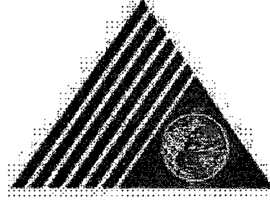

T.C.
YEDİTEPE UNIVERSITY
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The Imaging of Women in Bertolt Brecht's *The Good Person of Szechwan* & Friedrich Dürrenmatt's *The Physicists*

by

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ABSTRACT

The proliferation of feminist studies during the last thirty years has led to a broad exploration of diverse questions and established fields.Adressing interrelated questions about modernist canon formation and gender and theater with a focus on the trope of madness,this paper tries to analyze two modernist drama texts,Bertolt Brecht's *The Good Person of Szechwan* and Friedrich Dürrenmatt's *The Physicists,* which are written by men.The texts in question are central to the canon of modern drama,which presupposes universalist notions of modernity,marginality, and madness,but according to me, relies on gendered notions to stage this universalism.

I begin this research with an overview of feminist theater criticism which focuses on women,yet in which I do not solely decry the lack of representation of women in plays by men,nor do I simply value the representation of women.While reading this work,a feminist reader might expect more discussion of female figures or question of femininity.For example,the chapter two on Friedrich Dürrenmatt's *The Physicists* elaborates on science,dramatic form,and madness before it discusses briefly the questions of the play's female characters.

The triangulated relationship of modernism,madness,and sexual politics allows to me analyze how these three categories intersect to stage woman in these plays.Briefly,in this paper I try to search the relationship of modernism,gender,sexual politics,and madness in and against traditions of feminist research.

ÖZET

Son otuz yılda feminist çalışmaların artması farklı soru ve sahalarda geniş araştırmalara ön ayak oldu.Bu tez;modern kriter formasyonu,cinsiyet ve tiyatro konularındaki,delilik mecazı odaklı, birbiriyle ilintili sorulara değinerek erkek yazarlar tarafından yazılmış iki çağdaş oyununu,Bertolt Brecht'in *Sezuanın İyi İnsanı* ve Friedrich Dürrenmatt'ın *Fizikçiler*'ini incelemeye çalışmaktadır.Bu çalışmaya konu olan oyunlar;çağdaşlık,marjinallik ve delilik konularında evrensel ögeler içeren,fakat bana göre bu evrenselliği cinsiyet ayırıma fikrine dayanarak sahneleyen eserlerdir.

Çalışmaya kadın odaklı feminist eleştiriye genel bir bakışla başlar,fakat devamında ne kadının temsil edilmesinin eksikliğini kötülerim,ne de bu konunun önemini belirtirim.Feminist bir okuyucu bu yazıyı okurken kadın figürü ve ya da kadınlık teması üzerine daha ayrıntılı bir değerlendirme bekleyecektir.Örneğin;Friedrich Dürrenmatt'ın Fizikçiler oyunu üzerine olan ikinci bölüm ilim,dramatik form ve delilik konusunu oyunun kadın karakterlerinden daha fazla ele alır.

Çağdaşlık,delilik ve cinsel ideoloji arasındaki üçlü saç ayak ilişki sayılan üç ögenin kadının bu oyunlarda sahnelenmesinde nasıl kesiştiğini anlamamda yardımcı oldu.

Kısaca,bu yazıda çağdaşlık,cinsiyet ,cinsel ideoloji ve delilik mecazı kullanımı arasındaki ilişkiyi feminist düşüncenin geleneklerine karşı ve taraf olarak araştırmaya çalıştım.

INTRODUCTION

Traditional approaches to the study of drama have come under siege in the last hirty years. Semiotics, performance studies, poststructuralist approaches, Marxist eadings, spectator analyses, feminist perspectives, to name a few, have altered the vays in which we read and view plays. Among the most compelling of these emappings of the field are the feminist interventions. Sue Ellen Case, in her ioneering *Feminism and Theatre,* discusses the complex articulation between the arious kinds of feminism and forms of theatre within a materialist framework. She ilso deconstructs the classic male dramatic canon. She notes that early feminist vork registered the invisibility of women as playwrights until the early eventeenth century (Case, 1988). Theatre historians are now publishing and listributing the works of women playwrights to make women's voices heard. Their fforts take the form of anthologies and critical texts on women playwrights. Ielene Keyssar's *Feminist Theatre* (1985), Lynda Hart's collection *Making a pectacle: Feminist Essays on Contemporary Women's Theatre* (1989), and Enoch Brater's collection *Feminine Focus: The New Women Playwrights* (1989) are a few f the critical texts that pay attention to women playwrights.

Feminist deconstructive readings of traditional texts are also being produced. n studying classical all-male productions, feminist critics have observed that the oles of women were cultural fabrications (Case,1988). These classical plays did iot represent women as they might have been historically, but constructed emininity. This is most clearly revealed in Aeschylus's *Oresteia,* where Athena asts her vote against the Furies in favor of Orestes, who has committed matricide. Radical feminist critic Mary Daly argues that the playwright establishes a atriarchal tradition that covers over a matrilineal heritage (Daly,1978). The xclusion of women is spelled out by Apollo's speech which splits the female body n an originary moment of violence that formulates the culture:

> The woman you call the mother of the child
> is not the parent, just a nurse to the seed,

the new-sown seed that grows and swells inside her.
The *man* is the source of life—the one who mounts
["The Eumenides" lines 665—70, *Oresteia).*

Among those feminist theatre historians who have ventured to reread the male canon is Michelene Wandor, who is also a pioneer in the work she has done to stage and publish women's plays. In *Look Back in Gender* (1987), Wandor turns to the modern British play. She maintains that the inclusion of gender as a category of analysis alters the way we perceive the text. She politicizes postwar British drama. Wandor's historical specificity makes it possible for her to suggest causes for male typologies of female characteriza-tion and also to draw conclusions about the relationships between men and women at the time the play was written/produced.

Attention has also been paid to the woman as spectator, notably by Jill Dolan in her foray into modern American theatre in *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (1988). Her focus is on performance and spectacle. Dolan also has a reconstructive vision and offers examples of texts that do not objectify women. While much feminist work has been done to remedy the invisibility of women as actors, playwrights, and readers/viewers, much still remains to be done. Reading as a woman is still a fragile enterprise because it demands both unlearning and relearning.

Feminist research on women as viewers has been explored extensively by film scholars. Laura Mulvey in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" argues that the congealment of the diegesis, the space of the narrative or the recounted story, was structurally endemic to classic Hollywood cinema because of the display of the female body. Using a politicized version of psychoanalysis, she observes that the pleasures of looking, voyeurism, and scopophilia accrued to the male in the diegesis and to the audience because the diegesis placed the woman as "to-be-looked-at." The woman became the object of the male gaze (Mulvey,1975). Mulvey takes recourse to cinematic coding to demonstrate her thesis. Her view is that the female, if she identified with the passive female on-screen, would enjoy a very masochistic pleasure. Certainly, the male was the active player, and the female was the passive

object in these texis.

B. Ruby Rich's rebuttal of Mulvey's argument is instructive. She frames the problem of the female viewer of male texts in general terms and conclude? by conferring a certain power on the female viewer to produce meaning for herself, a meaning that may empower her rather than disempower her:

> For a woman's experience of culture under patriarchy is dialectical in a way that a man's can never be: our experience is like that of the exile, whom Brecht once singled out as ultimate dialectician for that daily working out of cultural oppositions within a single *body*. It is crucial to emphasize here the possibility for texts to be transformed at the level of reception and not to fall into a trap of condescension toward our own developed powers as active producers of meaning (Rich,1990).

The feminist critic, by working dialectically-inside and outside the text-can both derive pleasure from the text and yet put male constructions of femininity under scrutiny. In so doing, she winds her way out of the masochistic position of identifying exclusively with the female character who may be the object of enunciation and who may also be visually shackled. The dialectical mode enables the female viewer to transform the meaning of the text without giving up pleasure.

In adopting a feminist framework to study modernist theatre, does the critic give up the pleasure of the text/performance because of the relentless sustained scrutiny of the female in the text, the positioning of the female reader/viewer outside the text? Does it take the fun away? Annette Kuhn's notion that such feminist strategies denaturalize or demystify what appears natural is accurate(Kuhn,1982). Unearthing the hidden brings its own pleasure. Kuhn would have the female viewer be "passionate[ly] detached" (Kuhn,1982). Dialectical viewing, the split viewing that the female reader perforce engages in, is another incarnation of Kuhn's passionate detachment. Weaving outside the text confers power, winding back inside grants pleasure.

Looking at the male canon of modern drama brings the feminist critic to a standstill. Many canonized European playwrights from the mid-nineteenth century on have attempted to be socially progressive and have, in one sense or

another, worked with the form to produce change in the audience.

Of the many modernist plays that we could study to carve out feminist spaces in the field of drama studies, I chose those that had staked a claim to representing marginality and that have traditionally been taught and studied as extraordinarily innovative and progressive texts. I myself derived pleasure from them for many years because they spoke from a marginal place and in a different voice. They try to "speak the mad" (Derrida, 1978). I have deliberately refrained from using feminist theatre as a counterpoint. Juxtpositioning two or three feminist texts to the male canon would be to tokenize them and place them within a male framework.

Bringing a feminist perspective to the canon while grappling with the construction of marginality in the text, weaving and winding, involves double vision. "Revisioning" the canon has meant bringing traditional drama criticism, feminist theory, and semiotics together. In doing so, I oscillate between looking at woman's imaging to looking again at her construction in relationship to the representation of the marginal.

Madness, as a rhetorical and dramatic element in the text, does not immediately invite identification. It has the potential to alienate the reader into a posture of observation. The axis of identification between audience and character is broken when the audience acknowledges the character's madness. The text refuses to create "illusionistic" theatre, or theatre where the production would disguise its status as a play. Anti-Aristotelean, modernist plays on madness displace the spectator and place him/her in shifting ideologically contradictory positions. They do not reconfirm the male viewer's image of himself in any simple way, but challenge it in diverse ways. The depiction of the split self in these plays quarrels with universal notions of subjectivity. Neither the male in the play nor the male reader outside can count on a sense of self that is secure or on any authority in the social world. Because these playwrights are not mouthpieces for the dominant ideology and do interrogate the audience, their representation of women might be more dignifying of women than blatantly sexist modes and genres,.

Critical studies on madness in two outstanding examples of modern plays have concentrated on debating whether the mad person is really mad or not,

on analyzing the character of the protagonist, and on universalizing the protagonist's situation to include,first,the men and women,and second,all humanity-all classes,all people.Whether psychological, structural, mythical, or inter-personal, and however informative and interesting, the scholarship on madness effaces the sexual politics of the plays. The neutral cast attributed to the "breakdown" or psychic collapse of the character universalizes the mad to recuperate differences between the sane and mad. Consequently, the implied reader is seemingly neutral, obviously male, and lies within the Aristotelean trajectory. The most sophisticated of analyses of these two plays as metatheatre stumble into traditional male identification patterns.

