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THE PRESENTATION OF PERSONALITY  
IN THE NOVELS OF MAX FRISCH AND UWE JOHNSON

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THE PRESENTATION OF PERSONALITY IN THE NOVELS OF MAX FRISCH ANDUWE JOHNSONABSTRACT

In the twentieth century several writers from Rilke onwards have written prose works which deal with various problems of personality in a manner far removed from that of the traditional 'linear' novel, where events appear more or less chronologically and there is a fairly consistent point of view. Both Max Frisch and Uwe Johnson, while recognizing that in this century the serious novelist may no longer be able to assume the omniscience of a Balzac, have disclaimed all connection with any particular school of literary or psychological theory. Both however write novels of apparently loose construction, like Rilke and Hesse before them; the critic must therefore seek to establish whether Frisch's and Johnson's claims to literary independence are justified by true originality in their novels, and above all whether their use of non-traditional form makes a valuable contribution to the significance of each of their works, or whether this 'form' is after all simply a means of creating a spurious appearance of profundity and complexity.

Frisch's early novels, Jürg Reinhart and Die Schwierigen, reveal signs of influence in their subject matter by Albin Zollinger and Gottfried Keller, and show no remarkable manipulation of form. In the former work, the construction is loose, a number of different individual problems being touched upon and either left undeveloped or summarily solved with unfounded

optimism. It is a youthful work of some charm but little depth or originality. The looseness of construction of Die Schwierigen, which is written in fragments of considerably varying length as opposed to the traditional chapter division, is more justified as an expression of the theme which embraces all the main characters: the theme of the vanity of the attempt to find absolute freedom, the drifting aimlessness of life with its autumnal atmosphere of beauty and decay, which contrasts well with the characters' mistaken efforts to achieve aims beyond their abilities. This is the first albeit slight indication in Frisch's prose writing that he has begun to make the manner of presentation convey to the reader some truth which the central figures do not fully perceive. It is the contrast between what the central figure knows of himself and what is revealed to the reader by the particular manner of presentation which characterizes Frisch's next novel Stiller, written after an interval of ten years in which Frisch had given much thought to literary matters, including Brecht's theory of 'alienation', the forcing of reader or audience to think rather than respond emotionally.

Frisch's central concern in the sphere of human relationships emerges in this period before Stiller. The disastrous effects of 'image-making' preoccupy him, of creating a set picture in one's mind of oneself and of others and behaving accordingly. This is the source of Stiller's guilt: in the past he has constricted his wife by his view of her, and in the 'present' he is trying to refashion his own identity because he cannot accept his own insignificance and weakness as final. But the fight against 'images' is carried also into the form of the work: the reader is not told

Stiller's qualities, nor precisely what is happening to him. He is faced with a series of fragmentary notebook entries, and the gulf between Stiller's inflated view of himself and his basic weakness can be fully appreciated only by careful attention to the types of material Stiller includes in his notebooks, to their relative proportions, and to the frequency of their occurrence. There then emerges the picture of a man longing to impress, haunted by failure but basically wilfully blind about his own nature. The reader watches his gradual progression from confidence to humbler fear, and near despair, but is also able to detect the remnants of pride and ridiculous hope which he carries with him into his 'new' life as Stiller, in which the old difficulties then sadly recur. The overall theme of the danger of making set images of oneself and others emerges most clearly in the 'Nachwort', but as well as clarifying, it also carries on the theme, as it is written not by an anonymous narrator, but by a character already introduced whose vision is clearer than Stiller's although still limited. Absolute, active self-acceptance is seen to be an immensely difficult task, and perfect self-knowledge impossible, but there are degrees of honesty, and the reader is made to fight like the characters for depth of understanding through the fragmentation.

In his next novel, Homo Faber, Frisch presents a different type of misunderstanding of self. Faber is a man whose practical, unemotional approach to life has been fostered by his job as a 'Techniker', and his image of himself is that of an eminently rational man, rationality and logic being his criteria of worth. But again the central figure is made - by the arrangement of the fragmentary material - to give himself away against

his own knowledge and will. Having lived for years a somewhat selfish bachelor existence without regard for the feelings of others, Faber is shaken by the death of a young girl who attracted him and then proved tragically to be his daughter. He refuses to believe that the 'faults' of his nature - the excessive practicality - are responsible for this death, and yet is sufficiently disturbed to attempt to prove this on paper. There is indeed some doubt as to whether this accusation which would appear to be held against him really is justified. The work is also marred by indications that we are perhaps to understand the tragic events as retribution for past inadequacies in Faber: the question of the nature of Fate in the novel is an intricate one and suggests Frisch may not have clarified his purpose sufficiently. But the work can move the reader nevertheless: Faber is shaken into the discovery that in his own nature there was a sensitivity and emotional capacity he had denied, and that emotion, personal devotion to others can bring intense joy, which he has missed. But this recognition he long fights against, and it emerges primarily through the subjective unchronological ordering of his account of the tragedy: the depth of his attachment to Sabeth, for instance, is shown by his care to try to prove his unconcern, his reluctance to describe her death. The role of Fate since it cannot be accepted literally could be seen simply as an overall framework, to emphasize the seriousness of the events, and yet it is liable to antagonize the reader by its anachronism nevertheless. However, the reader is also justifiably challenged, as in Stiller, to participate in and thence to understand the painful process of a mind used to understanding but now fighting for clarity, yet fearing to reach it.

We - like Faber - progress in understanding without ever reaching a complete 'image'.

Mein Name sei Gantenbein, however, can be accused with even more justification of lack of clarity. The fragmentariness no longer seems a means to provoke the reader to active thought, but rather to mystify him. Although the work's most outstanding feature is humour, it is not unambiguously gay: there are serious moments which suggest a psychological crisis such as formed the basis of the two preceding novels, but no one aspect of the work dominates sufficiently for it to be seen as a 'Schelmenroman' or as the profound record of a struggle for new identity. It seems rather to be the product of unclear intention shielded by a form of apparent complexity - a confused, mystifying rather than stimulating work, whereas the preceding two novels both made use of 'mystery' as a structural element to capture attention initially for serious problems. We are not sure until near the end of each work what the fate of the central figure will be.

Johnson has often been criticized for unnecessary complexity. In his Mutmassungen über Jakob however, the shifting viewpoint performs for the most part a very valuable function, although there are instances in which very little is achieved by our inability to grasp who is speaking. Generally the movement between the various characters and modes of presentation - conversation, monologue, narration - serves to bring out Johnson's central theme of the isolation of the individual in the modern world, which is intensified by a situation such as that in Germany. By movement from, for example, strictly factual third person narration to individual memory or

comment, Johnson brings past moments vividly alive and makes them into highly personal experience. This process of course can also highlight the limitations of individual understanding, and the thoughts and discussions of each of the characters around the central problem of Jakob's death bring out the emotional, intellectual, political reasons which separate each from understanding of and fuller communication with the others. Gesine has left her country home for the big city and in the deepest sense has lost contact with her father. Jonas is intellectually dissatisfied with the East and university life there, but lacks the will to break away and so turns his critical faculties self-destructively against himself. Rohlfs is a dedicated Party official, able to understand minds and modes of thought other than his own to a noteworthy extent, but isolated ultimately by an inability to conceive of non-political motivation. Each of these has a particular view of Jakob - and yet, by means of brilliant 'cameo' pictures which capture gestures, physical attitudes, snatches of speech, we feel that Jakob existed in a very real sense beyond all that can be said of him. As a whole the work thus testifies to the view that individual people matter, that the loss of a man of Jakob's intense ordinariness is a tragedy which is appreciated only when it is too late: and this theme is opposed to the Communist view which would subordinate the individual to the State, interpret the past in terms of abstract laws, whereas its value is seen here to reside in individual experience, vivid moments which may never be fully appreciated but are above all personal property, not part of historical necessity. But this is not primarily an anti-East, pro-West novel. If the Communist conception of the rights and duties of man is implicitly rejected because

at crisis points it demands suppression of all individual desires, in more general human terms Man is also implicitly castigated for his lack of effort - even inability - to understand himself and others. The view that individuality and individual isolation are themes of great importance for Johnson is supported by a separately published series of short studies on some of the figures of the novel.

Das dritte Buch über Achim deals much more specifically with Communism and its possible effects on the human personality, having a more limited range of characters, so that one issue is concentrated on, rather than a central theme with variations as in the previous novel. Achim the sportsman would seem to be a simple, understandable phenomenon, but the attempt by the Western journalist Karsch to describe him in a biography grows increasingly difficult. He discovers that Achim is nothing but a public figure, that - disconcertingly - he has no 'private life': a state unusual in the West for any sort of 'star', yet conceivable perhaps in a dedicated evangelist. But worst of all, Achim - and his Communist advisors - have tried to remodel his past in line with his present position to such an extent that it is unclear whether he is any longer aware of dishonesty. A change of heart is always permissible, but the past cannot be altered as a whole to suit the image of the present. The shock this attempt causes in Karsch, his puzzlement are brought out in the highly original form of the work. A typical Westerner's inadequate misconceptions about East Germany emerge in the queries of an unidentified questioner, who has to push and provoke the narrator into a reluctant telling of his story, the reluctance and disorientation being shown both in a disinclination to elaborate points

until specifically asked, and at times even in antagonization of the questioner - an ironic reversal of the basic epic situation of story-teller and enthralled listener. Once again Johnson has shown his concern for individual personality and its integrity, but that this material is more specifically political than that of Mutmassungen über Jakob and deals with very particular problems is suggested firstly by the character of Karin, who shows us what happens when a basically honest character attempts to fit into a preconceived political mould, and secondly by the associated tale Eine Reise Wegwohin, 1960. Here Johnson elaborates the attitudes present in the questioner in the novel - notions about the East which reveal complacent self satisfaction, a too summary dismissal of the Communist State as wicked, and misguided. It may indeed have very serious faults in its attitude to the individual, but the West, it seems, does not look closely enough at the object of its criticisms. It is the clichés of East-West relations that Johnson has tried, in the Achim material, to undermine and upset.

In Zwei Ansichten Johnson's purpose is less clear, although the form of the work is very much simpler than anything he had written before. He would seem to be avoiding any element of sensationalism, stressing that the Berlin situation affects very ordinary people and is monstrous because of this; but the characters - especially the West German - are not portrayed deeply enough to engage our interest or intelligence, and there is no other element to counteract this effect. The novel lacks even the unashamed - although not melodramatic - adventure quality of Eine Kneipe geht verloren, with its stress on the escape mechanism. The novel could be seen as an

ironic modern version of the Romeo and Juliet situation, but nothing is done to gain our sympathy for the interrupted relationship. It is a curiously dispassionate and dull work about a situation which Johnson's several shorter prose works show to be of consuming interest and importance for him.

It seems then that freedom of form can be exploited in many original ways in order to deal with problems of personality which are not necessarily unique to our age, but which conditions of life in the twentieth century have worsened by political division, the fast pace of existence and fierce competition. But free form can also degenerate into mystification, unnecessary complication, spurious profundity and 'modernity'. Modernity alone is not enough to guarantee interest, as the situation of Zwei Ansichten shows. If a thoughtful response is required of the reader he must be presented with something more than simple topicality. It is however equally unsatisfactory to mystify the reader without allowing him some degree of final insight into the meaning of the work, even if - as in Frisch's case - the theme is that we are too swift in our judgements of others. Yet at its best the novel of fragmentary form can stimulate and goad the reader into a hard won but full appreciation of how complex human personality is, and how understanding can never be complete, nor should ever be thought to be so.

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## INTRODUCTION

There are several reasons why the novels of Max Frisch and Uwe Johnson should be associated in one study. While recognising that the only honest course for a serious writer in the twentieth century may be to abandon the straightforward 'linear' novel - that is, novels in which the events dealt with are presented for the most part in simple chronological order - both novelists have claimed not to represent any 'school' or particular literary doctrine. The implication is that both want primarily to write good novels, rather than philosophical or metaphysical tracts in fictional form.

Frisch has stated:

'Ich bewundere die Schriftsteller, die es sich leisten (i.e. die auf ein Gelingen verzichten), beispielsweise die Vertreter des "nouveau roman", die aus Theorie darauf verzichten, Romane wie Balzac zu schreiben.'<sup>1</sup>

It is clear from this that Frisch is concerned more to reach a wide public than to present any particular psychological or literary theory. Johnson, while taking at first a more overtly 'modern' position<sup>2</sup>, does not expound any dogmatic theory about the nature of the novel; referring to his first two novels, he has said:

'Es ging...lediglich darum, für die Erzählung ein Benehmen zu finden, das der Geschichte jeweils genau passte und geeignet war für die Bewegungen und Schnelligkeiten der Fabel, für die persönlichen und gesellschaftlichen Beziehungen, ihre Lokale, Gefühlswelten, auch Ergebnisse.'<sup>3</sup>

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- 1) Horst Bienek, Werkstattsgespräche mit Schriftstellern, Munich, 1962, p.23.
  - 2) Uwe Johnson, Address at Wayne University, Evergreen Review, XXI, November-December, 1961, pp. 18-30. Cf. below, p.245.
  - 3) Uwe Johnson, 'Auskünfte und Abreden zu "Zwei Ansichten"', Dichten und Trachten 26, Frankfurt, 1965, p.7.

While talking about his third novel, he added to these ideas:

'Unter einer solchen Geschichte verstehe ich einen erfundenen Zusammenhang, dessen Beschaffenheit die Art der Erzählung vorschreibt; aber über eine "Poetik", wie die Klappe des Schutzumschlages sie mir nachsagt, verfüge ich nicht.'<sup>1</sup>

Johnson stresses above all the very close cohesion between material and manner of presentation in each case; like Frisch, he implicitly invites the critic to examine each novel on its purely individual merits as a novel.

Both novelists deal, in different ways and with different emphases, with problems of human personality, primarily with that of our inadequate knowledge and understanding of one another: the novels of both writers indicate that we must abandon the belief that we know and understand others simply because they are physically present in our lives. Both also treat problems of self-knowledge and self-acceptance, involving the relationship of the individual to his own past. However, the combination of similar themes and 'anti-traditional' presentation is not new, although Max Frisch and Uwe Johnson claim no background of theory. Rilke's Malte Laurids Brigge, for example, exhibits what might be called 'free form'; there is movement between historical past, distant childhood and very recent events without chronological order, because all are equally important contributions to experience and the personality. The work is concerned with the need to rethink what 'reality' and individual personality are; as Wilhelm Emrich expresses it:

'Die Kritik Maltes richtet sich...gegen alle Allgemein-  
vorstellungen wie Kultur, Nation, Religion, weltgeschichtliche  
Zusammenhänge usw. Sie fragt nach dem einzelnen Menschen  
selbst, dessen Wirklichkeit von diesen Allgemeinvorstellungen

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1) *ibid.*, p.8.

verdeckt und überzogen worden sei wie von einem unglaublich langweiligen Stoff.'<sup>1</sup>

To take another example: Hermann Hesse's novel Der Steppenwolf also lacks a continuous flow of narrative, and demonstrates the view that the personality consists of a multitude of facets, not of one or two qualities, which must be faced and accepted in a continuous process of effort. There is no direct proof that either Max Frisch or Uwe Johnson has read these particular novels, but they could hardly be unaware of their existence, or of the mood of freedom in literary creation so dominant in the twentieth century. The major question to be answered is therefore: are Frisch and Johnson simply taking advantage of the new 'tradition' of literary freedom established by such authors as Rilke, Hesse, Joyce, Musil, Faulkner and others? Or are their novels really well thought out and planned, so that each individual manner of presentation has a value beyond that of fashionable obscurity? It is all too easy to beg questions raised by these modern forms. Critics of such note as Hans Mayer have explained its origins too simply; finding Johnson's novels unsatisfying, he writes:

'Auf Johnsons Menschen ist...kein Verlass. Dabei wissen sie es meistens gar nicht. Es fehlen Schurken, Intriganten, Filmespione. Durchschnittsmenschen aus Deutschland. Aber alles ist mit ihnen und durch sie möglich, im Guten wie im Schlimmen: je nach Augenblick und Konstellation. Darum sind nur Augenblicksaufnahmen von ihnen möglich und Mutmassungen über sie.'<sup>2</sup>

The word 'darum' suggests an oversimple connection between characters and form which will not bear close critical scrutiny: average figures do not

- 1) Wilhelm Emrich, 'Die Erzählkunst des 20. Jahrhunderts', Deutsche Literatur in unserer Zeit, Göttingen, 1959, p.67.
- 2) Hans Mayer, Zur deutschen Literatur der Zeit, Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1967, p.338.

have to be written about in Johnson's complex manner, as Mayer seems to indicate. Much closer examination of the texts is required with all these novels.

In the case of Frisch, critics have tended to concentrate on the ideas expressed in his work<sup>1</sup>, and - while making valuable observations - have neglected to differentiate between drama and the novel and to investigate what these genres can best express. Some critics have applied extraneous theories of composition: Karlheinz Braun<sup>2</sup>, for example, has clearly been influenced by the work of Günther Müller and Eberhard Lämmert. He has produced a careful analysis of the function of time in Stiller, and recognizes its subjective arrangement, but gives no clear explanation of the purpose of this subjectivity; that is, he gives no indication of whether we are to accept the novel simply as an intriguing story of very personal difficulties, or whether we should apply more serious critical standards to it. Karlheinz Deschner's criticism of Homo Faber<sup>3</sup> is also unsatisfactory, because he has failed to see the novel as a whole; the language of the work is for him inappropriately banal only because he does not link the manner of presentation closely enough with the figure presented. Margit Henning, whose remarks on Stiller are illuminating<sup>4</sup>, also criticizes Homo Faber for curious reasons; instead of asking what the function of the

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- 1) e.g. Monika Wintsch-Spiess, Zum Problem der Identität im Werke Max Frischs, Zurich, 1965.
  - 2) Karlheinz Braun, Die epische Technik in Max Frischs Roman 'Stiller', Dissertation, Frankfurt, 1959.
  - 3) Karlheinz Deschner, Talente. Dichter Dilettanten, Wiesbaden, 1964.
  - 4) Margrit Henning, Die Ich-Form und ihre Funktion in Thomas Manns 'Doktor Faustus', Tübingen, 1966.

'Ich-Form' might be, she dismisses it as inappropriate and so misses the point of the novel as a record of suffering.

This is not to claim that the novels are perfect: critics such as, notably, Stanislaw Lem<sup>1</sup>, have pointed out important difficulties, particularly in Homo Faber - difficulties which force the interpreter of the novels to question the clarity of Frisch's thought, which is most questionable in Mein Name sei Gantenbein. The aim of this thesis is to judge each novel on its own merits, and not - as does Werner Stauffacher<sup>2</sup> - to criticize them for lacking something which does not lie within their demonstrable aims, in this case some final, ineffable meaning for life. A close study of the novels also reveals how far Frisch's use of novel forms has developed since 1934, when his first prose work, Jürg Reinhart, was published.

Criticism of Johnson's novels has verged in many instances on adulation, primarily because of the immediate appeal of the subject matter to German readers. It is therefore necessary to ask whether there is anything more than topicality in his novels. Some warier critics, like Marcel Reich-Ranicki<sup>3</sup>, have given praise plus a certain amount of censure for unnecessary obscurity; others have seen only the obscurity, such as Deschner<sup>4</sup>, and have refused to look further, ridiculing the structure of the novels without careful analysis. Analysis itself can be a danger; Karl Migner's study of

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- 1) Stanislaw Lem, 'Über das Modellieren der Wirklichkeit im Werke von Thomas Mann', Sinn und Form, Sonderheft Thomas Mann, Berlin, 1965.
  - 2) Werner Stauffacher, 'Langage et Mystère', Études Germaniques, 20. Année, No.3, July/Sept., 1965, pp.331-345.
  - 3) Marcel Reich-Ranicki, Deutsche Literatur in West und Ost, Munich, 1963.
  - 4) Deschner, op.cit.

Das dritte Buch über Achim<sup>1</sup> makes some very good observations on individual points, but does not help the reader to see the novel as a whole and to judge its value, and the same can be said of Hansjürgen Popp's study of Mutmassungen über Jakob.<sup>2</sup> Gotthart Wunberg, in his article on the structure and symbolism of this same novel<sup>3</sup>, is content to point out simply that the structure is complex without conclusions on the precise effect of the structure, other than that the narrator is thereby shown to be no more omniscient than the reader - a 'Symptom unserer Zeit.' Werner Joachim Radke's immensely detailed metaphysical interpretation of Mutmassungen über Jakob<sup>4</sup>, which he sees as 'Kritik an den überlieferten Massstäben der alten doktrinären Gottesvorstellung'<sup>5</sup>, has many enlightening studies of individual figures and incidents; but he also sees the form of the work simply as a means to force readers to think objectively about a very serious and profound subject, and does not investigate it further.

The critic of Johnson's work, like the critic of Frisch's, must study the relationship between the subject matter, the basic 'story', and the precise manner of presentation. I hope to show where both Frisch and Johnson have taken advantage of the freedom introduced by authors such as

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- 1) Karl Migner, Uwe Johnson, 'Das dritte Buch über Achim'. Eine Interpretation, Munich, 1966.
  - 2) Hansjürgen Popp, Einführung in Uwe Johnsons Roman 'Mutmassungen über Jakob', Stuttgart, 1967.
  - 3) Gotthart Wunberg, 'Struktur und Symbolik in Uwe Johnsons Roman "Mutmassungen über Jakob"', Neue Sammlung, 2. Jg., Heft 5, Sept./Oct., 1962, pp.440-449.
  - 4) Werner Joachim Radke, Untersuchungen zu Uwe Johnsons Roman 'Mutmassungen über Jakob', Ph.D. Dissertation, Stanford University, 1966.
  - 5) *ibid.*, p.650.

Rilke, and where it has led them into difficulties: to show, in other words, how successful each author is in handling his material - varying problems of personality - within modern novel 'forms'.

## CHAPTER ONE

### MAX FRISCH'S EARLY NOVELS

#### Jürg Reinhart

Max Frisch's first published prose work, Jürg Reinhart, appeared in 1934, and it is probably this to which he is referring in the section 'Autobiographie' of his Tagebuch 1946-1949<sup>1</sup> when he speaks of his early travels:

'Das war...eine volle und glückliche Zeit. Das Ergebnis war ein erster, allzu jugendlicher Roman.'<sup>2</sup>

This judgement, made many years later after the accumulation of experience represented by the Tagebuch, suggests an ambivalent attitude to the early work. The maturer mind sees its faults, but there is pleasure in the recollection of the time which produced it, and the work itself justifies this view. It deals basically with an important theme - the ultimately successful search for happiness and meaning in life of a sensitive, vulnerable youth, but the problems touched upon are too summarily solved, and the whole novel suffers from diffuseness, although it presents no real difficulties of interpretation.

Jürg Reinhart finds it difficult to build relationships, especially with women. He is oppressed by a deep-rooted fear of love-making because he is conscious that the reality may not measure up to his dreams - and yet he feels that without experience of women he is in some way excluded from

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1) Tagebuch 1946-1949, Frankfurt, 1950, pp.274-282.

2) *op.cit.*, p.278.

life. He has to learn, partly through his own reflections, partly through the help of Inge, a woman matured in suffering, that purity is nothing to be ashamed of, that love and self-giving - the active entry into life for which he longs - do not have to take the form of a conventional love relationship. He is finally the only person who has the strength, the 'love', to help the tortured Inge to end her own life, after even her mother's compassion has given way before the fear of ethical guilt.

Jürg's problems are manifold; there is the dread of growing older, the fear of the passage of time which does not seem to bring confidence and strength:

'...seit einigen Jahren habe ich das klare Gefühl, dass ich immerzu was verliere, dass ich zerbröckele oder so. Denn dieses Erwachsenwerden, wonach man sich so geseht hat, ist nun ein Verarmen.'<sup>1</sup>

There is also in him a sense of the transience of all beauty, of all human life, and this he cannot accept with equanimity for long. At one point he is able to understand those poets who live in the awareness of death:

'Dann sehen sie unser ganzes Dasein als solch dauerndes Abschiednehmen, dann erleben sie alles in diesen innigeren und versöhnlicheren Farben eines letzten Abendleuchtens, wenn unerschöpfliche Schönheiten vergeudet werden über diesem Land, wo man bloss ein flüchtiger Gast ist.'<sup>2</sup>

But at other times this same awareness is oppressive and all he can do is 'immer weiterreisen, vorübergehen und immer weiterreisen, als wüsste man ein Ziel.'<sup>3</sup> His difficulties are increased by experience of the near impossibility of communication with other humans on anything other than a superficial level. He fears and dreads the need to converse:

1) Jürg Reinhart, p.77.

2) op.cit., p.131.

3) op.cit., p.168.

'...dann lässt man sich immer vergewaltigen von seinen ausgesprochenen Worten und sich immer zum verrücktesten Ende zwingen, das wir bloss aufrechterhalten aus diesem landläufigen Wahn, dass die Folgerichtigkeit das einzig Wahre sei...Wieviel ehrlicher kann man sein, und wieviel grösser ist die Welt, da wir ihre Dinge nicht immer beim Namen nennen wollen, als wäre alles eine Kücheneinrichtung, wieviel traumtiefer und ahnungsweiter, sobald wir die Bescheidenheit zum Schweigen haben...'.<sup>1</sup>

However, a life outside society would not solve all his problems, since he is also preoccupied with death, and the possible disintegration of the personality into nothingness:

'Ich glaube es nicht....Dass diese Welt so kleinstädtisch ist... Und dass eine Seele nicht überall lebt, wo man sie liebt, sondern nur dort und nur so lange, da sie zufällig einen Leib besitzt. Ich meine: wie lächerlich wäre es, wenn eine Seele nicht um diesen Erdball reicht, wie Radiowellen; wenn ein Mensch einfach aufhören würde, bloss weil wir die Wärme ihrer Hand und ihrer Stirne nicht fühlen können...'.<sup>2</sup>

Above all Jürg fears self-committal, inextricable involvement in life, irrevocable decision, and it is this that prompts Inge to comment, in a remark which sums up the general purport of the work:

'Wenn Sie Ihre Tat ertragen, so werden Sie reifer sein. Und so sind wohl alle Herbst, Jürg, mit diesem seltsamen Einklang von Welken und Reifen.'<sup>3</sup>

These are all themes which will be taken up again and again in Frisch's work; Stiller, for example, treats the problems of communication and active self-committal to life; Mein Name sei Gantenbein deals with fear of the passage of time, of aging, and the maturer works show that there are no simple solutions to these problems. Jürg Reinhart, however, ends on a note of optimism, of confidence and acceptance of life, which is too swiftly

1) op.cit., p.195f.

2) ~~op.cit.~~, p.224.

3) op.cit., p.237.

introduced. Jürg, in ending the sufferings of someone he loved, has performed his first real deed of 'love', it is true, and has thus made his entry into life from a state of Hofmannsthal-like 'Präexistenz': but the problem of communication is left unsolved, the fear of time fades into the background, and strictly speaking only the problem of overstepping the barrier between youthful purity and maturer self-committal is vanquished, and that by a deed - euthanasia - which is far from unambiguous. Although the reader's mind is guided by the mother's long discussions on the subject to feel that love knows no ethical barriers<sup>1</sup>, it is not easy to accept this view, nor entirely clear in any case that Jürg has acted out of love alone, rather than from offended aestheticism or even moral weakness. The change in him, represented by the final picture of him on board ship gazing calmly forwards<sup>2</sup>, comes about too suddenly to be entirely convincing after his earlier crises. In addition, too many peripheral problems are touched upon and then dropped. There is the case of Hilde, another innocent delicately studied, whose entry into life has been through seduction by a youth who abandons her: will she be able to face life with Jürg's apparent confidence? There is Inge's mother, unable to visualize her daughter after the latter's death: is this because she lacked courage at the crucial moment, or simply because time and age take away all that is precious? If so, then the ending of the novel is hollow. And what are courage, and genuine, unselfish love; how do they function in everyday circumstances? Many

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1) op.cit., eg., p.187: 'Ist unsere Liebe so gross, dass wir das Todesgrauen auf uns nehmen, um einem andern zu helfen, und uns in eine seelische Gefahr wagen, wo wir vielleicht unsere Lebensfreude opfern müssen?'

2) op.cit., p.243.

questions of this nature are raised in the reader's mind, but no answers are given or even clearly attempted.

The form of the work does not give any aid to the interpreter or place any difficulty in his way, as the form of the later novels will be shown to do. As the mixture of themes and problems suggests, the framework is loose, consisting simply of three major subdivided sections in which the chronology is straightforward and the transitions from section to section of no significance other than, for example, parallelism between the youthfulness of Jürg and Hilde, or contrast with the calmer maturity of Inge; figures come and go with their undeveloped individual problems, like the doctors Svilos and Heller, for both of whom Inge's operation represents a trial in self-knowledge. There is no one, strong, uniting thread, and less unity of theme than in Die Schwierigen, which - while even looser in construction, with some shorter individual sections - has, as will be shown, a central theme which this very looseness underlines. Both Jürg Reinhart and Antwort aus der Stille, an 'Erzählung' of 1937, suffer also from excessive manipulation of character development in order to secure a positive, happy ending. The short story deals with the discontent with life and its ordinariness of one man, who finds meaning in sheer existence through facing death on a mountain face. In neither work is the answer to the problems raised commensurate with their very real importance; in each case it takes the form of a dramatic reversal which is too neat a solution. It would seem that at this stage Frisch, though deeply interested in problems of personality, of self-knowledge and self-acceptance, had not yet the maturity to reach deep into the suffering mind. Not only are the problems

in these early works stated very obviously and programmatically, but the protagonists are shown in unusual circumstances away from the everyday world: Frisch is avoiding the difficult task of showing a mind fighting with its problems amid the complexities of a more normal setting - in other words, he is putting his characters in situations which make their problems easier to solve. The setting of Stiller may not be 'normal', but the material includes details of Stiller's life in an everyday sphere, not in a vacation setting only. Nor does he attempt in these early works to portray the actual moments of crisis, a fact which points to the same conclusion: that Frisch still lacked, at this stage, the intellectual and artistic equipment to make a really penetrating study of human personality in novel form.

### Die Schwierigen

With Die Schwierigen of 1943<sup>1</sup> Frisch makes a renewed attempt to portray characters who cannot simply accept life, demanding too much of it and of themselves, but this time with a more ordinary social setting and a less simple pattern of problems and dramatic answer. As Monika Wintsch-Spiess has shown<sup>2</sup>, it is necessary to study this novel in any examination of Frisch's ideas; but it offers little of interest for a study of the relationship between subject matter and manner of presentation, and in this respect still differs markedly from Frisch's later novels. Certainly it

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1) Die Schwierigen, Neuausgabe, Freiburg, 1957.

2) Monika Wintsch-Spiess, Zum Problem der Identität im Werke Max Frischs, passim.

is not entirely conventional in form: it contains four distinct 'books', but without chapter divisions. The narrative is divided into sections of irregular length, covering usually several pages, but occasionally one paragraph stands alone. As will be seen, in Stiller and in Homo Faber Frisch has a special reason for his manner of presenting his material: in Stiller the diary-like form is occasioned by the protagonist's circumstances and hopes, and in Homo Faber the fragmentary form is explicable by Faber's disturbed state of mind. Unlike these two works, Mein Name sei Gantenbein has no obvious justification for its form, but the three novels are nevertheless alike in that with varying success a fragmentary form has been employed in them in order to tax the reader's mind and make him think and combine for himself if he wishes to understand fully what is being implied. As will be shown, the diary-like form of Stiller can reveal Stiller's fears and difficulties both past and present in some depth, if read with attention; although Homo Faber lacks the cohesion of the preceding novel, its form does reveal the agony which Faber will not let himself admit; and the reader of Mein Name sei Gantenbein is also challenged to find the deeper significance of the work if he can, although in this case there is unnecessary complexity. The problems treated are no longer simple or even clear to the figures involved, and the reader has to be made to feel this.

In Die Schwierigen the form presents no such difficulties, no such challenge to the reader, although the work lacks the very simple resolution of clearly stated problems characteristic of the earlier prose works, despite the diffuseness of Jürg Reinhart. The chronology of events is relatively

straightforward except for the occasional flashback<sup>1</sup>, and the transition from one section to another in the narrative lacks the precise motivation which can often be found in Stiller. What the irregularity of form, the division into sections of very unequal length, does achieve is simply an effect of unordered progression, of purposeless and aimless movement forwards, which reflects the theme of the work: the difficulty of governing and shaping one's life. None of the characters knows precisely what he or she wants of life, and all tend to drift onwards - as does the novel as a whole.

The title refers to those who are for ever fighting with life, wanting something they cannot define, making demands upon others which cannot be fulfilled and feeling constantly a sense of futility and disappointment, yet remaining unable to conquer it. All the main characters are linked in their different ways to the central problem of what constitutes a real and valuable life. Hinkelmann represents one pole: he demonstrates an impregnable self-confidence and belief in the value of what he is doing until he meets Yvonne and their relationship develops; he is characterized by

'eine Art von harmlos-unerschütterlichem Selbstvertrauen, eine angstlose Zuversicht, dass ihm, Hinkelmann, nichts in der Welt wirklich misslingen könnte.'<sup>2</sup>

He is consequently completely destroyed by the inexplicable but incontrovertible fact that his marriage has failed; the comfortable image of life which governed his existence is seen to be inadequate where intimate human

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1) Die Schwierigen, e.g., p.177.

2) Die Schwierigen, p.14.

relationships are concerned.

Another relatively conventional character is Hortense. She is a nice ordinary girl with a youthful taste for adventure, but without the will to seek it. There is a hint of truth in Reinhart's comment to her:

'Sie fordern sehr viel vom andern, ungefähr alles....und wenn der andere einmal Ihre Herausforderung annähme?....Ich sehe Sie dastehen, Fräulein Hortense - zu Tode erschrocken.'<sup>1</sup>

Her marriage to Ammann makes both of them happy because it takes her back into the sphere where she belongs and frees him from the need to impress; but it is a marriage which Hortense enters into more through instinct and resignation rather than by positive decision<sup>2</sup>, and she never overcomes the insidious notion that life could and should be fuller, hence her disappointment at finding that Reinhart has not lived up to her image of him as the glorious adventurer<sup>3</sup>. She cannot fully accept, as does her father the Oberst, that at some point one must come to terms with the fact that one does not achieve all that one might perhaps have been able to.<sup>4</sup>

Yvonne is another figure who, for different reasons - primarily because of fear of her unfemininity - constantly wants what is beyond her powers of endurance, who causes difficulties for herself by unreasonable demands upon others, who are expected to understand her fully. It is hardly surprising that she feels constricted in her marriage to Hinkelmann, but she accepts no responsibility for her past decision and destroys him by her escape in search of freedom. She seems at first to find the embodiment of this

1) Die Schwierigen, p.148f.

2) op.cit., p.242.

3) op.cit., p.263.

4) op.cit., p.167ff.

freedom in her relationship with Reinhart:

'Leicht wie ein warmes Gewölk trug er sie durch den Taumel eines besinnungslosen Daseins!'<sup>1</sup>

But she is unable to escape the image she has of herself as 'überlegen' where men are concerned. Reinhart sees this when he likens her to Turandot<sup>2</sup>, and he is proved right by the course of their relationship.

Yvonne demands constantly if silently that Reinhart understand her:

'Oft schien es ihr unglaublich, wie wenig er sich mit all seiner Phantasie in ihre Lage versetzen konnte...Er musste es verstehen, ohne dass sie es ihm sagte; nur so konnte er vor ihrem Herzen bestehen.'<sup>3</sup>

But she does not see that Reinhart is granting her just that freedom which he claims for himself, that he is at the opposite extreme from Hinkelmann in this respect. Yvonne therefore finds a measure of contentment only when, in her marriage to Hauswirt, she stops making impossible demands and accepts a compromise relationship without idealism or self-delusion<sup>4</sup>.

Reinhart suffers most of all these figures, because he is the one who comes nearest to the achievement of glorious freedom from all ties and responsibilities, who sees most clearly what it could mean and is therefore the most bitterly disappointed at his own failure to achieve any such state. Complete freedom means the ability to accept whatever life brings, without regrets for what is over and gone or any need to rely on other people for comfort and strength to face the passage of time:

'Wie sollten wir danken, dass wir leben! dass wir Wesen sind,

1) Die Schwierigen, p.84.

2) op.cit., p.33.

3) op.cit., p.94.

4) op.cit., p.232ff.

die vergehen, die all das Zeitlose schauen und mit Schauer begreifen, dass sie sterben müssen, immerzu, damit sie die Schönheit begreifen und alles, was mehr ist als Schönheit, die auch nur ein Name ist, einer von vielen...man müsste auch danken können für den Schmerz, für die Angst, für den Ekel, für die Öde, für die stiere Verzweiflung, für alles, was unser Herz erlebt, alles innerlich Wirkliche, was den Bogen unseres Lebens spannt, auch für das Ewig-Unsichere, das unser Leben in der Schwebel hält wie eine glühende Kugel.'<sup>1</sup>

But he has not the strength to sustain this attitude, and makes a half-hearted attempt to find a niche in society by taking a regular job:

'Einmal muss man erwachsen werden! sagte er immer wieder. Eines Tages stehen wir vor der Wahl. Das Eine ist die Wehmut, jugendlicher Trauergenuß, der nicht weiter-führt, Wehmut vor jedem kommenden Herbst, ein heimliches Wundsein an allem, ein Grauen vor aller Vergängnis! Das ist das eine...Oder wir finden zum andern: Wir gehen hindurch, wir nehmen es an, das grosse Stirb und Werde, wir treten über die Schwelle unserer Jugend, ein für allemal.'<sup>2</sup>

Reinhart's tragedy is that he cannot integrate fully into society either, and this dualism is a theme which runs right through Frisch's work, although its presentation is marred in this early novel by the suggestion that heredity is largely to blame. Towards the end of the work we find out about Reinhart's background, and it is clearly intimated that his inability to find any satisfactory existence derives to a large extent from his 'tainted' heritage<sup>3</sup>. Details such as the implied unwitting destruction of his own sister's happiness are introduced to impose a dramatic air of fatefulness on events; it would have been more convincing to indicate nothing more than his illegitimacy in order to justify his feeling of

1) Die Schwierigen, p.71.

2) op.cit., p.158. Both these examples reveal Frisch's immaturity by their derivative language. 'Das grosse Stirb und Werde' for instance, indicates Goethean influence, although this is not acknowledged like that of Zollinger. Cf. below, p.20.

3) op.cit., p.281.

exclusion from the ordered society to which ultimately both Hortense and Yvonne belong and to which they return. Reinhart's tragedy - that he is not gifted enough to create a satisfactory life outside 'respectable' society while nevertheless being aware of the delights such a free existence could offer - does not need to be reinforced.

Over all this novel hangs the recognition that the belief of youth - 'Alles ist möglich'<sup>1</sup> - must and will be modified by experience. One will not achieve much without exceptional strength; one will seek after the wrong goals and then suddenly find that one's life is slipping away, that there comes a point when a new generation takes over, to pass through similar difficulties, hopes and disappointments. The autumnal atmosphere is quite unmistakable: glorious hopes fade and die, only to recur in another generation and then pass through the same sad cycle; indeed the several descriptions of autumn are among the most beautiful passages in the work.<sup>2</sup> It is just this insubstantiality of human existence which the form of the novel underlines; the lack of regularity, of precise balance between sections suggests itself the haphazard movement of the human lives presented in the work - and it contrasts oddly with the hint of Fate which is introduced so unnecessarily towards the end of the novel and which, one might expect, would need a more tightly constructed form to be even artistically convincing.

It would seem, then, that at this stage Frisch is aware that non-traditional novel forms can be at least moderately expressive, although

1) Die Schwierigen, p.34.

2) Die Schwierigen, e.g. pp.65, 105f., 116, 223, 288.

judging from this novel alone it would be impossible to tell whether Frisch was not more interested simply in the modernity of irregular form than in controlled expressiveness. It is probable that he was considerably influenced at this time by his long-standing admiration for Albin Zollinger, the meeting with whom is described reverently in the Tagebuch.<sup>1</sup> Although the maturer Frisch distances himself from his earlier enthusiasm<sup>2</sup>, there are distinct similarities between his early prose works and the novels of Zollinger. Der halbe Mensch<sup>3</sup>, Die grosse Unruhe<sup>4</sup>, Pfannenstiel<sup>5</sup>, and Bohnenblust<sup>6</sup>, all deal with figures who are artistically gifted and who find it difficult to come to terms with the demands of existence in a social community, with the constrictions of the marriage partnership, with life in Switzerland and Europe of the thirties and early forties. All four novels are extremely diffuse in construction, no one subject or figure remaining at the centre of interest for long, and although such important questions are touched upon, the reader is considerably hampered by the constant switching of scene, of time and place. There is no clear reason for such confusion other than perhaps the desire to include too many aspects of modern life; and Frisch's interest in similar themes may have led him consciously or unconsciously to emulate the formlessness of Zollinger's work also.

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- 1) Tagebuch 1946-1949, pp.175-178. The influence of Keller will be discussed in the following chapter. Cf. below, p. 23.
  - 2) Max Frisch, 'Nachruf auf Albin Zollinger, den Dichter und Landsmann nach zwanzig Jahren.' Preface to Albin Zollinger, Gesammelte Werke, Zürich, 1961, vol.I.
  - 3) First published 1924.
  - 4) First published 1937.
  - 5) First published 1940.
  - 6) First published 1941.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE YEARS BETWEEN 'DIE SCHWIERIGEN' AND 'STILLER'

Influences are difficult to trace with precision, but it is clear that in Stiller, Frisch is certainly not borrowing a mode - his ability to control an apparently irregular form will be shown. It is not clear, however, why - after the interval of ten years - Frisch should produce a third novel of such high quality. In the intervening years several dramas were published, and also the Tagebuch 1946-1949. It is in the latter work that Frisch has reflected at length on what can or might be achieved by a fragmentary prose form.

Frisch considers the significance of the 'Skizze' as a means of expression, contrasting the employment of fragmentary sketches and 'perfect' or complete forms with beginning, middle and end clearly defined and linked:

'...die Vorliebe für das Fragment, die Auflösung überlieferter Einheiten, die schmerzliche oder neckische Betonung des Unvollendeten, das alles hatte schon die Romantik, der wir zum Teil so fremd, zum Teil so verwandt sind. Das Vollendete: nicht gemeint als Meisterschaft, sondern als Geschlossenheit einer Form. Es gibt, so genommen, eine meisterhafte Skizze und eine stümperhafte Vollendung, beispielsweise ein stümperhaftes Sonett. Die Skizze hat eine Richtung, aber kein Ende; die Skizze als Ausdruck eines Weltbildes, das sich nicht mehr schliesst oder noch nicht schliesst; als Scheu vor einer förmlichen Ganzheit, die der geistigen voraussetzt und nur Entlehnung sein kann...'.<sup>1</sup>

'Ein Katholik beispielsweise, der sich in einer geschlossenen Ordnung glauben kann, hat natürlich die Erlaubnis zur Vollendung; seine Welt ist vollendet. Die Haltung der meisten Zeitgenossen aber, glaube ich, ist die Frage, und ihre Form, solange eine ganze Antwort fehlt, kann nur vorläufig sein; für sie ist vielleicht das einzige Gesicht, das sich mit Anstand tragen lässt, wirklich das Fragment.'<sup>2</sup>

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1) Tagebuch 1946-1949, p.118f.

2) op.cit., p.122.

These passages, in which Frisch finds that the 'Skizze' is the logical expression of an inability to make categorical statements about human existence, are complemented by a consideration of the effect of fragmentary form upon readers. After a section on Brecht and his 'Verfremdungseffekt', he adds:

'Es wäre verlockend, all diese Gedanken auch auf den erzählenden Schriftsteller anzuwenden; Verfremdungseffekt mit sprachlichen Mitteln, das Spielbewusstsein in der Erzählung; das Offen-  
Artistische, das von den meisten Deutschlesenden als "befremdend" empfunden und rundweg abgelehnt wird, weil es "zu artistisch" ist, weil es die Einfühlung verhindert, das Hingerissensein nicht herstelle, die Illusion zerstört, nämlich die Illusion, dass die erzählte Geschichte wirklich passiert sei usw.'<sup>1</sup>

This may not be an original notion, but it is a valid theoretical justification of 'free' form; the writer's feeling that life does not have any clear-cut meaning for many people is to be presented to the reader in a manner which will demand the latter's participation, a positive mental exertion. Thus the reader is to be forced into personal involvement in a work simply by being deprived of a neat, complete and hence all too easily dismissible pattern. The author may not provide any answers to the questions he raises, but in any case he refuses to do the reader's thinking for him.

The 'Skizze', then, challenges the reader to think; and for Frisch the only works which are of real interest are those which actively provoke thought:

'Was zuweilen am meisten fesselt, sind die Bücher, die zum Widerspruch reizen, mindestens zum Ergänzen: - es fallen uns hundert Dinge ein, die der Verfasser nicht einmal erwähnt, obschon sie immerzu am Wege liegen, und vielleicht gehört es überhaupt zum Genuss des Lesens, dass der Leser vor allem den Reichtum seiner

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1) Tagebuch 1946-1949, p.294.

eigenen Gedanken entdeckt...Noch da, wo wir uns am Widerspruch entzündeten, sind wir offenbar die Empfangenden. Wir blühen aus eigenen Zweigen, aber aus der Erde eines andern. Jedenfalls sind wir glücklich. Wogegen ein Buch, das sich immerfort gescheiter erweist als der Leser, wenig Vergnügen macht und nie überzeugt, nie bereichert, auch wenn es hundertmal reicher ist als wir. Es mag vollendet sein, gewiss, aber es ist verstimmend. Es fehlt ihm die Gabe des Gebens. Es braucht uns nicht.'<sup>1</sup>

This again may not be a particularly original view, but it is certainly a typically modern one. In the great novels of the nineteenth century, for example those of Keller and Stifter, there is no need for the reader to 'complete' the work in this way. The glory of a work such as Der Grüne Heinrich resides in the very fact that it gives us a unique view in great detail of a mature mind reviewing its own progress through youth to maturity. We are not given simply a series of incidents objectively related, but a manner of narration which captures both the enthusiasm of childhood and the gentle irony, the more balanced judgement of later years. The reader does not have to puzzle over interpretation and basic meaning as he does with many twentieth century novels; but no reader of sensitivity would deny that Der Grüne Heinrich affords a rich aesthetic experience without deliberately stimulating 'Widerspruch'.

It is interesting to note that Frisch speaks of this novel with reverence<sup>2</sup>; can his comments on the most enjoyable type of literature have been directed against such works in that case? He would doubtless answer that Der Grüne Heinrich does stimulate thought, that it does need active

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1) Tagebuch 1946-1949, p.117.

2) 'In jener Zeit las ich den Grünen Heinrich; das Buch, das mich seitenweise bestürzte wie eine Hellseherei, war der beste Vater, den man nur haben kann...'. Tagebuch 1946-1949, p.278.

participation in the reader for the profundity of the work to emerge fully, for its appreciation as something other than a mere sequence of entertaining events. Indeed it may well be that the double perspective of the later version of Der Grüne Heinrich helped Frisch to develop his own characteristic 'dual' method of personality presentation as it appears in Stiller and Homo Faber, where the reader is allowed an insight which the central figures struggle to reach; but there can be no question of 'Widerspruch' aroused by Der Grüne Heinrich, no 'Entzündung'. To make the stimulation of such reactions the ultimate criterion of literary merit in prose work is too restrictive - as restrictive as to reject all Aristotelian drama as ineffective because it demands emotional involvement in rather than intellectual reaction against or struggle with its material. To stimulate reaction is one literary method which would appeal to a man who, like Frisch, believed that most men are afraid to think for themselves<sup>1</sup>, unwilling to search out and face the truth about their own weaknesses, and that German art has too long been divorced from social reality in this century<sup>2</sup>. It is

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- 1) In an imagined conversation between a poet and a society woman Frisch illustrates the selfish, cowardly attitude which demands that the poet act as the conscience of society, facing the problems most men would rather not see: 'Ein Poet, dachte ich immer, darf überhaupt nichts haben - auch keine Angst.' Tagebuch 1946-1949, p.17.
  - 2) 'Ich denke an Heydrich, der Mozart spielte...Kunst in diesem Sinne, Kunst als sittliche Schizophrenie, wenn man so sagen darf, wäre jedenfalls das Gegenteil unserer Aufgabe, und überhaupt bleibt es fraglich, ob sich die künstlerische und die menschliche Aufgabe trennen lassen... Gerade das deutsche Volk, dem es nie an Talenten fehlte und an Geistern, die sich der Forderung des gemeinen Tages enthoben fühlten, lieferte die meisten oder mindestens die ersten Barbaren unseres Jahrhunderts. Müssen wir davon nicht lernen?' Tagebuch 1946-1949, p.115.

hardly surprising that Frisch admired Brecht and his startlingly new dramatic theory, although the passage quoted above was written before they actually met in 1947.

The Tagebuch 1946-1949 shows how fascinated Frisch was by Brecht's constant questioning of all assumptions, his energy in thinking out every action or idea rather than justifying it retrospectively<sup>1</sup>. He does not agree with Brecht's opinions and conclusions, but is impressed by the thought process at work:

'Die Ergebnisse freilich gehören ihm. Zu sehen, wie er sie gewinnt, ist unser Gewinn.'<sup>2</sup>

It is possible that this contact stimulated Frisch to more precise consideration of what he himself intended to achieve with each work; it certainly did lead him to consider the application of a 'Verfremdungseffekt' in prose works<sup>3</sup>, a concept which fitted in very well with his own developing ideas on the qualities of good narrative writing.

The Tagebuch 1946-1949 shows clearly how these years were for Frisch a period for considering a great range of ideas: his concept of 'Bildnis', for example<sup>4</sup>, emerges here; he reflects on the nature of love, jealousy, sympathy, and begins to collect material which forms the basis of several works, such as the incident which is later transformed into the play Als der Krieg zu Ende war<sup>5</sup>. It is primarily drama and theatrical effects with which he is concerned when he turns to thoughts of literature, although

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1) Tagebuch 1946-1949, p.286.

2) op.cit., p.292.

3) op.cit., p.294.

4) op.cit., p.31ff.

5) op.cit., p.213ff.

some of his ideas could be applicable to narrative writing, despite the fact Frisch does not draw such parallels as he does specifically with the 'Verfremdungseffekt'. He writes, for example, of the effectiveness of a contrast between 'Wahrnehmung', what the onlooker sees, and 'Imagination', the ideas which some remark may awaken in him:

'...wenn ich ein fröhliches und übermütiges Fest wahrnehme, hat eine Stimme, die den Tod erwähnt, besondere Macht: die Imagination, die sie verlangt, entspricht ja meiner Angst. Der theatralische Bezug - das Widerspiel von Wahrnehmung und Imagination - wird besonders zwingend sein, besonders ergiebig, besonders zuverlässig, wenn er den Bedürfnissen der menschlichen Seele folgt.'<sup>1</sup>

There is no reason why such a contrast should not be incorporated in narrative; and indeed it will be shown that the interest in both Stiller and Homo Faber lies to a considerable extent in the contrast between what the protagonist is trying to achieve - a new personality or the safeguarding of an accepted way of life - and what is revealed about his true state of mind and abilities by the precise manner in which he says what he does, that is by the form of the works. As in the theatrical situation described above, the reader watches, notes and is apprehensive. It will also be shown that in Mein Name sei Gantenbein one of the basic weaknesses of the work is the almost complete lack of any such tension between what the central figure knows of himself and what the observant reader sees, giving the impression that the form is being used simply to puzzle and not to help and stimulate the reader to a deeper understanding.

In Die Schwierigen there is only the germ of such a contrast. The convention of third-person narrative and comment on characters could have

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1) Tagebuch 1946-1949, p.265.

been used to show on the one hand the characters in action, and in opposition to this what they do not know or understand about themselves and their capabilities. But such a procedure has not been followed; the portrayal of the characters' inner lives does not penetrate beyond what individual figures are fully aware of in themselves, even though other figures may not be aware of these feelings, - a very conventional manner of presentation, quite unlike the sustained double perspective of Stiller and Homo Faber, which reveals all too clearly a vulnerability the central figures would like to deny. The use of inner monologue in Die Schwierigen<sup>1</sup>, although adding depth to the portrayals, still restricts our vision to that of the characters. However, there is another dimension of awareness hinted at, an awareness towards which the characters are moving, and that is represented by the general autumnal atmosphere which pervades the work. Here we have a repeated hint - in the many descriptions - of the passage of time, the death of life and beauty, which counterbalances the exertions of the characters. One is reminded of the Faustian framework of eternity in Goethe's poem, against which all the efforts of men are seen in scale, although the characters of Die Schwierigen have no Faustian purposefulness. This loose but all-pervasive background is the one element of the work which might be considered an early stage of Frisch's double perspective technique, and is at least an improvement on the technique of Jürg Reinhart, in which the gulf between reality and aspiration is stated rather than shown in its

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1) Die Schwierigen, p.95.

constant effect<sup>1</sup>. What links Die Schwierigen most clearly with the later novels is the author's interest in characters who are preoccupied with the restrictions life in normal society imposes upon them, with characters who are trying to be something they are not, having no clear vision of what they want to be, but only one of what they do not want to be: that is, conventional, ordinary citizens with responsibilities and commitments. What differentiates it most clearly from the later novels is the looseness of construction.

In the period between Die Schwierigen and Stiller Frisch had, then, not only matured but also had given considerable thought to questions of literary form and the effect of works of literature upon the reader and the public. However, precisely why he waited ten years before he published another novel is a question impossible to answer with certainty. There is always a danger, when dealing with Frisch's work, to seek for deep motivation when there is none. As indicated in the introduction, Frisch seems to want to appeal to a wide public or at least not to be writing from very profound motives and convictions. He says in his Tagebuch 1946-1949 that he turned to theatrical writing after his early novels because it was suggested to him by Kurt Hirschfeld, the 'Dramaturg' of the Zürich Schauspielhaus<sup>2</sup>: there was no deeper reason. In fact he laughs at those

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- 1) Jürg Reinhart, e.g. p.31, where we are told that Jürg has two levels of thought, one for thoughts concerned with everyday life, and the second level of unfettered imagination. This very simple view of personality is abandoned to some extent even in Die Schwierigen where the characters are already less clearly aware of the difference between reality and imagination and are shown trying to bridge the gulf in action.
- 2) Tagebuch 1946-1949, p.280.

who seek only profound reasons for literary composition:

'Eine Bemerkung unsererseits, man habe ein Theaterstück geschrieben aus Lust, ein Theaterstück zu schreiben, verstimmt unsere Konsumenten tief. Wo bleibt denn (was ihres Erachtens den Schriftsteller ausmacht:) der Drang nach "Aussage"?'<sup>1</sup>

He belongs, he says in the same speech, to those writers who write

'weil ihnen Schreiben noch eher gelingt als Leben und weil für diesen Versuch, das Leben schreibend zu bestehen, der Feierabend nicht ausreicht...'.<sup>2</sup>

In the light of this type of statement, it might well be the case that after having written five plays and no narrative work except the very short

Bin oder Die Reise nach Peking,<sup>3</sup> Frisch felt simply that he wanted to attempt another novel. Doubtless his visit to America in 1951/1952 influenced him;

it is obvious that he has drawn on experiences of this period for both

Stiller and Homo Faber, a particularly interesting point in the light of the following passage:

'Räume unbekanntes Lebens, unerfahrene Räume, Welt, die noch nicht geschildert worden ist, nennenswert als Fakt, das ist der Raum der Epik. Europa hat sich in allen landschaftlichen, in allen historischen, aber auch in fast allen gesellschaftlichen Räumen schon oft genug, meisterhaft genug, mehr als genug geschildert; die epische Eroberung, die die Dichtung junger Völker beherrscht, ist so weit noch möglich, wie es etwa in der Schweiz noch einzelne unbestiegene Gipfel geben mag; eine ganze Welt aber, eine entscheidend andere, eine Terra incognita, die unser Weltbild wesentlich verändern könnte, haben unsere Epiker nicht mehr abzugeben... Die Epik, die homerische, als Mutter unserer Welten: erst dadurch, dass eine Welt erzählt wird, ist sie da. Und erst wenn sie da ist, kann sie erobert werden, wie es heute noch die amerikanische Epik tut.'<sup>4</sup>

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- 1) 'Öffentlichkeit als Partner', Rede zur Eröffnung der Frankfurter Buchmesse, 1958, Öffentlichkeit als Partner, Frankfurt, 1967, p.60.
  - 2) *ibid.*, p.56.
  - 3) This work has been excluded from the study since its format precludes any comparison of its form with that of the novels. It would however need to be included in a study of Frisch's ideas alone.
  - 4) Tagebuch 1946-1949, p.241.

America, Frisch feels, is one of the few lands not yet totally 'conquered', still open for epic portrayal; his visit therefore probably stimulated him to turn to novel-writing again, providing him with material, with experience in his view uniquely suited to 'epic' treatment. He must also have grown increasingly conscious of the range of experience needed to produce a literary work of novel proportion, to hold the reader's attention for a longer period than that of a theatrical performance; indeed he comments later that most people have no idea

'was an Leben geleistet werden muss, um eine reine Figur der Kunst hervorzubringen.'<sup>1</sup>

Die Schwierigen, as Hans Bänziger suggests<sup>2</sup>, shows distinct signs of influence by Keller, both in the choice of name - Reinhart - and in the subject, a series of love relationships: Das Sinngedicht and Der Grüne Heinrich both come to mind as works portraying men seeking fulfilment in love and art. The possible influence of Zollinger has also been mentioned. By 1953, however, Frisch could draw on a wealth of experience, and although the problems he treats are not necessarily the product of one age or social sphere only, he had accumulated the necessary material to make them relevant to the modern world, Stiller's escapism for example being seen in relation to the New World, which no longer symbolizes freedom simply by its name as was the case generations ago, but which nevertheless still possesses 'Räume unbekanntes Lebens' for the European reader in such different forms as the Bowery and Mexico. With Stiller, then, Frisch made an entirely new

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1) Öffentlichkeit als Partner, p.61.

2) Hans Bänziger, Frisch und Dürrenmatt, 5te. neubearbeitete Auflage, Bern, 1967, p.45.

and independent start in novel writing with material very much his own. From 1953 onwards his narrative writing shows a delight in experimentation with form entirely lacking in Die Schwierigen - a clear attempt to match his new material with new methods, to make the form not just an echo of the theme but a vital contributory element in the presentation of personality in depth.

There are however other possible reasons why Frisch returned to novel writing. His considerations on narrative form are applicable to some of his other basic contentions. He is preeminently a novelist and dramatist, not a philosopher; that is, the public to which he addresses himself is a wide one and abstract insight must be translated into particular manifestations. His particular 'Weltbild' is revealed through the sphere of personal relationships, particularly between man and woman. In many passages on love, jealousy, sympathy, honesty and such topics<sup>1</sup>, Frisch expounds his view that we all tend to make convenient images of people which do not do justice to their personalities. True love, for example, consists for Frisch in the readiness to be surprised:

'Eben darin besteht ja die Liebe, das Wunderbare an der Liebe, dass sie uns in der Schweben des Lebendigen hält, in der Bereitschaft, einem Menschen zu folgen in allen seinen möglichen Entfaltungen.'<sup>2</sup>

Sympathy is closely allied to this readiness:

'Sympathie hat Geduld, die Geduld der Hoffnung, sie behaftet uns nicht auf einer einzelnen Gebärde, die ungehörig ist, vorlaut, tappig, eitel, rücksichtslos, selbstgerecht; sie lässt uns stets eine weitere Chance...'.<sup>3</sup>

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1) Tagebuch 1946-1949, e.g. pp.421ff., 59ff., 408, 335ff.

2) Tagebuch 1946-1949, p.31.

3) op.cit., p.335.

In Biblical terms, we all have a tendency to make 'graven images' of our fellows:

'Du sollst dir kein Bildnis machen, heisst es, von Gott. Es dürfte auch in diesem Sinne gelten: Gott als das Lebendige in jedem Menschen, das, was nicht erfassbar ist. Es ist eine Ver-sündigung, die wir, so wie an uns begangen wird, fast ohne Unterlass wieder begehen - '.1

This process of over-simplification to which we are prone can apply equally to the single individual. Each of us, according to Frisch, tends to assume that views held in the present are valid, and those of the past condemnable; that is, we constantly re-interpret ourselves but

'wir sind das Damals, auch wenn wir es verwerfen, nicht minder als das Heute -'.2

That is to say, at any given time we regard one of the possibilities latent within us as the only true self and so make images, constantly changing images it is true, but images nevertheless of our own characters.

Given these basic conceptions about human affairs, it is clear that Frisch must have two primary aims as a writer; firstly to avoid, in the creation of fictional characters, figures which appear to the reader to be explicable in simple terms; and secondly, to prevent the reader in any case from being able to make summary judgements. To this second aim the 'Skizze' form, with the qualities which have been discussed, is admirably well suited.

There is, however, a danger inherent in the adoption of this narrative method. If the form is excessively loose it will verge on incomprehensibility and defeat the original purpose of provoking thought. It must

1) Tagebuch 1946-1949, p.37.

2) op.cit., p.22.

therefore be asked whether Frisch avoids this pitfall, and I propose to examine his manipulation of 'free' forms in this light.

Clearly the concept of 'image-making' could be incorporated in non-epic work, and the basic principles of the 'Skizze' incorporated into drama. Frisch has in fact done just this. The belief that our hastily made images of others are a barrier to deep knowledge of them is a central idea in the play Als der Krieg zu Ende war, in which a German woman and a Russian officer transcend in their love the barrier of prejudice which has grown up between the conquered and conquering nations, and refuse to accept the images of each other demanded by general national feeling. Image-making is the central theme of Andorra also, seen in terms of anti-semitism: a blow is struck at the way society connects certain characteristics with Jewishness and condemns them without further judgement wherever they appear. In Don Juan Frisch presents us with a comical variation; the great lover with an attraction to which all women succumb tries constantly to escape the results of this element within him and to devote himself to the purer sphere of 'Geometrie', but the 'image' prevails and Don Juan, having engineered his own 'Höllenfahrt' to outwit those who misunderstand his abandonment of one woman after another, is trapped in a web of domesticity inappropriate alike to both warring elements in his character - an amusing end to a potentially tragic situation.

An example of very fragmentary dramatic form is offered by Die Chinesische Mauer, which consists of a series of scenes which do not develop a simple situation, but which highlight facets of the central ideas - how tyranny functions in the guise of freedom, the ineffectiveness of the

idealist with his 'image' of a better world. Indeed Graf Öderland is called a 'Moritat in zwölf Bildern', a description which lays emphasis on the play's divergence from a more conventional dramatic form, its relationship to the 'Skizze'.

Does the novel offer possibilities for fictional creation which the drama does not? The choice of subject for dramatic presentation is to some extent restricted by the need to maintain visual as well as intellectual interest. Even if one abandons all pretensions to naturalistic presentation and allows monologues, the putting into words of deeply personal thoughts, a drama still does not justify its form unless the visual element adds something to the significance or impact of the words; the lonely figures in Waiting for Godot are seen to be lonely and isolated, but it is hard to conceive of one figure only as a sufficiently interesting subject to engage an audience's whole attention. Certainly drama can show us the effect on others of one man's particular view of reality and present in this way the impression of, as it were, mental claustrophobia to an audience; but it cannot so easily present the inner view, the functioning of a mind in great detail without losing all visual interest and becoming quite untheatrical. That is, it cannot so restrict the viewpoint of the observer that he sees events and people through the mind of one person only. It is one of the particular properties of narrative form that it can be made effectively to reduce the world to a single vision. The reader can be taken completely into one person's personality, allowed to see even the unconscious mind at work.

This quality which the narrative can exhibit has much in common with

the inherent nature of the 'Skizze' method of composition. Narrative, including the novel, which shows directly the movements in detail of one mind only, excludes the possibility of one character within the book having complete knowledge of another; it probes to a depth inaccessible to all but the author, who - to use E.M. Forster's terminology, is creator and narrator in one and entitled to superior vision.<sup>1</sup> The adoption of 'Skizzen' suggests a desire to minimize even the appearance of formal control by the author, to give to the mind which is the subject of the book entire freedom of expression and 'responsibility' for the ordering of the material. It was Flaubert who formulated the notion that the author should be 'comme Dieu dans l'univers, présent partout, visible nulle part'<sup>2</sup>, and to the furthering of this aim he employed 'le style indirect libre'<sup>3</sup>. And yet, when one reads his novels, a surprisingly clear picture of his attitudes emerges; where he enters a mind his evocation of its elusive workings is brilliant, but he betrays himself in his far from objective portrayals of the bourgeois. Frisch's novels suggest that he has attempted another method of fulfilling Flaubert's dictum, in order to eliminate as far as possible any awareness in the reader that he is being presented with a perfectly controlled 'Bildnis'.

Each of Frisch's last three novels deals primarily with a single mind; each of them, in other words, can be seen as developments of those

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- 1) E.M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel, London, 1927, p.87f.
  - 2) Gustave Flaubert, Letter to Louise Colet, 9 December, 1852. Oeuvres Complètes, Paris 1927, Correspondance III, p.61f.
  - 3) In German 'erlebte Rede'. Cf. Werner Hoffmeister, Studien zur erlebten Rede bei Thomas Mann und Robert Musil, The Hague, 1965, p.17ff.

possibilities already seen as peculiar to non-dramatic art. It is therefore important to investigate just how well these possibilities are manipulated, whether the depth of revelation, the detailed portrayal deemed attainable have in fact been achieved, and if so, by precisely what methods. One might add to the considerations to be borne in mind the fact that the novel is primarily a popular form of literary expression, since the 'public virtuel', to use Sartre's terminology, is coextensive with the vast public able to read.<sup>1</sup> Is it possible to deal with something as serious as one man's psychology and still create a work acceptable to a wide public?

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1) Jean Paul Sartre, 'Qu'est-ce que la littérature?', Situations II, Paris, 1948, p.136ff.

## CHAPTER THREE

### 'STILLER'

#### The Form

The general outlines of Stiller's character are relatively easy to establish: the combination of weakness and 'Selbstüberforderung', demanding too much of himself, has already been commented on at some length by Monika Wintsch-Spiess<sup>1</sup> and Eduard Stäuble<sup>2</sup>, and, as Reich-Ranicki points out<sup>3</sup>, these are far from being startling psychological revelations. But whereas considerable attention has been paid to Stiller's life past and 'present' as a problematic existence, less attention has been given to the book as a novel, as narrative art, in order to ascertain what the chosen manner of presentation adds to our appreciation of the ideas and issues.

The book is divided into two distinct parts - the notes made by Stiller in prison, fluctuating between present observation, reflection, reports of past events from the accounts of others and general comment, presented to us in sections of greatly varying length; and secondly, a postscript by a figure who appears indirectly in the first part: an apparently unsystematic work, therefore. But if one compares the beginning and end of the first part, it is clear that some kind of progression has taken place. 'Ich bin

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- 1) Monika Wintsch-Spiess, Zum Problem der Identität im Werke Max Frischs.
  - 2) Eduard Stäuble, Max Frisch, Ein Schweizer Dichter der Gegenwart, 2. Auflage, Amriswil, 1960.
  - 3) Marcel Reich-Ranicki, Deutsche Literatur in West und Ost, Munich, 1963, p.92.

nicht Stiller!' <sup>1</sup> is an assertion full of confident vehemence, whereas 'Mein Engel halte mich wach' <sup>2</sup> expresses tentative hope, fear, doubt; and the final recognition of Wilfried's generosity <sup>3</sup> is in effect a recognition of dependence on others which contrasts strongly with the defiant independence of the novel's opening words. A 'downhill' movement has taken place, and this is further confirmed by the two-part form; the replacement of the 'Aufzeichnungen' by a 'Nachwort' suggests that the individual has for some reason had to abandon his isolated individuality and surrender to a wider framework of values. But does the book really provide a convincing picture of this progression?

The 'Aufzeichnungen' are justified from within the story. Stiller is asked to write by his defence counsel:

'Ich soll mein Leben niederschreiben!...."Sie schreiben einfach die Wahrheit" sagt mein amtlicher Verteidiger, "nichts als die schlichte und pure Wahrheit...".'<sup>4</sup>

Clearly a coherent account is expected, and it is therefore significant that from the very start Stiller makes no attempt to produce any such work. He recognizes no duty to subject himself to the laws of coherent narrative, the subordination and ordering of events and comments. The 'Skizze' is therefore a highly personal form dictated initially by Stiller's defiant attitude, and indeed the fact that he writes at all is evidence of the same confidence; he could have refused to do so, but obviously feels a desire to assert his presence, to defy his 'enemies' in yet another way. In

1) Max Frisch, Stiller, Suhrkamp Hausbuch, Frankfurt, 1963, p.9.

2) op.cit., p.453.

3) op.cit., p.453.

