass ich ins Bodenlose falle. Durch

meinen Sturz wird die Erde auseinanderbrechen".¹¹ In Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon, stars, galaxies and solar systems are mentioned several times by the angel and space-explorer, with the effect that the macrocosmos, e.g. the universe, in contrast to earth, a microcosmos, is conveyed as incomprehensible in its vastness but is nevertheless "bedrohlich nah" (p. 167).

The significance of heaven versus earth is made clear already in the initial stage directions. The playwright depicts it as "wichtigsten Ort; . . . unermesslich" in its dimensions, whereas earth is set in contrast to this immensity with the simple stage requisite of a "altbabylonische Gaslaternen, spärlich natürlich im Vergleich zum Himmel darüber" (p. 167). Dürrenmatt follows here a law of optical effects where a single branch, pole or other object in the foreground tends to re-inforce the vastness of the landscape or, in this case, the stage background.

Conspicuous too is the contrast between the grandiose, albeit indifferent heaven, represented by the Andromeda Nebula, and the posters in the foreground, depicting problems on the planet Earth such as: "Betteln ist unsozial" (p. 167), and the intimated splendour and ugliness of a metropolis, "prächtigt und dreckig zugleich" (p. 167). The angel's first impression of this planet is not favourable either. Being used to move around gaseous formations in the cosmos, he finds earth a "zähe und störrische Masse" (p. 167) and very cold

even in the deserts near Babylon, as compared to climates in other solar systems he usually explores (p. 169). (The author may also allude here to the stubbornness and coldness with which most of the earth's inhabitants react to Kurrubi, grace incarnate.)

Heaven is, however, not only represented as the immense physical universe, containing countless celestial bodies but is, in this comedy, also often referred to as a metaphysical realm. To the Chief-theologian, for example, heaven seems to be mainly a theological concept; to King Nebukadnezar, heaven is a power opposing his own; and to the first minister, heaven means mostly a concept to be reckoned with politically.

The planet Earth, too, a tiny ball amongst billions of other star-formations in the universe is not only a physical phenomenon but has, like heaven, a tangible as well as a metaphysical aspect. Despite its relative insignificance as compared to the size of other planets, it is nevertheless the one destined to receive God's grace. But before we take a closer look at the "'Einfall' der Gnade"¹², as Fritz Buri expresses it, let us consider briefly Dürrenmatt's choice of city where most of the action takes place.

The ancient city of Babylon is, as Urs Jenny states, "die mythische Grosstadt . . . die Weltmetropole schlechthin"¹³ and the author himself relates: "Was mich an Babylon reizte, war das Heutige, das Zyklopische dieser Stadt . . . eine Art New York".¹⁴ With this choice, Dürrenmatt has succeeded, I think,

again in linking the biblical past with the twentieth century. One could well associate the ambitious endeavour of the construction of Babylon's Tower with an edifice such as the Empire State Building in New York. The Old Testament metropolis, the playwright chose for this comedy may, however, also represent man's as opposed to God's creation, depicted by the city in the foreground of the stage and the Andromeda Nebula in the background (in Acts II and III).

A comical aspect, in connection with the city of Babylon, is the King's arrogance in assuming that his city was the only metropolis and that the world would end at the mountains of Lebanon. To the angel's superior knowledge, that there existed a few other "villages" behind the mountains in sight, such as: "Athen, Sparta, Karthago, Moskau, Peking" (p. 173), the ruler grandly replies: "Der grosse König Nebukadnezar wird auch diese Dörfer erobern" (p. 173, a reaction which calls to mind the antagonist of Dürrenmatt's first drama, Johann Bockelson, who proudly declared: "Wir gedenken uns so beiläufig zum Herrn der Erde zu erheben".¹⁵

Considering now the main characters in this comedy on God's grace and justice, there are two main groups in contrast to each other. On the one hand, there are the angel and Kurrubi, representatives of the metaphysical world and on the other, the inhabitants of earth, the tangible, physical world. Within the latter group, there are again a few categories, namely the ruling group, headed by the King who sym-

bolizes power; then the first minister as the one wielding power; the chief-theologian exerting mainly spiritual power; the general as leader of the army; the banker who dominates the kingdom's economy; and last but not least, the hangman, executing justice or what is deemed to be justice by those in authority.

Akki, the beggar and the poor poets form a category of their own. They show already a certain affinity with Kurrubi and are, incidentally, the only ones who accept her without speculations for personal gain.

The third of these sub-groups consists of the masses, represented by the workmen and their wives, the soldiers, the merchants, the town-courtesan and the policeman, the last-mentioned often acting as a middle-man between those in authority and the common people. The masses, as indicated by their actions and reactions in the course of the play, are swayed back and forth, bestowing their favour now on the ruling group, now on the angel and Kurrubi, depending on who incites their greed or fear.

Since grace is the predominant theme in Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon, but does not exclude justice, it is worthwhile to take a closer look at the presence or absence of these opposite poles in the main characters on stage.

The angel, as a first instance, can be perceived as being in a permanent state of grace, time and space having no significance in his mode of existence. The reason for this

continuous state of harmony with divine laws and the absence of problems and suffering common on the planet Earth, lies obviously in his unconditional obedience to his creator.

This is alluded to several times in the play. To Kurrubi's plea, for example, to stay with her until she was more familiar with human beings, the angel replies unwaveringly: "An mir ist es, die Menschen zu verlassen, und an dir, bei ihnen zu bleiben. Wir müssen beide gehorsam sein" (p. 190). His unquestioning obedience to God comes to the fore also in his reply to King Nebukadnezar's request, to give the radiantly beautiful Kurrubi to the King and not to the poorest of man. "Ich habe den Auftrag," the angel says, "zum geringsten der Menschen zu gehen, aber keine Fähigkeit, den Grund des Himmels zu wissen" (p. 188). Dürrenmatt may well imply here that although angels are thought to be free of human problems and temptations, they nevertheless lack the freedom of choice to act against God's intention.

As to the angel's other function in this play: to explore land and sea of the planet Earth, two possible interpretations come to mind, firstly, it could explain the angel's often displayed indifference to human sorrows and problems, due to the inevitable pre-occupation and absent-mindedness this "profession" entails. To Kurrubi's urgent request, not to leave her alone in the new and bewildering circumstances she finds herself in, the angel spreads his wings, saying: "Unmöglich. Ich habe schliesslich noch einen Beruf. Ich muss

die Erde untersuchen. Ich eile, zu messen, zu schürfen, zu sammeln, neue Wunder zu entdecken" (p. 191).

Secondly, the angel's task to explore the earth also leads to his ever-increasing awe of the overall beauty and perfection of this tiny planet. In the process of his discoveries he becomes more and more enthusiastic and declares, before returning to the outer cosmos:

Ein unwirkliches Wunder in den erhabenen Wüsteneien der Gestirne. Der blaue Sirius, die weisse Wega, die tosenden Cepheiden . . . nie wiegen sie dieses Körnchen Materie auf, diese winzige Kugel . . . atmend im Grün der Kontinente, im Silber der Meere (p. 248).

Having seen the tangible beauty of the planet Earth, he concludes that harmony and a state of grace among men would exist as well. In his last farewell to Kurrubi, the angel states joyfully: "Alles, was ich fand auf diesem Stern, war Gnade und nichts anderes" (p. 249) and he departs with envy for her being able to remain on this, to him, so fortunate planet. His envy, however, has a rather ironic connotation since, at that point in time, the young girl had just been sentenced to death by Babylon's King for refusing to be "reasonable" and comply with his wishes.

The angel, however, not being encumbered with a human body and human emotions, has the advantage of perceiving everything in the proportions of the macrocosmos as opposed to the inhabitants on earth who are bound to see things from a narrow point of view which is, in addition, often blurred by their own needs and prejudices. In his comment on the second version

of this comedy, Dürrenmatt states, in a very positive vein:

Immer noch hat der Engel recht, immer noch ist die Erde das Wunder. Der Engel mag uns weltfremd erscheinen, ich glaube jedoch, dass jene weltfremder sind, welche die Welt nur als Verzweiflung sehen. Die Erde hängt nicht im Nichts, sie ist ein Teil der Schöpfung. 16

This optimistic point of view on the position of the planet Earth in the universe does not seem to be maintained in the playwright's later works as is evident already in the play discussed in Chapter III of this study.

The angel's main purpose in this comedy, however, is not only to investigate the wonders of the planet Earth but, like other angels we hear about in religious writings and fairytales, this one too has the task of bringing something of significance to mankind. In both, the Old and the New Testament, it is most often an important announcement he has to make, as for instance the angel Gabriel having the task of announcing to Mary that she was chosen to become the mother of the promised Messiah. It is more in the nature of a fairytale, however, that the angel in Dürrenmatt's comedy should bring something tangible to the planet Earth and in the person of Kurrubi, the author has created his perhaps most beautiful and lovable female character on stage. She has an otherworldly, angelic quality about her and, at the same time, represents a credible young girl, capable of human behaviour and emotions.