Winding inside the text, weaving outside it will empower the female reader to produce feminist readings of these texts and thereby make a space for the feminist reader.

CHAPTER I

BERTOLT BRECHT'S *THE GOOD PERSON OF SZECHWAN*

Iris Smith asserts that feminist critics are attracted to Brecht's work because of "the redefinition of spectatorial pleasure" implied by his approach to the construction of the self and his dialogue with viewers (Smith,1991).Brecht's *The Good Person of Szechwan* explores the inherent possibilities of alienating the audience which the sane/mad/observer trajectory offers. The female viewer, enraged by the shameless exploitation of Shen Teh, seeks both to define and to solve the problems that Shen Teh faces. In dramatizing the life of a prostitute who metamorphoses into a male, Brecht does no less than to historicize madness: he gives it a name, a profession, and a gender. In showing the constitution of the female subject as mad, Brecht assumes that subjectivity and agency for the female subject in a patriarchal, capitalist society is fraught with peril that threatens her subject position.

In Brecht's play the gods come down to the earth to find a good person.Brecht equates the gods' notion of obedience with servitude to the status quo. If the gods find people who live by their laws, their norms will not be repudiated and their power will not be endangered. The third god explains what is at stake for them in this allegorically transparent caricature of the ruling class: "The resolution says: the world can go on as it is if we find enough good people who succeed in living a life worthy of a human being." *(Good Person,* 5. All subsequent references to the English translation of the play are from *The Good Person of Szechwan* in *Bertolt Brecht: Collected Plays,* translated by Ralph Manheim, edited by Ralph Manheim and John Willett [New York: Random House, 1976]

Wang, the water seller, takes the gods to Shen Teh, a prostitute who is considered "good." The gods give her money with which she buys a tobacco store, but she finds that she cannot cope with the problems she encounters. Brecht shows us that she adopts a male persona, the persona of a fictitious cousin. He records her "splitting," which becomes the focal point of the play.

The transformation that Shen Teh undergoes has been approached from the ethical, psychological, and material perspectives. Gender is not foregrounded in these analyses. The critical universalization of Shen Teh's dilemma is symptomatic of modernist humanist critiques which subsume gender under the rubric of a universality which ultimately remains androcentric. Elizabeth Wright approaches the play as an example of Brecht's dialectical practice and takes a material stand on the splitting: "Brecht is able to show the real split of the bourgeois individual into private moral self and public business self.The split person as an embodiment of capitalism has nothing to do with any notions of schizophrenia: s/he is the visible image of the objective contradictions of man/woman in the bourgeois capitalist world, an image of an alienated condition" (Wright,1989). John Fuegi, who privileges gender in his analysis, accounts for the splitting of Shen Teh/Shui Ta in economic terms. He argues that the "double exploitation" of women (because of class and gender position) and the "relations between men and women" in Szechwan can be "unmasked" only by the "masking" of Shen Teh (Fuegi,1974) In conclusion, he stresses that the two personae merge into a neutral category— that of "mensch"(human-being). Thus, he too finally concurs with the general hypothesis that the text is about man, not women.

The three major strands of criticism of *The Good Person of Szechwan* that have accounted for the splitting of Shen Teh have revolved around the notions that goodness is impossible in an evil world, that tragedy ensues from the fierce circumstances that enwheel Shen Teh, and that women bear a double yoke under capitalism. More generally, in considering Brecht's status as a Marxist playwright and his representation of women, Lennox argues that Brecht's women figures are "double edged" and that they "demonstrate both his blindness to women themselves and to a whole range of issues which women have taken to represent, but simultaneously they call forth a potentially Utopian dimension which might be elaborated in contemporary reutilisations of his works" (Lennox,1978). Shen Teh of *The Good Person* is not exclusively a classical female stereotype at all. Indeed, some aspects of the stereotype are held up for scrutiny. I argue that the play explores the psyche of the speaking subject as female and mad, that the world of the play is significant in the historical traces it leaves on the woman's formation, and

that Brecht scrutinizes male perceptions of women and women's desires. Further, the play is not a self-contained, unified whole whose every part can be tied to the center, but a fabular, fantastic, almost allegorical rendition of women's desire.

Brecht portrays Shen Teh's desire for the power and credibility of the phallus. This is why the play is not about the neutered "mensch" but the female who craves entrance into the symbolic—the realm of law, economics, language that the male sex has appropriated. It is in her desire for the phallic signifier that Brecht locates the madness of the text. Shen Teh may not want to be a man, but Brecht portrays her as a woman who wants to enjoy the effects of masculinity. This portrayal is consonant with the Freudian thesis that the girl child, when she first recognizes sexual difference, desires either to be a male or have a male child (Irigaray,1985). Yet, the desire lends Shen Teh an escape into potency and power. That it is only through madness that the female can insert her subjectivity is troubling to the female viewer, who nevertheless sees the splitting as indicative of the extremity and the specificity of the female's material and psychic condition in patriarchy (Cixous and Clement,1986).

Smith is more unequivocal about her reservations regarding the later plays. She notes that the feminist spectator's pleasure is prevented by essetialist dichotomizations that the mode of presentation ignores (Smith,1991). Nevertheless, she too is convinced that in both *Mother Courage and The Good Person,* Brecht does in fact work with a main female character's "struggle to avoid victimization" (Smith,1991).

The prologue of the play delights in a parable on the gods' search for goodness, a goodness they must unearth if the world is to continue as it always has been. Wang brings the gods to Shen Teh in his role of public spokesman. His opinion of Shen Teh does little to filter our perception because Wang merely isolates an abstract trait, goodness, and credits Shen Teh with its possession. Unlike Wang, the gods do not have a consistent point of view. They oscillate. The text shows the "goodness" motif to be a decoy since it invalidates the notion of "goodness" on the very same terms that it sets "goodness" up (Swaffar,1979). Its viability as a criterion is disproved. The gods value "morality" but accept Shen Teh's sale of her body;

the gods value honesty but accept Wang's false bottomed carrier; the gods value hospitality but pay Shen Teh for the price of a night's rest. The goodness motif, though a decoy, acts as a plot device to bring the play to the Shen Teh/Shui Ta transformation. Nominally, Shen Teh/Shui Ta undergoes her metamorphosis to uphold her vestigial "goodness" but the play becomes increasingly concerned with the process of recording her divided consciousness, while the "goodness" motif gets submerged and eventually completely canceled out by the gods' shamefaced encouragement of Shen Teh's persona. Passivity is the cardinal condition of goodness as it reveals itself in the opening scenes when the first god speaks: "We must find one. For two thousand years we have been hearing the same complaint, that the world can't go on as it is, that no one can live in it and remain good. It's high time we discovered someone who manages to keep our commandments" *(Good Person,* 6). She who survives the monstrosities of two thousand years without losing faith in the belief that passivity is its own reward is truly good. The exchange between Wang and the gentleman who spurns the gods is important:

> THE GENTLEMAN (laughing): I can imagine the kind of scoundrels you're trying to palm off on me. (Goes out.)
>
> WANG(grumbling after him): You swivel-eyed skinflint! Have you no piety?— Pause. There's no one left but Shen Teh the prostitute. She can never say no *[Good Person, 7].*

Goodness is a passive "feminized" commodity; it lies in being the good woman of Szechwan and having the protection of a male. And it lies in negations— in not exploiting men, in not coveting others' goods. Matthews has shown that goodness in a patriarchal society is very much a function of abiding by male edicts. When a woman breaks these rules, she is both bad/mad (Matthews 1984). According to this reading, Shen Teh assumes badness/madness when she becomes Shui Ta, who evades the norm altogether. Goodness is either a question of controlling one's desires or obeying one's hierarchical superiors—fathers, protectors. The man who is a guest in her shop on its opening makes the connection between (feminine) weakness and goodness or benevolence explicit. Shen Teh has just given the

unemployed man a cigarette:

> THE WIFE: Was that wise, my dear?
>
> MRS. SHIN: If you start offlike that, you won't keep your shop for three days.
>
> THE HUSBAND: I bet he had money in his pocket.
>
> SHEN TEH: But he said he had nothing.
>
> THE NEPHEW: How do you know he wasn't lying?
>
> SHEN TEH (angrily): How do I know he *was* lying?
>
> THE WIFE(shaking her head): She can't say no. You're too good, Shen Teh. If you want ro hold on to your shop, you'll have to turn people down now and then.
>
> THE HUSBAND: Say it doesn't belong to you. Say it belongs to a relative who demands a strict accounting. Can't you do that?
>
> MRS. SHIN: She could do that if she didn't always want to play Lady Bountiful.
>
> SHEN TEH (laughing): Grumble away. I'll change my mind about the room and take back the rice [*Good Person*, 13-14].

Inevitably, the relative assumes the guise of the authoritative male cousin who would presumably be able to keep Shen Teh's goodness or weakness at bay. Shen Teh's response is instructive. She laughingly tells them not to complain, for she could just as well refuse them their living quarters and their rice. When the carpenter, a little later, demands that Shen Teh pay her debt, the man whispers the word "cousin" to her. The wife implies that Shen Teh is not right and therefore is wrong because she cannot reject people's pleas. She is too good and must learn to be strong if the economic enterprise is not to suffer. The male guest agrees with the wife and thinks that Shen Teh is not able to refuse and should invoke the authority of a magical figure (ultimately "cousin") to help her be stern and unyielding. Shen Teh, however, can refuse people, as she shows by her immediate reminder to them their words could reverse back to injure them.

Shen Teh desires to insert her subjectivity, but the historical construction of her as a weak/good woman does not allow her to wield the

power that she has. Later, she finds that people like her cannot exert their wills, not because of their inherent powerlessness, but because of the cultural strictures that enjoin the landlady to demand an exorbitant deposit from her. A female prostitute must by some exigency uncover a male protector to justify her existence. The landlady hikes the price because Shen Teh is a prostitute. Since Shen Teh's goodness lies in her acquiescence born of helplessness, when she does remain firm as Shui Ta, she will be perceived as bad and ruthless. The issues that the text curves towards are female weakness/male strength. "Goodness" itself is sidestepped because the gods give her money with which Shen Teh buys power. This power is for Shen Teh a means by which to transform the lives of people around her:

> Yesterday I moved in here, and I hope I shall now be able to do a great deal of good. There's Mrs. Shin, for instance, the former owner of the shop. Yesterday she came and asked me for rice for her children. And there she is again, crossing the square with her bowl [*GoodPerson,* 11].