4) op.cit., p.9.

adopting a free diary-like form in preference to continuous description he does however expose himself to certain dangers: a form free enough to be a self-confident taunt to the organs of Swiss justice is also a form free enough to betray the writer's fluctuations of mood, since at no point does he have an established 'line' or framework to which to return, behind which to hide any weakening. The free form is, then, potentially a 'spiritual monitor'.

If the choice and ordering of the material is entirely subjective, it is important to establish the content and the relative proportions of the sections. It is possible to classify these sections in nine main categories:

- 1) Stories of the type told to Knobel, the warder; for example, the tales about the 'Haaröl-Cangster'.
- 2) Transposed memories, for example the incidents with Florence, in the Bowery.
- 3) Actual memories of Mexico and other places, descriptions of the desert etc.
- 4) 'Borrowed' stories, such as the discovery of the Carlsbad Caverns by Jim White, or the anecdote related by Rolf about the flesh-coloured material.
- 5) Entirely fanciful stories, for example on Isidor, Rip van Winkle.
- 6) Observations about Stiller's life in prison.
- 7) Dreams.
- 8) Accounts of the past life of Stiller, Julika, Rolf and Sibylle.
- 9) Sections of general reflection, comment, thought, and various motifs which recur to the writer's mind.

There are, of course, other ways of classifying the material. In his thesis on Stiller Karlheinz Braun<sup>1</sup> analyses the material with reference primarily to its various levels of time ('Zeitebenen'). This careful investigation reveals an inordinate degree of playing with chronology, which leads Braun to say:

'Entscheidend bleibt, dass die verschiedenen Zeitebenen durch das Bewusstsein des Tagebuchschreibers regiert werden, dass alles, was geschieht und was erzählt wird, durch das Medium eines Bewusstseins erscheint, eines vielfältigen Bewusstseins, das sich in seiner Subjektivität in den verschiedenen Zeitschichten bewegen kann.'<sup>2</sup>

This view reinforces the conclusions suggested by the very fact that Stiller writes at all and dealt with above, but it does not do justice to the degree of subtlety with which the nature of the 'Bewusstsein' is portrayed in detail. Braun does indeed reveal this in a number of isolated examples, but mainly examples only of 'Rückwendungen', flashbacks, of which he says:

'Die Form der einzelnen Rückwendung wird bestimmt durch ihre jeweilige Stellung und spezifische Ausprägung.'<sup>3</sup>

This rather obvious statement needs considerable expansion, needs to be related to all the other material if it is to lead to an assessment of the novel as a whole and not remain, as it is, simply an isolated exemplification of one of Eberhard Lämmert's 'Bauformen des Erzählens'.<sup>4</sup> Braun makes some illuminating comments on individual passages, showing how much of Stiller's character emerges in, for example, an apparently objective

- 1) Karlheinz Braun, Die epische Technik in Max Frischs Roman 'Stiller', Dissertation, Frankfurt, 1959.
- 2) *op.cit.*, p.119.
- 3) Braun, *op.cit.*, p.102.
- 4) Eberhard Lämmert, Bauformen des Erzählens, Stuttgart, 1955, p.104ff.

description of New York attributed to Sibylle<sup>1</sup>, but he does not deal with the development to be observed in the 'Aufzeichnungen' as a whole. An analysis of the above categories of material should yield a picture of some kind of progression, unless the author's use of the 'Skizze' form is merely a shield for obscurity or uncertainty of purpose.

Stories of the type told to Knobel.

The stories of the first category occur only in the first three of the seven notebooks which constitute the 'Aufzeichnungen'. 'White' relates to Knobel how he killed a 'Haaröl-Gangster' in Jamaica<sup>2</sup>, and adds colourful details to delight his hearer - how he carried an Indian dagger in his left boot, and so on: details which have the same sort of comic effect for the more sophisticated reader as, for example, the unlikely but admirably documented and detailed adventures of Christian Reuter's Schelmuffsky. The outrageous exaggeration is perhaps a kind of release, since it proves that even if his modest claims to a particular identity are rejected by officialdom, Stiller can still find a credulous public; but the humorous tone is uppermost. While Stiller can remain sufficiently at ease to enjoy this kind of joke, his confidence regarding his legal position is obviously not seriously shaken. Werner Kohlschmidt finds the humour (and incidentally all the criticisms of Switzerland) too lively to be genuinely a product of Stiller's mind:

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- 1) Stiller, p.372f.  
Braun, op.cit., p.143ff.
- 2) Stiller, p.27f.

'Frisch lässt seinen mittelmässigen Helden...über sich hinauswachsen...in den atemberaubenden Flunkereien von den angeblichen Erlebnissen in Mexiko und Nordamerika, in denen eine Spur genialer Phantasie und Erzähkraft sichtbar wird, die freilich früher nie und in dieser Lebensphase Stillers zu spät zum Zuge kommt.'<sup>1</sup>

The accusation of 'Formbruch' is to a certain extent valid; Frisch is supplying his mediocre figure with his own narrative ability and perceptiveness. The reader can, however, accept these qualities as products of Stiller's heightened intellectual perception at this juncture: he is fighting, albeit mistakenly, for his very existence, as Kohlschmidt himself hints when he applies the adverb 'leidenschaftlich'<sup>2</sup> to Stiller's thinking. These sections are extremely well integrated into the development of the narrative as a whole because they are so carefully placed at the outset only and not arbitrarily distributed; and when they fade out Stiller does not lapse into the dullness Kohlschmidt seems to expect of him, but the fighting element becomes more open as confidence fades. Stiller has passed through genuinely upsetting experiences, but it is ultimately - as will be shown - his character rather than his intellectual capacities which leads him astray, his entire lack of humility. Consequently even if one allows that Frisch has added an extra spark of wit to his figure in the early stages in order to make the tales entertaining, the 'Formbruch' is not serious or obtrusive: it is evidence of Frisch's constant attempt to combine the purely entertaining and the serious, and the reader is readier to assimilate any such unintentional 'Verfremdung' than many critics allow.

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- 1) Werner Kohlschmidt, 'Selbstrechenschaft und Schuldbewusstsein im Menschenbild der Gegenwartsdichtung', Das Menschenbild in der Dichtung, ed. Albert Schaefer, Munich, 1965, p.186.
- 2) *op.cit.*, p.186.

A little after the first wild tale, Knobel is disappointed when Stiller is too tired to elaborate a story. The latter comments:

'Mein Wärter ist enttäuscht, aber darin ist auch etwas Gutes, merke ich mehr und mehr: gerade die enttäuschenden Geschichten, die keinen rechten Schluss und also keinen rechten Sinn haben, wirken lebensecht.'<sup>1</sup>

Stiller makes no attempt to hide his calculation and exploitation of Knobel's gullibility; it must be remembered that these writings are not private in the sense that a diary is - they are written for the officials concerned with his case to read. To talk like this, then, of the best way of getting others to believe a story when this is precisely the misdemeanour of which he is being accused with regard to his own identity, reveals a considerable degree of complacency, even of bravado.

In the second notebook, after Stiller has begun to review the relationship between Julika and Anatol, we read:

'Knobel, mein Wärter, wird eine Last. Wie ein Zeitungsleser wartet er auf die täglichen Fortsetzungen meiner Lebensgeschichte, wobei mir sein Gedächtnis zu schaffen macht.'<sup>2</sup>

This would seem to indicate that the playfulness noted above has diminished, that some other concern is obtruding upon Stiller's peace of mind: a slight but significant sign of commencing worry, which has not yet forced itself upon Stiller's consciousness, but which has affected his mood nevertheless. He then goes on, when Knobel presses him to tell more murder stories, to explain that there is more than one way to murder someone:

'Es gibt allerlei Arten, einen Menschen zu morden oder wenigstens seine Seele, und das merkt keine Polizei der Welt. Dazu genügt ein Wort, eine Offenheit im rechten Augenblick. Dazu genügt ein Lächeln....'<sup>3</sup>

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1) Stiller, p.76.

2) op.cit., p.147.

3) op.cit., p.147f.

The thought content in these lines will be referred to later, and it is of course important for Stiller's conception of human relationships as well as for his self-dramatization. Braun sees this whole section of conversation with Knobel merely as an excuse to comment on the preceding report on Julika and Anatol<sup>1</sup>, taking only the thought content into account; but this emphasizes too much the workings of the conscious mind alone. Stiller, we assume, actually said these words to Knobel rather than constructing an artificial conversation as a framework to support them; certainly they refer to feelings aroused by what has gone before, and the fact that they are reported in detail shows their importance for Stiller. But one should not forget the circumstances in which they were originally said. Stiller is quite aware of Knobel's lack of intelligence, as we have seen; that he nevertheless says these words to Knobel in particular is a slight sign of pensiveness replacing sheer energy and arrogance. The language is certainly inflated and 'dramatic', but clearly Knobel would not understand the concepts even in such terms; so these lines combine vestiges of the desire to amaze and hints that Stiller is gradually becoming slightly more introspective, although this hint is counterbalanced by the recognition that these words contain a judgement on Julika and Anatol, which is also a self-distancing of the speaker from them. The point is a small one, perhaps, but nevertheless an illustration of how Frisch manages to convey the workings of the conscious and unconscious minds at one and the same moment. We do not of course know at first how much weight to attach to the latter; it is only on a second reading, when one knows that Stiller is in fact Stiller,

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1) Braun, op.cit., p.96f.

that one even notices the hint of slight uneasiness. On first reading the critical tone leads one to wonder whether perhaps 'White' is not Stiller after all: in other words, a simple mystery is used to engage the reader's attention, a device often employed by Frisch.

In the third notebook we read of Knobel's change in attitude when he has been convinced that Stiller is in fact Stiller, and that all his stories are now as completely untrue as he believed them true originally. Stiller makes no effort to explain:

'Julika überzeugt sie alle...Ich esse und schweige.'<sup>1</sup>

These words contain an element of resignation, not of emotion because the realm of freedom Stiller created for himself in his melodramatic tales was never a serious one; but compared with the energy of the opening lines of the book and of the earlier tales related with gusto to Knobel, there is noticeable lethargy here. Taking these stories as a category, the most significant point is that they do not occur after the third notebook. By the time they have been seen through, Stiller is already showing signs of slight disturbance, and no longer has the spirit to make up such amusing expressions of freedom and carefree roles. The confidence evident earlier on, and confirmed by such episodes as his arrest when he is delighted by the sight of Swiss orderliness in confusion, now disappears from the 'Aufzeichnungen' and becomes significant by its absence, bearing witness to a gradual change in mood, a greater vulnerability to objection and attack; and this is above all a change which Stiller does not himself consciously realize or comment upon at this stage, but which emerges for the reader nevertheless.

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1) Stiller, p.237.

### Transposed memories

A parallel case to the first category of material is offered by the incidence and nature of transposed memories. The stories featuring Florence and the cat undergo a subtle transformation, illustrating well how Stiller tries to avoid the true conclusions which he should draw from the past. In the first notebook the material is used for sensation and amusement, to impress Knobel, with a touch of arrogant exhibitionism. This is evident in the material itself - the exotic setting, the beautiful woman etc.<sup>1</sup> - and also in the manner of narration, in the way names are introduced without prior explanation and Knobel's amazement met with a laconic 'Klar.'<sup>2</sup> This is essentially story-telling for one's own benefit, for the sheer excitement of winning breathless admiration.

In the third notebook the same material recurs in somewhat different form.<sup>3</sup> It is related vehemently as a defence against Dr. Bohnenblust (an ironic contrast in his narrowness to Zollinger's character of the same name, illustrating the bad side of Swiss parochialism!) and his scepticism regarding 'White's' past; but in the process it is reduced to its true proportions as an example of Stiller's failure with women. He had tried to turn this instance of his insufficiency into one of his adventurous nature, and only when challenged factually does he produce a truer picture. Had he made up the above mentioned story for Knobel, this section would be less important; but we see now that his exhibitionism has been primarily a means of covering up his own sense of weakness, of reliving and changing

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1) Stiller, p.57ff.

2) op.cit., p.59.

3) op.cit., p.219ff.

the past. This is a good instance of how Stiller gives himself away unconsciously. By using the same material twice in different ways he exposes more of himself than he had intended, for his aim in this second narration is simply to establish the fact that he did live in America. But because of his unsystematic way of writing, material introduced spontaneously on one level testifies against him on another. If he had restricted himself to a simple - if fictitious - account of 'White's' past and not instituted this diary form with which to assert his presence, his character and consciousness in 'present' time, Stiller would have been less vulnerable.

Also in this third notebook is the Bowery incident, when Stiller claims to have found his step-father dying in the street.<sup>1</sup> The aim of its introduction is to prove his knowledge of New York and to give colour and vitality to his past life in order to distinguish it as far as possible from that of a Swiss citizen. However, by claiming that the man he saw was his father, he exaggerates too much; the story would have served a useful purpose without this embellishment, and in fact yet again he has set a trap for himself by his unpremeditated narrative technique. As will be seen, the 'Aufzeichnungen' become increasingly less well-controlled, and in this case a later remark destroys the initial effect of the Bowery material. In the crucial seventh notebook we read, on the occasion of Stiller's encounter with his stepfather:

'Er ist ziemlich vertrottelt...damals in der nächtlichen Bowery, als er mir einfiel, hatte ich ihn mir nicht viel anders vorgestellt.'<sup>2</sup>

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1) Stiller, p.208ff.

2) op.cit., p.443.

The truth about the strange incident would therefore seem to be that he saw an old man and thought, probably with feelings of guilt and evaded responsibility, of this stepfather, smothering these feelings of guilt and failure by making the incident dramatic, by picturing himself as a far more daringly irresponsible character than he knew himself to be; in other words, he made dull weakness into interesting evil.

Stiller is, therefore, seen to emerge gradually from his world of illusions, which give way to reflection, more serious thought and honest vision. That he should take events which really occurred and thus transpose, dramatize them, is not evidence of poverty of imagination, but of a desire to convince not only others but also himself that his past has been full of incident and unusualness. He is in effect trying to recreate his past according to an 'image'; but increasingly in the course of the notebooks he is forced to turn from positive recreation to defence, from grand illusion to recognition of insignificance. The cessation of these transposed memories highlights this gradual change. Stiller is free to play with his material as he wishes, but his choices are not necessarily dictated by careful consideration, and thus discrepancies such as those dealt with here show his inner state.

#### Actual memories.

The introduction of less fanciful, more realistic memories is nevertheless equally revealing. In the first notebook<sup>1</sup>, we find memories of Mexico, introduced significantly by the phrase: 'Ich sitze in meiner

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1) Stiller, p.29ff.

Zelle...'. A feeling of confinement sends Stiller's mind back to the space and movement of Mexico, and the very last line - why didn't I stay?<sup>1</sup> - gives a hint of dejection. These details, together with the length of the pictures, suggests that there is more at work than a simple desire to convince the reader that he had actually been in Mexico: this could have been done in a few lines. An ideal of both physical and spiritual freedom thus emerges, an assertion that there is a life beyond the present of which he must remind himself, for he attributes the feeling of enclosure solely to his present position in a prison cell. Later he will admit that even in the 'New World' he found no more satisfaction than he had in Switzerland<sup>2</sup>, but here he still believes in escape, he needs to believe. The emotional rather than factual content of these memories is evident when one notices that they rarely occur quite spontaneously: they are provoked by encounters with Dr. Bohnenblust<sup>3</sup>, and are an assertion of freedom in contrast with all he represents. Clearly Stiller feels threatened, from which one can deduce an insecurity which he will not openly admit. On the lowest level of interest this of course helps to make his identity ambiguous.

Memories of this category do not occur again until the seventh notebook. Another picture of Mexico is given<sup>4</sup>; the preceding section, the visit to the dentist, has passed off quite well, and then suddenly this unexpected theme returns. By this stage, if one considers all the material, it is clear that Stiller is reaching crisis point. The hopeful opening to the

1) Stiller, p.34.

2) op.cit., p.400ff.

3) op.cit., pp.40ff., 51ff.

4) op.cit., p.378ff.

notebook is a momentary respite<sup>1</sup>, for a time a jocular tone is resumed, but it is the section on Mexico which reveals the true state of the unconscious mind, for the memory appears without external motivation - 'ich weiss nicht unter welchem Zwang..' <sup>2</sup> - and brings in many motifs relevant to Stiller's case: love, devotion, the inexorable movement of time and life, death and decay. The impression for the reader is one of intense depression; and for the first time we have here a memory not being used for a specific purpose to some extent - an indication of just how inward-looking Stiller has become, in contrast to his earlier need to convince and his more outward-going energy. He no longer recreates, no longer posits a world to which he could escape; this admission is made specifically when he sees clearly that his life in America was never one of true independence.<sup>3</sup>

Just as he used to imagine Julika watching in order to avoid the sensation of loneliness<sup>4</sup>, so he has used his memories of Mexico and their contrast with the 'present' to avoid recognition of the fact that his troubles lay within himself and not in his surroundings. The disappearance of these memories for so large a part of the 'Aufzeichnungen' suggests therefore an increasingly strong pull back into the life he had tried to escape, an increasing involvement with it so that even toying with escape becomes a thing of the past. Then just before the final capitulation the old life recurs to him, almost as a leave-taking, with the awareness that it too was not Utopian. This is a touch of almost Racinian simplicity: one thinks

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1) Stiller, p.375.

2) op.cit., p.378.

3) op.cit., p.400ff.

4) op.cit., p.398.

of Phèdre imprisoned in her own passion, shunning company and longing for an impossible freedom: 'Dieux! Que ne suis-je assise à l'ombre des forêts!'<sup>1</sup>

Thus it might be said that the occurrence of these memories shows the general trend of Stiller's state of mind, from self-deception to self-recognition.

### Stories 'borrowed' by Stiller

Stiller's state of mind is also revealed by stories which Stiller adopts from other sources, although they are used with a greater degree of deliberateness. The discovery of the Carlsbad Caverns related in the third notebook is certainly very consciously included.<sup>2</sup> Both the man who dies and the man who escapes are called Jim White, and it is in fact an allegory of Stiller's own past as he sees it - of the death of his old self and the emergence of the new - and it doubtless owes much to Plato's Cave Allegory<sup>3</sup>, in which only those souls which emerge into the light have any idea what true reality is. The use of such a guise for his meaning shows that Stiller is midway between confidence and worry: he is sufficiently worried to be drawn back from the present to his past struggles to start a new life, but these are clothed in pretentiousness. There is genuine depth of feeling in the details of the life-and-death struggle, but the arrogance of the adaptation outweighs this. Not satisfied with creating new figures and roles, Stiller contravenes the laws of fact and time, in

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1) Racine, Phèdre, Act I, Scene III.

2) Stiller, p.184ff.

3) Plato, The Republic, Book VII.

order to find a striking expression of his situation. He is starting to admit his problematic past, but he is still proud of his 'victory': all this is contained in the section, far more than just Stiller's intended message to his readers - that he is a man of considerable experience. The flamboyant earlier stories, which were used to lay claim to this also, have given way to a more serious claim to experience: an indication of increasing unease which is as yet counterbalanced by a considerable degree of self-importance, self-dramatization.

Another story which Stiller adopts is that told by the 'Staatsanwalt', Rolf, about the packet of flesh-coloured material foisted upon him.<sup>1</sup> The significance of this tale is later explained by Rolf<sup>2</sup>: it relates to one's attempt to overlook parts of one's nature, to hide emotion behind intellectuality. At its first occurrence however it is related without comment; yet if one again remembers that these notebooks were originally intended to be a record for officials to read, one can measure the degree to which Stiller has diverged from his original purpose of defiance and challenge. This story surely indicates that something in its content affects Stiller; it would do nothing to aid his case with Bohnenblust, and is clearly a purely reflective entry. It will be seen that the amount of reflection increases through the notebooks, and this story is a subtle indication of the change actually taking place. The stories which Stiller previously related were more positive, purposeful; they are here replaced by introspection, even if it is not so formulated. Even if one goes only

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1) Stiller, p.238ff.

2) op.cit., p.380.

so far as to say that the tale is appreciated by Stiller simply as an example of escape with difficulty from one's own mistakes, the ambiguity still remains, the possibility that subconsciously Stiller senses a very much closer application to himself.

In the case of both these 'borrowed' stories, then, one can detect indications of Stiller's state of mind behind the conscious use of the narratives. Precisely what we are to deduce is not clear, and by this means Frisch maintains our constant wondering interest; once again Stiller's refusal to conform to the request for a straightforward reveals rather than hides his past and continuing worries.

#### More fanciful stories

Ambiguity and the degree to which Stiller is unaware of it also provide the major interest in his use of two rather more fanciful stories. The tale of Isidor<sup>1</sup>, as Braun points out<sup>2</sup>, occurs before a meeting with Julika and is a kind of warning to leave the past alone; Isidor leaves because his wife wants to know all about her husband's actions, not who he really is, why he acts as he does - she makes an image of him which will not allow of change. But the undeniable humour of this section, such as Isidor's splendid gesture of shooting into the cream cake, is heavily weighted to Isidor's advantage. His wife is made to look entirely ridiculous and because of this we overlook all Isidor's unreasonableness, his lack of effort to make the marriage work. Stiller is obviously

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1) Stiller, p.47ff.

2) Braun, op.cit., p.53f.

unconcerned about such possible interpretations; he is humourously arrogant - and thus repeats the same mistakes he has made in his own past, with no more insight. In fact the humour signifies an increased sense of security and confidence about the rightness of what has happened, about the validity of his own judgement.

The tale of Rip Van Winkle also reveals how Stiller's attitudes prevent him seeing more than one side of a story's significance.<sup>1</sup> Braun interprets this as a parable of the man who returns as a stranger to a world in which he was never really at home.<sup>2</sup> Margrit Henning sees it as an expression of Stiller's inability to say who he is.<sup>3</sup> Both interpretations are possible; it is quite true that Stiller sees Rip Van Winkle as a man misunderstood by his fellows, a man who has experienced wonderful things but is ridiculed, disbelieved, thought dead by all, even the closest relative. But neither of the above critics points out that Rip is also the man who slept away his life, who by dreaming failed to contribute to life in the social community. In other words, the story could be turned against Stiller, but he is entirely oblivious of unfavourable implications. As with the Isidor story, Stiller is too confident to see any ambiguity. Of these two sections Margrit Henning says:

'Sie kennzeichnen seine (Stillers) verzweifelte Situation, die Unmöglichkeit, zu sprechen und einfach die Wahrheit niederzuschreiben...Da er nicht selbst formulieren kann, erzählt er Vorgeformtes.'<sup>4</sup>

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- 1) Stiller, p.81ff.
  - 2) Braun, op.cit., p.55f.
  - 3) Margrit Henning, Die Ich-Form und ihre Funktion in Thomas Manns 'Doktor Faustus' und in der deutschen Literatur der Gegenwart.
  - 4) Henning, op.cit., p.164f.

This is to some extent true; Stiller cannot say what he wants to openly and must shield it in parable form for the sake of his own safety as 'White'. But this view overlooks the confidence detectable in both tales, confidence which is seen to approach arrogance when the failure to see more serious implications in the selected material is noted. It is also surely important that both tales occur in the first notebook and that nothing comparable appears in any later one. This is a sign of the very gradual loss of a sense of security, another instance of Stiller's arbitrary choice of material now testifying against him, revealing more than was intended.

#### Observations of prison life

Stiller's observations of prison life also reveal more than he perhaps realizes, and certainly more than just curiosity. At the very beginning of the book Stiller turns from his vehement assertion 'Ich bin nicht Stiller!' to his annoyance that whisky is denied him in prison; this is clear evidence of his self-assertiveness, of a will to make his presence felt in the 'present' by any means.<sup>1</sup> When he describes exercising in the prison yard<sup>2</sup> it is with a distinctly amused objectivity which shows that he is not writing purely for his own benefit such as is true of later sections of the book, especially in the seventh notebook; he is seeking an effect, and despite the fact that these details will not make his claim to another particular identity any more credible, they do constitute a direct challenge to authority, a desire to show that the writer is a character with lively

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1) Stiller, p.9.

2) op.cit., p.20ff.

opinions in the present. The details of the regimentation<sup>1</sup> show that he still has time to observe and is not yet too deeply preoccupied with his problematic position, and other observations add to this view.<sup>2</sup> The information on the Jewish fellow-prisoner who has committed suicide<sup>3</sup> is the last of this kind of notation and is more serious in tone, more introspective, as though even the most stringent keeping to the present cannot prevent the intrusion of reminders of the past - when one later learns that Stiller has also once tried to commit suicide the tone of anxiety is understandable. Obviously on first reading this is not clear, but if the reason for the change in tone and the subsequent omission of these sections is hidden, it is still apparent that Stiller gradually begins to lose contact with the present, with all around him. Thus, from the occurrence of this type of material, which hardly enters after the first notebook except on one occasion when it is obscured by reflection and worry<sup>4</sup>, the reader can sense Stiller's discomfort before he is himself fully aware of it or ready to admit it. The freedom of choice he has permitted himself shows all too well the uncertainty behind the apparent confidence which made him start to write in this loose way.

### Dreams

Dreams occur at several points, and these should be clearer indications of one's mental state than conscious fabrications, but again there is still

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1) Stiller, p.38.

2) op.cit., p.46.

3) op.cit., pp.80 & 98.

4) op.cit., p.217f.

a gulf between what is said and what could be said with greater insight. The early examples constitute a kind of challenge, since to admit to having dreamed of Stiller is provocative. Stiller dreams for example of Julika and her husband<sup>1</sup>, both of whom display hands bearing stigmata; the dream provides an opportunity to talk about Stiller as a quite separate character. But if one looks below the surface of this consciously detached portrayal, it shows once more the limitations of Stiller's own insight into his past. It will be confirmed constantly and made explicit at the end of the seventh notebook that while Stiller's experience with his 'Engel' made him see the pointlessness of his constant struggle with Julika, it induced him to make a wrong decision - to start again in a new setting rather than in the old. He has progressed from the days when he lived as Stiller, since he admits in the dream that both sides should bear blame, but his far from humble antipathy to sheer insignificance is still at work in the tastelessly 'dramatic' visualization of the suffering figures. The new Stiller mentions the dream openly because he feels himself so far detached from those concerned in it, but below the level of his conscious thought his attitudes remain the same: the exaggerated demands for 'Gnade' and 'Erlösung', of which Rolf will speak<sup>2</sup>, are ready to emerge again when Stiller is finally forced to resume his true identity.

The next dream occurs in the third notebook<sup>3</sup>, when Stiller has dreamt of himself as White in the uniform belonging to the 'vanished' Stiller. This dream also is an expression of confidence, of defiance, a claim that

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1) Stiller, p.73.

2) op.cit., p.498ff.

3) op.cit., p.205.

even in the unguarded world of the sub-rational he feels entirely separate from 'der Verschollene'. However, a few pages further on we read:

'Schon wieder von der Uniform geträumt.'<sup>1</sup>

This is recorded doubtless with much the same defiant intention as the above dreams; it would be possible to explain its occurrence as a natural result of 'White' being plagued with details of Stiller's past life, but ambiguity nevertheless creeps in - could the uniform have linked up in his sub-conscious mind with the Spanish Civil War incident? Could it indicate that even though he is not fully aware of it, Stiller is still haunted by his 'Versagen' as a soldier? In any case, the mere fact that he has begun to dream more frequently is evidence of less settled nerves than he appeared to have in Book One. It is open to the reader to wonder whether this is due to aggravation or unease.

In the fifth notebook a dream about Julika is recorded<sup>2</sup>, which links up interestingly with the 'stigmata' dream:

'Ihr Blick bittet mich dringend, nicht zu glauben, was sie mir schreibt, denn sie schreibt es unter einem Zwang, ihr Blick bittet mich sie von diesem Zwang zu erlösen...'

There is implicit in this last word the belief that he, Stiller, has an exalted duty to perform; this may not be an entirely conscious thought, but the word used implies that the self-importance which caused the initial failure of the marriage is still very active within him. This section occurs significantly immediately after the visit of Sturzenegger, which has stirred up the past in Stiller's mind, and the dream betrays his unconscious reaction.

1) Stiller, p.217.

2) op.cit., p.295.

This same dream recurs later<sup>1</sup> in a more anguished form. The breaking point is near for Stiller, and here we see his now desperate attempt to put the responsibility for what is to come on Julika; from seeing himself as 'Erlöser' he has been driven back on exaggeration of his faults - 'Ich "kreuzige" Julika'<sup>2</sup> - in order to be able to demand 'Gnade' from her rather than face up to his own utter insignificance. It is much easier to call oneself a terrible sinner and put the burden of forgiveness on another, than to learn to live with one's weakness.

Even nearer the crisis, past dreams reawaken in Stiller's memory.<sup>3</sup> These are simply related, not understood, although they reveal clearly two important aspects of his character: the dream of Julika seems selfishly to make her responsible for his difficulties by attributing scorn and cruelty to her, and the dream of his mother represents his feelings of guilt and failure in human relationships in general. These are aspects of Stiller's character which led to his attempted escape from the past, and the present uncritical, even though humbler approach to their recurrence foreshadows the difficulties which will be apparent in the events of the 'Nachwort'. Stiller is aware of his 'Nichtigkeit' but as yet unable to accept full responsibility for it - the violence of the Julika dream indicating that the fight will go on.

Frisch writes of dreams in his diary:

'Unser Bewusstsein als das brechende Prisma, das unser Leben in ein Nacheinander zerlegt, und der Traum als die andere Linse, die es wieder in sein Urganzes sammelt...'.<sup>4</sup>

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1) Stiller, p.394.

2) op.cit., p.395.

3) op.cit., p.450f.

4) Tagebuch 1946-1949, p.23.

Dreams restore a personality to completeness, overriding the artificial divisions the conscious mind makes, and this is most certainly true of Stiller; he views his life linearly - what is past in time is no longer part of his 'present' self, he feels, but his dreams reveal a persistence of attitudes of which he is not fully aware. In addition to this function, the dreams as a whole act as a guide to Stiller's changing mood; he records some in confidence as a challenge, but as he becomes more involved in the past, the dreams take on a less purposeful and more anxious, questioning aura, just as the 'Aufzeichnungen' as a whole move gradually from conscious provocation aimed at the officials who will read them, to a desperate need to write simply in order not to lose hold on events, on himself. Stiller, by the end of his writings, no longer has any pre-conceived meanings for what he sets down. He writes in order to find sense:

'...ich merke auch jetzt, wie ich....unwillkürlich versuche, die Dinge zu reimen, um allem "einen Sinn zu geben". Dabei habe ich gar nicht zu geben. Ich habe den "Sinn" lediglich empfangen.'<sup>1</sup>

The fact that he cannot detect the attitudes apparent to the reader - lack of real honesty, shifting of responsibility - is an intensification of precisely those same attitudes. Once again the freedom which Stiller has claimed for himself in his writing betrays more than he sees: the points made are rarely just those intended because there is no overall guiding plan. When he thinks he is writing for the 'present', his words bring back the true past, bring back the whole self which will dictate his future; and it is indeed precisely the attitudes evident in these dreams which shape the events recorded in the 'Nachwort'.

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1) Stiller, p.450.

Accounts of the past life of Julika and others.

The kind of objectivity which Stiller tries to accord his dreams is also evident in his accounts of the past life of Julika, her husband, Rolf and Sibylle. It will however be seen that this objectivity is not spontaneous, and in general programmatic to the point of entirely negating its own characteristics - in other words we find highly subjective 'objectivity'. There are nevertheless some sections where this is not quite so clear, when we wonder briefly whether we are not mistaken about the identity of the writer: the mystery element is almost imperceptibly maintained by these slight doubts.

Braun points out that the deliberately involved time-scale is a way of creating distance from his material for Stiller:

'Die Zeitschichtung ist von grösster Funktionalität für das Thema des Romans. Ermöglichen die Zeiten doch - dadurch, dass sie im Bewusstsein des Lesers immer klar getrennt bleiben - jene Distanz herzustellen, die der Tagebuchschreiber, Mr. White, benötigt, um der Geschichte Stillers, die er nicht als seine eigene anerkennen will, als ein Fremder gegenüberstehen zu können.'<sup>1</sup>

Braun means by this three levels of time: the time at which the events actually occurred, the time at which Rolf or another relates them, and the time at which Stiller records this relation. But it is not enough to note simply the existence of these different levels; Braun, it is true, does go on to mention a few ways in which Stiller reminds the reader of his 'Distanz' by small interruptions<sup>2</sup>, but he does not trace the variations in this procedure, except to say that the more interested in the events the

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1) Braun, Die epische Technik in Max Frischs Roman 'Stiller', p.124.

2) *op.cit.*, p.85f.

writer becomes, the greater is the danger that this method will give way.<sup>1</sup>

The first 'encounter' with Stiller for 'White' is the entry into Switzerland.<sup>2</sup> The dominant tone is definitely one of humour, and this is a measure of his confidence. So too is the frigidly correct reference to Julika - 'Frau Julika Stiller-Tshudy, die Gattin des Verschollenen'<sup>3</sup> - in formal terms such as apply to a total stranger in whom one is not particularly interested. There is nothing exaggerated in this. Equally careful is the treatment of Wilfried Stiller's letter, which is reproduced in full without comment.<sup>4</sup> Clearly Stiller does not yet feel himself endangered: he is reserved rather than over-emphatic. Indeed, he is confident enough to play at being Stiller with Bohnenblust<sup>5</sup>, to play the game of possible identities - the question of how he could prove himself to be a 'Kriegsverbrecher' is a delightful touch of humour aimed at scandalising the organs of justice.<sup>6</sup> However, a very slight hint of lack of ease is visible in the following section<sup>7</sup>, where the official details about Stiller are written down; the paragraph starts in an entirely disinterested tone, but the writer feels the need to state specifically that he is not Stiller, as though he were not quite sure that his detachment is sufficiently conveyed by the

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1) Braun, Die epische Technik in Max Frischs Roman 'Stiller', pp. 126ff., p.135.

2) Stiller, p.10ff.

3) op.cit., p.29.

4) op.cit., p.39f.

5) op.cit., p.40.

6) op.cit., p.41.

7) op.cit., p.45.

tone alone. It is at such points that we begin to wonder who in fact is writing; the objectivity is a little over-emphatic. The speculation about Stiller's political past is, as Braun indicates<sup>1</sup>, a red herring used to create a distinction between the writer and his subject, a very clever tactic, but it would have functioned better without the final comment:

'...die blosse Tatsache, dass ein Mann plötzlich verschollen ist, verlockt natürlich zu Spekulationen.'<sup>2</sup>

This is true, would be entirely true were 'White' genuine, but the very statement of such a truth suggests a need on the writer's part to justify himself which is unhealthy: a far from strong suggestion, but one to intrigue the reader.

A further section opens with ambiguity yet again.<sup>3</sup> The first remark betrays annoyance - 'Nichts bleibt mir erspart' - which could be interpreted as either disguise for fear or genuine indignation at humiliating treatment; the mystery element is nicely balanced. 'Die Dame aus Paris'<sup>4</sup> is an unnecessarily cool, dissociating appellation, but then the humour returns to clear the atmosphere: the last sentence - 'Sie behauptet meine Gattin zu sein, und wird mit dem Flugzeug kommen.'<sup>5</sup> - is a masterpiece of incongruous association, a very subtle way of reducing the claim to the same level of insignificance as the mode of travel without resorting to polemic. Julika is made to look ridiculous and possessive, the reader's sympathy is gained for the writer, but only for as long as he controls his violence as

1) Braun, op.cit., p.109f.

2) Stiller, p.45.

3) ibid., p.46.

4) ibid., p.46.

5) ibid., p.46.

here. The same trick is repeated later<sup>1</sup>, when Stiller writes of 'die Dame aus Paris, die sich für meine Gattin hält.' The whole sentence is very derogatory; by repeating yet again where she has come from, Stiller suggests that a ridiculous degree of fuss is being made, as well as, possibly, that she is a woman concerned with all that Paris represents in popular image - fashion, extravagance of every sort - rather than a woman of sense. This point is intensified by the phrase 'die sich für meine Gattin hält.' It would have been more correct to write, 'die mich für ihren Gatten hält', but in this peculiar turn of phrase Stiller manages to accuse Julika of delusions concerning herself and thus to dissociate himself from her as far as possible. One is given the image of a woman who does not quite know who she is, and nothing could be more damaging, far more flattering for 'White' - the inference being that he knows quite well who he is.

However, once our attention and caution have been aroused, albeit in small measure, by some of the above examples, others begin to raise more queries. When, for example, Stiller describes Julika<sup>2</sup>, and describes her in detail, the wary reader might interpret this in three ways: it could be an entirely genuine description of a stranger, it could be a deliberate attempt to make one feel that he does not know this woman, or it could also be a genuine re-experiencing of her, a self-persuasive account in the trust that the past is really gone for ever in its old form, that all things have become as new. There is probably something of both these last intentions

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1) Stiller, p.56.

2) op.cit., p.64.

in the passage, but it is still sufficiently plausible as an account of a first meeting to make one waver between belief, distrust, and sympathy. We do not of course know whether the ensuing conversation is a complete record, but it is certainly clear that the remarks made by Julika or chosen for emphasis by Stiller are hints to the reader that she is 'image-making'. Yet the conversation could have happened exactly like this: it is not too obviously weighted on one side. Again the reader is left guessing.

In this first notebook the objectivity is well managed. For example, Stiller writes of the visit to Davos:

'Es ist genau so, wie Thomas Mann es beschrieben hat.'<sup>1</sup>

Such a phrase makes it quite plain that he wants it to be understood that he has never visited Davos before, but he refrains from saying so specifically, from rising to the attack; and the literary reference also allows him to comment on the visit without venturing any possibly incriminating opinions on the place or its atmosphere. Nevertheless one wonders whether this is not a shield for fear as much as genuine detachment; and it could also be evidence of an inability to experience in depth. We learn later of books which Stiller has owned<sup>2</sup>, all of them necessary for the man who purports to be well-read; so this reference to Thomas Mann could conceivably be a similar 'blind', using the experience of another to hide one's own poverty - and if this is true, it links up with Stiller's inability to experience others as they really are. Of course, a literary reference gives a timeless quality to a description, and when Stiller goes

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1) Stiller, p.78.

2) op.cit., p.300.

on to ridicule his companions' attempts to remind him of everything he has supposedly seen before, he says: 'Als leugnete ich den würzigen Duft der Tannzapfen!'<sup>1</sup>, by which he stresses how real the 'present' impressions are for him. Both means therefore exclude any past, concentrate attention on present and timeless reality. This is, of course, crooked thinking, special pleading, since Bohnenblust never questioned Stiller's ability to appreciate in the present, but it is a lightly managed means of irony; there is no excessively obtrusive intention to ridicule the other characters involved, although some ambiguity is present for the attentive reader. One can accept, for example, that Stiller's use of Julika's Christian name could be the result simply of growing acquaintance with a woman who after all claims an intimate relationship, but then Stiller reverts to the old formal title<sup>2</sup>, and endangers all he has gained, since the context suggests that the reason for this reversion is simply fear: 'Frau Julika Stiller-Tschudy hat meine alte Narbe über dem rechten Ohr entdeckt und möchte wissen, woher ich sie habe.' The implication is very strong that there is something in his past which Stiller does not want touched, and that the formality is a means of holding off enquiry.

In the description of Zürich<sup>3</sup>, Stiller again writes as if he had never visited the town, and again with enough subtlety to avoid overt denials:

'...in dem blanken Licht seiner Föhnbläue, die, vom Weiss der Mäwen verziert, auch dem Einheimischen viel Kopfweh verursachen soll, hat dieses Zürich tatsächlich einen eigenen Zauber...'.<sup>4</sup>

- 1) Stiller, p.78.
- 2) op.cit., p.79.
- 3) op.cit., p.89ff.
- 4) op.cit., p.90.

The use of 'soll' alone presupposes hearsay, not actual experience.

In the second notebook, when details of the past are narrated at some length, the deliberate objectivity is more noticeable. Strictly speaking, to have written these details out should have been enough to show that 'White' felt himself separate from them; but such care is taken to emphasize this separation that one feels the sense of unease in the writer. He is being too careful to deny the accusations made against him, and perhaps too there is an element of self-persuasion involved. Again the reader's curiosity is aroused about 'White's' identity.

The method used is simply to make it quite clear that he, 'White', has a 'present' identity entirely separate from those in the narration. Phrases such as 'Als Fremder hat man den Eindruck...'<sup>1</sup>, or the frequently repeated 'ich protokolliere'<sup>2</sup> reinforce too obviously the detachment already inherent in the preterite tense of the narration. Comments such as

'Es ist komisch und grässlich, dass solche Dinge zwischen zwei Menschen, die sich lieben, plötzlich eine Rolle spielen, aber es ist so.'<sup>3</sup>

- such comments are included less for their value as judgements than for the reminder they give that the narrator is a man of experience who can view such things with suitable detachment. And should that detachment seem to be threatened, Stiller brings down the emotional temperature effectively by adding 'Usw.'<sup>4</sup> where he has ventured some criticism, and perhaps feels that

1) Stiller, p.104.

2) op.cit., e.g. pp.100, 105: 'Ich will aber versuchen, in diesen Heften nichts anderes zu tun als zu protokollieren..'

3) op.cit., p.109.

4) op.cit., e.g. p.126.

he might be growing too involved. Or a phrase such as that with which he interrupts the account of Julika's friendship in the sanatorium - 'Er selbst starb im späten September.'<sup>1</sup> - breaks the sequence of events and reminds us that they are being viewed from a higher standpoint.

None of the open criticisms ventured against Julika is extreme or vitriolic, but there are many insinuations which may or may not be deliberate, but which in either case reveal a far from unbiassed view. For example:

'Julika wusste also, trotz seines Schweigens, um Stillers sommerliches Verhältnis mit einer andern.'<sup>2</sup>

An apparently factual statement: but it stresses Julika's over-sensitivity, her preoccupation with Stiller's 'private' life. The following sentence further blackens the image of her:

'Verhältnis ist nicht gerade ein holdes Wort, mag sein, doch wieso sollte Julika (wenn sie daran dachte) romantische Umschreibungen suchen?'<sup>3</sup>

Why indeed should Julika not have used the word 'affair', a wife surely has a right to criticize an errant husband; but the clause in brackets is deceptively generous. The true implication is that Julika was too concerned with herself, with her absence from the world of art to be angry with Stiller. Open criticisms are made of 'der Verschollene'<sup>4</sup>, and so a balance is kept, the illusion of detachment maintained, but beneath the surface stir feelings of resentment.

At the start of the third notebook is the incident when 'White' is made

1) Stiller, p.139.

2) op.cit., p.148.

3) op.cit., p.148.

4) op.cit., e.g. p.145f.

to try on Stiller's military uniform.<sup>1</sup> Here it seems that Stiller can still derive amusement from the confusion of identities, but significantly it is an incident which enables him to stress his 'present' existence by discomfoting authority. The confidence gained in this amusing interlude is evident in the short reference to Wilfried's letter.<sup>2</sup> Stiller does not make any specific action of dissociation, but says, referring to his tardiness in replying: 'Ich will es tun, sobald ich die Musse habe.' The implication is both that he has more important things to think about than the childish misconceptions of others about him, and also that his lack of time is a result of the ridiculous games of officialdom. But he is still cautious in the subsequent meeting with Julika.<sup>3</sup> He takes care to note always his 'present' reaction to Julika, in order to balance the attention he is giving the past in meeting her and writing about it at all. Despite the studied care some emotion is detectable, for example:

'Hinterher...versuche ich umsonst, ihr lachendes Gesicht zu sehen; ich weiss nur sehr lebhaft, dass ich es dann, wenn es lacht, jedesmal mit beiden Händen greifen möchte wie eine Himmelsgabe, die ja doch mit Händen nicht zu greifen ist, nur zu glauben...'.<sup>4</sup>

This would seem to indicate an increasing re-involvement with the figure who belongs most intimately to the past he denies; Stiller desperately wants to believe in the difference he finds in her because it must seem to him a guarantee of his own new beginning. It does not however occur to him that it is the result rather of their being able to meet outside the sphere of

- 1) Stiller, p.179ff.
- 2) op.cit., p.184.
- 3) op.cit., p.202ff.
- 4) op.cit., p.203.

everyday existence, without the need to create personal relationships day by day anew under the strain of constant union. It is therefore an ominous sign of unhealthy excitement.

Where Wilfried is concerned, Stiller pursues his tactics of simply reporting what passes between them, minimizing his interest in it by being apparently unable to remember exactly what Wilfried wrote and by adding after his description of the letter the coolly unemotional phrase: 'In diesem Sinne...'.<sup>1</sup> Approximations are good enough, he implies, trying to show his entire unconcern.

With Rolf it is easy to be objective, since he is an entirely new acquaintance, but the detail with which his views on marriage are reported<sup>2</sup> gives away a more than business interest. These could prove mere curiosity, or a hint of the difficulties of Stiller's own past married life - again the mystery of the identity enters. However, even if the interest is genuine, it is important to note that as soon as mention is made of Sibylle, as a person who featured in the past events not just as Rolf's wife, the programmatic objectivity 'switches on' again:

'...ich verstehe auch sein Bedürfnis, einmal jenen verschollenen Stiller zu sehen, den seine Gattin, wie ich höre, bis zur Grenze des Erträglichen (für ihn) geliebt hat.'<sup>3</sup>

Even as late as the fifth notebook, there are lighter touches in passages dealing with the figures of Stiller's past: for example, when he is amused at Julika's sending the wrong brand of cigar<sup>4</sup>, and even more at

1) Stiller, p.206.

2) op.cit., p.235ff.

3) op.cit., p.237, my underlining.

4) op.cit., p.277.

the actions of the 'Psychiater'. But the tone is deceptive - pleasure and amusement are possible because the details allow Stiller to comment on Julika as a present figure, to portray her present relationship to him.

The methods of 'objective' narration dealt with above recur constantly in these last notebooks, for example in the meeting with Sturzenegger<sup>1</sup>, with Sibylle<sup>2</sup>, at the description of the studio<sup>3</sup>, at the meeting with Wilfried.<sup>4</sup> But in the seventh notebook, which so many other indications show to be crucial, this objectivity becomes more obviously ambiguous. For example, the conversation dealing with 'Selbstüberforderung'<sup>5</sup> is narrated at some length - because Stiller feels himself 'getroffen', involved, because he has no defence? Or during the meeting with Wilfried<sup>6</sup>, the objective details about the brother are mixed with a considerable degree of comment and reflection; and the section on the mothers<sup>7</sup> shows an attempt to assert difference of experience as difference in reality. This suggests an inability to overcome and neatly dismiss the emotions aroused by these memories, a weakening of resistance to the resurgence of the past. Faced with 'friends'<sup>8</sup>, Stiller's annoyance is obvious, he is helpless before their concerted attacks and makes less of an attempt to dissociate himself

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1) Stiller, p.285ff.

2) op.cit., p.295ff.

3) op.cit., p.300ff.

4) op.cit., p.384ff.

5) op.cit., p.380ff.

6) op.cit., p.384ff.

7) op.cit., p.385f.

8) op.cit., p.391ff.

from their Stiller than ever before - a sign of tiredness, discouragement. Then finally<sup>1</sup>, in the course of reflection, he admits even without noticing it specifically, to details which can only belong to Stiller - he talks of his 'Künstlerei', for example<sup>2</sup>, but 'White' never claimed to be an artist. He has reached the point of no longer caring what happens, the point of despair, which flares up in the last defiant gesture of destroying all his sculptures - a gesture which, to him perhaps gloriously defiant, is for the reader only a confirmation of Stiller's constant self-dramatization; there can be no doubt that he was aware of the symbolic value of the act.

Thus, even this most easy of 'blinds' to maintain, utter objective detachment, is a false ally, since the slightest exaggeration of it produces the precise opposite of the desired effect; and eventually it gives way under the pressure of the past, thus revealing itself retrospectively as a method of persuasion, as an extremely subjective form. Only at the end of the seventh notebook<sup>3</sup> does the factual approach become something other than this - a cover for extreme fear, the only possible utterance for a man on the verge of absolute despair.

#### Direct expressions of thought, reflection.

It is the direct expressions of thought which are necessarily the most revealing sections - in two ways: firstly, through what is actually said, and secondly, in the frequency of their occurrence, which is an indication of Stiller's progression from confidence to introspection, since what

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1) Stiller, p.396ff.

2) op.cit., p.397.

3) op.cit., p.453.

started as a record written in defiance and with humour becomes more and more diary-like as these sections of reflection increase.

The theme of the difficulty of writing the truth is introduced early in the work.<sup>1</sup> Stiller asserts that truth is not equivalent to facts, a valid point, but one which should colour one's reading of all that is to come, since it undermines the 'objective' pose. The tone here is relatively unconcerned: no particular emotion is observable.

This same theme recurs at intervals with differing emphasis. At one point<sup>2</sup> the expression is still kept general enough to refer to someone other than just Stiller, but the thought is a shade more worried than previously - words such as 'Unmöglichkeit', 'das Unaussprechliche' occur for the first time. This section is a disarmingly valid criticism of people's behaviour, in anything but exaggerated terms; but it leaves much unsaid: it is true that we may not stay the same for ever, but Stiller overlooks deliberately or just does not grasp the point that we must accept all the past changes we have gone through as well as claiming the right to future ones. Frisch clarifies this view in his diary:

'Wir leben auf einem laufenden Band, und es gibt keine Hoffnung, dass wir uns selber nachholen und einen Augenblick unseres Lebens verbessern können. Wir sind das Damals, auch wenn wir es verwerfen, nicht minder als das Heute.'<sup>3</sup>

It is clear, then, that Stiller has blind spots in his insight into human behaviour.

After he has spent some time with Julika in Zürich, this inability to

1) Stiller, p.20.

2) op.cit., p.74f.

3) Tagebuch 1946-1949, p.21f.

give expression to the truth becomes more specifically personal, less of an abstract problem: 'Ich habe keine Sprache für meine Wirklichkeit.'<sup>1</sup> After personal confrontation with his past, the feelings of helplessness well up strongly enough to rob him of sleep.

Until the seventh notebook, there is only intermittent reference to this problem<sup>2</sup>, because Stiller becomes increasingly involved in its practical solution; but a later passage<sup>3</sup> takes it up again more fully and provides a kind of farewell to the topic. In the intervening pages Stiller has made the attempt to express the - for him - inexpressible, that is, his 'new' personality; now he realises that writing can take him no further and that he has to live out his 'Wirklichkeit'. In a sense, then, these lines present both the justification and the limitation of the 'Aufzeichnungen'. Stiller makes the important point that it is not only the role itself which matters, but also one's free choice of it; that is, one's reality lies in the act of committal itself. He does not, however, draw the obvious conclusion that this means, for man within society, accepting the role society assigns to him and remaining himself consistently within that social framework, with its past as well as its future. Stiller still, even at this late stage, hankers after being an entirely new person. Even though he is quite right in saying that language cannot capture all reality and that writing is a means of finding out what one is not, by experiment and failure, there is still something slightly pretentious about the

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1) Stiller, p.98, my underlining.

2) op.cit., e.g. p.207 (top), with a hint of anger.

3) op.cit., p.391.

phraseology when one considers the formlessness of all that has gone before, for example:

'Schreiben ist nicht Kommunikation mit Lesern, auch nicht Kommunikation mit sich selbst, sondern Kommunikation mit dem Unaussprechlichen,...'.<sup>1</sup>

Even in admitting his failure Stiller cannot assume a tone of humility; ultimately it is not so much his character which is at fault in his estimation, as the nature of the task he tried to take on - one, he would have us think - beyond all human capability.

Another theme which recurs is that of 'Mord'. It first enters when Stiller claims to have murdered his wife<sup>2</sup>, a rather pretentious way of saying that he made her life miserable and she his - he has to dramatize a rather undramatic relationship, picture himself as decisive in action, even if the only action to which he can lay claim is ethically condemnable. Something of the same aim is present in his mind when he boasts of his murders to Knobel<sup>3</sup>; but the section on 'innerlicher Mord', although still the boasting of an intellectual before naivety, does show a very slight change of mood, a slight lessening of the desire simply to dupe and confuse. The last lines of the section<sup>4</sup>, when Knobel misunderstands what Stiller means about the time needed, suggest a little weariness in their lack of further comment. But again there is the contrast between what is to be conveyed and the mode of expression. There is nothing dramatic in the kind of day-by-day difficulties which Stiller has in mind; but even though the

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1) Stiller, p.391.

2) op.cit., p.36.

3) op.cit., p.147f.

4) op.cit., p.148.

metaphor of murder is tempered a little and shown to be just a metaphor, it is still too 'absolute', too inflated for the situation it represents. In addition, Stiller manages to convey a considerable degree of self-importance by comparing modern man and the great figures of the Renaissance. While he no longer claims the spurious 'glamour' of the criminal, he has moved no further towards recognition of his own extreme unimportance.

The murder motif reappears finally in the visit to the studio.<sup>1</sup> There Stiller feels an urge to throttle Julika - a situation of considerable irony. A motif used by Stiller to explain his past 'Versagen', and in explaining it control and shape the memory of it to his liking, suddenly becomes frighteningly real and demonstrates to him exactly how unreal his escape from the old attitudes towards Julika is. There is wry humour in the comment he adds:

'...einen Augenblick lang ist es mir, als werde ich Julika nun an die Gurgel greifen und sie erwürgen. Aber auch das geschieht nicht, versteht sich...'.<sup>2</sup>

It is as though he were being paid back for his presumption in ever talking of his relationship with Julika in inflated terms, by being shown how incapable he is of living up to them even when he feels most violently towards her! Thus the course of this motif shows well the general trend of the 'Aufzeichnungen'.

Otherwise, although there are other recurrent ideas, the sections of reflection proper are more revealing by their frequency and by their

1) Stiller, p.422ff.

2) op.cit., p.447f.

increasing transparency than by their actual content alone. Small but significant points to note are: firstly the change from 'Ich bin nicht Stiller'<sup>1</sup> to 'Ich bin nicht ihr Stiller'<sup>2</sup>, which indicates for Stiller perhaps just annoyance, anger at the way other people waste his time, but which makes the reader wonder about the identity of the writer again by its ambiguity; secondly, the idea of 'Nichtigkeit'<sup>3</sup> recurs later with unchanged emphasis<sup>4</sup> - 'meine Nichtigkeit' is a pompous phrase of Uriah Heep quality, which belies the very notion of insignificance. Just how ingrained a misconception it is, is shown by the fact that Stiller has already seen through himself<sup>5</sup> and yet he still falls back on these terms of inverted self-importance. Thus these three instances show both how far Stiller has progressed and also how far he has to go before his occasional honest understanding of himself becomes a secure possession. Thirdly, the concept of 'Rolle'<sup>6</sup> is taken up again later.<sup>7</sup> In the first instance, Stiller feels that in refusing to accept the identity offered he is fighting for his true self, but later he begins to see that some kind of role has to be assumed, and that freedom lies in the choice, although he does not go far enough in his conclusions, as shown above.<sup>8</sup> He is moving towards the point where he will admit that he can be free without having

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1) Stiller, p.9.

2) op.cit., p.56.

3) op.cit., p.56.

4) op.cit., p.406.

5) op.cit., p.383.

6) op.cit., p.56.

7) op.cit., p.391.

8) Cf. above, p. 74.

to convince people of it forcibly, simply by accepting as a convenient role the one society had originally accorded him, although he will have to learn by his trials that this means acceptance of the past as well as of the trials held by the future.<sup>1</sup> It is also very interesting to note that quite early in the work<sup>2</sup> the deep need for, rather than possession of, self-assurance is plain, and with it enters the ambiguity which will increase through the course of the 'Aufzeichnungen'. The words of this paragraph - 'Ich bin nicht ihr Stiller...' - seem to imply the Stiller/White identification and represent a moment of anger, a breaching, however brief, of the barrier of self-assured defiance, a swift hint that we are to look below the surface of what is actually said for the rest of the 'Aufzeichnungen'.

Apart from these directly linked groups of thoughts are single sections of equal importance. After the meeting with Julika, subsequent reflections<sup>3</sup> indicate that Stiller is considerably agitated, although he makes no specific mention of names or reasons. The reader is left to deduce that the reunion is the cause. Although he blames himself to some extent, Stiller does it with a kind of tortured pride which is far from humility. 'Diese Wissen auf mich zu nehmen' is the phrase of a man who fancies himself as expiator, finds importance in his solitary guilt. Stiller is clearly far from accepting his 'Nichtigkeit'. A similar tone is evident in a subsequent passage already discussed.<sup>4</sup>

- 1) Stiller, 'Nachwort', p.457ff.
- 2) op.cit., p.56.
- 3) op.cit., p.69f.
- 4) Stiller, p.74f. Cf. above, p. 73.

The first admission of fear behind the arrogance comes a little later: 'Meine Angst: die Wiederholung -!'<sup>1</sup> This entry, with no specific reference, comes immediately after the visit to Davos, that is, after Stiller has been taken out of the comparative safety of the prison into a setting associated with the old Stiller; for the first time he has had to face people and a place at once, and although the actual visit passes off well, one can surmise that these words represent the after-effect. This same small fear gradually grows<sup>2</sup>, and we soon have the first really clear admission that beneath his appearance of calm and confidence, Stiller is terrified. But the terms used are still very general, he is careful not to give away anything incriminating while writing down his feelings as a kind of release. Even in the very last section of the first notebook<sup>3</sup>, although the feeling of fear and danger is genuine, the language is a little too rhetorical to be entirely acceptable as an expression of deep anguish: the balanced phrases 'Sprung in die Nichtigkeit, in ein nie gelebtes Leben, in die Schuld durch Versäumnis, in die Leere...' suggest a concern for style not in accord with the crisis the whole metaphor would seem to convey. In both these last cases, one feels that this is a very self-conscious confession, a means as much of making the writer interesting as of giving a vitally necessary vent to feelings. This is not the language of a man convinced of his own insignificance, but rather of one who likes to play with possible formulations for his 'dilemma'.

Also to be noted at the close of this first notebook is the earlier,

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1) Stiller, p.79.

2) op.cit., p.80.

3) op.cit., p.99.

as yet unelaborated, mention of Stiller's 'Engel'.<sup>1</sup> This will prove to be of great importance in relation to Stiller's past, and the occurrence of it here suggests that Stiller is being dragged back, however slightly, into that past. The studied objectivity of the succeeding books is an attempt to counteract this - for the writer as well as for the reader - and the increasing amount of reflection an indication of an ultimate inability to do so. Another kind of evidence is given by the criticism of the old Stiller<sup>2</sup> which uses the phrase 'eine Flucht vor sich selbst'. This is just the type of expression Stiller/White has already been using in discussing himself<sup>3</sup>, and the perhaps unwitting concordance of the two shows how the same notions and formulations preoccupy Stiller whether he is reflecting as 'White' or criticising 'objectively' a man he claims not to know.

Later on<sup>4</sup> even the chance for turning away from introspection given by his present surroundings is not taken; whereas at first such descriptions served to emphasise Stiller's 'present' existence, now they act only as stimuli for rather melancholy thought. An important admission is made here.<sup>5</sup> Despite the dramatic stories it seems the time in America was far from happy, although Stiller tries to minimize the effect of the admission by adding that he does not want any part of the past again, that is, he is trying to persuade himself that he is not attempting to escape anything

- 1) Stiller, p.98.
- 2) op.cit., p.164.
- 3) op.cit., p.56.
- 4) op.cit., p.217.
- 5) op.cit., p.218.

particular in the past. He is moving gradually nearer to entire honesty with himself, shedding the more exaggerated claims, but he is still looking too much to the future for release.

The long section about the difficulty of leading a truly individual life in the twentieth century<sup>1</sup> has been interpreted by Hans Mayer as one of the vital passages of the book.<sup>2</sup> Certainly the criticism of our times is valid, but it should surely be seen in the same light as Stiller's invective against Switzerland<sup>3</sup> - both types contain truth, but if seen in context show how Stiller takes any opportunity to avoid recognition of what is really wrong with his own situation: his own weakness of character. Bohnenblust may indeed be infuriating, but in his pedantic way he does help Stiller, by giving him a half-justified excuse to rail at Switzerland, to avoid the truth: that it is not so much his ability to experience as an individual which is being challenged by the factual enquiries on America, as his right to impose his own view of his life on others. He grows angry at Bohnenblust's negative image of him, but cannot see that he himself, in claiming to be White, is destroying part of many people's lives, since Stiller belongs to their past also.

Stiller's essential selfishness is further revealed in a short passage a little later.<sup>4</sup> When Julika begins to enjoy the present and forget the past, he is uneasy; he alone is allowed to do this and other figures have to fit into his patterns, it seems. Coupled with this is perhaps a latent

1) Stiller, p.219ff.

2) Hans Mayer, Dürrenmatt und Frisch. Anmerkungen, Pfullingen 1963, p.42ff.

3) Stiller, e.g. pp.18, 230ff.

4) Stiller, p.229.

awareness that the past will eventually be inescapable, so that the mixing here of past and present confuses and worries him. Earlier in the 'Aufzeichnungen' Stiller would have greeted any such readiness to meet him on his new ground with unequivocal joy. His disquiet issues in anger at the slight excuse; having, we presume, been questioned about politics he writes an exasperated 'Was geht's mich an!'<sup>1</sup> The following outburst against Switzerland is to be seen in the light of this; it is anything but unbiassed comment - rather a convenient means of giving vent to his fear of being trapped by all these questions, a diatribe against a scapegoat held responsible for Stiller's own increasingly awkward and uncomfortable position.

Another group of comments concerns Julika, speculations which are rarely revealing in what they actually say but more so by their presence - as Stiller feels more and more endangered, engulfed in the past, he begins to depend heavily on Julika, since he must have someone to convince of the change in him and society as a whole will not accept his claims. The early comments<sup>2</sup> show little more than curiosity, simple preoccupation with the very attractive figure of Julika. She seems to be to him a guarantee that someone is interested in him.<sup>3</sup> But then he tears up a letter from her because of its 'naive' assumption that he is Stiller.<sup>4</sup> The humour such 'misconceptions' have caused him is missing here<sup>5</sup>, and the preceding section

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1) Stiller, p.230.

2) op.cit., pp.218, 236.

3) op.cit., p.277.

4) op.cit., p.284.

5) Cf. op.cit., p.181ff.

perhaps explains why. Stiller has been visited by a couple whose son committed suicide partly at the instigation of the missing Stiller; he is thus reminded of his own inability, reflected in the young man, to accept what he is, reminded of his past failures. Hence, when Julika's letter arrives it only adds to his awareness that his escape attempts are futile - although there is no specific admission of who he really is and the words could conceivably signify annoyance at the injustice of her assumption. The struggle to create a new identity has not yet been abandoned, but the habit of writing down loosely whatever occurs to him is making 'White' more and more suspect, more and more obviously vulnerable.

The fact that the encounter with the bereaved parents has upset him deeply is confirmed by the next short section of reflection.<sup>1</sup> Stiller makes here a further step towards entire honesty, admitting that the past cannot simply be dismissed; but still cannot accept it as part of his present self. He sees that one ought to be able to ignore what society thinks, and this is a considerable step forward when one compares it with his earlier<sup>2</sup> view that his problem is basically that his new reality cannot be expressed in words. However, he cannot achieve this step of disregarding society alone:

'...man müsste imstande<sup>sein,</sup> ohne Trotz durch ihre Verwechslung hindurchzugehen, eine Rolle spielend, ohne dass ich mich selber je damit verwechsle, dazu aber müsste ich einen festen Punkt haben-'.<sup>3</sup>

This explains the importance which Julika will gradually assume for him; he is unable to live without convincing one person at least of who he

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- 1) Stiller, p.284: 'Heute wieder...'
  - 2) op.cit., p.98.
  - 3) op.cit., p.284.

'really' is, and Rolf later confirms this view.<sup>1</sup>

His deep uncertainty and fear again emerge in anger when Sturzenegger visits him, and again it is Switzerland which serves as scapegoat.<sup>2</sup> Such an outburst acts as a safety-valve for his feelings of confinement, and obviates the danger that he will give away, in his highly emotional state, the facts needed by his official accusers.

A similar function is attributable to the composite description of the 'missing' Stiller.<sup>3</sup> It is a clearer judgement of the man than any previous reference, but suggests nevertheless that the writer feels the worse he paints the image, the further he will be removed from it - to criticize in detail is a way of channelling off his fear, an attempt to regain, perhaps, some of the ground lost by earlier highly ambiguous confessions.<sup>4</sup> This impression is reinforced by the very end of the fifth notebook. There is a tremendous sense of relief in the words:

'Zum Glück (und zum sichtlichen Bedauern meines Verteidigers) stellt sich heraus, dass dieser Zahnarzt vor kurzem gestorben ist. Ich werde bei seinem Nachfolger angemeldet - also bei einem Mann, der Stiller nie gesehen hat und nicht behaupten kann, er erkenne mich wieder.'<sup>5</sup>

The sixth notebook represents a period of calm and perhaps caution; Stiller occupies himself with retracing the role played by Sibylle and is able to maintain at least the appearance of detachment. The seventh book opens also with a touch of regained confidence - the visit to the dentist.<sup>6</sup>

1) Stiller, p.457.

2) op.cit., p.290ff.

3) op.cit., p.297f.

4) op.cit., e.g. p.284.

5) op.cit., p.299.

6) op.cit., p.375. Cf. above, p. 49.

But it is short-lived. The memories of Mexico reveal an undercurrent of deep pessimism<sup>1</sup>, and then a discussion with Rolf moves him at last to something approaching uncompromising honesty - he admits<sup>2</sup> that the admissions of his own unimportance always contained the hope that the opposite would be made true by this very admission. It is clear to the reader that once this has been said, the value of writing as a path to truth and clarity begins to diminish, and the need to live out the insight and attempt independence in practice grows. Writing alone cannot really help further, since Stiller admits here that making statements is a means - paradoxically - of negating precisely what they say, of intellectual dishonesty. But he is still hoping for release; though he realises that his demands on God are preposterous, he negates this insight by making similar demands on Julika - it is in this last notebook that his preoccupation with her becomes obsessive. His references to her<sup>3</sup> show how very aware of her absence he is: she is the last division between him and the enforcement of self-sufficiency from which he shrinks.

The following section on the meeting with Wilfried Stiller<sup>4</sup> serves to reinforce the picture of a Stiller unable to be alone despite his professed desire to be left alone. He is disturbed by Wilfried's unquestioning acceptance of him, his tacit agreement that Stiller has a right to be whatever or whoever he wishes. Absolute freedom frightens him, as does perhaps the realisation that he has never known Wilfried; 'Warum bin ich

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1) Stiller, p.378f. Cf. above, p. 48 ff.

2) op.cit., p.383.

3) op.cit., pp.377, 383.

4) op.cit., p.384ff.

nie sein Bruder gewesen?'<sup>1</sup>, although interpretable as the admiring remark of a stranger, also conveys Stiller's first full recognition that he has been wrong about other people, that it is not only they who have been at fault in the past by making images of him - and possibly even the dread 'Can I have been wrong about myself too?'. Stiller shies away from the implications of the meeting by turning to Julika again<sup>2</sup> - 'Warum schreibt Julika nicht?', he writes, just after his final recognition of the inadequacy of trying to express all he feels in words! She is his final hope of salvation from the need to reenter life, bearing utterly alone the knowledge of his weakness and mistaken ambition. His anger over his 'friends'<sup>3</sup> is also an emanation of his fear, of the recognition of how lonely he is going to be, how utterly self-dependent. He dreams of Julika<sup>4</sup>, cannot bear her absence in patience<sup>5</sup>, and becomes increasingly discouraged as, one suspects, the feeling of inevitability grows within him. The awareness of the impossibility of his position becomes acute<sup>6</sup>; Stiller's language is no longer so dramatic, and the end of the section is simplicity itself, the simplicity of unadorned despair:

'Mein Verhalten ist lächerlich, ich weiss, meine Lage wird unhaltbar. Aber ich bin nicht der Mann, den sie suchen, und diese Gewissheit, meine einzige, lasse ich nicht los.'<sup>7</sup>

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- 1) Stiller, p.390.
  - 2) op.cit., p.391.
  - 3) op.cit., p.391ff.
  - 4) op.cit., p.394.
  - 5) op.cit., p.395.
  - 6) op.cit., p.395.
  - 7) loc.cit.

How different from his earlier rhetoric.<sup>1</sup>

Gradually a further insight is reached.<sup>2</sup> The inability to remain alone, already apparent to the reader, reaches Stiller's conscious mind. He bids farewell to many of the exaggerations of the earlier notebooks - but not with equanimity. He doubtless feels that time is running out, not only because the official verdict is due, but also because he has been forced to see the impossibility of cancelling out the past in others' minds as in his own and a crisis must result. The very proliferation of reflective entries in this seventh notebook indicates the abandonment of a stable, extrovert position, and now every façade crumbles, and with them the pretence that he is not Stiller. It is a bitter moment:

'Warum war ich nicht imstande, allein zu sein, und gezwungen, mich mit dieser Balletteuse zu langweilen, derart, dass ich dieses Meertier auch noch heiraten musste?'<sup>3</sup>

This is an extremely unflattering reference to Julika - he still cannot blame himself entirely for what has happened. Even though he admits that America was anything but a land of freedom for him, that he has never really found peace, he still will not abandon hope in everything but his own efforts and stop seeking solace and strength in external things and dependence on others:

'Alles, aber wirklich alles, was uns an Leben noch möglich ist, hängt davon ab, ob wir, du und ich, über alles Gewesene hinaus zu einer Begegnung kommen.'<sup>4</sup>

This he writes in a projected letter to Julika, when it should be in full

1) Stiller, p.99. Cf. above, p.79.