Kurrubi is similar to the angel inasmuch as she too originates from the hand of God and as such lives in a state

of innocence and grace. Jenny associates the name Kurrubi with "Cherub"¹⁷ which sounds quite convincing. The Concise Oxford Dictionary, namely, defines a cherub as an "Angelic being . . . gifted with knowledge [and] love [and also as] beautiful or innocent child."¹⁸ the heroine of this play embodies all of these attributes. The angel who brings her to earth emphasizes, in addition, that she is "unvergänglich wie das Nichts . . . und vergänglich wie der Mensch" (p. 168). Like the angel, then Kurrubi is a celestial being but unlike him she is, at the same time, "Ein Wesen in Menschenform" (p. 168), and as such subject to human joys, hopes, disappointments, suffering and despair.

An interesting aspect, in the context of Kurrubi's mission, can be seen in the many allusions to the life of Christ on earth. Kurrubi's arrival on this planet, for instance, is first made known by the angel to the poorest of men (the beggars Akki and Anaschamaschtaklaku); Christ's birth was first announced to lowly shepherds. Kurrubi's reception by men is of an ambiguous nature. King Nebukadnezar desires her because of her beauty but then kicks her to ground when she insists on following only the poorest of men in accordance with God's command. King Herod, when he heard of Christ's birth inquired, at first, carefully as to where the newborn child might be found so he too could go and worship him; then, however, decides to have him killed instead, for fear of losing his throne; similarly, Kurrubi in her just indignation, accuses

King Nebukadnezar: "Deine Macht ist Ohnmacht . . . deinen Thron wagst du nicht zu verlassen, aus Furcht, ihn zu verlieren" (p. 244) when the King, in vain, tries to convince her that he and the poorest of men were one and the same person. Akki and the poets, however, accept Kurrubi without reservation; the shepherds and the three magi also accepted Christ on faith, the former believing unconditionally the message of the angels, the latter having their faith based on predictions and the careful observation of the laws of astrology. In Dürrenmatt's comedy, the ruling group, the banker, the merchants and the masses praise Kurrubi with poems and when they become convinced, by the re-appearance of the angel, that she is indeed of supernatural origin, they all, except Akki and the poets, want to make her their queen, shouting: "Es soll unsere Königin sein" (p. 211). This closely resembles Christ's entry into Jerusalem where the Jews wanted to proclaim him their king after having witnessed his power to perform miracles. When the mob, which had previously lauded Kurrubi and had wished to see her crowned, now screams: "Ein Hexenmädchen. . . . Gib es dem Henker" (p. 247), we are reminded of a similar scene, related in the New Testament, where the mob cried: "Crucify him!", shortly after the same crowd had demanded that Jesus of Nazareth be made their king. When Kurrubi is deserted by all who had earlier claimed to love her, the scene calls to mind a similar situation in the garden on the Mount of Olives where Christ was abandoned by

even his closest friends.in the hours of his trial.

To conclude this brief comparison between the fate of Dürrenmatt's heroine in Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon and events in Christ's life, a last striking parallel between these two representatives of God's grace may be worthwhile considering. I am thinking of the first gospel of St. John in the New Testament where he speaks of the origin of the Logos, the Word that became Flesh. St. John was inspired to write: "Und das Licht scheint in der Finsternis, und die Finsternis hat's nicht ergriffen", and later, in the same gospel, "Wie viele ihn aber aufnahmen, denen gab er Macht, Gottes Kinder zu werden".¹⁹ In this modern play, too, although it is set in the distant past of Old Testament times, Kurrubi comes as a radiant light into man's world on earth but most of its inhabitants, after being at first impressed by her miraculous appearance on the planet and enamoured of her beauty, reject her when she insists on holding fast to God's command; to belong only to the poorest of them. To those, however, who accept her for what she represents, namely grace incarnate, she becomes a light they cannot forget. The poor poets by the riverside sorrowfully recite at her parting: "Ach, wie haben wir geschmachtet / Nach der Gnade. . . . / Hoffend, dass der alte, weise / Engel uns das Mädchen lasse" (p. 213). The beggar Akki, who realizes perhaps best Kurrubi's true nature, states with regret, when he has to give her over to the masses who, in their spiritual darkness, want her for their earthly queen:

"Zufällig tauschte ich dich ein (for the ex-king Nimrod, in the beggar's contest with Nebukadnezar, p. 193), [und] ein Stück Himmel blieb an mir haften" (p. 212).

Whereas Kurrubi, then, personifying divine grace, is the purest and most beautiful character in this comedy, Akki, the beggar is perhaps the most colourful one. He is so, however, not in a literal sense as is the angel who, in appearance, could have been inspired by some of Chagall's paintings (as stage directions indicate, for example in Act II, p. 208, the angel is to wear "Tannzapfen, Mohn im Haar, Sonnenblumen, Tannzweige usw. im Arm"). Akki, apart from his notorious flaming-red beard, distinguishes himself more with an earthy good humour, common sense, wit, but also, at times, with scathing irony. His most sympathetic trait, though, is his mostly veiled, but ever-present compassion for any fellow-human being in need. He is indeed the character who combines mercy and a sense of justice in his personality, as opposed to King Nebukadnezar who has the the grand plan to re-educate mankind and deigns it not below him "es noch mit Humanität zu versuchen" (p. 172). Akki, the poorest of men by his own choice, is the true humanitarian in this play.

As mentioned earlier, the beggar is one of the few who accepts Kurrubi. When he trades her for the captive ex-king Nimrod, he already gives her supernatural origin the benefit of the doubt. Not without some scepticism, he nevertheless concedes: "Ein Engel soll dich hergebracht haben. Ich bin ein

Freund der Märchen, ich will das Unglaubliche glauben" (p. 194). His predilection for phantastic tales does not, however, prevent him from considering also the practical aspect of a profitable partnership with the beautiful girl from heaven. "Wir wollen doch sehen," he says with good common sense, "was wir erbetteln, du mit deiner Schönheit und ich mit meinem roten Bart" (p. 194). The genuine kindness, innate in this sympathetic beggar, is revealed by Kurrubi when she has to take leave of him on request of the masses. "Du nahmst mich zu dir", she says with gratitude, "Du gabst mir zu essen, wenn ich hungerte, zu trinken, wenn ich durstig war. Wenn ich mich fürchtete, sangst du mir deine gewaltigen Lieder vor . . . wenn ich müde war . . . trugst du mich . . . auf deinen mächtigen Armen. Ich liebe dich, wie man einen Vater liebt" (p. 212). None of the other characters in this comedy deserves or receives such heart-felt words of praise.

Akki shows mercy, however, not only to the innocent and beautiful but extends it to a large number of poor poets (whose occupation he considers a nuisance most of the time); a few pick-pockets, and even some outcast lepers, all of whom share the charitable beggar's outdoor living quarters under the bridge by the river Euphrates. To the thirsty policeman (who only recently had to torture the beggar for the latter's contempt of the law, forbidding anyone to beg for a living in Babylon) Akki offers some wine to drink (p. 198). And he lets the hangman, who came to execute him, join in the common feast

of "Rindfleischsuppe" and "eine Bouteille besten Ägypters" (pp. 214-6), together with the above mentioned poets, assorted petty criminals and outcasts.

The beggar's compassion and mercy, then, with the helpless, the poor, or the prisoners of their own professions, such as the policeman or the executioner, reflect divine mercy at its best. His charity may sometimes have a practical note, as in his relationship with Kurrubi, or be spiced with contemptuous remarks as he often does when he shows kindness to the poets, or have a jovial or even sly tone as when he offers food and drink to his persecutor or hangman. That he clothes his good deeds into these aforementioned disguises, takes the hypocritical sting out of them which so often accompanies the charity of men and makes him one of the most endearing characters Dürrenmatt has created in this work.

Not only Akki's mercy towards his fellow-men, however, deserves attention but equally so his sense of justice. This complementary trait can be noticed throughout the play but is illustrated most clearly in two of his Makames and, in Act III, in his new profession as the King's hangman.

In the first Makame, the beggar expounds to his audience, consisting of the poets, the policeman and Kurrubi, the transitoriness of all things. By developing three different examples, Akki relates the fate of those who, he says, had brought him up in one of his previous incarnations, "in jungen Jahren, vor vielen tausend Jahren" (p. 201). In the first stage, he de-

scribes a life of affluence he enjoyed as a youth--until bankruptcy sets in and both his parents had to end on the stake. The second stage deals with a period of piety and devotion which he had to spend under the guidance of a prophet. But then, another highpriest took over in Babylon and--the prophet, together with his man-made gods, had to burn on the stake as well. In the third stage, as a young man, he says he has been further educated by a general who, by his loyalty to the king and his being victorious in battle, accumulated honour and riches until--another king came to power and the general too had to suffer the fate of the preceding characters.

The moral the beggar draws from these experiences is contained in the fourth paragraph of this Makame, namely: "Der Mensch sei wie Sand, Sand allein hält stand" (p. 201). This statement is an interesting parody of the proverb, "Wer auf Gott vertraut, hat nicht auf Sand gebaut", God being associated in the latter statement as the solid rock as opposed to drifting sand. Having depicted the outcome of these three instances illustrated in the Makame of his life, firstly: "Das Silber wird schwarz, das Gold rollt davon"; secondly: "Die Religion wird schwarz, die Gnad' rollt davon" and thirdly: "Die Ehre wird schwarz, das Amt rollt davon", and that, consequently: "Die Zeit wird schwarz, die Macht rollt davon" (p. 201), Akki concludes that only a beggar who owes nothing and is nobody of significance, would manage to escape annihilation.