She sees her situation as infinitely more powerful and positive now, but the others do not perceive her differently. Brecht insinuates that her, projectys is hopeless; first, because benevolence is not revolutionary, and second, because as a woman she cannot discipline them into a different mode. It is against this background chat Brecht accounts for Shen Teh's mad game with maleness.

Brecht's vocabulary in the play locates madness as the primary signifier which highlights the displacement of Shen Teh/Shui Ta without confining the pattern to a simplistic dialectic of the self and the Other. Both reside in Shen Teh/Shui Ta. Plural voices mark the signification of madness. Initially, the carpenter makes a telling contrast between goodness and madness which equates goodness with passivity and madness with assertiveness. When Shui Ta is firm about offering the carpenter one-fifth of what he wants for the wooden shelves in the tobacconist's, the carpenter, enraged, calls him "crazy" *(Good Person,* 23). Ironically, the carpenter contrasts him to her good cousin Shen Teh "who seems a better sort" *(Good Person,* 23). Shui Ta retorts that Shen Teh is ruined, which of course refers to Shen Teh's financial situation,

but also indicates her psychic stress in a pointed way *(Good Person,* 23). The carpenter, frustrated at Shui Ta's obduracy over the price of the shelves, finally turns abusive and calls him an "idiot." Mrs. Shin, Shen Teh's confidante and dependent, also views Shui Ta_in like manner. She refers to him as "maniacal" (good person, 41)The referents carry different resonances when Shen Teh is named mad. Shen Teh calls herself "frivolous" when she tries on a shawl that she can ill afford because she is beside herself with joy at the prospect of marrying Sun, the flyer *(Good Person,* 41). The mention of money makes her realize that the rent had "clean gone out of [my] mind." Shen Teh asks the old lady: "Would you really lend money to anyone so scatterbrained?" *(Good Person,* 41). At this juncture, the old lady replies that she would prefer to lend the money to Shen Teh rather than Shui Ta, "who is anything but scatterbrained" *(GoodPerson,* 42). Shen Teh is Shui Ta, so the question of "contradiction" is rendered complex by the fact that those who exploit Shen Teh call Shui Ta "mad" in the pejorative sense, while the old lady who is genuinely humane accepts Shen Teh's perception of herself as "scatterbrained" in the most positive sense of the word. Shen Teh might be scatterbrained, but she will not scheme to do the old lady out of her money. Her scatterbrainedness is linked not only to her goodness, but also to her "weakness," which formulates her "madness." Shui Ta, on the other hand, is said to have more "sense" and "wisdom" *(GoodPerson,* 63).Conversely, Sun tells his mother that while he has a tacit understanding with Shui Ta, who has a "head on his shoulders," he finds Shen Teh too "stubborn" *(Good Person,* 60). Pie tells his mother that she is "too pigheaded" *(GoodPerson,* 58.)Without being aware of it, Sun contrasts the two personae explicitly and suggests to Shen Teh that her cousin has "more sense" than she does *(Good Person,* 63). Sun also calls Shen Teh a "little fool" who cannot count as he waits for the sensible cousin to bring him the money *(GoodPerson,* 64).Like Yang Sun, Mrs. Shin upbraids Shen Teh for her honesty when Shen Teh hesitates about accepting the barber's blank cheque:

> MRS. SHIN: What? You're not going to take the cheque? Thai's a crime! Is it only because you feel you would have to marry him? That would be plain madness *[GoodPerson, 69].*

Shen Teh, however, does not pay attention to Mrs. Shin's scolding and bursts into a song about her love for Yang. Mrs. Shin is emphatic about her disapproval: "I've never seen anything so idiotic" *(GoodPerson,*70). Brecht emphasizes the perception of Mrs. Shin, who along with Wang is among Shen Teh's closest acquaintances. She asks Shen Teh if she is "crazy" because Shen Teh has just given Wang the cart to make enough money to go to the doctor. Shen Teh is making amends for having "failed" Wang earlier *(GoodPerson,* 72).

The owner of the house shares Mrs. Shin's impressions on Shen Teh, although her judgment is based on different criteria. She comments harshly on Shen Teh's abrupt decision to accept the barber's money. She declares herself "astounded" that young girls should be so "frivolous" *(Good Person,* 76), Shen Teh herself is self-reflexive about her subject position. She claims to the jury of the gods:

> Yes, it is I.
> Shui Ta and Shen Teh, I am both of them.
> Your order long ago
> To be good and yet to live
> Tore me like lightning into two halves *[GoodPerson,* 100].

The first god validates Sun's, Mrs. Shin's, and the landlady's beliefs that Shen Teh is "mad." He opines that Shen Teh is "muddled, completely muddled" *(GoodPerson,* 101).Shui Ta also describes Shen Teh's feverish restlessness. When Shui_Ta is in conference with Shu Fu and virtually promises Shen Teh to Shu fu,he says that Shen Teh is "dreadfully upset" *(GoodPerson,* 54). Further, Shui Ta promises that Shen Teh *will* be "reasonable," as though to say that she has been senseless up to this juncture *(Good Person,* 54). Whether as Shen Teh or Shui Ta, the lead character is considered less or more than ideally rational.

The Shui Ta posture seemingly liberates Shen Teh from the weight of an age-old burden—male expectation of women. The people of Szechwan expect her to be "good," the policeman expects her to come under male protection, Yang expects her to accede to his wishes. Freed from the constraints of the essentialist conflation of femininity and weakness, Shen Teh is now less soft

and pliable and more powerful and assertive in her Shui Ta persona. Indeed, Shui Ta is not a monster; he is merely an efficient manager who enjoys the unexpected privilege of being free to execute his own decisions. For instance, Shui Ta runs the shop the way he wishes. Brecht suggests that the female body confines itself because as a male Shen Teh is able to articulate her desire, which is to control her life and to enjoy an independent existence. Shui Ta has the power of words, as is evident in the scene when he shows up at the tobacconist's:

> SHUI TA: My cousin regrets of course that she is unable to observe the laws of hospitality forever. Unfortunately there are too many of you. This is a tobacco shop and ic's Miss Shen Teh's livelihood.
> THE MAN: Our Shen Teh could never bring herself to say such things *[Good Person*, 23].

Shui Ta's language is direct, aggressive, and confrontational. It is not conciliatory. Brecht's stark characterization of the female as weak and the male as strong is problematized by the fact that the female becomes the male who is strong, who fights to survive. The historical conditioning of gender roles is completely disclosed by Shen Teh/Shui Ta's quiet eviction of her bothersome unwanted guests: "You're thieves and parasites. If you go quickly and waste no time in arguing, nothing will happen to you" *(GoodPerson*, 24). Shen Teh is not unable to say these fighting words. Why is it Shui Ta's prerogative to say them? Does language itself assume a more directive force when uttered by a male? Brecht's perception would seem to be that Shen Teh is imprisoned by her body, not her body qua body, but by the prison house of male expectation that will not demur if men speak these words, but will clamor if women speak them.

Brecht's insidious suggestion that helplessness invests Shen Teh with the mad necessity of maleness also implies that the world is not ready for women who seek to control their lives and environment. He drives the point home by portraying Shen Teh not only as a woman whose body renders her a prisoner to male desire and desire for males, but as a woman who in male garb can and will assert herself forcefully. The two pictures are seemingly contradictory because Brecht lends her ascendancy and power even in her male madness,

but when she acknowledges what Brecht regards as the essential "feminine"—her pregnancy—she is completely subservient to men. It is a contradiction he does not resolve and hence the ambiguity as to whether the dichotomy male/female is to be viewed strictly as received perceptions that Shen Teh plays out or anatomical constrictions that overcome her. Since Brecht does resort to a closed ending, one where he shows the female form burdened by itself, unable to acknowledge its own growing motherhood, and with no possibility of an extinction of the necessity to be male, the latter seems more likely.

The trajectory of the female who does have the potential to overcome her body but succumbs to it is exposed in the encounters of Shen Teh/Shui Ta with Yang Sun. As Shui Ta, Shen Teh controls Sun, but as Shen Teh, she is subject to him. Brecht explores the limits of the female body and suggests that it has no freedom. Brecht initially shows a Shen Teh who has to have recourse to a male protector in more than one way. Although Shui Ta does lend her the aura of male power, he cannot guarantee that the situation can be endlessly perpetuated because Shen Teh will have to give up all claims to her gender. She will not be able to express her desire for men. Besides, Shen Teh cannot be ritually murdered because Shui Ta is Shen Teh and the female will have to emerge if she is not to be consigned to male bachelorhood. Shen Teh/Shui Ta confirms that Shen Teh will have to manage as a female but hopes that as a female she will exert the same authority that Shui Ta is capable of exercising. After the fracas with the carpenter, in which Shen Teh is taken seriously because of her Shui Ta persona, she tells the policeman:

> SHUI TA: But how is someone like Shen Teh to get credit?
> THE POLICEMAN: Then, you're not staying here then?
> SHUI TA: No. And I won't be coming back. I was only able to give her a hand on my way through. I was only able to prevent the worst. Soon she'll be left to her own resources. I can't help wondering what'll happen then [*Good Person*, 29].

The policeman makes the conventional suggestion that Shen Teh be married off to an eligible suitor who will take care of her interests and by implication ensure that she gets the respect she does as Shui Ta. The rich barber, Shu Fu,

who is very much taken up with the "angel of the slums," conies forward to cloak her in wealth and respectability. On her way to settling the marriage, Shen Teh runs into a flyer who is on the verge of committing suicide. Yang Sun's story makes a powerful impact on her. It gives her a glimpse of sky gods winging their way through life. Her imagination is stirred by the passion that Yang Sun shows for flying. Metaphorically, flight expresses her desire. Yang Sun as an individual is less important than what he represents. He is a romantic figure, definitely, in contrast to the widower with three children, and he is capable of such extrême intensity that in her glowing imagination he symbolizes an Icarus ready to immolate himself for his splendid desire. Brecht shows that desire will always wreak havoc in the most well planned of economic enterprises. Shen Teh abandons Shu Fu and decides to marry Yang Sun. Shen Teh strains herself to share in Yang Sun's passion to realize a dream: "One man at least will rise above all this misery; one man at least will rise above us all!" *(GoodPerson,* 45). Unfortunately, she does not have the power to realize these dreams as a woman:

> SHEN TEH: But we still need 300 silver dollars to get him the job. We must pur our heads together, Mrs. Yang. (Slowly) I know someone who might help me. Someone who lias already given me good advice before. I didn't wane to call him back because he is such a hard, crafty man. This must really be the last lime. But obviously a flyer must fly. That is obvious *[GoodPerson, 44].*

A keen knowledge of her powerlessness as Shen Teh and her efficacy as Shui Ta also prompt her to tell Yang Sun about her "cousin":

> SUN: Have you got a friend?
>
> SHEN THE(hesitantly): A cousin.
>
> SUN: Don't trust him around the corner.
>
> SHEN TEH: He's only been here once. Now he has gone away and he'll never come back again *[GoodPerson,* 34].