2) op.cit., p.396ff.

3) op.cit., p.398.

4) op.cit., p.405.

knowledge and acceptance of the past that hope is placed, not in the discounting of all that has happened.

Despite this statement, Stiller is nevertheless already aware to some extent of what is wrong in his hopes. This is the tragedy of his position - that he can see in the abstract, but that as soon as he becomes involved with people his insight ceases to function. One example shows that he has come to understand his own dilemma up to a point:

'Gelegentliche Versuche, zu beten, scheitern...gerade daran, dass ich hoffe, durch Beten irgendwie verwandelt zu werden, meiner Ohnmacht zu entgehen, und sowie ich erfahre, dass dies nicht der Fall ist, verliere ich die Hoffnung, auf dem Weg zu sein. Das heisst, unter Weg verstehe ich letztlich noch immer nur die Hoffnung, mir zu entgehen. Diese Hoffnung ist mein Gefängnis. Ich weiss es, doch mein Wissen sprengt es nicht...'.<sup>1</sup>

And yet, as has been shown<sup>2</sup>, the lines which follow this admission still reveal a kind of self-importance; and in the next small section we are shown just how right Stiller has been in his own diagnosis:

'Ich habe jetzt, seit gestern, keinen Menschen mehr, der mich nicht schamlos verraten hätte, ausgenommen mein Staatsanwalt.'<sup>3</sup>

'Verraten', betrayed, is not the word to be used by a man aware of his entire insignificance - Stiller's sense of importance persists in some measure to the very end. Even when he speaks of his most precious experience he deludes himself.<sup>4</sup> The 'Engel' to which he refers represents some force which helped him over the collapse of his life and aided him in facing the void of the future; but he interprets this deep experience as meaning that death is no escape, that after the 'end' of one life an entirely new one

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1) Stiller, p.406.

2) Cf. above, p. 77.

3) Stiller, p.407.

4) op.cit., p.448ff.

must be entered upon with blind courage and trust. Yet this same experience could be taken to mean that life is continuous, that it is not to be thrown away but continued despite all difficulties. Who is the individual to decide that his life 'nie eines gewesen war'?<sup>1</sup>

Werner Stauffacher's<sup>2</sup> interpretation of this 'Engel' motif misses this very important - and typical - gulf between what Stiller sees and what an external observer, the reader, grasps. He sees it not through Stiller's mentality, but as a genuine symbol of some 'mystère ineffable'<sup>3</sup> given us by Frisch as a way of introducing the notion of a realm beyond earthly existence, in which Man is placed and which he seeks to understand. Such a view misses the subjectivity of the word, misses the self-delusion, self-dramatization inherent in the use of such a term, and on the basis of such view Stauffacher castigates the novel for not solving the problem of the nature of this 'mystère'. Marius Cauvin<sup>4</sup> rights this mistake to some extent by showing that the only 'mystère' Frisch is concerned with is that of human personality itself, not metaphysics - a view which does more justice to the whole process of self-deception of which the 'Engel' motif is the climax and turning-point.

The words 'Mein Engel halte mich wach'<sup>5</sup> show fear, doubt, uncertainty, - a far cry from the initial confidence of the notebooks. Stiller has

1) Stiller, p.451.

2) Werner Stauffacher, 'Langage et Mystère', Études Germaniques, 20. Année, No. 3, July/Sept., 1965, pp.331-345.

3) ibid., p.336f.

4) Marius Cauvin, 'Max Frisch, L'absolu et le nouveau roman', Études Germaniques, 22. Année, No. 1, Jan./March 1967, pp.93-98.

5) Stiller, p.453.

learnt humility to some extent, and yet to the very end more of him emerges in his highly subjective writing than he seems to realize: despite the obvious hesitancy here, apparent in the subjunctive, a willingness to face his own life in its entirety is still lacking. Stiller prays in effect that his past experience of separation from the old life shall not be lost to him; but as long as he clings to it he cannot hope to understand fully what went wrong in his marriage initially, since he is looking at Julika, at their problems only from his own standpoint, with the realization only of his sufferings. Until he sees how he makes Julika suffer, he cannot construct a new life more successful and happy than the old.

These, then, are the constituents of the 'Aufzeichnungen', and whichever category is considered it reveals something of Stiller's downhill progression; each type of entry becomes either modified or excluded. To return to the introductory remarks on the possible value of such fragmentary form: the 'Aufzeichnungen' do not allow incomprehensibility to enter because there is this distinct though subtle line of development constantly traceable. Secondly, this form allows us penetrating vision of Stiller, allows us to enter both his conscious and his subconscious minds, to see more of his emotions and his character than he can see himself - primarily because he writes without any overall, controlling plan or pattern. Thirdly, as a result of this, the form exemplifies the way one should look at other people according to Frisch: because of this unusually deep portrait we are prevented from sharing Stiller's 'Bildnis' of himself and enabled to recognize the danger which lies in forming set pictures of

oneself, and therefore of others also, as Stiller did. Of course we have Frisch's 'Bildnis' of Stiller, but it emerges so naturally, so free of any obvious manipulation, so fully, that one overlooks this, accepts it as a necessary prerequisite of literary creation, and becomes engrossed in the picture of a personality divided against itself.

### The 'Nachwort'

In view of the depth of the psychological portrait which emerges through the 'Aufzeichnungen', it might seem at first unnecessary that another man's view of Stiller is given. Why then does Frisch add a 'Nachwort', and why specifically by Rolf? Stiller has been shown, at the end of the 'Aufzeichnungen', to be still full of his old misconceptions. Because of the verdict he is forced to move out of the period of intense preoccupation with himself and back into the social sphere. We now want to see him with other people, because the problems dealt with in the first part of the book, those of making images of oneself and of others, are essentially social problems, and to understand Stiller as fully as possible we must be able to see him at some stage from 'outside', to see how he copes with his difficulties. Rolf has already proved his good sense, and we need a balanced view by a recognizable character rather than an anonymous third-person narrative, which would mean a return to the mechanics of the traditional story-form. An omniscient narrator introduced even for this short section of the book would immediately emphasise the 'unreality' of the first part by reminding us that the impression of immediacy we have

gained is only an impression, a technique of story-telling. Additionally, in not going beyond the circle we already know, Frisch keeps our minds on the problems of human relationships, their instability and change. The testimony of a man sympathetic to Stiller and yet unable to help him beyond giving advice also emphasizes just how alone each one of us is ultimately, how complex a thing friendship is. Rolf's established role as friend and advisor allows him to make interpretative comments which could be very irksome if presented without any reason other than the author's wish that we should know and appreciate these points, points which we do need in order to grasp fully what has been going on in Stiller's inner life. However, perhaps the most important point of all is that even Rolf is not entirely free from bias. He puts the burden of blame very definitely on Stiller, and says of Julika little more than that she is human and imperfect. Thus, even here there is a slight tendency to over-simplify, to make 'images' - and so the theme remains valid and in action until the end. There is no permanent solution to the issue of how to know and understand oneself, and indeed to provide any one answer would be to deny the universal validity of the problems treated in the novel. Frisch has said:

'Die Haltung der meisten Zeitgenossen...ist die Frage, und ihre Form, solange eine ganze Antwort fehlt, kann nur vorläufig sein.'<sup>1</sup>

He himself is not trying to present us with any simple answers, with comforting endings which turn a book into something well-rounded and thus easily separable from the reader once he has completed it. Frisch's aim is rather to provoke questions, to use the entertainment value always

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1) Tagebuch 1946-1949, p.122.

expected of the novel as a vehicle for more serious thought - hence the value of a figure like Rolf, whom we can appreciate as a man with a 'story' firstly, and then as a man of intelligence, from whom we can accept a considerable amount of interpretative writing.

### Mystery as a binding element.

It has been seen that the fragmentary form is far from confusing or simple: the 'Aufzeichnungen' can be seen as an extremely effective development of the Ich-Form, which has been called 'die Romanform der Moderne'<sup>1</sup> because it allows entire unity of vision, provides a viewpoint acceptable in an age where omniscience is at once suspect - although this should be qualified, for Kafka, for example, obtains unity of vision with third-person narrative. The Ich-Form is one of the forms for the modern novel: but if the reason for its importance in the twentieth century is the authors' refusal to know more than one person can know of reality, then at once the danger arises that we shall no longer be given insights which we ourselves find new or exhilarating. In other words, there is danger that for the sake of truthfulness, novel writers attempt to express only the ordinary - and the consequently dull. This is a danger which Thomas Hardy foresaw:

'The recent school of novel writers in their insistence on life, and nothing but life, in a plain slice, that a story must be worth the telling, and a good deal of life is not worth any such thing, and that they must not occupy a reader's time with what he can get at first hand around him.'<sup>2</sup>

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1) Walter Jens, Deutsche Literatur der Gegenwart, Munich, 1961, p.93.

2) Quoted in Robert Liddell, A Treatise on the Novel, paperback edition, London, 1965, p.34.

'A story must be exceptional enough to justify its telling. We tale-tellers are all Ancient Mariners, and none of us is warranted in stopping Wedding Guests (in other words the hurrying public) unless he has something more unusual to relate than the ordinary experience of every average man and woman.'<sup>1</sup>

Frisch has managed to combine the limited viewpoint with elements which do assure the maintaining of interest. He has chosen firstly an ordinary man but has made him take out-of-the-ordinary decisions and actions.

Stiller is indeed 'ein nichtiger Mensch', but his denial of his identity provides a background of 'mystery', to use E.M. Forster's terminology:

'The facts in a highly organized novel (like "The Egoist") are often of the nature of cross-correspondences and the ideal spectator cannot expect to view them properly until he is sitting up on a hill at the end. This element of surprise or mystery - the detective element as it is sometimes rather emptily called - is of great importance in a plot. It occurs through a suspension of the time-sequence; a mystery is a pocket in time, and it occurs crudely, as in "Why did the queen die?" and more subtly in half-explained gestures and words, the true meaning of which only dawns pages ahead. Mystery is essential to a plot, and cannot be appreciated without intelligence. To the curious it is just another "and then"; to appreciate a mystery, part of the mind must be left behind, brooding, while the other part goes marching on.'<sup>2</sup>

Thus mystery covers a range of possibilities, from the crude arousing of curiosity found in a detective novel or adventure tale, to the very subtle 'half-explained gestures and words' which contribute to a 'mystery' of character, that is, where the outcome of the book is not the resolving of difficulties or the discovery of some hitherto concealed fact, but the totality of a character only gradually revealed. Mystery is an element skilfully employed by Frisch, in differing ways in the different novels. In Stiller he has achieved the considerable feat of combining more than one

- 1) Quoted in Miriam Allott, Novelists on the Novel, London, 1959, p.58.
- 2) E.M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel, London, 1927, p.84.

level of it. We have the simple mystery, the question of identity; for though we feel sure that 'White' is Stiller, there is no positive identification until very near the end of the 'Aufzeichnungen', when Stiller finally talks of details that only Stiller, the husband of Julika, could have known. As Braun points out<sup>1</sup>, there are deliberate 'red herrings', such as the references to the 'Smyrnov affair'<sup>2</sup>, which mislead the reader; but these are not just tricks used by the author to misdirect the reader's attention. They are also indications of Stiller's separation from his old self, his defiant attitude of dissociation from whatever facts are brought up in order to trap him. However, there is also 'mystery' in the gradual revelation of Stiller to himself; the reader watches the at first widely divergent and then very slowly converging courses of his conscious and subconscious attitudes throughout the 'Aufzeichnungen'; this is mystery in the sense that it causes the reader to wonder just how much Stiller realizes about himself, how much the subconscious attitudes will affect his later life outside the prison, - mystery as the maintenance of interest, in other words. The theme is a serious one, but it is made palatable by popular elements such as this provocation to ask what will happen - to both the 'criminal' and to the man as an individual problematic personality.

Not least among the elements which would appeal to a wide public is the negative one of rejection of the obviously artificial. Frisch is careful to justify Stiller's writings in the first place: and some of the

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1) Karlheinz Braun, Die epische Technik in Max Frischs Roman 'Stiller', p.110.

2) Stiller, e.g. pp.214, 229f.

techniques of story-telling become transferred to Stiller and become his rather than the author's. Günther Müller talks of 'Zeitraffung'<sup>1</sup> as one of the prime characteristics of prose narration; that is, some periods of time are dwelt on in detail, others covered in a few words, according to their relative importance for the central figure or central purpose of the book concerned, and also because a written work cannot in any case hope to recreate the passage of time exactly. In Stiller, because the 'Ich-Form' is so carefully maintained, all manipulation of time becomes of importance; when, for example, Stiller expends much time on his descriptions of Mexico<sup>2</sup>, far longer than would be necessary to convince Bohnenblust that he had been there, we see that his primary problem is not really to convince others of the fact of his travels but rather to make himself settle and accept some kind of everyday existence, instead of dreaming of other places and other identities. Thus the literary device of 'Zeitraffung' becomes again for the reader what it originally was - the instinctive recognition that within each life time is relative, is measured qualitatively, according to the importance it bears for us. Thus, while this in fact means that the author is very much in control of his work, extracting every possible ounce of significance from his material by making it all interpretable with reference to Stiller, the impression given is one of unique immediacy, of uninterrupted contact between reader and subject. Like every author, Frisch knows all there is to know about his characters, but in handing over the process of

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1) Günther Müller, Die Bedeutung der Zeit in der Erzählkunst, Bonn, 1947, p.14ff.

2) Stiller, e.g. pp.29ff., 34, 400ff.

narration to a created figure, he hides his control without sacrificing any of his insight into his creation: the insight is transferred to the subconscious mind, never actually put into words at the moment of revelation, but nevertheless present in ambiguity, in the precise moment or position at which something is said.

Frisch, then, revives in Stiller the mystery story to capture attention, and employs inverted 'Zeittraffung' to stimulate attention, but without the intrusion - common to the mystery story proper - of the flamboyant or wildly impossible, except in Stiller's own fabrications. He turns our thoughts to the discovery of one personality, made interesting by the division between the conscious and the subconscious, rather than to discovery of any fact. We are not told what to think, but neither are we allowed to flounder, since there is a clear progression which one senses, even if at first reading its movement is less obvious; and the 'Nachwort' gives us retrospectively lines of guidance without taking us out of the circle of characters already established to another view-point which would make all that had preceded unreal. It invites us to think, just as the motto at the start of the 'Aufzeichnungen' does. According to Percy Lubbock we are constantly 'creating' people in our minds:

'...nothing is simpler than to create for oneself the idea of a human being, a figure and a character, from a series of glimpses and anecdotes. Creation of this kind we practise every day: we are continually piecing together our fragmentary evidence about the people around us and moulding their images in thought.'<sup>1</sup>

This statement helps to support Frisch's concept of 'Bildnis', and clearly his concern must be to prevent the lazy exercise of this process. He does

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1) Percy Lubbock, The Craft of Fiction, London, 1921, p.7.

this in all his later novels by depriving us of the simple observer's position from which we could just watch his figures as they act. We see their actions through the refraction provided by their own consciousness. In Stiller, the emphasis on 'presentness' given by the substitution for events simply narrated in the preterite of the actual act of writing, also prevents us from feeling that everything significant has already happened. This is a danger of the first-person narrative, since in its normal form it must be retrospective and make us feel that the book starts with a completed form which only remains to be revealed to us - an omniscient narrator in a third-person narrative has the same effect. Of course one knows that the book is not being written before one's eyes, but the illusion is there as it is in a theatrical performance, the illusion that what is to come is as yet undefined, that to understand and share in it we must make an effort of thought and concentration, since there is no already complete pattern which we can sense. We feel that to some extent the end is not predetermined, that we can by our attention see how it shapes itself. Yet this book is concerned with not making images, so it would be dangerous for the author to invite his readers simply to make what they can of events and ideas in it. Hence we have the balance between on the one hand the 'Aufzeichnungen' methods, where the reader has to be alert to realize the ambiguities and hints of a gulf between the conscious aims and the sub-conscious restrictions laid upon those aims by the personality, and on the other hand the framework provided by the motto and 'Nachwort', which, it is important to note, do not exhaust what there is to be said about Stiller by a very long way and so give guidance without imposing an image in their

turn. We have seen that the 'Nachwort' serves to clarify and also continue the problems of the 'Aufzeichnungen'; does the motto serve a similar purpose?

Frisch and Kierkegaard.

Hans Mayer claims that the motto, taken from Kierkegaard's Either-Or, stands in an ironical relationship to the narrative which is to follow it:

'In "Entweder-Oder" war behauptet worden, die Selbstwahl eines Menschen sei so schwer, weil sie ihn zwar recht eigentlich erst zur vollen Individualität führe, damit aber von allen andern Individuen isoliere. Zur Isolation aber trete die Kontinuität, denn alles frühere Dasein dieses Menschen vor der Selbstannahme gehe kontinuierlich in die Entscheidung ein. Von nun an sei es vorbei mit aller Lebenslüge und allen Umtauschmöglichkeiten. Erlangt werde durch die Selbstwahl die wahre Individualität als einzig mögliche Erfüllung, als Seligkeit des Einzelnen, der sich zu sich selbst bekannte.

Stillers Schicksal beweist, dass all dies im Zeitalter der Reproduktion nicht mehr möglich ist. Kierkegaards Thesen konnten nur den Menschen aus der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts in einem verhältnismässig frühen Stadium der Bürgerwelt meinen. Indem die Existenzialisten diese Freiheitsphilosophie mitten in der spätbürgerlichen Welt von neuem verkünden, begehen sie eine ideologische Regression, statten sie im Jahre 1950 ein Seelenleben mit Tapeten der Kierkegaardzeit aus. Stiller versucht, die Nachfolge Kierkegaards anzutreten und sich selbst anzunehmen. Gerade dadurch aber wird er zum Rip van Winkle, der das Leben verschlief. Wie soll er durch Selbstannahme zur Seligkeit der Individualität gelangen, wenn die Voraussetzungen dafür nicht mehr vorhanden sind? An die Stelle des bürgerlich freien Individuums trat die Epoche der Reproduktion. Stiller nimmt sich zwar an, wird dadurch aber trotzdem nicht zum originalen Schöpfer von Kunstwerken. Er scheitert als Mann wie als Künstler. Das Motto Kierkegaards bezieht sich auf den ersten Teil des Romans, auf den Versuch, der im Gefängnis unternommen wird. Der zweite Teil widerlegt das Motto.<sup>1</sup>

Of the 'Nachwort' he then adds:

'...dieser scheinbare Epilog, der in Wirklichkeit erst dem ganzen Roman die endgültige Perspektive gibt, steht durchaus windschief zu dem Kierkegaardmotto.'<sup>2</sup>

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1) Hans Mayer, Dürrenmatt und Frisch, p.49.

2) *op.cit.*, p.49.

Is this a tenable view, or does it pay too much attention to the circumstances of the events, that is, the particular nature of the twentieth century, and not enough to the individual mind at work?

To take one point: Mayer says that Stiller fails as an artist even though he accepts himself, implying therefore, by the rest of the argument, that it is the century which is to blame, and that in the 'bürgerliche Zeit' proper he would have succeeded. Mayer sees in Stiller a kind of 'Künstlerroman'<sup>1</sup>, in other words. But this is surely to underestimate the story of individual weakness so apparent in the course of the 'Aufzeichnungen', to overlook Frisch's symbolic use of the term 'Bildhauer' to mean 'image-maker'. Certainly Mayer is right in suggesting that some aspects of twentieth century society make it harder for the individual to excel than ever before, but art of all sorts flourishes as never before. Stiller is not prevented from being a successful artist by the age, but by not understanding that one cannot excel in art by simply trying. He cannot accept that he is an indifferent artist, that he will never achieve a high standard - so art is used as a convenient means of showing Stiller's ridiculous attempts to attain the impossible, and not as a subject of great intrinsic interest. The twentieth century does have a use for art, but it encourages great competition, and Stiller is not prepared to settle for the more lucrative type of commercial art in which he could make a living - he must be a 'real' artist.<sup>2</sup> To say, then, the following about the novel is a misjudgement:

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1) Hans Mayer, Dürrenmatt und Frisch, p.46.

2) Stiller, e.g. p.276f., where the 'missing' Stiller's sensitivity to criticism of his art is hinted at.

'Stiller war als Bildhauer gescheitert. Alles war vermutlich recht achtbar, geschmackvoll, auch beachtenswert, wenn man dergleichen überhaupt Beachtung zu schenken gedachte. Es verhielt sich mit Stillers Plastiken wie mit dem individuellen Ofenrohr in seinem Atelier. Es waren wohl die gleichen Plastiken, wie man sie in fast jedem Pariser oder New Yorker Atelier finden konnte. Wozu also? Der Roman "Stiller" ist ein Künstlerroman im Zeitalter der Reproduktion.'<sup>1</sup>

This view fails to see that Stiller's destruction of his own works is evidence not so much of the Artist's frustration as of self-dramatization, a consciously symbolic gesture of image-destroying, which betrays how little Stiller has really progressed towards humility, and self-acceptance.

Mayer's views on the Kierkegaard motto would seem to be of the same nature; that is, he fails to appreciate the subtlety of the psychological processes portrayed or rather revealed in the 'Aufzeichnungen'. To claim that there is some connection other than an ironical one between the motto and the 'Aufzeichnungen' is not to maintain that the latter are an exact exemplification of the former, of Kierkegaard's philosophy; but there does seem to be enough of a direct connection to suggest that Frisch used Kierkegaard's ideas as framework, to suggest the difficulty of really accepting oneself. P. Manger points out<sup>2</sup> that Frisch reverses the order of the quotations as they appear in Kierkegaard, which does suggest that they are meant - as they stand in Stiller - to apply closely to the development and structure of the work, the 'first' quotation relating to the 'Aufzeichnungen' and Stiller's attempt to become something different, and the 'second' to the 'Nachwort' and to Stiller's fight for his basic self. There is nothing in

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1) Mayer, op.cit., p.47f.

2) P. Manger, 'Kierkegaard in Max Frisch's novel "Stiller"', German Life and Letters, vol.XX. No.2, Jan., 1967, p.126.

these quotations or in Kierkegaard's Either-Or as a whole which makes them applicable only to the nineteenth century, as Mayer seems to believe. Nowhere does Kierkegaard suggest that self-acceptance is ever an easy process or that the 'Seligkeit' of the motto means individuality in the sense of outstanding-ness, which is what Mayer's views appear to read into the motto, since he blames the 'Zeitalter der Reproduktion' for Stiller's failure as an artist.

Many passages could be quoted to show that Either-Or is very relevant to the problems treated in Stiller, and directly - not ironically relevant; for example:

'For to think that for an instant one can keep one's personality a blank, or that strictly speaking one can break off and bring to a halt the course of the personal life, is a delusion. The personality is already interested in the choice before one chooses, and when the choice is postponed the personality chooses unconsciously, or the choice is made by obscure powers within it.'<sup>1</sup>

Stiller does not postpone the choice of a consistent character, as does Kierkegaard's aesthete, but he makes a wrong choice in trying to break his own continuity - and his true personality, his 'unconscious' mind testifies against it, as the whole course of the 'Aufzeichnungen' shows; he is not the confident man he tries to appear, and the reader sees this. Or again:

'...the self which is the aim is not an abstract self which fits everywhere and hence nowhere, but a concrete self which stands in reciprocal relations with these surroundings, these conditions of life, this natural order. This self which is the aim is not merely a personal self, but a social, a civic self.'<sup>2</sup>

This is in essence the problem which Stiller has to face after his release;

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- 1) Soren Kierkegaard, Either-Or, translated by Walter Lowrie, New York, 1959, vol.II, p.168.
  - 2) *op.cit.*, vol.II, p.267.

he has to learn that even personal acceptance of an identity is not enough, that one must accept oneself as others see one also, and learn not to impose one's views on one's surroundings. This is what is meant by the 'Isolation' of the motto; Stiller was ready to accept isolation in the literal sense, but not the absolute integrity of every personality within society, the right everyone must be allowed to misunderstand his fellows!

In several places Kierkegaard emphasises that even the accomplishment of this act of choice will not bring startling results, that true acceptance means the abandonment of exaggerated desires:

'Yes, my young friend, it requires much ethical courage not to wish to be distinguished by differences, but to be content with the universal.'<sup>1</sup>

'The truly extraordinary man is the truly ordinary man.'<sup>2</sup>

'Many, though they have a just conception of what a human life is, wish to be contemporary with great events, to be involved in important situations. Who will deny that such things have their validity? But nevertheless, it is superstition to think that an event or a situation as such is capable of making a man something. He who lives ethically knows that it all depends upon what one sees in every situation, with what energy he regards it, and that he who thus cultivates himself in the unimportant situations may experience more than he who has been a witness to, yea, a part in the most notable events.'<sup>3</sup>

What is there in these lines which makes them applicable to any one century only? They suggest not that the personal 'Seligkeit' to be won is dependent on any external circumstances, but that it lies in the acceptance of ordinariness. This is utterly contrary to Mayer's view that it is the century which prevents Stiller's self-fulfilment. Likewise his view that

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1) Kierkegaard, Either-Or, vol.II, p.232.

2) *op.cit.*, vol.II, p.332.

3) *op.cit.*, vol.II, p.257.

the 'Nachwort' is quite out of harmony with the motto is untenable, for Kierkegaard specifically says:

'The very instant he (the man contemplating the choice of ways of life) chooses himself he is in motion; concrete as his self is, he has nevertheless chosen himself in accordance with his possibility, in repenting himself he has ransomed himself for the sake of remaining in his freedom, but he can remain in his freedom only by constantly realizing it. He, therefore, who has chosen himself, is eo ipso active.'<sup>1</sup>

In other words, the choice is made real only by living it out actively in the world. This is precisely what Stiller is trying to do after his release, and what he will have to go on doing in his solitude. Therefore, Kierkegaard's motto cannot be taken as a claim that self-acceptance will be easy or bring permanent happiness, as Mayer seems to imply when he sees it as relevant only to an age less complex than ours; it is a choice which would be difficult in any age, and a choice constantly to be made anew. Certainly the twentieth century is not an age for individual, lone adventurers - hence the popularity of figures such as James Bond, through whom readers find a means of escape from humdrum existence - but it is Stiller's refusal to adapt himself to his circumstances which brings trouble: in any age he would be unsuited to a life of danger and self-reliance, even were it more possible than now. Certainly, as Mayer sees<sup>2</sup>, it is difficult not to be swamped by the manifold prescriptions for life found in the 'Illustrierten', since life has become so complicated, but this is not really Stiller's problem. His diatribe against the twentieth century has already been shown<sup>3</sup> to be avoidance of the truth, not genuine social

1) Kierkegaard, Either-Or, vol.II., p.236.

2) Hans Mayer, op.cit., p.41f.

3) Stiller, p.219f. Cf. above, p. 81.

criticism, that is, highly subjective in origin. Werner Kohlschmidt is quite right when he says, in his rejection of Mayer's views:

'Durch alle Indizien und Beweise verurteilt, der bürgerliche Zeitgenosse Stiller zu sein...also auf seine Kapazität zu einer neuen Wirklichkeit verwiesen, bleibt Stiller der introvierte Egoist, der er war.'<sup>1</sup>

Stiller's weakness is magnified by the mass-culture of our century, but it is still his weakness as such which is at fault. If Stiller knows that his experiences and feelings are not 'borrowed', that ought to be sufficient for him, but of course it is not, just as his knowledge that his past does not reveal all of his potential has to be confirmed by others. As social critic, Stiller is acting a part as much as he is in the stories about Florence.<sup>2</sup> Mayer, in taking the line he does, overlooks Frisch's essentially critical attitude to Stiller, critical in the sense that the novel reveals Stiller's excessive subjectivity and egoism. It is not by trying to accept himself that Stiller fails, as Mayer suggests, but by never really accepting himself in practice. Mayer sums up his attitude to the Kierkegaard question thus:

'...die von ihm gepriesene Seligkeit des Einzelnen, die in der blossen, wenn auch schonungslosen Selbstannahme liegen soll, erweist sich als monströse Selbstsucht. Es ist Philosophie liberaler Kaufleute aus dem 19. Jahrhundert.'<sup>3</sup>

Are we to accept that all Rolf's words are meant to be valueless? That self-acceptance is an entirely mistaken goal? No; we are surely meant to see how painful a process it is, one with no guarantee of permanent success,

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- 1) Werner Kohlschmidt, 'Selbstrechenschaft und Schuldbewusstsein im Menschenbild der Gegenwartsdichtung', Das Menschenbild in der Dichtung, ed. Schaefer, p.183.
  - 2) Cf. above, p. 46 ff.
  - 3) Mayer, op.cit., p.53.

but a necessary one if we are to be fully human and to live within society as normal humans. Stiller may not be an aesthete in the exact sense in which Kierkegaard uses the term, but he is trying to escape continuity - and continuity, an awareness of one's past, has been seen as a basic requirement for personal identity from Hume to Proust.<sup>1</sup> Certainly - as Homo Faber will show, the twentieth century can make it all too easy to avoid full self-awareness, it may make self-fulfilment in the deepest sense more difficult than ever before; but it does not stop man from reaching self-awareness through memory, through a sense of the passage of time. Stiller has not realized that human personality as such is based on continuity: what he fears is the continuity he has known, the repetition of weakness, boredom, failure. Consequently he takes great pains to write disconnectedly, in order not to slip back into the thoughts or attitudes of the old Stiller which might take a grip on him if he were too carried away by the flow of writing. However, he does not see that even this loose written form has continuity, in the sense that the isolated sections are held permanently together on paper, as a record of a period of time, unified by their gradually increasing sense of threat and uncertainty. In order to reject his past, his whole personality, Stiller should have avoided expressing himself in sustained, coherent way which allows of consistent observation: his determination to reject the faults of the old Stiller has blinded him to this fact. So the failure of his attempt to escape the past and his inability to accept his true 'present' result from a basic misunderstanding of the nature of human personality plus moral weakness: these are

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1) e.g. David Hume, Treatise on Human Nature, Book I, Part 4, Section 6.

to the end personal causes, not the product of cultural changes.

Why then does Frisch choose Kierkegaard specifically, with his strongly ethical bias, as a source for a framework; why not Locke or Hume, for example? Again for reasons which reflect on the individual weakness of Stiller. There is great irony in the fact that 'White' criticises Stiller for his failures, that is passes moral judgement on him<sup>1</sup>, while all the time he is attempting something which itself can be seen as unethical. The reference to Kierkegaard makes this striking irony possible and highlights the author's critical attitude to Stiller: it makes his attempt not just abortive but ethically wrong also. This point is also made by Stiller's spiritual arrogance within the 'Aufzeichnungen', his inability to accept a God who would not change his nature<sup>2</sup>, his wilful creation of the 'Engel' myth. Not for Stiller the Christian God who forgives and helps the weak. It is this ethical guilt which also makes the final peripeteia all the harder to bear for Stiller, and so adds an extra 'dramatic' quality to the work to help capture and hold the reader's attention. It is a similar process to the one whereby in tragedy ethical guilt is often added to weakness or lack of understanding in order to magnify the tragic fall: Othello kills Desdemona instead of just rejecting her, Hamlet's weakness leads to the death of Ophelia and Laertes.

The motto, which Rolf will take up in the 'Nachwort', also serves a useful constructional purpose, giving the fragmentary form an additional degree of cohesion, as will the inverted Oedipus myth in Homo Faber, as do

1) Stiller, e.g. p.123.

2) op.cit., p.383.

the dreams of far-away places - Santorin and Santa Cruz in the plays Graf Öderland and Santa Cruz. Kierkegaard's thought is illuminatory, providing, as Manger shows<sup>1</sup>, a useful basic pattern for the process of self-acceptance: despair, resignation, repetition, choice, the final 'leap' back into life. It is, in other words, a means of provoking thought, close enough in its basic conceptions to the situation in the novel to be a useful preliminary guide, and yet general enough to make one think how far it really applies, to think how much there is behind the superficial story-level of a man who denies his identity. It leads one behind the mystery to the problem of personality.

### Conclusions

The real value of Stiller resides, then, in its revelation of one mind at work, in its direct portrayal of its theme - the danger of making images of oneself and others. To emphasize its element of social criticism is to underestimate its subtlety as a novel of personality, and its unique combination of depth and popular style, in a form - first-person narrative - which is perhaps more difficult to manage well than many. Anthony Trollope once wrote:

'...it is always dangerous to write from the point of view of "I". The reader is unconsciously taught to feel that the writer is glorifying himself, and rebels against self-praise. Or otherwise the "I" is pretentiously humble, and offends from exactly the other point of view. The old way, "Once upon a time", with slight modifications, is the best way of telling a story.'<sup>2</sup>

Lubbock helps to answer this criticism of first-person novels:

1) P. Manger, op.cit., passim.

2) Letter to Kate Field, quoted in Allott, Novelists on the Novel, p.260.

'...do not let the hero come between us and his active mind, do not let the heroine stand in front of her emotions and portray them - unless for cause, for some needful effect that would otherwise be missed.'<sup>1</sup>

Both writers see that a man cannot communicate much about himself without being in danger of excessive self-interest. It is evidence of Frisch's mastery of the form that he has made this very self-interest the 'cause' of which Lubbock speaks; he takes the inherent danger of the first-person narrative and exploits it, but undermines it at the same time, by showing us both Stiller's arrogant defiance and his self-delusion and fear. Thus the fragmentary form has been used to intensify some of the particular potentialities of the 'Ich-Form'.

Liddell writes of the novel:

'As well as the setting in which characters physically live and act, there are countries of the mind, places where their hearts and minds are present, in memory, fear, hope or desire - they carry about with them this second background, an effect too subtle for the stage, though the novelist may wish to avail himself of it.'<sup>2</sup>

Stiller has quite literally 'countries of the mind' in Mexico and America, but if one extends the range of this notion and includes under 'countries' interests, particular subjects on which the mind dwells, then one sees how justified Frisch was in his choice of the novel form for Stiller; for what he has been able to convey is the composition out of fragments of 'memory, fear, hope and desire' of one mind, fulfilling what has been seen as the purpose of the modern novel -

'...sich auf das konzentrieren, was nicht durch den Bericht abzugelten ist.'<sup>3</sup>

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- 1) Percy Lubbock, The Craft of Fiction, p.145.
  - 2) Robert Liddell, A Treatise on the Novel, p.123.
  - 3) Theodor Adorno, Noten zur Literatur I, Frankfurt, 1958, p.62.

The problem of the individual's isolation has already been recognized as a specifically twentieth century problem<sup>1</sup>; in seeing this Frisch is not so original, but in his presentation of it as it affects one mind, one circle of people he has written an eminently good novel.<sup>2</sup>

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- 1) e.g. Georg Lukacs, Die Theorie des Romans, Neue Ausgabe, Neuwied, 1963, pp. 57f., 64f. and passim.
  - 2) Cf. Rudi Goldschmit, 'Die verlorene Identität', Stuttgarter Zeitung, 18 December, 1954: 'Das Buch liest sich so spannend, so unterhaltsam wie wenige moderne deutsche Romane, und es ist dabei so hintergründig...'..

## CHAPTER FOUR

### HOMO FABER

Frisch has expressly dissociated himself from those 'die aus Theorie darauf verzichten, Romane wie Balzac zu schreiben.'<sup>1</sup> This indicates that in each novel the form has been evolved as the best vehicle for the particular ideas to be presented, that the fragmentation is not necessarily expressive of the author's inability to reach a coherent view of the world, but should add rather to our understanding of the characters. The danger that this untheoretical approach may degenerate under the guise of 'modern' form into deliberate exploitation of the reader will be considered in the next chapter on Mein Name sei Cantenbein. In Homo Faber one is immediately struck by the apparent lack of order and by its contrast with the factual language. In Stiller the language, with its occasionally rather grandiose ring, revealed the central figure's self-dramatization; it was the language of a man obsessed with his own 'Nichtigkeit' and trying to escape it. The language of Homo Faber is far more idiosyncratic, but representative of a type of mind, since the vocabulary is full, in particular, of common twentieth century jargon. Certainly Faber is an individual - the individualising elements of the portrait reside in the degree to which various traits of the 'Techniker' are developed in him - but his characteristics are also supra-personal to the extent that they are intensified by conditions of life in the twentieth century: for this century as no other

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1) Horst Bienek, Werkstattgespräche mit Schriftstellern, Munich, 1962, p.23.

has valued a certain kind of intelligence - the practical as opposed to the artistic, the intuitive.

The title and its implications

The title suggests this representative function; Homo Faber is a nickname for Walter Faber, used because he has a consistency of thought and action which invites summary description. It is usually in association with comedy that one finds these typifying names, for instance in Molière's plays - one thinks of L'Avare, Le Misanthrope - and comedy, as these plays show, deals with dehumanization, with the loss of adaptability towards other people and the development of mechanical reactions.<sup>1</sup> 'Homo' Faber's rigidity is far from comical, but such a comparison does suggest a guide to his attitudes and behaviour: they are 'inhuman' in the sense of incompletely human; and indeed the novel is concerned with his restoration to full humanity, with the gradual discovery of latent but suppressed qualities. The particular form this 'inhumanity' takes is also clearly indicated by the title: 'homo faber' is a term coined by Henri Bergson, who writes of human history:

'Si nous pouvions nous dépouiller de tout orgueil, si, pour définir notre espèce, nous nous en tenions strictement à ce que l'histoire et la préhistoire nous présentent comme la caractéristique constante de l'homme et de l'intelligence, nous ne dirions peut-être pas Homo Sapiens, mais Homo Faber. En définitive, l'intelligence, envisagée dans ce qui en paraît être la démarche originelle, est la faculté de fabriquer des objets artificiels, en particulier des outils à faire des outils, et d'en varier indéfiniment la fabrication.'<sup>2</sup>

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- 1) Cf. for the 'mechanical element in comedy': Henri Bergson, Le Rire.  
 2) Henri Bergson, L'Évolution Créatrice, Paris, 1911, p.151.

Walter Faber is the one-sided representative of this eternal faculty, and the twentieth century fosters its development by placing emphasis on technical advance, to the detriment of human relationships.

### Language

Faber's language reveals clearly his modernity, in the notation of brand-names, for example, which place him firmly within the world we know.<sup>1</sup> But the precision of notation is noteworthy for psychological reasons also; critics such as Rolf Geissler<sup>2</sup> have already pointed out Faber's factual approach to everything - time and place are as exactly recorded as the brand-names:

'Unser Aufenthalt in der Wüste von Tamaulipas, Mexico, dauerte vier Tage und drei Nächte, total 85 Stunden...'.<sup>3</sup>

As Geissler puts it, this is 'symptomatisch für das vordergründigberechende und mathematisierende Weltverständnis Fabers.'<sup>4</sup> Similarly, Faber's use of twentieth century jargon, as well as placing him in our age, is an indication of how little he cares for language as a vehicle for expression to be used with care and adapted to circumstances. For him it is a series of symbols and no more intrinsically beautiful than mathematical signs, as is shown by his indiscriminate use of 'Fremdwörter', for example: 'Götter gehören zu ihrem job'<sup>5</sup>, said disparagingly of Hanna. Faber constantly

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- 1) Homo Faber, Frankfurt, 1957, e.g. 'Super-Constellation', p.34; 'Hermes-Baby', p.41.
  - 2) Rolf Geissler, Möglichkeiten des modernen deutschen Romans, Frankfurt, 1962, p.202ff.
  - 3) Homo Faber, p.31.
  - 4) Geissler, op.cit., p.202.
  - 5) Homo Faber, p.175.

reduces language to the absolute minimum necessary for comprehension:

'Die schwirrenden Vogel -  
Nie ein Flugzeug!'<sup>1</sup>

Such a notation lacks all personal participation in the scene around the observer and is equivalent simply to pointing at objects, saying the minimum about them. Language is here deprived of its unique power of expressing the speaker's feelings and attitudes to what he sees - depersonalized in that sense. This is the language of a man used to dealing with the machine, for whom people are only 'Bevölkerung'<sup>2</sup> and not individuals, of a man who is self-sufficient and feels no urge to communicate in the deeper sense of exploring his own reactions to things and attempting to give them form.

Ironically, however, because Faber treats language so disdainfully, it reveals far more about him than would be visible if he had a more careful style. The fascination of the novel lies, as it does in Stiller, in the picture of a mind, a character giving itself away; and the repetition of various words and phrases is very revealing. Most noticeable is his constant use of 'üblich' and 'das Übliche': this suggests a tendency to fit each experience - a flight, a party - into a preestablished mould, which holds no new mysteries of delights. This is the comment not of a bored aesthete, but of a man who believes himself fully in control of life. Writing, for example, of his time in Mexico with Herbert, Faber notes:

'Am dritten oder vierten Morgen, als wir wie üblich frühstückten ..war Herbert von der fixen Idee besessen, es müsste irgendwo.. irgendeinen Jeep geben.'<sup>3</sup>

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- 1) Homo Faber, p.60.
  - 2) op.cit., p.20.
  - 3) op.cit., p.56.

Even in such a setting, with all one supposes it to offer in the way of unusual sights and experiences, life very soon becomes a series of expected 'usual' happenings; this point proves the justice of Hanna's contention that Faber arranges the world, as it were, in order not to be surprised or challenged by it, in order to avoid its demands for response in each new situation:

'Diskussion mit Hanna - "über Technik (laut Hanna) als Kniff, die Welt so einzurichten, dass wir sie nicht erleben müssen.'<sup>1</sup>

Faber looks for the similarity in events, not for the differences which add interest and variety; he is ready to dismiss all he meets as 'üblich' so he need not react emotionally. Also, the repetition of this word creates a sense of security; everything has its place, there is nothing surprising in the world, nothing beyond the visible, he feels, nothing beyond his control. Therefore he will write of the view from the plane:

'Farbspiel wie üblich, ich habe es schon oft genug gefilmt...'<sup>2</sup>, unwilling and unable to find any interest in the spectacle. And when he hears about Joachim after an interval of some years, all he can comment is:

'Was ich erfuhr, war so das Übliche; Heirat, ein Kind...'<sup>3</sup>

Even for the life of a once close friend he can find no enthusiasm, no response.

Also conspicuous is his constant use of words associated with 'Vernunft'. He judges Herbert's development plans as 'kühn, jedoch nicht unvernünftig'<sup>4</sup>,

1) Homo Faber, p.241.

2) op.cit., p.21.

3) op.cit., p.36.

4) op.cit., p.20.

indicating that a calculated venture is vastly preferable to a spirited risk, that only when based on demonstrably sound grounds is action praiseworthy. Faber has no time for instinctive or emotional reasons for behaviour. Of himself and Hanna he says at one point: '..plötzlich die wahnsinnige Idee, nach München zurückzukehren. Ich stellte mich vor sie, um sie zur Vernunft zu bringen..'.<sup>1</sup> He cannot appreciate her feelings about the child she is to bear, not even in retrospect. Feelings of any sort are summed up as nonsense; his highest praise of Ivy comes when he finds her 'rational': 'Sie sah entzückend aus, dabei die Vernunft in Person'<sup>2</sup>, which indicates that Ivy is no longer making claims on him; he cannot understand emotional dependence, and what he cannot understand has no validity.

Consequently Faber tends to oversimplify issues. In explanation of his failure to marry Hanna he says: 'Es kam einfach nicht dazu.'<sup>3</sup> What he is attempting to do is to show how rational his own behaviour had been and so disprove Hanna's contention that his more recent mistakes derive in some way from that behaviour. But 'einfach' reveals how unaware Faber is of depths in others; he appears to believe that human relationships can be begun and ended without ado, that there is no need to attempt self-analysis even when marriage plans fail for no external, circumstantial reason.

Naturally enough he is ready to attribute his own reasons to others. He professes for instance to understand Joachim's suicide:

1) Homo Faber, p.68.

2) op.cit., p.92.

3) op.cit., p.66.

'Ich opferte noch anderthalb Tage, um Herbert zu überzeugen.., dass sein Bruder einfach dieses Klima nicht ausgehalten hat, was ich verstand..'.<sup>1</sup>

He understands the physical effects such a climate would have, but discounts any more complex motivation of an emotional, more personal nature. The slight arrogance of 'opferte' is tantamount to a comment on Herbert's lack of common sense in not agreeing to this view, and of course Faber cannot understand the kind of pride which makes Herbert determine to replace Joachim. Both these last examples show the summary fashion in which Faber assesses other's attitudes.

These are only a few of the examples which show the very language of reason betraying its user and showing his limitations in human understanding; one could add the unfeeling use of 'officialese' noted by Geissler, for example: 'Was Hanna betrifft..'<sup>2</sup>, which reveals Faber's purely factual approach to people however close to him. This ingrained attitude of notation rather than feeling survives even after the revelation of Havana:

'Ich wusste, dass ich alles, was ich sehe, verlassen werde, aber nicht vergessen; - die Arkade in der Nacht, wo ich schauke und schaue, beziehungsweise höre...'.<sup>3</sup>

The approach to people may have developed by this stage, but the mania for exactness still outweighs sensibility to the world in general. This example is chosen deliberately because it is quoted by Karlheinz Deschner as a crass example of 'Geschmackslosigkeit' in Frisch's style. He sums it up thus:

'Alles ist sehr flott, fit, aber doch nur eine glatte, moderne

1) Homo Faber, p.77f.

2) op.cit., p.45.

3) op.cit., p.257.

Allerweltsdiktion, eine Klipp-und-klar-Prosa, die eo ipso die Poesie erstickt.'<sup>1</sup>

He takes exception to the considerable repetition of vocabulary as well as to the use of such words as 'beziehungsweise': but the above examples should suffice to show that Deschner's criticism is based on a singular neglect to relate the manner of writing to the nature of the book as a whole - the repetitions, the choice of vocabulary are vitally important as indications of what type of mind is attempting self-expression. They are not to be dismissed simply as evidence of the author's inability to write in a more poetic style: an 'Ich-Roman' is of necessity a form from which the author is 'excluded' in the sense that he cannot make comments directly without destroying the illusion of the first-person narration; therefore the 'writer' must reveal himself by his own self-interpretations and by his language. If the language were solely that of the author the form would be misused; and Frisch does not allow this to happen - he makes Faber constantly reveal more of himself than he is consciously aware of, and the use of language is quite deliberate, especially where we find an incongruous mixture of descriptive and 'rationalistic' vocabulary.

### Form

If this inhumanity and entire lack of concern about it were all the novel revealed, it would be a pointless and alienating book. It is with this recognition that the entirely 'irrational' form becomes significant. If one considers initially the treatment of time, the highly personal nature

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1) Karlheinz Deschner, Talente.Dichter.Diletanten, Wiesbaden, 1964, p.144.

of the work starts to emerge; in the first section of the book, the 'narrative' follows anything but chronological order, moving between the events of the distant past, and of the recent past, and giving way constantly to the 'present' time of actual writing and reflection. The events of the second part are mostly subsequent to the time at which the 'Erste Station' was written, and much of this section is taken up by 'simultaneous' passages, one of which closes the book. There is therefore no final, well-considered viewpoint - events catch up on the writer constantly, preoccupy and worry him. Thus the ordering of the material alone suggests restless enquiry.

It has been argued by Margrit Henning that the presentation of the material is unnecessarily complex:

'Eine derartige Einteilung und das ganze System von Vorausdeutungen, Rückwendungen und Einschaltungen der Vorzeithandlung sind nur sinnvoll, wenn sie als Gestaltungsmittel der Problematik des Romans angewandt werden...Verglichen mit dem "Stiller"...wirkt die formale Anlage des "Homo Faber" künstlich.'<sup>1</sup>

'Der einzige Grund, der sich für diese Umgruppierung der Ereignisse erkennen lässt, ist die Erzeugung von Spannung, die hier eine Rolle zu spielen scheint. Die Rückblenden sehen konstruiert aus und lassen sich auch kaum aus der Seelenlage des Erzählers erklären, der ja zeitlichen Abstand hat.'<sup>2</sup>

'Die Formelemente des ersten Teils, Verschränkung der Zeitschichten und Rückblenden, sollen die Situation und die seelische Verfassung des Erzählers spiegeln; sie wirken denn auch im besten Fall assoziativ, oft aber willkürlich und zufällig. Die Tagebucheintragungen des Zweiten Teils überzeugen formal und inhaltlich nicht, da der Leser nicht erkennen kann, welche innere Not den Erzähler treibt.'<sup>3</sup>

'Die Konzeption der Hauptgestalt und die Form der Darstellung stehen von vornherein in einem Missverhältnis, denn ein Typus wie Faber schreibt einfach nicht; daran ändert auch die scheinbar angemessene Sprache nichts.'<sup>4</sup>

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- 1) Margrit Henning, Die Ich-Form und ihre Funktion in Thomas Manns 'Doktor Faustus' und in der deutschen Literatur der Gegenwart, p.196.
  - 2) *op.cit.*, p.198.
  - 3) *op.cit.*, p.201.
  - 4) *op.cit.*, p.202.

Clearly to some extent one must accept the fiction of Faber having written his own story - this is part of the necessary response to any kind of fiction, the willing suspension of disbelief. Frisch does, however, present us with the external reason that Faber wanted to explain the course of events to Hanna, but lacked her address and so wrote a kind of 'Bericht' instead.<sup>1</sup> The use of the word 'Bericht' is important; by it Faber signifies that he is writing a - to him - coherent document, for a 'report' presupposes a grasp of events, an overall view. But this is a subjective designation, thus one may consider it a hopeful title expressive of a desire to demonstrate how easily explicable and manageable events are. The 'Techniker' then writes in self-defence because he feels his world threatened by Hanna's intimations of 'Fügung' present in events, and in order to refind for himself the rational thread which runs through the rest of his life. This is what Walter Henze means when he writes of Faber:

'Zum erstenmal gehen seine Rechnungen nicht auf, er kann nicht mehr planen und fühlt darum das völlig neue, ungewohnte Bedürfnis nach Rückschau, Reflexion, Selbstdarstellung.'<sup>2</sup>

It is one of the ironies of the novel that what is projected as a 'Bericht' and written in the language of official communications - 'beziehungsweise', 'Vergleiche hierzu' etc. - emerges as unlike a report even in external form as it is. The result clearly contradicts the desire, and in view of the exceptional events it is not really difficult to accept the desire, as that of a man who has deliberately cut himself off from other people and has forgotten how to communicate normally: he turns to the only medium which

1) Homo Faber, p.242.

2) Walter Henze, 'Die Erzählhaltung in Max Frischs Roman "Homo Faber"', Wirkendes Wort, 11 Jg., 1961, Heft 5, p.281.

is in the slightest degree familiar to him - the written word, which he must have 'practised' in reports on his development projects. Thus the fact of his writing at all indicates his unease and his intense, unfamiliar sense of loneliness, plus the inability to overcome these with rational methods. To deny this, as Margrit Henning does, is to overlook the tragic elements in the novel; even if it is not possible to establish irrefutable reasons for the transitions between all sections, this does not minimize the general impression of a mind used to understanding and controlling, and now floundering helplessly. Brigitte Bradley rightly points out the combination of memories and comments forms an important paradox: 'Together they stress his self-contradiction in asserting the comprehensibility of life while reporting occurrences which are enigmatic to him.'<sup>1</sup> To see the form as evidence merely of a desire to arouse 'Spannung' is short-sighted; this is not to deny that there may be an element of design behind the ordering of the material, an intention on the author's part to intrigue his readers by presenting names and facts without explanation or preparation - we learn very early of the death of someone called Sabeth.<sup>2</sup> But this is a very special kind of 'Spannung' and Margrit Henning's claim would need closer definition if this is what she intended to imply: it is intended to interest the reader in how the events happened, not in what they actually were, to act as 'mystery' in E.M. Forster's sense.<sup>3</sup> It is not suspense in

1) Brigitte Bradley, 'Max Frisch's "Homo Faber": Theme and Structural Devices', Germanic Review, vol.XLI, No.1., Nov. 1966, p.281.

2) Homo Faber, p.30.

3) Cf. above, Chapter Two, p. 94.

the crude sense, neither is it simply a device imposed on the work to intrigue the reader: the unexplained introduction of names, the adumbration of events may also be interpreted as evidence of the highly personal nature of the writing, as proof of the discrepancy between the title 'Bericht' and its un-report-like nature; this 'Bericht' does not achieve even well-ordered presentation of material and can be shown to be formed by emotion, not logical thought. It is far from impossible to understand, on closer examination, the writer's 'innere Not', as Margrit Henning suggests. What does emerge can be briefly summarized thus:

- 1) The picture of a man whose attitudes to people range from amused detachment to plain incomprehension.
- 2) The picture, nevertheless, of a man who wants and tries to explain everything and cannot; his world is tragically crumbling, and he is afraid.
- 3) The reason for what is happening to him lies in a capacity for feeling, for 'irrationality', which he would never acknowledge.
- 4) He is therefore unable to explain away in rational terms the events and feelings which perhaps made him more susceptible to Sabeth's youth, even if one does not accept that they were all 'fatefully' connected.
- 5) His entire unawareness of the depth of his attachment to Sabeth, which reinforces the tragedy of her loss.

#### Faber's attitudes to other people

Faber makes absolutely no attempt to share others' enthusiasms. This

can issue in ironic humour at others' expense, for instance, when he describes Herbert in the desert: 'Herbert stand und erlebte noch immer.'<sup>1</sup> The unusual use of the verb at once puts the notion of 'experience' on a par with any other activity, suggesting that it is an assumed reaction, not a spontaneous passive feeling. There is nothing more reprehensible in this than in Heine's similarly ironic lines:

'Ich steh' auf des Berges Spitze,  
Und werde sentimental.' 2

But in Faber's case the irony is directed at another person, and shows in slight measure a lack of genuine interest in characters different from his own. As he says himself: 'Ich war unhöflich, mag sein...Menschen sind anstrengend...'.<sup>3</sup> This is in appearance a perfectly reasonable statement; fatigue renders conversation exhausting. But it is soon followed by these words: 'Er (Herbert) redete über Wetter, beziehungsweise über Radar, wovon er wenig verstand...'.<sup>4</sup> This suggests that the real reason why people tire Faber is that if they do not measure up to his level of knowledge, he has no sympathy for them and is merely irritated. Indeed, when Herbert begins to talk with more authority of his development plans, Faber immediately 'wakes up'. He is all too ready to sum up others as incompetent amateurs; people tire him because he does not know how to treat them as people, only as receptacles of information upon which he makes snap value judgements, or towards whom he shows arrogant - though amusing - disdain:

- 1) Homo Faber, p.35.
- 2) Heinrich Heine, Buch der Lieder.
- 3) Homo Faber, p.10.
- 4) ibid., p.11.

'Er kenne den Iwan! Das sagte er mehrmals...  
 Ich schälte meinen Apfel.  
 Unterscheidung nach Herrenmenschen und Untermenschen, wie's der  
 gute Hitler meinte, sei natürlich Unsinn; aber Asiaten bleiben  
 Asiaten -  
 Ich ass meinen Apfel.'<sup>1</sup>

The deliberate, pointed action is barely disguised insolence; Herbert is indeed dull as a conversationalist, but Faber prefers to ridicule rather than attempt to introduce new topics. And when one remembers that this action is written in retrospect, the irreverence is doubled. The arrogance has not been tempered by the shock of Sabeth's death.<sup>2</sup>

In many examples it is made clear that for Faber people are often just numerical entities to be manipulated, not individual beings to be understood. He speaks of his job while his thoughts are elsewhere and finds this a useful accomplishment.<sup>3</sup> People are not valued by him for their personalities, with which he might make contact in conversation, but according to their degree of 'sense'. He writes, for example, with very subjective logic: 'Er weinte immerfort, obschon er Mathematiker ist...'.<sup>4</sup> Emotion is unrespectable, individual feelings to be abhorred.

Faber does not simply state his dislikes honestly; they emerge in his phraseology with ingrained disdain, for example:

'Warum soll ich erleben, was gar nicht ist? Ich kann mich auch nicht entschliessen, etwas wie die Ewigkeit zu hören; ich höre gar nichts, ausgenommen das Rieseln von Sand nach jedem Schritt.'<sup>5</sup>

- 1) Homo Faber, p.12f.
- 2) Cf. Homo Faber, p.226, for the date of the first part, and p.230, with an earlier date and specific mention of Sabeth's death.
- 3) *op.cit.*, p.14.
- 4) *op.cit.*, p.21.
- 5) *op.cit.*, p.34.

Faber is not so rude as to call those who 'experience' fools, but he condemns them by the word 'entschliessen', which implies that 'Erlebnisse' are not an involuntary state but something one persuades oneself into, something one 'decides' to have. He is all too ready to generalize and reject; his world is self-centred, as is shown again by his annoyance at Herbert's 'Einsilbigkeit'<sup>1</sup>, and at Hanna's 'déformation professionnelle'<sup>2</sup>. These are his own faults - he reacts to them in others without realizing his own culpability. Certainly he says: 'Sicher hat auch unsereiner, ohne es zu merken, eine déformation professionnelle'<sup>3</sup>, but it is said unconcernedly, is not pursued further. Even at this late stage he is profoundly self-satisfied. This point of Faber's would incidentally still be effective if it were used in conversation in a third-person narrative; but it is far more revealing when even after the event Faber can write it down with no more self-consciousness than at the time the terms first occurred. The deeply rooted attitudes of the 'Vernunftmensch' are thus strongly emphasized.

Even after a profound shock, Faber has not gained in charity either. It is not just that he has rigid views; if this were so, he could still respect others, but he constantly exhibits a sense of superiority. He writes of Marcel:

'...er behauptete steif und fest, man könne diese Hieroglyphen und Götterfratzen nicht fotografieren, sonst wären sie sofort tot.'<sup>4</sup>

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- 1) Homo Faber, p.39.
  - 2) op.cit., p.201.
  - 3) op.cit., p.201.
  - 4) op.cit., p.58.

Faber does not openly say that he cannot understand this attitude; he slyly undermines Marcel's opinion in advance by adding 'steif und fest', thus prejudging the words to come. This particular attitude is of course subsequently explained by Faber's reaction to the Maya temples; he is unable to appreciate any values other than material ones. The repeated comment 'Wozu?'<sup>1</sup> shows his assumption that every action should have a logical foundation. Since his approach to time is to live in the moment without any sense of continuity, he cannot appreciate the subordination of the present to a supra-temporal framework, such as the Maya culture reveals.

For Faber there is nothing which distinguishes people from other items in his life. Personal relationships matter no more than material possessions, especially when the latter are precision instruments. For instance, when he describes how he started to write to Ivy, his attention is easily diverted to the state of his typewriter: '...ich holte meine Hermes-Baby (sie ist heute noch voll Sand)...'.<sup>2</sup> When individuals do engage his attention, they are classified by externals; it is Hanna's age and appearance which interest him, not speculations on how she may have fared in the interval in other than material terms.<sup>3</sup>

Sometimes his attitudes to others go beyond restricted interest to positive egoism. For example, he writes: 'Ich bin nun einmal ein Typ, der mit beiden Füßen auf der Erde steht..'.<sup>4</sup> There is false humility in these words; the colloquial tone of 'Typ' is intended - whether consciously or

1) Homo Faber, p.60.

2) op.cit., p.41.

3) op.cit., p.40.

4) op.cit., p.66.

not makes no difference - to convey the writer's ordinariness, and thus to make others, in this case Hanna, seem tense, emotional and exaggerated in behaviour. Deliberate cunning is not evident: Faber has sufficient control of language to achieve that, but an ingrained disdain for others, plus a firm belief in his own 'well-balanced' opinions are clear.

This is again evident when he talks of Hanna's belief in myths:

'...es hindert sie nichts, mitten im ernsthaftesten Gespräch damit zu kommen.'<sup>1</sup> He here implicitly denies her beliefs any serious validity, even when he appears to be - and probably believes himself to be - describing factually the differences between his thought and Hanna's.

It would be a mistake, therefore, to suggest that Faber is deliberately cruel in his disregard of others; he just does not understand why people make claims on others, and desires entire freedom. He will often therefore overlook his self-centredness entirely; for instance, writing of the razor episode, he says: 'Ich wollte wissen, was los ist...'.<sup>2</sup> This is quite true as far as it goes, and seems to be a chance event; but he does not look quite closely enough at the context, and does not see that this 'chance' provoked him to demonstrate his predilection for machines and technical precision as opposed to people and their desires - in this case Ivy and her need for affection on the last night together. He was only too glad to seize the chance to escape her for a little while. At no point, here or later in the course of events, does Faber show a sense of responsibility for others, or a willingness to make concessions of time and attention.

1) Homo Faber, p.201.

2) op.cit., p.89.

He is often less than honest with himself, for example when he says: '...ich hatten keinen Grund anzunehmen, dass Hanna lügt...'.<sup>1</sup> This refers to Hanna's statement that Joachim is Sabeth's father; but in fact Faber had every reason to suspect. If he were a less self-centred observer of human behaviour he would often have noticed the subterfuges which men employ to mask their motives or feelings from those who will not understand. The proof that this is an untenable excuse comes when the truth is finally revealed and Faber admits that he knew it all the time inwardly.<sup>2</sup> He does not want to concede that until he has to, because it hints at something other than reason within him.

This example and the following one begin to show that despite the coldly rational approach to others, Faber is not so entirely a 'Vernunftmensch' as he would like to be: 'Ich platzte nur, wenn Marcel sich über meine Tätigkeit äusserte...'.<sup>3</sup> If Faber were a true 'Techniker' with no vestiges of humanity left, this reaction would not be produced, his pride would not be vulnerable. Thus we are gradually prepared for the decisive evidence of the association with Sabeth, when his latent ability to be deeply moved is revealed.

A sense of insecurity has of course been instilled in Faber by Hanna, but the complete 'Techniker' would dismiss her words categorically.<sup>4</sup> Faber is however sufficiently disturbed to try to refute her imputations,

1) Homo Faber, p.207.

2) op.cit., p.223.

3) op.cit., p.71.

4) op.cit., e.g. p.196, where Hanna suggests Faber has been trying to control life too much, impose himself on it. Cf. p.201, where he tries to dismiss the notion of 'Schicksal'; p.209, where Hanna accuses him of reducing the stature of every subject he touches.

but his deep uncertainty is evident in his constant admissions that he does not understand.<sup>1</sup> Although we have seen how unreasonable he can be towards others, we cannot remain entirely unmoved by this: the spectacle of a man who thought he understood life bewildered by events and suggestions is pathetic.

#### Faber struggling to explain events

Faber's bewilderment is evident in his attempt to justify things which need no justification, as though he were clutching at straws, unable any more to see events in perspective. Margrit Henning seems to assume that Faber's 'zeitlicher Abstand' should automatically give him understanding and calm<sup>2</sup>, but it is surely part of the book's pathos that in retrospect everything becomes more not less confused for the writer. He is at a loss to know where to look for significance; for instance, writing of his first encounter with Sabeth, he says: 'Ich war einfach durch diese Warterei gezwungen, sie zu betrachten.'<sup>3</sup> There is nothing unusual or reprehensible in watching one's fellow passengers; what Faber implicitly shies away from is an examination of how he reacted to Sabeth after they had become acquainted. Whether one interprets the subsequent events as Fate, as Hanna seems to, or whether one sees in them simply the sad picture of a man unaware of how much he loves another human until he has lost her - in either case there are elements present in his relationship which Faber is afraid to

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- 1) Homo Faber, e.g. pp.18, 79, 84, 88, 118, 175, with the constant questions 'Wieso?' 'Warum?' etc.
  - 2) Margrit Henning, Die Ich-Form und ihre Funktion in Thomas Manns 'Doktor Faustus'..., p.108.
  - 3) op.cit., p.99.

examine, because they may destroy his equilibrium as a 'Vernunft-Mensch'. A sentence such as the above one is an involuntary attempt to avoid the issue and deny all deliberate association with Sabeth.

A deeper level of misunderstanding is evident when Faber speaks of his conversation with Herbert on Hanna:

'Warum ich nicht fragte, ob Hanna noch lebt, weiss ich nicht - vielleicht aus Angst, er würde mir sagen, Hanna sei nach Theresienstadt gekommen.'<sup>1</sup>

He is aware of a conspicuous lack of interest in himself and the attempts to supply an answer at all indicate his sense of threat and uncertainty; but the pathos of the insufficiency of his understanding is doubled when one sees that although he supplies a reasonable explanation, he considered Hanna's possible fate primarily as that of a Jew, not the woman he abandoned. He classifies her in a group.

One very clear example of the real insufficiency of Faber's reasoning comes when he speaks of Sabeth in relation to the child he and Hanna were to have had:

'Natürlich dachte ich daran, aber ich konnte es einfach nicht glauben, weil zu unglaublich, dass dieses Mädchen..mein eigenes Kind sein soll.'<sup>2</sup>

In trying to establish a reason for the rejection of the idea, Faber shows a purely emotional reaction, for the rejection of an intimation simply as 'incredible' has nothing to do with reasoned argument. The emotional reaction also suggests that precisely this possibility has occurred to him, even if he had prevented it occupying his conscious thoughts. In trying to emphasize his rationalism, he betrays its weakness.

1) Homo Faber, p.40.

2) op.cit., p.168.

It is often when Faber tries to justify his actions most specifically that the most revealing statements are made: the contrast between the intensely purposeful act of writing and what is actually conveyed by the words used is highly ironical. For example, in trying to explain his treatment of Hanna, he says: 'Ich war kein Feigling, ganz abgesehen davon, dass wir uns liebten.'<sup>1</sup> He intends to show that he cannot be accused of any kind of desertion of duty; his claim is true enough - but how wrong his priorities are! The social role and his 'image' are valued above the demands of personal devotion.

The ultimate admission of defeat, though it is not seen as such by Faber himself, comes in the narration of his Italian trip with Sabeth: 'Ich sah keinen Grund, eifersüchtig zu sein, und war es doch.'<sup>2</sup> This is an admission of utter lack of reason. It will be seen in the section on his relationship with Sabeth that part of Sabeth's attraction was her almost 'incredible' youthfulness and the fear of age which it awoke in Faber bound him to her; his jealousy is fear that she will find him dull. But quite apart from the actual explanation, it is very moving to see Faber reduced to a helpless statement of such utter illogicality as this. Here we see the language of reason testifying to the speaker's limitations.

These are not just isolated examples: the whole arrangement of the 'Bericht' performs the same function, with deep irony.

1) Homo Faber, p.64.

2) op.cit., p.153.

The ordering of material as evidence of Faber's unavowed emotionality.

What the 'Bericht' presents is anything but a cogently argued thesis. Faber starts off with a fairly straightforward account of the forced landing, and then breaks off<sup>1</sup>, to argue against the concept of 'Fügung'; at the point where the really important events are to begin - the growing acquaintance with Herbert etc. - he pauses to justify himself in advance, a sign of latent fear that there might just be some pattern in the events which he cannot see. The very emphatic rejection of the notion, aided by all the trappings of rational enquiry, betrays unease, an impression reinforced by the sentence: 'Es ist nicht auszudenken, wie anders alles gekommen wäre ohne diese Notlandung in Tamaulipas.'<sup>2</sup> These words undermine the whole rationalist approach: what is the use of advocating reading, if logical thought can be outweighed by emotional reactions? Thus, what was intended as a kind of precautionary introduction to what is to come, defeats its own purpose.

In the following section on the time in the desert, 'present' reflection soon intrudes<sup>3</sup>, suggesting an uncomfortable sense of having been called to account, a need to prove the validity of the writer's attitude to life on all fronts, as though he does not trust the events to speak for themselves. This hint of weakness is covered up to some extent by the escape into irony at Herbert's expense - but then this reaction against sentimentality becomes, in the precise context, itself an emotional reaction!

1) Homo Faber, p.30.

2) op.cit., p.30.

3) op.cit., p.33, 'Ich habe mich schon oft gefragt...'

When he reaches a point in the narrative where the events are less interesting for the moment, Faber's thoughts return to Hanna, naturally enough<sup>1</sup>; but the factual details he gives could be interpreted in two ways. Possibly this vision of their relationship in economic terms is partly self-defence - he may be unconsciously attempting to anaesthetize himself against the effect Hanna is having on him in the 'present'. Certainly the section makes his self-centredness quite clear, in that he enquires no further into Hanna's reasons and is not seriously perplexed by her behaviour, being only too ready to accept that all decisions are reached on logical and therefore valid grounds which are the concern only of the person who makes them. But it is not just chance that the section ends with these words: 'Im Grunde war es Hanna selbst, die damals nicht heiraten wollte.'<sup>2</sup> The categorical tone and positioning of these words add emotional emphasis which again belies the 'cool' approach.