The first Makame, then, tells about the inherent justice

in all conditions, i.e. he who is wealthy risks to lose all (Akki himself throws all the riches he accumulates during his begging rounds, into the river Euphrates. "Nur so wird die Welt vom Reichtum erleichtert", he tells the surprised Kurrubi, p. 196); he who worships only within a rigid framework of a certain religion, must perish when a change occurs; and he who is ambitious and loyal to one ruler only, has to die when another comes to power.

This thread of wisdom is spun further in the beggar's last Makame, which is a brilliant piece of rhetoric: "Die Makame von der Waffe der Schwachen" (p. 221). Here, the possible downfall of power itself is depicted and how this can be brought about. But first, Akki warns of the potential pitfalls en route to this goal: Never try to conquer the powerful with heroic resistance--they will only laugh about it. Never incite their envy by displaying your possessions to them--they have means to take them away from you. And the conclusion is again: "Nur wer nichts hat und nichts ist, bleibt unversehrt" (p. 221). This last Makame is then enriched with a number of poignant pieces of advice on how to behave in order to survive, such as: "Stelle dich dumm, nur so wirst du alt. Von innen greife an . . . erniedrige dich und du brichst jede Mauer. Ertrage Schmach, . . . vergrabe, will's die Zeit, wilde Hoffnung, heisse Liebe, Leid und Gnade, Menschlichkeit" (pp. 221-2). Significantly, with these concluding words, Akki puts on the mask and red coat of a hangman and thus transformed, illus-

trates the truth of the above Makame. He now goes on, in Act III, to put into practice what he had just expounded on: to contribute his share in bringing about justice upon the King's court.

Akki's role as Nebuakdnezar's hangman, a position he had cleverly traded with Sidi (who called himself "der Unbestechliche"), in order to elevate this unpopular profession too. The new hangman's motto is: "Henken heisst laufen lassen!" (p. 220). This does not come as a surprise, however, after having heard his Makames and realized his compassionate attitude in various circumstances. Akki now adheres to his philosophy by sparing first the King's page who was condemned for writing poems about Kurrubi (p. 226); he then does not make any effort to arrest and hang the geographers and astronomers of the kingdom whose sole crime consisted in their ignorance of a few "villages" on the other side of the Lebanon (p. 226); and instead of killing the poets who, according to the King Nebukadnezar, made public non-existent emotions and invented tales without any logic to them, Akki carouses with them out of the King's sight and eventually lets them go. The only men in Babylon he would have hanged with pleasure are the theologians and foremost among them their head, Utnapischtim. This religious leader, however, an autocrat in the spiritual realm, the creator of dogmas and writer of articles against the existence of angels (p. 227), is indispensable in the King's endeavour to win Kurrubi as his wife. Akki's eagerness to eliminate the,

in his opinion, superfluous theologians, is overruled, in this case, by those in authority.

Before we take a closer look at the Chief-theologian, however, some light ought to be shed first on the character of the "Erzminister" in Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon. This powerful politician, author and guardian of the five hundred thousand paragraphs which are said to uphold the kingdom's bureaucracy is, in more than one aspect, diametrically opposed to the personality of Akki, the beggar. This may best be illustrated by the tempting offer which is made to the beggar by the representative of the first minister and also, by the "Erzminister"'s reaction and interpretation of the two supernatural beings: the angel and Kurrubi.

When the policeman, ordered by those in authority, offers Akki a lucrative position in the department of finance, with the promise of a splendid career to come, the latter flatly declines, stating instead his preferences: "Karrieren, Polizist Nebo, interessieren mich nicht", Akki says stubbornly, "Ich ziehe vor, freischaffender Künstler zu bleiben" (pp. 199-200). The first minister, on the other hand, adapts himself, chameleon-like, to any change in the kingdom. When Nebukadnezar, for instance, loses his throne to the ex-king Nimrod, the former sadly states: "Wir rollen einem allgemeinen Untergang entgegen", to which the first minister self-assuredly replies: "Leute wie wir kommen immer wieder irgendwie hoch" (p. 239). Later on, when the masses riot and threaten to overthrow the

kingdom, the "Erzminister" has the appropriate documents already prepared. "Zum Glück habe ich die repuplikanische Verfassung bereit" (p. 244) he says smugly.

The appearance of the angel is to the calculating politician not a possible miracle with a certain purpose but, on the contrary, a definite nuisance. In this respect, the first minister resembles the character of Charles V in Es steht geschrieben, who said: "Ich liebe nicht das planlose Spiel des Zufalls, ich bewundere die regelmässigen Bahnen der Gestirne".²⁰

One can compare this statement of the emperor with the highly satirical declaration of the "Erzminister" in this comedy, who says:

Ein Staat, eine gesunde Autorität ist nur möglich,
indem die Erde Erde und der Himmel Himmel bleibt,
indem die Erde eine Wirklichkeit darstellt, die von
Politikern zu gestalten ist, und der Himmel eine
holde Theorie der Theologen, über die sonst niemand
klug zu werden braucht. Wird jedoch der Himmel Wirk-
lichkeit . . . muss der Staat notgedrungen zu einer
Farce werden (pp. 239-40).

and he issues the stern warning that "in Zukunft [müsse] das Erscheinen von Engeln richtig organisiert werden" (p. 241).

Like the emperor in the previously discussed drama, then, the head politician of Babylon's kingdom attempts, mostly in vain like the former, to impose human control on any event, even the most unpredictable or, in this case, supernatural ones.

Akki, for his part, does not worry much as to whether Kurrubi was brought to earth by a supernatural being or not. He gives the sensational news, as mentioned earlier, the benefit of the doubt and accepts the creation "aus dem Nichts"

(p. 168), without wanting to exploit it for his own ends. To the first minister, though, Kurrubi is a commodity which he tries to manipulate to political advantage. "Wir haben die Möglichkeit," he says enthusiastically, "metaphysisch zu verankern, was politisch auf allzu schwachen Beinen stand [the threat of an imminent overthrow of the monarchy]. Machen wir das Mädchen zur Königin, so ist die republikanische Idee für einige Jahrtausende zerstoßen" (p. 231).

Quite in agreement with the first minister's proposal is Utnapischtim, the kingdom's Chief-theologian. He, too, sees nothing but advantages in a marriage of King Nebukadnezar and the young girl, said to be brought to earth by an angel. "Religion und Staatsraison fügen sich aufs schönste zusammen", he rejoices, not considering, at first, that Kurrubi is meant to belong only to the poorest of men and a union with the King would therefore be out of the question. When the innocent girl insists, however, on obeying solely the angel's, i.e. God's command, the old theologian attempts, with remarkable dialectic skill, to convince her that heaven would not and could not demand the impossible. "Wenn du das Gebot des Himmels als unbedingt ansiehst," he argues, "und verlangst, dass der König, der dich als Bettler erhielt, nun auch ein Bettler werden müsse, so verwirrt das die menschliche Ordnung" (p. 238).

There is, then, the "logical" human order of things as opposed to the unfathomable will of heaven to which Kurrubi uncompromisingly wants to adhere and which the Chief-theolo-

gian tries to bend and re-interpret until it fit human convenience. In this attempt Utnapischtim goes as far in his spiritual arrogance as to say: " Es ist meine Pflicht, den Himmel zu bewahren, sich selber zu schaden" (p. 242). He, then, has the arrogance of wanting to control and manipulate things supernatural just as the first minister attempts to organize the happenings on earth. Another of the Chief-theologian's arguments in convincing the young girl to hide her true identity is that humanity is not ready yet to comprehend her supernatural origin and her purpose on this planet. "Allzufrüh schwebte der Bote des Himmels zu uns Kindern herab" (p. 243), he says with mock-humility (since he considers himself mature and wise enough to save even heaven from harming itself). As a consequence, the appearance of the angel being so detrimental to the precepts of state and established religion, Utnapischtim is ready for a settlement with the "Erzminister". The former agrees to deny publicly the reality of the angel, on the condition that half of the monarchy's income would go into the coffers of the temple.

All the Chief-theologian's shrewdness, though, in the battle with Kurrubi's unwillingness to compromise with the "menschliche[n] Notwendigkeiten" (p. 243), as the King puts it, is to no avail. Utnapischtim's attempt to interpret the message of heaven: "Die Worte des Himmels dürfen nie persönlich, sondern nur allgemein aufgefasst werden" (p. 228), as he tells Nebukadnezar, is frustrated by Kurrubi's resistance.

Dürrenmatt is said to have remarked, at the introductory evening of this play, that "die tragischste und schmerzlichste Person des Werkes sei der Obertheologe, der den Himmel entschärfen wolle."²¹ The head of the established religion, then, loses out on this unique chance to win God's grace by courageously accepting it. The tragedy of this kind of attitude is well expressed in the last stage directions concerning Utnapischtim. When Kurrubi turns to him as a last resort for protection and understanding, directions are: "Der Obertheologe wendet sich ab" (p. 247).