When Sun comes to the tobacconist's, Shen Teh meets him as Shui Ta, despite her promise to herself not to succumb to the magic of being male. Self-assurance and the ability to protect himself characterize Shui Ta. From

this point on the resemblances between Shen Teh and Shui Ta vanish. Brecht's initial portrayal of Shen Teh/Shui Ta had pointed out some classic gender stereotypes such as Shen Teh's sensibility and Shui Ta's sense. Shui Ta had not been radically, irrevocably different from Shen Teh, but merely firmer about clinging to his/her livelihood. The split between Shen Teh and Shui Ta has developed to a pitch where the two are impossible to reconcile in one persona. Brecht has skillfully dramatized the change as though to suggest that the periods of Shui Ta have contaminated Shen Teh and the periods of Shen Teh have stupefied Shui Ta. The two now are distinct personalities; Shen Teh has become schizophrenic. Brecht attributes the classic binary oppositions between male and female to Shui Ta and Shen Teh:

Shui Ta (Male)	***Shen Teh (Female)***
Logical	Irrational
Practical	Passionate
Strong	Weak
Proud	Servile
Cruel	Compassionate
Selfish	Giving
Intellectual	Sensuous

The oppositions unfurl themselves in the encounters between Shen Teh/Shui Ta and Yang Sun over the marriage and also in Shen Teh/Shui Ta's response to the injustice done to Wang. Shen Teh had earlier already made up her mind that Sun must fly. As Shui Ta, she questions Sun closely on both his professional and romantic intentions. Thorough and meticulous as a lawyer, Shui Ta grills Sun on when he plans to sell the shop, how he plans to get the job, and what guarantees he has that he will be able to keep it. Acting the responsible protector, Shui Ta suggests that the sale of the tobacconist's shop might be a tempestuous act. He sensibly urges Sun to consider working there. When Sun leaps up to accept Mrs. Mi Tzu's offer, Shui Ta questions him on the price of the tickets that will take Shen Teh with him to Pekin. Yang Sun reveals his true colors in a scene exquisite in its irony. Yang Sun does not

realize to whom he is speaking when he tells Shen Teh/Shui Ta:

SUN: Don't go into a tizzy old boy. I'll get to Pekin all right.

SHUI TA: But it must be expensive for two.

SUN: Two? I am leaving the girl here. In the beginning she'd only get in the way.

SHUI TA: I see. SUN: Why do you look at me as if I were a leaky oil can? I'm only trying to
make the best of things.

SHUI TA: What do you expect my cousin to live on? SUN:
Can't you do something for her? *[GoodPerson,* 50].

Despite the shock s/he has received, Shui Ta insists that Yang Sun hand the money back till he can show him the two tickets. Yang Sun is undisturbed about this admonition because he is convinced that Shen Teh is the proverbial putty in his hands. Brechc is ruthless in his portrayal of the way men talk about women when they are not there:

SHUI TA: You seem to forget that she is human and has a certain amount of sense.

SUN(amused): It always hands me a laugh the way some people think they can make the females in their family listen to sensible arguments.Haven't you ever heard of the power of love or the itching of the flesh? You're going to appeal to her reason? She hasn't got any reason! On the other hand, she's been stepped on all her life, the poor little thing. If I put my hand on her shoulder and say: "Come with me," she'll hear bells, she won't know her own mother any more.

SHUI TA (with difficulty): Mr. Yang Sun!

SUN: Mr. ... whatever your name is!

SHUI TA: My cousin is attached to you because...

SUN: Let's say because I've got my hand on her bosom. Put that in your pipe and srnoke it *[GoodPerson,* 51].

Yang Sun's language reveals all too clearly the notes of derision and contempt with which men refer to women. Since a female relative is a woman, not much can be expected of her. Further, her condition as female

renders her pliable to emotionalism, which leaves her with no grip over her reason, which in turn lends her only the intelligence and rationality of an animal that can be controlled and enchanted by caresses. For Sun, woman's sensuousness expresses her animality.

The revelation "unmans" Shui Ta, who is now suspended between the two personae. Brecht exhibits considerable skill in this scene in which he shows the binary oppositions breaking down to exhibit Shui Ta/Shen Teh's bewilderment: "The business has gone! He's not in love. This means ruin. I am lost" *(GoodPerson, 54).* The cry registers both personae in sequence. Shui Ta cries out against economic ruin, Shen Teh cries out against betrayal; Shui Ta reverts to the pressing economic exigency, Shen Teh realizes that she is abandoned. Shui Ta's confusion about the weaknesses that despoil one's livelihood culminates in Shen Teh's bitter knowledge of a girl's fate:

> SHUI TA: Caresses turn to strangling,
> A sigh of love becomes a cry of terror.
> Why are those vultures circling?
> A girl is going to a rendezvous *[GoodPerson,* 52].

Shen Teh comes back to her male self and negotiates as Shui Ta with Shu Fu. Brecht underlines the fact that men alone have the power and ability to sell women. When women sell themselves they find themselves in the plight in which Shen Teh finds herself. The bargain between Shui Ta and Shu Fu over Shen Teh's marriage is struck when Shui Ta unctuously assures the barber of Shen Teh's timely recognition of her folly in having fallen in love with Yang. When Yang Sun returns, the situation is totally reversed because Shen Teh meets him as her female self. She completely collapses and succumbs to Yang Sun's seeming concern for her. Brecht schematically stresses the difference between the genders in this painful episode in which Shen Teh is seduced by Yang Sun's words and charm:

> SUN: I want you to come away with me.
> SHEN TEH: Mr. Shu Fu, forgive me, I want to go away with Sun.
> SUN: We love each other, you see. (He leads her to the door.) Where have you got the key of the shop? (He takes it out of her pocket and gives it to Mrs. Shin.)

SHEN TEH: Please don't call my cousin, Mr. Shu Fu. He doesn't see eye to eye with me, I know that.But he's not right, I can feel it *[Good Person,* 59].

It seems appalling that Shen Teh should go off with Yang Sun when she knows what he has said of her. It is doubly ironic that she justifies her move by speaking of feelings which Sun has spoken of as characteristically feminine. Brecht splits the "male mind" from the female body with a vengeance. Shen Teh is portrayed as a woman completely immersed in a destructive love that knows no logic, no pride. Shen Teh acknowledges on her wedding day that she is deeply divided; her need for power seems to have been overridden by her need for love: "The bad things he [Yang Sun] had said to Shui Ta were no lesson to Shen Teh" *(Good Person,* 61). Indeed, she repudiates the sterner counsel of Shui Ta, and although conscious of her contradictions, gives in to the essentialist "feminine" conception. She tells Yang Sun, "If you love me, you can't love him" *(Good Person,* 60).

Feminists have critiqued Brecht's portrayal for its stereotypical representation of the woman as blindly emotional. Sarah Bryant-Bertail has suggested that Brecht's characterization of women falls into four stereotypical categories: prostitute, capitalist entrepreneur, abandoned sex object, and martyr mother (Bryant-Bertail,1983). Shen Teh traverses these roles. A prostitute, she sells her goodness to the gods in return for the money that she accepts from them. An entrepreneur, she borrows money against her capital: her shop and her body. Curiously enough, she cannot raise money as Shui Ta. A sex object, she takes pleasure in pleasing Yang, who abandons her. Shen Teh/Shui Ta finds herself pregnant when the distance between the two per-sonae is the greatest. A mother to be, Brecht portrays her allegorically as the earth that would crack open before she let harm fall upon her creatures:

_Then I
Will fight for my own at least, even if I have to
Turn tiger. Yes, now
That I've seen this, I will break
With them all and never rest

Until I have saved my son, at least my son *[Good Person, 74]*.

Lennox's notion that Brecht overcomes objectificacion of the female by deeroticizing her is relevant in this context. That the divestiture of the sexual renders her powerless becomes in the first instance stereotypical. It is important to note that there is no real discrepancy in both stereotyping the maternal figure and using it as a vehicle for one's ideas, because of the conventional veneration of motherhood (Lennox,1978). While Brecht deconstructs the icon of maternity in *Mother Courage,* he is far less ambivalent in *Good Person.* Pregnancy may fulfill Shen Teh's desire, but it prevents her from accepting Shu Fu's offer of money. Mrs. Shin articulates Shen Teh's dilemma in no uncertain terms: "If only it's not a little stranger! (Laughs.) He certainly fixed you. If that's how it is, you can forget about your big cheque. It wasn't meant for this kind of thing" *(Good Person,* 70).

Shui Ta must intervene to reestablish order in Shen Teh's house because Shen Teh cannot really avail herself of the barber's generosity, which is hollow. The barber had given the retainers the shed because his stock of soap was going rotten there. The unemployed man calls for Shui Ta to save the situation: "She's got to send for her cousin! Tell her, all of you, to send for her cousin! He's the only one who can do anything" *(Good Person,* 75). Shui Ta returns, having buried Shen Teh, and assumes the grotesqueness of a male pregnancy. He restores order instantly but imposes conditions on them. They must work, including the carpenter and the unemployed man. Shui Ta holds out the promise of Shen Teh to the barber and keeps the project flourishing with true entrepreneurial zeal. Shen Teh's existence itself would be problematic because the barber would no longer be generous to the mother of Yang's child. His generosity has already been sorely tried by Shui Ta's expanding projects:

Mr. Shui Ta, I feel a profound reluctance to discuss your constantly expanding projects. I suggest a little supper with your cousin, you bring up your financial difficulties. I offer your cousin houses for the homeless, you set up a factory in them. I hand her a check, you cash it. Your cousin disappears! You ask for 100,000 silver dollars and tell me my houses aren't

big enough. Where is your cousin, sir? *[GoodPerson,* 90].

Shen Teh had to be murdered, if she was to provide for her child. Brecht dramatizes the metaphorical slaying of Shen Teh ironically because Wang and Sun begin to suspect that she has really been murdered by Shui Ta. The final scenes witness Shui Ta's trial, whsre he is accused both of symbolic and real murder. The gods are as fatuous about goodness as they were in the opening scenes. When Shui Ta discloses the horrible dilemma he is locked in, the gods say that she lay "hidden" *(Good Person,* 102). *She* stands for both Shen Teh and goodness. Thus, the gods do not accept the contradictions of her situation at all. They cannot give her new life but insist that she accept the burden of being feminine. Of Shen Teh's change, Lennox comments that "spectators are again confirmed in their belief that such stereotypical male and. female behavior is natural to the sexes" (Lennox, 1974). Smith adds a different dimension to the question when she states that the difficulty with Brecht's portrayal of mothers is his inability to represent their desire (Smith, 1991). Shen Teh is in the worst situation she has ever been in. She will have to face the rascal Sun. Shu Fu will withdraw his support if she reveals that Shui Ta is female. Things have come full circle and have merely deteriorated for Shen Teh. The madness of being Shui Ta cannot help her continue indefinitely because of her pregnancy. No future invested with power awaits her as Shen Teh, only imminent disaster.