In the next section<sup>3</sup>, dealing with his trip with Herbert, Faber seems to realize that he has reached a point which could be turned against him as an accusation of irrational behaviour, but he does not deal with this openly, in a spirit of genuine enquiry - again an emotional attitude enters, this time a defensive tone, implicit in 'Mein Entschluss'. This suggests a greater degree of positive decision than was in fact present. This kind of detail occurs constantly; at the start of a section Faber collects his thoughts, as it were, and gives extra emphasis to his 'innocence' or

1) Homo Faber, p.45.

2) op.cit., p.46.

3) op.cit., p.46, 'Mein Entschluss...'.

freedom of action.

Before the important section dealing with the discovery of Joachim<sup>1</sup>, Faber again returns in thought to the past with Hanna<sup>2</sup>, as though, before he continues, the associations which Joachim stirs in him have to be 'laid'. While Faber is constantly trying to disprove and nullify the idea of 'Fügung', that is, of direct and close connection between past and present, the order of sections here suggests that subconsciously he feels that there might be some element beyond his own vision. He has to 'lay' the past before recording more recent events because he fears that otherwise his whole attitude to life will be upset. There is constant self-justification, as for example at the end of the section on Hanna, when he writes in excessively deliberate restraint: 'Ich hatte gesagt: Dein Kind, statt zu sagen: Unser Kind. Das war es, was mir Hanna nicht verzeihen konnte.'<sup>3</sup> The implication is unmistakably 'this is all I said, and see how unreasonable she was'. Suitably strengthened in his self-righteousness, he can now go on to treat the moment when, with the figure of Joachim, the past visibly re-entered his life.

After the Joachim section, Faber again turns to thoughts of Hanna<sup>4</sup>; again this is natural since old memories had been awakened. But these are not just memories: they are once more attempts at self-defence, as periodically the fear that he might have been justly accused reasserts itself. He implicitly blames Hanna and Joachim for their 'irrational'

1) Homo Faber, p.68ff.

2) op.cit., p.63ff.

3) op.cit., p.68.

4) op.cit., p.79ff.

## behaviour:

'Es ist mir heute noch ein Rätsel, wieso Hanna und Joachim geheiratet und wieso sie mir, Vater des Kindes, nie haben wissen lassen, dass dieses Kind zur Welt gekommen ist.'<sup>1</sup>

The words 'mir, Vater des Kindes' are intended to show his unquestionable right to knowledge which makes the situation so puzzling for him; but in asserting his rights he also betrays his incomprehension. If he can feel himself so innocent as to be unaware of the resentment any woman would feel for his so matter-of-fact approach to life, then it is he who is at fault. Thus the word 'Rätsel', which is meant to be an indictment of Hanna's puzzling lack of common sense, becomes ironically self-accusation.

No chance for self-defence is neglected, indicating again and again both the rationalist approach to life and a vague feeling of threat undermining it. For instance, when the nylon thread stops him going out and missing a vital phone call, Faber inserts<sup>2</sup> a detailed explanation of just how much chance was involved. But the confidence is a little tempered by the last words of the passage:

'Hätte ich das Apparatchen nicht zerlegt, so hätte mich jener Anruf nicht mehr erreicht...und wir wären einander nie auf der Welt begegnet, meine Tochter und ich.'<sup>3</sup>

There is a wistful, regretful tone in the words 'meine Tochter und ich'; it is already clear who he is talking about, since Sabeth has been mentioned by name, so that the use of 'Tochter' suggests his fascination and sadness at the thought of a kind of relationship he has never truly experienced,

1) Homo Faber, p.79.

2) op.cit., p.89f.

3) op.cit., p.90.

rather than being just an indication to the reader of whom Faber is thinking about. Again, then, when Faber is trying his hardest to 'explain', emotion creeps in.

A different kind of emotion is indicated by the transition between the next section of narrative, dealing with the departure from New York, and what follows it.<sup>1</sup> Faber returns to the end of the visit to find Joachim; there is no obvious reason why he should do this, but it does suggest, as do the included words '(so denke ich oft)', that he is obsessed by all he saw in Mexico, by the primitive life and almost primeval vegetation, so that he feels somehow unsettled by this sphere which has no knowledge of his own standards. He feels in it something beyond his control, which constitutes a challenge to all his assumptions about the nature of life. Hence there is fear implicit in the occurrence of this section: by the very arbitrariness of its introduction, it testifies to the disturbed state of Faber's mind.

After this, Faber returns to the course of the narrative proper, and the meeting with Sabeth; but it is a narrative which he finds difficult to control. One outburst illuminates the whole nature of the 'Bericht': 'Was ändert es, dass ich meine Ahnungslosigkeit beweise, mein Nichtwissen-können!..Wozu noch ein Bericht?...'<sup>2</sup> His thoughts run on uncontrollably to what he has yet to record and his self-control weakens, for a moment admitting the supremacy of life as it is lived over rational discussion of it; despair almost makes him abandon his self-defence, and we are afforded a clear view of the ironic contrast between the aim of writing a report and

1) Homo Faber, p.96.

2) op.cit., p.102.

the capability of the writer. But blind obstinacy, itself an irrational reaction, reasserts itself in the emphatic, twice repeated 'ich war nicht verliebt' and the passage ends almost on a note of angry defiance:

'Wieso Fügung! Es hätte auch ganz anders kommen können!' <sup>1</sup> This he has to be sure of before he continues; he has to be certain that Sabeth's death was not ordained by some higher power as retribution for his own past behaviour. But while his will to remain the factual 'Techniker' is abundantly clear, it is equally clear to the reader that he has an unavowed capacity for emotion, that he needs and constantly seeks reassurance, even in the form of recrimination.

Faber now launches into the Sabeth narrative proper <sup>2</sup>, and its length - thirty-seven pages - shows the reader just how fascinated he was and is by her, even though he denies that he pursued her in any sense. This is one of the many occasions when the reader can see more than the writer.

When he does interrupt the narrative, it is to follow up thoughts on youth, innocence, and relations with women <sup>3</sup>, and significantly the person who springs to mind is a woman with whom he felt uneasy; does this not suggest that something in his relationship with Sabeth disturbed him, even though he will not allow this explicitly? The section also deals with the time of his youth, implying consciousness of his present age; this suggests, and the text supports it as it continues, that it was not just chance that brought him and Sabeth closer together, but also a feeling of challenge, an unwillingness to admit that the continuity of life must bring with it

1) Homo Faber, p.102.

2) op.cit., p.103ff.

3) op.cit., p.140.

changing attitudes with growing years - this is what Hanna means when she accuses Faber of treating life as 'Addition'<sup>1</sup>; he will accept no influence upon his action but rational ones, and thus makes the mistake of trying to re-live youth.<sup>2</sup>

Before he starts to deal with the really vital part of the story, the journey to Italy and Greece, Faber brings in a strong defence of abortion.<sup>3</sup> This suggests a latent sense of guilt and insecurity which the words deny, but which his insistence betrays - like Stiller's constant 'überzeugen wollen'. This is superficially the most unfeeling section of the whole book, but in this very appearance gives us the measure of Faber's fear of what is to come from this point onwards in the narrative. It is as though, thinking of the tragedy, he says inwardly: 'Why did the child have to be born at all?', hiding his deep emotion behind savage inhumanity. One is reminded of the convention whereby the hero of a tragedy may wish he had never been born, which is expressed here in a transferred manner, in terms appropriate to a 'Techniker'.

After the narration of the night spent in Rome - where for the first time several important hours are only hinted at, not described openly<sup>4</sup> - Faber produces a long passage on 'Schuld'.<sup>5</sup> Before the actual point of tragedy he has once again to reassure himself that he is not guilty of

1) Homo Faber, p.241.

2) For a good exposition of this attitude, cf. Brigitte Weidmann, 'Wirklichkeit und Erinnerung in Max Frischs "Homo Faber"', Schweizer Monatshefte, 44. Jg., Heft 5, April 1964-March 1965, pp.445-456.

3) Homo Faber, p.148ff.

4) op.cit., p.172ff.

5) op.cit., p.175ff.

misdemeanour. The chronology now becomes even less straightforward; Faber starts with his meeting with Hanna, as though he is afraid in some way of reliving what has happened, and puts it off as long as possible. He even seems to be putting the burden of blame on Sabeth by emphasising that she came to his room.<sup>1</sup> In addition, the details of the accident are presented in two separate sections, only the second of which suggests that he caused Sabeth to fall by frightening her.<sup>2</sup> Faber is obviously afraid of any detail which might make him appear culpable - and fear is emotion.

Faber's sense of utter loneliness, something which previously had never worried him, also his gradual awakening responsiveness to others are revealed in his memories of a night spent in the open air with Sabeth.<sup>3</sup> This passage occurs immediately after the notation of Hanna's rejection of him, as though he was and is afraid to be alone, afraid to admit the sense of desolation to which Hanna was adding. The saving of the memory until this point also suggests an incipient sense of value; it is a precious memory, one which is far more than a series of factual details - it is charged with joy in life, joy in the wonder of Sabeth's youth; it is a memory to be relived at a point of intense depression, an unacknowledged but entirely obvious 'Erlebnis'. Only when the unbearable tragedy has to be recorded does the factual approach recur in its unadulterated form.<sup>4</sup> But here it is a defence, not a sign of confidence, a defence against the flood of emotion and grief only too ready to carry Faber away and for ever

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1) Homo Faber, p.177.

2) op.cit., pp.180ff, and 222.

3) op.cit., p.212ff.

4) op.cit., p.226.

destroy his contention that life consists only of facts and not of feelings.

The conclusion to be drawn from all these examples would seem to be that the profound disturbance in Faber's equanimity is revealed by the highly personal ordering of the material in the 'Erste Station', by the constant interruptions to the flow of the narrative 'report'. The fragmentary presentation serves a double purpose of characterisation and suggestion, revealing in broad outline the suppressed fears and emotions of the mind at work on the conscious level. Thus the view of Margrit Henning that the tampering with chronology serves no useful purpose is short-sighted<sup>1</sup>: the first part of the novel shows by its disorder a disturbance one would not expect from a man such as we judge Faber to be by his language. Whether the involved chronology in the second part of the work adds anything to our understanding is more doubtful; there the mixture of 'past' and simultaneous diary entries seems to have been employed primarily to arouse the reader's curiosity as to what happened to Faber immediately after the tragedy and what is going to happen to him eventually, since the final answers to both threads are held back, by means of this interweaving, until the very end. The process is motivated - Faber is not allowed to use his typewriter at all times and resorts to the diary-form in between<sup>2</sup>; but the involved ordering is irksome, since it lacks the revelation of mood contained in the presentation of the first part.

Be that as it may, the form at its best indicates the emotional depths,

1) Margrit Henning, Die Ich-Form und ihre Funktion in Thomas Manns 'Doktor Faustus'..., p.201.

2) Homo Faber, p.229.

which Faber will not acknowledge. Because of this blindness, he is unable to understand the events and feelings, which, though prior to his meeting with Sabeth, made him perhaps more susceptible to her youthfulness.

Faber and the events prior to his meeting with Sabeth

One cannot deny that in Faber's attempt to miss the plane at Houston<sup>1</sup> there is something other than reason at work. One may perhaps be able to interpret this in terms of foreboding and inescapable Fate; or one can interpret it as a kind of lowering of defences, due perhaps to the onset of illness hinted at several times.<sup>2</sup> In either case, the purely rational façade begins to show cracks which - if added together by the reader, which Faber does not do - suggest that when he met Sabeth the impression of youthful vitality she made was reinforced by a vulnerability already apparent in Faber, an openness to irrational impulses.

Faber will often use the word 'einfach' when his reasons for an action are indefinable, covering up his unease at the possible existence of motivating forces which are beyond his comprehension. But the simplifying is an abdication of reason in the guise of explanation - and this is again a saddening spectacle.

There is for example his sudden decision to abandon his job and stay with Herbert: 'Es ödete mich einfach an, schon wieder in ein Flugzeug zu steigen.'<sup>3</sup> He invalidates even this emotionally tinged explanation by relating immediately afterwards how he took off with Herbert!

1) Homo Faber, p.15ff.

2) op.cit., e.g. p.13f.

3) op.cit., p.46.

Several times when one would not normally expect a justification, Faber gives away his - perhaps not even fully conscious - awareness that his well-ordered life is threatened from within himself. Of his waiting in Palenque he writes:

'Ich dachte an Joachim -  
Aber was eigentlich?  
Ich war einfach wach.'<sup>1</sup>

He is afraid to admit that the past had begun to preoccupy and disturb him, and that in addition his thoughts were ill-defined; he attempts therefore a vain explanation in physical terms, which serves by its inadequacy to reinforce the impression that he was not in control of those thoughts, that they were governed by emotional not rational stimuli.

The constant use of the phrase 'Ich weiss nicht warum...' is also indicative of an awareness that something inexplicable by his normal standards has been taking place, as well as of a fear of pursuing the enquiry further, perhaps. The abandonment of the rational process of probing is again pathetic. Faber is caught between two stools: either he should enquire rigorously into his own behaviour or admit that his understanding is inadequate, but he does neither seriously. For instance, of his first meeting with Herbert he writes:

'...was mich nervös machte, war...diese Vibration...dazu der junge Deutsche neben mir, der mir sogleich auffiel, ich weiss nicht wieso, er fiel auf, wenn er den Mantel auszog...'.<sup>2</sup>

By apparent enquiry into such insignificant details, Faber shows only that he does not know any more where rational investigation is applicable.

1) Homo Faber, p.55.

2) op.cit., p.9.

An even clearer example of the capitulation of understanding is found in Faber's record of his attempt to escape the searching airline officials: 'Ich weiss nicht, wieso ich mich versteckte. Ich schämte mich; es ist sonst nicht meine Art, der letzte zu sein.'<sup>1</sup> He senses something unusual, but draws no conclusions, unable or deeply unwilling to relate this feeling to events yet to come. In the plane he takes the stewardess by the arm, again 'uncharacteristically':

'Ich hielt sie am Arm, die junge Person, die meine Tochter hätte sein können, beziehungsweise am Handgelenk; ich sagte ihr (natürlich zum Spass!) mit erhobenem Finger, sie habe mich zu diesem Flug gezwungen...'.<sup>2</sup>

His jocular excuse does not hide his uneasiness, but he does not add the various indications together and conclude that at this stage something other than reason was at work in him, something which will govern to some extent his reaction to Sabeth - although the two sets of incidents are not necessarily connected in any way other than by the evidence they provide of the limitation of the 'Verstand' Faber so believes in. For him each moment exists separately, even when he looks back on a course of events, and so he can gain no clear picture of himself.

The duality within him is shown by the fact also that he remembers and records sensations quite clearly, and yet still tries to explain them away. For example, of the first morning in the desert he writes:

'Beim Erwachen am Morgen, als ich zum Fensterchen hinausschaute und den Sand sah, erschrak ich eine Sekunde lang, unnötigerweise.'<sup>3</sup>

'Unnötigerweise' must refer to the absence of physical danger which he at

1) Homo Faber, p.18.

2) op.cit., p.25f.

3) op.cit., p.37.

once realised; he does not stop to consider whether the fear might have emanated from a more personal source, from a feeling that the events taking place were intrinsically frightening because so alien to his normal smooth existence and that he could not cope.

Of his resolution to return from Palenque to Mexico City, all he can say is: 'Warum ich es nicht tat, weiss ich nicht'.<sup>1</sup> Again he feels the inconsistency of his behaviour, but no need to do other than note it down. He does not look for significance, because he has no sense of continuity; he sees only the moment of unfulfilled decision, not the general listlessness which had overtaken him and which should have afforded him insight into the fact that not all actions derive from rational motivation - and, by extension, into his relationship with Sabeth, which, whether seen in terms of Fate or not, is tragic in that its depth was not appreciated in time. It is another of the novel's ironies that although Faber protests that he allows for the unlikely<sup>2</sup>, he applies it only to events, assuming illogically that he himself is consistent in his attitudes. However, the reader constantly sees him betraying something other than rationality, for instance in his 'decision' to travel by ship: 'Plötzlich hatte ich genug... Plötzlich hörte ich mich am Telefon..'.<sup>3</sup> In his concern to show just how infuriating Ivy is, he reveals exactly how he acts: not from well-considered motives - the rational 'Ich' remains outside, hearing him on the telephone - but from an instinctive dislike and rejection of human relationships once they become at all complex. It is simply an illusion that the

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1) Homo Faber, p.48.

2) op.cit., p.30f.

3) op.cit., p.84.

reason he worships is necessarily the guiding force in his actions, a threatened illusion, we feel, when he goes out of his way to uphold it. The decision to go by sea to Europe is ostensibly an escape from Ivy, revealing enough in itself, but when he plays on Ivy's emotion by hinting at the dangers of flying, an ambiguous note creeps in, heralded by the well-known emphasis on rationality:

'...obschon ich meinerseits nicht an Wahrsagerei glaube, versteht sich, nicht einen Augenblick lang, musste ich sie trösten, als wäre ich schon abgestürzt...ich lachte natürlich, aber ich streichelte sie...'.<sup>1</sup>

Does this emphasis on reason not suggest that, as well as his characteristic rejection of awkward relationships in favour of egoistic solitude, there is another possible reason for the decision to go by sea - a fear of the recurrence of the loss of complete control over his actions which he associates with his last air trip? An emotional reason, in other words.

Another example which shows how little Faber understands of himself is afforded by one remark about his stay in Palenque:

'Ich trank Rum und schlief.  
Jedenfalls dachte ich stundenlang an nichts -'.<sup>2</sup>

This for the reader is a step away from 'Sachlichkeit', but because there is no positive sensation of fear etc., Faber does not notice how unusual it is for him to be so languid; he cannot judge himself because he never makes comparisons until they force themselves on him, each moment remaining isolated. When he does sense a more obtrusive emotion, he instinctively clothes it in the trappings of logicity and 'explains' it. For example:

1) Homo Faber, p.87.

2) op.cit., p.57.

'Meine Wohnung, Central Park West, war mir schon lange zu teuer, zwei Zimmer mit Dachgarten, einzigartige Lage, aber viel zu teuer, wenn man nicht verliebt ist -'.<sup>1</sup>

This is a typical, slightly ironic statement, but it is closely followed by these words:

'Ich stand am Fenster und hasste die ganze Zeit, die ich in diesem Manhattan verbracht hatte, vor allem aber meine Wohnung. Ich hätte sie anzünden wollen!'<sup>2</sup>

There is nothing in the nature of the flat as stated in the first excerpt to provoke such a violent reaction as is apparent in the second, and the contrast of the two emphasises the emotion in the second. But Faber carefully chooses the words 'hasste' and 'die ganze Zeit' to suggest, and persuade himself, that this is not just a momentary irrational mood but long-standing dislike, something more than depression, for to admit that would be to admit to a certain degree of emotional instability.

So obsessive is his desire to refute the accusation of selfish desires, that Faber can overlook the presence simply of sensitivity in himself. For instance, when dealing with his journey by sea, he makes great efforts to prove he had no designs upon Sabeth: 'Ich hoffte wirklich auf Männertisch.'<sup>3</sup> But he gives considerably less attention to the unusual joy he feels at the prospect of the trip:

'Ich hatte das Gefühl, ein neues Leben zu beginnen, vielleicht bloss, weil ich noch nie eine Schiffreise gemacht hatte; jedenfalls freute ich mich auf meine Schiffreise.'<sup>4</sup>

He writes this after implicitly ridiculing 'Gefühle'<sup>5</sup>, and also after his

1) Homo Faber, p.83.

2) op.cit., p.87f.

3) op.cit., p.98.

4) op.cit., p.90.

5) op.cit., p.82.

indifference to the beauties of the desert. He notes nothing odd by comparison, because this is a pleasant not threatening feeling - although for the reader it suggests a sense of escape and relief in Faber, hence somewhere in his subconscious fear of what has been happening to him on the American continent. So firstly he does not recognize emotion in himself as such, and secondly he is utterly unaware of its depth. Perhaps too this sense of unguarded relief and freedom contributed to his sensitivity where Sabeth is concerned.

After all Faber is not such a 'Vernunftmensch' as he believes, even when he believes he is being most factual. Particularly when away from his usual surroundings, even simple description can become difficult:

'Wenn man den Kopf zur Seite dreht...meint man jedesmal, man sei am Meer, unsere Pyramide eine Insel oder ein Schiff, ringsum das Meer; dabei ist es nichts als Dickicht, uferlos, graugrün, platt wie eine Ozean - Dickicht!'<sup>1</sup>

Twice in these lines he has to remind himself of reality, to stop his imagination wandering; the emphatic ending shows his uneasiness, though typically he draws no conclusions.

A quotation which shows the duality in Faber - and one which is not provoked by danger or any other really exceptional circumstance - comes after the forced landing, when Faber is showing how little there is to become excited about: 'Sand gelblich, das Flimmern der heißen Luft darüber, Luft wie flüssiges Glas.'<sup>2</sup> The notation is as factual as possible, the tone bored; and yet the comparison is by no means bad. Despite Faber's professed dislike of 'experience' in Herbert's sense, there is a

1) Homo Faber, p.61.

2) op.cit., p.29.

subconscious response within him to visual stimuli and a faculty which compares them with elements outside the scope of the immediate situation. Even at his most 'sachlich', Faber cannot entirely hide the sensitivity which Sabeth will finally bring to life.

### Faber and Sabeth

That Faber, despite his protestations to the contrary, is fascinated by Sabeth is quite clear to the reader. He notices the table-tennis bats and remembers them in retrospect<sup>1</sup>, a tiny detail but suggestive of a pre-occupation with the thought of Sabeth. Her youthfulness and her capacity for amazement, emotional vitality, engage his attention: 'Ich habe nicht mehr gewusst, dass ein Mensch so jung sein kann...'.<sup>2</sup> A little later he notes: 'Sabeth fand mich komisch.'<sup>3</sup> Writing this small fact down could be explained by his usual exactness; or more significantly as the first sign of sensitivity to her opinion, an interpretation supported by the following lines: 'Ein wenig, glaubte ich, mochte sie mich doch.'<sup>4</sup> For the first time, Faber wants to be liked - a great step forward from his reactions to Herbert and Ivy! But he is unaware of a change.

He is equally unaware of what a vast difference is noticeable - to the reader - is his general behaviour: '...und ich hatte Zeit wie noch nie, und kam nicht einmal dazu, die tägliche Bordzeitung zu lesen.'<sup>5</sup> At least,

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1) Homo Faber, p.102.

2) op.cit., p.103.

3) op.cit., p.106.

4) op.cit., p.106.

5) op.cit., p.107.

he is aware of the change, but it remains a factual observation; yet that a man previously so exact in his habits should give way to the free and easy life on board ship is far from unimportant. Here again is proof of Hanna's later contention that the individual moment of life is for Faber never linked to what has gone before or is yet to come, in this case the growing attachment to Sabeth, the signs of which he never puts together.

Faber begins in these passages to show considerable preoccupation with age - he feels his vitality threatened, but does not conclude from this that he ought to act differently from the youthful, only that he must prove his élan vital. For example, he resents the Baptist's approach to Sabeth, his taking of her arm: 'So eine Alt-Herren-Manier.'<sup>1</sup> The implication is that he is far more youthful, less sentimental; but he gives himself away by seeing through the gestures of others with untypical clarity! Even when he is being his usual factual self, fear of age creeps in:

'...man bleibt in der Mitte einer Kreisscheibe, wie fixiert, nur die Wellen gleiten davon, ich weiss nicht mit wieviel Knoten in der Stunde, jedenfalls ziemlich schnell, aber es ändert sich überhaupt nichts - nur dass man älter wird.'<sup>2</sup>

Faber's observation of Sabeth's gestures continually belies his professed lack of deep interest; he certainly was not obsessed with her if one equates obsession with violent passion, but clearly was obsessed with her in the more subtle sense of feeling in her a challenge to his existence. Indeed, the very number of his protestations to the contrary proves the point:

1) Homo Faber, p.109.

2) op.cit., p.107.

'Es interessierte mich wirklich nicht, ob ein Mädchen wie Sabeth ...schon einmal mit einem Mann zusammengewesen ist oder nicht, ich fragte mich bloss.'<sup>1</sup>

This is a very inadequate reason, and omits to point out that any degree of curiosity about another life is unusual for Faber.

His attempts at detachment are painfully obvious:

'Sie hatte sich umgekleidet und trug jetzt einen olivgrünen Manchesterrock, glockig, was ihr besser stand als die Bubenhosen, fand ich - vorausgesetzt, dass es wirklich dieselbe Person war!'<sup>2</sup>

The reservation at the end of this sentence is jokingly said, but clearly an attempt to cover up the interest felt, to pretend his observation was not as close as it in fact was.

There are several signs that Sabeth arouses positive emotion in Faber, which he does not dare recognize, or cannot as yet appreciate. After the visit to the engine-room, he writes: 'Ich hatte ihr etwas bieten wollen.'<sup>3</sup> For him this is just the notation of a slight regret that the treat was not an entire success, but for the reader a revelation - when had Faber ever gone out of his way to try to give someone else pleasure, or ever minded what others felt? Also, when at the end of the trip he writes the apparently unremarkable phrase: 'Wenn ich mir vorstellte, wie man sich in vierundzwanzig Stunden verabschieden wird...'<sup>4</sup>, he overlooks the vital point that never before had he felt any desire to look beyond the present, let alone to regret the swift passage of time.

His complete blindness as to what is taking place in his own heart is

1) Homo Faber, p.116.

2) op.cit., p.100.

3) op.cit., p.124.

4) op.cit., p.124.

perhaps most clear in his dejection on his fiftieth birthday. He imputes this to the lack of celebration, but when has he ever previously shown a desire to have other people making a fuss of him? This is a rather bad shield for his sadness at the approach of disembarkation.<sup>1</sup> Similarly his criticism of modern dancing: 'Ich finde sie lustig, ihre heutigen Tänze, lustig zum Schauen...alles etwas epileptisch, aber lustig'<sup>2</sup>, which is merely a blind for his inability to join in with success, a cover for disappointed awareness of his departed youth. If one compares this with the above reference to an 'Alt-Herren-Manier', Faber's inconsistency is illuminating; at one moment he wants to deny his age, at another, when it prevents him from doing something, he withdraws into its dignity and ridicules youth a little. Both are emotional reactions.

So too is his tirade against women and 'Gefühl'.<sup>3</sup>

Although agreeing with what we have seen of his previous behaviour, the inclusion of these thoughts at precisely this point suggests a decrying of what he fears to find in himself, in order to control it. His annoyance at Sabeth's inference that he is sad because he is lonely<sup>4</sup> is a similar process of emotional self-defence.

He is noticeably upset by Sabeth's suggestion that he is a cynic.<sup>5</sup> She may indeed be exaggerating, but it is his sensitivity to her opinion in the first place which is noteworthy; he again protests that he cannot stand

1) Homo Faber, p.125.

2) op.cit., p.126.

3) op.cit., p.128f.

4) op.cit., p.128.

5) op.cit., p.129.

'feelings', admittedly with some humour: 'Mann kann sich nicht selbst Gutnacht sagen - aber ist das ein Grund zum Heiraten?'<sup>1</sup> But the humour is based on exaggeration, suggesting that Faber is trying too hard to cover up his own feelings of both inadequacy vis-a-vis Sabeth, and fear of what is happening within himself.

The same fear is more evident in another example; of Sabeth he writes:

'...sie...wollte nach wie vor wissen, was ich denn die ganze Zeit grübelte, und irgendetwas musste ich ja sagen; ich gab ihr das Feuer, das ihr junges Gesicht erhellte, und fragte sie, ob sie mich denn heiraten würde.'<sup>2</sup>

This moment of revelation about Faber's feelings is greatly underplayed, as if he were afraid to admit the strength of her hold on him and his fear of losing her. He is never able to see clearly the effect she has on him, but we can infer it by comparison with earlier episodes. At the end of the trip comes this line: 'Draussen die Ausschiffung, die man gesehen haben musste...'<sup>3</sup> There is a reluctance, in these words, to go and watch, unexpected in a man whom one would suppose interested in the precision of the docking operation, and who likes to record everything factually on film where possible.<sup>4</sup> His mind for once is not on the external event, but preoccupied with unspecified thoughts - one surmises with the coming parting: it is this which has remained in his memory most clearly. A climax is reached when he says: 'Mein Leben lag in ihrer Hand.'<sup>5</sup> For a man who has built his life on self-reliance this is indeed a humbling admission, and a

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1) Homo Faber, p.131.

2) op.cit., p.134.

3) op.cit., p.134.

4) op.cit., e.g. p.21.

5) op.cit., p.134.

very moving one in its unadorned simplicity.

After the departure from the ship, there is a noticeable recurrence of the earlier constant use of 'üblich': 'Paris war wie üblich...ich wohnte wie üblich am Quai Voltaire, hatte wieder mein Zimmer mit Blick auf die Seine...' <sup>1</sup> These expressions have not been used so obviously for some time, and their mass entry here, so to speak, indicates an intense feeling of emptiness, and dullness, hence an unacknowledged recognition of what Sabeth had come to mean. But Faber would not face the truth; when Williams felt that Faber needed leave, the latter seeks reasons in the physical appearance, unconscious of the fact that emotional disturbance shows itself just as clearly if less starkly than physical illness. <sup>2</sup>

When Faber meets Sabeth again, their association is described in almost uncertain terms, as though even in retrospect he hardly dare feel that she had been glad to see him:

'Es war Frühling, aber es schneite, als wir in den Tuileries saßen...sie war froh um unser Wiedersehen, schien mir, wegen der Zigaretten, sie war bankrott....' <sup>3</sup>

And the fact that he records the setting is also important, signifying that association with Sabeth was gradually making him more aware of all that he had previously missed in the world around. He even tries to disparage his own emotion, as one does when afraid it may be too powerful:

'Vielleicht liess sie sich wirklich von jedem Mann aushalten, eine Vorstellung, die mich nicht entrüstete, aber eifersüchtig machte, geradezu sentimental.' <sup>4</sup>

- 1) Homo Faber, p.136, my underlining.
- 2) *op.cit.*, p.136.
- 3) *op.cit.*, p.141.
- 4) *op.cit.*, p.143f.

The recollection of the thoughts of this time reveals to the reader, though not to Faber who makes no comparisons, the extent of the change which has been taking place: 'Hatte ich von der Vernunft etwas zu erwarten, was ich nicht schon kenne? Für Sabeth war alles ganz anders.'<sup>1</sup> Never before has he given a thought to the future, and certainly never with such blatant regret. Suddenly 'das Übliche', which he had always set up for the sake of convenience to avoid the need for exertion of the senses, for engagement in the unknown, becomes empty: a change indeed. His sensitivity to any manifestations of age increases; of American tourists he says: 'Ausbruch aus einem Altersheim!'<sup>2</sup> thus implicitly dissociating himself, reassuring himself in his own mind of his own greater vitality.

Despite the 'zeitlicher Abstand', then, Faber is still unable to understand the workings of his own personality, and it is this inability which provides the primary interest - reminiscent of the dramatic device whereby the audience can see clearly what is happening while it is hidden from one of the characters: tragic irony, in fact. As in Stiller, though with less actual 'mystification', since the events themselves are over, we have here the type of mystery which E.M. Forster might have had in mind.<sup>3</sup> Faber writes, for example:

'Heute, wo ich alles weiss, ist es für mich unglaublich, dass ich nicht schon damals, nach dem Gespräch auf der Via Appia, alles wusste.'<sup>4</sup>

He cannot see, either at the point of the action or the point of writing,

1) Homo Faber, p.155.

2) op.cit., p.162.

3) E.M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel, p.84.

4) Homo Faber, p.167.

that the rules of logical deduction did not apply in this case, that it was ironically his enjoyment of the emotions set up in him by Sabeth which prevented him from reaching the truth - he did not want the 'present' at that moment to be destroyed.

Another example is provided by Faber's reaction to seeing Hanna again: 'Hanna mit weissen Haaren!'<sup>1</sup> He is illogically amazed at her changed appearance, forgetting that the passage of time for her is the same as for himself: this comment hints at his own desire to forget age aroused by his association with Sabeth - as though he were siding with Sabeth against Hanna, who belongs to an 'older' generation. But Faber himself does not fathom his surprised reaction to Hanna. It is only in the deliberately restrained language of the end of the 'Erste Station'<sup>2</sup> that we see how he begins to be aware of what Sabeth has meant.<sup>3</sup>

### The 'Zweite Station'

By the time of writing this second section, Faber has had more time to reflect; the language is noticeably less self-assured and dogmatic.

One major change is the very frequent use of 'ich verstehe nicht..'.<sup>4</sup> Faber no longer automatically imposes his interpretation upon people or even tries to find reasons and explanations, although he is still far from understanding what has happened in its entirety. There is nevertheless a new note of humility.

1) Homo Faber, p.178.

2) op.cit., p.226.

3) Cf. above, p. 139f.

4) Homo Faber, p.229 & passim.

Just as he was blind to the real nature of his attachment to Sabeth, that is, to its depth, so now he is unaware of the depth of the change taking place in him in general. He asserts<sup>1</sup> that he has never enjoyed New York parties; this may be true, but he does not stop to differentiate the reasons. Formerly it would have been because he just could not be bothered with people and their amateurishness but now, one suspects, because of the profound shock he has received, because of the awful void in his life which he is just beginning to feel fully, he finds other people emotionally superficial.

It is a slow process of rehabilitation to life, but one in which the reader shares by many details; for example, when Faber writes: '..ich kann mir wirklich nicht vorstellen, was Hanna ausserhalb dieses Zimmers tut...'.<sup>2</sup> This shows the reader that Faber has at last made a start towards a new appreciation of life by trying to imagine, however unsuccessfully, what Hanna does when away from him. Although he cannot as yet fully share her grief, he has acknowledged her independent existence and begun to move out of himself to some extent. His literal transcription of her words is also a genuine if uncomprehending attempt to appreciate another point of view, his own basis for life having been so profoundly shaken.<sup>3</sup>

The vital point of change comes of course in the visit to Cuba, where the richness and beauty of life have revealed themselves to him, with the attendant pain of transience. His own life suddenly seems 'belanglos'<sup>4</sup>,

1) Homo Faber, p.230.

2) op.cit., p.234.

3) op.cit., p.241.

4) op.cit., 254.

petty. But with this comes the realisation that it is the only life he has, and that he is letting it slip by unused in the fullest sense. At last he approaches life directly, refusing significantly to film any more.<sup>1</sup>

A testing point soon comes, when he writes: 'Hanna meint, ich merke ihre liebe Rücksicht nicht...'.<sup>2</sup> He now has to go through the painful process of being taken for what he has previously made himself - unobservant of human kindness - but no longer is. He takes this fate humbly, talks constantly of Hanna as though he is only just beginning to know her, as if she is his only hold upon existence. Such a sentence as this: 'Hanna ist mein Freund, ich bin nicht allein...'<sup>3</sup> is most moving if one remembers Faber's earlier rudeness to others in order that they should leave him alone. Now loneliness is what he most fears.

To the end there is conflict between the old Faber and the new man, uncertain of what to make of life; for instance<sup>4</sup> within a few lines one finds a clear contrast between sudden thoughts of 'Dämonen' and the repeated, reassuring assertion that everything is 'wie üblich'. But it is a losing battle against the need to admit the restricting blindness of the past. The final capitulation comes when Faber writes: 'Auf der Welt sein; im Licht sein...Ewig sein; gewesen sein.'<sup>5</sup> He admits that to live is to be aware of the hardships and of the delights of existence, to accept the joys and pains of life in the knowledge of its transience.

1) Homo Faber, p.259.

2) op.cit., p.259.

3) op.cit., p.282.

4) op.cit., p.279f.

5) op.cit., p.283.

There are many other passages which could be added to these, some already analysed in detail by critics: for example, the word games with Sabeth<sup>1</sup> which monitor Faber's increasing awareness of the world which lies waiting for appreciation by the senses, and the stay in Cuba which brings this awareness to its maturity.<sup>2</sup> These are more obvious choices for interpretations, but it is rather in the countless small details of expression that the value of the form lies, that is, in the less self-conscious remarks. From the examination of these throughout the course of the book we can see; firstly, the mind of the 'Techniker' and its 'Sachlichkeit' which expresses itself whether Faber is being deliberately matter-of-fact or not; and secondly we see beyond his own knowledge of it Faber's response to Sabeth and the gradual change it brings about in his capacity for emotional experience. To sum up, then, we see here, in the first-person form, a process of which the 'writer' (Faber) is largely unaware, just as Stiller is unaware of the gulf between what he tries to become and what he really is; and the tragedy is reinforced by the fact that even after the event clarity is not immediate, the old habits of mind persist and make it plain to the reader why, given the circumstances and the characters, the events happened as they did.

Would any other form have been able to produce quite the same degree of poignancy? 'Erlebte Rede' could also show the workings of the subconscious mind as also the limitations of the conscious mind. Margrit Henning<sup>3</sup>

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1) Homo Faber, p.212ff.

2) Cf. Hans Geulen, Max Frischs 'Homo Faber', Studien und Interpretationen, Berlin, 1965, pp.78ff, 88.

3) Margrit Henning, Die Ich-Form und ihre Funktion in Thomas Manns 'Doktor Faustus'...., p.202.

advocates the use of third-person narrative; certainly the events could be presented thus, and Faber's limitations shown in his speech. But neither form could reproduce the effect Frisch has achieved: that Faber's limitations persist even when he has been sufficiently shaken to take the (for him) unprecedented step of expressing himself in writing. It is through the reliving of events in this extended fashion, not just in flashes of memory, that his emotional experience is increasingly deepened in preparation for the revelation of Cuba. Walter Henze is only partially right when he says that in the first-person form we come closest to Faber's unease, his doubts, cynicism, mistakes and fears<sup>1</sup>; it is only in the first-person written form that we see the real tragedy of the Sabeth action - that Faber has lost in her the one person who would have given him joy when the emotional responses of which we see he is capable had fully developed.

### 'Personal responsibility'

Although one can justify the form and enjoy the book as the record of a tragic loss which is fully appreciated only when it is too late, is there any causal connection between what Faber is - a 'Vernunftmensch' - and Sabeth's death? Certainly one can say that the fact he does lose her is tragic because we see latent qualities in him which she might have brought to fuller fruition. Certainly one could also say that at the point when he met her, he was particularly susceptible to youth and joy after the strange experiences in Mexico; but is it true that it was the callous

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1) Walter Henze, 'Die Erzählhaltung in Max Frischs Roman "Homo Faber"', Wirkendes Wort, 11 Jg., Heft 5, 1961, p.289.

attitudes to people and lack of sympathy, which we can see in so many instances, which led to the development of their relationship and so eventually to Sabeth's death? Is it possible to accept Hanna's view that Faber felt towards Sabeth a kind of emotion which he misunderstood because of his character and habits?<sup>1</sup> Certainly he was not aware of the depth of his attachment, and this is the essence of the tragedy, but surely it is vain to assert that there is something so different about parental feelings that they can be differentiated from purely sexual response when the relationship of the people concerned is not known to either?<sup>2</sup> How else, in other words, could Faber have treated Sabeth? If he had made more overt advances, she might possibly have been frightened and have avoided him, or she might equally have allowed herself to be seduced earlier and the tragedy would only have been advanced in time and a little less poignant because the deep affection would not have developed in Faber. It is unjust to call him 'irresponsible' simply because he lived for the moment and gave no thought to the possible future development of their relationship; we all act in this way when we make new acquaintances. Hanna is right when she accuses him of treating life as 'Addition'<sup>3</sup>: we have seen that because of

1) Homo Faber, p.241.

2) Social anthropologists, although not in agreement on the origins of the incest taboo, do agree that man is not averse to incest as such by instinct, but only to sexual relations with those whom he knows to be close relatives - which is not Faber's case. They do not accept that there is any instinct which indicates blood relationship when this is not known to exist between two persons.

Cf. E. Westermarck, The History of Human Marriage, London, 1894.

Robin Fox, Kinship and Marriage, Harmondsworth, 1967, especially Chapter II, pp.69 & 73.

3) Homo Faber, p.241.

this he cannot see the emotional constituents of his personality. Faber, like Stiller, has very little real self-awareness and sense of continuity, although for very different reasons: partly indeed because of the 'Techniker's' way of life, the constantly rootless existence which his job entails, but primarily because he deliberately avoids what creates awareness of continuity most clearly -- emotional attachments to other people. His lack of knowledge of himself is not the result simply of never having time to think about personal matters. The mentality which positively suited him for his particular career is one which made it difficult for him to understand and appreciate emotional responses to life. This is not to say that every engineer is coldly factual in the same way, but only that the factual approach was so pronounced in Faber that no other career would have seemed possible -- and of course the pursual of that career once started would lead to a reinforcement of his basic characteristics. What then happens in his association with Sabeth is that at last he happens to find someone who makes a strong emotional appeal, and so he enters into an organic relationship which -- although very short -- is entirely different from Faber's association with Ivy. With her, Faber never allowed any one mood to dominate for long, he was in charge, as it were; but so stirred is he by his relationship with Sabeth that he allows it to grow and develop -- he allows it continuity in other words, that basic element of all human personality; and once he has allowed continuity into his life in however small a degree, he begins to feel that he has missed something immensely valuable, that he has been less than human, in fact. Hence his distraught feelings afterwards. But one cannot say that precisely because of this

fault of 'inhumanity', of lack of sense of time and continuity, he forgot his age entirely when with Sabeth, when he should have realized that it demanded a different relationship with a girl of her age: many more worthy men have married girls further from them in years than Sabeth is from Faber. Indeed, we have seen that his attitude to his age is inconsistent and indicative of an instable emotional state, not of irresponsibility. One might perhaps argue that Faber the 'Vernunftmensch' was irresponsible in so far as he was willing to take from Sabeth whatever she gave him while knowing that her tendency was simply to experiment with relationships and gain 'experience'; but one has to allow other people for their own actions and decisions, and Sabeth was not such a child after all. In fact one could even interpret the fact she came to Faber's room<sup>1</sup> as evidence not so much of Faber's avoidance of blame as of her initiative in the relationship.

There are several ambiguities of this nature; for instance when Faber writes:

'Ich halte es mit der Vernunft. Ich bin kein Baptist und kein Spiritist. Wieso vermuten, dass irgendein Mädchen, das Elisbeth Piper heisst, eine Tochter von Hanna ist?'<sup>2</sup>

The opposite of his actions and attitudes he rejects high-handedly as superstition: this is Faber at his most self-centred. But there is some truth in the second part of the statement: why indeed should he have suspected from the start who Sabeth was? Admittedly, when he does later find out, he prefers not to think about it, but by that stage the relationship is already advanced. This statement is not so much irresponsible as

1) Homo Faber, p.177.

2) op.cit., p.113.

tragic: it is, as has been shown, pathetic to see a man who believes in reason no longer able to understand what he has and what he should have done. Although the emphasis on reason is overplayed in the next excerpt, presumably to make the reader feel that Faber is profoundly uncertain of what he is saying, one cannot reasonably deny the validity of what he says:

'Hätte ich damals auf dem Schiff..auch nur den mindesten Verdacht gehabt, es könnte zwischen dem jungen Mädchen und Hanna, die mir nach der Geschichte begreiflicherweise durch den Kopf ging, ein wirklicher Zusammenhang bestehen, selbstverständlich hätte ich sofort gefragt: Wer ist Ihre Mutter?'<sup>1</sup>

Admittedly this does not excuse Faber if one indicts him on the score that he behaved inappropriately for his age and Sabeth's, when he should have felt more responsibility in view of her youth; but one must agree with him when he says: 'Ich bin nicht pervers.'<sup>2</sup> One might say that Sabeth's apparent lack of interest in him for a start incensed his pride a little, and that to this extent his behaviour towards her was not unselfish, but this is entirely irrelevant to the question of whether he could or should have known that she was to be treated differently.

This selfishness is certainly more evident in the later stage of the relationship, when Faber dismisses worries about Sabeth's identity - but this is also evidence of his attachment to her, of the gradual, moving conversion of the 'Vernunftmensch' to sensibility. He avoids the question later with Hanna:

'"Seit wann hast du gewusst", fragt sie, "dass ich ihre Mutter bin?"  
Ich trank meinen Kaffee.  
"Du weisst noch gar nicht", sage ich, "dass Joachim gestorben ist -"  
Das hatte ich nicht sagen wollen.'<sup>3</sup>

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1) Homo Faber, p.113f.

2) op.cit., p.114.

3) op.cit., p.206f.

He changes the subject conspicuously, and comments himself only: 'Ich hatte mich hinreißen lassen.'<sup>1</sup> One could see these as evidently guilty memories, but equally as an emotional and therefore moving response: he should have deduced more about Sabeth sooner, objectively speaking, but that he did not is a sign as much of genuine emotional involvement with her as of irresponsible selfishness. It is very difficult to accuse Faber justly of direct personal responsibility for what happened; the 'Vernunft-mensch' in him is challenged by Sabeth, it is true, but her death is not a result of sheer selfish negligence on his part.<sup>2</sup>

Faber is, then, a type whose faults are heightened by the modern world, but he is not a 'new' kind of man: it would be wrong to see the novel simply as a critique of modern society, although there is an element of criticism implied in that the twentieth century mode of life may aid avoidance of true commitment to others. If Faber is 'guilty', it is as an individual, not primarily as twentieth century man, and his guilt is towards human personality as such, towards nature: Sabeth's death, and their brief relationship, is no more than an unfortunate accident which brings this basic past guilt of Faber's to light. It cannot be said rightly that this 'guilt' - shown in his association with Ivy, for example - is a direct

1) Homo Faber, p.207.

2) Brigitte Bradley sees the tragedy as a result of Faber's 'irrationality', by which she presumably means his emotionality; but the instances she chooses to prove this are not of the same type. Faber's refusal to accept the role of father may have been the 'irrational' response of fear, but Sabeth's fatal fall is something he could not have foreseen, and there is no reason why he should have suspected her injury when the snake bite was all too obvious. Cf. Germanic Review, vol.XLI, No.4, Nov. 1966, pp. 279-290.

cause of Sabeth's death, because he was in fact beginning to build for the first time a truly organic relationship. Certainly refusal to respect the integrity of others can be an ethical problem for Frisch, as we have seen in Stiller, but the association of a death with the problem suggests a false link, a manipulation of events in order to suggest the seriousness of Faber's faults. Valuable though the association of weakness with ethical guilt can be<sup>1</sup>, the association here is based purely on chance, and is a misleading influence on the reader's judgement of Faber.

Fate, and lack of clarity in the novel.

If the tragedy of Sabeth's death does not result directly from the 'Techniker' elements demonstrable in Faber, or from his 'irrational' elements, then it is a consistent tragedy - such as the inverted Oedipus legend would suggest it is meant to be - only if one accepts it as retribution for past actions, that is, for Faber's abandonment of Hanna. One would then have to accept the notion of an avenging Fate.

On one level, the hints of Fate, the introduction of legendary associations, myths etc., function as an aid to the unity of the work. For instance, the use of 'omens'; the vultures indicate at intervals the horror Faber feels of uncivilised nature and his fear of death as one of the primitive forces.<sup>2</sup> The recurrence of these birds as an obsessive detail indicates something about the nature and content of Faber's sub-conscious; one might say that, even though the full significance of death

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1) Cf. above, p. 107.

2) Homo Faber, pp.48, 69, 75, 125.

is realised only at the end of the work, it begins to be felt as early as the trip to Mexico, and together with the hints of serious illness impending<sup>1</sup> causes an unconscious reaction which makes Faber particularly sensitive to Sabeth, once given their meeting.

There is also the figure of Professor O.<sup>2</sup> Again this motif is linked with death; the obvious aging process in the professor becomes a visible reminder of death to Faber and haunts him more than he realises, indicating an emotional susceptibility to suggestion which he would never admit. Both these elements are well used, since they occur in the first instance as physical elements within the setting of the story and become motifs only by their reflection in Faber's mind. One does not have to accept them as 'omens' of impending death in the manner of the omens of Greek legend.

However, the fact that the setting is partly in Greece does suggest that we are to make this link mentally and take these hints at a deeper level than that of aids to composition. Are we dealing with a recreation of the ancient concept of Fate to be held against the incarnation of twentieth century life - America?

Critics disagree on this point. Geulen writes:

'Wenn Faber nach dem Zusammenbruch den ersten Teil seines Berichts schreibt, so beabsichtigt er zweierlei: erstens den Nachweis der Unverbindlichkeit aller Erscheinungen und Zusammenhänge, die zum Inzest führen, was nicht gelingt. Im Gegenteil: die schicksalhafte Verknüpfung der Ereignisse ist offenbar..'.<sup>3</sup>

Margrit Henning, on the other hand, rejects any such view:

1) Homo Faber, pp.14, 60.

2) op.cit., pp.21, 145, 244, 275.

3) Hans Geulen, Max Frischs 'Homo Faber', Studien und Interpretationen, p. 93f.

'Dass es sich um Zufälle handelt, merkt der Leser von selbst; die Selbstkommentare bestätigen nur, dass auch Faber sie für Zufälle und nicht etwa für schicksalhafte Fügungen hält. Dabei bleibt allerdings offen, wie der Autor die Vorgänge verstanden wissen will.'<sup>1</sup>

It is in fact Faber who introduces the idea of 'Schicksal' specifically, as though Hanna has claimed that this is the right view of what has happened. He says:

'Betreffend Statistik: Hanna wollte nichts davon wissen, weil sie an Schicksal glaubt, ich merkte es sofort, obschon Hanna es nie ausdrücklich sagte.'<sup>2</sup>

What she in fact says is as follows:

'...Ich habe (meint Hanna) eine Art von Bedeutung erlebt, die ich nicht kannte, und sie missdeutet, indem ich mir einredete, verliebt zu sein. Es ist kein zufälliger Irrtum gewesen, sondern ein Irrtum, der zu mir gehört (?) wie mein Beruf, wie mein ganzes Leben sonst.'<sup>3</sup>

What she seems to be saying here is that, given the meeting with Sabeth, the result was inevitable because of Faber's character - although this too is questionable, as we have seen. Certainly Hanna's rejection of Faber<sup>4</sup> suggests a possible feeling of inevitability, but it need not be interpreted as metaphysical recognition - physical and emotional exhaustion can produce a similar reaction, an abandonment of all self-defence. One could interpret Hanna's view as close to Schopenhauer's conception of the 'Kausalkette'; Schopenhauer<sup>5</sup> asserts that nothing happens entirely by chance in the sense that every event is the result of a chain of anterior causes -

- 1) Margrit Henning, Die Ich-Form und ihre Funktion in Thomas Manns 'Doktor Faustus'..., p.199.
- 2) Homo Faber, p.201.
- 3) ibid., p.241.
- 4) ibid., p.274.
- 5) Schopenhauer, 'Über die anscheinende Absichtlichkeit im Schicksal des Einzelnen', Sämtliche Werke, Wiesbaden, 1960, vol.5, pp. 213-237.

such as the character of the person involved:

'Objektiv betrachtet, ist der Lebenslauf des Einzelnen von durchgängiger und strenger Notwendigkeit: denn alle seine Handlungen treten so notwendig ein, wie die Bewegung einer Maschine, und alle äusseren Begebenheiten kommen heran am Leitfaden einer Kausalkette, deren Glieder einen streng notwendigen Zusammenhang haben. Wenn wir dies festhalten, darf es uns nicht so sehr wundern, wenn wir seinen Lebenslauf so ausfallen sehen, als wäre er planmässig angelegt, ihm angemessen.'<sup>1</sup>

Coincidences are the occurrence together in time of points on separate

'Kausalketten', and these are ultimately linked at some distant point:

'Sonach bilden alle jene, in der Richtung der Zeit fortschreitenden Kausalketten ein grosses, vielfach verschlungenes Netz, welches ebenfalls mit seiner ganzen Breite, sich in der Richtung der Zeit fortbewegt und eben den Weltlauf ausmacht. Versinnlichen wir uns jetzt jene einzelnen Kausalketten durch Meridiane, die in der Richtung der Zeit lägen; so kann überall das Gleichzeitige und eben deshalb nicht in direktem Kausalzusammenhange Stehende, durch Parallelkreise angedeutet werden.'<sup>2</sup>

Remarkably like these ideas is a passage by Frisch himself:

'Alles hat Folgen; Freundschaften gibt es, die jahrelang darauf bestanden haben, dass man sich von dem andern bewundert wähnte, eine Art von Versicherung, die man wiederum mit Bewunderung zahlte: ein offenes Wort, und weg ist sie. Und Marion ist an allem schuld; denn alles, was man in Wahrheit sagt, hat Folgen.

Auch gute vielleicht -

Eine Ehe geht in die Luft, zum Beispiel, mitsamt einem Haus und sieben Zimmern, Küche mit Kühlschrank; dafür eine Liebe, eine andere, die schon lange wartete wie ein Keim unter dem Stein, ein Mögliches, das plötzlich an die Sonne kommt, ein Lebendiges...'<sup>3</sup>

According to this, everything one says or does starts off a 'Kausalkette';

we have here a belief in an organic connection between events such as

Schopenhauer posits. With reference to such ideas, one could interpret

Homo Faber thus: Faber, in the past, started one 'Kausalkette' in which

1) Schopenhauer, op.cit., p.231.

2) Schopenhauer, op.cit., p.228.

3) Frisch, Tagebuch 1946-1949, p.17.

Hanna and Joachim features, and started it by the exertion of his personality, his 'Sachlichkeit' in his treatment of Hanna. Another 'Kausalkette' brings him in touch with Herbert and eventually onto the ship, due partly to his characteristic lack of sympathy for Ivy. These two are linked by a 'Parallelkreis'. If this is so, then one could say that he is looking for the wrong thing in searching for signs that he might have been compelled by some evil external force; what he should see is that between the two views of utter chance and complete predetermination there are degrees of personal responsibility for events - his pride, for example, influenced him to some extent in his attachment to Sabeth, who certainly gave him no encouragement at first. In addition, his attitude to time could be cited as a major 'Kausalkette': Faber has no sense of the continuity of life, hence his unconcern about Hanna's further life after their parting, his failure to find out about the child. In this sense Faber is 'mutatis mutandis' Kierkegaard's aesthete who lives for the moment, as opposed to ethical man who accepts the duties and responsibilities of continuity and continuous relationships. He does not go so far as to seek sensations, as does the aesthete proper, for he is not a sensuous man; he does not exploit other people either like the aesthete, but is equally inhuman in that he gives no thought to the views and feelings of others. Like the aesthete he has no appreciation of individuality, nor of development within time. The aesthete seeks ever new sensations to drive away the demon of boredom, to cover up the passage of time and the depreciation of the power to enjoy stimuli, while Faber stresses 'das Übliche'; but he does this in order to be able to see his life as comfortable repetition, not as progression and change,

and thus his attitude to time is very like that of the aesthete.

This view would link up with another passage by Frisch:

'...Dabei wäre es nicht nötig, dass wir, um die Macht des Zufalls zu deuten und dadurch erträglich zu machen, schon den lieben Gott bemühen; es genügt die Vorstellung, dass immer und überall, wo wir leben, alles vorhanden ist: für mich aber, wo immer ich gehe und stehe, ist es nicht das vorhandene Alles, was mein Verhalten bestimmt, sondern das Mögliche, jener Teil des Vorhandenen, den ich sehen und hören kann.'<sup>1</sup>

Chance is conditioned, according to this view, by what we respond to out of the range of the possible, therefore by what we are. What we are determines what we make of events as they reach us, and what we are is largely the result of choices we have made in the past. 'Alles hat Folgen', in other words, or as Frisch says later in the same sequence: 'Am Ende ist es immer das Fällige, was uns zufällt.'<sup>2</sup> If this is true, then what happens to Faber may appear to be chance, but it is an experience he deserves: if he had learnt a little more consideration for other people, perhaps the relationship with Sabeth might have developed differently.

If one could accept this far more general view of Fate, it could be held against Stanislaw Lem's accusation that Frisch is guilty of reactionary philosophical thought.<sup>3</sup> But then what is the point of using 'omens', of the Greek setting and the many references to myths? There is the whole framework of the story to be considered - an inverted parallel to the Oedipus myth - and the hints that Faber too, not just Hanna, feels a connection with the figures of Greek antiquity, for example the involuntary

1) Frisch, Tagebuch 1946-1949, p.463f.

2) op.cit., p.464.

3) Stanislaw Lem, 'Über das Modellieren der Wirklichkeit im Werk von Thomas Mann', Sinn und Form, Sonderheft Thomas Mann, Berlin, 1965, pp.157-177, especially p.169.

link with Agamemnon.<sup>1</sup> Can these be just 'red herrings', and if so, is it not too much to expect of the normal reader, who approaches this book with the hope of being entertained, that he should see beyond them to the 'truth'?

Among critics, Erich Franzen shows a clear appreciation of the novel's weakness in this respect:

'Die antike Kulisse, die im Hintergrund zu sehen ist...soll auf den doppelbödigen Charakter der Handlung hindeuten, aber sie wirkt wie eine Dekoration, die zu einem andern Stück gehört.'<sup>2</sup>

The classical references are too obvious to be incidental, yet as soon as they are accepted as significant in some way, the basic premises of the book are questionable and ill-suited, as Franzen intimates, to the modern setting and tone. It is too simple a solution to dismiss the references as not 'konstitutiv', as no more than 'gebildete Anspielungen', to say that 'Frisch verlässt sich nicht auf den Mythos'.<sup>3</sup> The whole point is that Frisch does not make it clear to what extent his narration is meant to depend seriously on myth. Myth has been used in twentieth century novels as a framework to give shape to unwieldy material, in for example Thomas Mann's Der Zauberberg and James Joyce's Ulysses; but in these cases the myths are relatively free from metaphysical overtones about the relationship of Man to higher powers, and even where a myth involving notions on Man's relationship to the Divine has been used, as in Mann Joseph novels, the myth has been reinterpreted. Joseph is no longer simply the favoured son who suffers and is glorified, but the highly intellectual product of a long line of godfearing, divinely

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1) Homo Faber, p.193.

2) Erich Franzen, 'Homo Faber', Merkur, Jg. 12, Heft 10, Oct. 1958, p.982.

3) Joachim Kaiser, 'Max Frisch und der Roman', Frankfurter Hefte, Jg. 12, Heft 12, Dec. 1957, pp. 876-882.

favoured men, who by his very difference and exceptionality enables the line to continue: God needs Man to fulfil Himself, 'Leben' needs 'Geist', and 'Geist' in Joseph is ultimately exceptional by reason of very human, not supernatural qualities, and valuable in proportion to its service to Life, to the continuity of tradition. But it is not true to say that there is such a reinterpretation of myth in Homo Faber. The incest content of the Oedipus myth is valuable because it deals with a taboo which is generally accepted even in our century of shifting moral values, and will therefore produce a similar response of shock in most readers: such shared responses are important for works of popular literature.<sup>1</sup> But Frisch seems to have overlooked the fact that Fate as a stimulus to the reader's imagination will not be predictable in its effect; it belongs to the category of impulses which 'change as fashions change'.<sup>2</sup> If the notion of revengeful Fate were used ironically, it might perhaps be acceptable: but the only irony is that Faber, while recalling archetypal Greek myths as expressions of deep horror at his situation, avoids precisely thereby clear recognition of his personal 'guilt' - but then one returns to the whole vexed question of unproved personal responsibility for what has happened.

Geulen suggests that the use of myth is to ensure 'Verfremdung'<sup>3</sup>; that is, he believes that by employing an overall mythical form, Frisch intends to awake our attention, through the alienating effect of an unfamiliar idiom. This is possible, as Frisch is interested in the notion of 'Verfremdung'<sup>4</sup>;

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1) I.A. Richards, Principles of Literary Criticism, Paperback edition, London, 1967, p.150.

2) *op.cit.*, p.149.

3) Hans Geulen, Max Frischs 'Homo Faber', p.97.

4) Frisch, Tagebuch 1946-1949, p.293.

but the purpose of alienation is to provoke thought, and this is already achieved by the arrangement of the material, as it is in Stiller; the reader can understand what is happening to the central figure only by giving attention to the implications of the subjectively ordered material of the novel. The author remains aloof in the sense that, having created the material such that Faber gives himself away, he retires behind the narrative and neither hinders nor helps the reader by siding with or against him - we shall see in Mein Name sei Cantenbein what happens when this position is abandoned. Is the use of myth an added means of provoking thought and nothing more? It is more likely that it is used as a convenient framework to simplify the issues; just as the bad influence of twentieth century 'culture' and modes of life are focussed in the figure of Faber - in so far as he is a 'Techniker' - and in America, so the eternal dangers of pride and disdain for humanity are symbolised by the eternal quality of myth. In the myth we find a stylised reminder to the twentieth century that however advanced and utterly new its discoveries are, however complete its apparent control of life, there are still more primitive forces at work in men than they care to acknowledge; hence one could draw a parallel with Rolf's story in Stiller of the 'fleischfarbener Kleiderstoff'<sup>1</sup>, which indicates that the somewhat 'primitive' emotion of jealousy, which he believed he could control with modern theories on marital freedom, is unexpectedly powerful. However, in the first place we have already seen that Faber is not just a typical twentieth century man, but one whose faults are magnified by conditions of

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1) Stiller, p.238ff.

life in this century, so that the contrast does not hold fully; and secondly, and more importantly, even if this contrast were intended it is a dangerous venture nevertheless, for as Lem has shown<sup>1</sup> it can be an antagonising framework, more antagonising by its anachronism than would be the creation of a new 'myth' or framework story. Certainly the recognisable myth is useful in that at each point where a reference to it enters, it brings the whole complex of events before our eyes, as a kind of shorthand reference. But even if one does accept that Frisch is not seriously trying to convince us of the existence of an avenging force called Fate, even if one were to accept the rather loose 'Kausalkette' as a basis for the work, this does not dispose of Lem's objection that the events themselves are improbable in the extreme<sup>2</sup>, and that if the reader is to accept them as given, he is being asked to make a great effort of suspension of disbelief. Even if one accepts the Schopenhauerian notion of a 'Kausalkette', the chain of events bringing Faber into contact with Herbert and then even Sabeth, still seems extremely arbitrary. In other words, if the Fate element is to be taken seriously, Lem's criticisms most certainly apply. If not, then it is difficult to see the advantages of adopting such motifs which would outweigh the disadvantages of confusion and of mystification. Only if one accepts the events as given, can one concentrate on the very subtle revelation of the emotion behind the facade of 'Sachlichkeit' in Faber, but to say this is implicitly to condemn the devices used to

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1) Stanislaw Lem, Über das Modellieren der Wirklichkeit.

2) Stanislaw Lem, op.cit., p.164.

capture our attention.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the only conclusion one can draw from all this, is that it must depend on the individual reader as to how far the risk of using such a controversial framework 'pays off'; if we are meant simply to be watching a mind trying to disprove the existence of Fate and yet proving its existence involuntarily, then the book is a failure as Lem claims, since the events are not all obviously linked as Geulen would have us believe.<sup>2</sup> But if one can overlook this aspect and concentrate on the spectacle of a mind used to understanding and now floundering amid events which have caught it unawares and make the writer of the 'Bericht' reveal - despite himself - unexpected depths and weaknesses, then one can find reading the novel quite

- 1) Werner Stauffacher is one of the few critics to object to the mythical framework, but for insufficient reasons. He is looking, as he is with Stiller, for some key to life, some 'mystere ineffable' which he believes Frisch is trying to present and so is not convinced by the use of Greek myth because it does not convey an adequate answer to the questions he puts to the novel. He does not question whether the 'myth' might be used for any other reason, for shock effect, or for structural purposes, without any serious appeal to us to believe in Fate, and fails in general to establish any objective reasons for the weakness brought into the novel by the notion of Fate. Stauffacher, 'Langage et Mystere', Etudes Germaniques, 20. Annee, No.3, July/Sept., 1965, pp. 331-345.
- 2) Hans Geulen, Max Frischs 'Homo Faber', p.94. The 'mystery' element alone - the attempt to find out what 'really' happened and what will happen - is doubly justified since it holds the reader's attention through curiosity but without facilely presupposing any simple answer. Likewise the Oedipus references, in a work which did not seek to establish the suspense of a search for truth, might pass as indications of seriousness. Together however - whether Frisch intended it or not - the two elements interact to suggest that there is an answer to the search and that it resides in some kind of guilt, which as shown above is never proven. The Oedipus story can after all itself be seen as an archetype of detective fiction (cf. Ernst Bloch, 'Die Form der Detektivgeschichte und die Philosophie', Die Neue Rundschau 1960, pp. 667-683), but it is of course essentially a case of detection with a final revelation of truth and so misleading in a modern context where 'truth' is so much more relative.

a moving experience. To this extent the form, the use of the first-person, is entirely justified, as it is in Stiller, for the fragmentariness does achieve self-revelation in the central figure on both the conscious and the unconscious levels of the mind, whereas in Mein Name sei Gantenbein it will be seen to be an obstacle to the reader's understanding. Homo Faber presents, like Stiller, a problematic personality trying to come to terms with itself, and presents it - despite serious reservations on some points - sensitively and well by means of an apparently disordered but in fact very subtly managed form.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### MEIN NAME SEI GANTENBEIN

Like both Stiller and Homo Faber, this novel is written as a series of distinct sections of varying length; but there is no indication, as there is in the other novels, of the central figure's<sup>1</sup> purpose in setting down the story. In Stiller 'White' is required to write an account of his life, and in Homo Faber the writer, unable to justify himself to anyone else, attempts to prove to himself on paper what he wants to believe. In both cases a valuable aid to interpretation is contained in the discrepancy between the initial motivation for writing and the written form of the book; Stiller reveals his essential self-centredness in substituting for the desired coherent narrative a diary-like form, and Faber - the supposedly insensitive man in an insensitive age - shows by the fact of his writing the depth of the shock received and the actuality of his emotional involvement in events, emphasised by the arbitrary changes of time and place within his record, and emotion is precisely what he desires to deny. In Mein Name sei Gantenbein there is no such contrast between the ostensible purpose of the narrator in writing and the actual manner of setting down his 'story': the justification for and significance of the form, if it is not to be dismissed immediately as merely the product of wilful subjectivity, must be sought in the ideas which can be extracted from the apparent confusion of the book.

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1) The central figure will be referred to as the narrator for convenience, but this does not presuppose a clearly defined identity, or omniscience as in many nineteenth century novels.

## Time and Age

One of the major difficulties encountered in dealing with this novel is deciding what in fact happens, whether there is any ultimately coherent sequence of events. However, certain ideas and topics do recur throughout the book and would seem to have some bearing on the form - or formlessness. For instance, there is a prominent fear of time, a desire to escape all recognition of its movement and consequences, such as aging or the acquisition of an unalterable past. An early example of this is found when the narrator, whose identity will be discussed later, has been following other people, giving way to a sense of association with them and thereby escaping in some measure from himself.<sup>1</sup> But a man whose age he has estimated at thirty-five is seen, face to face, to be nearer fifty:

'...natürlich sagte ich mir sofort, dass es nicht derselbe Mann sein könne, ich musste ihn im Gedränge verloren und verwechselt haben, schiefergraue Mäntel gibt es viele. Trotzdem erschrak ich, als der plötzlich ein Mann von fünfzig Jahren war.'<sup>2</sup>

This small incident is an unwelcome reminder of the process of aging, and evidence of a fear of age within the narrator. Later in the book comes a passage when the narrator in one of his guises, after a night spent with another man's wife, has to face the reality of the following day. He passes through the streets:

'Alles unverändert: nur ist es nicht gestern, sondern heute. Warum ist es immer heute?...Es belästigte ihn keineswegs die Untreue, die sie begangen hatten, beide, daran brauchte er noch nicht zu denken; es belästigte ihn einfach, dass es jetzt eine

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- 1) It will be shown that it is a deliberate attempt to escape with which the novel deals, rather than an involuntary disintegration of the personality such as Rilke's Malte Laurids Brigge experiences.
  - 2) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, Frankfurt, 1964, p.11.

Tatsache sei, die sich gleichsetzt mit allen übrigen Tatsachen der Welt.'<sup>1</sup>

Here we see the individual's unease at his inability to prevent experience from slipping into the past, giving way to a new 'heute'. The word 'Tatsache' indicates the effect of the process; every experience loses its unique quality of freshness, becomes for him a factual constituent of the past just like all else, irrespective of its original degree of intensity. This inevitable process causes not so much a sense of loss as a horror of the unchangeable nature of what is past. The sadness which pervades Die Schwierigen is a sadness aroused by the dull nature of existence in which all intensity of experience is tarnished by repetition; the lovers Reinhart and Hortense discover this; absence makes it less noticeable only:

'...der Umstand, sich lange nicht gesehen zu haben, machte sie reich und neu voreinander wie einst im Anfang, nicht alles Erlebte war schon einmal erwähnt...'.<sup>2</sup>

In a way Stiller also craves not just difference but excitement and intensity. The narrator of Mein Name sei Gantenbein is however less concerned over the ever decreasing newness of experience than over the inexorable movement forward of life of which this is symptomatic. Like Walter Faber, he dreads continuity, but more consciously. Every tiny detail of life is capable of awakening this realization: 'Und trotzdem bleibt eine Tatsache, wie belanglos auch immer; unsichtbar; nicht wegzuwerfen wie ein nasses Taschentuch.'<sup>3</sup> Even if the past is not regretted, it is disturbing as a

1) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, Frankfurt, 1964, p.109.