A different attitude towards the intentions of heaven is portrayed in the character of King Nebukadnezar. He is not just attempting to interpret the divine will to suit his own wishes but, in the course of the play, develops a strong opposition towards the justice of heaven. The young king starts his reign with the naive but nevertheless dangerous idea of establishing a perfect government. His desire is to achieve "ein makellooses Reich, . . . ein durchsichtiges Gebilde, das alle umschliesst, vom Henker bis zum Minister". This aim, he tries to justify with the noble sounding: "Wir streben nicht nach Macht, wir streben nach Vollkommenheit" (p. 172). That this is utter utopia is realized very soon by Akki, the beggar, who replies to the confidential information of the policeman, that even "die Wissenschaft [müsse] vollkommen . . . sein (in Nebukadnezar's kingdom)",: "Der Anfang vom Ende" (p. 199).

When the King, in Act I of the comedy, is offered grace

incarnate in the person of Kurrubi (the angel assuming that he is indeed the poorest and least capable of men since he had just lost the beggar's contest with Akki) he, not unlike Utnapischtim, tries to re-interpret the angel's clear instructions. Excerpts from the dialogue between the messenger from heaven and the King in beggar's disguise illustrate the latter's bargaining with the angel:

Nebukadnezar (bitter): So willst du diese Heilige
dem letzten Bettler überlassen?

Der Engel: Der Himmel weiss, was er tut! . . .

Nebukadnezar (verzweifelt): Was soll denn ein
Bettler mit ihr tun?

Der Engel: Bin ich ein Mensch, der Bräuche kennt?

. . . .

Nebukadnezar: An Nebukadnezar's Seite würde sie die
Welt regieren, an meiner bittet sie!

Der Engel: Du musst nun einmal lernen, dass das
Weltregieren dem Himmel zukommt und das
Betteln den Menschen (p. 190).

There is a curious reversal of values expressed in the above dialogue. The King's argument, from a human point of view, sounds reasonable enough but this does not distract the angel from insisting on executing divine orders, namely to give Kurrubi only to the poorest of men.

The angel, then, suddenly inspired, relates: "Vielleicht ist es so, dass, je ärmer ein Mensch ist, desto mächtiger die Vollkommenheit aus ihm hervorbricht" (p. 190). What the angel speaks of here is, however, diametrically opposed to the perfection Nebukadnezar plans to achieve in his kingdom. The kind of man the angel refers to seems to be more in the

Lutherian sense, e.g. that God's grace can be worked best in the man who utterly depends on Him through faith, whereas Nebukadnezar aims at a man-made perfection, independent of divine grace.

It is not surprising either, that Babylon's King likes to think of himself as being a humanitarian (p. 172), the term being defined in The Concise Oxford Dictionary as "One who professes humanism . . . ,[also a] visionary philanthropist".²² By eliminating poverty and educating the human race in order to establish an immaculate world-kingdom, Nebukadnezar is doubly frustrated in his efforts: firstly, by Akki's resistance in giving up his occupation as a beggar and, secondly, by Kurru-bi's insistence of belonging to Anaschamaschtaklaku only. The young ruler then tries to revenge himself on the unco-operating heaven by condemning Akki to death and by kicking Kurru-bi, heaven's grace offered to him, to the ground.

After the events in Act I of the play, Nebukadnezar is depicted as feeling "müde und traurig, vom Himmel beleidigt (p. 194). His growing bitterness and cynicism is expressed in his answer to the innocent girl's question, after the angel had departed: "Weinen denn die Menschen nicht, wenn ein Engel des Himmels von ihnen geht?" to which the King replies: "Wir haben das Weinen verlernt und das Fluchen gelernt" (p. 191).

In Act II and III of this comedy, Nebukadnezar's frustration grows more profound since he persists in his utopian

endeavour of creating a new order, based solely on human reason. By pronouncing the death sentence on the last beggar, the geographers and astronomers as well as the poets, the King assumes that now, the realization of his plans had begun. His attempts are in vain, however, (his death sentences are all being waived by Akki, who became the King's hangman, without the King's knowledge) and his ever-deepening sadness and resulting fury at heaven's injustice is summed up towards the end of Act III, where he realizes:

Ich trachtete nach Vollkommenheit. Ich schuf eine neue Ordnung der Dinge. Ich suchte die Armut zu tilgen. Ich wünschte die Vernunft einzuführen. Der Himmel missachtete mein Werk. Ich blieb ohne Gnade (p. 249).

Having reached this final stage of disappointment and despair there are only two possible attitudes left: humility or continuing pride. King Nebukadnezar persists in his pride, calling to mind Johann Bockelson, the antagonist of the first drama, who displayed a similar attitude till the end. When Nebukadnezar realizes that not only he but also his subjects, who desired Kurrubi as well (either as a wife or a queen), refuse to give up their wealth, their business or whatever material security they have, thus becoming collectively guilty, the King decides to take direct revenge on heaven by commanding his people to build a tower, "der die Wolken durchfährt, durchmessend die Unendlichkeit, mitten in das Herz meines Feindes. Ich will der Schöpfung aus dem Nichts [i.e. Kurrubi, God's creation]", he swears, "die Schöpfung aus dem Geist des Mensch-

en entgegenstellen und sehen, was besser ist, meine Gerechtigkeit oder die Ungerechtigkeit Gottes" (p. 250).

After this dramatic climax of human pride and arrogance there follows, however, an anticlimax, when the idiot dances once more across the stage, demonstrating the utter vanity of the King's last, gigantic, but nevertheless doomed endeavour in attempting to fight the justice of heaven. Stage directions indicate: "Da seiltanzt der Idiot grinsend über die Bühne. Nebukadnezar bedeckt sein Antlitz in ohnmächtiger Wut, in ohnmächtiger Trauer" (p. 250).

But this extremely pessimistic ending of the King's attempts is counter-balanced by a jubilant finale. It is Akki, the beggar, who has the last word in this comedy on God's grace. He does not reproach heaven for its seeming injustice but exalts in praising the earth which, to him, is still "an Möglichkeiten wunderbar . . . einmalig an Glück und einmalig an Gefahr (p. 251) whereas Babylon, he says prophetically, "zerfällt mit seinem Turm . . . der sich unaufhaltsam in die Höhe schiebt, dem Sturz entgegen" (p. 251). Akki, the great realist as well as the great idealist, flees with Kurrubi (whom he had accepted from the beginning) toward "ein neues Land, voll neuer Verfolgung, voll neuer Verheissung und voll von neuen Gesängen" (p. 251).

ENDNOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

¹ Armin Arnold, Friedrich Dürrenmatt (Berlin: Colloquium Verlag, 1969), p. 41.

² Friedrich Dürrenmatt, "Theaterprobleme," in Theater-Schriften und Reden (Zürich: Arche, 1966), p. 120.

³ Elisabeth Brock-Sulzer, Friedrich Dürrenmatt, Stationen seines Werkes (Zürich: Arche, 1960), p. 75.

⁴ Friedrich Dürrenmatt, "Es steht geschrieben," in Komödien II und Frühe Stücke (Zürich: Arche, 1963), pp. 106-10.

⁵ Brock-Sulzer, p. 78.

⁶ Dürrenmatt, "Theaterprobleme," pp. 113-14.

⁷ Gero von Wilpert, Sachwörterbuch der Literatur (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner, 1969), p. 467.

⁸ Dürrenmatt, "Theaterprobleme", p. 114.

⁹ Brock-Sulzer, p. 78.

¹⁰ Dürrenmatt, "Dokument," in Theater-Schriften, p. 35

¹¹ Dürrenmatt, Es steht geschrieben, p. 67.

¹² Fritz Buri, "Der 'Einfall' der Gnade in Dürrenmatts dramaturgischem Werk," in Der unbequeme Dürrenmatt (Basel: Basilius Presse, 1962), p. 35.

¹³ Urs Jenny, Dürrenmatt (Velber bei Hannover: Friedrich Verlag, 1965), p. 50.

¹⁴ Dürrenmatt, "Theaterprobleme", p. 107.

- 15 Dürrenmatt, Es steht geschrieben, p. 22.
- 16 Hans Bänziger quotes Friedrich Dürrenmatt, in Frisch und Dürrenmatt (Bern: A. Francke, 1960), p. 160.
- 17 Jenny, p. 50.
- 18 "Cherub", in The Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1965.
- 19 John I, verses 5-9, in Die Bibel oder die ganze Heilige Schrift des Alten und Neuen Testaments, Nach der deutschen Übersetzung Martin Luthers (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1969), pp. 117-18.
- 20 Dürrenmatt, Es steht geschrieben, p. 168.
- 21 Bänziger quotes Dürrenmatt, p. 162.
- 22 "Humanitarian," in Oxford Dictionary, p. 592.

All quotes from the text Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon, are from Friedrich Dürrenmatt, Komodien I (Zürich: Arche, 1957), with the page-numbers given parenthetically.

CHAPTER THREE

The themes of justice and grace in the radio-play
 "Das Unternehmen der Wega"

In the play, Das Unternehmen der Wega, (1954), Dürrenmatt flings open the curtain, so to speak, onto a world entirely different from either the sphere of a drama in the style of a "Welttheater", or a comedy in the genre of an oriental fairy-tale. Not only did the author here create a work of science-fiction but it is also, unlike most of his other works, "auf die eine Ebene des Hörens abstrahiert"¹, i.e. it is a radio-play. This may account, at least in part, for its relative obscurity as compared to many of his stage-plays or novels. A stage or film version of this radio-play, though, seems quite feasible (as the playwright has done, for instance, with Herkules und der Stall der Augias, another of his radio-plays²).