Registering her disappointment with Brecht's desexualization of Shen Teh and consequent effacement of female desire, Iris Smith makes the suggestion that: "The desire [of the woman] could be foregrounded in the actor's playing of Shen Teh, if she expanded on the feminist possibilities of Brecht's early scenario, in which Shen Teh continues to sell herself when not forced to" (Smith,1991). Although Smith's point regarding the erasure of female sexual desire is well taken, her view on the female body in the text does not consider that Shen Teh makes one of her more powerful symbolic moves as a woman when instead of selling herself, she sells a commodity. This also allows Brecht to emphasize the difficulty of her completely withdrawing her body from the market, as witnessed by her beholdenness to Shu Fu. Further, to

suggest that pure sexual pleasure is possible or that it is detachable from its context is disturbing. At least, Brecht does not domesticate Shen Teh by leaving her to Yang Sun's tender mercies, a sign that he sought a less conventional kind of resolution for the text.

The so-called "open" conclusion of the play invites the spectator to resolve the problem in his/her own way. The epilogue asks us to conclude the play. Yet, it is difficult for the female viewer to envision any kind of resolution to the play. Shen Teh's options have been shut off. Trapped by her body, she can no longer claim the male effect that empowers her. One can only suggest that Brecht's depiction of the way society hedges Shen Teh is compromised by the introduction of the biological. Shen Teh herself is left in the dark and pleads for answers. In restricting madness as a possibility, the text indicates that the powers of the woman in madness betoken a rebellion contained by her body/the body of the text. The stark contrast between the powerless-ness of women and the potency of men can be read to mean that history and society conspire to solidify these vicious constructions. Yet, despite the weight of history, the madness that converts Shen Teh to Shui Ta is neither tragic nor universal; it is a political act of protest against the ways people think of women. Brecht demolishes these conceptions by showing a shui Ta who was none of the so-called essentially feminine qualities. And yet in debarring the pleasure the female viewer takes in the construction of female subjectivity by confining Shen Teh, the text uneasily, if mockingly, echoes Freud's dictum that anatomy is destiny.

CHAPTER 2
FRIEDRICH DURRENMATT'S *THE PHYSICISTS*

Post-Brechtian theater, both in Germany and England, witnessed a variety of different kinds of theatre that were interventionist without adopting the dogma of alienation theatre. Among playwrights of the antirealist tradition, Friedrich Diirrenmact takes his place as a maestro of the macabre effect and devastating resolution.

Dürrenmatt's understanding of the complexity of the modern world and its emphasis on facticity enabled him to ask a number of questions crucial to the development of theatre. Chief among these is whether the theatre is adequate for the representation of the modern world (Innes,1979). Dürrenmatt's thoughts on the "grotesque" as a form most appropriate to the nuclear era place him with those practitioners who avoid realism fervently.

Dürrenmatt defines the grotesque as "a physical expression of paradox" (Innes,1979). The tangibleness or tactility of the grotesque heightens its impact on the viewer. The physical distortion of perspective that Dürrenmatt works with makes for exaggerated theatre that threatens the viewer's everyday response. Innes explains the grotesque as "a way of gaining precision, objectivity and distance, of forcing the audience to take a moral stand while retaining the playful artificiality of a literary game" (Innes,1979)

The grotesque, as an unfamiliar entity, must estrange the viewer or distance him or her. Although Dürrenmatt wants an absorbed audience, he does not necessarily demand one that identifies with the characters. Speaking of *The Physicists*, he said he wanted the audience to resist identifying with the physicists despite the temptation to do so. *The Physicists* has political pretensions, and even if it does not completely break with conventional forms of persuasion, it brings two disparate elements together. On the one hand, the content of the play is overtly political, concerning as it does the future of the world; on the other, the form is classical rather then documentary or experimental. Further, its mode is grotesque.

Indeed, Dürrenmatt believed that the grotesque was appropriate to the post-World War II generation as a technique of intervention. Further, he considered that it was dramatic to pursue an incident or event to its worst end. He put these ingredients together in the recipe for *The Physicists*.

The Physicists invited world attention because of its focus on the ethical dimensions of scientific and technological advancement. Imminently threatened by nuclear annihilation, European capitals were engaged by this play. Set in a sanatorium for the mad, the play works through the relationship between justice, power, and knowledge. The discourse on gender impinges on the three themes and constructs the female as grotesque.

Dürrenmatt combines heterogeneous elements. His expedient of placing three physicists who may or may not be crazy in the sanatorium clearly enabled him to discuss the relationship between knowledge and power. The introduction of the criminal element—the murder of three nurses by three inmates, further allowed him to introduce notions of justice, which in the text are seemingly differentiated from larger humanitarian issues of ethical responsibility. A unified thematic is dispersed in two separate theatres of action. In one, Dürrenmatt tackles the evasion of responsibility by exaggerating the profusion of identities the three inmates sport. In the other, he questions the terms by which ethical responsibility is accepted by considering what the relationship of power is to justice. By concretizing one theatre of action and rendering the other abstract, the dramatist allows us to see connections between the personal life and the public act.

Critical attention conferred on the play has tended to concentrate on the global theatre. Viewed as a political intervention, it is judged on how effectively it makes a statement about the nuclear era. Among the most hotly contested points is whether the physicists' resolve not to publish their findings actually changes the course of world destiny or whether their decision does not even stay nuclear advances momentarily.

Linked to political concerns are moral concerns. This perspective has Dürrenmatt as moralist interrogating the virtue of the physicists (Fickert, 1972). Innes compares Möbius to Icarus; this vein of interpretation follows the model of the portrait of the physicist as arrogant (Innes,1979). Reno takes a different approach by suggesting that Dürrenmatt juxtaposes science and

religion, physicist and prophet. Reno concentrates on how both discourses are about the possessors of knowledge. He argues that Dürrenmatt regards Möbius as arrogant but also considers him to be chained by his discoveries because he does not know that he owes them to God (Reno, 1985).

Another area of interest is the genre of the play. Dürrenmatt himself called it a "satyr play" (Weimar, 1966). Weimar finds it a "tragicomedy of the modern paradox, a paradox which insists that something must be done, while at the same time implying that nothing can be done" (Weimar,1966) . Beckmann is not convinced that the play has any appeal beyond its time possible?" (Ritter,1991). Whitton considers the play a model of "what could happen if the individual does not make himself aware of the consequences of his actions" (Whitton,1990). Ernst Brüche christens the play a "farce of the demise of the world" and argues that the playwright sees "terror as the only form of emotion possible today" (Ritter,1991). Suter thinks of it as a "play of ideas" (Ritter,1991).Murdoch views the play as a tragedy because of Dürrenmatt's rendition of Möbius's hamartia and hubris (Murdoch,1970). The interest in classification has meant that other equally important areas have been overlooked. Inevitably, the manner in which the political or public is imbricated in issues of gender is not acknowledged, not even tacitly. While the female characters are discussed, their roles are analyzed from a male-centered perspective so that the critics also see them the way the physicists do.

Whether or not critics are sympathetic to the physicists' resolve not to share their knowledge in the interests of humanity, the debate implicitly assumes that the physicists' acts are motivated by altruism, even if it is wrong-headed. Some critics quarrel with Dürrenmatt because of his inadequate characterizations of the physicists, others because they are not drawn in a sufficiently sympathetic way for the audience to appreciate their dilemma.Innes comments pithily that "clockwork has replaced characterization" (Innes,1979). Beckmann wants to know when we will care for the characters Dürrenmatt creates (Ritter,1991). Kaiser too thinks that the play is not convincing (Ritter,1991). Voser admires the play tremendously, especially its inversions. She finds, however, that the murder of Monika is

insufficiently motivated (Ritter ,1991).Nagel is emphatic about finding in the mixture of genres a unique virtue (Ritter,1991)

Dürrenmatt is an author of the heterogeneous, one who smashes the play. He solders together what does not belong together in order to make visible the paradox of content through the paradox of form. He intends to unmask rationality as the being of madness, madness as the goal of rationality.

The significance of the mixture of the other two genres is minimized.

The Kabinettspiel and the detective narrative are subsumed by the public plot. The two subgenres are significant in that they work with issues of identity and motivation. As a genre, the deteccive narrative is concerned with psychological motivation. Although in this instance, Detective Voss gratefully accepts the official story on motivation, identity remains crucial to the audience because it reveals motivation. The director has after all opened with the cliche of the detective narrative: a dead body. To spice it up, the mise-en-scene exhibits clear signs of struggle. In the first instance, knowing who these men are will help us solve the mystery of why they killed the women. the characters in this play have several identities, and thus identity is rendered problematic.

The physicists sport several identities. One of the three, supposedly Beutler, is also seemingly aware of the projections he casts. "Newton" passes himself off as Newton because he does not want to disturb Ernesti, who is convinced he is Einstein. Newton claims he is the real Einstein, however. We are only half-certain that the men are physicists. The emphasis on the psyche and on identity initiated by the murder of the three women makes it quite clear that this private theatre will also have a say in the future of the world. Motivation after all cannot be neatly separated into public and private spheres.

Dürrenmatt's grotesque framework in *The Physicists* enables the audience to locate the humor of the text.Dürrenmatt's absurdities are meaningfully loaded in a painful way. And unlike farce, the dark side of sexuality or the psyche does not really become the occasion for laughter. In *The Physicists*, pain is not dissolved by laughter.

Dürrenmatt chooses to work with a strongly realist stage setting to

balance the parodic humor that erupts. The mise-en-scene poses the greatest challenge for the antirealist metteur. Dürrenmatt's stage directions describe a picturelike stillness that would suggest muted normalcy but is overdone, so that its artifice does not allow it to be merely background. It works to parody the concept of quiet rest; it is no sanatorium in quiescent Switzerland, but a madhouse. The sanatorium itself bears not just she imprint of a struggle, but is transformed into an asylum. The period furniture strewn around jars or clashes, perhaps to emphasize the two levels that interlock: sane and insane. The mutedness of the mise-en-scene also contrives to shock the viewer in retrospect because of the general disarray that reigns at the conclusion when the madhouse/sanatorium becomes a prison-house. Despite these contrasting effects and the bright artificial tone, the mise-en-scene remains quasi-realistic, a point of difference from the faintly unbelievable quality and direction of the action of the play.