2) Die Schwierigen, p.222.

3) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, p.110.

reminder that the range of possibilities open to us as we look forward is an illusion, for time in passing binds us to just one element of what we felt ourselves capable of experiencing, of being. This attitude is less like Stiller's fear specifically of 'Nichtigkeit' than like the state of mind described in Musil's Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften. Ulrich once says of a conversation with Arnheim:

'Ich habe ihm erwidert, dass mich das Verwirklichen jederzeit weniger anzieht als das Nichtverwirklichte, und ich meine damit nicht etwa nur das der Zukunft, sondern ebenso sehr das Vergangene und Verpasste.'<sup>1</sup>

But the narrator of Mein Name sei Gantenbein is more aware of how much the simple passage of time vitiates the attempt 'alles, was ebenso sein könnte, zu denken und das, was ist, nicht wichtiger zu nehmen als das, was nicht ist.'<sup>2</sup> For him, all attempts to maintain a balance are hampered by the tendency of the future to develop and stabilize the momentary, thus emphasising harshly the 'Nacheinander' rather than the 'Nebeneinander' of life:

'Sie hatten einander versprochen, keine Briefe zu schreiben, nie, sie wollten keine Zukunft, das war ihr Schwur:

Keine Wiederholung -

Keine Geschichte -

Sie wollten, was nur einmal möglich ist: das Jetzt... - denn die Zukunft, das wusste er, das bin ich, ihr Gatte, ich bin die Wiederholung, die Geschichte, die Endlichkeit und der Fluch in allem, ich bin das Altern von Minute zu Minute...'<sup>3</sup>

This same consciousness of time intrudes constantly:

'Er hatte sich jetzt erhoben.

Um nicht der Zukunft zu verfallen...

- 1) Robert Musil, Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften, Hamburg, 1952, p.275.
- 2) *op.cit.*, p.16.
- 3) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, p.111.

Es war lächerlich: Ich erhebe mich, ich setze mich, ich rauche, ich stehe, ich schlafe, ich erwache, ich erhebe mich, ich gehe, ich setze mich, ich erhebe mich.

(.....)

In der Nacht, auch wenn sie kaum schliefen, hatten sie einander soviel wie nichts gesagt, um nicht die Welt heranzulassen durch Worte und Namen; sie hatten nicht geschwiegen, o nein, aber sie hatten geflüstert, als gäbe es nur sie, kein Vorher, kein Nachher...

Jetzt schlug es elf Uhr.<sup>1</sup>

Any kind of continuous action is liable to remind one of passing time, but the alternative of constant stress on the 'presentness' of what one is doing is ridiculous, as this passage shows. However hard one tries to opt out of the world where moments and names are interrelated, the simple striking of a clock marks defeat: '...die Zeit...meldete sich überall und mit jeder Bagatelle...'.<sup>2</sup>

The horror of being trapped in an unchangeable identity is one aspect of this fear of time. A later passage reads:

'...ja, es ist Zeit, so vermute ich, Zeit wie immer, Zeit, um aufzubrechen in die Zukunft, ich bin entschlossen und rasiert, eigentlich munter...einen Augenblick, jetzt bevor ich den Fuss auf den Teppich stelle, halte ich inne: - immer wieder, ich weiss es ja schon und doch erschrecke ich reglos, bin ich Enderlin, ich werde noch sterben als Enderlin.'<sup>3</sup>

This momentary insight into the continuity of any identity brings with it a shock, because it preforms the future to some extent; and just as the past is painful in its fixed form, so the future can be torture if it is already planned out. Hell is visualised as an ordinary life lived in the exact knowledge of what is to come.<sup>4</sup> It has nothing to do with what is ordinarily

1) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, p.121.

2) op.cit., p.123.

3) op.cit., p.187.

4) op.cit., p.190ff.

thought of as pain; it is life 'ohne die Neugierde, wie es weitergeht, ohne die blinde Erwartung, ohne die Ungewissheit, die alles erträglich macht -'.<sup>1</sup> The narrator is much more of an aesthete in Kierkegaard's sense than Stiller; the 'Wiederholung' the latter feared was that of a whole insignificant life, whereas the narrator of Mein Name sei Gantenbein fears any experience, pleasurable or not, because it diminishes the expectancy with which he can face the future:

'Erfahrung ist ein Vorgeschmack davon (i.e. of Hell in the above sense), aber nur ein Vorgeschmack; meine Erfahrung sagt ja nicht, was kommen wird, sie vermindert nur die Erwartung, die Neugierde -'.<sup>2</sup>

Similar passages occur throughout the novel, perhaps best summed up by these lines:

'Vergangenheit ist kein Geheimnis mehr, die Gegenwart ist dünn, weil sie abgetragen wird von Tag zu Tag, und die Zukunft heisst Altern...'.<sup>3</sup>

The story of a man who believes he has only one year to live<sup>4</sup> is a variation on the theme of the fight with time, defiance of the future. Even the amusing episodes in the pictures of Gantenbein with his daughter Beatrice - a beautifully ironic choice of name - show a process of growing up, of passing time.<sup>5</sup> There is fear also not only of the using up of the future but also of mental rigidity; one of the narrator's deepest anxieties emerges in this view of the approach of age:

'...er wird sich an die fernsten Dinge erinnern, die ihn einmal

1) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, p.193.

2) op.cit., p.193.

3) op.cit., p.211.

4) op.cit., p.214ff.

5) This aspect has been brought out by Hans Egon Holthusen, 'Ein Mann von fünfzig Jahren', Merkur, 18 Jg., Heft 10/11, Oct./Nov. 1964, pp.1073-1077.

beschäftigt haben...Seine Ansichten sind nicht mehr zu ändern...  
Gegenwart? Er weiss, wie er zu dieser Gegenwart gekommen ist...'.<sup>1</sup>

Age brings a fully formed memory, fixed opinions, a whole life with a traceable course, a present which cannot separate itself from the past which has led to it; and to be dreaded above all is the respect of others: 'Man wird ihn sprechen lassen, weil er älter ist...'.<sup>2</sup> This respect assumes that age can speak with finality and admires what the narrator sees as terrible rigidity; even the care of others to spare one physical exertion is an implicit assertion that one is capable only of a passive existence. Age in other words is an inevitable, because a physically determined, fixed 'Bildnis'.

'Das Leben, das tatsächliche, gestattet ja nicht, dass man es überspringt, nicht um ein Jahr und nicht um einen Monat und nicht um eine Woche, auch wenn man ungefähr weiss, was folgen wird...'.<sup>3</sup>

These lines sum up the spirit of 'ennui' which recurs so frequently, and begin to explain, perhaps, the nature of the novel; it is an attempt to foil this constraint, to overcome or blur the movement forwards by spreading outwards, as it were, into a number of roles.

The hope that this may be possible, and its frustration, are expressed near the beginning and end of the novel:

'Es ist wie ein Sturz durch den Spiegel, mehr weiss einer nicht, wenn er wieder erwacht, ein Sturz wie durch alle Spiegel, und nachher, kurz darauf, setzt sich die Welt wieder zusammen, als wäre nichts geschehen. Es ist auch nichts geschehen.'<sup>4</sup>

1) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, p.247.

2) op.cit., p.246.

3) op.cit., p.361.

4) op.cit., p.25.

This refers presumably to an awakening from the everyday self to a new identity, something in the nature of Stiller's 'Engel' experience.

Nothing has happened: nothing has changed outwardly, there is however no longer any past and all is yet possible. But the later passage reads:

'Das Erwachen (als wäre nichts geschehen!) erweist sich als Trug; es ist immer was geschehen, aber anders.'<sup>1</sup>

This can be taken to mean that whatever view one takes of life, however one tries to alter one's relationship to it, there is always nevertheless some kind of past which cannot be eradicated or relived.

Yet, between and even after these two passages, which show when compared at least some progress towards rationality, one finds repeated instances of desperate adherence to the present, most clear in the experience of sense impressions. Many times we find the rather unusual form of verbs in the first person and present tense, unusual for a novel which, to quote E.M. Forster, primarily 'tells a story'<sup>2</sup> and uses the preterite, restricting the present tense to speech or interior monologue in most cases. This verbal form conveys here the impression of a deliberate stress on the present action, the present moment as the only reality the narrator wants to recognize, since it cannot really be classed as historic present used for vividness, for the actions themselves are mostly insignificant.<sup>3</sup>

One telling episode is the walk in the forest.<sup>4</sup> Whichever identity

1) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, p.485.

2) E.M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel, p.40ff.

3) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, e.g. pp.75, 121, or the constant 'ich stelle mir vor', when other phrases could be used to indicate the entry into an imagined situation.

4) *ibid.*, p.151ff.

one feels is speaking, the meaning is probably that nature, open air and space and colours, forms, textures awaken the senses, are a means of release from the deceit of social existence:

'Nachmittag im Grunewald. Samme Kieferzapfen und schleudere sie, soweit ich vermag, hinaus in die Krumme Lanke, und Patsch, unser Hund, springt in das bräunlich stille blasige Wasser...'<sup>1</sup>

A comparable passage expresses pleasure found specifically in the beauty of autumn:

'Ich liebe den Septembermorgen, tau-grau-blau, Sonne wie hinter Rauch, die ländlichen Häuser erscheinen wie in Seidenpapier, der See blinkt, das andere Ufer verdunstet, Herbst...'.<sup>2</sup>

These words are strongly reminiscent of a much earlier passage:

'Wir sitzen noch einmal da und schlürfen die Augenblicke, jeden für sich, wie man die Trauben genießt, Beere um Beere...Die Strahlen...zerfließen auf unserer Stirn und unsern Augenlidern, und es ist nur noch eine goldene Milde. Und überall sieht man nun das, was die Gegenwart ins Berauschte steigert, den Zauber des letzten Males...  
Das ist der Herbst.

Wer denkt nicht manchmal: so müsste man sein ganzes Dasein erleben können, wie diesen Tag, als ein grosses, ein einziges, ein dauerndes Abschiednehmen...auf keine Zukunft sich vertrösten, ganz und gar die Gegenwart empfinden, als ein immer Vergängliches...

Ich liebe den Herbst, weil er den Grundklang unseres Daseins dichtet wie keine andere Zeit.'<sup>3</sup>

There is in these two passages the same pleasure in the quality of the light, the senses are awakened by autumn's gentle beauty to an awareness of the present moment. But the second passage adds to this a further notion: autumn is the time poised on the brink of nature's 'decay', a time of beauty with no future; and so life should be lived, as a constant farewell, a constant savouring of the last precious moment. This would be an ideal

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1) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, p.151.

2) op.cit., p.166.

3) Blätter aus dem Brotsack, Zürich, 1940, p.26ff.

state of mind for a man so fearfully aware of the passage of time as the narrator of Mein Name sei Gantenbein; his difficulty is not that he has to console himself with the thought of the future but that the future and past alike terrify him when he visualises the whole extent of a human life as one unit. His experience of transience is not the usual one of distress at the loss of all that is dear, but rather distress at the loss of the potentiality of the moment, at its ordering into a sequence of time. Anything which emphasises the moment, the present is therefore precious, and autumn does this - as the season balanced between the blaze of summer and the gloom of winter, on the brink of decay, it makes everything seem more vividly alive, more palpably real. Significantly, the very last passage of the novel<sup>1</sup> deals with a September day; though the narrator has not come to terms with the need to live within time, as the wry story of the corpse shows<sup>2</sup>, he still tries to approach his ideal state by immersion in the present, in the intensified present of an autumn day. It is only within this framework that he can say: 'Alles ist Gegenwart.' One can surmise, then, that these last lines indicate a transitory state, not the achievement of a permanent happiness; but it should be emphasised that this is not immediately clear from the novel as it stands, and one is left with an unsatisfying uncertainty as to what the concluding paragraph signifies, without the above passage from a much earlier work to add significance to the stress on warmth and light.

That this final rejoicing in the life of the senses, in the simple

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1) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, p.496.

2) *op.cit.*, p.488ff. Cf. p.485ff. for a more serious hint of the same inability.

realities of life - food, drink - will be impermanent is indicated by an earlier section, where the narrator describes a day on the Appian Way with a girl full of the exuberance of youth.<sup>1</sup> Nature is here the only reality which counts:

'Im Himmel tönt ein Flugzeug; unser Blick bleibt im Geäst der Pinie. Ihr lederne Tasche über die Schulter gehängt, einen dreiblättrigen Klee in der Hand, steht sie und dreht sich im Wind, der ihr Haar verzaust, und schaut auf das braune Land hinaus, Campagna mit wuchernden Vorstädten, die ein Anlass wären, über Städtebau zu sprechen; sie schweigt. Ich schenke ihr einen harzigen Pinien zapfen...Ihre Augen: sie glänzen vor Gegenwart..'.<sup>2</sup>

With the companionship of youth and the vivid actuality of nature, some degree of peace is reached, but without these aids, the fear of time recurs:

'Heute habe ich den Harzzapfen, der immer noch in meinem Wagen gelegen hat, weggeworfen...eines Tages werde ich sie wiederssehen... eine junge Frau, die lebhaft plaudert über dies und das, über ihre Heirat usw.'<sup>3</sup>

The retention of the fir-cone is characteristic: the narrator cannot find the strength to bid the moment farewell without regrets; he cannot stop his thoughts from moving to the future and so bringing about what he most fears - the ordering of each moment into a sequence. In the light of this passage, where only with the aid of externals is freedom from fear achieved, the final paragraph of the novel cannot be anything but another attempt at escape, a momentary joy due to the surroundings. One is reminded of a passage in Frisch's diary:

'Es gibt kein Leben ohne Angst vor dem anderen; schon weil es ohne diese Angst, die unsere Tiefe ist, kein Leben gibt: erst aus dem Nichtsein, das wir ahnen, begreifen wir für Augenblicke, dass

1) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, p.212ff.

2) op.cit., p.212f.

3) op.cit., p.214.

wir leben. Man freut sich seiner Muskeln, man freut sich, dass man gehen kann, man freut sich des Lichtes, das sich in unsrem dunkeln Auge spiegelt, man freut sich seiner Haut und seiner Nerven, die uns so vieles spüren lassen, man freut sich und weiss mit jedem Atemzug, dass alles, was ist, eine Gnade ist.'<sup>1</sup>

In the last paragraph of the novel, the word 'Gräbern' occurs three times: could this be evidence of a sudden reminder that life is after all not so permanent? A reminder in the image of the above diary extract, in which awareness of death causes a similar reaction of joy in sheer existence? It is also interesting to note that Frisch stresses 'begreifen wir für Augenblicke'; this reinforces the view that no permanent harmony is achieved at the end of the novel.

Another passage with some bearing on this matter is the description of the nearly fatal venture into the sea.<sup>2</sup> The meaning is far from clear, but the important point would seem to be the instinctive efforts to escape drowning. One might expect that a character with the depression to which the narrator seems subject would rejoice in death as an escape; but paradoxically, confrontation with death causes life to reassert itself - just as the diary passage describes. Is it this same instinct which makes the very last paragraph possible, when logically one might expect suicide?

It would appear from the interplay of these reactions that the novel presents a form of vicious circle; fear of age and passing time drives the narrator to cling to the present, to relish whatever emphasises the present without reference to past or future; but the fight to hold the present only serves to make its loss doubly bitter; and any contact with entire

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1) Tagebuch 1946-1949, p.179.

2) Mein Name sei Cantenbein, p.383ff.

nothingness beyond life draws one back into the life one longs to stand outside.

The term 'Geschichte'

Such ideas are clearly going to affect the form of any writing by a figure who holds them; a normal narrative with a beginning, middle and end would be a concrete reminder of the 'Nacheinander' of time, whereas the fragmentary form seems to be a way of avoiding rigidity in self-expression, of creating a kind of 'Nebeneinander', with repeated new starts - even though, as was shown with reference to Stiller<sup>1</sup>, one cannot ultimately escape or ignore continuity and still remain a normal human within society, for continuity and human personality are inextricably linked.

To describe this novel as a series of 'Geschichten' would however be misleading, for this particular word is used in the novel with two distinct, though never clearly distinguished, meanings. It signifies firstly the fixed pattern, the factual 'shape' of a life apprehensible by other people, and is opposed to 'Erfahrung' or 'Erlebnis', the inner reality apprehended by the experiencing 'Ich' alone, which may or may not be deducible from the facts or an event or life. 'Geschichte' and 'Erlebnis' do not necessarily 'fit' or even co-exist. To quote Frisch himself on this point:

'Erfahrung ist ein Einfall, nicht Ergebnis aus Vorfällen. Der Vorfall, ein und derselbe, dient hundert verschiedenen Erfahrungen ... Sie werden zugeben, dass entscheidende Wendungen in einem Leben, genau besehen, auf Vorkommnisse beruhen, die nie vorgekommen sind, auf Einbildungen, erzeugt von einer Erfahrung, die da ist, bevor eine Geschichte sie zu verursachen scheint.'<sup>2</sup>

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1) Cf. above, p. 106f.

2) Horst Bienek, Werkstattgespräche mit Schriftstellern, Munich, 1962, p.26.

Secondly, 'Geschichte' has its more usual sense of a story, 'eine erfundene Geschichte', used as a means of avoiding in one's own consciousness the stereotyping which results when one is held to be solely what one's 'Lebensgeschichte', in the above sense, makes one appear to be.

Both senses are implicit in the first use of the word in the novel.<sup>1</sup>

There the narrator listens to a barman who relates some sequence of events:

'So war das! sagt er, während er die Gläser spült. Eine wahre Geschichte also. Ich glaub's! sage ich. Er trocknet die gespülten Gläser. Ja, sagt er nochmals, so war das! Ich trinke - ich denke: Ein Mann hat eine Erfahrung gemacht, jetzt sucht er die Geschichte seiner Erfahrung...'

For the barman, this story - in the sense of narration - is true; he wants it to be accepted as the truth about himself. But the hearer's attitude contains a degree of irony - 'eine wahre Geschichte also' - which implies the view: here is a man who has had some kind of experience, something intangible and personal, and at once he wants to give it one unalterable shape in order to ensure its acceptance by society. He is using it to create the 'Lebensgeschichte' by which society will recognize him. But the hearer's reaction implies his belief that it is in 'Erfahrung' that the true self lies, if one can be strong enough to dispense with the urge to find social recognition. There are two poles here: the man who craves integration into society, and the man who wants to live a purely personal existence. The one uses stories to create a fixed social image, the other, we shall see, uses them to escape continuity.

A little later these ideas are further developed:

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1) Mein Name sei Cantenbein, p.9.

'Ein Mann hat eine Erfahrung gemacht, jetzt sucht er die Geschichte dazu - man kann nicht leben mit einer Erfahrung, die ohne Geschichte bleibt, scheint es, und manchmal stellts ich mir vor, ein anderer habe genau die Geschichte meiner Erfahrung...'.<sup>1</sup>

This is the justification for introducing stories like that of the 'Bäckermeister'<sup>2</sup>; other people act without recognizing the full significance of their actions - while the narrator longs to have some means of giving expression to the parts of his personality which his everyday self does not include. The baker gives form to the experience of jealousy, provides a 'Geschichte' for the 'Erfahrung'. Similarly, the narrator's preoccupation with the idea that he might have killed the German he met on the mountain in 1942<sup>3</sup> is the product of the awareness that his factual innocence does not express the potentiality he felt within himself for violent action.

At another point the attitude to 'Geschichte' becomes less positive. We return to the scene at the bar, but now added to the hint of irony are the words:

'Ich trinke und beneide ihn - nicht um seine russische Gefangenschaft, aber um sein zweifelloses Verhältnis zu seiner Geschichte...'.<sup>4</sup>

The narrator seems to envy the type who is satisfied with one 'Geschichte' and needs nothing more for contentment, although previously he has suggested that this is weakness. In his more confident moments, one can assume, he has no desire to be tied to one aspect of his personality, but in depression he envies the security of those untroubled by the restrictions imposed by

1) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, p.14.

2) op.cit., p.170ff.

3) op.cit., p.78ff.

4) op.cit., p.72.

life within time. The difference between the two attitudes lies in an insight into the nature of social existence from which some are spared; as soon as one is aware that any form one adopts for one's life is a violation of its range of potentiality, then one's peace of mind is lost.

Frisch speaks of this in a recorded conversation:

'Jeder Mensch erfindet sich früher oder später eine Geschichte, die er oft unter gewaltigen Opfern, - für sein Leben hält, oder eine Reihe von Geschichten, die mit Namen und Daten zu belegen sind, so dass an ihrer Wirklichkeit, scheint es, nicht zu zweifeln ist. Trotzdem ist jede Geschichte, meine ich, eine Erfindung und daher auswechselbar...Wer es nicht weiss, und zum Glück wissen es die wenigsten, hat keine Wahl, da er seine Erfindung von sich selbst nicht als solche durchschaut, und seine ganze Kraft dient dazu, Vorkommnisse herbeizuführen, die seine Erfindung bestätigen...'.<sup>1</sup>

Most men would be too weak to bear the knowledge that there is no one purpose in anyone's life, and instinctively create roles for themselves which they can consider comfortably as their vocation. This is what Frisch means when he speaks of the Greeks and the Trojan War, and of their need for Helen as an excuse:

'Denn das ist das Menschliche daran, sie brauchen einen Grund, wenn sie Krieg führen wollen. Ein Grund oder wenigstens ein Ziel, einen Zweck. Sie sind keine Götter, die ohne all das auskommen. Immer brauchen sie den Vorwand, damit sie nicht sehen:  
Wir kämpfen um zu kämpfen!  
Denn das wäre abermals der Ausblick in die Weltnacht, ins Leere, ins Nichts.'<sup>2</sup>

The narrator has seen that ultimately all reasons one puts forward for one's life are invalid because incomplete; but he still tries to avoid the ultimate conclusion - that he must voluntarily choose restriction, or risk madness by multiplying the process of creating roles for himself as far as

1) Horst Bienek, Werkstattgespräche mit Schriftstellern, p.24f.

2) Blätter aus dem Brotsack, p.59.

possible. This is, of course, all connected with his attitude to time: time is the arch-enemy which enforces continuity, gives consequences to the momentary.

Several stories are introduced to elaborate the narrator's ideas on the relationship of the individual to his 'Rolle'. There is the tale of the milkman who suddenly discovers that the pattern he has chosen unconsciously for his life wears out, and he does not know how to find another<sup>1</sup>; it is an amusing, slightly grotesque tale - but surely too anecdotal to bear any profound meaning. Slightly more meaningful is the tale of the man who believed himself unlucky.<sup>2</sup> This does show how one can present a facade to the world which serves as a kind of label by which others recognize one, and also how one-sided such an image can be, although admittedly convenient since it frees one from the need to face each situation without any idea of how to act; in other words, it frees one from a certain amount of responsibility - just as the sort of person who convinces others that he cannot do certain things frees himself from the need to try. But Frisch does not condemn this sort of 'Geschichte' any more than the narrator does<sup>3</sup>:

'...seine Erfindung, ein redlicher und von keinem Glück begünstigter Mensch zu sein, ist ihm jede Summe wert; andernfalls müsste er sich ja ein anderes Ich erfinden, das heisst: er müsste seine ganze Lebensgeschichte nochmals umdichten, alle Vorkommnisse seiner Vergangenheit anders erzählen, nochmals sich selbst erleben, was kostspieliger ist, glaube ich, als der Verlust einer Briefftasche.'<sup>4</sup>

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1) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, p.74ff.

2) op.cit., p.76ff.

3) op.cit., p.78.

4) Horst Bienek, op.cit., p.25. The loss of a 'Briefftasche' is a reference to the action the unhappy man takes on winning a lottery, to enable him to retain his 'Lebensgeschichte'.

By his non-critical attitude Frisch shows that this donning of a role is not deliberate deceit, but an instinctive process with valid social benefits, and the man for whom it fails deserves sympathy; are we then to feel that the narrator of the novel also deserves sympathy for his insight into the superficiality of all social roles? Certainly it is possible to interpret his multiplicity of roles as fear of trusting himself to one course, but much in the novel suggests that his aims are more selfish; like Stiller, his assertion of freedom or attempts to gain it are strictly anti-social, since a useful life within society demands a certain amount of self-discipline in the service of others. The narrator in fact condemns himself by his introduction of the story of the ambassador, who sees that he is not the 'Ekzellenz' the world of international society held him to be.<sup>1</sup>

'Aber er tritt nicht zurück. Er wählt das Grössere: die Rolle. Seine Selbsterkenntnis bleibt sein Geheimnis. Er erfüllt sein Amt...Er weiss: wer nicht schweigen kann, will erkannt sein in der Grösse seiner Selbsterkenntnis, die keine ist, wenn sie nicht schweigen kann...'.<sup>2</sup>

To achieve any kind of service to others, the individual must make a sacrifice of his freedom and accept one image, even if it does do injustice or violence to one's true self, to the possibilities within one. In the light of this, the narrator's self-expression is utterly self-centred.

This can be proved from the story about the German on the mountain.<sup>3</sup>

Two interpretations are possible: the one mentioned above - proof that facts and experience are not the same thing -, or evidence of a purely

1) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, p.182ff.

2) op.cit., p.183f.

3) op.cit., p.78ff.

idiosyncratic attitude, of an inability to accept anything as it appears to be, a wilful desire to play with supposed possibility. This view is strongly supported by one passage:

'Ich kann es nicht mehr hören, dass ich das und das getan habe, ob schändlich oder rühmlich. Nur als unvergessbare Zukunft, selbst wenn ich sie in die Vergangenheit verlege als Erfindung, als Hirn-  
gespinnst, langweilt mein Leben mich nicht...'.<sup>1</sup>

Playing with an incident such as the mountain encounter is harmless enough, but at some point facts have to be accepted, at some point a commitment to life and other people has to be made - we have already seen that when the narrator writes 'ich möchte keine Liebesgeschichte'<sup>2</sup> it is not from propriety, but from fear of time and the permanence it will impart to the moment of joy, tantamount to opting out of life in order to avoid facing the hard truth that existence involves self-restraint: denying facts about oneself involves intrusion into the lives of others who are associated with one's own existence.

On consideration of all this evidence one must conclude that the introduction of 'Geschichten' in the second sense of stories, whether they concern the narrator himself or other figures in whom he is interested, are a means of hiding - by spreading one's interests widely - the forward movement of life and the need of the subordination of imagined possibilities to practical existence. The narrator writes: 'Ich probiere Geschichten an wie Kleider'<sup>3</sup>, and this sums up the form of the book: self-willed,

1) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, p.89.

2) op.cit., p.99. Cf. above, p.180f.

3) op.cit., p.30.

relatively haphazard at first glance, the product of a mind evading 'Geschichte' in the first definition.

Form, in the light of the above considerations

In the light of the above, it is possible to explain the 'Skizze' form as perhaps the best way of presenting the material outlined, since the prime aim is to avoid continuity; but it should be emphasised that the ideas dealt with above have been extracted from a work of nearly five hundred pages, and their interconnection is not immediately apparent. A series of disjointed writings should have some kind of binding element to justify their presentation under one title as a novel. In Stiller and Homo Faber this element is provided by a subtle progression within the material, leading if not to a definite conclusion at least to a turning point. Even in works so associative in their ordering as Virginia Woolf's there is a recognisable period of time which frames the 'stream of consciousness', the continuity of personality. Even this time-framework is lacking in Mein Name sei Gantenbein; we are given no guidance as to what is happening, when or how the state of mind one can detect has developed. One must question seriously the relationship of the author to his created figure. The two seem to be so closely associated that we are never given any norm or standard outside the mind of the narrator against which to measure his attitudes. In Stiller we have the final section presenting an eminently reasonable mind; in Homo Faber we have verbatim accounts of Hanna's criticism of Walter, which enables us to see him at least briefly from an external viewpoint. Also, in Stiller although the

author is out of sight in the sense that he makes no direct comments or intrusions into the novel, he is very much in control of his creation: Stiller is made to give himself away in what he writes and we watch the dual progression of his conscious thought and his subconscious attitudes. In Homo Faber also, though less successfully executed because of the nature of the 'guilt' involved, we see a mind betraying itself, revealing in an attempt to prove the opposite the ability to be affected emotionally, to act from non-rational motives.

Lubbock foresaw the dangers attendant upon the choice of a first-person narrator:

'...the man or woman who acts as the vessel of sensation is always in danger of seeming a light, uncertain weight compared with the other people in the book - simply because the other people are objective images, plainly outlined while the seer in the midst is precluded from that advantage, and must see without being directly seen.'<sup>1</sup>

In Mein Name sei Gantenbein there are no other figures who are seen with objectivity; but even if we are faced with a mind trapped in its own subjective world, is it justifiable to leave the reader without any indication of the narrator's position within the world? In a story such as Büchner's Lenz we are presented with an unbalanced view of the world; the author never says specifically that this is so, and even presents the logic of madness without commentary - in the opening picture of Lenz walking, for example -, yet the third-person portrayal allows the introduction of other figures and the unbalanced mind is seen for what it is. This possibility is forfeited by Frisch for the greater scope afforded for detailed presentation of a mind by the first-person form, and he ignores even the method suggested by

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1) Percy Lubbock, The Craft of Fiction, p.259.

Lubbock, for keeping a just balance between the subjective and objective.

'The hero (i.e. the person through whose vision we see events)... can at any moment become impenetrable, a human being whose thought is sealed from us; and it may seem a small matter, but in fact it has the result that he drops into the plane of the people whom he has hitherto been seeing and judging.'<sup>1</sup>

Rudolf Hartung, in a review of the novel, suggests that the author is all too obviously in charge:

'...die blinde Identifikation des Lesers mit dem Romanhelden (wird) immer wieder vereitelt, indem der Autor seine Karten aufdeckt und dem Leser zu verstehen gibt: das Ganze ist Fiktion - die Geschichte könnte sich so zugetragen haben oder anders.'<sup>2</sup>

However, it is surely due more to the rigidly restricted 'vision' of the novel, which results in considerable confusion, than to the author's ironical attitude to this creation that we are unable to make any identification; what is there in the novel to compare, for example, with the opening passage of Thomas Mann's Der Erwählte as an instance of deliberate distancing? The reader feels no involvement in Frisch's novel because he simply does not know what is meant to be taking place in the work.

#### Possible thematic links

Apart from the ideas dealt with above as an aid to understanding possible reasons for the form, there are other motifs which recur and might be of some value in the attempt to ascertain what lies behind the confusion. For example, there is the theme of escape in various forms.

The earliest indication of the narrator's preoccupation with this subject occurs with the picture of a man who passes quietly away at the wheel of his

1) Lubbock, op.cit., p.261.

2) Rudolf Hartung, review of 'Mein Name sei Gantenbein', Die Neue Rundschau, 1964, p.682.

car:

'Es muss ein kurzer Tod gewesen, und die nicht dabei gewesen sind, sagen, ein leichter Tod - ich kann es mir nicht vorstellen - ein Tod wie gewünscht...'.<sup>1</sup>

Death is visualized here as a possible, desirable relief from undefined, implied hardship. A little later comes the story of the escape from a hospital<sup>2</sup>, an amusing anecdote, but one which ends sadly in a pathetic recapture scene. There is also the tale of the man who attends his 'own' funeral and unexpectedly finds himself the possessor of unlimited freedom<sup>3</sup>; or the equally odd tale of the errant corpse.<sup>4</sup> And, of course, the whole Gantenbein complex is based on the acquisition of a kind of freedom; the figure is introduced with the words:

'Ich stelle mir vor:

...seine gesellschaftlichen Möglichkeiten, seine beruflichen Möglichkeiten dadurch, dass er nie sagt, was er sieht, ein Leben als Spiel, seine Freiheit kraft seines Geheimnisses usw.'<sup>5</sup>

All these examples are variations of the previously described theme of time and its consequences; there is a constant desire to live beyond all possible claims upon one, to avoid any kind of consistent relationship or any kind of official classification which would impose continuity of identity or simply of behaviour.

Another recurrent element is treatment of 'triangle' relationships, difficulties between man and woman. The story of the 'Bäckermeister' is one instance of the preoccupation with jealousy and infidelity<sup>6</sup>; Ali and

1) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, p.8.

2) op.cit., p.14ff.

3) op.cit., p.385ff.

4) op.cit., p.488ff.

5) op.cit., p.30.

6) op.cit., p.170ff.

his blind bride provide another aspect - devotion and suffering are here illustrated.<sup>1</sup> There is a discussion with Burri on the difference between men and women in their attitudes to each other<sup>2</sup>, and the murder of Camilla Huber by her lover adds yet another possible aspect of the man-woman relationship.<sup>3</sup> A considerable amount of the Gantenbein material also features this subject, and it is possible even to trace the germs of a progressive sequence of attitudes behind the apparently haphazard mass of detail. Quite early in the novel we read:

'Ich werde mir neue Kleider kaufen, dabei weiss ich: es hilft nichts, nur im Schaufenster erscheinen sie anders...Ob billig oder teuer, englisch oder italienisch oder einheimisch, bleibt einerlei; immer entstehen die gleichen Falten am gleichen Ort, ich weiss es.'<sup>4</sup>

If one reads this as an indication of the speaker's repetitive difficulties, then it is possible to see a development in the Gantenbein role which suggests that within this imagined existence the same emotional problems gradually emerge as can be detected in what is probably the 'real' life<sup>5</sup> - although it should again be stressed that such a development is far from obvious on a first reading. 'Die gleichen Falten' can be taken to be jealousy and dissatisfaction, mistrust. The Gantenbein-Lila marriage starts off idyllically, but gradually a more worried tone can be detected. We read, for example: 'Wenn Lila wüsste, dass ich sehe, sie würde zweifeln an meiner Liebe, und es wäre die Hölle, ein Mann und ein Weib, aber kein Paar...'.<sup>6</sup> Then almost immediately afterwards appears the line: 'Ich bin

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1) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, p.249.

2) *op.cit.*, p.323f.

3) *op.cit.*, p.420ff.

4) *op.cit.*, p.29.

5) Cf. below, p. 204f.

6) *op.cit.*, p.159.

glücklich wie noch nie mit einer Frau.'<sup>1</sup> Could it be that despite the desire to depict an idyllic relationship, the attitude of doubt and expectancy of difficulties encroaches on this vision and has to be repressed by a determined, if not entirely convinced, assertion of happiness?

After an amusing portrayal of Lila's arrival at the airport the narrator as Gantenbein adds: 'Hoffentlich werde ich nie eifersüchtig!'<sup>2</sup> The tone has been fairly light-hearted; the possibility of jealousy has, however, begun to darken the imagined happiness. Significantly too, this hint is followed by the story of the 'Bäckermeister', which deals with just this topic, not with a happy relationship.

Later in the book the charm and novelty of the Gantenbein figure begin to wear thin, and the narrator begins to play with possible crises. The interest rests initially with the Gantenbein figure and his attempted and comically unsuccessful 'confession'<sup>3</sup>; then the reader is taken through still amusing portrayals of jealousy - the attempt to put off an unwelcome visitor<sup>4</sup>, or the latter's supposed arrival<sup>5</sup> - to a tragically serious ending to the fun<sup>6</sup>, with the abandoned flat; and even before this point one can detect <sup>an</sup> ambivalent effect in an incident such as the reading of love-letters the reader does not realize are his own.<sup>7</sup> The scene is comical, but a little painful too. The attempt to catch a glimpse of a young man in the

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1) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, p.159.

2) op.cit., p.170.

3) op.cit., p.253ff.

4) op.cit., p.265.

5) op.cit., p.304ff.

6) op.cit., p.308.

7) op.cit., p.295ff.

car mirror has also a touch of the farcical, but is again not entirely free of serious overtones, ending with an admission of conflict: 'Ich weiss, ich werde ungeniessbar...'.<sup>1</sup> In this long sequence, then, it would seem that the awareness of reality, the knowledge of how difficult it is to exist peaceably intrudes more and more on the imaginary and shapes it into a similar process of disillusionment.

After this, the changes within the imaginary sphere become slightly more rapid, for example within the space of one page Lila's role is twice altered. This could be taken as evidence of an increasing inability to blot out the real world, of a restless discontent. The very amusing episode with Lila as the absent Comtesse<sup>2</sup> soon gives way to sections which stress the problems of marital life and the dangers of jealousy more seriously: for example, when Svoboda becomes the centre of interest and we watch a confession of infidelity, the attempts by the man to clarify his reactions to himself and hide his despair<sup>3</sup>; there are indeed traces of near anguish:

'Warum, ja, warum fällt jetzt kein Vorhang?  
Man weiss doch, was folgt - '.<sup>4</sup>

In such words the imaginary framework breaks down; and in fact although the section starts with 'ich stelle mir vor' like many of the Gantenbein roles, the name Enderlin is used. If one accepts that Enderlin is nearest the 'real' figure of the narrator<sup>5</sup>, then this reinforces the view that what

1) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, p.292.

2) *op.cit.*, p.326ff.

3) *op.cit.*, p.343ff.

4) *op.cit.*, p.358.

5) Cf. below, p. 209 ff.

starts as imagination becomes inextricably linked with real and unforgettable events which torture the mind behind the book, so that emotion shows through the adopted façade.

The use of the names Baucis and Philemon is also indicative of a change; for their first occurrence<sup>1</sup> they appear frequently with increasingly heavy irony. The names are associated with a couple entirely devoted to one another, who can not bear to be parted, but are used in the novel for couples divided by suspicion and jealousy, relatively playfully at first but less so later.<sup>2</sup> Here we have a picture of a couple who form a pair only in name; the joy has gone out of their relationship, until even when physically close, they are entirely cut off from each other in spirit. In the words: 'Sie hiessen Philemon und Baucis: Das Paar' there is a wealth of disappointed hopes and disillusionment about the possibility of a really close, sustained relationship between man and woman. The whole Gantenbein sequence ends significantly with a parting.<sup>3</sup> Gantenbein admits<sup>4</sup> that he cannot imagine not having been deceived; does this reflect some similar difficulty with a woman in the 'reality' of the narrator? Is he here admitting the flimsy foundations on which jealousy is built, his own inability to believe in an ordinary uncomplicated relationship? Is there expressed in the revelation that Lila is not deceiving her husband a faint hope that fidelity is not entirely impossible? Perhaps the sum total of the experiences can be linked with a passage from Frisch's diary:

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1) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, p.270.

2) op.cit., p.362f.

3) op.cit., p.484f.

4) op.cit., p.483.

'Es ist unsere eigene Einsamkeit, die uns letztlich immer das gleiche Gesicht zeigt, unser Gesicht, das endgültig ist, und über dieses Du hinaus kommen wir nie. Es ist nur so, dass manchmal ein Mensch in dieses Du hineinkommt, kürzer oder länger.'<sup>1</sup>

Are we to understand the novel as an exemplification of the individual's utter loneliness, his slavery to one 'face' and his inability to make contact with others? Or are we dealing with one particular, disillusioned individual? To questions such as these the text provides no unequivocal answers; all it is possible to do is construct tentative explanations, for the book contains nothing beyond the possibility of a latent pattern. If one takes all the above material, the recurrence of 'die gleichen Falten', in conjunction with the occasional references to an empty flat, then a possible 'story' begins to emerge. At the first occurrence<sup>2</sup> we have a long description of a desolate flat, still full of signs of the life that has been led there, but with a hopeless, deserted atmosphere. A very similar picture occurs later, after the portrayal of Lila's desertion of Gantenbein, when all the slightly grotesque comedy has become awful seriousness.<sup>3</sup> Then again later<sup>4</sup> the same details reappear, after the 'official' declaration that the Gantenbein material is all a figment of imagination; it is as though a hopelessness too deep for direct expression, a hopelessness which paralyses action draws the narrator back to the inescapable reality of having been abandoned. It would seem that some unhappy affair has taken place; the man has been deserted, but who should bear the blame, who precisely was involved remains unclarified. However, on this evidence -

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1) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, p.175.

2) *op.cit.*, p.25ff.

3) *op.cit.*, p.308.

4) *op.cit.*, p.487.

the recurrent details of the flat, the inevitable almost involuntary returns to the theme of betrayal and jealousy - one can surmise that the 'Geschichten' are an attempt to escape not just the dullness of continuous existence and its restrictions, but also something more immediately personal: to escape the recognition of personal failure in the relationship which seems to have just ended in desertion of one party by the other. And yet, despite the fact that such a hypothesis can be worked out, the novel is exceedingly unclear, and the difficulty of seeing such a possible pattern is surely a criticism of the work; for it could have served as a uniting framework for the reflections on time and so on, instead of which it is a tantalizing puzzle. The recurrent pictures are not obvious nor unambiguous enough to justify entirely a view such as that of Paul Konrad Kurz:

'Was in allen Spiegelungen bleibt, was alle Vorstellungen geradezu heraufstreibt, wie eine nicht zu stillende Wunde Blut, ist die zugrunde liegende Erfahrung. Der Roman ist die Fixierung und der Versuch einer Neutralisierung dieser verzehrenden Erfahrung.'<sup>1</sup>

This is a vision rather of what the novel might have been than of what it is. Certainly the book is concerned to some extent with the difficulty of grasping what reality is in other people, but when E.M. Forster wrote of 'mystery' as a structuring element in fiction, he surely meant constructive not obstructive mystery, which is what one finds here. Mystery in its positive sense means the constant withholding of some information in order to intrigue the reader, hold his attention; it presupposes a degree of continuity, and not the constant introduction of new questions with no

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1) Paul Konrad Kurz, 'Mein Name sei Gantenbein', Stimmen der Zeit, 90. Jg., 175 Band, 1 Heft, October 1964, p.58.

answers or clues. In both Stiller and Homo Faber this minimum of continuity is to be found, in the progression towards greater clarity of the minds we see at work. In particular, Stiller offers no ultimate solutions to the problems of knowing one's fellow-humans, but a mystery does not have to have one single solution, it has only, to engage and hold interest, to show some progression towards increased clarity. This is achieved in both Stiller and Homo Faber by the converging of the twin threads of a conscious and a subconscious mind. In Mein Name sei Gantenbein we have a mystery in the sense of a frustrating puzzle, without any really continuous thread - recurrent ones indeed, but tangled, not intertwined.

Transitions between sections as a possible guide to meaning

In this novel there is not the significance to be seen in the movement from one section to another that there is in Stiller and to a lesser extent in Homo Faber; in Stiller, for example, the 'stranger's' criticism of Swiss pettiness comes always after some meeting with figures from the past which heighten Stiller's awareness of his spiritual confinement within himself, and the vehemence of the criticism reveals the latent fear and uncertainty in the writer. In certain cases there appears to be a reason for the shift from the 'real' identity to Gantenbein; after the description of the accident, for example,<sup>1</sup> and the notation of boredom - 'Ich weiss nicht, wozu ich das erzähle. Mein Unfall interessiert mich nicht..<sup>2</sup> - the phrase 'Mein Name sei Gantenbein' occurs. Is the long description of the accident

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1) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, p.30ff.

2) op.cit., p.36.

made in the attempt to find some interest in what has happened, or simply out of lethargy, for want of something better to do? In either case, boredom is all-powerful and the escape is made into the realm of imagination where all is possible.

Later we find the description of Enderlin with a group of his acquaintances and feel his discomfort at being the man with a 'Ruf nach Harvard'<sup>1</sup>; he is expected to be pleased, expected to be intellectual, witty and entertaining - and again an escape is made into the freedom from all restraint offered by the Gantenbein imaginary world. The next section starts with the words: 'Es war eine lange und öde Stunde...'<sup>2</sup>, which serve as a transition from the mood of the preceding pages, but it opens out into a sequence where Gantenbein unobtrusively gets the better of those around him.

Further on the Gantenbein identity enters upon a long section of development, immediately after the return from a night with Svoboda's wife has been described<sup>3</sup>, and the inexorable movement of time has been painfully recognized. Gantenbein here functions, it would seem, as a vehicle of experience without the dreaded 'Geschichte', because he is outside time altogether as long as his creator keeps his imagination entirely separate from his 'real' worries.

After the section of what will happen to others' treatment of one as age approaches, and the expression of dread ending with the bitter words 'Warum hat man sich nicht erhängt?'<sup>4</sup>, Gantenbein is turned to, though

1) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, p.57ff.

2) op.cit., p.62.

3) op.cit., p.124.

4) op.cit., p.247.

briefly, as a means of directing all thoughts into a different channel. The preoccupation with what would happen if one knew that one had only a year to live which had led to the climax of a dread of age, is thus taken into the imaginary framework and robbed of some of its reality and immediate application. Again after a section of mounting tension - the sequence about the use of a tape-recorder in order to catch others' 'betrayal' of the narrator, about his inability to believe that what he sees and hears is reality, to believe that the woman he loves exists outside their relationship in unchanged form and forms part of others' lives as well as of his own - after these obsessive reflections, the Gantenbein identity is brought back, with some effort however:

'Mein Name sei Gantenbein!  
(Aber endgültig.)' 1

It is clear here that it serves as an escape from the uncomfortable recognition that jealousy is created by the sufferer, from the recognition therefore that the suffering is self-inflicted and self-defeating.

The last occasion on which the change from 'reality' to imagination is meaningful is when the comic sequence about the overflowing shower follows on from the very much more serious attempt to see Lila 'von aussen', in the recreation of a sea passage.<sup>2</sup> The attempt ends uncertainly, not with the achievement of an objective view, but simply the view through another personality - and a consequent doubt about the writer's own identity. The shower incident is one of the funniest of the book; but in context its humour has a somewhat agitated tone, for it is not just an isolated

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1) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, p.420.

2) op.cit., p.433ff.

appendage but an escape from anxiety.

Although in all these cases it is clear that Gantenbein is a means of escaping the conclusions to be drawn from difficult situations, of escaping thoughts charged with emotion, it should be noticed that there are about ninety separate sections in the book, and that the number of times when one can justifiably put forward a reason for the particular order of material is very small in relation to the whole. This is not to claim that an author should necessarily produce a clear reason why he orders his material as he does; a good novel should be able to present something new, new associations, new combinations of ideas to provoke thought, but since every other kind of guidance for the reader appears to be lacking here, one might have expected some kind of unobtrusive continuity between individual sections. A comparison with Rilke's Malte Laurids Brigge clarifies the point: the reader is at first often puzzled by the changes of time and place, but gleans enough information about Malte, his background and problems to have a basis for understanding the very varied material.

#### The identity of the narrator

In view of the above, one must ask whether there is any kind of continuity of personality in the novel, or whether the character of the narrator is apprehensible at all. Reviewers disagree on the relationship between the identities of Enderlin, Gantenbein and Svoboda. Monika Wintsch-Spiess, for example, seem to take Gantenbein as 'real':

'Seine Blindenbrille ist ihm das Mittel, alles beobachten zu können, ohne selbst gesehen zu werden. Damit schliesst sie ihn von jeder echten, spontanen Teilnahme aus, sie verhindert gerade

jedes unmittelbare Engagement in der Gegenwart. Gantenbein bleibt in einem zwar unbehelligten, doch beziehungslosen, unverbindlichen Raum.'<sup>1</sup>

This view has no supporting examples, and it seems to overlook the precise sphere in which Gantenbein fails - in his relationship with a woman, and not because of inability to achieve 'Engagement', but through the recurrence of jealousy, which the Gantenbein role at first seemed to escape by reason of the freedom of action it allowed its creator and others. It is not the problematic nature of the Gantenbein role which causes its eventual failure, but the intrusion of emotion from the world of 'reality'. It makes more sense to understand Gantenbein as a figment of imagination created by the narrator - who is really the one without 'Engagement'. The other two identities can be seen equally as free creations, but this view would overlook certain passages which suggest that 'reality' is nearest in Enderlin, and that the narrator borrows other identities, whether entirely fictitious like Gantenbein, or probably originally 'real' like Svoboda, the deceived husband. For instance, after a night spent with another man's wife, the central figure finds himself forced to re-enter the everyday world of time and says bitterly:

'...einen Augenblick, jetzt bevor ich den Fuss auf den Teppich stelle, halte ich inne: - immer wieder, ich weiss es ja schon und doch erschrecke ich reglos, bin ich Enderlin, ich werde noch sterben als Enderlin.'<sup>2</sup>

This must be seen in conjunction with a later emphatic attempt to be free from Enderlin:

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- 1) Monika Wintsch-Spiess, Zum Problem der Identität im Werke Max Frischs, p.21.
  - 2) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, p.187.

'Ich habe Enderlin aufgegeben -

Es gibt andere Leute, die ich nicht aufgeben kann, selbst wenn ich ihnen nur selten begegne oder nie mehr...Sie fesseln mich lebenslänglich durch meine Vorstellung, dass sie, einmal in meine Lage versetzt, anders empfinden und anders handeln und anders daraus hervorgehen als ich, der ich mich selbst nicht aufgeben kann. Aber Enderlin kann ich aufgeben. '1

The attempt to dispose of the identity of Enderlin is slightly too deliberate to be convincing; it is an attempt at self-persuasion, one feels, because the identity is restrictive, because it is not 'anders', not sufficiently different from the 'Ich'. If one then turns to one of the last sections of the novel, the position becomes a little clearer: the full 'awakening' comes<sup>2</sup> and the admission that Gantenbein and Camilla are 'lauter Erfindungen'. It would then seem reasonable to assume that Enderlin is nearest the identity from which escape is sought into a world of possible experience; the stories of Gantenbein are not told simply for the purposes of amusement - this is made clear by a re-phrasing of the accusation:

"Sie erzählen lauter Erfindungen."  
"Ich erlebe lauter Erfindungen." '3

According to these words, an attempt is being made to substitute imagined for real experience, and once one accepts this, the novel begins to gain in interest as the representation of one man's struggle to escape himself and 'live' a different life, and it is the Enderlin identity which seems most discontented, and Enderlin who enters upon the illicit love-relationship.<sup>4</sup>

The Svoboda<sup>5</sup> sections are more obviously purely 'experimental', variations on the same theme of relationships between man and woman seen from within

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1) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, p.248f.

2) op.cit., p.486.

3) op.cit., p.486.

4) op.cit., pp.57ff., 93ff., 104.

5) 'Svoboda' is the Czech word for freedom, significantly.

the abandoned husband, a man with emotional difficulties but lacking the profound discontent associated with Enderlin.<sup>1</sup> The narrator may then be taken to be most similar in character and position to Enderlin - which gives him a modicum of identity.

Why, then, if the narrator is, like Enderlin, a man of some intelligence, do the same problems recur in the imaginary existence as in the real, taking 'reality' as illustrated by the empty flat scenes? Why does the inventive humour associated with Gantenbein give way, and the Enderlin identity seem to be a trap rather than an escape?

There is of course the fear of time already dealt with, which would make any stable relationship, based on self-commitment, difficult; this could be the effect of the approach to middle age, of a feeling that life is slipping away too fast - we are told that Enderlin at least is forty-one and has no sense of achievement from the years that have passed.<sup>2</sup> But there is evidence of a more immediately personal difficulty in one vital passage: 'Ich kann nicht glauben, dass das, was ich sehe, schon der Lauf der Welt ist.'<sup>3</sup> From this it would seem that the crux of the narrator's problem - and Enderlin's too since he cannot accept and rejoice over his Harvard appointment - is the inability to accept facts as final; everything which he imagines, or which is reported from elsewhere is far more 'real' to him than his own limited existence.

This is a problem touched upon by Frisch in earlier years:

'Wie sollte man danken, dass man lebt! Dass man ein Wesen ist, das vergeht, das all das Zeitlose sieht und begreift, warum es

- 1) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, pp.181ff., 200ff. Cf. Svoboda, p.363ff.
- 2) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, p.57.
- 3) op.cit., p.487.

kein Stein ist, und begreift, dass es sterben muss, immerzu, damit es die Schönheit begreift und alles, was mehr ist als Schönheit, die auch nur ein Name ist, einer von vielen - man müsste auch danken können für den Schmerz, für die Angst, für den Ekel und die Öde, die stiere Verzweiflung.'<sup>1</sup>

This precisely what the narrator cannot do. He cannot accept that hardship and suffering is proof of life, proof of the miraculous ability to feel deeply. Anything which engages his imagination is consequently of more interest than his own life, which he cannot believe is all human existence has to offer. Talking of events in Algeria, he says:

'..und wenn ich es mir einige Augenblicke lang vorstellen kann, gibt es nichts anderes, und die Vorstellung ist kaum auszuhalten.'<sup>2</sup>

Events outside his own experience are intensely real when he allows his imagination to enter into them, but in his own life he can see nothing but encroaching age.

Consequently, when he does experience something deeply - and one imagines that there was a deep attachment to the woman who left him - he cannot accept that the person he loves and the person who exists in a world outside his are one and the same. He will not accept the reality of his own everyday existence and so refuses to believe that someone who helps to blot it out of his consciousness, someone whom he loves, has an ordinary existence too, away from him. This is the origin of jealousy, the refusal to accept that one shares a person with the world at large, that he or she has an existence in relation to other people beyond the scope of one's own desires and emotions:

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1) Blätter aus dem Brotsack, p.79f.

2) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, p.33.

5) op.cit. p. 111

'Eifersucht als Beispiel dafür, Eifersucht als wirklicher Schmerz darüber, dass ein Wesen, das uns ausfüllt, zugleich aussen ist. Eifersucht hat mit der Liebe der Geschlechter weniger zu tun, als es scheint; es ist die Kluft zwischen der Welt und dem Wahn...die Welt deckt sich mit dem Partner, nicht mit mir, die Liebe hat mich nur mit meinem Wahn vereint.'<sup>1</sup>

Enderlin (one presumes, since he has already been associated with Burri<sup>2</sup>)

is unable to see his 'Lila' from without:

'...ich hätte doch gern gewusst, wie er (Burri) "meine" Lila sieht. Er spricht von ihr mit einer Verehrung, die mir schmeichelt. Und zugleich war ich erschrocken...Er redete von ihr...wie von einem wirklichen Menschen, und ich scheine der Einzige zu sein, der sie nicht sieht.'<sup>3</sup>

If only he could correlate his image of her with what the world sees, then

he would be nearer achieving a permanent and happy relationship:

'Einzige Gewissheit über Lila: so wie ich sie mir vorstelle, gibt es sie nicht; später einmal werde ich auch sie sehen, mag sein, Lila von aussen -'.<sup>4</sup>

In his desire to create an existence apart from the world of everyday reality, the narrator re-creates people in subjective images, which must at some point inevitably give way before fact, but so fluid is his personality that the subsequent attempt to see Lila from outside, by associating himself with Svoboda in order to achieve a different viewpoint, only adds to the uncertainty he feels about his own reality.<sup>5</sup> But the problem is very real, for although Lila has been associated with both Gantenbein and Enderlin, she is here spoken of directly by the narrator without any intervening 'persona'.

1) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, p.420.

2) op.cit., p.214ff.

3) op.cit., p.338.

4) op.cit., p.433.

5) op.cit., p.448.

Even when faced with the reality of suffering, the narrator has to transform it in some measure before it becomes 'real' to his imagination. In the first description of the deserted flat<sup>1</sup>, the phrase 'wie in Pompeji' recurs several times, suggesting - apart from the indication of learning appropriate to a man like Enderlin - that everything in the narrator's life has to become magnified, exalted by such associations before it is acceptable to him. The details of his actual life bore him; what has happened to him is either unclear, or at best dull and restrictive. The feeling is often conveyed in the sentence structure, for example Enderlin's lack of interest in his call to Harvard, despite the enthusiasm of others:

'Wann er nun nach Harvard gehe, fragt eine Dame, und nachdem auch das gesagt ist, leider so leise, dass die andern jenseits des Lampenschirms nochmals dieselbe Frage stellen, und nachdem Enderlin nochmals hat antworten müssen und zwar laut genug, damit alle hören, wann Enderlin vermutlich nach Harvard geht, ist natürlich Enderlin neuerdings im Mittelpunkt...'.<sup>2</sup>

The sentence is heavy, dully repetitive, expressing effectively Enderlin's intense boredom: and one can assume that some similar feeling of boredom led the 'real' narrator into the relationship which the empty flat shows has ended in bitterness because too much was demanded of it.

Everything to do with the 'Alltag' is intensely disliked. Much of the fun of the Gantenbein-Lila association resides in its constant eventfulness: 'Unser Alltag ist lustig.'<sup>3</sup> Jokingly Gantenbein says at one point: 'Alltag ist nur durch Wunder erträglich'<sup>4</sup>, which suggests a latent fear of its dreadful continuity which hovers as a constant threat.

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1) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, p.27.

2) op.cit., p.59f.

3) op.cit., p.139.

4) op.cit., p.166.

Ultimately this dread becomes the refusal to believe what one sees is final, as quoted above.<sup>1</sup> The story of the encounter with a German on the Piz Kesch is another example of this refusal,<sup>2</sup> a refusal to accept that what happens, in all its insignificance, is in fact all; and the obverse side of this refusal is the desire to mould other people in one's imagination in such a way that they have nothing to do with the everyday world, with the objectively real social sphere which seems so full of insignificance and boredom, and above all of dull continuity. Certainly it is true that events as they happen, people as they function within society, do not necessarily express what we feel to be our full potentiality; but at some point the individual must accept and acknowledge as final the facts of a happening as they stand, or the range of his abilities as shown in action; to be obsessed with what might have been is to verge on insanity. In no state is entire satisfaction found for the narrator; the desire to escape time has been dealt with above, but even the Gantenbein identity which aids this has disadvantages:

'Gantenbein ist froh, dass er nicht wirklich blind ist...Die Vorteile überwiegen...Der Nachteil, der ihn am meisten ängstet: die Verinnerlichung, der seine Blindenrolle ihm aussetzt.'<sup>3</sup>

The narrator realizes that assumed blindness, for all its advantages, would leave one open to assault by memory since isolation increases with 'blindness', so that even the striking of a clock becomes paradoxically welcome as 'ein Schutz vor der Erinnerung und ihren Schlünden'.<sup>4</sup>

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1) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, p.487. Cf. above, p. 212.

2) *op.cit.*, p.78ff.

3) *op.cit.*, p.64f.

4) *op.cit.*, p.64.

In addition to the feverish attempts to elude time and continuity, there are other, more obscure details which could conceivably suggest that the mind of the narrator is not just eccentric but unbalanced.<sup>1</sup> The horse's head is the most puzzling instance, with its association with Jerusalem:

'Ich lag wach.

Ich sah:

- unversehens erstarrt, eine Mähne aus roter Terrakotta, leblos, Terrakotta oder Holz mit einem kreideweissen Gebiss und mit glanzschwarzen Nüstern, alles kunstvoll bemalt, lautlos zieht sich der Pferdekopf langsam in den Fels zurück, der sich lautlos schliesst, risslos wie das Morgengrauen vor dem Fenster, grau, Granit wie am Gotthard; im Tal, tief unten, eine ferne Strasse, Kurven voll bunter Autos, die alle nach Jerusalem rollen (ich weiss nicht, woher ich das weiss!) eine Kolonne von bunten kleinen Autos, spielzeughaft.'<sup>2</sup>

Reference is made to this entirely inexplicable picture later<sup>3</sup>; the only indication of any meaning behind it is when the head is described as 'ein Kopf voll Todesangst', which suggests that this vision might in some way be the product of obsessive fear.<sup>4</sup>

Another indication of an unbalanced attitude to life comes at the point where other people are in effect deprived of their objective existence:

'Ihr wirkliches Verhalten mag enttäuschen, aber das macht nichts; es bleibt ihnen der Spielraum meiner Erwartung. Solche Leute kann ich nicht aufgeben.'<sup>5</sup>

- 1) Theodore Ziolkowski mentions this novel in an article dealing with 'abnormal' views of the modern world, although he does not suggest that the narrator is unbalanced. Cf. 'Der Blick von der Irrenanstalt', Neophilologus, vol. LI, No.1, Jan. 1967, pp. 42-54.
- 2) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, p.15.
- 3) op.cit., p.238.
- 4) op.cit., p.15.
- 5) op.cit., p.248.

The narrator seems to need other people, but only in so far as they serve his purpose of escape from the role assigned to him by society; he is not interested in others for their own sake, which indicates a dangerous degree of unhealthy subjectivity; but these ideas must remain only conjectures, and the reader is tantalized by not knowing whether he is seeking rational meaning where there is none. Perhaps we are dealing simply with an emotional and mental breakdown; but it is impossible to decide whether the background events suggested by the recurring picture of the flat are the cause or the result of the mental state. One suspects, as suggested above, that the relationship failed because too much was demanded of it, and this may have intensified the peculiar attitudes to life, but nothing can be proved with certainty. However, one is at least justified in feeling that an interpretation based on some degree of abnormality in the narrator is more easily defensible than one which might claim some generally valid social message. It could, for example, be asserted that the narrator's difficulties derive from lack of opportunity for self-expression in the present century, from the need for everyone to take up a functional position in society, and from the consequent feeling of restriction. But the escape into imagination does not introduce exotic or exciting episodes, just variety; the dislike for the 'Alltag' is because it is All-tag, continuity. Such social comment as there is is relatively superficial, true though it may be; indeed, much of the humour is based on social hypocrisy.

#### Humour as the novel's most distinctive feature

It is in fact the humour which is the most memorable feature of the

novel, and it might be said that it represents in Mein Name sei Gantenbein the popular element provided by the identity mystery in Stiller. Whatever may be the more serious reasons for the choice of Gantenbein, he is a figure who affords great scope for amusing situations. Most critics appear to have underestimated the sheer entertainment to be found in this aspect of the novel; whether the humour makes the book a good novel is another question, but it should not be ignored, or treated too seriously. For example, Dr. H. Knorr suggests that Frisch has shown in this novel a deep appreciation of the problems and compensations of blindness. He underestimates the playfulness of much of the Gantenbein material:

'Während die meisten Blindendarstellungen in der Literatur mehr um Verständnis für den Blinden werben möchten, hat man beim Lesen des Gantenbein-Buches fast den Eindruck, als wolle der Autor den Blinden sagen, wie sehr sie eigentlich den Sehenden überlegen seien, und zwar nicht im Sinne des Trostes, sondern vielmehr als Hinweis auf die Verpflichtungen, die dieses Schicksal dem Betroffenen auferlegt.'<sup>1</sup>

The emphasis is wrongly placed: the 'blindness' is being used in the novel not for its own sake, but to show up comically the limitations of those who think they see and understand.

The beginning is made with the buying of a 'Blindenbrille'<sup>2</sup>, which allows the introduction of grotesque colour contrasts and mistakes of identification - the image in the mirror<sup>3</sup> - which are strongly reminiscent of farce, when blindfolding or some such process deprives the 'clown' of normal vision and the surroundings become suddenly unfamiliar and his

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1) Dr. H. Knorr, 'Vom Spiel mit der Blindnis', Marburger Beiträge zum Blindenbildungswesen, 27 Jg., No.2, April-Sept. 1965, p.12.

2) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, p.36ff.

3) ibidem, p.39.

responses inappropriate. On the following pages the first tentative steps are made in the new role of blindness; many 'howlers' are made - 'ein Blinder, der sich umschaute!'<sup>1</sup>, 'der Blinde hat nicht warten können, sondern sich gebückt, um seinen Stock selber aufzunehmen',<sup>2</sup> - but they go unnoticed. Clearly men are so preoccupied with their own business that they look no further than the first indications of another's role: the dark glasses are therefore an unquestioned 'label'.

Comment on society is made more directly on other incidents, for example: '..was die Welt braucht sind Leute wie Gantenbein, die nie sagen, was sie sehen, und seine Vorgesetzten werden ihn schätzen..'.<sup>3</sup> When men are freed from at least one aspect of the facade which they maintain of honesty, innocence or whatever it may be, they are grateful; this is the origin of Camilla's affection for Gantenbein - her assumed role of manicurist is for the first time accepted as true and she can be the contented, independent woman she would like to be. This is a basically serious indictment of the way society functions, but it is never developed in detail, only to create amusing situations. In blindness, for instance, one gives a new freedom not only to others, but also to oneself; one does not have to pretend to have read all the 'right' books - Joyce's Finnegan's Wake in this case<sup>4</sup> -, nor does one have to conceal one's thoughts in order not to offend others - the dress-buying expedition<sup>5</sup> is a light-hearted example of how the narrator

1) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, p.40.

2) op.cit., p.41.

3) op.cit., p.50.

4) op.cit., p.131.

5) op.cit., p.140ff.

is 'als Blinder nicht verpflichtet, entzückt zu sein.'<sup>1</sup> 'Normal' social responses are suddenly made to look wooden, a matter of 'Verpflichtung', and this woodenness - in Bergson's definition of comedy<sup>2</sup> - is the very essence of the comic situation.

There is also a positive delight in showing up the pretentiousness of society's functionaries; when Gantenbein goes to be registered as blind, he forgets his stick and returns to the doctor's office to find it, locating it with no difficulty: 'Aber der Amtsarzt..findet nichts dabei, so sehr glaubt er an seine eigene Unterschrift...'.<sup>3</sup> This insight into the self-importance of officialdom could easily have been developed into a very valid criticism of how little the individual counts; but that it is not indicates a playful rather than serious purpose behind the humour. Frisch has picked on a harmless instance of what Bergson calls 'du mécanique plaqué sur du vivant': the doctor's mind is not as acute as it should be and he appears puppet-like in his self-confidence, unable to vary his responses. This is a very basic type of comic effect - like Moliere's satire on the medical profession which shows doctors acting as though doctors were more important than health, projecting always an inflated picture of their own dignity and never responding to the needs of the individual case.

Blindness as a means of forcing others to see the truth is another motif. By dint of asking pointed questions, Gantenbein makes Lila question her choice of dress<sup>4</sup>; and there are several incidents when people are

1) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, p.145.

2) Henri Bergson, Le Rire.

3) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, p.71.

4) ibid., p.142ff.

unexpectedly faced with their own opinions expressed elsewhere:

'...da es einmal ausgemacht ist, dass Gantenbein nicht sieht, was gespielt wird vor seinen Augen, wird man überall gern seine Meinung vernehmen. Ab und zu, mag sein, kann es peinlich werden, etwa wenn er einen Herrn begegnet, der sich als Monsignore vorstellt, und wenn Gantenbein blindlings fragt, wer denn das gewesen sei, der vorhin von Saujuden gesprochen habe; es ist der Monsignore selbst gewesen.'<sup>1</sup>

There are numerous scenes which derive their humour from incongruity; the idea of a 'blind' man training his own guide-dog is a delightful touch<sup>2</sup>, and the scene where Gantenbein converses with the characters of a play whom he knows only from their roles amuses by the mixture of two spheres - imagination (the theatrical) and everyday reality; theatrical grandeur is politely reduced in stature:

"Ich bin Macbeth."  
 Ich stelle mich ebenfalls vor:  
 "Gantenbein"...  
 "Ich bin Banko", sagt der Dritte.  
 "Sehr erfreut", sage ich.'<sup>3</sup>

There are times also when Gantenbein indulges in pure mischief; one incident takes place in a car carrying Gantenbein, Lila and an admirer:

'Der Hingerissene, der hinten sitzt, redet unentwegt, als wäre ich nicht nur blind, sondern auch stumm. Ich sitze neben Lila und sehe eine Hand auf ihrer Schulter, eine Hand, die von hinten kommt, voll Verständnis für Lila und sie tröstet über eine blöde Kritik in der Presse. Es wäre hartherzig, wenn ich ganz und gar dazu schweigen würde; die Kritik war wirklich sehr ungerecht-witzig, und ich lege meine Hand, die blinde, auf die andere Hand, die schon seit der Gedächtniskirche auf ihrer schwachen Schulter liegt, und sage: Mach dir nichts draus!'<sup>4</sup>

This is an episode which gains its humour from its tongue-in-cheek narration:

- 1) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, p.51.
- 2) op.cit., p.152.
- 3) op.cit., p.151.
- 4) op.cit., p.156.

the true reason for Gantenbein's action - a desire to embarrass without apparent intention - is never once hinted at.

He also delights in baffling others, in a game of chess for example<sup>1</sup>, where Gantenbein exhibits phenomenal powers of memory. Or there are the difficulties which arise simply from the need to sustain the role; the blind man suddenly finds it difficult to find his way in the dark!<sup>2</sup> Or he is faced with a choice between a useful act and strict adherence to his role - as for instance when the shower overflows, and after repairing the damage he has to recreate it for the sake of verisimilitude.<sup>3</sup> The scenes where little Beatrice tries to take advantage of him with childish cunning are charming, for example in the bathroom episode<sup>4</sup>; and one of the most ingeniously funny scenes of all is that where Lila the Comtessa is late for her meal, and Gantenbein and the servant both give accomplished performances in order to get through the meal without any awkward moments.<sup>5</sup>

The role gives ample scope for verbal humour also; the use of 'blindlings' in the Monsignore quotation<sup>6</sup>, for example, where it signifies both 'at random' and 'blindly' referring to the supposed state of the speaker. Or there is the play on words in 'man kann einen Blinden nicht hinters Licht führen.'<sup>7</sup> Then in the chess match, the opponent's slowness

1) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, p.157f.

2) *op.cit.*, p.140.

3) *op.cit.*, p.448ff.