To date, however, Das Unternehmen der Wega, has been conveyed (to my knowledge) through the spoken word only, without stage, scenery, background and performing actors. Dürrenmatt's statement: "Es gibt . . . keine andere Überwindung des Abgrunds zwischen den Dingen als durch die Phantasie"³, seems especially appropriate in the case of a radio-play since the audience has to bridge the gap between the aural and the vis-

ual by means of the imagination. In addition, the listener is under the illusion that he hears a taped recording of the events taking place, i.e. the launching of the space-ship WEGA, the conversations on board and the dialogues between the visitors from planet Earth and the inhabitants of Venus, a task which is assigned to Mannerheim, the medical doctor on board.

The concept of timeless validity can be readily seen in the two previous works. This science-fiction drama, however, has a visionary quality about it. Dürrenmatt wrote Das Unternehmen der Wega in 1954; in 1957, the first earth-satellites were moving in the orbit and "The first nuclear explosion", as is stated in McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of Science and Technology, "was by a fission weapon detonated at Alamogordo, New Mexico, on July 16, 1945".⁴ During the thirty-five years elapsed since, tremendous "progress" has been made, though, both in space research and in the development of ever deadlier weapons. The playwright's projecting the plot of this work into the year 2255 (thereby allowing the cold war to smoulder on for another three centuries), is, however, in the light of today's state of affairs, almost wishful thinking. Robert Collison, in his article, "The new threat of nuclear war" in Saturday Night's magazine of May 1980, elucidates: ". . . the fear that the Soviets will soon be able to launch a successful first strike obsesses Pentagon war planners. So they've dreamed up the MX (a new supermissile), America's own

first-strike weapon system . . . comparable in size to the Soviet's giant SS-18".⁵ Although Dürrenmatt has demonstrated remarkable vision in this play, Collison (and with him many others, writers and scientists alike) see the possibility of mutual annihilation on this planet as a prospect of the near future, unless man stays within the limits of reason.

Die "Ausweitung der Welt",⁶ as Elisabeth Brock-Sulzer formulates it, is dramatically expressed in this science-fiction play. But whereas it has a grotesquely-funny note when, in the first drama, the protagonist Bockelson declares: "Ich werde wie ein Meteor durch eure Nächte stürzen";⁷ or when, in the second work discussed, the angel, alias space-explorer, praises the grandeur and beauty of celestial bodies such as "der blaue Sirius, die weisse Wega, die tosenden Cepheiden . . ."⁸ the exclamations are more in a poetic vein; the mention of moon-fortresses, however, occupied by the Russians, the strength and self-sufficiency of a population on Mars, and the dire climatic conditions on Venus, all of this sounds today, though originating from Dürrenmatt's prodigious imagination, quite realistic and within the range of the feasible.

The international calibre of the cast in Das Unternehmen der Wega adds to the concept of an "Ausweitung der Welt" as well. Mannerheim, for instance, who has the task of taping all the conversations taking place on this voyage and then reporting to the President of the Free United Nations on Earth, is presumably German, extremely polite and doggedly loyal; Colonel

Camille Roi is possibly a Frenchman, elegant in his uniform, one can imagine, and precise in executing orders; then "ein gewisser Petersen", a dubious character, former war-criminal, with a Scandinavian-sounding name; John Smith, with a typical Anglo-Saxon name, suspect to the members of the Free Nations because he is said to be the son of an American Communist; Irene from Poland, a former prostitute, now a nurse on Venus; and the two main characters: the protagonist Sir Horace Wood, Foreign Minister of the Free United Nations of the planet Earth, sounding distinguished as well as cosmopolitan; and Bonstetten, the antagonist of the play, presumably Swiss, a former delegate of the Free United Nations, now a medical doctor on Venus, calling to mind Albert Schweitzer, Henry Dunant or--Graf Bodo von Übelohe in Dürrenmatt's, Die Ehe des Herrn Mississippi (1952). All of these characters may sound somewhat cliché-ridden but then, in a science-fiction radio-play like this, which the author created in a very condensed and economical manner, leaving much to the imagination of the listener, the use of stereotypes is almost a necessity. It seems to enhance rather than diminish the impact of the drama.

This contemporary cast, then, consists of two groups: the passengers and crew on board the space-ship WEGA, traveling from planet Earth to Venus on a specific mission, and the former terrestrials, now inhabitants of Venus. The latter group is made up of former criminals and politically "undesirable elements" from both power-blocks on Earth who have been,

for the past two centuries, deported to the extremely un hospitable planet Venus and there left to their own devices.

It is interesting, too, that the playwright, in this work, determined that all the characters be ordinary human beings as opposed to the previously discussed comedy, where the characters from outer space are distinctly different from mortal men on Earth, namely direct creations of God. Seen in a psychological context, however, the people on Venus are of great interest insofar as they have undergone profound changes in their attitudes and behaviour due to the hostile environment they were thrust into, in contrast to the visitors from Earth who appear rather static in their outlook and thinking, as Wood expresses it at the outset of their journey and again on their return to Earth, they are "gefesselt" (pp. 8, 43), i.e. prisoners of their self-created power-system on planet Earth (which they consider, however, to be superior to any other conceivable, this being part of their static, prejudiced way of thinking).

Looking at the significance of justice and grace in this science-fiction play now under scrutiny, one soon notices the immanent character of these themes. They are of a much less explicit nature than was the case in either of the two previously discussed works. Also, there are hardly any symbols evident here, save perhaps the one implied in the author's choice of Venus, a planet long associated with the goddess of love and beauty, whereas in this play it is, for the deported

terrestrials, a habitat with the most cruel living conditions, as Mannerheim reports: "Es war die Hitze, die Feuchtigkeit der Luft, die immer spürbaren Erdbeben Dieser Himmel ohne Sonne, ein schwer lastender Wolkenbrei, von unermesslichen Orkanen durchbrüllt . . ." (p. 18). And yet, justice and grace are present on Venus, whereas on Earth, they are expected to come about in the future.

As mentioned earlier, the passengers on board the WEGA, members of the Free United Nations of Europe and America, are on their way to Venus on a special mission. In Dürrenmatt's first drama, the Anabaptists too believe they have a mission, namely to purge the world of the "unbelievers". In the previously discussed comedy, it is the angel who comes to Earth with a double mission: to bring God's grace to men and, in addition, to explore the planet Earth. In the present play, the delegation from Earth has the mission of winning allies for a war against the opposing power-block on Earth. As incentives for a selected number of inhabitants on Venus, political power to rule the population there, and hope to return to Earth after a victorious outcome of the war, are held out.

Before we elaborate any further, however, on the reactions of the representatives of the population on Venus to the proposals from their visitors and the decision they finally make, one might well ask at this point already: Is there any justice or mercy inherent in either the deportation of "undesirable elements" from Earth to another planet, of which

is known, as the Secretary of State admits: "Klimatisch ist dieser Planet eine Katastrophe. Er befindet sich in einem Zustand wie die Erde vor etwa hundertfünfzig Millionen Jahren" (p. 12), or the present action of approaching the population on Venus for active participation in a nuclear war against the opponents of the Free United States of the planet Earth.

From the viewpoint of the terrestrials, the deportation of criminals and political non-conformists, to another planet, a "safe" distance of forty-five million kilometers away seems, in an age of space travel, a reasonable enough solution, according to the German proverb: "Aus den Augen, aus dem Sinn". Such dealings, however, show very little justice and no compassion at all since, as previously mentioned, it is known to the terrestrials that the chances for survival on Venus are extremely poor. For those who manage to survive and propagate there, it presents almost endless difficulties and surpasses in cruelty any punishment customary on Earth.

The assumption of the delegation from Earth that the inhabitants of Venus would now comply in actively participating in a nuclear war against the opposing power-block of the so-called Free United Nations of Europe and America, this after several centuries of utter indifference as to their fate on planet Venus, demonstrates again grave injustice on the part of the terrestrials. For them, the population on Venus has obviously no human dignity whatsoever, as the Minister of Defense casually states: "Es gilt, die Bagage da oben für einen Krieg

gegen Russland und Asien zu gewinnen. Strategisch besitzt der Planet Venus den Vorteil, dass die Wolkenschicht seiner Atmosphäre eine Beobachtung der Oberfläche unmöglich macht" (p. 14). There are two points, then, this minister makes: "die Bagage da oben", and "strategisch besitzt der Planet Venus den Vorteil . . ." . Human beings on Venus are therefore regarded by the terrestrials as pawns only and their participation in a war is courted solely because the planet they are forced to live on could be advantageous to the Free United Nations on Earth for war strategy. The assumption, however, the leader of the delegation, Sir Horace Wood, expresses: "Wir haben es mit Menschen zu tun. Sie sind nicht anders als wir und ebenso leicht zu verführen wie wir" (here with the promise of political power and the hope of returning to Earth, p. 26), does not coincide anymore with the views of the inhabitants of Venus who, during two centuries of hardship and struggle for survival, have developed different concepts of justice and grace.