"An anti-bourgeois satire," the play is antiillusionist with a vengeance (Whitton, 1990). The fate of humanity is decided from the most unlikely of locales—an asylum for the mad. Absurdist, on the face of it, but extraordinarily rational in that it puts together a "model." Two men who believe they are Einstein and Newton live with a man who claims to be the legendary King Solomon. When the play opens, the audience does not know if these men are really physicists or men pretending to be not only physicists, but Einstein and Newton. They are grouped together because of the liberal psychotherapy of the owner, Dr. Martha von Zahnd. The spectator's interest in the identities of these men is aroused by the play's sensational thriller opening. It begins with a police inspector investigating the murder of Irene Straub. She was apparently strangled by her charge, Einstein, whose ID proclaims him as Ernesto Ernesti. The criminal's identity becomes important because motive can be secured only through the psychology of the criminal, whose sense of identity is crucial to his/her understanding of the motive. Even at the outset, we know that the act is not random and motiveless because another nurse has been strangled, but not by the same man. Dorothea Moser's murderer was Newton, who also believes that he is really Einstein. His ID proclaims him Beutler.

The physicists' sense of who they are ultimately determines their actions.

Yet the play only partly concentrates on eking out the motive for murder. Despite the overture's emphasis on the detective narrative, complete with dead body on the margin of stage and signs of struggle, the action of the play is overinvested by abstract motives that the detective frame cannot accommodate. Classically "unified," the motive ostensibly leads into the thematic of the play: the ethical responsibility of the physicists or their perceptions of their identities. The detective narrative is overtly diverted by the inspector's investigation. Far from being the typical detective in search of knowledge, the inspector is easily fobbed off by the chief nurse. Investigation leads to diagnosis. The detective's lack of interest in ascertaining motive creates mystery but also accentuates the audience's distance from the physicists.

Inspector Voss, the sane police investigator, finds very soon after his entrance into the asylum that his norms do not hold in this space. The seker of knowledge of the mystery narrative, the detective/hero is blocked at every step. His authority is completely undermined because of the milieu. Nurse Martha Boll is punctilious about the liberal ideologies of psychotherapy and drives the inspector batty by her unreal attitude towards the murder of Nurse Stetder. Voss is not allowed to see the director or the assailant. The director is apparently soothing the murderer by accompanying him in a duet. The murderer's needs are regarded as much more important than either the inspector's duties or the rights of the two dead women. The inspector's theory about the enule nurses not being physically strong enough to work with the male patients is also mocked by Nurse Boll, second in command, who informs us that Nurse Moser was a crack wrestler, Nurse Straub expert at judo, and she herself a weight lifter. If the women could not have been overpowered by sheer brute strength, they must have been killed when their guard was down. The dialogue is peppered with corrections of the inspector's nomenclature: the murderer is the patient, the murder is the incident. Voss is told twice that the man who killed Stettler is ill and that he is not the murderer but the "assailant." Voss is also reprimanded for referring to the "murder" and is asked to substitute the term "unfortunate incident." Apparently liberal, the medical establishment nevertheless evades the question of the scientists' responsibility. In itself reasonable, the inspector's acceptance of the evasion

is slightly more disturbing, especially in Act II when roles are switched symmetrically. The inspector insists that it is an "incident," the director; a murder.

The grotesque surfaces in both parties' indifference to the fate of the victims in Act I. The mise-en-scene is a visual reminder of the nurse's struggle to live and the body an even starker one of her defeat. Their placement on stage underlines the manner in which the nurse's life is marginalized.

The elements of humor are patent in the inspector's having to wait while the patients' nerves were soothed. The inspector is also not allowed to see the director and not allowed to smoke. He does not have even the modicum of authority. He appears to have lost all judicial power in the space of the asylum. Durrenmatt suggests that a different law operates in this world, one which the inspector can only view as spectacle and cannot control. Yet these reversals are not absurd in that they are not without meaning. Where Dürrenmatt's comedy differs from the absurd is in the deathly moral significance attached to every macabre twist. The inspector's lack of information and his antigeneric behavior do not draw us into identifying with him. Because the first physicist we see has already killed and is in a sanatorium, we are not immediately urged to identify with the physicists. We are distant spectators who increasingly get persuaded by Möbius because of his rhetorical manipulation. When Mobius convinces the two scientists, he comes close to taking us in. Diirrenmatt works with emotions to examine them.

In order not to divert us from the grotesque, Dürrenmatt also keeps us from identifying with the nurses. We know very little about them and in fact none of them survives the first act. Murder mysteries are often structured around exploring the victim's psyche to enable capture of the murdered. *The Physicists* does not belong to this genre, nor does it fit in with studies in psychopathology like Fritz Lang's *M.*

The detective's lack of knowledge and indeed his submission to the official story are particularly startling in Act II. The detective now corrects the personnel on their vocabulary. He insists that the assailants are patients, the killings are incidents. He claims that it is exhilarating to give justice a

holiday. By the end of Act I, the suspense produced by the detective narrative is heightened.

Similarly, the Kabinettspiel also explains the psyche. Mobius is here viewed in the midst of his family. Like Strindberg, with whom Dürrenmatt has been compared, the playwright once again forges connections between the personal and public theatres of action. After the Kabinettspiel of the Rose family's visit to Möbius, Möbius has a long discussion with Nurse Monika Stettler, confesses that he is not mad, and strangles her. The curtain falls.

An exploration of these two genres in the text also accounts for the effort Dürrenmatt took to structure it according to premodernist theatrical law. The play has been much praised for its unimpeachable practice of the classical unities, devices that welded the personal or psychic with the public. Indeed, Dürrenmatt claimed that because the play was set in a sanatorium, it was essential that the unities lend some semblance of order.

The detective narrative provides the basic motivation for the physicists' imprisonment at the end of the play. More importantly, their relationship with the three women undergirds their decision not to publicize their discoveries. The four women in the play, their interaction with the men, and the men's perception of them become completely instrumental to the physicists' choices and the world's future. Dürrenmatt grounds the abstract problematic of the limits of power and knowledge in the politics of sexuality, family, and madness.

Both genres have been most often used in the realistic mode. The murder mystery's digression into the space of the grotesque is achieved through the underscoring of the thematics of madness. The grotesque mode grafted to the detective genre deforms it. In taking the detective genre and deflecting its narrative goal, Dürrenmatt directs our attention to the dividing line that separates the criminal from the heroic, the genius from the demoniacal, and the sane from the insane.

The play does boast many moments when the tables are turned on the inspector and the sane. Newton's discussion with Voss in Act I in exemplary of the space between the two. Newton appears in eighteenth-century costume to present a hypnotically convincing image of his madness. The inmate raises rationality and logic to a new peak while the bumbling detective falters

through his own cross-examination. Newton frames his own conversation by puncturing the association of madness with disorder. He straightens the mess made by the aftermath of the murder calmly with the explanation:

NEWTON: I simply can't stand disorder. Really it was love of order that made me become a physicist —(He rights the standard lamp) — to interpret the apparent disorder of Nature in the light of a more sublime order[*The Physicists*,295;allsubsequent references are to the translation by James Kirkup (New York: Grove Press, 1965)].

Ironically, Newton also provides Inspector Voss and the audience with a motive for the murder. He says: "My mission is to devote myself to the problematics of gravitation, not the physical requirements of a woman" (*The Physicists,296*). We are not given any indication whether Voss believes that this is a rational motive. Newton continues to puzzle Voss by mocking him for accepting that he is Newton. When Voss is sarcastic with him about how old he must be (if he is really Newton), he asks Voss directly: "Are you out of your mind, Inspector, or are you just having me on?" (*The Physicists*,297). Dürrenmatt does not use elaborate inversions to debate the sanity of either Newton or Voss. Indeed, the theme seems almost peripheral in that he complicates the relationship of the mad with society to such an extent that their status as mad is overdetermined by their roles as scientists, actors, criminals.

The mise-en-scene as an antisocial space that is nevertheless a refuge from the power of the state is a more important element in the play than the status of the inmates as mad. *The Physicists* makes no attempt to play with the claims of sanity that the physicists make. At the end we have to take their sanity seriously if the tragic dimension of the apocalypse is to be believed. Of course, we could see them as geniuses beyond the pale, which again does not really separate them from the sane.

The antisocial space is amenable to giving everyday reality a holiday and forcing the grotesque to speak its truth. Dürrenmat brings the discussion to the nature of physics at the climax of the Newton and Voss conversation. He implies that the relationship between the physicist and society is the mystery

that has to be unraveled. Newton posits a relationship whereby the physicist is God behind the scheme, society unthinking humanity:

NEWTON:All I do is to elaborate a theory about it on the basis of natural observation. I write down this theory in the mathematical idiom and obtain several formulae. The engineers come along. They treat electricity as a pimp treats a whore. They simply exploit it. They build a machine — and a machine can only be used when it becomes independent of the knowledge that led to its investigation. So any fool can switch on a light or touch off the atomic bomb. (He pats the INSPECTOR'S shoulders.) And that's what you want to arrest me for, Richard. It's not fair.

INSPECTOR: But I don't want to arrest you, Albert.

NEWTON: It's all because you think I'm mad. But, if you don't understand anything about electricity, why don't you refuse to turn on the light? It's you who are the criminal, Richard. But I must put my brandy away; if Sister Boll comes there will be wigs on the green. (Newton hides the bottle of brandy behind the wire guard in front of the fire, but leaves the glass where it is.) Well, goodbye. INSPECTOR: Goodbye, Albert. NEWTON: Oh, Richard. You're the one who should be arrested [*The Physicists*,298].

Newton's psychic changes clearly reveal the ego of a man who believes that he has completely uncovered nature's wonders. His self-presentation to Voss, through the guises of madness, suggests that whether he is sane or not, his ego projection is intense. Gravity and relativity: the intellectual property of one man. The arrogance explicit in his telling Voss that he should be arrested is a clue to the distance that separates the two. It also implies that Newton assumes a responsibility for the safety of the world that Voss has abnegated by his lack of knowledge. At the level of the detective narrative, it taunts Voss for not keeping the nurses safe.

When Mathilde von Zahnd makes her entrance, she comes across as being even more self-assured than Newton was. Newton's claims are ultimately not viable because he lacks narrative authority. How seriously are we to take a man who is an inmate in an asylum? Hence Newton's games with the inspector seem irascible but nonthreatening. Indeed, one could admire him for subverting the inspector from a tenuous position. Von Zahnd, on the other hand, is shown to accrue authority to herself by her scientific knowledge and

more peculiarly by invoking her ancestors, who visually dominate the mise-en-scene.