4) *op.cit.*, p.472.

5) *op.cit.*, p.326ff.

6) *op.cit.*, p.51. Cf. above, p. 222.

7) *op.cit.*, p.154.

4) *op.cit.*

in play is condemned with the words: 'Es ist, als sehe er nichts mehr.'<sup>1</sup> Such examples of mock-seriousness, of punning or, as in the last case, ironic transference of ideas more appropriate to the speaker, could be multiplied in number several times, and do suggest a delight in gentle irony for its own sake. Just occasionally the humour has more serious undertones - in the tape-recorder incident, for example<sup>2</sup>, where the ridiculous side is overshadowed by the serious dichotomy in the narrator, (which persona he has assumed is unclear and this alone is an indication that this section is not just fun, but comes close to 'reality'), for he desires independence from the images and 'labels' of others, and yet longs sometimes for confirmation that he does in fact exist outside his own imagination.

Among the other sections of humour outside the Gantenbein framework is the escape from the hospital.<sup>3</sup> The picture of the marshalled forces of justice pursuing a solitary naked figure who is too embarrassed at his position to stop is highly entertaining; but it ends with pathos. The forlorn figure in the 'Königsmantel' is a sad anti-climax, and this part is told as the repeated tale of another person, perhaps in order to distance the narrator from the final ignominious capitulation.<sup>4</sup> There are germs of a serious message here; the doctors show by their questions how little they understand the urge simply to escape, and they too are guilty of oversimplification in treating the man without ado as mentally ill. But again this latent 'message' is given no clarification; the story can be accepted

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1) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, p.158.

2) op.cit., p.413ff.

3) op.cit., p.16ff.

4) op.cit., p.22ff.

simply as grotesque humour unless one notes the parallel contained in the corpse story later.<sup>1</sup> The humour here is of lighter vein - with a degree of resignation? - but deals still with the relationship between the individual's desire for isolation and the opposing aims of officialdom. The details here are eminently well chosen: the picture of the policeman's helmet floating off downstream, of the provocatively smooth passage of the coffin despite all efforts at recapture are worthy of the best silent films, and are humorous because they make us see only the heavy, all-too-slow solemnity of the organs of justice and not their true import; intelligence is here outwitted by, of all things, a dead body! No explanation is needed to illustrate how society exerts itself even to the point of ridiculousness to keep the individual within its ordered bounds and give him an identity acceptable to all. But like most humour, this is a one-sided representation of the situation and could be held against the narrator; irresponsibility might be laid to his charge, a refusal without cogent grounds to contribute to the smooth functioning of society within which he nevertheless remains.

Equally ambiguous are the sections on the milkman and the 'Pechvogel'.<sup>2</sup> The former particularly has the visual impact of farce, the stupor caused by the entirely unexpected in a respectable community is brilliantly captured. But does this story contain more humour or tragedy? Are we meant to feel the narrator's deep sympathy for the misunderstood, or to question his sanity? The Svoboda scene, where he shoots at random<sup>3</sup>, ridiculous though it is, has a kind of despairing determination: we feel

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1) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, p.488ff.

2) op.cit., p.74ff.

3) op.cit., p.403ff.

uneasy because Svoboda refuses to take his own position seriously. Paul Konrad Kurz comments enlighteningly on the close connection in this novel between 'Spiel' and 'Schuld':

'Darf man mit dem Abgründigen und Schrecken der "Erfahrung" so extrem spielerisch umgehen? Wird sie durch solchen Umgang nicht verharmlost? ...Das eigentlich Schwergewichtige wird umgemünzt in leichte Münze. Mit so leichter Münze kann aber keine Katharsis ausgelöst werden. Indem sich die Geschichten vor das Wahre stellen, verstellen sie es zugleich. Spiel und Schuld sind nicht mehr zu trennen. Das Leben hat im Roman nicht stattgefunden, aber auch vom Romanende her führt kein Weg zu wirklichem Leben.'<sup>1</sup>

This criticism would apply very well to Svoboda's attitude in the above scene and explains our uneasiness, although it is somewhat unjust when applied to Frisch, as intended, for there are many serious notes struck in the novel which is open to criticism more from a constructional than moral point of view - to criticize from a moral standpoint is to make a false identification between the author and the narrator. It is Frisch's creations who can be accused of levity.

When one considers all the categories of humour, one is struck by the inconsistency of tone, by the constant changing from possible serious import in sections which appear to serve a purpose of communication over and above their entertainment potential, to sheer play based on the simplest foundations of comic effect. The result is, one concludes yet again, that the reader tends to look for hidden significance where there is none, or to overlook possible implications. It is as if the author and his created figure had combined forces to make the reader feel the inadequacy of his understanding.

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1) Paul Konrad Kurz, review of the novel, Stimmen der Zeit, 175 Band, 90 Jg. 1964/1965, 1 Heft, Oct. 1964, p.60.

### Unity or Incoherence?

Is there then any basis for this novel which is worth or even open to serious discussion? A number of interesting points are made - the frustration of hopes by the very forward movement of life, the workings of jealousy - but the novel lacks the combination of the extremely personal with applicability to society as a whole which is to be found, for example, in the 'Bildnis' concept illustrated in Stiller. We seem to have a case of chronic inability to accept continuity of any kind, presented without the awful seriousness of Rilke's Malte Laurids Brigge, but also without the consistent lack of pretention to philosophical depth of Günter Grass' Die Blechtrommel or Thomas Mann's Felix Krull. This is not to deny the latter works depth, but to claim for their thought content a well-maintained front of rollicking humour. It is misleading to link Frisch's novel too closely to Grass's, as has been done:

'Von der Wahl des Erzählers her offenbart gerade die deutsche Epik eine deutliche Freude am Spiel. Der blinde Gantenbein und der zwergenhafte Matzerath sind unter diesem Blickwinkel Brüder. Ihre Verwandtschaft besteht darin, dass sie die Menschen, die von ihnen ein falsches Bild haben, ihrer Masken berauben, und unbekümmert festhalten, was ihnen, die man nicht als vollwertige Glieder der menschlichen Gemeinschaft ansieht, als Wirklichkeit entgegentritt.'<sup>1</sup>

The comparison is based on the false assumption that Gantenbein is seen from the start to be an outsider, an odd figure, as is Mazerath. As this is not clear, as we do not know how seriously to take Gantenbein and his relationship to the narrator, there is no guiding line to help the reader's understanding of what kind of viewpoint is being expressed, whereas Die Blech-

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1) Werner Welzig, Der deutsche Roman im 20. Jahrhundert, Stuttgart, 1967, p.10.

trommel can be appreciated for its consistently wry view of life, the depth and penetration of which into contemporary Germany emerges behind the sheer humour for the careful reader. The two levels co-exist: whereas in Mein Name sei Gantenbein - if there really are two levels - they are hopelessly muddled.

Mein Name sei Gantenbein seems then to be something of a 'Mittelding'. Some of the questions touched upon are reminiscent of passages in Frisch's Tagebuch which are entirely serious and concerned with the difficulty of living in the consciousness of life's repetitive character<sup>1</sup>; and yet much of the book appears to be anecdotal - none the less enjoyable for that, but hardly conducive to compact construction and coherence of tone. A possible solution, although one hesitates to suggest 'improvement' when the author's purpose is so very unclear, would have been to develop the deserted flat sections as a poignant balance for the undeniably entertaining humour, which would then assume the perfectly justifiable function of light relief one knows so well from Shakespeare. As the novel stands, the sections of humour would lose little if removed from their context, and indeed the story of the man who attends his funeral has been turned into the 'Skizze eines Films' called Zürich - Transit.<sup>2</sup> This entire lack of continuity deprives those ideas which deserve more serious attention of their right to due consideration, and the reader is left with an impression of eccentricity, while what seems, on repeated examination, to be the probable basis of the

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1) Cf. above, p. 187f.

2) Frankfurt, 1966.

novel, that is, a man's suffering under the necessity of being one particular for ever identified person and the fear of the image time itself will impose and contribute to, this emerges only after repeated examination. It is Frisch's own fault that some critics, such as Hans Mayer, impose excessively profound interpretations upon the book, which closer analysis will not support. Mayer, for instance, sees it as related to Kierkegaard's thought and of general philosophical significance:

'Die Verwandlung von Leben in Geschichten ist Verwandlung von Dasein in Kunst. Dies ist Max Frischs eigentliches Romanthema.... Das geheime Kierkegaard-Thema des Romans hat mit der Frage zu tun, ob Leben als eine rein ästhetische Existenz möglich ist.'<sup>1</sup>

As Reich-Ranicki pointed out in answer to this view, Mayer overlooks the very particular causes for the narrator's difficulties which are indicated by the deserted flat sequences:

'Zwei Personen, eine männlich, eine weiblich - das ist das einzige Thema des Romans. Alles andere ergibt sich aus dem, was diese beide Menschen verbindet oder trennt.'<sup>2</sup>

He is right to suggest that the basis of the novel is probably the failure of a personal relationship, but like Mayer attributes a clarity to the 'real meaning' of the novel which is simply not evident. Mayer is at least a little disturbed that not all the stories fit into his scheme:

'Aber im zweiten Teil seines Romans scheitert er (Frisch) weitgehend daran, dass alle Verwandlung von Leben in Möglichkeiten voraussetzt, dass es sich um künstlerisch fruchtbare Möglichkeiten handelt. Max Frisch war als Erzähler offenbar gewillt, auch die sterilen Varianten auszuprobieren.'<sup>3</sup>

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- 1) Hans Mayer, 'Mögliche Ansichten über Herrn Gantenbein', Die Zeit, 19 Jg., No.38, 18 Sept., 1964.
  - 2) Marcel Reich-Ranicki, 'Plädoyer für Max Frisch', Die Zeit, 19 Jg., No.40, 2 Oct., 1964.
  - 3) Mayer, loc.cit.

Mayer speaks also of a 'flaues Gefühl vor lauter Geschichten aus dem Alltagsklischee, das den Leser schliesslich beschleicht'<sup>1</sup>, but does not consider whether this gradual decrease in interest of the incapsulated stories could be significant: it could indeed be evidence - as is the increasingly frequent portrayal of jealousy - of 'reality' penetrating the escape. Mayer's two major points are not based on a careful enough examination of the work - although the novel itself invites such summary judgement since it does not present its *raison d'être* with any clarity to the reader or reviewer. Reich-Ranicki goes to the opposite extreme of mistaken evaluation in accepting the looseness of form as honest and purposeful without any real definition or proof:

'Max Frisch verzichtet diesmal auf das traditionelle Täuschungsmanöver und bietet Fiktion als Fiktion und Epik als Epik. Dies scheint mir nicht nur aufrechter, sondern auch sinnvoller und zweckmässiger zu sein...Ähnliches gilt für die Komposition des Romans...Keine alles einrahmende, überdachende und scheinbar auch ordnende Fabel schützt eine formale Ganzheit vor. Dennoch zerfällt der Roman nicht.'<sup>2</sup>

He is quite right to emphasise the primarily non-philosophical nature of the problems one glimpses:

'Nur sollte man sich hüten, Frisch irgendeine philosophische Interpretation der Vergänglichkeit und des Todes zu unterstellen. Vornehmlich in emotionalen Kategorien sieht er diese Fragen, er nähert sich ihnen nicht etwa als Philosoph, sondern als Künstler und Psychologe.'<sup>3</sup>

However, in his 'correction' of Mayer's views, Reich-Ranicki passes too glibly over the problem of the shaky unity of the novel:

- 1) Mayer, loc.cit.
- 2) Reich-Ranicki, loc.cit.
- 3) Reich-Ranicki, loc.cit.

'Das Buch habe auch viele Schwächen, vor allem enthalte es eine Anzahl überflüssiger und störender Episoden? Ja, das ist richtig. Aber man zeige mir einen einzigen in deutscher Sprache nach 1945 geschriebenen Roman, auf den dies nicht zutrifft.'<sup>1</sup>

One can counter at once that it is far less true of Frisch's own two preceding novels, and this fact alone should stimulate the critic to further enquiry. It is begging the question to say no novel is perfect: one should rather ask why this novel differs from the earlier ones so radically.

It seems in fact that the novel has suffered from a divided purpose: that of saying something about human life within time together with that of writing a truly readable work of popular fiction. The result is an unsuccessful compromise. In the two preceding novels, Frisch succeeded - particularly well in Stiller - in combining genuinely interesting ideas with readable form, primarily by judicious exploitation of every reader's instinctive interested response to a 'mystery', even in its most refined form of a progression of feelings and attitudes of which the ultimate course is not entirely predictable. In the case of Mein Name sei Gantenbein the fragmentary form has no such progression unless one takes a very long and careful look at it, and even then all one can show are latent patterns to which the author has not given any prominence. The 'form' is indeed explicable to some extent by the ideas on time contained in the novel, but it seems on the whole to be more of a modern 'gimmick' to suggest the presence of ideas difficult to communicate, than a method designed to present serious ideas to the reader in a manner which demands his careful attention and rewards it by ultimate coherence if not clarity. One feels that Frisch

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1) Reich-Ranicki, loc.cit.

has followed Stiller's advice that stories 'die keinen rechten Schluss und also keinen rechten Sinn, wirken lebensecht.'<sup>1</sup> This is indeed a pity, since the humour is often so genuinely entertaining that one wishes Frisch might have used it more constructively; one suspects that he could write a delightful satire on social hypocrisy, and one knows from Stiller that he can write a serious and intriguing novel. Yet in Mein Name sei Gantenbein the material pulls the reader's attention in several directions at once, without any linking idea or motif which embraces the whole work. Holthusen suggests that the figure of Teiresias, the blind seer, may have been in the author's mind<sup>2</sup>, but it is a very tenuous possibility with no confirmation in the text. In both Stiller and Homo Faber the novel's unique quality of being a means by which author and reader may enter a mind and watch its motions was fully exploited. In this case however we have subjectivity out of control; a novel may justifiably puzzle its readers if thereby some useful statement is made about the difficulty of understanding reality - Johnson's Mutmassungen über Jakob belongs to this category, with some reservations - but what is the value of a novel which gives us no real information about the character whose thoughts are revealed in detail? Rudolf Hartung is one of the few critics to have faced this question:

'Problematisch in gewisser Hinsicht ist der Roman, weil er die Einsicht nicht in sich aufgenommen hat, dass die Kategorie der Möglichkeit ergiebig und zauberhaft nur bleibt, wenn sie immer wieder mit der Kategorie der Wirklichkeit kontrastiert wird, wenn Traum und Verheissung des Möglichen sich der Wirklichkeit entringen.'<sup>3</sup>

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1) Stiller, p.76.

2) Hans Egon Holthusen, 'Ein Mann von fünfzig Jahren', Merkur, 18 Jg., Heft 10/11, Oct./Nov. 1964, p.1074.

3) Rudolf Hartung, review of the novel, Die Neue Rundschau, 1964, p.685.

It is all very well to assert that the reality we see of a person is in fact an image, a 'Bildnis' conditioned by what we are ourselves, but a person is not all mind and imagination nevertheless. This is why the 'Nachwort' in Stiller performs such a useful function. There is admittedly no value in stating uninteresting details of an existence in order to fix it within the visible world - a story has to be indeed worth the telling, and a good novel should add something to our experience, widen our vision - but there is no virtue either in stating the inexplicable.

It is unduly kind to the novel to class it within any established literary category, as Carol Petersen has done:

'Frisch hat...die deutschsprachige Literatur um eine Art Schelmenroman bereichert, sein bisher letztes Buch setzt Glanzlicht auf Glanzlicht hintergründigen Humors auf unsere heutige Welt.'<sup>1</sup>

This view emphasises the amusing side to the detriment of the germs of serious thought, but it is hardly surprising that views differ so widely among critics as to the value and precise nature of the novel. Yet to give it a label as a 'Schelmenroman' suggests it has unity, and Carol Petersen does in fact go on to say:

'...aus den Erfindung gewordenen Erfahrungen sprudelt nun die Erzählung heraus, genauer gesagt, die Erzählungen, denn von einer Mehrzahl kann hier getrost gesprochen werden, bedenkt man die Fülle der Einfälle, die sich in dem weitgespannten Rahmen des Romanganzes bisweilen fast selbständig zu machen scheinen. Doch muss betont werden, dass es wirklich nur eine vorgetäuschte Selbständigkeit ist, Frischs kompositorische Meisterschaft verhindert, dass auch nur eine der zahllosen Episoden sich jemals von der Beziehung zur Mitte löst.'<sup>2</sup>

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1) Carol Petersen, Max Frisch, Berlin, 1966, p.86.

2) *op.cit.*, p.91.

But where is this elusive 'Mitte'? Stauffacher maintains<sup>1</sup> that the novel is simply a collection of stories with some justification, although he is challenged by Cauvin<sup>2</sup> who sees it as an exemplification of 'nostalgie de l'amour et hantise de la mort'. It has been shown that germs of a theme or themes do exist, but in rightly maintaining that much of interest and poignancy is said about age and the passing of time, Cauvin overlooks the fact that it takes considerable effort to sort out the recurrent themes into some kind of coherence. He calls the narrator 'un Stiller vieilli, hanté par l'idée de la mort, qui s'exerce à l'indulgence et à l'oubli, sans pouvoir vaincre ses démons familiers', which is a valid view in as much as it points to the obsessive recurrence of some ideas, but he is wrong to suggest that the character and problems of the narrator emerge as clearly as do Stiller's as a centre for the novel. One critic goes so far as to say that in this novel Frisch has become 'deutlicher' than before in his exposition of the individual's isolation and search for contact with others<sup>3</sup>; another adds: 'Was diesen Roman vor seinen Vorgängern auszeichnet - seine Stilsicherheit'.<sup>4</sup> To say 'Abschweifung und Einlage sind hier selbst das Thema' begs the whole question of the novel's all-too-frequent obscurity. Heinrich Vormweg comes nearer a true appreciation when he suggests that it has received such praise only because it makes an impression of 'Neuartigkeit':

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- 1) Werner Stauffacher, 'Langage et Mystère', Études Germaniques, 20. Année, No. 3, July/Sept. 1965, p.343.
  - 2) Marius Cauvin, 'Max Frisch, L'absolu et le nouveau roman', Études Germaniques, 22. Année, No.1, Jan./March 1967, pp.93-98, esp. p. 97.
  - 3) Herbert Werner, 'Das Leben zum Tode oder das unerreichbare Ich', Kirche in der Zeit, 19 Jg., Heft 11, Nov. 1964, pp.513-515.
  - 4) Günther Blöcker, Literatur als Teilhabe, Berlin, 1966, p.18.

'Das Identitätsproblem mit all seinen Modulationen erscheint hier aus keinem anderen Grund so attraktiv, als weil es mechanistisch, peripher-psychologisch gestellt ist. Die Romanform...macht nur wegen der hieraus abgeleiteten Verzerrung den Eindruck der Neuartigkeit...'.<sup>1</sup>

He sees it however as on the whole 'geschickt verzerrt, verfremdet, gut geschrieben'<sup>2</sup>: it is my contention that what is lacking in the work is precisely the 'kompositorische Meisterschaft' of which Carol Petersen speaks, and which is to be found in Stiller. Holthusen expresses a similar feeling when he says:

'An der Stelle, wo "Gantenbein" erschien, hätte man von einem Autor wie Frisch ein Meisterwerk erwartet.'<sup>3</sup>

Why then this retrogressive step? For it must be considered as such when one looks back to the great increase in technical mastery of the novel's possibilities between Die Schwierigen and Stiller. But even in Die Schwierigen, which lacks the almost dramatic tension of the two succeeding novels, which has an apparently aimless, ambling form, the reader is not left so helpless by the author. There is a clear sequence of events, and the apparent aimlessness of the form is seen to have an echoing function when one notes the stress on the theme of transience, of the inexorable, impersonal movement forwards of life which denies the value of personal achievement. Is the formlessness of Mein Name sei Gantenbein another means of echoing the aimlessness of, in this case, one life? This is a possible view, but it does nothing to justify the degree of confusion: even the loose framework of 'Geschichten anprobieren' does not account satisfactorily

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1) Heinrich Vormweg, 'Othello als Mannequin', Der Monat, 17 Jg., Heft 195, Dec. 1964, p.81.

2) Lehrbuch

3) Hans Egon Holthusen, Merkur, Oct./Nov. 1964, p.1077.

for the bewildering number of changes of place, time, person. Coming after two important novels dealing with very serious problems, it raises expectations in the reading public that something similar is being attempted again. This of course need not be the case, but there are sufficient indications that there is an attempt in the novel to avoid continuity - a very serious purpose, but one which does not accord well with the flippancy of much of the writing. If this is a comic romp, why the hints of tragedy; if it is the tragedy of a personality disintegrating, why make it so hard for us to grasp and sympathize with what is happening?

It is difficult to suggest reasons for the lack of clarity of purpose and of precise thought. Frisch himself has said:

'Die Erfahrung dichtet. Wenn Menschen mehr Erfahrung haben als Vorkommnisse, die als Ursache anzugeben wären, bleibt ihnen nichts anderes übrig als ehrlich zu sein: sie fabulieren. Wohin sonst mit ihrer Erfahrung? Sie entwerfen, sie erfinden, was ihre Erfahrung lesbar macht. Die Erfahrung ist nicht ein Schluss, sondern eine Eröffnung; ihr Bezirk ist die Zukunft.'<sup>1</sup>

One can only suggest that, perhaps even as a reaction against the adverse criticism aroused by his imposition of a mythical pattern upon Homo Faber, Frisch allowed his inventive ability - of which he speaks here - to outweigh his sense of design. He does, after all, admit in a speech that literary art contains for him a considerable element of sheer enjoyment; discussing the relationship of the writer to the 'public' he says:

'Öffentlichkeit ist Einsamkeit aussen! - in diesem Sinne: Ich habe meinen Partner, den erfundenen, sonst niemand (i.e. the imaginary entity, partner without specific identity to whom his works are addressed). Und dies zu erfahren, als Schock von Zeit

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1) Frisch, 'Das Lesen und der Bücherfreund', Das kleine Buch der 100 Bücher, "Die Bücher der Neunzehn", 8. Jg., 1960, p.5.

zu Zeit, ist schon Anfang der Befreiung, Befreiung zum Anfang:  
zum Spieltrieb, zur Machlust, zum Schreiben, um zu sein.'<sup>1</sup>

Frisch writes for readers however vaguely visualized, from sheer pleasure in writing and not from any particular theory; but in this instance, the desire to write a readable novel has led him to create an often entertaining but as a whole frustrating work which is problematic primarily for reasons other than, as in earlier works, having at its centre a problematic personality. It is all very well to accept, with Ernst Bloch<sup>2</sup>, that the basis of the popular 'Detektivgeschichte' is 'der getarnte Mensch', and that the modern age presents many serious variants of this state: but for such a serious view a norm for comparison, for the sheer understanding of what 'getarnt' means, would be necessary, otherwise the reader while reading is almost in the position of the cave dwellers in Plato's allegory - unable to make relative judgements. The difference is that being more sophisticated, the reader will not then accept the work as 'truth' but reject it as meaningless.

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1) Frisch, Öffentlichkeit als Partner, p.67; my underlining.

2) Ernst Bloch, 'Die Form der Detektivgeschichte und die Philosophie', Die Neue Rundschau, 1960, p.672.

CONCLUSIONS: FRISCH'S PRESENTATION OF PERSONALITY

From the preceding chapters it is clear that Frisch does not discover how best to exploit the novel form until the composition of Stiller. In Jürg Reinhart the manner of presentation makes little contribution of the theme of entry into life: the constant movement from one figure to another does not give a composite picture of youth and its difficulties, but serves only to introduce a range of problems which are never fully developed but which undermine the hopeful positiveness of the work's rather contrived ending. In Die Schwierigen there is a little more awareness of form: the drifting aimlessness of the narrative underlines the theme of human weakness and inability to lead a full, clearly and purposefully directed life, a theme to which all the main characters can be linked; and there are also already one or two figures who cannot or will not see the truth about their lives and who afford therefore a hint of what is to come in Frisch's later work: the dual perspective, the contrast of what the narrator of central figure and what the reader see. This dual perspective is of prime importance in both Stiller and Homo Faber.

The three later novels all resemble each other in one respect: each deals with one personality, which should result in studies of detail and depth. Stiller gives us an impression of a man preoccupied with himself to an unusual degree - or at least with what he believes to be his true self. The novel is concerned with his attempt to turn this subjective 'reality' into a communally accepted reality. In Homo Faber we have a man who has always unquestioningly accepted his view of life as the only valid one, and is challenged by tragedy to reconsider, to seek understanding of what has

happened to his daughter and to himself. He is a man fighting entirely alone for clarity. Mein Name sei Gantenbein shows us a man trying, we assume, to escape the consequence of time and the claims of others upon him by living in a world of which he is the sole creator. The mind concerned is attempting to isolate itself from all normal obligations and ties.

However, despite this similarity of concentration upon one figure, the novels vary greatly in literary merit. Stiller is a very successful combination of two levels of interest: the reader's attention is gained and held initially by the 'mystery' element provided by uncertainty as to the true identity of the narrator and the consequences of his defiance of authority; and once gained, it is led through a self examination of increasing anguish and considerable depth. The questions raised by the novel are fundamental ones concerning the freedom of the individual personality. Such abstract problems are presented in a form clearly reminiscent of the epistolary or diary novel: as well as being a method of showing subtle details of psychology, the form as a whole demonstrates Stiller's constant need and ever renewed attempts to convince and persuade others. That the method reveals far more than the narrator intended has been demonstrated.

In Homo Faber we find a similar combination of elements: the popular appeal of the specifically twentieth century setting, and the serious motivation of the actual narration. Faber has almost defeated his purpose of self-justification before he starts, for the decision to write is, for a man of his nature, evidence of profound disturbance,<sup>1</sup> although he tries to

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1) Cf. above, p. 120f.

play down this disturbance by speaking as negligently as possible of his writing: '...es blieb mir nichts anderes übrig (etwas musste ich in diesem Hotel ja tun!) als einen Bericht abzufassen...'.<sup>1</sup> Once again Frisch has tried to create an overall unifying framework for his novel. In Stiller the mystery and the legal proceedings bind the whole together, give it a beginning and end to some extent, if only outwardly. In Homo Faber, the adaptation of Greek notions of Fate and retribution spans the whole work.<sup>2</sup> Such material, however, involves terms of reference which cannot be accepted seriously by a modern reader, and by being alien detract from the immediate appeal of the work. Yet within this framework the novel is well managed; the transitions between sections have some function of revelation as they do in Stiller, although they are not so consistently significant: in the latter work they are outstandingly well managed, and the progression and change of balance from one notebook to another is a subtle indication of psychological states. In neither novel does the reader have difficulty in ascertaining in general terms the trend of emotional and mental development, but careful reading reveals an increasing richness of significance.

When one turns to Mein Name sei Gantenbein, one difference is immediately noticeable: there is no distinct final section as in the two preceding novels, in which another person speaks or is at least reported verbatim. One consciousness, one kind of subjectivity dominates therefore. This is not of itself necessarily bad in a novel, but in this case it results in almost complete mystification of the reader, since insufficient

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1) Homo Faber, p.242.

2) Cf. above, p. 165 ff.

information is conveyed for him to be able to exercise understanding or sympathy fully. The freedom of form appears to be a means of intriguing the reader not by ingenuity but by lack of clear thought and preparation on the author's part. Absolute clarity is not essential; but the reader must be given some guidance - especially since many details proclaim this to be a novel seeking popular attention: the many incapsulated stories reveal a raconteur of original humour. The novel toys with ideas of popular interest - time, age, the claims of the social hierarchy -, but has in fact only the appearance of complexity and depth. The form is to some extent explicable from the ideas which can be gleaned from the work; but the explanation is reached only after unrewarding and tantalising effort punctuated by flashes of insight into possible meanings. There is no immediate appeal to popular taste through mystery or an up-to-date setting, as in the previous two novels, both of which elements serve to give the reader an immediate - if superficial - impression of the works as a whole and prevent him from foundering entirely unaided in a mass of disconnected jottings. Mein Name sei Gantenbein lacks the intensity of the other two novels; the reader's interest is held periodically, but is not sufficiently well sustained to encourage him to make the closer study so rewarding in the case of the other two works. The composition lacks vitality; the tricks used to gain attention and interest remain tricks only and are not integrated into a deeper level of meaning as, notably, in Stiller. For example, the amusing anecdotes in the later novel may be intended as a kind of 'Galgenhumor', the product of despair, but there is no clarity on this point, and they remain amusing anecdotes. In Stiller however, each of the stories has a

demonstrable value within the overall framework.

Mein Name sei Gantenbein seems, then, to be more diffuse. The author appears to be so involved with his creation that he makes no concessions to the reader, who is less able to find his way through the maze of events and comments than through the drifting aimlessness of the much earlier work Die Schwierigen. In both Stiller and Homo Faber the reader feels that the author is on his side, for the central figures are made to reveal more of themselves than they are aware of or would desire. In the latest novel, however, the reader seems to be totally unimportant and irrelevant to the purpose of composition. It is not the irrelevance one might feel as the reader of a novel such as Rilke's Malte Laurids Brigge; in that case, the actual process of writing is vitally important for Malte, he is fighting to find himself and the reader is privileged to watch the process. But Mein Name sei Gantenbein has no such purpose; it is full of stories which seem directed at readers with a sense of humour - the tale of the man who attends his 'own' funeral, Gantenbein and Lila shopping, and so on - but ultimately the reader is left to founder unaided: he is allowed to take up no constant position.

Commercially, Frisch's latest novel has already proved a success; it has the appearance of modernity and depth, but lacks nevertheless the real depth of Stiller, and the attempt, which we find in Homo Faber although it is not an entirely successful one, to deal with a modern manifestation of the eternal problems created by selfish pride, by the individual's persistent refusal to admit that his own judgement and his own manner of existence could be faulted. In Stiller we are enabled to grasp at least the outlines of

the psychological problems from the beginning, and indeed there are glimmerings of problems of equal depth in Mein Name sei Gantenbein, but we are not allowed to share in them with sympathy or understanding. Stiller is far from being an exemplary figure, but 'Gantenbein' is more unhealthy in that the only response we can make to him with any frequency is laughter, and the humour verges sometimes on the grotesque. The scene of the shooting for example<sup>1</sup>, is destructive and pointless; it does not represent a blow against any authority or convention that one can see, and appears to be rather self-destructive defiance, a despairing attempt to prove freedom by the annihilation of anything which might claim affection by familiarity. Taken as a whole, the book could be called self-destructive if one views it seriously, since it represents an attempt to live without continuity of any sort; it lacks the humanity of the earlier works, but this cannot ultimately be held against it as can the fact that the reader must find it impossible to make any sustained, serious response to it. The novel entertains spasmodically: it does not hold and develop intelligent attention.

Of the novels here discussed, it is clearly Stiller which is the most successful by literary standards; it has the unobtrusive unifying framework lacking in varying measure in the subsequent two novels. It is indeed very interesting to note that when Frisch abandons all conventional methods of stimulating interest - by mystery and suspense as to what will become of the central figure - he can create no substitute: Mein Name sei Gantenbein fails because there is no aid for the reader who wants to

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1) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, p.403ff. Cf. above, p. 225f.

understand what validity there might be present in the ideas behind the novel. Frisch has suggested that he writes for pleasure and profit, not with theory in mind; it seems that the attempt to emulate the popularity of the 'nouveau roman' theorists<sup>1</sup> by adopting their 'modern' form without the body of doctrine which led to such developments has brought him into difficulties. His skill lies rather in using more conventional, more strictly 'popular' methods to clothe ideas of more than passing interest: problems of the individual personality who does not or will not know himself and accept a life bound by the continuity of time.

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1) Cf. above, p. 1.

BRUNNEN  
VERLAG  
pp. 722-731.

2) OVERSEAS REVIEW

## CHAPTER SIX

### MUTMASSUNGEN ÜBER JAKOB

Johnson has expressed views on the form of works trying to say something about the modern world and, more specifically, about the German situation, implying - unlike Frisch - that indeed one can no longer write quite like Balzac:

'Where does the author stand in his text? Attitudes of omniscience are suspicious. The godlike panorama of a Balzac is admirable. Balzac lived from 1799 to 1850. How can the author who first has to invent and assemble his text squat on a stool high above the field like a referee during a tennis match, how can he know all the rules, all the players, and unerringly observe them besides, intervene supremely at any time he chooses and even change places with his characters and look into their hearts as he rarely manages to look into his own? The author ought to admit that he invented what he tells, that his information is incomplete and imprecise.'<sup>1</sup>

He has gone a stage further than Frisch in linking the novel to the contemporary world, but he does not evolve a lengthy body of dogmatic theory; his sole aim is to reach the greatest degree possible of precision, and he states that each writer must use his own means to reach this end:

'An author is expected to report on the situation, should he do so with methods the situation has outgrown? In the standing feud about the treatment of time: conventional versus more recent methods, he can only choose whichever is the more precise, because precision is part of his job. Of course the principle by which he keeps trying to adapt his style to incessantly changing reality is limited to himself.'<sup>2</sup>

Johnson is 'preaching' only honesty, recognition of the limits of the

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- 1) Uwe Johnson, in an address at Wayne State University, printed in translation in Evergreen Review, XXI, Nov.-Dec. 1961, p.29f. German version, 'Berliner Stadtbahn', Merkur, 15 Jg., N.162, August 1961, pp. 722-723.
- 2) Evergreen Review, p.30.

individual's insight: he is not advocating fragmentariness and excessive complexity as the only path to 'precision'. This is made more clear by later remarks quoted in the general introduction.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, it will be shown that in his own work he moves away from the obviously 'modern' to almost traditional straightforwardness of presentation. Given that one must try to be as honest as possible about the kind of world in which we live, he feels, the writer's aim is still to entertain first and foremost:

'Und was ich will ist: eine Geschichte zu erzählen, mehrere Geschichten, die neu sind und interessant wegen ihrer Neuheit, wegen der in ihnen enthaltenen Erfahrungen und Kenntnisse, und zum anderen, weil das unterhaltsam genug ist.'<sup>2</sup>

Like Frisch, he presupposes that entertainment means stimulation for the intelligence, not just the satisfaction of curiosity: he believes the reader is interested in the gaining of new knowledge.

If these interpretations are just, then the tendency to concentrate heavily on the political implications of Johnson's work is misleading; he wants to entertain and interest by writing novels which are neither political tracts nor expositions of aesthetic doctrine. A just investigation of their merits must therefore seek to establish two points: firstly, is the political content of the novels superimposed on or really contained in the stories 'in terms of character in action'<sup>3</sup>; and secondly, is the form really derived from the nature of the story - since it is not the product of a specific theory -, or is it, as the political content might be, developed for its 'Neuheit' alone? Are they 'well-made books', books 'in which the

1) Cf. above, p. 1 f.

2) Horst Bienek, Werkstattgespräche mit Schriftstellern, p.93.

3) Robert Liddell, A Treatise on the Novel, p.58.

subject and the form coincide, and are indistinguishable...in which the matter is all used up in the form, in which the form expresses all the matter?'<sup>1</sup>

Form - the shifting viewpoint in 'Mutmassungen über Jakob'

We know from Johnson himself that the starting point for Mutmassungen über Jakob was the question: what remains of a man's life and character in the memory of others when he is dead; and this, he says, led automatically to a rather involved form:

'Der Versuch,...den Lebenslauf eines Toten und die Ereignisse vor seinem Sterben zusammenzufinden aus Vermutungen, Behauptungen und knappen Zeugenberichten, ein solcher Versuch muss "schwierig" ausfallen.'<sup>2</sup>

Johnson here begs the question a little in his self-justification.

Certainly, once one decides to treat not just one character but the opinions of several about one who is no longer available to prove or disprove their notions, the resulting work is not going to be as straightforward as - to take an arbitrary example - Moritz's autobiographical Anton Reiser; but the form 'has to be' complex only if one assumes that nobody will be able to say anything conclusive about the dead man. However one must do Johnson the justice of assuming - in the light of his remarks on precision - that he had specific notions about why the form had to be 'schwierig'.

In order to clarify what the chosen form implies in general terms, it is possible initially to imagine other methods of narration from the simple

1) Percy Lubbock, The Craft of Fiction, p.40.

2) Uwe Johnson, 'Auskünfte und Abreden zu "Zwei Ansichten"', Dichten und Trachten 26, Frankfurt, 1965, p.7f.

starting point of a death. What Johnson has produced is a mixture of third person narration by an unidentified narrator, of snatches of conversation in which the participants are not always easily identifiable, and personal memories in the form of italicized monologues by three of the characters, and all these alternate constantly and irregularly. A much simpler form would have been a straight-forward narration of the events which constitute Jakob's 'story', that is, of his association with Rohlf, his meetings with Gesine and Jonas and his mysterious death as a climax. The emphasis would then naturally have been on the events above all, and something like a political mystery would have resulted, with a strong dramatic element suggestive of propaganda. A simple, continuous time-scale would miss the pathos implicit in the act of remembering after a life is over: none of the characters uses clichés about a 'sense of loss', but each of them, in dwelling on the past, gives it a value and substance and so creates an impression of loss too deep for summary accounts. Johnson, then, wanted to avoid the impression that a life consists only of what 'happens' in it; it is more of a combination of what one feels and what others see in one - but tragically, with a life so supremely ordinary as Jakob's, nobody stops to think about it until it is too late. The form as it stands would seem to question our knowledge of each other, suggesting not only that human insight is limited but that people do not even attempt to appreciate others as fully as possible until that knowledge is already rendered useless. Frisch shows us that we make 'images' of others by letting us see the discrepancy between one man's picture of himself, and his subconscious desires and fears. Johnson takes a more negative view of human relations.

While Frisch stresses that we restrict others by our 'images', Johnson indicates that perhaps we do not even go so far as to make positive images, and we shall see that the German political situation adds to the difficulties. 'Adds' is used here deliberately: if Johnson had intended his book to be simply anti-Communist he could have used a constant narrator, and starting with the fact of Jakob's death, produced a tract on the lines of 'this man has died and I will show you why'. That this was very far from his intention is proved by the characterization of Rohlf's, who is anything but a melodramatic villain.

Why did Johnson not use one of the characters as narrator? Unless one of them were an author or moved by exceptional circumstances to write, such as Walter Faber in Frisch's Homo Faber, the degree of sensibility and reflection needed would be entirely unrealistic for an 'ordinary' man, and much of the poignancy of the story would be lost if these were exceptional characters. Indeed, in dealing with a situation which belongs to the sphere of international affairs as does the division of Germany, it is surely vital to bring it as close as possible to everyday life, so that a wide public may feel its effects and not dismiss it as yet another political fact, for - as Johnson has himself pointed out - there is always the danger of presenting 'the merely factual as reality'.<sup>1</sup> Walter Jens points out also the peculiar role of the writer in our century as enabling the reader to experience what newspapers convey to him factually:

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1) Johnson, Evergreen Review XXI, p.24.

'...(die Dichtung) vermag nicht mehr eine terra incognita zu schildern und Wahrheit auf eine tabula rasa zu ritzen, sondern muss sich mit der Aufgabe begnügen, etwas bereits Gewusstes exemplarisch zu verdeutlichen.'<sup>1</sup>

Johnson's refusal to use figures in any way exceptional is a parallel recognition. In using several characters he demonstrates that no one person has the right to claim entire knowledge of another, and in making them on the whole unexceptional, he questions whether any of us try to understand even those closest to us, whether the physical presence of a person can be an excuse for laziness of perception and lack of appreciation. The reader is moved by the fact that Jakob existed as an entity beyond all that memory can recall of him - this point will be dealt with more fully in the section on Jakob. It would seem, then, that the use of a shifting viewpoint, the rejection of other possible uses of the same basic material point to an interest in character rather than in events alone, and in characters interacting in the modern world rather than in any one exceptional figure. Johnson is showing that we are all isolated in different ways, and, of course, that the political situation in Germany brings new kinds of separation which have little to do with mere physical isolation.

Once one considers that the shifting viewpoint may have a serious purpose, the question arises, why did Johnson not use it in larger, chapter-like units, but choose to switch constantly from one form to another, often without even the grammatical separation of a full-stop and succeeding capital letter. Is the technique simply one of association, as Karl Migner suggests<sup>2</sup>,

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1) Walter Jens, Literatur und Politik, Pfullingen, 1963, p.19.

2) Karl Migner, 'Gesamtdeutsche Wirklichkeit im modernen Roman', Welt und Wort, 17 Jg., 1962, pp.243-245. Cf. p.244: '..die verschiedensten Aussagen werden durch blasse Assoziationstechnik aneinandergesfügt', my underlining.

or are there more specific reasons for the abandonment of anything approaching chapter units?

Use of the fragment-technique for specific effects

An examination of the transitions between sections reveals several recurrent, more concrete reasons. A major reason for transition from one form of presentation to another is the desire for vividness, for some aspect of character to be brought alive in the experience of another figure. For example, the description of Frau Abs and her relationship with Gesine is followed by a brief reminiscence of her by Gesine:

'Sie hat mir das Essen gekocht und hat mir gezeigt wie man es machen muss mit dem Haar, sie hat mir geholfen in der Fremde.. ich habe eine Mutter gehabt alle Zeit.'<sup>1</sup>

This section emphasises that Frau Abs' major characteristic was kindness to others, but a simple statement of this fact means far less than Gesine's first experience of what it meant to have a 'mother'; and this relationship explains Frau Abs' flight from political exploitation - a point which will be elucidated in the remarks on Communism as it appears in the novel.<sup>2</sup>

Sometimes conversation is used similarly; we read of Jakob's appearance on football-team photographs<sup>3</sup>, but football is a shared experience, and in order to evoke the reality of Jakob within his milieu, the use of conversation appreciating the memories aroused by the photos is more effective than simply description of them. Very often Johnson will bring an event already

1) Mutmassungen über Jakob, Frankfurt, 1959, p.18.

2) Cf. below, p. 295 ff.

3) Mutmassungen, p.24f.

made known to us even closer by reflecting it is some human consciousness, questioning in this way whether factual recording is not - despite its simplicity - distortion of reality, for reality is something shared between people<sup>1</sup>; for instance, Frau Abs' flight could have been described in great detail, but it is not her experience alone, so we find the events speculated upon even by those not immediately affected.<sup>2</sup> That one's motives are real only in so far as they are understood by others is a corollary of this, so that the process of conversation etc. about events in order to present them vividly is ambiguous: the events 'come alive' in this way, but the impossibility of complete understanding is demonstrated - the novel as a whole does this, for Jakob's death is a shared but never fully understood experience.

But even if completeness is impossible, minor events can often be shown in their importance for one character at least by the inclusion of a short scene. We are never told directly what is felt, but shown what others could have observed and left to surmise; for example, one section captures vividly something of the atmosphere of Jakob's 'homecoming' with Gesine:

'Als Jonas in die Küche kam, stand Jakob vor Gesine am Tisch und stützte sich mit den Händen rücklings auf die kalten bunten Fliesen... "In Budapest sind Aufstände...": sagte Jonas immer zögernder... Jakob wandte sich halb um zu Jonas, sein Geischt begann zu strahlen als könne er vor Spass nicht aus den Augen sehen. "Doll, was...?" sagte er.'<sup>3</sup>

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- 1) This is a point Frisch makes implicitly also: both Stiller and Walter Faber sin against others in having a rigid view of their own past, for the past was shared with other people upon whom one has no right to impose any one interpretation of events.
  - 2) Mutmassungen, p.60f.
  - 3) op.cit., p.194f.

Political events of great importance are gaily dismissed in the happiness of rediscovered affection. Jakob's return affected his own feelings, those of Gesine, and by its timing, Jonas' intellect, since the contrast between his priorities and Jakob's is demonstrated, and all of these are part of the event.

At other points, the switch to a scene or conversation is made to avoid lengthy explanations when the reader will want to know 'how the characters felt'. Johnson answers this by showing only what those involved allowed each other to see. For instance, after Jakob has heard from Jonas of the dissatisfaction of Berlin intellectuals, he has probably begun to wonder just how far political ideas should encroach upon ordinary existence - a consideration urged upon him of course by Rohlfs. But how many people would reflect coherently and lengthily upon the sense of difference gradually entering their lives? A scene with Sabine however makes the point admirably at the moment we wish to know: there is still affection between them, but also involuntary restraint.<sup>1</sup>

It is noticeable that Johnson takes great care to arouse our imaginative participation as far as possible. He will 'dramatize' scenes for example by reproducing as nearly as is feasible with the written word the duration of what happens. One excellent example comes when Jakob realises the full implications of what Rohlfs demands of him<sup>2</sup>; this means effectively the disruption of his whole concept of service, and it is a moment of great tension: "Das kann man von einem Menschen nicht verlangen..." sagte Jakob

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1) Mutmassungen, p.138f.

2) op.cit., p.220.

endlich.' Then follows a brief description of Jakob's posture, as if there were a moment's silence in which all eyes are upon him until Rohlf's answers. Again there is a pause, represented here by Jonas describing very briefly how he reacted, and then the positive tone of Jakob's command breaking the highly charged silence: '"Sitzenbleiben" sagte Jakob...'. In addition there are the italicized words, thought by Gesine:

'Ich liebe dich wie den Regen  
 .....  
 wie den Regen'

which indicate the upsurge of admiring affection as Jakob twice clashes 'head-on' with authority, authoritative himself. Such a moment would lose its impact in a descriptive representation, but has as it stands the same effect as a theatrical scene which hushes the auditorium with an intensely felt participation and shock.

Often the movement from one section to another is reminiscent of film technique, suggesting that Johnson is trying to gain something of the immediacy of presentation which is possible visually. On the very first pages<sup>1</sup> we have a picture of a figure disappearing into the gloom, preceded and followed by voices, as though Johnson were thinking of a silent picture overlaid as it were by questioning voices belonging to a different point in time, a not uncommon cinematic procedure. Certainly the conversation and the picture link together: the voices differ - one emphasizing certain knowledge of Jakob's abilities and assuming implicitly that he was in full possession of them and not troubled in some way likely to affect his alertness, the other asserting the natural causes of the accident. In the

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1) Mutmassungen, p.7f.

intervening picture we have both emphasis on the weather, the slippery conditions, but also mention of a figure moving 'sicher und achtlos', which would allow the interpretation of physical habit but mental abstraction: both speakers' views are represented thus - but the figure is only 'vielleicht Jakob'. Anything more like the opening of a mystery film would be hard to imagine, and one is reminded of E.M. Forster's words on mystery as a structuring element, already shown to be relevant to Frisch's novels<sup>1</sup>: that is, in a novel which does not appeal primarily to curiosity - 'the lowest of the human faculties' - curiosity about the course of events is nevertheless enlisted in order to engage the fullest attention possible.<sup>2</sup>

A comparable cinematic technique is that of the hidden onlooker, in some ways like the theatrical device of dramatic irony whereby the audience knows something hidden from one of the characters on stage and is thus held in suspense. Jakob is being watched by Rohlf's<sup>3</sup>; we see him moving about and doing his job, and we hear Rohlf's in the first person describing what he sees, not simultaneously since this is impossible in a written work, but very nearly so through the device of intermingling sections. One reacts as

1) Cf. above, p. 94.

2) R. Hinton Thomas has brought out this aspect of Johnson's work, with an illuminating comment from Ernst Bloch about our ignorance of ourselves and others - 'Kaum ist irgendeiner für sich schon klar da. Unerkennbar liegen wir uns selbst noch im blinden Fleck' - which he suggests is relevant to the kind of mystery Johnson is presenting basically, i.e. an investigation into identity and personality. This is very similar to Frisch's use of the technique, cf. above, p. 97.

R. Hinton Thomas & Wilfried van der Will, The German Novel and the Affluent Society, Manchester, 1968, p.122.

3) Mutmassungen, p.25f.

to a film sequence viewed from within a room where a figure stands by the window watching another but unsuspecting figure whom we also see through the framework of the window, Johnson has captured the physical separation and yet threatening link between Jakob and Rohlfs by suggestion.

One might in fact see the whole novel in terms of cinematic technique: the constant interlocking of different voices and situations is reminiscent of the film's ability to fade one picture into another - a good example of this is the arrival of Jonas in Jericho, where his account 'fades into' that of Rohlfs.<sup>1</sup> The italicized 'monologues' are comparable to film flashbacks, perhaps; but this point does highlight one danger of the technique - visual pictures are accepted swiftly by the mind, the written word less speedily however, and it could be a mistake to emulate the pace of one medium in the other. As in the case of the Fate framework in Homo Faber, individual readers will differ in their ability to accept and follow with all the power of their imagination the technique here used.

### Balance

An undoubtedly successful use of the shifting viewpoint is in the maintenance of balance, that is, the refusal to view any character from one aspect for too long; and in this case, the reader is definitely aided by the swiftness of some changes, for the more quickly a range of views is introduced, the more able the reader is to consider them in their totality rather than consecutively. Once one assumes that the 'reality' of a figure cannot be summed up in a simple statement about him, then it is a logical

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1) Mutmassungen, p.72ff.

step to try to present several views together, and to avoid as far as possible the uneven distribution of significance which can result if such views are presented successively at length. Cresspahl, for instance, is first introduced in his daughter's words before he is seen objectively<sup>1</sup> - he is above all a father and not just an isolated old man; but then he is seen by Rohlf's and his right to privacy is challenged<sup>2</sup>, and all these views occur within one page. We are given no indication as to whether the author finds one closer to 'truth' than another, for each contributes an entirely different aspect and they are in no way mutually exclusive. The same process is followed with events; to return to Frau Abs' flight: we have seen how it is made an experience rather than a factual notation, but it is an experience for several people. Two voices discuss what had been seen on the day she left, Cresspahl is seen with the cases and then Gesine is informed.<sup>3</sup> Jakob too is watched after the event, and Jöche comments on it.<sup>4</sup> In such a way we are made to feel that nobody has the right to put a definitive interpretation upon 'facts' for to do so is to contravene the equally valid experience of others. The multiplicity of 'reality' is evident also in the stress on simultaneity, served by the use of small letters to open sections<sup>5</sup>, as though one were breaking in on a continuous stream, parallel not subsequent or subordinate to what has gone before.

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- 1) Mutmassungen, p.8f.
  - 2) op.cit., p.9f.
  - 3) op.cit., p.34f.
  - 4) op.cit., p.38ff.
  - 5) op.cit., p.38: one of many examples.

### Isolation

However, as well as combining views, this technique also divides; one excellent example of this is the meeting of Jakob and Rohlf's at a hotel where Gesine also happens to be present.<sup>1</sup> The use of the shifting viewpoint here reinforces the hostility evident in Gesine's words about Rohlf's; instead of seeing the three participating figures together, we find distinct personalities isolated from each other with separate trains of thought. Gesine expresses the atmosphere when she says of herself and Rohlf's: 'Wir sehen uns an wie zwei fremde Tiere.' The technique of balance here serves incompatibility; and throughout the novel the first-person sections vary between a simple viewpoint to be added to others and a means of conveying isolation, by which the figures are shown - whether they will or not - to be restricted to some extent within their own consciousness. For example, Gesine talks freely with Jonas about Jakob, but some very personal memories are not shared, as though she wants to keep the Jakob of her childhood as a precious memory.<sup>2</sup> These details are so precious that they are expressed in terms which make no concessions to the reader, who has to deduce for example that Jakob always acted as Gesine's protector and 'brother' with quiet affection. The relationship between them was one of trust too deep to share with others.

### Cresspahl

This is self-willed 'isolation', comparable to that of Cresspahl, for

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1) Mutmassungen, p.148ff.

2) op.cit., p.165: '...wie ein Kind in der Schule...'

whom the first-person monologue is not employed - we see him in third-person accounts or through others' eyes. The reason for this is suggested by the very small amount of direct speech recorded for him: he is a taciturn figure not given to formulating his thoughts or feelings, but devoted to the business of continuing life in the sense of everyday duties. Yet this willed 'isolation' is challenged; his long speech to Gesine with its admission of love but lack of understanding<sup>1</sup> represents enormous personal effort and hence deep emotion wrung from him by the gulf between them brought about by difference of generations, accentuated by social/political conditions in Germany. He is happiest when able to welcome others into his milieu - his humour and generosity are evident in his acceptance of Jonas and welcome to Jakob.<sup>2</sup> Yet his feelings emerge in action: consequently when a fairly lengthy train of thought is recorded for him in a kind of 'erlebte Rede'<sup>3</sup> occasioned by Jonas' speech and writings, the unusual form alone brings out the disturbance felt, the resentment and puzzlement at the way politics complicate and encroach upon private life; and the climax of his thought is reached in the terse comment to Rohlf: 'Wo geen sie mit den Menschen um.'<sup>4</sup> Thus the forms chosen to present Cresspahl to us are far from arbitrarily chosen. He is cut off from other figures by his practical approach to living, but cruelly he is forced into reflection.

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1) Mutmassungen, p.210ff.

2) op.cit., p.78f.

3) op.cit., p.171f.

4) op.cit., p.222.

Rohlfs

The isolation of the others is of a different nature, not willed on the whole, and thus in ironical contrast to that of Cresspahl. In these cases the first-person reflections are often evidence of an inability to communicate fully with those around, aggravated by a trained intelligence alive to complications. Rohlfs is isolated by his job and by his political views - isolated from the community of the novel, that is, but also to some extent from his fellow Communists because he cannot treat Communism as just another way of life as do the soldiers<sup>1</sup>, nor yet as a system whose advocates should deny all personal values - his respect for Jakob is clear at the end of the book:

"Sie sind kein guter Verlierer" sagte Jonas..Er (Rohlfs)..dachte in seinem Herzen dass es nicht die Wahrheit sei. Dass er mit Jakob darüber sich hätte verständigen können. Wortlos, in einem kurzen unauffälligen Schweigen und Blickwechselln. Dass Jakob gerechter gewesen wäre.<sup>2</sup>

Even though what Rohlfs means by 'gerecht' is ambiguous, it is clear that he values Jakob more highly than Jonas, that is, that he sees people as individuals, not as indistinguishable units to be used. Rohlfs' monologues and thought show him then cut off from all associations in depth. Whereas, for example, Gesine and Jonas can at least discuss Jakob, Rohlfs shares nothing - he reflects on others, but silently, dissociating himself from them, attempting not empathy but superior vision. And yet he has enough sympathy to feel a little when this kind of position is forced upon him as it is by Frau Abs. He is quite aware that she is lying to him but not

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1) Mutmassungen, p.195f.

2) op.cit., p.308.

angry, only regretful that she imposes a gulf between them by implicitly denying his humanity:

'Ich kann solche Ruhe mit flatterndem Blick und heimlich zitternden Händen nicht vertragen, ich bin nicht so alt, ich mag nicht sehen wie einer aus Not lügt.'<sup>1</sup>

In the discussion scene at Jerichow we slip momentarily into Rohlf's view of it, because he is expressing views which none of the other participants fully shares and the first-person form cuts him off effectively from any assimilation into the group; but it also, interestingly, adds details of personal observation of the scene which show us at least that he is far from inhuman, although unable to communicate this to others because of the sense of priorities which cuts him off from all around: for example: 'Sie hob ihr Gesicht auf und wandte ihr Kinn schräg, ihr Blick ging auf Jakob zu und glitt am Fenster ab.'<sup>2</sup> Despite her animosity towards him, Gesine does have the insight to say of Rohlf and his relationship to Jakob:

'....sie hätten befreundet sein können, wenn sie nicht gestanden hätten an unvereinbaren Stellen, wenn dazu nicht der schmerzliche Unterschied der Meinungen gehört hätte..<sup>3</sup>

The tone of Rohlf's monologues often supports this view and of course renders its truth more regrettable; for example, though he 'talks' about others and dissociates himself, he does not use the language of official documents, does not conform therefore to the popular image of the Communist as an automaton speaking in phrases dogmatically doctrinal - his 'speeches' are often highly colloquial, showing humour if with a touch of superiority.<sup>4</sup>

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1) Mutmassungen, p.20.

2) op.cit., p.218.

3) op.cit., p.162f.

4) op.cit., p.118, his reference to Jonas.

His relationship with his chauffeur Hänschen is not at all condescending<sup>1</sup>, nor is he an intellectually ungifted or uninformed man: he can talk the language of his 'opponents'. Talking of the area he travels through in his pursuit of Jakob he shows knowledge of etymology and cartography culled from his father, and is even conversant with a broadly speaking 'romantic' view of landscape:

'Wer dieses Land bei Nachtzeit durchstreift zum Spass... (nicht im Dienst... sondern nur auf der Suche nach einem Land, das ferne leuchtet wie man hört) sollte sich klarmachen in jedem Falle dass wir nicht fragen werden nach dem eiszeitlichen Oberflächenaufbau der Landschaft und nicht nach einer Heimat der Erinnerung sondern etwa ob einer sich das vielleicht anders denkt mit den erkennbaren Verbesserungen des menschlichen Befindens.'<sup>2</sup>

The reference to Mörike is unmistakable:

'Du bist Orplid, mein Land!  
Das ferne leuchtet;'<sup>3</sup>

But there is despite the recognition of other possible attitudes no concession: there comes a point always at which Rohlf's isolates himself by an absolute refusal to admit that he might be wrong. Just as he cannot abide sloppiness in soldiers on duty, so he cannot accept compromise in politics when it comes to a decisive point, hence his anger at the Twentieth Party Congress speech of February 1956, when in a closed session Khrushchev made a violent denunciation of Stalin and of the later years of his leadership, mentioning many serious errors of policy.<sup>4</sup> Rohlf's view is harsh:

'Ich halte...diesen Namen 'Fehler' für einen einzigen Unsinn, was ist denn damit gemeint; Massnahmen der Regierung sind von der

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1) Mutmassungen, p.20.

2) op.cit., p.186.

3) Mörike, 'Gesang Weylas'.

4) Cf. Encyclopaedia Britannica Book of the Year 1957. Events of 1956, p.480ff.

Bevölkerung unliebsam empfunden worden - als ob sie damit falsch wären! Über die Notwendigkeit kann niemand urteilen als die Partei, wir. Gewissermassen ich. Sie hätten weitermachen können ohne Schwäche und Verluste, aber da sie an Wohlstand und Stärke zunehmen wollen in den Augen der Welt, ist ein bisschen moralische Aufregung nicht unnützlich für den Anfang.<sup>1</sup>

This 'speech' contains Rohlf's willing acceptance of isolation where a choice between popularity, between being liked and political 'necessity' must be made. His attitude is explicable partly from the peculiar situation of East Germany: Russia, he suggests, can afford to make overtures to the outside world:

'...alle Grenzen sind fest sicher der Sowjetunion, innenpolitisch machen sie nicht weiter als Verwaltung...wir haben erst vor zehn Jahren angefangen...'.<sup>2</sup>

A sense of national pride enters here, an identification with the cause of East Germany rather than just Communism: and linked with this attachment is a hint that a sense of physical inferiority adds to his political touchiness - he has to prove that the cause to which he devotes himself is important, since all his own importance derives from it.<sup>3</sup>

Rohlf is however not an arrogant man and will admit his own mistakes to himself, as his slight embarrassment at the hide-and-seek movements he has forced on Jakob shows: 'Ich bin ja selbst schuld an dem Versteckspiel...'.<sup>4</sup> He will question his methods quite sincerely<sup>5</sup>, but - and this must be strongly emphasised - he never does this openly, and he is not prepared to question the ultimate authority of the state and its right to influence even the

1) Mutmassungen, p.127.

2) op.cit., p.128.

3) op.cit., p.128.

4) op.cit., p.205.

5) op.cit., p.291f.

smallest details of life: 'Die Staatsmacht wird nicht geringer, wenn sie sich auch kümmert um die missbräuchliche Benutzung des Bürgersteigs..'.<sup>1</sup>

Sympathetic as he can be in details, the political role always comes before the purely human element and he judges by political standards only in the last resort. He expects no co-operation from Gesine because he recognizes that her standards must be different, but what he cannot accept is that a man who lives within the 'Democratic Republic' and does not clash with its authority, as Jakob did not, might not be politically conscious, might want only to live quietly and do his work efficiently. A conversation with Gesine makes the point:

'...Jakob kriegte eine Menge Einladungen für die nächsten Tage zum Mittagessen zum Besuch in der Werkstatt zum Autofahren.  
 - Aber er ist doch nicht hingegangen.  
 - Warum soll das denn Verachtung bedeuten, Gegnerschaft? Verlegenheit.  
 - Das kann ich mir nicht vorstellen. Er kann nicht vergessen haben dass es vernünftig ist gegen den Krieg zu sein.'<sup>2</sup>

However near Rohlf's comes to understanding a person's character, he still cuts himself off by imputing political motivation either for or against his own views at some point. He sees and respects Jakob's interest in his work<sup>3</sup> and comes to appreciate his integrity, but can never grasp that this integrity consists in sincere and as far as possible undivided attention to whatever Jakob has been asked to do. Rohlf's sees that Jakob is prepared to listen to his arguments and interprets this as political interest, seeing no reason why Jakob should not continue his work as a Dispatcher as a service to Communism in addition. But Jakob's attitude to his work, as will be

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1) Mutmassungen, p.292.

2) op.cit., p.282f.

3) op.cit., p.50.

shown, is more that of an artist than that of a simple workman: it engages his whole intelligence and attention. When Rohlf's asks him to consider political activity in the direct sense, he gives the idea equally serious attention; and his energies are claimed also by Gesine when she reappears, for - as her memories of their childhood show - he has always accepted the role of protector to her. In other words, Rohlf's looks no further than to what is agreeable to him, and never sees that by dividing Jakob's attention he creates for him insuperable difficulties: irrespective of whether one interprets Jakob's end as suicide or not, it is clear that Rohlf's has destroyed the unity of purpose on which Jakob's security and peace depended by presenting him with conflicting possibilities of 'service'.

Rohlf's, then, is a man whose views - when he is apart from his family, putting Communism into practice - isolate him from all those who do not share them whole-heartedly, although he is by no means a caricature produced by virulent anti-Communism and is an extremely interesting figure for this reason; but the monologue form is needed in order that the reader should sense his separation from and overall opposition to the other characters which ultimately asserts itself in action, and in addition should feel the contrast between this overall opposition and the far from unsympathetic figure behind it who is himself responsible for its existence. His isolation is thus made all the sadder from a purely human point of view.

### Gesine

With Gesine, the isolation is of a different order. She is a 'displaced' person in two ways: firstly, like so many other young Europeans,

she has left the social background of her childhood home, and though sentimentally attached to it, has made her life elsewhere - but a life without solid roots; and secondly, she has left one culture for another to which there can be no satisfactory return. Her vocabulary and expression suggest considerable sensitivity and warmth, for instance when she thinks about her father her words are evocative rather than purely informative:

'Mein Vater war achtundvierzig Jahre alt in diesem Herbst und lebte allein in dem Wind, der grau und rauh vom Meer ins Land einfiel hinweg über ihn und sein Haus.'<sup>1</sup>

Her awareness of natural surroundings and 'atmosphere' is evident; she is not a politically minded young woman in the sense that she does not see her father against the wider background of the state system, but one for whom the particular setting matters. And yet she is separated from her own 'context', from those who could most easily provide warmth and affection and has forfeited the possibility of return by leaving a state which will judge her departure politically as Rohlf's does. The most distinctive feature of her monologues is the frequency of her return in memory to childhood; apart from indicating the powerful impression made upon her by Jakob's character, such passages betray how ill at ease she is in the present, how insecure. For instance, when she recalls the night of her 'secret' return to Jerichow with Jakob, she slips into the childhood sense of security she had experienced in his company:

'...ich...war noch geblendet als Jakob mich an den Zaun zurückgerissen hatte zwei Meter in einem Sprung über den Bürgersteig. Er hielt mich noch am Handgelenk in seinen Fingern spürte ich das weiche warme Waldgras und

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1) Mutmassungen, p.8f.

Baumduft Kiefernborke duft und die Russen die auf uns kamen...'.<sup>1</sup>

Her most prominent characteristic is a sensitivity to sense impressions of every kind; she thinks in terms of people and pictures, not abstractly:

'Ich kann so abstrakt nicht denken dass ich "über die Wirklichkeit des ungarischen Aufstands und seine Unterdrückung hinaus" käme mit irgend einer Zuversicht des Zukünftigen...'.<sup>2</sup>

This is said specifically of political theories to Rohlf's, but it shows how she lives in and for the present by nature, and her 'present' is one empty of objects for her affection; and the isolation this means, in the emotional sense, is emphasised when for a time she 'finds' Jakob again, finds contentment once more, only to lose it again, irrevocably. One has only to see the extent to which Jakob's figure overshadows that of Jonas in her mind in order to understand what this 'rediscovery' and subsequent loss must mean in increased isolation: she has to exert herself in order to behave suitably to Jonas:

'Er stand vor mir in meines Vaters Haus und war so wirklich wie Jakob neben mir ich wusste kein Wort und sagte GUTEN TAG und schämte mich und befahl mir die Erinnerung: dies ist Jonas der mich liebt.'<sup>3</sup>

Her understanding of Jakob is instinctive not reasoned, and deeper than that of any other figure - she grasps for instance that the whole basis of his existence was the need to fulfil a clearly defined purpose to the best of his ability; she understands thus how ill at ease he was in the West:

' - war ich doch jedes Mal überrascht dass er keine Uniformjacke trug mit den silbernen Achselklappen und Rangsternen und Kragenspiegeln: dass ihm so gar nichts anzusehen war von Vorhaben und verlässlicher Beschäftigung.'<sup>4</sup>

1) Mutmassungen, p.157.

2) op.cit., p.274.

3) op.cit., p.200.

4) op.cit., p.276.

Her memories are full of Jakob and their shared experiences, but there is nobody with whom these memories can themselves be shared; Gesine's isolation is that of emotional deprivation, her monologues a sad substitute for the companionship she lacks.

### Jonas

In Jonas' case the isolation is intellectual. We meet him first - significantly - as a solitary passenger occupied by his thoughts and observations, but aimlessly so.<sup>1</sup> What we learn of his life explains this near lethargy; he has a good position in university teaching but is critical of the political regime which isolates him among his fellow intellectuals who are all too keen upon compromise<sup>2</sup>, and yet he has not the strength of character to break away from what he despises and make a new life in the West, which would seem the obvious course of action. He takes a distinctly ironic view of his own position, distancing himself from it in his account told to Jakob and Cresspahl. Many points of this long section are mocking of his own preoccupations:

'Die eigens auf den Lautstand gerichtete Linguistik untersucht die reine Sprache und deren erstaunliche Veränderungen von den frühesten Dokumenten bis zur Gegenwart...'.<sup>3</sup>

'...es gibt keine Erklärungen für den Übergang von o zu a aus offenbar heiterem Himmel...solche Dinge beweisen nur dass es nicht bleibt wie es ist in menschlichen Angelegenheiten.'<sup>4</sup>

The underlined phrases mock the seriousness of academic attention to details as though they were world-shaking, and the last phrase of the second example

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1) Mutmassungen, p.72.

2) op.cit., p.116f.

3) op.cit., p.101, my underlining.

4) op.cit., p.101, my underlining.

seems to ridicule the Communist interpretation of life as following a demonstrable pattern: Jonas is deliberately undermining the foundations of his life as an academic in a Communist state on both scores. Then the later reeling off of academic preoccupations, borrowing a technique from the exaggeration of comedy and theatrical bombast, derides the vital importance attached to these.<sup>1</sup> Again, the portrayal of the Seminar has a touch of bitter honesty without mercy for the mediocrity of the students<sup>2</sup>; he is nihilistically destroying everything which could give his life meaning because he has not the determination to overcome his sense of futility and actively create a purposeful life. His relationship with Gesine is highly characteristic. In her he finds escape from academic circles, but senses perhaps also her parallel 'homelessness'. He is attracted by her, but makes no positive move to engage her affections - he longs for freedom but is unable to pursue it. Jonas' monologues are conspicuous by their frequency, as though he finds musing to himself easier than direct communication - even in the section on his life in Berlin<sup>3</sup> it is impossible to tell how much he actually formulated in utterance and how much remained silent thought and discontent. In the long section describing his stay in Jerichow<sup>4</sup>, the third person narration is interrupted by small excursions into Jonas' mind, even in one case only half a line long.<sup>5</sup> These bring out forcefully his intellectual exclusion from the peaceful surroundings into which he wishes he could enter fully. Although dissatisfied with his

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1) Mutmassungen, p.102.

2) op.cit., p.103f.

3) op.cit., p.101ff.

4) op.cit., p.174ff.