The underlying motivating forces making necessary a diplomatic mission from Earth to Venus, are fear and distrust: fear of the possibility of mutual annihilation by means of nuclear weapons which both power-blocks possess, and distrust that the opposing power may launch the first bomb. Dürrenmatt, in his essay on "Theaterprobleme", speaks of "unsere Welt, die nur noch ist, weil die Atombombe existiert: aus Furcht vor ihr",⁹ and, in this science-fiction play, he lets the Minister of De-

fense remark: " . . . sowohl wir als auch die Russen [besitzen] künstliche Monde, von denen aus wir einander beobachten"(p. 14). Fear, then, and distrust motivate both power-blocks to ever costlier means of watching over the enemy's every move.

On a smaller scale, fear and distrust are illustrated early in the play when Wood, before boarding the space-craft, is politely asked by Mannerheim to put on a hat and dark glasses. "Spione könnten uns erkennen", is the plausible explanation, and Wood agrees: "Das ist immer zu befürchten" (p. 7). The leader of the mission is also not surprised to realize that Mannerheim is not only in charge of the physical well-being of the passengers and crew on board the WEGA but acts, at the same time, as a member of the Secret Service of the Free Nations on Earth and is assigned to tape (with a pocket-tape-recorder) Wood's every utterance on this mission and then to report back to the President of the Free Nations upon their return. Wood, the seasoned politician, however accepts this rather irksome circumstance as part of the rules of the game, which can be expressed by: Don't trust anyone, not even your closest friend or ally.

The delegation from Earth, then, arrives on Venus with an attitude of fear and distrust and, once there, seems neither capable nor willing to tolerate any other possible alternative. Their main fear is, as their leader Wood states, towards the end of the play: "Die Russen könnten kommen und mit ihnen einen Pakt schliessen" (p. 43) which is, of course, precisely the in-

tention of the members of the Free United States. Aggravating the severity of the deadlock situation on Earth is the potentially explosive state of a near-balance of power as far as armament is concerned. During their first conference on board the WEGA, Wood emphasizes this danger: "Die beiden Gegner sind annähernd gleich mächtig. Annähernd" (p. 11). (This warning bears a striking resemblance to the earlier mentioned statements by Collison, published in May 1980, twenty-six years after Dürrenmatt's, Das Unternehmen der Wega.)

Closely related to fear and distrust are, on the part of the terrestrials, cowardice and escapism. Wood, for instance, does not like the prospect of leaving the beautiful planet Earth and embarking on a mission with an uncertain outcome. "Schade, wegfliegen zu müssen", he says nostalgically to Mannerheim, "wäre gern fischen gegangen" (p. 9). Towards the end of the play, Wood comforts himself with the knowledge that he is in the possession of a "secure" bomb-shelter on Earth, thanks to his elevated position in the hierarchy of the political system he belongs to. In the case of a nuclear war, he plans to retreat into a sane world of esthetic literature such as the reading of T.S. Eliot. (Escape from a cruel reality occurs repeatedly in Dürrenmatt's work as, for instance, in Frank der Fünfte (1959), where the main character, a corrupt bank-director, is, as Urs Jenny puts it, "Goethe und Mörike zugeneigt, ein Ästhet",¹⁰ or as in Der Mitmacher (1976), where Doc, the antagonist of that play, seeks respite from his macabre

type of work, the chemical dissolving of corpses, in the reading of comic books.)

A dangerous kind of cowardice is demonstrated in the avoidance of independent thinking and the acceptance of responsibility. It is Wood, the shrewd politician, who expresses this perhaps best in his dialogue with Colonel Roi, the man in charge of the nuclear weapons on board the WEGA. Wood says:

Mit Verwunderung habe ich ihre Anwesenheit bemerkt, Oberst, doch weiter darüber nachzudenken, kann ich mir als Aussenminister der freien Nationen nicht leisten (p. 17).

The military commander, for his part, cannot afford either to ponder or reflect on his actions. To Wood's ironic comment: "Sie sind ein gefährlicher Bursche, Roi", the Colonel simply replies: "[Ich bin] Soldat" (p. 17). He assumes no responsibility for the H-bombs on board, or the purpose they might serve, since they are there, "Auf Wunsch des Präsidenten" (p. 17), and Wood takes the same stance when he gives his permission for the bombs to be dropped on Venus. To Roi's urging: "Der Präsident hat befohlen", the Foreign Minister then diplomatically consents: "Wenn der Präsident befohlen hat, Oberst Roi, lassen Sie die Bomben eben abwerfen", adding coldly, "möglichst gleichmässig über die Venus verteilt" (p. 34). With this, both of them transfer any individual responsibility to the "Präsident", a nameless figure in the power-structure of the Free United Nations. Dürrenmatt says of types such as these: "Ihre Macht ist so riesenhaft, dass sie selber nur noch zufällige, äussere Ausdrucksformen dieser Macht sind,

beliebig zu ersetzen"¹¹ and states, furthermore, "die heutige Macht ist nur zum kleinsten Teil sichtbar, wie bei einem Eisberg ist der grösste Teil im Gesichtslosen, Abstrakten versunken".¹²

There are, then, no more individual villains in a modern tragedy of this kind. Wood and Roi, as well as the other members of the delegation from Earth, are only cogs in the wheels of an intricate state-machinery of giant proportions. The death of millions, caused by nuclear weapons, is, as the author puts it, "von Weltmetzgern inszeniert und von Hackmaschinen ausgeführt".¹³ Wood's protestations: "Ich bin kein Schlächter" (p. 41), is valid only inasmuch as there can be no more individual guilt considering the anonymity of large power-structures whose decisions they are to execute.

Two aspects, however, point towards a more personal kind of guilt as far as the leader of the delegation is concerned. One is his relationship with Bonstetten, as illustrated by the diplomat's sentimental: "Du bist mein Freund, Bonstetten. Ich kann doch einen Freund nicht töten" (p. 41), which is soon deflated, though, by his regretful remark: "Es ist tragisch, dass ich in dieser Hinsicht nicht frei bin" (p. 42). Wood, then, finds himself in a dilemma between feelings of personal sympathy and friendship for his former fellow-student, and the obligations as leader of this particular mission to Venus. By choosing to conform to the demands his position imposes on him, he betrays the principles of loyalty to a friend he still not

only likes but also admires for his courage and determination.

The other aspect which intimates a personal guilt in Wood's behaviour is his frantic attempt, after the irreversible execution of his consent to bomb the planet, to justify his decision. "Mich ekelt dies alles", he tells Mannerheim, "Diese Venus ist fürchterlich. Sind schliesslich alles Verbrecher da oben. Bin sicher, dass Bonstetten sich mit den Russen verbünden wollte" (p. 45). This need to justify one's actions seems to be innate in man. The author expresses this in one of his aphorisms: "Das Schwerste: Sich nicht zu rechtfertigen."¹⁴ In addition, Wood, portrayed as the well-educated cosmopolitan, becomes obvious as the intellectual with the bad conscience, as opposed to the Minister of Defense or Colonel Roi whose sole ambition it is to earn yet another laurel in the successful conquest of "enemies",¹⁵ The Foreign Minister, for his part, is not only aware of the consequences of his decision but feels personally guilty about it, hence his need for justification and--escape into the realm of the harmonious and esthetic by means of which he hopes to numb the painful feelings of guilt.

One more group of negative traits on the part of the terrestrials is worthwhile considering before we shed some light on the behaviour and reactions of the inhabitants on Venus. Although it may appear paradoxical, fear, distrust and cowardice are often effectively covered up by a display of pride, arrogance and an air of superiority. The first encounter of the

delegates from Earth with the representatives of the people on Venus, is a masterful satire on this topic. Mannerheim reports:

Seine Exzellenz Wood hielt den kleinen Zettel mit dem Konzept seiner Rede in den Händen, hatte sich auch eine mächtige Hornbrille aufgesetzt, doch sahen wir nichts als drei Männer in zer-schlissener Kleidung, die nur aus Hemd und Hose bestand. Sie näherten sich uns zögernd vom Strande her (p. 19).

The above depicted situation is not without a good portion of grotesque humor as well: the presumably elegant, well-groomed diplomat from the planet Earth, accompanied by Mannerheim and two other ministers, is prepared for an introductory speech to--a group of three men, clad in old shirts and pants, approaching only hesitatingly. Pride and a sense of superiority is clearly expressed in dress and approach of the visiting delegation. The first words of introduction exchanged mark already a contrast between humility and pride. John Smith (leise): "Ich bin John Smith"; Wood: "Sir Horace Wood" (p. 19), and whereas the men from Venus are introduced simply as "Herr Petersen, Herr Petrov", Wood deems it necessary to present his colleagues as "Excellencies" (p. 19). The effect of superiority is deflated, however, when Wood starts out with his carefully prepared speech, containing much rhetoric, complete with quotations by T.S. Eliot, and nature interferes with a furious thunderstorm. Wood's elaboration on the concepts of "Ideale . . . Humanität . . . Freiheit" are drowned accoustically by "Krachender Donner, unermessliche[n] Wind-

stösse[n] [und] Regenrauschen" (pp. 19-20).