Dürrenmatt comes closest to problematizing the distinction between sanity and insanity in the persona of Mathilde von Zahnd, who hovers on both sides. Unlike Newton and the inspector, who briefly seem to switch sides, Mathilde von Zahnd cannot be placed on either. Dürrenmatt allows her to let slip her own psychic condition right at the very beginning. Von Zahnd says that her father despised her. Why honor him by hanging his portrait in the room? Her psychic contradictions are as patent as Newton's. She reveals her power when she claims that her patients adhere to what she wants them to think. The effect on the viewer is unsettling. Her own wry comment on her relative sanity despite her ancient pedigree underscores the instability of the scene: both authority figures have either been confused or have qualified their "normalcy." Our consternation about her sanity is further heightened by our knowledge that her great-aunt and cousin are also inmates of the asylum.

Sister Boll's total avoidance of the murders and her spellbound obsession with the intellectually stimulating dimension of the physicists' condition are of a piece with Mathilde von Zahnd's diagnoses. Sister Boll has a different, if recognizable, value system. Disconcertingly, its values are not those of the "mad" inmates, but Mathilde von Zahnd's megalomaniacal ideology combined with Boll's notions of the scientific. Von Zahnd's grand illusion of controlling the world is not unveiled till the conclusion. For the moment, she discourses eloquently on her superior, enlightened, and rational treatment of the mad. She succeeds in leading the inspector down the garden path and making him feel totally stupid by presenting her preposterous theory about the murderous effects of radioactive material on the two physicists as perfectly obvious.

The question that provides the transition between the detective frame and the abstract metaphysical theme is posed by Newton in the tone of an enfant terrible: "Is it because I strangled the nurse that you want to arrest me, or because it was I who paved the way for the atomic bomb?" (The Physicists,298). He equates the murder of a woman with a scientific discovery when he asks which is the greater crime. A brilliant device on the part of Dürrenmatt, as one commentator has pointed out, to advance the criminal-physicist thesis (Weimar,1966). Yet, the insignificance of the murder is quite

appalling and brings us back to justice and sexual politics.

The playwright is inscrutable about opining on the question. He uses irony to pose the question, a grotesque irony possible only in a sanatorium for the insane. Yet the question is presented as a rational one. Several commentators have had difficulty with Dürrenmatt's "demonization" of the atomic bomb as the single source of humanity's annihilation (Ritter,1991). Many others have accepted the physicists' rationalization as Dürrenmatt's ideology and justified the "femocide" (the killing of women) as absolutely ethical on the grounds that the killings were sacrifices in the interest of humanity. One critic alone has asked why the physicists could not commit suicide if their main interest was to protect humanity from their discoveries (Ritter,1991). The physicists' desire for control and the humiliating lack of control they experience in the end would account for why they do not commit suicide.They are clearly not modern-day heroes, even if they are takeoffs on the classical model of Oedipus. Dürrenmatt's nonrealistic mode and the exaggerated scale of the question would seem to suggest that the play is a model. His conclusion leaves the physicists in jail and divests them of both power and knowledge. Clearly, the physicists are not his mouthpieces. Nevertheless, consistency of the representation of the murdered women as sacrificial offerings does give the female viewer pause.

Frau Rose is the chief character in the cabinet play which forms the other subgenre of Act I. She comes to bid farewell to her husband, Johann Wilhelm Möbius. Her story of sacrifice for the physicist's advancement is instructive in its complete self-effacement. She has already traveled the route Sister Monika wishes to take. She has nine children in all at the moment and has apparently played the role of mother to Möbius too. She calls him "little" the four times she refers to him and directly addresses him as "little" three times. When she recapitulates the story of their life together, it is less the saga of a couple than a mother who tends her young. Möbius in this portrait emerges tremendously weak and Frau Rose, despite her trials, strong and vigorous. Möbius was not only without family, he met Frau Rose as a fifteen-year-old boy. And later, after Frau Rose had completely educated him, he fell sick and was unable to be a "man" and "provider" to her. Her sketch, while seemingly replete with domestic piety, serves as an indictment of an

adolescent who never grew up to assume responsibility. Paradoxically, when she finally abandons Möbius, she seems to have stepped into a similar nurturing role with Herr Rose. Dürrenmatt slyly reveals the financial motive lurking beneath the motherly one. Frau Rose's account is sentimental:

Fraulein Doktor. Try to understand my position. I am five years older than Johann Wilhelm. I first met him when he was a fifteen-year-old schoolboy, in my father's house, where he had rented an attic room. He was an orphan and wretchedly poor. I helped him through high school and later made it possible for him to read physics at the university. We got married on his twentieth birthday, against my parents' wishes. We worked day and night. He was writing his dissertation and I took a job with a transport company. Four years later we had our eldest boy, Adolf-Friedrich, and then came the two others. Finally there were prospects of his obtaining a professorship; we thought we could begin to relax at last. But then Johann Wilhelm fell ill and his illness swallowed immense sums of money. To provide for my family I went to work in a chocolate factory. Tobler's chocolate factory. (She silently wipes away a tear.) For years I worked my fingers to the bone[*The Physicists*,307].

Presumably, Frau Rose's sacrifice will inspire her husband to make greater sacrifices for humanity. Ironically, his sacrifice will result in the annihilation of a woman who wants to give herself to him. In the hierarchy of sacrifices and stakes on heroism, women sacrifice for men and children, men sacrifice women for the higher good.

Two of the nurses are completely absent. One of them is present only as a corpse. As Oskar Keller implies, Monika Stetler's death works as a motivating device in the action of the play (Keller, 1970). While it may seem that the power to initiate action lends the woman agency, this is not the case with Stettler. Indeed, she is punished for attempting to put an end to Möbius's stasis by bringing him out into the world when she dies by his hand. Keller's observation that the playwright's directions do not refer to Monika is well taken. Dürrenmatt's reticence indicates the invisibility of the woman's role in the production. She is more of a "Funktion" than a character (Keller, 1970).

Ironically, Monika Stettler has the largest role. Woman as sacrificial offering dominates the presentation. In the detective narrative, women are victims. Clearly, the victims had to be female in order for the dramatist and the physicist to imply that the woman's pull to the material compromises the men's ascent to the metaphysical. Dürrenmatt's symmetrical organization of the triple murder, each killing stylistically repeated and with the same motive attributed for it, bears this observation out. Perhaps the repetitive motif is designed in part to maintain unity, but it is also clearly intended to intensify the grotesque effect of three strangulations. The female figure is manipulated to construct the grotesque.

We do see one of the nurses, Monika Stettler. And her portrayal as the woman who wants to consecrate her life for the physicist/hero is distressing in that her repeated urgings to Möbius become a variation of the obnoxious "she asked for it." Like Frau Rose, in that she wants to devote herself to the higher cause of male development, Monika is unlike her in that she expresses sexual desire. She is not voided of sexuality because of motherhood in the way Frau Rose is. For the boy/physicist Möbius, Monika's demands could be quite threatening in that sexuality is not presented as a maternal by-product but as an erotic desire. She wants to be looked at, desired. And she takes the sexual initiative. We are to infer that the other two nurses were similarly aggressive about their physical desires. Monika's awareness of her body and her need that Möbius recognize both body and desire could well be the underlying motive for murder. After all, Möbius became sick when he had to assume adult responsibility. For Möbius, the will to stay adolescent is at least as strong as the will to save the world. Perhaps the latter covers up the former and becomes the justification for the physicist's prolonged life as immature adolescent. Newton has also clearly stated that Dorothea Moser interfered with the advancement of physics. Since Dürrenmatt's structure replicates theme and motive, Dorothea's demands clearly paralleled Monika's, and it is equally certain that Newton was unable or unwilling to meet them. Einstein's story is also identical to Möbius's and Newton's. He tells Monika that Irene had arranged their lives together in exactly the same manner Monika had. Einstein emphasizes the pointlessness of women sacrificing themselves almost as though to disavow responsibility for his own act. Monika is deaf to

his warnings, including his injunction to run away. Disturbingly, she too is remarkably without feeling for her fellow nurse Irene and sympathizes with Einstein's trauma. To cap the irony, Monika tells both Möbius and the audience that von Zahnd had proclaimed herself madder than Möbius. Monika's faith in both Möbius and Solomon speaks to a simplicity beyond all proportion or perhaps the rare quality of accepting difference with grace. Apparently Monika does the latter, as does Mobius's former teacher who also is not repelled by Möbius's apprenticeship with Solomon. Monika's belief costs her life. The scene ends with Möbius choking her with the curtains.

Newton and Einstein are implicated in this murder. Einstein fiddles and Newton drinks at the close of the scene. Von Zahnd's manipulation subjugates Monika's intelligence and attributes responsibility to her. It lets Möbius, who discourages Monika from her plan, appear increasingly desperate but also larger than life. Such a framing glorifies Möbius's act by insisting that he perpetrated it against his will.

In its presentation of Frau Rose as the only version of femininity worthy of survival, the Kabinettspiel suggests that the play is about the repression of female desire. Frau Rose's sexuality is further submerged by her second marriage, with its missionary impulse and ethic of nurturance. Perhaps the three other women are punished for transgressing the social boundary that permits the mothering role but debars the sexual.

Möbius, however, while rejecting Monika's love, cannot tell her the truth. He goes along with her plans and even tells her that his life has been more supportable because of her presence. Monika is open about her dedication:

I want to sleep with you. I want to have children by you. I know I'm talking quite shamelessly. But why won't you look at me? Don't you find me attractive? I know these nurses' uniforms are hideous. (*She tears off her nurse's cap.*) I hate my profession! For five years I've been looking after sick people out of love for my fellow-beings. I never flinched; everyone could count on me: I sacrificed myself. But now I want to sacrifice myself for one person alone, to exist for one person alone, and not for everybody all the time. I want to exist for the man I love. For you. I will do anything you ask,

work for you day and night: only you can't send me away! I have no one else in the world! I am as much alone as you [*The Physicists*,319].

Möbius is shown trying to send her away at least three times. Monika's insistence became a motive for Möbius to kill her. Of course, Dürrenmatt does not justify murder, but he does explain it all too successfully after the manner of detective narratives. In and of itself, these explanations may be dismissed as part of the generic stock-in-trade, but the consistency of the portrayal of women as sacrifices, much fortified by the representation of Möbius's ex-wife, brings Dürrenmatt dangerously close to the physicists' point of view on this issue.

The theme of woman as votive offering is raised to new levels when the women become linchpins for the logic of the ego. Möbius and the other two swear to stay in the sanatorium in order to remain true to the exalted spirit of physics that has driven them to kill. A variant explanation might say that the presence of women itself was threatening to the physicists, especially intelligent and attractive women who desired them and saw through them. Each of the women had crepe through the masks the men had worn.