5) op.cit., p.176.

intellectual background, the habit of constant reflection intervenes between him and the simple life of Cresspahl. This insight and clarity divide him constantly from others: his considerations on Gesine and Jakob<sup>1</sup> rightly establish how suited for each other they are and feel their deep mutual affection:

'Sie hob ihre Arme auf zu seinem Hals, seine Hände kamen an ihre Schultern. Ihre Lippen berührten sich. Und ich hätte mich gewundert wenn sie es nicht getan hätte. "Komm auch wieder" sagte sie.'<sup>2</sup>

But in recognising this affection he admits that he can offer Gesine nothing comparable. One particularly effective passage is that where, in speaking to Gesine after all these events, Jonas drifts off into memory which he will not formulate into speech because he senses the emotional barrier between Gesine and himself:

'- Verstehst du: die allgemeinen Regeln für anständiges Verhalten ...man muss es von Fall zu Fall neu erfinden, und ich wäre sofort abgereist wenn ich vermocht hätte sie auch nur einen Atemzug lang aus den Augen zu verlieren....'<sup>3</sup>

He knows that he has no claims upon her, and, in his indecision, can only add to her sense of displacement. By nature and inclination an intellectual, he can find no worthy allegiance and isolates himself by his honesty which cannot tolerate self-deception and complacent acceptance of prescribed views such as he finds among his 'friends'.<sup>4</sup>

These then are the characters for whom monologues and fragments of speech are employed, and in each case these forms add not so much to the

1) Mutmassungen, p.189ff.

2) op.cit., p.205.

3) op.cit., p.214f.

4) op.cit., p.271f.

characterisation<sup>1</sup> as to the impression, the aura of isolation which surrounds each figure. Paradoxically, the monologues both aid and restrict our understanding of the characters: through them we reach some insight into their feelings and attitudes to the world - or worlds - in which they find themselves, but they also warn us not to read too much into what is said, for if, as we have seen, the characters withhold emotions from one another, what right have we to feel that we have a more complete, or more correct view than any character in the novel? If the figures are constantly making discoveries about themselves - as Gesine's appreciation of her childhood awakens and isolates her more and more - can we assume that anything that is said is final? One gains a fairly clear but by no means full picture of various forms of isolation, that is the most that can be said: the precise causes and effects remain shadowy and must do so, given the importance Johnson attaches here to the monologue form.

It can however be puzzling sometimes that Johnson chooses to describe an event primarily from one viewpoint only. For example, Rohlf's first interview with Jakob is reproduced to a very large extent through Rohlf's<sup>2</sup>, so that we hear little of Jakob's actual speech. This is a very important scene, since it represents Jakob's first encounter with the demands of the

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1) R. Hinton Thomas has rightly pointed out that 'fullness of characterisation is the least relevant of criteria in assessing Johnson's work', The German Novel and the Affluent Society, p.123. The details given above are intended to show that Johnson presents us with a series of characters who for various reasons are cut off one from another, but without any implication that this is 'good' or 'bad' characterisation: it is serviceable in that we are allowed to see enough to understand why we cannot be shown more.

2) Mutmassungen, p.47f.

State, and it could have been presented as a third-person narration as are so many other scenes in which Jakob features. It is possible that Johnson wants to show us that Jakob does not yet have a clear attitude, that his response to political questioning is not yet positive enough to make a good balance for Rohlf's; the method certainly stresses the political 'intrigue', since the restricted viewpoint creates an impression of sly opposition to Jakob, of power against which he is helpless, whereas a straightforward conversation would have allowed a more even balance between the figures. Much else in the novel minimizes the melodrama which could result from the political elements of the story, but sections such as this and Rohlf's thoughts<sup>1</sup> remind us subtly that one of the major sources of isolation is the need - propounded by Communism - for political alignment, which may be enforced if not freely chosen. These scenes mark the onset of Jakob's enforced isolation. But it is also possible that Johnson is here attempting something which is achieved many times during the novel with unequivocal success: the creation of two distinct levels of time.

#### The Effect of the Time Scheme

Käte Hamburger first raised the problem of whether the use of the preterite in narration really indicated past time to the reader<sup>2</sup>, and decided that the 'epic preterite' served rather the purpose of indicating the fictional nature of the events and characters of the work concerned. Fiction she equated with the absence of any 'reale Ich-Origo' and its

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1) Mutmassungen, p.186.

2) Käte Hamburger, 'Zum Strukturproblem der epischen und dramatischen Dichtung', Deutsche Vierteljahrschrift, 25, 1951, pp. 1-26.

replacement by 'fiktive Ich-Origines, die mit dem die Fiktion in irgendeiner Weise erlebenden Ich, dem Verfasser oder dem Leser, kategorial nichts zu tun haben.'<sup>1</sup> Consequently the 'Ich-Erzählung' presents difficulties, and Käte Hamburger decides '..durch den Ich-Erzähler wird ein autobiographisches, d.i. ein historisches Dokument konstituiert.'<sup>2</sup> It is irrelevant whether the Ich-Erzähler is entirely fictional or not, whether he has to be identified with the author or not; it is important only that he treats himself as non-fictional, and that therefore the preterite regains its reference to the past, since there is now one firm time level with the book and separate from the main stream of events, so that in comparison they become 'past'. True fiction, it is maintained, is characterized by 'Zeitlosigkeit':

'Der Roman erzählt im allgemeinen Geschehen, Situationen, die Menschen mit ihren Gedanken und Problemen, ohne sich darauf zu besinnen, dass das Leben "in Wirklichkeit" in einer Zeit abläuft.'<sup>3</sup>

However, Wolfgang Kayser<sup>4</sup> and Franz Stanzel<sup>5</sup> have rejected this distinction between true fiction and the 'nichtfiktiver Faktor'<sup>6</sup> of a recognisable narrator. They agree that the preterite does not always have the past force it bears in everyday usage, but Stanzel in particular makes

- 1) Käte Hamburger, 'Das epische Praeteritum', DVJS, 27, 1953, p.334.
- 2) Käte Hamburger, 'Das epische Praeteritum', p.355.
- 3) Käte Hamburger, 'Die Zeitlosigkeit der Dichtung', DVJS, 29, 1955, p.417.
- 4) Wolfgang Kayser, 'Die Anfänge des modernen Romans im 18. Jh.', DVJS, 28, 1954, pp.417-446.
- 5) Franz Stanzel, 'Episches Praeteritum, Erlebte Rede, Historisches Praesens', DVJS, 33, 1959, pp. 1-12.
- 6) Kayser, op.cit., p.429.

3) Stanzel, op.cit., p.429.

4) Kayser, op.cit., p.429.

it clear that all depends upon the 'Erzählsituation'<sup>1</sup>, upon whether the reader's attention is drawn to the 'Erzählvorgang'<sup>2</sup> by a narrator being present, or whether it is directed to the events primarily, in which case they become vivid and the past sense is lost: and this can happen even with a narrator, depending on how obtrusive he makes himself:

'Die Bestimmung der Erzählsituation und ihrer Durchführung lässt deutlich werden, dass die zeitliche Orientierung der Vorstellungsbilder des Lesers sehr oft nicht einmal im einzelnen Er- oder Ich-Roman konstant ist, sondern von Partie zu Partie wechselt, so dass das epische Praeteritum einmal die ihm ursprünglich zugehörige Vergangenheitsbedeutung bewahrt, dann aber wieder diese temporale Bedeutung so weit neutralisiert, dass dem Leser eine vollkommene Vergegenwärtigung des Erzählten gelingt.'<sup>3</sup>

Johnson has clearly recognised this variation. To narrate too continuously in the third person in the preterite makes one enter into the narration as into the present and feel that the events are happening as one reads them. But Jakob is dead, and to present him objectively too frequently makes one lose sight of this fact, which is vital if one is to feel how sad it is that the realisation of a person's qualities comes when it is too late, and inadequately even then. We cannot, in other words, be allowed to become too directly involved with Jakob as he was, or he will become a 'present' figure to us. The introduction therefore of monologues, which have the character of reminiscences by reason of having a distinct speaker, creates constantly a counter-balance to the sections of third-person narration and emphasises that they do in fact belong to the irretrievable past. In the case quoted above<sup>4</sup>, the procedure is dubious, because Rohlf's'

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1) Stanzel, op.cit., p.3.

2) Stanzel, op.cit., p.3.

3) Stanzel, op.cit., p.3.

4) Mutmassungen, p.47f. Cf. above, p.271.

monologue adds something unnecessarily sinister to the interview and does not just emphasise that it is past. Occasionally also this framework technique can be irritating; for example, after the section dealing with the time of Jakob's first being noticed by officialdom<sup>1</sup>, there are a few lines of conversation relating to the visit to the refugee camp to see his mother later in the 'story':

'Die Grossen des Landes warfen ihr Auge auf Jakob.  
 - Und was ist mit Cresspahls Tochter?  
 - Ich weiss nicht. Ich meine: vielleicht ist er auch nur ins Flüchtlingslager gefahren. Sagt Sabine. Was ich auch sagen wollte.'<sup>2</sup>

The use of conversation as such, to bring us back to the level in time from which Jakob's life is being reviewed, is on the whole successful, but irritating when - as here - the conversation itself is unintelligible on first reading. Certainly this example is 'realistic' in the broadest sense that conversation is never meant to be overheard and belongs solely to those engaged in it. But this degree of adherence to reality is a sin against artistic presentation which can never be entirely equivalent to reality as it is lived - and this novel is indeed a highly developed art form in its complexity of presentation.

The possibilities of the technique are handled better at the end of the first section of the novel. There is a brief conversation between two entirely anonymous voices ending thus:

'- Jakob war sieben Jahre bei der Eisenbahn will ich dir sagen, und wenn irgend wo sich was gerührt hat was auf Schienen fahren konnte, dann hat er das wohl genau gehört.'<sup>3</sup>

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1) Mutmassungen, p.28.

2) op.cit., p.28f.

3) op.cit., p.7.

There then follows immediately an 'explanatory' picture:

'unterhalb des hohen grossglasäugigen Stellwerksturms kam eine Gestalt quer über das trübe dunstige Gleisfeld gegangen, stieg sicher und achtlos über die Schienen eine Schiene nach der anderen..'.<sup>1</sup>

It does not matter that we do not know who is speaking, since the situation to which they are referring is 'dramatized', then the conversation resumes and serves its purpose as a framework of later time, as well of course as indication how difficult it is to establish the details of the past.

All the monologues have this function among others, for instance one will intervene between two third-person passages describing Jakob's movements<sup>2</sup>; or conversations will frame another such passage<sup>3</sup>, sometimes just speculative in tone, and sometimes taking on the distancing value of the monologue by introducing a speaker who has just featured in the narration of past events, thus giving particularly strong emphasis to their past quality: for instance, the description of Jonas with Jakob in Jerichow<sup>4</sup> is followed by a conversation between characters one can best identify as Jonas and Gesine:

' - Und was war das eigentlich mit den Briefumschlägen.  
- Mit welchen Briefumschlägen.  
- Na. Ihr habt doch ein Bier getrunken im Stadtcafe, als ihr von Messereit zurückkamt, und da kam Wallfarr, weiss doch dieser versoffene Rangierer, und gab Jakob einen Briefumschlag...'.<sup>5</sup>

Significantly, the first four divisions of the novel end with some such section<sup>6</sup> which reminds us before we go on that all that is yet to 'happen'

1) Mutmassungen, p.7.

2) op.cit., p.25f.

3) op.cit., p.70f.

4) op.cit., p.88ff.

5) op.cit., p.91, my underlining to emphasise the stress on the past.

6) Mutmassungen, pp.71, 141, 226, 300.

is in fact already past; and at the very end, when the memories have been related and action begins again, it is action - the meeting between Gesine and Rohlf's - which stresses more strongly than could any other the fact that Jakob is gone, for he had tried so hard to keep these two apart, and as long as he remained alive there would have been no close association.<sup>1</sup>

Examination of the form in detail corroborates, then, what was deduced from the initial consideration of other possible uses of the same material: that the author lays his emphasis not on the events in order to excite us, but rather on characters 'interacting' not in the sense of conflicting dramatically, but trying to understand and know their fellows. He investigates basic social assumptions such as that we live together within a community, and this of course has special relevance for Communism, which stresses more than does 'Capitalism' the fellowship element of society. As will be seen with greater clarity in Das dritte Buch über Achim, Communism interprets the past in terms of a well-defined development towards socialism in which all share; but the stress in this novel on vividness, on bringing the past alive by means of cinematic techniques, striking details of gesture (as will be seen in the section on Jakob<sup>2</sup>) and highly personal memories - in other words by use of the shifting viewpoint - emphasises that the past is a collection of personal memories and individual moments.<sup>3</sup> Associated

1) Mutmassungen, p.308.

2) Cf. below, p. 278 ff.

3) The sustained importance of vividness - 'Vergegenwärtigung' - is also brought out by Herbert Kolb's excellent study of the style. He demonstrates convincingly that apparent vagaries of grammar etc. serve to bring alive the active, vital nature of thought and memory, which does not separate events into clearly subordinated categories. Herbert Kolb, 'Rückfall in die Parataxe', Neue Deutsche Hefte, Jg. 10, Heft 96, Nov./Dec. 1963, pp.42-72.  
Cf. below, section on Communism, p. 295 ff.

with this is, however, the fact that one's experience of the past is not deeply felt until after the events which cause one to feel: the framework technique brings out the sad and even tragic 'pastness' of the past, which all reminiscing cannot recall in its entirety. And reminiscing, though discovering perhaps precious details such as Gesine's recollections of Jakob, tends to bring out the isolation of the individual in the present.

If it is impossible for anyone to explain the past conclusively, it would nevertheless be entirely wrong to say that Johnson maintains that people exist only in others' minds: the supreme test for this is to examine the figure of Jakob, for if he does not exist and act beyond all that can be said of him, then there is no purpose in one's trying to understand others, and it will indeed be seen that Johnson suggests our awareness of each other is inadequate for many reasons, but not valueless, since people like Jakob are there to be experienced, and to experience at all is of great value.

#### Jakob as a character to be experienced

It has been suggested that the characters are 'nicht geschaut, sondern gedacht'<sup>1</sup>, although this has also been strongly denied.<sup>2</sup> But Jakob is presented without constant entry into his thoughts and feelings, so at least in this sense characterisation of him is not 'abstract'. This approach to him from without, it will be seen, is in keeping with his business-like character and, as in the case of Cresspahl, gives added significance to those points where thought emerges: to use Schiller's terms, he might be

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1) Kurt Ihlenfeld, Zeitgesicht - Erlebnisse eines Lesers, Berlin, 1961, p.122. This is not his own view, but one quoted.

2) loc. cit.

called initially 'naive', while Gesine and Jonas are 'sentimental', out of place and unable to regain harmony. Jakob is therefore presented by objective narration first: this consists often in beautifully executed 'cameo' portraits which seize a gesture or an attitude, for example as he pauses in the kitchen of his lodgings:

'Er stand mitten in der Küche seiner Wirtin auf dem fleckigen Glanz des Linoleums und fühlte die Tasche schaukeln an seiner Hand, während er sich umsah.'<sup>1</sup>

We see him smiling with contentment and well-being in Cresspahl's house:

'Nach dem Mittagessen in der Küche hing Cresspahl ihm (Jonas) eine Schürze um den Hals wegen seines guten Anzugs ausdrücklich und stellte ihn auf neben Jakob, der das Geschirr abwusch, und erklärte für sich selbst das ein de inne Eck steit un mit de Emmes klappit wie wiert is as tein de arbeiden: was Gesine fünfzehnjährig gesagt hatte, da stand sie an der Eimerbank und wies ihren Vater an wie er die Tracht zu halten habe beim Wasserholen. Aber danach fragte Herr Dr. Blach auch nicht, obwohl er Jakob leise auflachen sah über den Küchentisch gebeugt...'<sup>2</sup>

In a very different mood he faces Sabine and is conscious of the barriers between them despite their past affection:

'Als sie die schwarze feuchtglänzende Kapuze über ihre Haare hob, blieben ihre Arme stehen in dieser Bewegung; sie sah von sich zu Jakob, der mit hängenden Armen neben ihr stand abseitig verengert blickend, die Falten zwischen den grauen Augenbrauen spannten das Gesicht...'<sup>3</sup>

And when he realises Gesine's precarious position his agitation is evident in his movements:

'Jakob schlug mit der flachen Hand vor sich hin in die Luft und antwortete nichts... "Wir wissen nur eins gewiss": sagte Jakob. Er sah zu Jonas auf. "Ja" sagte Jonas... "Wenn sie sie jetzt zu fassen kriegen, dann hat sie hier in Jerichow einen Aufstand vorbereiten wollen..." Er lag nun völlig zwischen den Armlehnen mit schaukelnden Beinen.'<sup>4</sup>

1) Mutmassungen, p.70.

2) op.cit., p.90.

3) op.cit., p.140.

4) op.cit., p.202.

Several times we are given vivid impressions of Jakob's inner calm and quiet confidence, which enables him for instance to show genuine interest in Jonas because he is not himself self-conscious, despite the intellectual gulf between them:

'Als Jakob auf den Tisch zum Becher griff, kam sein Blick zu Jonas und rührte ihn an im Grübeln, es war keine Frage in dem Ansehen und nicht das gefürchtete voreilige Ich verstehe - Kann mir das gut vorstellen, denn Jakob hatte ja zugehört. Er sah ihn an und versammelte Jonas mit den neuen Eigenheiten seiner Erzählung und erwartete mit? vielleicht mit Geduld wie dies weitergehen sollte.'<sup>1</sup>

In his ability to listen thus, Jakob shows us how great is the peace of his own character in contrast to Jonas' uncomfortable mockery of himself.

Perhaps the most memorable <sup>scene</sup> is that where Jonas visits him at work and his posture alone evinces relaxed concentration and the calm of real competence, plus uneffusive friendliness:

'Jakob hob die rechte Hand über die Schulter ohne sich umzuwenden; diese Bewegung hatte etwas sehr Gefälliges und Höfliches in sich, und Jonas sah dass es hier auf seinen Händedruck nicht ankam... (Jakob) sass ergeben gegen die biegsame Lehne seines Drehstuhls gestützt mit den Händen im Schoss und führte seine Gespräche als sei er auf der Treppe eines Mietshauses angehalten worden und lasse sich die Neuigkeiten eines fremden Tages erzählen ohne Interesse ohne Ungeduld, hier sass er nun einmal...'.<sup>2</sup>

So vivid is his physical person in innumerable examples, the impression of calm controlled movement, that it takes only a shrug of his shoulders at the news of the imminent landing of troops in Egypt (Suez) to indicate the great change that has taken place: apathy is an entirely new attitude for him and means that his uncomplicated but positive acceptance of life has been deeply disturbed:

1) Mutmassungen, p.108.

2) op.cit., p.243f.

'...sie (Gesine) horchte schrägen Kopfes auf die Stimme des Nachrichtensprechers, der inzwischen die neuesten Vermutungen über die bevorstehende Landung der britischen und französischen Truppen in Agypten bekanntgab. "Sie werden landen" sagte sie böse. Jakob sah nicht auf. Er zuckte die Achseln.'<sup>1</sup>

All this confirms Jonas' initial impression of him:

'...alles was wir als Regel und Vorschrift auswendig wissen und hersagen wenn wir uns bewegen hatte er in sich war in ihm aufgesogen jenseits der Worte, und weil ich einen Namen gesucht hatte, nannte ich ihn "wie eine Katze so unbedenklich" wissend dass es falsch war...Ich hatte sagen wollen: ich habe einen gesehen dem man das Leben ansehen kann.'<sup>2</sup>

Jakob is, initially, a man who devotes his physical and intellectual energy to what for him is a clearly defined purpose and therefore 'lives' constantly with the whole of himself, 'balanced' in the fullest sense. Again and again the impression is reinforced by what we see of him in action; his handling of affairs after his mother has left<sup>3</sup> is calm, resolute and eminently sensible; and above all his attitude to his work - for example, his evolving of a new time-saving system of dealing with trains<sup>4</sup> - indicates not slavish dedication but the kind of enjoyment in perfection one might expect from an artist or craftsman, and the training of his young assistant is undertaken with thoroughness but enjoyment, which is more than mere efficiency<sup>5</sup>. He speaks little, but with all the more purposefulness for that; when he says of his mother: "'Man muss vorsichtig sein mit ihr"<sup>6</sup>, then one senses his gentleness, undemonstrative consideration and intuitive understanding despite

- 1) Mutmassungen, p.294.
- 2) op.cit., p.75.
- 3) op.cit., p.92f.
- 4) op.cit., p.137f.
- 5) op.cit., p.234f.
- 6) op.cit., p.95.

the lack of direct communication between himself and his mother. His directness is almost disarming, especially for Rohlfs who can be very devious; he challenges the latter with: 'Soll einer sich selbst versäumen über einem Zweck?'<sup>1</sup> and Rohlfs can of course answer, but is stunned momentarily by Jakob's penetration to the heart of what he is being asked to do. In Jakob's words is contained his belief that everyone should fulfil the position he has to the best of his ability, a belief which is the foundation of his entire lack of discontent and is disregarded by Rohlfs in favour of service to an abstract principle. Where Gesine is concerned, his belief in the independence of the individual is strengthened by ties of affection and family responsibility, which make his threat to Rohlfs, should be interfere with her - '"Ich bring dich um wie einen tollen Hund, wenn."<sup>2</sup> - very impressive because it is said not as show, but with the meaningfulness visible in all his actions.

#### Jakob as he is seen by other characters

Much of what we learn of Jakob is gained from the testimony of the other characters, in which they characterize themselves and their types of isolation at the same time. From Gesine we experience Jakob's solicitude and dependableness above all, for this is what her 'new' life has not replaced; Jonas feels his genuine friendliness and enquiring if not intellectual mind, which enables him to talk about his own frustrations.<sup>3</sup> Rohlfs remembers his directness - '"Versprich" sagte Jakob. Ich kam mir

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1) Mutmassungen, p.156.

2) op.cit., p.224.

3) op.cit., p.99ff.

überrumpelt vor"<sup>1</sup> - which reflects upon his own lack of it, the appeal to a personal sense of honour being entirely alien to him. And Cresspahl also, through the narrator, adds his inarticulate awareness of Jakob's forceful presence, forceful in its lack of complexity:

'Als Cresspahl sich an Jakob erinnerte, lächelte er vor lauter Gegenwärtigkeit, denn Jakob erstarrte nicht in den Bildern des Abschieds sondern blieb im Gedächtnis als eine Wirklichkeit von Lächeln und Antworten und Spass und Leben überhaupt, wie eine Gebärde.'<sup>2</sup>

It is basically the loss of this simplicity of existence which cuts Gesine off from her father's understanding.

But these are all complementary qualities, and significantly it is only when the subject of political motivation arises - as it must after the circumstances of Jakob's death - that disagreement, that is, the propounding of mutually exclusive views, occurs. Gesine maintains, for example, that Jakob's remaining in East Germany was never the result of a 'political' decision<sup>3</sup>; it was not even the effect of thinking that he was needed in his job, but rather the knowledge that although ultimately he might not be irreplaceable, his leaving would cause short-term hardship to people who were his friends - in other words, it was the result of a deep concern for the good of other people. Jonas cannot accept this; even if he reduces it to very simple terms, his interpretation is still political, in that he assumes some kind of comparison of the two systems - the East and West German - must have taken place. And to a far greater extent Rohlf's assumes that political motivation is inevitable within the Communist State: in an example

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1) Mutmassungen, p.206.

2) op.cit., p.170.

3) op.cit., p.152ff., the conversation between Gesine and Jonas.

already quoted<sup>1</sup> he says specifically that he cannot imagine Jakob acting from purely personal reactions, because in his terminology

'...wer dem Gegner schadet, nützt uns; wer uns schadet nützt dem Gegner; wer nichts tut schädigt uns um einer Möglichkeit und gibt dem Gegner Raum für eine andere...'.<sup>2</sup>

He can only think in terms of action for or against the state, the Communist ethos. One is tempted to take as final Gesine's comment to Rohlf's: '-Sie haben Jakob für einen Menschen von Gerechtigkeit gehalten; das war aber nicht die Ihre...'.<sup>3</sup> This view certainly agrees with the impression we gain of Jakob in all the objective presentation of him: he is a man devoted to carrying out what he feels he can best do and ready to help those who claim his help for immediate personal needs like Gesine; a practical man who thinks in terms of immediate, tangible effects, not in broad schemes, a man therefore to whom the sweeping historical interpretations of Communism must have been meaningless, and who judged each event as it arose on its own merits - his fury that someone held up the troop trains en route for Hungary<sup>4</sup> is not to be attributed to virulent Communism so much as to a sense of practical reality. The symbolic gesture is not for him.

It is difficult to assess just how far Johnson intended us to attribute political meaning alone to this disagreement of views about Jakob. It would be possible to say that it is only when a system like Communism tries to impose a rigid interpretation upon personal motivation that the true personality is overlooked in the process: it is certainly true that there is

1) Mutmassungen, p.283, cf. above, p. 264.

2) op.cit., p.292.

3) op.cit., p.262.

4) op.cit., p.246f.

much which Rohlf's misses in Jakob. But neither does Jonas grasp fully how unpolitical Jakob would seem to be; this could of course be attributed to the fact that Jonas also has been educated in Communist thought but one could also widen the issue by saying that Jonas' restricted view is due primarily to his purely intellectual cast of mind as such. Whatever his political background, he would probably have assumed a considerable degree of consciously thought-out intention in Jakob's acts. Gesine's interpretation would seem to be more acceptable because we can see that she is more like Jakob in her enjoyment of simple uncomplicated things: and yet does she not perhaps underestimate his intelligence, his concern for right and wrong because she needs him so much as a guarantee that something in her life has had value, solidity? If this is the case, then Johnson is indeed suggesting that it is to a large extent what we are in our different ways which tends to come between us and an appreciation of others, the theme of isolation again. The reader who is tempted to interpret the lack of knowledge about Jakob simply as Communist distortion of motives should bear in mind that there is a similar lack of understanding between Cresspahl and Gesine, aggravated doubtless by the different political systems against which they live out their lives, but surely also explicable by reference to the vast gulf that separates the generations in an age which changes so quickly as the twentieth century, a gulf observable in any land including our own. Johnson is showing - by making Jakob a person whom we too can experience - that whatever people think about others, those others have an independent existence beyond all opinions, and perhaps if we did not allow ourselves to become so isolated, we should learn to appreciate more fully

the qualities of those with whom we come into contact. Because we 'know' Jakob, we can feel the 'tragedy', if that is not too grand a word, of his loss, for none of the characters understood in full what was happening to him at the time, and are not sure even in retrospect.

All this raises the question of whether this is a simple 'cautionary tale', demonstrating our laziness of perception. If it were, there would have to be a 'complete' picture of Jakob against which we could measure all surmises in order to feel the author telling us 'Jakob could have been seen to be such and such a person, if it had not been for the prejudices and blindnesses of the others'. But there is no final certainty about why Jakob died, no definitive picture of him; we can see a development interesting enough to make him a worthwhile subject for a study, but no more - which suggests that Johnson is not giving a warning, as Frisch is with his choice of situations in which image-making has disastrous results, even though he never suggests that the process of knowing and understanding oneself and others can ever be completed. Johnson is stating a sad fact: we, the readers, do not know one another, partly because of the diversification of life in our century, and this position is made worse when an element such as Communism is encountered for it divides men too violently into factions, partly also perhaps because it is so difficult to break out of our own particular cast of mind and mental habits.<sup>1</sup> By the fact that we are given no clear answer to the question why Jakob died, we see that Johnson deliberately abandons the position of omniscience open in theory to any

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1) Frisch achieves a similar goal by, for example, the 'Nachwort' in Stiller. Cf. above, p. 91ff.

author, in order to involve us as well as his characters in the difficulty of understanding. Just as the use of monologues both helps and hinders our grasp of events<sup>1</sup>, so the brilliant use of 'cameo' pictures which bring Jakob so very much alive also restricts our view: for these are only moments, impressions which we receive as any other observer might have received them, we long to see more because of the vividness achieved, but into the inner life of this most vital of men we cannot see even as far as we can into Frisch's figures.

There are then two major sides to the work: firstly, the suggestion that isolation as such restricts our understanding of those around us, and secondly that in our century and in the particular situation of Germany, the conditions for this isolation are 'better' than ever before. Does the latter point outweigh the former and so make the novel irrevocably dated? Or is Reich-Ranicki right when he says:

'...die im Mittelpunkt stehende Geschichte zeichnet sich durch die überwältigende Einfachheit grosser Parabeln aus. Es ist das Gleichnis vom gerechten Mann in einer ungerechten Zeit...'<sup>2</sup>

The answer lies in a consideration of whether Johnson has presented Communism according to Liddell's just requirements for the 'humanist' writer.<sup>3</sup> Are we moved by seeing what happens to Jakob? Can we be moved without fully understanding? Or are we simply politically angered by the unexplained fact of his death?

1) Cf. above, p. 270f.

2) Marcel Reich-Ranicki, Deutsche Literatur in West und Ost, p.239f.

3) Cf. above, p. 246.

### Jakob's development

It should be clear from the above examination of the impression we gain of Jakob as he was, that he is an immensely 'sympathetic' figure, with a unique kind of vitality which is 'merkwürdig anziehend'.<sup>1</sup> To watch the gradual destruction of this is indeed moving, for Jakob most definitely does undergo a development. The tone of his first interview with Rohlf's is quietly confident<sup>2</sup>: he feels no need to accept Rohlf's, the Party representative, as superior in any way, and explains his own sense of responsibility without any apology. But a new demand having entered his life, Jakob cannot simply ignore it: as the overall picture of him shows, he respects other people too much to treat them arbitrarily; and because of this new demand, which wraps itself in secrecy, Jakob begins to find his uncomplicated relationships, based on mutual trust, now suffer. For example, we see him after the above interview, with Jöche:

'An dem breiten geräumigen Fenster sassen zwei junge erwachsene Männer...sie waren sich gewohnt und befreundet seit sechs und sieben und acht Jahren, ihre Berufe hatten sich gesondert mit der Zeit, in verschiedenen Verhältnissen waren sie erst heute, Jakob wusste es nun, Jöche erfuhr es zu spät.'<sup>3</sup>

The novel goes on to show how close is the relationship between Jakob's mental and physical attitudes normally; so that retrospectively his parting from Jöche is seen as the beginning of a gradual process of division:

'...Jöche...winkte mit seiner Hand, und Jakob hob seinen Arm wie er hatte tun wollen am Morgen. Nun kam sein ganzes Verhalten unbenutzt zurück von Jöche und löste sich einzeln heraus aus dem Vormittag: als habe er kein Wort ausgesagt und keinen Blick angenommen und sich in nicht einer Weise verständigt.'<sup>4</sup>

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1) 'Ost-West - Eigentlich unerzählbar', Der Spiegel, 13. Jg., No.52, 23. Dec., 1959, p.84f.

2) Mutmassungen, p.47f.

3) op.cit., p.61f.

4) op.cit., p.64.

Here we see how Jakob's gesture no longer expresses his feelings fully. In the long section of thought on the irrevocable passing of time<sup>1</sup>, and the Communist claims of insight into history we see further evidence of Jakob's slightly disturbed state of mind, although he can still make a clear distinction between the generalised Communist view of the past and his own concrete experiences. But there is a hint of future difficulties in his very honest recognition that he cannot simply blame Rohlf's for the interference in his life, for Rohlf's is part of a much larger system:

'Für sein Leben muss einer aufkommen aber nicht für das Relais (i.e. the relay functioning in the phone he is using); dachte er: nun kam aber das Relais nicht auf für seinen Teil, Herr Rohlf's enthielt sich auch, wer war nun schuld an Jöches Entfernung, wer wollte die Unabänderlichkeit rechtfertigen?'<sup>2</sup>

But once the 'naive' man has begun to reflect, how long will he be able to maintain his uncomplicated, concrete sense of duty?

Ironically it is Jonas who pushes the process of confusion further.

In him Jakob comes into contact with a degree of concern for politics which he has never previously met, and which raises again the question: how far is one justified in restricting one's efforts solely to the task in hand? Is it of any value to make protests and to argue over abstract concepts? We begin to feel that Jakob is worried by the thought processes starting in him:

'Denn sofort am Sonntag nahm er die dritte Schicht, weil ihm der Feiertag eingefallen war und dass sein Vertreter ja auch verheiratet war; eigentlich hatte er beschäftigt sein wollen.'<sup>3</sup>

For the first time work is not an end in itself; and during his work, his

1) Mutmassungen, p.64ff.

2) op.cit., p.66.

3) op.cit., p.130.

thoughts wander back to all Jonas has said. He muses on the discussion about 'freedom'<sup>1</sup> and 'consciousness' - to his own surprise linking them however superficially with himself:

'Was bedeutete "Finalität"? Ja: der Einzelne verfolgt seinen eigenen Zweck in jedem Tun, und mag das noch so oft uneigennützig genannt werden. Und welchen Zweck verfolge ich? dachte Jakob gelassen spöttisch vor seinem Bildblatt; er fand seine Stimmung selbst wunderbarlich.'<sup>2</sup>

He is not dissociating himself quite so easily as before; the slight association made is ironic and 'gelassen', but it represents a breach in Jakob's absolute certainty of conduct. At this stage, however, the damage is not deep; the value he attaches to his work remains dominant, and Jonas appears to some extent as a man who interferes in what is not really his province:

'Er war auch wieder nicht ganz sicher ob Jonas so auf sich achtete wie auf das was er sah und was ihn nichts anging. Aber dieses Gesehenhaben...dies wollte er gesagt haben und verantworten und sein Leben darauf einrichten: und es ergriff doch den Tagesablauf und die Anstrengung bei der Arbeit: wie Jakob überrascht gewahr wurde. Denn war Jonas nicht sofort verweist?'<sup>3</sup>

Practical everyday living still remains at the head of Jakob's priorities, above all 'insight' and theoretically based courses of action. So for the moment he finds his way back into his familiar context of duties:

'Denn Cresspahl wollte er (Jonas) immerhin eine andere (seine) Meinung beibringen über seine Tochter; die war aber in die Ferne gereist. Und Jonas nach Jerichow. Und meine Mutter in die Flüchtlingsbaracken von Westberlin mit der Eisenbahn, und ich Sorge dafür dass sie alle sicher und pünktlich kommen wohin sie wollen.'<sup>4</sup>

- 1) Mutmassungen, p.135.
- 2) op.cit., p.136.
- 3) op.cit., p.136.
- 4) op.cit., p.137.

During his association with Gesine the worries become to some extent obscured by the joy of rediscovered affection<sup>1</sup>, and the immediate need to keep her safe engages his attention: the demand that Rohlf's should promise her safe conduct<sup>2</sup> is, as we have seen<sup>3</sup>, made with all his old integrity - an instinctive appeal to a personal sense of honour such as his own. But the first crisis comes in the discussion with Rohlf's, Häschen and Jonas on Socialism, when it becomes clear once and for all that Rohlf's puts the State before the individual whoever he may be:

"Das kann man von einem Menschen nicht verlangen..." sagte Jakob endlich. Er lächelte nicht...

"Und das ist genau was verlangt wird" sagte Herr Rohlf's.<sup>4</sup>

It is after this that Häschen makes an important remark:

"Wissen Sie, er ist schon in Ordnung", er meinte Jakob, "aber damit wird er nicht durchkommen."<sup>5</sup>

This is indeed a good summary of his position, and a comment on Communism: it is meant in the sense that personal justice must be supplemented by political consciousness, but for the reader it defines the tragedy - here is an eminently good man doomed to destruction in an age and a situation where goodness and integrity are no longer virtues; and the kind of goodness embodied in Jakob is of a nature to appeal to any normal reader, without religious idealistic connotations. It is a situation which must move the observer.

A second 'crisis' point is reached when Jakob is furious that the troop

1) Mutmassungen, p.195.

2) op.cit., p.206.

3) Cf. above, p.282ff.

4) op.cit., p.220.

5) op.cit., p.225f.

trains are being held up<sup>1</sup>; he is concerned for the smooth functioning of the railways, but contact with an external event of the magnitude of the Hungarian uprising in this way makes him realise that even in his work he is not allowed to remain a private person - and that by fulfilling his tasks he is furthering Communism in a very tangible sense. For the first time, his work and his personal values diverge:

"Schreib mir den Namen auf von dem Kerl! Der hat eine Meinung über die Russen, hält er sie auf, ja glaubt er denn dass wir uns nichts denken dabei!..ich weiss auch wohin die fahren, hält er sie auf. Als ob zehn Minuten was nützen."<sup>2</sup>

He does his duty as a Dispatcher, but the picture of him immediately afterwards reveals how disorientated he now feels:

'Und Bartsch sagt heute, ihm wär schon damals so gewesen. Wie Jakob so dagestanden hat mit dem Mantel über dem Arm und so als ob der nicht wisse wohin nun gehen.'<sup>3</sup>

This impression is reinforced by his weariness.<sup>4</sup> His attempt to persuade Jonas to work for the railways is almost like an attempt to convince himself that it is worth continuing. Certainly he realises now what it means to work in a Communist state:

"Und dass einer sich immer aussuchen kann was er will und verantworten mag: das nennst du Freiheit?" fragte Jakob. Jonas suchte in der Ernsthaftigkeit nach Spott.'<sup>5</sup>

The relevance of the question to the above mentioned incident and his part in it is unmistakable. To stay means to assume responsibility for actions other than one's own, or else the sacrifice of efficiency. But Jakob's

1) Mutmassungen, p.246ff.

2) op.cit., p.247.

3) op.cit., p.251.

4) op.cit., p.251, at the foot of the page.

5) op.cit., p.253.

life is his work, hence his inability to settle in the West when he visits Gesine:

'...wenn ich zum Dienst wegfuhr, sah ich ihn doch sitzenbleiben als wolle er sich nun bis Mittag nicht rühren aus seiner Unbeweglichkeit von Rauchen und Nachdenken, das kann nicht einmal für die Kellner nach geübtem Nichtstun ausgesehen haben.'<sup>1</sup>

When one considers Jakob's normal vitality, even when sedentary as Jonas first saw him<sup>2</sup>, this is a sad picture; apathy<sup>3</sup> is the visible sign of the loss of his positive grip on life - the old certainty has been disturbed, and the West offers no better standards, in his eyes, as the British and French sweep into Egypt.

The isolation which now claims even Jakob is excellently conveyed in the last picture we have of him before his death<sup>4</sup>; at the point where we may suppose Jakob's thoughts to be deeper than ever before, we see nothing of them - they cut him off entirely, and we are therefore not even allowed to see his expression in detail. His loneliness is emphasised by the irrelevant loquacity of the landlady's recollections, and by the atmosphere of this attempt by Jakob to reenter the life which he has been forced to question - rain, darkness, and the silence of early morning. The lack of any distinctive gesture or posture - 'sie hat noch gesagt, er sieht so müde aus, was er darauf geantwortet hat weiss sie nicht mehr'<sup>5</sup> - is in itself an indication that Jakob's purposefulness is gone, that he is just allowing himself to be led by the patterns of action which have formed his life for

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1) Mutmassungen, p.276.

2) op.cit., p.74f.

3) op.cit., p.294. Cf. above, p. 281.

4) op.cit., p.298f.

5) op.cit., p.298.

so long, without actively accepting them any more; or alternatively, that he has gained an uncharacteristic guardedness, is no longer 'unbedenklich'.<sup>1</sup> We do not know what is in Jakob's mind at the end, but we can recognize the change in him, the destruction of something intrinsically valuable. Jean Baudrillard misses this point entirely when he maintains that Johnson's methods of description are more successful with things than people, since he records only visible gesture etc. Baudrillard makes the mistake of assuming that the only theme of the novel is a political one: the difference between East and West, and judges therefore that the characters do not bring this out convincingly enough.<sup>2</sup> He does not grasp the themes of isolation and lack of understanding which demand restricted 'characterization'. Hellmut Jaesrich shows a better appreciation of the novel's true value when he writes:

'Die Darstellungsweise...lässt die Dinge, vor allem aber die Menschen, neuartig und überaus dreidimensional erscheinen.'<sup>3</sup>

but draws no conclusions as to why this is so, and a subsequent critic speaks again of Johnson's 'Entmenschlichung seiner Akteure'<sup>4</sup>, making implicitly a deprecatory judgement. That this is invalid the study of Jakob's development shows. The novel is anything but an abstract political treatise. Yet there are also critics who, while not suggesting that the political

- 1) Mutmassungen, p.75.
- 2) Jean Baudrillard, 'Uwe Johnson: La frontière', Les Temps Modernes, 18. Année, No. 199, December 1962, pp.1094-1107.
- 3) Hellmut Jaesrich, 'Quer über die Gleise', Der Monat, 12 Jg., Heft 135, December 1959, p.74, my underlining.
- 4) Günther Zehm, 'Ausruhen bei den Dingen', Der Monat, 14 Jg., Heft 163, April 1962, p.69.

issues are too schematically presented at the expense of human interest, still see the novel as strongly and single-mindedly anti-Communist.<sup>1</sup> Is Johnson rejecting Communism out of hand? Is it the arch-enemy?

### Communism in the Novel<sup>2</sup>

One could interpret this very moving portrayal of Jakob's development as a blow solely against Communism, but, as has been shown, Jakob's central 'case' is surrounded by various forms of isolation. Yet surely the isolation Communism imposes is of a very different nature from that of the academic life, for example? The answer is that Johnson shows not that Communism is ideologically 'right' or 'wrong', but that like other disciplines and habits of life - only more so - it tends to lose sight of the fact that people matter. Writing of Communist materialism as opposed to what Communists call 'idealism', R.N. Carew Hunt says:

'...materialism insists that reality is not mind but matter; that the existence of matter precedes that of mind; that the material world, so far from existing only in our minds, possesses an objective existence apart from our perceptions of it; and that we can therefore obtain a knowledge of the world which, though incomplete, contains an indestructible core of absolute truth which is continually growing as our knowledge increases.'<sup>3</sup>

This is to some extent a healthy reminder to look beyond ourselves; but truth for Communism is the dependence of historical change upon economic factors, is the belief that

- 1) e.g. Robert Detweiler, "'Speculations about Jakob'". The Truth of Ambiguity', Monatshefte für deutschen Unterricht, deutsche Sprache und Literatur, vol. LVIII, No.1, Spring 1966, pp.25-32.
- 2) Cf. above, p. 277.
- 3) R.N. Carew Hunt, The Theory and Practice of Communism, Harmondsworth, 1963, p.60.

'a better world is being born in accordance with laws that are irresistible in their operation and can be scientifically demonstrated. In such a situation there are only two possible courses - to oppose the process which is heralding the new order, or to collaborate with it.'<sup>1</sup>

It is this 'necessity' which Jakob cannot see in his own recollections of the Second World War<sup>2</sup>:

So hat einer wenig teil an der Art seiner angeblich ganz unverwechselbaren Bewegung durch die Zeit, welche Heute ist und Hier und Das Wichtigste Was Zuerst Muss Getan Werden, sie will für sich die Zukunft haben und nimmt die Würde der Vergangenheit in ihren Anspruch obendrein.'<sup>3</sup>

The Communist view re-interprets the past as a supra-personal development, but Jakob remembers only the succession of soldiers and various small incidents, and can see no overall 'plan' in which he played a part:

'...Jakob wollte weder Herrn Fabian noch Herrn Rohlf's die Würde bestreiten, insofern er ihrer Wirklichkeit inne geworden war und insofern etwas würdig ist wenn es nach einem anderen kommt (und wenn alles mehr des Wünschens wert ist als dies Vorher). Und er hatte aber an dieser Würde keinen Teil.'<sup>4</sup>

'Würde' refers to the gradual but 'inevitable' establishment of a Communist state, which has no personal experience value for Jakob.

Gesine in particular has equated reality with 'experience-ability' (Erlebbarkeit), whereas Rohlf's does not. This is clear in their conversation on Communism and on how much of a Communist in Rohlf's sense Jakob was; referring to Jakob's Berlin visit to see her, Gesine states:

'- Lassen Sie sich doch ein auf Unterschiede. Sie würden es einen Besuch beim Kapitalismus nennen. Den es nicht gibt: würde ich hinzufügen, solange die Konjunktur dauert. Zuerst kommen die

- 1) R.N. Carew Hunt, The Theory and Practice of Communism, Harmondsworth, 1963, p.30.
- 2) Mutmassungen, p.67ff.
- 3) op.cit., p.67.
- 4) op.cit., p.69.

handgreiflichen Auswirkungen der Verelendung des Proletariats, oder der notwendigen Krise, dann kommt der Klassenkampf, und am Ende sind es ökonomische Gesetze gewesen: das nimmt aber von Stufe zu Stufe ab an Wirklichkeit.  
- An Erlebbarkeit.'<sup>1</sup>

The implication in Rohlf's answer is that for him 'Wirklichkeit' and 'Erlebbarkeit' are entirely separate: the economic laws which have no meaning for Gesine are for him the course of the past, even though they are abstracts hard to grasp. All or nothing must be sacrificed to the operation of the overall 'historical necessity' when the point of decision is reached. This point is made clearly also in Jonas' memory of a discussion in which Rohlf called the Hungarian uprisings 'ein historischer Irrtum', and to Jonas' objection that they were nevertheless a reality answered:

'Man soll nicht die Wirklichkeit ausdeuten nach den nichts weiter als persönlichen Erfahrungen sondern die durchhaltenden Linien der Entwicklung aufsuchen: die Anatomie des Fortschritts in jeder gegenwärtigen Minute.'<sup>2</sup>

Everything in the novel testifies however to the view that individual people are of importance and that any view which regards them as units only in a bigger entity, or any kind of isolation which turns us in upon ourselves, is bad in a greater or lesser degree. The attention to vividness<sup>3</sup> points to a view of the past as experience, which we may or may not appreciate at the time: to say, for example, that Jakob was an efficient Dispatcher tells one little about him and his attitude to life, which had to be felt by actual contact with his vitality. Jakob himself was aware of this:

1) Mutmassungen, p.273.

2) op.cit., p.219.

3) Cf. above, 'Use of the fragment-technique', p. 251ff.

'...er wusste dass die Lebensumstände nichts zu tun haben mit einer Person (während Herr Rohlf's zu meinen schien dass der Lebenslauf oder die Biografie einen Menschen hinlänglich und jedenfalls bis zur Verständlichkeit erkläre: als ob der Staubstreifen hinter einem fortgerückten Schrank und ein nutzloser Nagel in einer leeren Wand und die alberne Traulichkeit eines Blumentopfes auf dem Fensterbrett eines ausgeräumten Zimmers noch verlässliche Nachrichten wären)'.<sup>1</sup>

Jakob knows that social classification gives no indication of what a person is; and the fact that the novel is written as personal recollection to a great extent stresses in itself the value of the 'experience' approach to others - letting them make an effect on one's consciousness rather than putting prepared 'labels' upon them, tying them too closely to the factual details of their existence. Even those who recollect are not to be exonerated: the memories are only pieces of a whole, of the whole Jakob, biassed to some extent by the preoccupations of the remembering mind, while Jakob existed in a very real sense to which the individual memories are only an approximate guide. Through the complexity of the form we are made to exercise our own powers of appreciation, fighting for knowledge as we do in life where we gain understanding of others only by what we observe and what we are told by others with a viewpoint no higher than our own. The constant movement between past and present is a blow at our complacent view of the past as completed - and the whole novel is thus directed against any belief, including Communism which is so relevant in our days, which does purport to understand the past and see it as a whole, or which assigns similar goals to vast groups of men. Ironically, the very isolation which is seen to be characteristic of humanity in Johnson's view, is also a means

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1) Mutmassungen, p.96.

of showing the very valuable truth that no two people can think and direct their lives entirely alike. Only one critic has really emphasised this most important point, although seeing Jakob alone as the 'proof':

'Johnson's novel invites us to look into the self to discover the only perspective which, as long as human equality is granted, cannot degenerate into a pattern by which to control the minds of men...' "Mutmassungen über Jakob" invites us to find individuality in the image of the man Jakob.'<sup>1</sup>

Communism is the most obvious attempt known in the modern world to impose 'pattern' - but on a less doctrinal level it is not unlike other social pressures in the modern world, such as the swift changes which separate generations impossibly far, which all cause individuality to exist only as isolation.

While there is then a case for seeing Communism as the greatest enemy of individuality in the modern world, one must also be careful about concluding that this novel is intended to be above all anti-Communist. Whether one feels Johnson is right in his assessment of the modern world is ultimately irrelevant: what must however be seen is that he has not set out to write a novel solely about Communism - and in addition, pro-Communist critics such as Hans-Jürgen Geisthardt<sup>2</sup> should appreciate the surprise and salutary warning to Western readers contained in the far from unsympathetic portrayal of Rohlf's 'der sich bemerkenswert vom landläufigen Untermenschen-

- 1) Erhard Friedrichsmeyer, 'Quest by supposition', Germanic Review, vol. XLII, No. 3, May 1967, p.225.
- 2) Hans-Jürgen Geisthardt, 'Das Thema der Nation und zwei Literaturen', Neue Deutsche Literatur, 14 Jg., Heft 6, June 1966, pp. 48-69.  
Cf. p.68: 'Die Verschleierung der realen zeitgeschichtlichen Situation und des Klassenkampfes, der sich in ihr vollzieht, führt zu einem Bild des sozialistischen Staates, das allen Anforderungen der antikommunistischen Propaganda gerecht wird.'

Klischee politischer Kolportage unterscheidet'.<sup>1</sup> After all, Johnson himself has said that he left the East because he feared:

'...dass die Behörden drüben sich zu diesem Buch unvernünftig verhalten werden, insofern als sie eine Kampfansage und eine Entscheidung gegen den Versuch des Sozialismus in der DDR darin erblicken könnten, aber das ist es nicht.'<sup>2</sup>

Although he has been wildly misrepresented by Hermann Kesten<sup>3</sup>, Johnson has tried to be as impartial as possible:

'Ich berichte von Menschen in einem zweigeteilten Land, in dem man weder auf der einen noch auf der anderen Seite mit gutem Gewissen leben kann.'<sup>4</sup>

The view of the novel as solely anti-Communist is too restrictive; but it has also been suggested with equal conviction that Mutmassungen über Jakob is, on the deepest level of interpretation, an allegory about Man's relationship to God.<sup>5</sup>

### The Christian Religion and the Novel

Werner Joachim Radke believes that the 'real' meaning of the work is hidden behind the contemporary exterior - which, it must be stressed, he

- 1) 'Ost-West - Eigentlich unerzählbar', Der Spiegel, 23. xii, 1959, p.85.
- 2) Günther Rühle, 'Notiert nach einem Gespräch', Frankfurter Neue Presse, 24 October, 1959.
- 3) Hermann Kesten, 'Mutmassungen über Uwe Johnson', Die Welt, 25 Nov., 1961. This is a somewhat biased representation of a speech by Johnson made in Milan, when Johnson tried to be rather more down-to-earth about the Berlin Wall than Kesten and was so accused in this article of condemning the West 'im Gegensatz zu der sittlichen DDR.'
- 4) A report of the same occasion in Milan by Monika von Zitzewitz, Die Welt, 17 November, 1961. For a really balanced view of what took place, cf. Der Spiegel, 6 December, 1961, pp.93-94.
- 5) Werner Joachim Radke, Untersuchungen zu Uwe Johnsons Roman Mutmassungen über Jakob, Ph.D. Dissertation, Stanford University, 1966.

does not intend to deprive of importance or validity as one level of significance, which he sees as the most superficial level. He suggests that Johnson has adopted the method of writing advocated by Clement of Alexandria<sup>1</sup>, and he has worked out a large number of correspondances to Biblical events and sayings. By no means all of these are convincingly proved: he interprets the references to the Twentieth Communist Congress and its 'secret' speech<sup>2</sup> as parallels to the gathering of the disciples described in St. Luke, Chapter 20, without really explaining what the 'deeper' meaning of the episode would then be - presumably defiance of established authority and rejection of the past for a new future: although this would be to give the episode relatively far more importance than it bears on the 'superficial' plane, where it is used not positively, but negatively as a means of bringing out Rohlf's' more rigid views. All the precise notations of time or introduction of figures are similarly seen as references to specific verses of the Bible.<sup>3</sup> These details result from his central thesis that this is a work about man's search for and lack of awareness of God. Jakob is identified with Christ, references to Friday<sup>4</sup> are seen as indications that His Passion is being reconstructed<sup>5</sup>, Jakob's reticence is reminiscent of Christ's silence before Pilate<sup>6</sup>, his telephone

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1) *ibid.*, p.38ff., where he refers to Clement's Miscellanies, Books VI and VII.

2) Mutmassungen, p.125ff., Radke, *op.cit.*, p.246ff.

3) Radke, *op.cit.*, p.231ff.

4) Mutmassungen, e.g. p.71, 72.

5) Radke, *op.cit.*, p.50ff.

6) Radke, *op.cit.*, p.84ff.

conversation with the 'Dispatchleitung' recalls Christ's prayer to the Father in His isolation before the Crucifixion<sup>1</sup> - and so on. Jonas is consequently seen as an embodiment of the Holy Ghost, the Spirit who exists after the death of Christ and carries His values out into a hostile world<sup>2</sup>; and Cresspahl is taken to represent God the Father<sup>3</sup>, his desire for revenge<sup>4</sup> fitting in with the Old Testament conception of the deity, and the many references to wind in descriptions of him and his life<sup>5</sup> are felt to be reminiscent of the 'rushing mighty wind' associated with God in Ezekiel<sup>6</sup>. Within this scheme, Rohlf's represents a Marcion-like figure<sup>7</sup>: the frequency with which he says or is referred to as 'Mensch'<sup>8</sup> being taken as an indication of his representative function as 'die Menschheit in ihrer Gottessuche'.<sup>9</sup>

Such a brief summary cannot do justice to the care with which this theory is expounded by Radke, and there most certainly are Biblical overtones in his work.<sup>10</sup> Jakob, Jerichow - which means in Radke's translation 'Hinterseite'<sup>11</sup>, the city set apart which must fall -, Cresspahl, the

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- 1) Mutmassungen, p.65., Radke, op.cit., p.130ff.
  - 2) Radke, op.cit., p.301ff.
  - 3) Radke, op.cit., p.479ff.
  - 4) Mutmassungen, p.223.
  - 5) Mutmassungen, pp.191, 200, 9.
  - 6) Ezekiel, I/4. Cf. I Kings, XIX/11.
  - 7) Radke, op.cit., p.618ff.
  - 8) Mutmassungen, e.g. pp.223, 159, 148.
  - 9) Radke, op.cit., p.619.
  - 10) Cf. R. Hinton Thomas, The German Novel and the Affluent Society, p.158, note 11.
  - 11) Radke, op.cit., p.493f.

'Kunsttischler' so reminiscent of Christ's earthly father by his occupation: all these correspondances are possible, and it may well be that Radke is right to suggest that there are many more. But does their use necessarily suggest allegory, or could it not be simply that by the evocative nature of these names etc. Johnson wants to establish the serious nature of his narrative, which could otherwise be taken as an 'adventure' tale? Would that be surprising in a country where the vernacular version of the Bible - Luther's translation - contributed so much to the establishment of the language itself, influencing some of the country's greatest writers?<sup>1</sup> And above all, it is most likely that in a work dealing with both Communism and the more general theme of the isolation of the individual, the language should be made reminiscent, however slightly, of a religion which preaches the value of the individual and the importance of brotherly love, self-sacrifice, the breaking out of one's isolation. This cannot of course be proved, but Johnson has never given any indication that he intended metaphysical significance of a highly complex nature to be found in his work. Again this is not conclusive proof, but if the novel is so intricate as Radke suggests, one would expect Johnson to have worked it out with some care before he began to write, and yet he has said that he made very few notes for any of his works.<sup>2</sup> It will also be shown that he has in any case an overriding concern with human personality in his other prose works, so

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1) e.g. Goethe. Cf. Eric A. Blackall, The Emergence of German as a Literary Language, Cambridge, 1959, pp.483, 496.

2) In a letter to Miss M.E. Cock: 'Tatsächlich habe ich mir zu einem Buch, "Zwei Ansichten", Notizen gemacht, bevor ich anfang es zu schreiben, jedoch sehr wenige, und auf eine planlose Weise.'

that it is more likely that he intended here also to treat man in his relationships with his fellows rather than with God. But perhaps the most powerful argument against the theory is that it does violence to the figures particularly of Jonas and Cresspahl. Jakob certainly could be said to have Christ-like qualities in a world which does not understand them: patience, honesty, fairness, a strong sense of justice; but Jonas, as has been shown, is essentially a weak character for much of the work, and it is hard to see how his passiveness can be reconciled with the nature of the Holy Spirit as an essential part of the Godhead, different only in function and not kind from Christ. Certainly Jonas tries to uphold what Jakob could be said to represent (though he would not have seen it in such abstract terms), and that is freedom to make one's own decisions, but he remains to the end without a clear sense of purpose. Indeed, his significance emerges only when the reader realizes how helpless he is despite his intellectual superiority, how it imprisons rather than inspires him. He is at his most meaningful when seen in relation to the other studies of human isolation.

Similarly the characterisation of Cresspahl is not consistent with a symbolic function as God the Father, for such an interpretation does not take into account the very moving change from naivety to some measure of thought and political awareness however rudimentary. This is not to say that he is not a 'father-figure' in the fullest sense; he is generous, hospitable, upright, strong-principled, even excessively trusting like the Father in the Biblical parable of the wicked husbandmen<sup>1</sup>, but the furthest

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1) St. Matthew, Chapter 21.

one can go is to say that he has qualities which have been traditionally associated with God the Father. His relationship to Jakob is not that of the man in the parable to his son: he is not the motivating force in the story 'sending out his son', and although Radke did not want to suggest that Mutmassungen über Jakob was nothing but allegory worked out with immense and absolute precision, such a discrepancy would be an important fault.

The Biblical parallel, as was suggested, might seem to function better with the figure of Jakob himself. Here is a man forced into an impossible position by reason of his innate goodness, a man who 'lives' in the fullest sense, as Jonas immediately feels<sup>1</sup>, who inspires trust and confidence and even respect in his enemies - Rohlf's final comment<sup>2</sup> could be seen as a parallel to the Roman soldier's: 'Truly, this was the Son of God', the ultimate recognition of worth from a man unwillingly impressed. Perhaps, as Radke suggests, Abs is derived from Hebrew 'Abba', 'father'<sup>3</sup>, but need such parallels be more than evocative? To see Jakob as a representative of all that is worthy and good in ordinary humanity, to find links even between his sufferings and the Passion does not mean that Johnson necessarily wanted to draw attention thereby to transcendental values rather than human ones. Christ has often been seen as an example of perfect humanity without any reference to His divine mission<sup>4</sup>, and it is possible to interpret the

1) Mutmassungen, p.75.

2) op.cit., p.308.

3) Radke, op.cit., p.139.

4) e.g. Renan's famous Vie de Jésus: '...tous les siècles proclameront qu'entre les fils des hommes, il n'en est pas de plus grand que Jésus'.

parallels, if such they are, in the same way, without taking them at their full metaphysical value. Jakob has after all no sense of mission<sup>1</sup>: he is forced to take up a political position when he would rather not become involved and distracted from his daily work<sup>2</sup>. And is not the very name Jakob ambiguous? Critics have seized upon it as indicative of 'the just man'<sup>3</sup>, but the Biblical Jacob is no straightforward character: might the name not be meant to evoke the impression of a man who is basically good but not easy to understand? For it has already been noted that Jakob's intelligence should not be underestimated.<sup>4</sup>

If one allows that any Biblical overtones, any similarities to the figure of Christ derive from recognition of the value of human personality in the Bible, and from Christ's perfect humanity rather than divinity, then it becomes much easier to see the general human import of the novel, since figures like Cresspahl and Jonas do not have to be forced into rigid schemes; and their very important 'weaknesses' - whether of passivity or political innocence - have a very definite significance: as contributions to a study of various kinds of isolation.

One major point to be brought against Radke's study is that he neglects to mention that most of the narrative is formed by reminiscences, together with a few direct presentations of events; in other words, Jakob's

1) Cf. above, p. 284.

2) Cf. above, p. 282.

3) e.g. Reich-Ranicki, cf. above, p. 287.

4) Cf. above, p. 285. Cf. R. Hinton Thomas, The German Novel and the Affluent Society, p.114, where he shows that even if one does call Jakob just, it is a very unclear term when one asks what his attitude on specific matters might have been. One cannot be sure.

significance, his importance to each of the other figures is realized only in retrospect, or at best when an exceptional set of circumstances was well under way: and the 'realizations' themselves are still inadequate, as has been shown. This suggests that Johnson wanted to stress Man's unawareness of what is good and valuable until it is taken from him and Man's inadequacy even when he is trying to understand. If this is true, then it would be a much more powerful indictment of modern man in his individual isolation if what Jakob 'stood for' were a kind of goodness so intensely ordinary that it is almost inconceivable that we should not be able to see below its surface. When one considers - as has been suggested<sup>1</sup> - that the functioning of memory, the sense of continuity, of existence within time is an important element of or even the foundation of personal identity, the work takes on a sad irony. In finding out as much as possible about Jakob and their own relationships to him in discussion and monologue, Gesine and Jonas in particular are finding out about themselves, what they valued and appreciated in the past. Thus they find out which 'side' they stand, whether one talks of 'sides' in the strictly political sense of Capitalism versus Communism, or in the more general sense of respect for personal integrity versus exploitation for some impersonal goal. But precisely what helps them to become more 'whole' as people, more self-aware also acquaints them with their loss. Fullness of memory and happiness do not coincide as they do for Proust: and this is not because memory does not function properly, but because the present is never experienced fully enough, because the world around is shut out to some

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1) Cf. above, p. 106.

extent because of varying personal and political preoccupations - and things of value can thus pass away all too swiftly from man's grasp. In the exercise of their memory, Gesine and Jonas are to some extent trying to become what Jakob already was in greater measure: people with a truly balanced approach to life - the irony being that even a high degree of 'balance', self-control, is not enough to make life simple and straightforward in the modern, politically divided world. Certainly Jakob is in a sense 'better' than any of the other figures in that he has a strong sense of commitment to his work and his friends, and a readiness to give any demand careful consideration, but he is overcome by political and social pressures and is not the life-giving Messiah Radke would suggest. It is much more satisfying, for instance, to take Jonas' remark 'ich habe einen gesehen dem man das Leben ansehen kann'<sup>1</sup> as evidence of his appreciation of Jakob's balanced, 'naive' approach to life undisturbed by excessive intellectual ponderings, than as a parallel to Christ's 'I am the Life'.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Gesine's response to Jakob - 'ich liebe dich wie den Regen'<sup>3</sup> - is more effective an indication of their relationship if one interprets it as a response to Jakob's absolute ordinariness than to any kind of quickening effect which Radke calls 'das Nass aus dem noetischen Himmel'.<sup>4</sup> It is in fact a very evocative response: Gesine is to some extent out of place as a city girl, her roots are in Jerichow and country life. Rain would be one of the few things in city life which would remind her of nature,

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1) Mutmassungen, p.75.

2) Radke, op.cit., p.600f.

3) Mutmassungen, p.220.

4) Radke, op.cit., p.601f.

the country, her childhood - and Jakob also embodies the peace she has lost in his calm, steady, refreshing naturalness.

Radke would doubtless say that one can interpret these sayings on an ordinary and on a symbolic level, but his 'spiritual' interpretations present a picture of the relative relationship of all the major characters which is quite different from their relative relationship on the 'real' plane: they assign too much importance to Jakob who has himself no sense of being better than or different from his fellows and indeed spends the last days of his life trying to find his way out of a sense of disorientation - as far as we can tell. Even if he might 'stand for' something on another level of meaning, to say that Jakob's voice on the air at the end of the novel<sup>1</sup> indicates that in a spiritual sense he is not dead, does violence to the whole mood at the end of the work where Gesine and Rohlf come together.<sup>2</sup>

Many men find the acceptance of transcendental, spiritual values difficult, and would find it hard to accept a Christ, without being bad humans for that reason; but how damning to have been unable to grasp fully the true worth of a man who was great in a very human way - and the reader and his world are included in the condemnation. To say, as does Radke, that the title of the novel was suggested by Nietzsche's phrase 'Gott ist eine Mutmassung'<sup>3</sup>, does not prove his contention that the novel is about the search for spiritual values: it only indicates that it is probably about the need for something, which may or may not have spiritual

1) Mutmassungen, p.306ff., Radke, op.cit., p.613ff.

2) Cf. above, p. 277.

3) Nietzsche, Also sprach Zarathustra, 'Auf den glückseligen Inseln', Radke, op.cit., p.647ff.

significance, to which to attach value in order to make life worthwhile - and that something would seem to be individuality without isolation, such as Jakob seems to have at the outset but loses.

Radke calls the work:

'Ein suchendes Nachdenken über die dem Menschen innewohnende Vernunft, um auf diesem Wege die Weltvernunft als das absolute Mass der Wahrheit aufzufinden, d.h. um den Logos als permanente, immanente und transzendente Funktion des Absoluten aufzuspüren... Auf Grund der Unmöglichkeit, sich ein konkretes Bild von Gott zu machen, sind Johnsons Mutmassungen Kritik an den überlieferten Massstäben der alten doktrinären Gottesvorstellung, die er zerstückelt und von der er das Brauchbare aufarbeitet... Johnson macht es zu seinem dichterischen Anliegen, das Fragwürdige an den Vorstellungen seiner Zeitgenossen über das Dasein Gottes zu betonen. Denn jeder, der nicht den Inhalt seines Glaubens in Frage stellt, sondern bloss Ererbtes unerworben übernimmt, begibt sich seines Menschseins und seiner Menschenwürde.'<sup>1</sup>

Mutmassungen über Jakob is a critique, but just as in Das dritte Buch über Achim Johnson is concerned with a danger to the very basis of the human personality, so here he is uncovering our lack of understanding and respect for each other in the modern world; and, to turn Radke's religious material against him, it was Christ Himself who said how can you love God whom you have not seen if you do not first love those whom you have seen. We would have, in Johnson's view, to break the barriers of isolation in order to establish a better society: and it is the difficulty of doing just that which the form of Mutmassungen über Jakob conveys, making the reader share in the process of struggle.

This is not however to say that Johnson does not occasionally go too far in his attempt to make us think and combine for ourselves.

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1) Radke, op.cit., p.646ff.

## Unnecessary complexity in the novel<sup>1</sup>

Among the critics who have accused Johnson of irritating obscurity is Günther Blöcker:

'Der Nebel, das Geheimnis, das schlechthin Undurchdringliche der Existenz wird bei Uwe Johnson zum Formprinzip. Daraus ergibt sich eine vielsagende, wenn auch zuweilen irritierende und die Geduld des Lesers überfordernde Diskrepanz zwischen der Schärfe des Einzelnen und der Undeutlichkeit des Ganzen.'<sup>2</sup>

It is not, however, the overall lack of precise knowledge - about Jakob in particular - which is irritating. This is justifiable to point the contrast between the reality of his existence, and what we really understand about him; or, in more general terms, the contrast between what we see of life and what we really 'know' of it. Sometimes, however, Johnson introduces obscurity which can have no such purpose; in the section beginning 'Jöche, kennt einer Jöche?'<sup>3</sup> it gradually becomes clear that the only person to understand Jöche is Jakob and that this whole passage is a comment on the latter's appreciation of work done devotedly and of quiet responsibility. But the point could have been made without the confusion caused by the abrupt entry of a new figure. Little is gained by not permitting the reader to know in some cases who is talking, although it is usually possible eventually to work out the answer - but, and this is important, it is far from clear on first reading. Here the 'cinematic' technique has been overworked: Johnson tries to minimize the part of the narrator by omitting tags - such as 'sagte Jonas' - on many occasions, so that we enter very

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1) Cf. above, p. 275.

2) Günther Blöcker, Kritisches Lesebuch, Hamburg, 1962, p.193f.

3) Mutmassungen, p.58f.

directly into the conversations as in a film and experience keenly the 'presentness' of the struggle to understand. Usually he gives indications as to who is talking by the form of address - 'du' or 'Sie' - but to make it absolutely unclear is to appeal to our simple curiosity, not to our intelligence. There is so much in the novel which justifies considerable thought, that it is a pity when pure mystification enters. It is also surely self-defeating, for to choose a twentieth century setting and then deliberately to confuse the reader is to ask him to make an identification and see an immediate significance, and then to hinder him in the attempt to do this.

There are also several passages where the expression is far from clear<sup>1</sup>, although the general sense may be clear. Ihlenfeld seems to find this stimulating:

'Zugegeben, dass es mitunter schwerfällt, die verschiedene Stimmen...immer "sauber" auseinanderzuhalten, dass die Fäden der Handlung bei dieser Art des "umkreisenden" Erzählens sich manchmal verwirren, es sollte dem Autor nicht zum Vorwurf gemacht werden. Vielmehr sollte der Leser sich freuen, wenn ihm etwas zugemutet wird an Intelligenz und Geduld, sofern eben das Ganze diesen Dichtigkeitsgrad besitzt, der es zur Dichtung macht.'<sup>2</sup>

But the reader's intelligence is challenged to see how much it can achieve in the way of human understanding, as are the characters by the death of Jakob, and to demand as well that it should expend its energies on guessing-games also is to endanger the serious purpose of the book as a whole and to tempt one to interpret it as a simple mystery story designed to confuse the reader on all points. This is to do the novel an injustice, for it is a

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1) Mutmassungen, pp.135f., 274f.