Arrogance and vanity are displayed by the Minister of Defense and the Minister for extraterrestrial domains. They find it "Unerträglich . . . unsinnig . . . Zum Wahnsinnigwerden" (pp. 22-3) on Venus, and the sight of a chameleon, measuring fifty meters in length is to them, downright "Unanständig" (p. 24). When the delegates, later on, are expected to continue their negotiations with Irene, a former prostitute, the two ministers express their frustrated pride in no uncertain terms. One exclaims: "Noch nie ist eine diplomatische Mission auch nur annähernd so beleidigt worden. Man hält uns in einer verstunkenen Kabine zum Narren" (p. 28), and the other vents his feelings with: "Wenn wir nicht die Russen auf dem Buckel hätten, wäre es unsere Pflicht, diesen Kerlen den Krieg zu erklären", adding, "Wir haben schliesslich unseren irdischen Stolz!" (p. 28). Even the polite Mannerheim cannot hide his astonishment. He reports: "Wir waren überrascht. Wir hatten geglaubt in einer Stadt oder einem Landhaus zu verhandeln . . . [aber wir waren] eingepfercht in einen kleinen, schlechtbeleuchteten Raum, der durch die Wogen des fremden Ozeans abenteuerlich hin und her geworfen wurde" (p. 20).

Wood's pride, however, is of a much subtler kind than are the ones of the three men previously mentioned. The Foreign Minister keeps his sense of humor, at least in the early stages of the play. When the two ~~other~~ ministers advocate a speedy return to Earth since they consider their mission a failure and,

"Eine lächerliche Angelegenheit" (p. 24), Wood manages to see the comical aspect of the situation. "Mir schien die Venus vernünftig", he says, "Jedes Mal, wenn ich in meiner Rede auf Ideale zu sprechen kam, hat's gedonnert" (p. 24). The simple statement of the representatives of the people on Venus that they don't need a government and not even politics per se, elicits Wood's respect and he is still willing to negotiate with whoever is available. He is proud, however, to be a humanitarian. When he claims, in the dialogue with his former fellow-student Bonstetten: "An unserem guten Willen kann nicht gezweifelt werden. Die Freiheit und die Humanität werden sich schliesslich durchsetzen", he seems actually to believe in what he says although these statements have a somewhat defensive ring to them. Bonstetten's reply: "Natürlich" (p. 40), is then tinged with gentle irony.

The Foreign Minister, however, deflates his grand claim immediately afterwards with the seemingly realistic words: "Wir sind einfach momentan gezwungen, scharfe Massnahmen zu ergreifen" (p. 40), thereby implying that following the threat and, if necessary, the use of nuclear weapons, freedom and humanitarianism would ensue as a consequence. (This would then raise the question as to who would be left on the planet, a radioactive wasteland, to enjoy freedom and humanitarianism?)

The double-standard, then, of the delegates from Earth is evident. Talking about ideals and, at the same time, planning to act and finally acting in a manner diametrically opposed

to these ideals, leads to doubt about what the visitors from Earth might say or promise, no matter how eloquently formulated.

The delegation from Earth cannot conceive of any other basic attitude in human relations than fear and distrust and a display of pride and arrogance to conceal the former. That there are, however, alternatives in attitude possible, is perhaps the crux of this science-fiction play. These are demonstrated vividly by the inhabitants of Venus, as expressed by their representatives who have to deal with the diplomats from Earth.

There is, first of all, a refreshing directness in the manner of speech the people on Venus employ in contrast to the often long-winded approach of the terrestrials. To the Foreign Minister's inquiries, for example, as to the extent of authority, in relation to their government, Smith, Petersen and Petrov might have, Smith answers simply that they have no government. To Wood's astonished reaction: "Wie soll ich das verstehen?", the plain (if somewhat rude, at least in the ears of the visitors) answer is: "Wie ich es sagte" (p. 21). There is no double meaning, then, entailed in the statements of the inhabitants of Venus which would make necessary an interpretation of their every word.

Wood seems to be aware of a lack of truthfulness, often occurring as a matter of course, in the speech of the terrestrials. When the planet Earth is still in sight, he muses:

"Schön, die Erde. . . . Ein gebogener Schild. Schade, dass sie falsch ist. . . . Ihre Bewohner sagen nicht immer die Wahrheit" (p. 10). Later on, Wood's suspicion that there are indeed nuclear bombs on board the WEGA, is confirmed, this despite Colonel Roi's initial, evasive: "Wüsste nicht wozu" (p. 17). Another member of the delegation, the Secretary of State, is caught in the attempt of camouflaging the truth about deputies from Earth (such as Bonstetten) on Venus. He tells the Foreign Minister, at first: "Die Venus ist für eine menschliche Besiedlung ungeeignet, sowohl Russland als auch unsere verbündeten Staaten haben denn auch die Kommissäre zurückgezogen". It is only after Wood insists: "Ich hörte etwas anderes darüber" (pp. 12-3), that the Secretary of State admits that, in fact, the deputies had, by their own choice, refused to return to Earth.

The gravest falsehood, however, on the part of the terrestrials is their promise that their space-craft would visit the planet Venus with peaceful intentions and that they would not carry any weapons with them. The truth later revealed is that not only were ten of the deadliest nuclear bombs put on board the WEGA but also the command given, by those in charge within the Free United Nations, to detonate them over Venus should the population there not agree to the propositions of the delegation from Earth.

Falsehood is, however, not a part of the attitude or behaviour of the population on Venus, since this would only

create confusion and seriously hamper trust and cooperation, so vital for their survival. Equally absent on this planet are pride and arrogance. Petersen's statement, early in the play, illustrates this. He tells the minister for extraterrestrial domains: "Die Venus ist gross, und wir sind klein. Sie ist grausam. Wir müssen kämpfen, wenn wir leben wollen" (p.21). This is not boasting but a simple acknowledgement of dire living conditions. John Smith is not being arrogant either when he, to the remark of the Minister of Defense: "Sie nennen sich Bevollmächtigter der Venus . . .", truthfully answers: "Ich bin es" (p. 22), and further states that it was he himself who had taken the liberty of having this function (to the consternation of the "Kriegsminister"), since it was his duty to act as a representative when they received the wireless messages from Earth.

Pride and arrogance, then, as well as any kind of falsehood, are absent on Venus because, as illustrated, all of these traits would mean an utter waste of time and energy. In addition, there is no cowardice concealed in the inhabitants of this planet. In the context of the above mentioned situation of receiving wireless messages from another planet, Smith emphasizes: "Keiner darf sich bei uns um seine Aufgabe drücken, auch wenn er diese Aufgabe zufällig erhält und sie ihm nicht im mindesten liegt" (p. 22). Under an austere system such as this it is no surprise, then, that true heroism develops amongst the people on Venus. Irene, the former prostitute,

from Poland, is a good example for this. Not only has she married and looks after a deaf-mute man but she also works now as a nurse in a primitive kind of submarine which is converted into a hospital, assisting the doctor in all kinds of tasks, including amputations without any means of anaesthesia (p. 31).

Last but not least, it is Bonstetten, the former deputy of the Free United Nations, who excells in courage and heroism. Having completely abandoned a lucrative diplomatic career on Earth he chose to work on Venus as a doctor and in this function faces almost insurmountable obstacles. He realistically tells his former fellow-student Wood:

Alles müssen wir uns selber schaffen. Werkzeuge, Kleider, Schiffe, Funkapparate, Waffen gegen die riesigen Tiere. Alles fehlt. Die Erfahrung, das Wissen. . . . Keine Medikamente; Pflanzen, Früchte, die wir nicht kennen, die meisten giftig. Sogar an das Wasser kann man sich nur langsam gewöhnen (p. 38).

But to Wood's objection: "Dann muss es ein fürchterliches Leben sein", Bonstatten replies firmly: "Ein richtiges Leben" (p. 37).

Heroism, then, instead of cowardice can be seen in individual characters in this science-fiction play but is also demonstrated on a larger scale, namely when the whole population refuses, despite the tremendous hardship on Venus, to return to the planet Earth. This kind of heroism is based on an attitude of humility and fearlessness which led to a sense of total acceptance of adverse circumstances and even death. Bonstetten, in his dialogue with Wood, expresses this with dignity:

"Alles Notwendige ist leicht. Man muss es nur annehmen... . das Notwendigste, das Natürlichste auf diesem Planeten ist der Tod. Er ist überall und zu jederzeit," adding quietly, "Wir fürchten eure Bomben nicht, weil wir mitten im Tode leben und lernen mussten, ihn nicht mehr zu fürchten" (p. 42). As to why mankind on the planet Earth lives in a state of continuous fear of each other, the doctor on Venus realizes clearly that: "Die Erde ist zu schön. Zu reich. Ihre Möglichkeiten sind zu gross. Sie verführt zu Ungleichheit" (p. 39).