The detective narrative links up neatly with the metaphysical. The revelations of Act II clarify not only motive but also identity. Dorothea Moser's assailant, perturbed by the dramatic changes in the asylum, divulges that he is not Newton, Einstein, or Beutler: he is Alec Jaspar Kilton, noted physicist. The nurses have been replaced by heavyweight and middleweight boxers. For Kilton and later for the other physicists, the boxers' dimensions and sizes provide a discomfiting change from the nurses. The physicists do not now control their lives. At this juncture, neither the audience nor the physicists know that von Zahnd maneuvers their existence. Because their moods and impulses have been respected to the point that they have got off scot-free after murder, they have been convinced that they were in control because of their manufactured madness. It is no coincidence that they feel that their freedom is threatened when males rather than females play the role of warders. Diirrenmatt exaggerates the physical prowess of the men, who are well known in international boxing circles. The introduction of the male warders also shows Diirrenmatt pushing a situation to its extremity in order to provoke thinking about the resolution of the problem. The stunning

physical presence of these three giants, bizarre in this spectacle as they wait on the inmates, is the first indication that the sanatorium will turn into a prison.

Even before the revelation of the physicists' identities, the three men have bonded. Newton, for instance, was concerned about Ernesti and is now empathizing with Möbius because he cannot eat. For his part, Möbius almost giants Newton clemency by expressing his understanding of Newton's decision to do away with Moser. He reiterates his understanding when Einstein proclaims his identity and similarly rationalizes the murder of Irene Straub. Dürrenmatt has Einstein repeat verbatim what Newton said. Their bond perhaps makes intimacy with women difficult. The approval they get from each other makes general social accountability a matter of indifference. The echo mocks as it mimics because the mirroring effect divests each of them of singularity. They function for each other as the Lacanian mirror image might for the child during the mirror stage (Lacan, 1977). In the first stage, before their resolve to stay put, they do not know that they are seeing themselves but think that they are seeing someone else who belongs to the same genus. This is comparable to the child identifying the mirror image as a child, but not himself or herself. When they do acknowledge their likeness, the ego ideal, the sense of self, is strengthened by reification of the mirror image. As with the child's "meconnaissance"(lack of recognition) of its reflection whereby it sees the image as more coordinated, they too enjoy more power and plenitude from the reflection. Their world is one of sameness. In terms of their identities, Einstein/Eisler and Newton/Kilton have effectively ceased to be physicists and have become spies. Their perception of themselves has changed: Möbius's compact offers them an honorable version of the self.

Both Möbius and Newton claim to have been ordered by a higher authority. Newton/Kilton invokes the intelligence agency; Möbius has recourse to an even higher authority: Solomon or the divine tongue. Both sidestep the issue of personal/human responsibility. Möbius's argument is tawdry; it is inconceivable that both the men, one from the free trade sector, the other from a socialist economy, would be scandalized by the breakdown of the economic system. Nuclear destruction and the havoc it might cause are

clearly a weapon to use for economic advancement in the capitalist and socialist worlds and hence imperial power. Although aware of underlying economic motives, Möbius is very much a prisoner of the "ideological state apparatus" that Dürrenmntt wished to demystify (Althusser,1971). Knowledge colludes with power to maintain the status quo, to uphold the old pernicious ideology. Möbius emerges with a completely confused received ideology that claims to be above it but is actually under it.

The murders render the physicists criminal; ergo they must protect their secrets to protect humanity. Of course, the fact that they retreat on all their vows once Mathilde von Zahnd traps them in her little net calls their integrity into question.

If the structure of the play sets the three nurses up as impediments to the scientists' journey to save mankind, and if Frau Rose was a martyr because she succeeded in removing herself as one, Mathilde von Zahnd is the biggest impediment. Apparently, she initiated the love relationships between scientists and nurses. And she has started to use the inventions that the scientists had thought were safe from human beings.

Dürrenmatt creates a world of surfaces when he exposes Mathilde von Zahnd's machinations. She is a grotesque double to the physicists. She has ouiplanned and outmaneuvered them, and like them she has a secret agenda to hold the world hostage. Eerily, her logic mocks their rationale; both groups exult in power.

Von Zahnd is pictured as a hunchback Mathilde emblematizes the grotesque.

Mathilde von Zahnd is not constructed as a realistic character. Rather she is a personification. Dürrenmatt makes her the only surviving heir of a wealthy in-bred family and uses the trope of idiocy to differentiate the physicists' craziness from her lunacy. She is, as it were, pathologically "abnormal." The logic of the play demands that the scientists be foiled, either to show up the impossibility of keeping knowledge free or the probability of it being perverted. In either case, the physicists emerge suspiciously heroic. They may be naive, even scatterbrained, but they are sane and concerned, despite their godlike pretensions that have to be curtailed.

The conclusion could appear mystifying in that the physicists reappear to

restate their mythical identities. Reno claims that Möbius, for instance, "realizes at long last that he shares essential characteristics with the ancient king to whom he has so often referred; in a moment of deep insight, he comes to understand that what is true of Solomon is true also of himself" (Reno, 1985) Reno's discussion of Möbius's self-acknowledgment invites us to him as a tragic hero. Fickert insists that Mobius becomes humble and accepts a universe beyond human logic. Interestingly, Fickert places the time of recognition around Monika's murder: "the unavoidable murder of Monika proves the impossibility of achieving a peaceable society among men—his dream" (Fickert,1970). Yet, for the female viewer, this view is inimical because Möbius's "sacrifice" annihilates the female while it restores his ego, dented as it is by Mathilde von Zahnd's clever trickery. Mathilde von Zahnd is constructed as the evil machinator who somehow gets to take the rap for the murders. She plans them to frame the physicists so that they can be her prisoners in perpetuity.

Clearly, knowledge has failed in the face of evil, sanity in the face of idiocy. While Mathilde von Zahnd's plans serve Dürrenmatt's purposes, the female reader is wary of the personification of the grotesque as female. A more "objective" viewer might advance the proposition that Mathilde von Zahnd's grotesquerie is intended to be gender neutral and to signify general monstrosity. Both von Zahnd and Einstein name her gender, however. It would appear that the choice of the female to signify the grotesque is highly suspect in the light of a traditional masculinist construction of the female monster in classical and medieval allegory, best exemplified by the choice of the female pronoun for Skylla in the *Odyssey*. While I do not wish to psychoanalyze the dramatist's fears of the female, I do aver that the play classically recasts the model of the man as voyager, the female as impediment; the man as sane, the female as insane.

CONCLUSION

The imaging of women in the modernist canon appears to be a superimposition: figures discernible under the surface that cannot be brought to light. The female figure is the ground on which the male text is imprinted. The terrain is marked in different ways that shape the lighted surface. When we "look through" to the ground, the female figure becomes visible, but if she is heard, it is only through the male echo.

Male figuration of femininity dramatizes many versions. Familiar tropes through the plays are of the female as mirror image, as spectacle, as body. The physical is symptomatic of the female, the intellectual the male. Above all, despite the tremendous difficulty in attempting to generalize about texts that span a hundred and fifty years, one framework remains intact: the male network of references.

Male desire enacts itself on stage and text regardless of the character on stage. Relayed through women characters, male desire assumes distortions that widen the gaps in the text. In those plays that do acknowledge a different desire, contradictory articulations circumscribe female desire. Brecht's The Good Person is more readily appropriated for feminist ends.

Considering that the possibilities of plural readings of any given text are endless, even granted there are limits, the male canon could have greater possibilities for other female readers/viewers. Feminists of another time period may well see different patterns than the ones I have seen. And even within our own period, feminists in performance would interpret these texts more concretely. Lesbian feminist readings may also be more sensitive to sexual likeness and hence foreground an alternative sexual politics.

My sense is that, in general, modernist plays have more feminist possibilities as productions. Some would, I believe, resist feminist takeoffs, although most would be amenable to some change because of gaps in the text.

Plays in ihc canon that have "strong female roles," such as Brecht's The Good Person would seem to be more hospitable to women actors and viewers. Shen Teh's desire for autonomy and Susan's sexual desire could be evoked quite powerfully. The costuming of Brecht's Shen Teh and her body itself as the site of cultural contradictions have the greatest scope for dramatizing

femininity under trial. Backed up by a resoundingly patriarchal crew to play the gods, the parable could illustrate the female breaking many codes. Bisexuality could be insinuated in the performance to lend the character a greater mobility than Yvette, the prostitute in Mother Courage. The pregnancy, which has stopped Brecht's feminist readers, could be dramatized in such a manner that cultural contradictions about maternity are highlighted. We could see a Shen Teh mother-to-be, but with the same sexual and social desire. My own qualification of the last would be that the production be registered as Utopian, for if Shen Teh were seen to celebrate a pregnancy that was not economically viable, audience response could again be distressed. *Good Person* can accommodate a feminist viewer until the controversial pregnancy.

Dürrenmatt's *The Physicists* perhaps expresses the more violent, because more buried, forms of sexism. It could be played in a progressive way only by deconstructing male fantasy. A female observer could be attracted if the whole were pictured through very visible male points of view in terms of stylized self-projections, mirror imagings, and delusions of monster females. The trope of the female as monster just cannot be negotiated in this text.

Many of the texts are hostile to the female reader unless she assumes a male viewpoint. Women in the text have very little power. What power the woman has is invariably delineated as a rebellion contained. The most pleasurable texts are the ones where the rebellion erupts through the surface: such as Brecht's *The Good Person*.

As there is no universal viewer, so is there, in point of fact, no female viewer, only female viewers. I use the term cautiously to create a space or a positioning for women in texts that do have clearly etched male positionings in terms of identification, power, knowledge, and pleasure.

B. Ruby Rich's promise that the female viewer's rereading empowers her is validated, but not entirely (Rich, 1990). Mulvey's diagnosis that the female viewer's pleasure in identifying with the female turns masochistic and painful has been borne out sharply bjt instances in each of the plays (Mulvey, 1975). Is there a woman in this play? Or is there a play on the woman? In many situations, the female reader has to let go of her gender identification in order to enjoy the pleasure of the text, more specifically, the presentation of the

marginal perspective.

For much of the time, the female reader has been suspended. She has oscillated, has shifted. However oblivious to real female presence the texts are, the insistence on regarding male representation of women serves to draw the female reader out of contradictory postures. She can free herself from the male positioning the text enjoins by turning her eye to the female figure.

Weaving out, the female reader squints in order to be able to see the female figure under the male surface. The grounding has remained female, however, because the male subject is constituted strictly in relationship to the female/the female body. And male theatre has been performed through the female image.

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