There can be no justice, then, on Earth since the very advantages of this planet such as beneficial climates and steady cycles of seasons, producing food in plenty, have not led to happiness, equality and the brotherly sharing of all resources, but to "Ungleichheit". Abundance is taken for granted and leaves the human race on Earth plenty of time and energy to covet their neighbour's possessions and strive for the dominion over more and more, possibly extending their quest, as is implied in this science-fiction drama, to other planets as well. In addition, the two power-blocks on Earth live in deadly competition and ready themselves for, so they believe, an Armageddon which would soon be unavoidable, as the Foreign Minister expounds on the delegation's first conference on board the WEGA:

Die Diplomatie ist am Ende ihrer Künste, der Kalte Krieg lässt sich nicht mehr verlängern, ein Friede ist unmöglich, die Notwendigkeit, einen Krieg zu führen, grösser als die Furcht vor ihm (p. 11).

On the planet Venus, however, justice has developed as a natural consequence of cruel living conditions, as opposed to the inequality on Earth, resulting from the insatiable greed of their inhabitants. On Venus it is poverty which is the great equalizer, since practically every member of the population was deported to the planet without any personal belongings. This accounts for the healthy pride they then take in their achievements. "Nur hier ist die Armut etwas Natürliches", says Bonstetten, "An unserer Nahrung, an unseren Werkzeugen klebt nur unser Schweiss, noch nicht Ungerechtigkeit wie auf der Erde" (p. 39). (Poverty, we may recall, was an important topic too in Es steht geschrieben, and in Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon. In the first drama, it is Knipperdollinck who rejoices in his abject poverty, after he had freed himself from all his possessions, and in the comedy discussed, it is the unforgettable Akki who deems the state of poverty as the best possible means for survival.)

Poverty and cruel living conditions also make for the utmost cooperation among the population on Venus. It is impressive to note the frequency of the first person plural in this play when any of the people on Venus speak, such as: "Wir haben keine Regierung"; "Wir können uns Politik nicht leisten" (p.21); "Es ist wichtig für uns, dass wir Wale jagen" (p. 27); "Wir wollen nicht zurück" (p. 32), and many other instances. The most significant statement in this context is perhaps: "Wir müssten töten, wenn wir zurück wollten, denn helfen und töten

ist bei euch [auf der Erde] dasselbe. Wir können nicht mehr töten" (p. 38). The daily struggle for survival, then, has created on Venus a kind of ideal communism or, by the same token, a realization of the second part of the main law of the Hebrew-Christian tenets: Love your neighbour as yourself. Cooperation, developed due to sheer necessity, seems to thrive among the population on Venus whereas on Earth, as is presented in this play, this concept has almost disappeared and been replaced instead by an ever-increasing competition which ultimately may show no winners but destroy all.

There are only two kinds of fear the population on Venus experiences: the fear of the affluence on Earth which has led to greed and falsehood, and the fear of evil intentions of the delegation from Earth. The realistic Bonstetten expresses this aptly when he tells Wood: "Und so haben wir Furcht vor ihr (der Erde) . Furcht vor ihrem Überfluss, Furcht vor dem falschen Leben, Furcht vor einem Paradies, das eine Hölle ist" (p. 39). The people on Venus prefer therefore to remain "In eine[r] Hölle, die ein Paradies ist" (p. 38), as Wood ruefully stated earlier. As to the second kind of fear, this too is realized and expressed by Bonstetten, who has no illusions about the purpose of the mission from Earth. "Ihr braucht uns jetzt nur, um uns wie Hunde vor den Wagen eures Krieges zu spannen. Doch könnt ihr uns zwar hieher schicken, aber nicht zur Rückkehr zwingen" (p. 39), he frankly tells the leader of the delegation.

Since Das Unternehmen der Wega is an entirely secular play, as opposed to the two previously discussed works which show a strongly religious content, the concepts of justice and grace must also be considered in a somewhat different light. There is, at any rate, no mention of divine justice versus human justice, or God's mercy versus a human interpretation of the term. The highest concepts on Earth mentioned in this play are, as the Minister for extraterrestrial domains ("mit schwacher Stimme") states, "die hehren Ideale der Freiheit, der Humanität und der Privatwirtschaft" (p. 32). The Foreign Minister, too, seems to believe that freedom and humanism will eventually triumph on Earth.

True humanism should, however, include justice and mercy towards one's fellow human being, as an individual as well as a race (which would comprise, in the context of this play, also human beings on other planets). Justice might then more conveniently be called fairness, and mercy human charity towards the weak, the erring and the disadvantaged. But then, the terms of freedom, humanitarianism and free enterprise are often nothing but lofty concepts used, as in this work, to cover base instincts, such as fear, cowardice and the ruthless application of the assumed rights of the stronger and better equipped.

On Venus, however, justice is present as the consequence of the need for survival. The practical application of the tenet: Love your neighbour as yourself, has produced not only

justice but also the realization that this way of life is preferable to a life on the planet Earth where to help each other often means the elimination of anyone who does not comply with the demands and expectations of whoever may in power.

The central insight in this work, though, is expressed in Bonstetten's reply to Wood's crucial questions: "Was habt ihr gegen die milde Erde eingetauscht? . . . Welche Erkenntnis habt ihr dafür bekommen?", to which the doctor on Venus answers with conviction: "Der Mensch ist etwas Kostbares und sein Leben eine Gnade" (p. 38). The Foreign Minister's disappointed: "Lächerlich. Diese Erkenntnis haben wir auf der Erde schon lange", is challenged by Bonstetten's earnest: "Nun? Lebt ihr nach dieser Erkenntnis?" (p. 38). The ensuing silence following is an answer in itself.

On Earth, then, this central insight has not produced positive results. Earth is "zu schön . . . Zu reich" (p. 39), and therefore not conducive to the realization of man's insights. Dürrenmatt presents this topic also in his first drama where it is only Knipperdollinck, however, who has the courage to live according to the insights he gained by reading the gospel. In Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon, it is only Akki who, in the course of his experiences, has learned about the futility of man's greed and ambitions and who acts accordingly. How timely it is, in the second half of the twentieth century, to think about the insights man on the planet Earth has gained so far, is elucidated by the author. He feels that: "Die Welt,

in der wir leben, ist nicht so sehr in eine Krise der Erkenntnis gekommen, sondern in eine Krise der Verwirklichung ihrer Erkenntnisse."¹⁶

In this science-fiction radio-play, then, the playwright has succeeded in drawing up yet another illustration of the concepts of justice and grace. Because the population on Earth has failed to put into practice the principles of freedom and humanitarianism, neither justice nor grace have emerged. That alternatives are possible is demonstrated by the attitude and conduct of the inhabitants of Venus, this despite the tragic ending of the play, the bombing of the planet by the delegation from Earth. The bringing about of justice among human beings and the ability of regarding every das as "Gnade", are the achievements which really matter. Wood's pessimistic words, on the other hand, (after the H-bombs had detonated on Venus): "Nun sind die Bomben gefallen, und bald werden sie auch auf der Erde fallen" (p. 45), indicate the justice, i.e. the law of retribution, which is inherent in every action. Dürrenmatt's creation of a science-fiction utopia on Venus where there is no impulse toward falsehood, competition or cowardice and where all work together in brotherly love, contains nevertheless a somewhat grim note since this ideal state came about only through extreme hardship and adverse circumstances. The author may well imply that this might indeed be the only way mankind would ever manage to survive.

ENDNOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

¹ Friedrich Dürrenmatt, "Vom Sinn der Dichtung in unserer Zeit," in Theater-Schriften und Reden (Zürich: Arche, 1966), p. 61.

² Urs Jenny, "Lebensdaten und Werkverzeichnis," in Dürrenmatt (Velber bei Hannover: Friedrich Verlag, 1965), p. 10.

³ Dürrenmatt, "Kunst," in Theater-Schriften, p. 42.

⁴ "Nuclear Explosion," McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia, 1971.

⁵ Robert Collison, "The new threat of nuclear war," in Saturday Night, 95, May 1980, p. 17.

⁶ Elisabeth Brock-Sulzer, Friedrich Dürrenmatt, Stationen seines Werkes (Zürich: Arche, 1960), p. 30.

⁷ Friedrich Dürrenmatt, Es steht geschrieben, in Komödien II und Frühe Stücke (Zürich: Arche, 1963), p. 23.

⁸ Friedrich Dürrenmatt, Ein Engel kommt nach Babylon, in Komödien I (Zürich: Arche, 1957), p. 248.

⁹ Dürrenmatt, "Theaterprobleme," in Theater-Schriften, p. 122.

¹⁰ Jenny, "Frank der Fünfte", in Dürrenmatt, p. 73.

¹¹ Dürrenmatt, "Theaterprobleme", p. 119.

¹² Dürrenmatt, p. 119.

¹³ Dürrenmatt, p. 119.

¹⁴ Dürrenmatt, "Hingeschriebenes," in Theater-Schriften, p. 89.

¹⁵ Friedrich Dürrenmatt, "Nachwort," in Der Mitmacher (Zürich: Arche, 1976), p. 158. In the section entitled "Boss", the author states: "Es gibt Intellektuelle mit schlechtem Gewissen, wie unter anderem mich, und Intellektuelle ohne schlechtes Gewissen".

¹⁶ Dürrenmatt, "Vom Sinn der Dichtung," p. 60.

All quotes from the text are from Friedrich Dürrenmatt, Das Unternehmen der Wega (Zürich: Arche, 1958), with the page-numbers given parenthetically.

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