2) Kurt Ihlenfeld, Zeitgesicht - Erlebnisse eines Lesers, Witten & Berlin, 1961, p.123.

highly original work. As Hans Magnus Enzensberger has pointed out<sup>1</sup>, there are distinct similarities to the methods of Döblin and Faulkner, and Johnson has expressed interest in the latter and other modern authors.<sup>2</sup> But his own use of the methods of fragmentation has entirely adequate justification in this novel. In Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury, for example, the confused time scale draws us into the hazy consciousness of the imbecile Benjy; Johnson's time scale has an equally distinct 'raison d'être', for it can be related to his attempt to bring out the personal value of the past in opposition to the Communist view, and to show the inadequacies of our perception and their results in general. We are given no help from the creator's omniscience, but are challenged to see how far we can observe and understand before Jakob is 'lost' again at the end of the novel. Sartre has expressed the relationship between reader and author thus:

'Puisque la création ne peut trouver son achèvement que dans la lecture, puisque l'artiste doit confier à un autre le soin d'accomplir ce qu'il a commencé, puisque c'est à travers la conscience du lecteur seulement qu'il peut se saisir comme essentiel à son oeuvre, tout ouvrage littéraire est un appel.'<sup>3</sup>

In Johnson's case this is particularly true: he is making an appeal to our ability to experience other people, to which even Rohlf's succumbs momentarily:

"Sie sind kein guter Verlierer" sagte Jonas gegen den Rücken von Herrn Rohlf's...Der wandte sich nicht um...Aber er dachte in

- 1) Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Einzelheiten, Frankfurt, 1962, p.238.
- 2) Günther Rühle, 'Notiert nach einem Gespräch', Frankfurter Neue Presse, 24 October, 1959.
- 3) Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Qu'est-ce que la littérature?', Situations II, Paris, 1948, p.96.

seinem Herzen dass es nicht die Wahrheit sei. Dass er mit Jakob darüber sich hätte verständigen können.'<sup>1</sup>

The use of 'Herz' referring to Rohlf's is striking; he is the man who interprets life according to pre-established laws of development, and yet Jakob is able to cause 'feeling' in him. To quote Sartre again, this is the task that Johnson has fulfilled in Mutmassungen über Jakob, on the whole, by showing in a highly interesting way that people do matter as individuals:

'Ainsi, en prenant parti dans la singularité de notre époque, nous rejoignons finalement l'éternel et c'est notre tâche d'écrivain que de faire entrevoir les valeurs d'éternité qui sont impliquées dans ces débats sociaux ou politiques.'<sup>2</sup>

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1) Mutmassungen, p.308.

2) Sartre, op.cit., p.15.

OTHER TEXTS RELATED TO THE MATERIAL OF 'MUTMASSUNGEN ÜBER JAKOB'

Three short studies in the collection Karsch und andere Prosa<sup>1</sup> are connected with the material of Johnson's first published novel. In Osterwasser<sup>2</sup> we have an episode from Gesine's youth, which brings out her sensitive femininity in the attachment she shows to popular legend. Her essentially 'romantic' nature here reinforces the picture of her which emerges from the novel, as a person whose life is grounded in spheres outside the way of life she has chosen as an adult. The study is also of course quite delightful in its own right, as a portrayal of youthful psychology, free from any serious political overtones. Gesine's strong sense of isolation is then emphasised in Beihilfe zum Umzug<sup>3</sup>, which concentrates primarily on the difficulties which arise when a family becomes split between East and West. Gesine aids someone who has for years thought badly of her, simply because she needs contact, however tenuous:

'Cresspahls Tochter hatte sich nur Zeugen beschaffen sollen. Ihre Handlungsweise wurde von vielen missbilligt, und ihr selbst war auch nicht sonderlich wohl dabei.'<sup>4</sup>

This brief picture brings out her sense of displacement, and it is this which the reader of the novel feels so strongly.

It is present also in Geschenksendung, keine Handelsware.<sup>5</sup> The title gives ironic stress to the notion of gifts which should bring people closer:

- 1) Frankfurt, 1964.
- 2) Karsch und andere Prosa, p.7ff.
- 3) *op.cit.*, p.18ff.
- 4) *op.cit.*, p.22.
- 5) *op.cit.*, p.23ff.

the gifts which Gesine tries to send only serve to emphasize the difference and the gulf between her present position and her background. The last two stories study more closely than any part of the novel conditions of contact between East and West Germany in general, everyday terms, but the fact that Gesine is used in them shows how important the individual personality is for Johnson: his characters interest him in their own right even beyond the scope of their major function within the novels. They are people in the fullest sense, not pawns of political propaganda, even if we do not know or understand them completely.

Osterwasser also contains an interesting picture of Jakob, which complements what we can deduce about Gesine's feeling for him in the novel. His dependability, his understanding and firm friendship, his respect for the desires and feelings of others all reinforce what we feel at the end of the novel: that his loss matters. His value lay in his humanity, and the imposition of a political role confuses his innate readiness to help others. These studies support, therefore, the view that in the novel Johnson is pleading primarily for recognition of individual value, within a political clash which obliterates it and a world in which individuality can too easily mean only isolation.

We find in Geschenksendung, keine Handelsware the same honesty as is present in the novel, for instance on the question of why packages are sent to the East:

'...zum Geburtstag, gegen Mangel, gegen Krankheit, gegen die Trennung; aus Pflichtbewusstsein, Scham, gutem Willen, gegen das Finanzamt.'<sup>1</sup>

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1) Karsch und andere Prosa, p.26.

Johnson indicates here, as he does in the novel, that a political situation involves a wide range of personal reactions, not black and white oppositions. The whole form of the novel is intended to make us feel just that: by showing the multifarious nature of human isolation and sensitivity.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### DAS DRITTE BUCH ÜBER ACHIN

Johnson's second published novel is simpler in structure than the first, in that it has a clearly defined framework - that of question and answer - as opposed to a constantly shifting viewpoint. This device is, however, far from conventional, and again raises the question of whether Johnson is simply trying to engage the reader's attention by novelty. What does this particular manner of presentation convey to the reader? Does it have an important function in the novel?

#### The Question and Answer Form

Karl Migner has pointed out that the process of question and answer is closely related to the origins of all epic art:

'...(es) handelt sich um eine künstliche Abwandlung der Ursituation aller Epik, die darin zu sehen ist, dass ein Erzähler einem oder mehreren Zuhörern, die durchaus die Möglichkeit haben, durch zwischenfragen die Ausführlichkeit und den Gang des Berichteten zu beeinflussen, eine Geschichte erzählt.'<sup>1</sup>

'Story-telling', however, in its simplest form, surely begins with the teller's desire to interest his hearers; he employs devices of varying degrees of sophistication to stimulate curiosity and ensure attention. It was in recognition of this that E.M. Forster emphasised the importance of 'mystery' as a structuring element in fiction.<sup>2</sup> But within Das dritte

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1) Karl Migner, Das dritte Buch über Achim. Eine Interpretation, Munich, 1966, p.26.

2) E.M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel, p.94f.

Buch über Achim this basic situation is reversed. The initiative comes from the questioner, not from the narrator, as we see from the final section on Karsch's return<sup>1</sup>: Karsch makes no attempt to contact his friends, and the initiative is taken by an unidentified telephone caller. Certainly many of the questions put reveal curiosity: 'Wie war es denn?', 'Verhielt er sich auf dieser Reise anders als auf seinen üblichen?', 'Wie kam er mit Achim aus?', 'Wie dachte Karsch aber anzufangen?', 'Warum hatte Achim sich zur Mitarbeit entschlossen?', 'Was sagte denn Achims Vater dazu?', 'Und wie fing es an mit dem schnellen Fahren?', 'War denn unter solchen Umständen etwas zu schreiben?'<sup>2</sup>; but these are all questions which prompt the narrator. For example, in the section prior to the question 'Wie kam er mit Achim aus?' the narrator has been relating what little was visible of Karin's relationship with Achim and ends on a note which is anything but intriguing and effectively closes the subject:

'Er sah sie Achims Hemden bügeln, sie legte ihm die Post in den Griff, hielt die Küche in Ordnung, stand mit seitlich eingestemmt Armen vor den Fenstern und murmelte die Regenflächen an, war jetzt achtundzwanzig Jahre alt und half Achim wohl erheblich bei seinem Leben. Karsch weiss nicht mehr als ihm auffiel.'<sup>3</sup>

The final sentence has a distinctly uncommunicative tone, and it is left to the questioner to find another avenue of approach. Similarly, the question 'Wie dachte Karsch aber anzufangen?' follows on a section which does nothing to instigate further questions<sup>4</sup>; in answer to the question 'what gave

1) Das dritte Buch über Achim, p.336f.

2) Das dritte Buch über Achim, pp.10,22,29,46,48, 106,147,178,225.

3) op.cit., p.28.

4) op.cit., p.48.

Karsch the idea of writing a book?' a factual list of observations is given and the topic neatly rounded off with Achim's reaction to the decision. The subject is thus ended, nothing actively stimulates the questioner to probe further, so that again the latter has to find a new topic with which to proceed. In this case he takes up the subject of Karsch's proposed methods of writing, which the narrator, with a noticeable lack of enthusiasm about the whole topic, does not himself raise. In these and other examples, the curiosity exists prior to the events or details given: it is not led to these by any device of the narrator.

This is not entirely true of all the questioner's enquiries and comments. A query such as that relating to Karin: 'Was hatte sie denn für Sorgen'<sup>1</sup> refers back to something specifically mentioned in the previous section, but significantly not said right at the end as an obvious invitation to further questioning, but passed over without explanation in the course of describing the visit to Prague. Or, to take another instance, when the questioner says: 'Was heisst hier zu privat?'<sup>2</sup> he is demanding an explanation of Frau Ammann's words, set down within a description of her by the narrator which lacks any comment or interpretation, the reader's attention being drawn rather to her physical presence alone. But in both these cases, the questioner's initiative is still dominant over the narrator's; the particular course the book takes is largely attributable to the former's probing rather than to the latter's lead. This is the kind of curiosity which results when one is interested in a place firstly, and knows

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1) Das dritte Buch über Achim, p.211.

2) op.cit., p.143.

a person who has just been there; one asks questions for one's own benefit, not because the other person actively invites them. It is only towards the end of the novel that the narrator seems to exert any influence over the questioner, and then it is to antagonize him to some extent. The former concentrates doggedly upon the techniques of cycling, which first bore the questioner - 'Na ja und?'<sup>1</sup> - and then exasperate him - 'Hör endlich damit auf!'<sup>2</sup>. And curiously, the narrator himself appears to be equally bored; at the end of the section showing several possible ways of attempting to 'present' Achim - by an impressionistic film technique, or by choosing one somehow characteristic anecdote etc. - we read:

'G. Oder noch anders. H. Oder gar nicht. I. Wieviel Buchstaben hat das Alphabet?'<sup>3</sup>

The endless possibilities all seem equally futile; the narrator has not the energy or conviction necessary to detail them, and retreats into ironical boredom.

Both the constant 'prompting' by the questioner and this process of antagonization suggest something radically 'wrong' with the narrator's attitude to his material. The two elements are linked in that the prompting suggests a reluctance in the narrator to relate at all, and the antagonization is a bitter reinforcement of this reluctance - a *reductio ad absurdum* of the narrator's inability to inject vitality into his material. As the very first section of the novel shows, it is all too easy to melodramatize the division of Germany: that the narrator refuses to exploit

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1) Das dritte Buch über Achim, p.257.

2) *op.cit.*, p.265.

3) *op.cit.*, p.282.

this unique opportunity to enthrall the reader hints at a deeply worrying experience which has struck at the root of the narrator's art. It is, then, not just in the actual events which form the basis of the novel - Karsch's abortive attempt to write a biography of Achim - that difficulties of contact between East and West Germany are made apparent; even in retrospect, as Karsch looks back over his time in the East, the difficulties themselves defy or hinder simple narration.

Why could Karsch's difficulties not have been presented in a straightforward third-person narration? This is a point which will be dealt with more fully later<sup>1</sup>, but briefly the questioner represents succinctly the attitudes with which Karsch doubtless entered East Germany, and which persist in the West. These attitudes explain to a great extent the difficulties which the narrator - whether it is intended to be Karsch himself or someone speaking for him - finds in communication. The use of a narrator not unambiguously identified with Karsch, rather than of the latter himself<sup>2</sup>, also adds to the impression that the events are very distant from the questioner, that they are more than just the personal experience of a friend returned from holiday; while conversely, the close identification of the two - visible in a question such as 'Deswegen bliebst du da? Blieb Karsch da?'<sup>3</sup> - suggests that Karsch is trying hard to objectivize, therefore that something profoundly disturbing has happened, for as well as the restrained use of the material already noted we have the equally surprising restraint

1) Cf. below, p. 345 ff.

2) i.e. Karsch is referred to in the third person.

3) Das dritte Buch über Achim, p.37.

of a journalist who is abandoning the tempting prospect of an 'eye-witness' account.

Another alternative would have been a presentation similar to that employed in Mutmassungen über Jakob, where the narrator is used only to give an impression of Jakob's existence beyond all that can be said of him, while the larger part of the work consists of individual viewpoints. We have seen that the function of the monologues is to express the isolation of the figures; each, except Cresspahl to some extent, is trapped within his or her thoughts. Jonas is the intellectual lacking the will to action and resorting therefore to ironic self-deprecation; Gesine the girl who has grown away from her humble background materially but not emotionally, and so on. All these characters have therefore particular reasons for being driven back into their own thoughts; a simpler figure like Cresspahl has no such sustained mental activity. If then Johnson uses the 'monologue' precisely where it is realistically appropriate, why does he avoid it in this second novel where two figures from vastly different backgrounds meet each other and might be expected to feel their 'separation'? Not because he cannot think himself into a Communist mentality, for he has done just this in Rohlfs. The answer lies in his conception of Achim's personality; for some reason Achim's reactions to Karsch cannot be shown directly, and the study of Johnson's methods in Mutmassungen über Jakob suggests that the cause may not be reluctance, but some kind of inability to feel any detailed reaction. Frisch's characters are either, like Stiller and 'Enderlin', deeply preoccupied with themselves and their 'images' or else are forced into self-knowledge, like Faber; so a narrator with superior vision is not

employed, for it is the individual fights for understanding which make the novels so intriguing, and we are made to share in the character's struggles without the assurance that a narrator already sees and grasps the whole process. In a writer so obviously unconventional as Johnson it is initially surprising to find a narrator used at all; it is an ironical usage however in this second novel, for the narrator is introduced to tell a 'story' which cannot tell itself as Frisch's do. Nothing, one would assume, would be more straightforward than a biography, where the course of the narrative will be determined by that of the life concerned; we have seen in Mutmassungen über Jakob that Johnson believes it is very difficult to understand other people fully, but a biographer makes a deliberate attempt to do just this while most others are too involved with their own lives - and yet Karsch is unable to reach any satisfactory degree of understanding. This is in itself surprising, although it could theoretically be put down to Karsch's obtuseness. But the entire lack of entry into Achim's mind, of imaginative reconstruction of possible thought patterns, suggests that this is not the case. Karsch's difficulties come from without, from contact with a man who simply does not have an inner life of his own; and in addition Achim is not interested in self-examination. Hence the narrator is used to present figures who do not or cannot think for themselves - Achim, and to some extent Karin.

#### Presentation of the individual characters

The manner in which the figures are presented to us - through statements about them rather than just pictures of them in action, speech, in

which we might forget the presence of the narrator, also suggests that they do not act unselfconsciously or freely. It is a serious misunderstanding to judge this method negatively as evidence of a preoccupation with general circumstances rather than with human personality. Reich-Ranicki, in an otherwise favourable review, comments:

'...offenbar liegt dem Verfasser des "Dritten Buches über Achim" weniger an den Charakteren als an der Darstellung der Verhältnisse ...Er strebt die zeitgeschichtliche Bestandsaufnahme an. Die psychologische Analyse hingegen interessiert ihn nur gelegentlich.'<sup>1</sup>

It is more relevant to ask what statement about characters indicates about the writer's attitude to his figures.

On this subject Lubbock comments:

'...the art of fiction does not begin until the novelist thinks of his story as a matter to be shown, to be so exhibited that it will tell itself. To hand over to the reader the facts of the story merely as so much information - this is no more than to state the "argument" of the book, the groundwork upon which the novelist proceeds to create.'<sup>2</sup>

Liddell develops this further when he distinguishes between 'Summary' and 'Scene', seeing that the former - 'that part of a novel in which the novelist says that things are happening, or that they have happened'<sup>3</sup> - is necessary on occasions to carry the reader over less important periods in the course of a narrative; but like Lubbock he attributes far more skill to scenic presentation - 'that part of a novel in which the novelist makes things happen under the reader's eyes.'<sup>4</sup>

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1) Marcel Reich-Ranicki, Deutsche Literatur im West und Ost, p.244.

2) Percy Lubbock, The Craft of Fiction, p.62.

3) Robert Liddell, A Treatise on the Novel, p.67.

4) *ibid.*, p.67.

In the light of these considerations, which are indeed basic ones for the novel, to accept Johnson's statement or 'summary' method of presentation at its face value is to accuse him of entire lack of subtlety. But this is a quality in which Mutmassungen über Jakob has revealed him to be far from deficient, even to the point of excessive intricacy. It is surely more just to assume that this is a way of reminding the reader constantly that Karsch never reached the stage where he could order his material into an evocative reconstruction of Achim's life, and that the narrator is similarly hampered unless he wants to make Karsch's sensibility into the centre of his narration. That this is not done suggests, as has been seen, that the experiences of Karsch's visit to East Germany were not so much dramatic, but deeply puzzling, frustrating.

### Achim

What do we in fact see of Achim? There is a certain amount of physical detail, used as in Mutmassungen über Jakob to evoke the gesture of a moment of a characteristic posture, using 'characteristic' in the sense of habitual rather than indicative of character. For example, there is the description of Achim's gait:

'Er setzte die Füße genau auf dem Hacken auf und rollte sich über Ballen und Zehen ab, seine Arme schlenkerten...Er schien ganz aufgesogen von der Beobachtung seines Körpers.'<sup>1</sup>

Or there is the vivid evocation of his exhaustion:

'Achim war gegen die Sofalehne gelegen mit halb angezogenen Beinen. Er blinzelte gegen das übernächliche Licht und versuchte sein Gesicht offenzuhalten.'<sup>2</sup>

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1) Das dritte Buch über Achim, p.66.

2) op.cit., p.208.

But these 'cameo' pictures are relatively few in number and illuminate only the athlete's existence, his physical prowess, endurance or exhaustion. These details could be incorporated in a description of any athlete: Achim's dedication reveals nothing about him as an individual, in the way that Jakob's supremely calm confidence in himself as he works does about him.

When we see Achim out of the context of his athletic training, there is still little that could be called revealing if one is looking for something other than dedication to sport. After his ride with Karsch, for example, Achim makes an unusually demonstrative gesture:

'Achim lachte begeistert, rüttelte Karins Schulter, schlug Karsch in den Rücken, bewegte sich sehr. - Was habe ich dir gesagt wie er fährt! rief er ausser sich. - Entschieden fährt er!'<sup>1</sup>

The narrator has tried to convey something of the tone of the words in the phrase 'ausser sich', but this is a commonplace with little characterisation value. The only possible interpretation is that Achim's enthusiasm derives from Karsch's skilful manipulation of the car, which he sees as a transposition of his own 'art'. The details are sufficient to suggest physical presence and energy, but not individuality - they are descriptive not truly evocative. One might expect more from speech, but what is recorded for Achim is either inexpressive or is later retracted and negated. For example, when Karsch admits that he cannot understand the language of the official newspapers, we read: 'Achim war sehr betroffen. - Ach: sagte er enttäuscht.'<sup>2</sup> This appears at first like a perfectly normal piece of characterization, until one realizes that 'betroffen' indicates only that

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1) Das dritte Buch über Achim, p.33f.

2) op.cit., p.26.

there was a reaction without specifying its nature, and that 'enttäuscht' could cover a number of reasons and degrees. This is only a token attempt at dressing the monosyllabic reply in normal literary garb, undertaken because there is no obvious 'lead' to aid understanding of what was meant. When Achim is induced to talk at length, it is usually about the past which is, as it were, ready-made and enables Achim to converse without the spontaneous reactions to another personality of which normal conversation is composed - this kind of conversation is singularly lacking: either Achim avoids it, or finds no need for it. Typical of his behaviour is the strange omission to ask about Karin's earlier association with Karsch: 'Er sah ihnen unbeteiligt aber vergnügt zu. Er fragte nicht woher sie einander kannten.'<sup>1</sup> Other people do not seem to engage his attention at all, except in so far as they enter his life; and his own life interests him ultimately only in the present. He will relate details about the war years, but then disclaim or reject them - 'Die Rote Armee müssen Sie wegnehmen'<sup>2</sup> - and eventually insist: 'Sie können von meinem Leben nur wissen was ich Ihnen davon sage.'<sup>3</sup> This remark confirms what the lack of conversation as give-and-take indicates: Achim is quite prepared to ignore the personalities of others, for in rejecting his own past, he is really - like Stiller - imposing his images on the lives of other people also, denying them their existence.

The only subject on which Achim shows enthusiasm is that of cycling,

- 1) Das dritte Buch über Achim, p.34.
- 2) *op.cit.*, p.192.
- 3) *op.cit.*, p.203.

into which no personalities enter, participants being reduced to human machines. When Karsch asks for an explanation of team tactics, Achim becomes noticeably more animated than usual: 'Wenn der Wind so kommt wie heute: sagte Achim, er liess die Hände fallen, blickte auf, sagte lächelnd: Klar?'<sup>1</sup> But all that remains in Karsch's memory of this occasion are physical details, outward appearances, for the animation does not express conviction and opinion so much as sheer physical mastery of a situation and a skill. Karsch can only make statements such as:

'Karsch erinnert Achims helle unbiegsame Stimme im Gespräch, das Glänzen schrägen Sonnenlichtes in den schweissigen Stirnfalten und im blonden wehenden Haar über dem staubschwarzen Gesicht.'<sup>2</sup>

The timbre rather than the tone of the voice is given, the colour not the expression of the face - because neither is truly expressive?

There are many scenes which are summarized rather than presented in the full sense, either because they have insufficient 'character' for direct representation, or because the narrator and Karsch are not sure of what emphasis to give them - a point which a writer must decide before he can recreate what he has seen and to which he should normally be led by the tone of the speaker concerned. For instance, when the subject of the 1939-1945 war arises, we read:

'Über die Angriffe der vereinigten Welt aus der Luft sagte Achim: Das weisst du ja. Er lernte die Stadt erst wieder kennen, als sie bereits aufgelöst wurde von den Bomben.'<sup>3</sup>

For memory Achim here substitutes an appeal to Karsch's own knowledge,

1) Das dritte Buch über Achim, p.30.

2) op.cit., p.31.

3) op.cit., p.94.

factual knowledge; and the recreation of Achim's attempt to find his own home is Karsch's alone, for Achim's own words are not expressive enough, one suspects, to warrant reproduction.

Another instance is the meeting between Karsch and Achim in a Prague art gallery:

'-Ja wissen Sie...: murmelte er (Achim) blicklos mit Handrücken und baumelnder Brille umgeben von der friedlichen Malerei eines vergangenen böhmischen Jahrhunderts, streckte sich, stiess zu; kumpanenhaft zwinkernd wollte er (wahrscheinlich) zugestehen dass er nicht gelebt haben wollte wie ein anderer das aufschrieb...'.<sup>1</sup>

Karsh and the narrator have to try and state the relationship between Achim's gestures and thoughts because they are far from clear. The sense of frustration of which this statement technique is the result emerges clearly from the following lines:

'Da wollte Karsch froh sein, wenn Achim seine Person und die Geschichte dieser Person überhaupt mitbrachte zu dem Treffpunkt, den der verständigende Gebrauch von Sprache zwischen ihnen verabredete...So konnte der eine nicht vom andern reden und für ihn gemeint haben: ich...'.<sup>2</sup>

Achim's thoughts and attitudes are singularly opaque and unreachable; his most favourable comment is: '...Aber sonst ist es so ungefähr gewesen.'<sup>3</sup> This is anathema to the conscientious biographer; even if he tries to overcome it and create 'scenes' on his own initiative in which he can attempt some evocation of atmosphere, they remain isolated, as for instance the 'schulfreier Tag'.<sup>4</sup> And if Achim does express some positive emotion, it is not spontaneously through facial expression and voice and words, but in

1) Das dritte Buch über Achim, p.185.

2) op.cit., p.187.

3) op.cit., p.128.

4) op.cit., p.83f.

private after the events which occasioned it; his pleasure at Karsch's apparent interest in cycling is reported by Karin as a fact, not an experience.<sup>1</sup> One cannot but notice the countless times the tag 'sagte Achim' is used without any amplification, as though the narrator does not know how to turn the fact that Achim has spoken into an experience with some particular 'colour'; and when one considers that in Mutmassungen über Jakob Johnson made it quite clear that for him life consists of personal experience, not of dates and simple facts, then this point is doubly significant. In the latter novel, the characters' own isolation prevented them from realising this until one valuable experience - Jakob - was lost. In Johnson's second novel, a deliberate attempt to experience another person is balked. The narrator is forced into statement and summary, for instance: 'Er (Achim) wollte gelebt haben schon wie immer jetzt und seit fünf Jahren Mitglied in der Sachwalterpartei...'.<sup>2</sup> Quite apart from the question of falsification of fact, Achim resists 'experience' because he himself telescopes time. 'Wie immer' covers a number of years with barren alacrity; Karsch is prevented from 'reliving' them with Achim, and the narrator can only accept the summary. One might also see the 'Verfremdungseffekte' - the comments which make it quite clear that the narrator and Achim are very distinct from one another - as evidence of Karsch's sense of separation from his subject. Achim will be referred to, for instance, as 'der Mann im Strassenanzug', 'ein junger Mann in grauem Strassenanzug', or as 'der Lange'.<sup>3</sup> While these

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1) Das dritte Buch über Achim, p.31.

2) *op.cit.*.. p.239.

3) *op.cit.*, pp.15, 185, 234.

phrases and others such as 'Dies ist ein lokales Detail'<sup>1</sup> or 'und so weiter'<sup>2</sup> which intervene in description are intended to distance the reader from the figures and ensure that he feels unable to identify with them, they are also acceptable as renewed attempts by the narrator and Karsch to see Achim at a distance and thence approach him afresh. It is as though the narrator, failing in the effort to understand Achim, constantly stops the flow of detail in order to make quite sure that the fault does not lie within himself, that he is not being carried away by his own words or imagination. This attitude develops into irony against the narrator himself, when, in the 'film-version' of Achim's life the accompanying waves of sound are described. The perfectly acceptable metaphor is made bitterly obvious in heavily ironical 'realism':

'...auf dem dazu synchronen Tonband schaukeln die Berge und Täler des brüllenden Tonfalls um in die schwer flappenden Überschläge von Meeresbrandung (um den Vergleich doch endlich zu rechtfertigen)...'.<sup>3</sup>

Where does the difficulty really lie for Karsch and the narrator? Is it that he finds Achim simply taciturn and reserved? On the contrary: every part of Achim's existence is 'überschaubar'. The narrator begins by looking for some individual emotional life behind the public facade and says: 'Von seinem Leben war weniger sichtbar'<sup>4</sup>, implying that what could be observed was simply the social role. But the initial inability to see is gradually replaced by the suspicion that there is no private life behind the

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1) Das dritte Buch über Achim, p.115.

2) *op.cit.*, p.134. This is very reminiscent of Stiller's method of holding up his narrative in order not to be drawn into the continuity of the past even on paper.

3) *op.cit.*, p.276.

4) *op.cit.*, p.19.

image; Achim has no affection for his home, which to most public figures must surely be a haven. All his flat testifies to is his exalted position, not to his character and taste:

'Er war nicht zu vergessen, war sogar erinnert in der Leere seiner hochbezahlten Wohnräume, die öffentlich und auswechselbar waren einem Bahnsteig vergleichbar und der Vorhalle eines Kinos und allen Orten, an denen nicht zu leben ist, da kann man sich treffen und reden über was, du weißt schon.'<sup>1</sup>

The word 'leben' here is used in the sense of to have a private life which is not the concern at the same time of society in general. The problem which Achim sets Karsch derives from this entire lack of division between public and private life:

'...sein überraschtes Lächeln war glaubwürdig, sein langer harthäutiger Kopf war fasslich und befremdete kaum, er betrug sich bescheiden, was er tat war überschaubar und lobte den Sachwalter.'<sup>2</sup>

Karsch simply cannot believe that the association of politics and sport sums Achim up entirely, that there is not somewhere some kind of individualising desire, emotion or attitude which does not enter these categories.

The implication is, however, not that Achim hides those thoughts which do not coincide with his public image, but that his thinking follows pre-established patterns and that he constantly plays a part in the full belief that it is his life - although this cannot be proved. One could draw an interesting comparison here with Frisch's anecdote about the ambassador who suddenly realised that he was not the man all the world held him to be, but who controlled his fear and continued.<sup>3</sup> With Achim there seems to be no

1) Das dritte Buch über Achim, p.135.

2) op.cit., p.226.

3) Mein Name sei Gantenbein, p.182ff.

awareness of an artificial role which he is called upon to play as best he can: the role given to him has absorbed his private self entirely, it would seem, until there is no division. Perhaps this is why he appears to show annoyance at Karsch's report that Herr Fleisg had referred to Achim as a 'Sinnbild'<sup>1</sup>; and what appears as possibly modesty in this scene could also be a firm belief that he is a straightforward part of the Communist present with his whole self, and nothing as fanciful as a symbol of the future. It could of course also be a feeling of discomfort that the politicians are encroaching too much on his life - but is he as unpolitical as Jakob Abs?

The political man in him is constantly evident. One very revealing example of this occurs when Achim, out with Karsch, is waylaid by fans:

'Liebe Freunde: sagte er: ich habe meine Arbeit genau wie ihr; haltet mich nicht auf. (Da ging er mit Karsch Hemden kaufen.)'<sup>2</sup>

No trace of amusement follows these words, which in a Western 'star' would be interpreted as a convenient trick to get away, as exploitation of a privileged position for personal ends. But in Achim there seems to be no conscious 'white lie'; however ludicrous a statement it seems to us in the circumstances, he appears to have made it in all seriousness, as though the whole of his life, whether he is actually on political/state business or not, is 'Arbeit' for the state. Achim has no sense of humour, no sense of the ridiculous and the inappropriate because there seems to be only one way in which he can regard himself.

It is only in religion that one otherwise finds such a willingness to

1) Das dritte Buch "über Achim", p.44.

2) op.cit., p.35.

accept guidance from others for one's life. The impression Achim gives is that he has resigned all right to an individual will. His politeness is studied and repetitive, not spontaneous and lively<sup>1</sup>; this could of course suggest that he practises it simply for personal reasons without bringing it off very well, but there is no desire in him for material gain, as Karsch soon discovers when he recognizes that the 'rags-to-riches' formula is inappropriate.<sup>2</sup> And what other gain could there be from his popularity, unless he were simply a megalomaniac, in which case his mania would be blatantly obvious. It seems therefore that the politeness is adopted on superior advice and practised sincerely if woodenly as a vital part of the good Communist's life. The 'hero' label is not a passport to self-indulgence as it can be for the Western 'demi-god' but a call to development of one's capabilities as a social responsibility; and this view automatically leads to the rejection of individualism in favour of accepting experienced guidance, hence Achim is induced to aid Karsch as far as possible.<sup>3</sup> Only once does he have to think for himself, and that is when Karin unexpectedly disappears, when the type of emotion of which he is capable becomes finally clear:

'Hol sie zurück! sagte er. - Hol sie mir zurück! Aber sie war zu Freunden in einer anderen Stadt gefahren und nicht über die Grenze. Das hatte er missverstanden. Er hatte sich nun nicht vorstellen können dass sie mit ihm in einem Land blieb. Er dachte sie meinte immer noch ihn, weil er sie noch meinte.'<sup>4</sup>

Achim can only think in political terms: he assumes Karin has fled to the

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1) Das dritte Buch über Achim, p.205.

2) op.cit., p.57f.

3) op.cit., p.111.

4) op.cit., p.305.

West because her shock at discovering his part in the 1953 uprising had been 'hushed-up' for so many years would induce in her an emotional and political revulsion. He would not understand that it is her faith in human integrity as such which is most hurt - and in any case he has no knowledge of, perception for her own considerable difficulties.<sup>1</sup> So Achim's reaction shows that, although obviously hurt by Karin's supposed flight, he cannot separate their personal relationship from his own political context. Like Rohlf's he has no understanding of non-political motivation. But the touch of anger in his voice suggests that he is testily aware of something to be ashamed of in his past; yet is it his dishonesty, or the fact that he ever was non-Communist? Does he ever give the impression that secretly he feels he has denied his better self? The autocratic rather than humble tone suggests not, for it implies he will show Karin that she has misunderstood him.

A kind of inhumanity is evident when Achim relates certain incidents of his past. He is very concerned that his 'image' should be faultless in the political sense, so it is understandable that he does not want the story of the illegal acquisition of a gear-system to be included.<sup>2</sup> But when one adds to this rejection his concern about whether he could be accused of jilting his young girl-friend, his attitude becomes more questionable.<sup>3</sup> Even if one allows that there were some 'fault' in these actions, both could easily be excused as youthful folly; but Achim has no sense of proportion, he wants to

1) Das dritte Buch über Achim, p.211ff.

2) op.cit., p.226ff.

3) op.cit., p.178.

eradicate not just political 'mistakes' but normal human failings, dismissing them as 'anfängliches Zögern'.<sup>1</sup> In a State which insists on the eradication of individuality in service for a common good, it is indeed ironical that one of its leading 'examples' should be guilty of something approaching hubris. The section 'Und sonst nichts von Prag?'<sup>2</sup> shows up just how little real humanity the narrator feels in Achim: the latter's interest in Karin's change of address is interspersed with flashbacks to the race which he has just completed, as though the narrator could not accept Achim's apparent concern as genuine, and saw constantly behind the individual the State hero Karsch had just been watching on television.

To have written simply the details of Achim's life as they were visible to the world would have been to accept the Communist image: it would not have overlooked the private Achim behind the public image because he does not exist, but it would not have made it clear that there is nothing behind it. It is for this reason and not only because Achim denies facts that Karsch could not write his biography. The same 'inhumanity' as Achim shows is evident in his Communist advisors; when Frau Ammann stresses the importance of 'Nützlichkeit'<sup>3</sup> for the socialist author, she is intimating that the actual subject is irrelevant for it is the treatment that matters, and when, as the case is here, the proposed subject is a human life which is to be turned into a useful example for others, the notion of 'Verantwortung'<sup>4</sup>

1) Das dritte Buch über Achim, p.191.

2) op.cit., p.204ff.

3) op.cit., p.127ff.

4) op.cit., p.129.

seems very hollow. In the service of an ostensibly humanitarian ideal - the advancement of the masses - understanding of individual complexity is lost. The dishonesty of the image is doubly clear when we see Frau Ammann's own momentary fright when Karsch asks her bluntly where she had been before 1945:

'- Wo waren Sie bis neunzehnhundertfünfundvierzig: fragte das laufende Band mit Karschs Stimme...dunn schliff das unbesprochene Band wiedergegeben und traf abermals in Frau Ammanns Handausstrecken zum Glas, hielt die zusammenfliessende Arbeit der Muskeln an und knickte die Bewegung zu sichtbarem Schreck für die Dauer eines kürzeren Seitenblickes...'.<sup>1</sup>

She is falsifying both social history and human truth in fostering the image of Achim: she changes the past to suit the present and Achim concurs with her in this.<sup>2</sup> Together they reject the notion of gradual change and development of personality - Communism is here seen as, in fact, the destroyer of natural human personality. One could counter this by saying that Christianity also believes in the possibility of radical change - in conversion, a kind of volte-face. But Christianity also believes in the importance of admitting one's past faults, whereas Communism, as it is shown in the novel, tries to eradicate even the change of views itself, and does not so much turn away from as try to remodel entirely the past, positing a kind of infallibility in all good Communists, which reason must surely reject.

Achim is, then, a created personality who willingly accepts the image offered, not in order to continue another existence behind it, but in order to fit himself into it as far as possible. He shows no signs of missing

1) Das dritte Buch über Achim, p.136.

2) op.cit., p.239. 'Er suchte nach Spuren dieses Denkens....'.

what we mean by a private life. Frisch's characters expend all their energies on fighting images which restrict their humanity: Achim performs this restriction willingly. Walter Maria Guggenheimer saw something of this when he wrote:

'Achim...ist nicht mehr Partner, oder Opfer, Gegner, willentlicher Diener dieser Staatsmacht mit dem "erfinderischen Ansinnen", die Menschen "mochten noch andere werden"...: er ist bereits ihr Produkt.'<sup>1</sup>

He does not fit into any expected mould: he is not anxiously subservient, nor yet the reflective, rationally convinced Communist who would have every right to hold views he could justify in discussion, even if we, the readers, would not agree with them. His mind seems entirely shut to all other types of existence: he gains no tangible benefit from his position as sportsman and exemplary Communist - but is more active as the latter than would be necessary if all he wanted was to be allowed to get on with his sport. There is no part of his life which stands outside his socialist image and which could in any way derive profit or benefit from its cultivation - not even a sense of humour to derive amusement from the adulation of others and his power over them, or a sense of pride in that same power. Of course, there does not have to be a selfish reason for the 'change' in his views any more than one would expect to find one in a Christian conversion; but it is the absolute nature of the change which is so disturbing. If the past is hushed-up, one expects it to be through fear or hope of profit: neither cause seems to apply here. There are after all many ex-Nazis in the West who would rather forget the past, in order to lead a quiet life of private

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1) Walter Maria Guggenheimer, 'Nachwort' to Karsch und andere Prosa, p.93.

respectability - but Achim has no private life. He is not a personality who holds Communist views: he is nothing but a Communist; the fact that his life is so 'überschaubar' is its most worrying quality.

### Karin

To add to our understanding of this situation the figure of Karin is presented to us: she is far from being simply the excuse for Karsch's entry into East Germany. Karl Migner writes of her:

'Sie ist - im Gegensatz zu Achim - durchaus und ganz sie selbst und hebt sich in diesem Sein deutlich von Achim ab.'<sup>1</sup>

This is not quite accurate. What Karin does show is how difficult it is for anyone with a basically honest personality to submit to the imposition of an image, for Karin does indeed try to fit herself into the mould of a Communist star. The difference is that she has for some years had close contact with the West in Karsch, and has not grown up entirely within the supervised society of the East, as has Achim who through his cycling was soon involved in team-work plus attendant Communist training in corporate responsibility as opposed to individual exertion of will.

Karin's 'attachment' to East Germany is explicable as the acquisition of a kind of security she has never previously known. We do not know how great her talent is, but in the fiercely competitive world of the West she doubtless found it difficult to make a successful career: and this is important for her because she is alone in the world - no friends are

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1) Karl Migner, Das dritte Buch über Achim. Eine Interpretation, p.57.

mentioned and her mother is dead.<sup>1</sup> It is also suggested that the values her mother represented seem to have no relevance for her to the present, so that she has to create her own life, amid new standards:

'Der Sachwalter...tat alles, was ihr die tote Mutter beschrieben hatte als hinderlich für die Erlangung der ewigen Seligkeit.'<sup>2</sup>

That she is not interested in the art of films as such, but rather in the relative security she enjoys by acting in propagandist films is evident from her words to Karsch:

'Er (Karsch) hat diese Filme nicht gesehen, weil sie sofort sagte: Geh da nicht hin. Dass du dir das niemals ansiehst!'<sup>3</sup>

She is quite aware that what she is doing is a betrayal of art.

Karin certainly makes her feelings plainer than does Achim:

'Sie fuhr wild und heftig auf ihn (Karsch) los. - Sei nicht so eingebildet! sagte sie: Sei nicht so nervös!'<sup>4</sup>

This display of temper is uncalled for, and together with her fierce independence it suggests a profound lack of equanimity. The changes which Karsch notes in her support the impression that she cannot relax and is basically insecure; there is no radical difference - 'Karsch nach einer Woche zurückgefahren hätte seinen Freunden gesagt: Ihr kennt sie ja'<sup>5</sup> - but an intensification of self-control and self-possession, as though she has to concentrate very hard upon her conduct:

'Sie war älter, sie hatte sich und ihren Körper erzogen...Ich würde sagen dass ihr Blick kühler war und nichts mehr auslieferte.'<sup>6</sup>

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- 1) Das dritte Buch über Achim, p.300.
  - 2) op.cit., p.300.
  - 3) op.cit., p.18f.
  - 4) op.cit., p.27.
  - 5) op.cit., p.27.
  - 6) op.cit., p.35f.

The feature which strikes him even more forcibly than before is significantly Karin's ability to control and alter her facial expression:

'...dass sie ihr Gesicht so bei sich hatte und benutzen konnte für nicht zählbare Arten von Verhalten, deren ein Mensch überhaupt fähig ist...'.<sup>1</sup>

Everything about her is controlled rather than spontaneous on the whole; and the exceptions are very revealing. On one occasion she talks at length to Karsch about Achim's childhood.<sup>2</sup> She agrees with Karsch's rejection of the picture as improbable, but continues to muse, creating almost an idyll. Because she is aware of the discrepancy, one cannot interpret this passage as a naive belief in Achim's essential innocence; it is an escape for Karin herself into the dream of an unworried free existence. Her subsequent provocative dancing<sup>3</sup> seems then like an outburst against the need to watch herself closely all the time, another kind of escape which she soon tries to cancel out: 'Plötzlich sagte sie: Du musst es Achim nicht erzählen!'<sup>4</sup> Karsch finds that she is 'bemüht..ohne fremde Hilfe zu leben'<sup>5</sup>, as though she were afraid to let anyone see her emotions and needs. She knows that she is more vulnerable than a Western 'Personality' would be, because her opinions on topics entirely alien to acting are a public concern. Her wariness is evident when she says:

"Über die neuerlich wegweisenden Massnahmen des Sachwalters...sei sie sicherlich einer Meinung mit allen Menschen guten Willens.'<sup>6</sup>

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- 1) Das dritte Buch über Achim, p.36.
  - 2) op.cit., p.67f.
  - 3) op.cit., p.71f.
  - 4) op.cit., p.74.
  - 5) op.cit., p.37.
  - 6) op.cit., p.163.

It is as if she were trying to suppress her individuality as far as possible. But she is not a dedicated Communist; she accepts the system as far as it benefits her, with no concern for its dogmatic basis. When Karsch is ironically surprised at the ease with which she gains a new flat, she replies only: 'Kann ich für diesen Staat, du. Soll ich vielleicht...'.<sup>1</sup> In view of this unconcern, her attempts to speak Communist jargon after the newspaper report affair seem very pathetic<sup>2</sup>; but this is the language of genuine fear - and fear is human. Her reaction, if weak, is evidence of her basic lack of self-confidence; her stunned recognition of Achim's dishonesty<sup>3</sup> then reveals itself as disappointment and sadness. She must have felt that despite her own difficulties, the effort to conform might just be worthwhile since it could lead to the kind of assurance visible in Achim. To find this is based on a kind of fraud is a disillusionment, which mocks all her efforts to spare Achim embarrassment.<sup>4</sup> Her own momentary escapes show us how she has sacrificed her individuality to social position: the 'truth' about Achim shows her that the ultimate sacrifice is not worthy of her efforts, as also that it is not reached by effort alone.

The contrast between Achim and Karin is then an important one. Non-communists most certainly try to assume 'images' also, but usually for personal reasons: this is where Karin's humanity shows through, in her use of Communism to find a degree of security. Her taciturnity<sup>5</sup> suggests that

1) Das dritte Buch über Achim, p.209.

2) op.cit., p.223.

3) op.cit., p.292.

4) op.cit., p.302.

5) op.cit., p.107.

she does not deceive herself at all. In Achim the deceit would seem to be immeasurably greater - even to the point of no longer being recognized as such.<sup>1</sup> To write a biography of such a man, if one is honest in the accepted ethical sense, is an impossible task.

### The Political implications of Karsch's difficulties

All biography demands some selection, of course, and Günther Blöcker suggests that Karsch's difficulties derive primarily from the impossibility of describing any other human life adequately:

'Dass Achims Geschichte nicht geschrieben werden kann, liegt nicht allein an der Ungunst politischer Verhältnisse, es ist schlechterdings in der Unmöglichkeit begründet, dem Leben eines anderen mit Worten nahezukommen, die mehr wollen, als Möglichkeiten zur Auswahl stellen und eine "unentschiedene Zusammensetzung von Ungefährern".'<sup>2</sup>

This might certainly be true if Karsch were trying to write a very detailed character study of Achim: he might then find, as the characters do in Mutmassungen über Jakob, that to understand another human fully is impossible. But Karsch's attempts fail ultimately on the much more basic level of ascertainment of fact. Difficulties are put in Karsch's way over and above those facing any conscientious biographer, and indeed the general difficulty of biography is only sketchily developed in the novel<sup>3</sup>, despite the attempt by some critics to give it central importance.<sup>4</sup> If it were only Achim who

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- 1) Cf. R. Hinton Thomas, The German Novel and the Affluent Society, p.119: talking of Achim's concealment of fact, he says: '..the extent to which he is now aware of it is open to question.'
  - 2) Günther Blöcker, Kritisches Lesebuch, p.198.
  - 3) Das dritte Buch über Achim, p.235f.
  - 4) e.g. Herbert Ahl, 'Dichter des gespaltenen Deutschland', Diplomatischer Kurier, 10 Jg., Heft 21, 18 Oct., 1961, pp.763-766.

were concealing or disregarding information, the book would be more general in application. What makes Achim's case so particular is that it involves not just opportunism, but a widely-shared conspiracy intended to influence great numbers of people. The most 'general' message the book could contain is that purely adulatory biography is dishonest because inevitably superficial - a point suggested by the fact that Johnson has in fact modelled his Achim partly on the East German idol T"ave Schur, on whom two very dull, fulsome biographies have been written.<sup>1</sup>

The change that Karsch notices in Karin since her settling in the East indicates that we are to understand the novel not as a general book on difficulty of contact, but as a contrast between two distinct manners of existence. This view is further reinforced by the nature of some of the questions which direct the course of the narrative; they reveal a concept of truth different from that of the Communist authorities and sometimes a complete misunderstanding of the East German situation. For example, the question 'F"uhlte Karsch sich von Beobachtern verfolgt?'<sup>2</sup> shows a readiness to see East Germany as a sinister place full of spies. In saying of Achim 'Der wird doch hochm"utig sein'<sup>3</sup>, the questioner is applying Western 'star' psychology without waiting to see if it is appropriate; and in the question 'Wird es nun doch die Geschichte von der Dame mit den beiden Herren?'<sup>4</sup> he shows how ready he is to fit details into preconceived categories and abandon

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1) Karl Pestalozzi, 'Achim alias T"ave Schur', Sprache im technischen Zeitalter, May 1963, pp.479-486.

2) Das dritte Buch "uber Achim, p.26.

3) op.cit., p.31.

4) op.cit., p.133.

all efforts to retain an open mind. But sometimes the Western concept of truth emerges in the questions. When Achim wants the story of his illegal trip into West Berlin omitted, the questioner comments 'Das ist aber doch nicht wahr!' <sup>1</sup>, and 'Das lässt sich doch nicht ersetzen!' <sup>2</sup>, and in the query 'Was heisst hier zu privat?' <sup>3</sup> the Communist identification of public and private life is rejected. What he asks is often highly irrelevant from the Communist point of view, but very pointed for the Western reader; the questioner wants to know whether Achim's father was in fact responsible for the sabotage <sup>4</sup>, while this is of very secondary importance for Frau Ammann, who rates usefulness above factual truth. This is not to say that the questioner represents the only 'right' view: both he and Karsch have a strong interest in 'truth' where this happens to work against the Communists - all evidence of Achim's earlier opposition is greeted with particular interest, as the narrator indicates when he shows that Karsch could have portrayed many afternoons instead of the one he did choose - the one on which Achim entered West Berlin. <sup>5</sup> What one sees is largely what one wants to see: but this is said far more generally in Mutmassungen über Jakob where all kinds of isolated vision are portrayed; in Das dritte Buch über Achim the problem is related to political differences more specifically. The use of contrast - between Karin and Achim, between the questioner and the Communist officials - suggests that Johnson is writing about one particular

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1) Das dritte Buch über Achim, p.234.

2) op.cit., p.239.

3) op.cit., p.143.

4) op.cit., p.101.

5) op.cit., p.235f.

situation, rather than about general possibilities. What he shows us is a divergence of attitude to what constitutes a personality. Karsch is looking for the man behind the heroic image - and finds there is nothing there. Fleisg demands a portrayal of 'die ganze Person'<sup>1</sup>, but this is an artificial 'Ganzes'; Karsch allows for Achim's desire to present himself in as good a light as possible when the latter relates incidents and then retracts, but he is not prepared to accept outright dishonesty, and the dishonesty resides not in Achim alone. Frau Ammann reproaches Karsch for being factual<sup>2</sup>; she wants him to write a 'useful' book rather than a 'true' one - and yet she has pretensions to 'realism'. In one section we read her reported words to Karsch:

'...(es) sei eben dem Schriftsteller die Mitarbeit aufgegeben an Befestigung und Ausbau des in Aussicht genommenen Weges.'<sup>3</sup>

She goes on to detail what she means, stressing thus her down-to-earth attitude to life; but her whole view of Achim is nothing but an image. She both implicitly claims a realistic view of life and uses utterly unrealistic and inexact methods to promote it - the ultimate in hypocrisy. This is a very specific unmasking of one type of Communist procedure.

It has been claimed by some critics that the choice of a racing cyclist as the subject for a biography is both pointless and unlikely, since the task would in any case hardly be given to a West German.<sup>4</sup> It is not however difficult to imagine that a West German who showed interest would be

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1) Das dritte Buch über Achim, p.59.

2) op.cit., p.126.

3) op.cit., p.128.

4) e.g. Reich-Ranicki, Deutsche Literatur in West und Ost, p.243. Blöcker, Kritisches Lesebuch, p.197.

encouraged to develop it as a kind of flattery to the State, for propaganda can be taken to extremes of silliness, as is shown, for instance, by a report that the Chinese claimed the sale of imitation Red Guard uniforms in Carnaby Street at £7 a piece as incontrovertible evidence of the great expense to which British youth will go to demonstrate sympathy with Mao Tse Tung's thought!<sup>1</sup> There is nothing so wildly preposterous about the assumption behind Das dritte Buch über Achim. One would assume that in the figure of a sportsman, Western and Eastern interests could meet most easily; but the failure to understand even such a category of Communism is a devastating comment on the deep division between the two halves of Germany. In the opening pages of the book the intention is made clear: we are not to see exciting adventures, but learn to appreciate that the division in Germany is more than just a state boundary - it is the severing of what should be and recently was one. That is why the 'Entfernung'<sup>2</sup> is so tragic. The choice of an attempted biography as a subject represents the hope for a kind of lowest common factor: the doctrinal differences are well known, but surely human personality is basically the same on both sides of the boundary? The terrible answer is that in some cases it is not: there is nothing left to be shared. The novel is not saying that Achim has been brain-washed, and that left to himself he would necessarily have been different: this would be to slip into the typical Westerner's melodramatic view of the East. The situation portrayed is dreadful enough in that it shows Communism will accept and foster such 'image-making'.

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1) Report in the B.B.C. News, 10. April, 1967.

2) Das dritte Buch über Achim, pp.9 & 337.

It is the failure to recognise the significance of biography as an attempt to understand something as basic as human personality that has led Deschner to make such dogmatic statements as the following:

"Das dritte Buch über Achim" ist ein Roman über einen Radsportler in Ostdeutschland; kein Buch über Ostdeutschland, noch weniger über die Teilung unseres Landes.<sup>1</sup>

He ridicules the question and answer form - 'dieses stupide Strukturieren soll witzig sein'<sup>2</sup> - because he does not appreciate either the value of the contrast, nor that of the abandonment of straightforward narrative, which one could see as an emotional reaction on the part of the narrator and Karsch and so the final point of contrast to the Communist 'realism' which purports to know, understand and control all. What Deschner claims is 'salopp' as a structure was never intended to appear 'jungenhaft', 'elastisch' or 'sportlich'<sup>3</sup> as he seems to think, on the basis of which assumption he condemns it.

#### Limitations of the work

Precisely because it is a novel about the gulf between West and East this is however to some extent a limited book, for we must be interested in the problem initially, since the characters as such are subordinated to the contrast-scheme; it is one of the requirements of the book that we should feel their distance from us, not their almost tangible reality, as is the case with Jakob Abs. It is after all a novel about the impossibility of getting 'near' to one 'personality', as well as a plea not to dramatize the

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1) Karlheinz Deschner, Talente. Dichter. Dilettanten, p.190.

2) *op.cit.*, p.192.

3) *op.cit.*, p.192.

division of Germany and so obscure the true issues which divide it. Our attention is held to some extent by the indications of Karsch's increasing desperation which we are made to share, although the process is complete before the book opens. For example, we are given Karsch's first attempt to write about Achim<sup>1</sup> and only some pages later the revelation that this description has been rejected as inadequate by Fleisg.<sup>2</sup> By this order we follow exactly Karsch's reactions: interest in a well-loved sporting figure, enjoyment in presenting the movement and vitality of the scene, and then suddenly the incomprehensible rejection of what is felt to be a very competent piece of work. Some sequences seem at first simply to hold up the narrative, for example:

'Sehr aufregend könnte an Frau Leibenreuths Klingelknopf eine sauber um den Nagel gerundete Fingerspitze erschienen sein, die mit Druck und Senkung den offenen Stromkreis schliesst und auf der anderen Seite regelmässige Schläge der Hammerfeder gegen eine isolierte aufgehängte Glockenscheibe auslöst...'.<sup>3</sup>

In this case the irrelevant description suggests the writer's dearth of interesting information of the type expected by the questioner who says 'Es ist so gar nicht spannend!'<sup>4</sup> in disappointment. The section performs the function of antagonization mentioned above<sup>5</sup>, showing the narrator's slight bitterness, and reflecting also Karsch's position - he is not hampered by an inability to use words, but cannot penetrate beyond what he considers trivialities to the 'heart' of the subject which he supposes to

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1) Das dritte Buch über Achim, p.13ff.

2) op.cit., p.45.

3) op.cit., p.157.

4) op.cit., p.157.

5) Cf. above, p. 321.

be there. The long descriptions of Achim's cycling career towards the end of the book are equally ironically used: the dabbling in isolated incidents of his youth have been abandoned, and for the first time a fairly lengthy sequence of events is narrated<sup>1</sup>, but cycling is the least important aspect of Achim's existence in some ways. That Karsch and the narrator turn to it eventually is evidence of their inability to penetrate any deeper. There is heavy irony in the words:

'Karsch war also bereit das Fehlende zu ersetzen mit der minuten-gerechten Beschreibung aller Rennen, die Achim je gefahren war. Ihn hatte ja ohnehin die darstellende Vorführung des Rennfahrens verleitet zur Beschreibung eines Lebens.'<sup>2</sup>

It should however be added that not every passage of this kind is so functional; the description of the typewriter mechanism<sup>3</sup> is irritating at the stage at which it appears, adding little to the significance of the section - the close watch kept on all citizens, except perhaps to indicate at rather unnecessary length that only mechanical things can be viewed and investigated openly, while human lives are hidden from view. Johnson's interest in tangible, 'knowable' things as opposed to the mystery of human lives verges here on mannerism, minute description for its own sake.

The ultimate expression of the growing frustration we can trace through the novel occurs when the narrator describes Achim's reaction to Karsch's departure:

'Wie nahm Achim das auf?  
Mit Bedauern. Er zeigte Bedauern. Er schien es zu bedauern.'<sup>4</sup>

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- 1) Das dritte Buch über Achim, p.247ff.  
 2) op.cit., p.246.  
 3) op.cit., p.115ff.  
 4) op.cit., p.331.

Three successive attitudes are distinguishable here; firstly, the narrator, via Karsch's memory, feels that Achim regretted the departure, hence the plain statement, which perhaps conveys Achim's own words. But then he questions whether the regret is real and can only say that Achim showed regret, and leave it open. However, the more Karsch saw of Achim, the more puzzling the latter's actions became, so finally we read 'er schien es zu bedauern' which weakens the original observation even more. The whole pattern of the novel is repeated here: the movement from simple observation through doubt to confusion. We are thus allowed to feel something of Karsch's increasing desperation - to feel the inhumanity of Achim bringing out precisely Karsch's humanity, his confusion, failure, depression, all shown in the refusal to co-operate with the questioner.

But our ability to experience through the narrator what Karsch felt does not minimize the fact that this experience rests upon the contrast in human understanding between East and West Germany: the non-German reader is liable to dissociate himself from the problem, and ultimately it must depend on the individual as to how much he is moved by a problem of personality he cannot observe in his own world. It would be possible to observe Frisch's 'image-making' process in endless variation, but the problem of Achim lacks by its very nature the sheer entertainment value of, for example, the schizophrenic Maria-Mariquita of Hofmannsthal's Andreas who puzzles and fascinates by the contrast in character. The form of Johnson's novel is well-designed, however, to bring out precisely the unusual opaqueness of the figure facing Karsch in East Germany, and makes the reader immediately aware that here is something very different from the merciless psychological investigation found in so

many twentieth century novels.

To take one critic of the twentieth century novel, David Daiches writes:

'Closely linked to the new view of time was the new view of consciousness deriving in a general way from the work of Freud and Jung but concentrating on the fact of the multiplicity of consciousness, the presence in the given consciousness of all that it had ever experienced and perhaps also of all that the race had experienced..The past exists always in the present, coloring and determining the nature of the present response, and to tell the truth about a character's reaction to any situation, we must tell the whole truth about everything that has ever happened to him.'<sup>1</sup>

This is a summary of new possibilities open to the modern novelist, and we see by Johnson's rejection of them in Das dritte Buch über Achim, after he has shown us in Mutmassungen über Jakob how important the past as personal experience can be in the present - for example, in Gesine's inability to settle happily in the West - how deliberate must be the form which he has chosen. In this special case of a problem personality, not even the oldest methods of narration - the straightforward telling of a story - are able to show a man who has abandoned all that made him an individual in the full sense and who has become precisely what most modern novelists, including Frisch and Johnson in his earlier novel, are trying to avoid: a schematic personality who can be summed up in a few words.

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1) David Daiches, The Novel and the Modern World, revised edition, Chicago, 1965, p.7f.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF 'EINE REISE WEGWOHIN, 1960'  
TO 'DAS DRITTE BUCH ÜBER ACHIM'

It has been shown that the short studies relating to the figures which appear in Mutmassungen über Jakob support the impression given by that novel: namely, that Johnson is interested above all in the individual person. Consequently it is interesting to see that the prose narrative Eine Reise wegwohin, 1960<sup>1</sup>, in which Karsch appears, has a primarily political tone as has the novel Das dritte Buch über Achim. We have already seen that the latter deals with very specific effects of Communism on the personality.

The tale opens with a far more detailed account of Karsch's mental state prior to the journey than is found in the novel. We are given an impression of his dissatisfaction with his way of life, of his inability to create a satisfactory relationship with his son, of his general feelings of approaching age: he is, in fact, a man very much preoccupied with himself. In this situation the invitation to visit East Germany comes as a welcome chance to reorientate himself by creating a link with a pleasurable episode of his past:

'Er fuhr ab wegen des Balkons, hinter dem in einem baumgrünen Zimmer er vor Jahren gelebt hatte mit ihr in Westberlin..'.<sup>2</sup>

All this emphasizes Karsch's unpreparedness for political impressions; the journey is made for highly personal reasons. He is not interested in the

1) Karsch und andere Prosa, p.29ff.

2) op.cit., p.32.

East for its own sake, and is perhaps freer from the more popular misconceptions than he might otherwise have been. But he cannot remain oblivious to political differences; not having armed himself with Western self-confidence, he is confused rather than amused by what he sees of the constant emphasis on comparison with the West:

'...der Nachdruck war ihm von Hörensagen bekannt, er war zu Hause zum Lachen gewesen, es war den Polizisten ernst, und er hielt sich an einen beiläufigen, fast kameradschaftlichen Ton, der dem des Krieges benachbart war, kam so durch.'<sup>1</sup>

He has not come as a political figure, but finds himself forced to be one to some extent; a degree of political awareness is awakened, and with it the latent prejudice of the Westerner, the more insidious for being relatively unselfconscious. Its existence emerges clearly in Karsch's first encounter with Achim; the entire lack of understanding between the two is established when Karsch interprets Achim's initial reserve as embarrassment:

'Anfangs vermutete Karsch, der Mensch schäme sich für sein Parteiabzeichen, aber immer wieder ein strahlendes Lächeln kam ihm gutwillig vor, machte ihn irre.'<sup>2</sup>

Achim's inability to grasp the fact that Karsch's journalism is a commercial not a political occupation is a misinterpretation of the same order, and we are told later<sup>3</sup> of his rejection of much of Karsch's biography - as in the novel - but the emphasis remains mainly on Karsch, once the radical difference of views has been established. More stress is laid, for example, on Karsch's particular interest in the weaknesses of Communism, in details

1) Karsch und andere Prosa, p.33.

2) op.cit., p.34.

3) op.cit., p.47.

which can be given an anti-communist bias, than is evident in the novel, despite Migner's emphasis on this aspect of the latter.<sup>1</sup> Karsch, his awareness of difference aroused by the meeting with Achim, attempts deliberate comparisons of the ways of life, but it is still very much personal curiosity which motivates him, the reporter's instinct for interesting details, rather than a desire for research in depth: hence the pronounced anti-communist bias, for he must be aware of popular interest in such details. He chooses, for instance, a child who differentiates naively between wicked and good tank manoeuvres, displaying for the Western eye a considerable degree of indoctrination.<sup>2</sup> The political differences and their investigation provide something in the nature of a game.<sup>3</sup>

However, there is clear indication of the gradual changes in Karsch's attitudes. In the novel, the form indicates effectively the intense bewilderment produced by Achim's personality; the short story concentrates more directly on the progress of the change. The almost childish joy in 'discovery' gives way to more circumspect reserve:

'Anfangs hatte sie (Karin) ihn auf die ärgerlichsten westdeutschen Manieren hingewiesen; seitdem verbreitete er sich, etwa, bei der umständlichen Vorbereitung eines Ferngesprächs nicht mehr über den automatischen Verkehr in Westdeutschland, zog überhaupt seine Vergleiche ohne sie auszudrücken, stellte sein Auto schlichter ab, kleidete sich den Einheimischen ähnlich, liess kaum ein Gericht noch zurückgehen in die Küche, wollte auch die Küchen nicht noch besichtigen.'<sup>4</sup>

Here we see that he is beginning to lose some of his earlier ostentation;

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- 1) Karl Migner, Das dritte Buch über Achim. Eine Interpretation, p.48.
  - 2) Karsch und andere Prosa, p.42.
  - 3) op.cit., p.41.
  - 4) op.cit., p.44.

but he is still a very un-political man in a deeper sense.

The confrontation with his biographical subject, Achim, is another element in Karsch's progression beyond a priori assumptions. Again the problem arises of whether Johnson is saying that one cannot understand any other person entirely.<sup>1</sup> In Mutmassungen über Jakob he most certainly suggests that our knowledge of each other is limited, and shows Communism to be the worst offender in this direction, for while all of us suffer from insufficient awareness of our fellows, it imposes a positive, final image: Man is seen to be worthy in proportion to his ability to subordinate personal values to the needs of the State. But the strictly biographical problem in the second novel, and in this short story, is rather different. It is irrelevant to ask whether it is ever possible to recreate a whole person on paper; far more important is Karsch's discovery that in the East, even the degree of truth which he is used to achieving is denied to him, for he assumes that to some extent he will be able to penetrate behind the public image:

'Für ihn aber, Karsch, waren Lebensbeschreibungen gute, unterhaltsame Arbeit. Er fand es regelmässig lehrreich, eine Person anzusehen auf ihre Entstehung, hinter der Person ihr Leben zu finden. Es machte Spass, einer bewussten Vergangenheit die tatsächliche zu finden...'.<sup>2</sup>

The contrast of the two words 'bewusst' and 'tatsächlich' suggests a belief that discrepancies between fact and the subject's own memories can be attributed to some unconscious process of mutation. The dramatic concealment of Achim's participation in revolt is needed for the lengthier fabric

1) Cf. above, p. 344f.

2) Karsch und andere Prosa, p.45.

of the novel to give it a distinct climax, a 'detective-story' element comparable to the 'mystery' of Jakob's death - although it is a little misleading since many people have episodes in their past they would rather forget; in the short tale it is not used, and the rejection of apparently quite innocuous material is concentrated on.<sup>1</sup> Concealment is less of a problem than reinterpretation, which brings out the constant political, dogmatic purpose of the Communist 'image'.

It is important to note here Johnson's scrupulous fairness. He portrays Achim's attitude, but not in order to contrast it with Karsch's exemplary truthfulness. Karsch is seen to argue against Communist jargon and misconceptions, but without the honesty to admit that he himself is not really well-informed. He finds his lack of precise knowledge 'hinderlich', not regrettable:

'Manchmal, etwa wenn er Achim kriegslüsterne Barone in der Ruhrindustrie auszureden versuchte, kam ihm hinderlich bei, dass er von der Ruhrgegend vielleicht nur den Nachtschnellzug genau wusste...'.<sup>2</sup>

The episode of Karsch's visit to Niebuhrs<sup>3</sup> represents perhaps a mistaken spirit of enquiry. Time brings great change anywhere, and it is the nature of the intervening years which matters, as is seen when Karsch finds it so hard to adopt the East German manner of speech:

'Selbst in umgänglichen Reden der gewöhnlichen Leute fand er sich kaum unauffällig zurecht, da ihm zehn Jahre dieser Geschichte fehlten...'.<sup>4</sup>

- 1) Karsch und andere Prosa, p.47f.
- 2) op.cit., p.50.
- 3) op.cit., p.52ff.
- 4) op.cit., p.40.

Karsch learns little from his nostalgic visit to Mecklenburg because he looks for some trace of strict continuity linking the present to the past. This is of course precisely what Achim seeks to establish, but by 'altering' the past to fit the present while Karsch learns that one cannot expect the two to 'fit'. He learns more, however, by forgetting about himself and by observing East German refugees. He begins to see that their apparently simple reasons for flight derive from something more than 'allgemeine Sturheiten der ostdeutschen Politik'.<sup>1</sup> They simply cannot express their discontent, because the ten years of separate development has deprived both sides of shared political, social and economic concepts:

'Da war die ostdeutsche Sprache ins Elend gekommen. Sie lief hier nicht um, galt für nichts als was zurückgeblieben war, ihr Zeichen vermochten das Bezeichnete nicht zu überführen, nur mit der Sprache waren die Fremden gekommen, die verständigte sie nicht, sie konnte auf Mitkenntnis nicht rechnen.'<sup>2</sup>

Karsch realizes that for years he has lacked understanding of their plight; but as soon as he makes some progress, his knowledge is immediately shown to be still far from complete:

'...denn er meinte ja wunder was gemein zu haben mit den Fremden an Kenntnis und Anspielung in Lippenschürzen oder Verstummen aus den neunzig Tagen, die er ihr Gast gewesen war...'.<sup>3</sup>

Oddly enough, it is not until later that he feels dissatisfaction with his position, when one might have expected an increasingly complacent trust in his own 'understanding'. He reacts emotionally:

1) Karsch und andere Prosa, p.60.

2) loc.cit.

3) op.cit., p.61.

'Der Nachmittag hatte ihm die Empfindung von Dazwischen auf den Leib gerückt, die war ihm so unheimlich, er brachte seine ost-deutschen Sachen ins Reine, sich in Sicherheit zurück.'<sup>1</sup>

Something within him - perhaps physical exhaustion, perhaps the deep-seated honesty of the trained reporter - makes him long to escape his present position of continual half-understanding, and he is irrationally glad to reenter Hamburg.

A very large proportion of the narrative is concerned with events after the 'homecoming', a period which scarcely figures in the novel. This suggests at once a divergent purpose, which is soon made plain. Though Karsch had progressed apparently only little in appreciation of the differences between West and East, he finds the standard Western attitude impossible. He meets in fact himself as he was:

'Karsch benutzte den Begriff Aufenthaltsgenehmigung. Eine ostdeutsche Aufenthaltsgenehmigung für Leute von Zeitungen war nun erst recht unerfindlich, warum warst du da so lange, man sieht doch alles auf den ersten Blick.'<sup>2</sup>

He had not gone consciously thinking this, but his practical comparisons had been based on very similar assumptions. The prejudices which emerge are very illuminating. Whereas a traveller who absent-mindedly uses phrases from the foreign land he has just visited is hardly noticed, anything smacking of Communism is immediately suspect<sup>3</sup>: in other words, nobody is even prepared to try looking at East Germany as just another land. It is to Karsch's credit that despite his feeling of superior comprehension earlier on, he cannot treat East Germany either as immediately suspicious and 'wicked'

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1) Karsch und andere Prosa, p.63.

2) *op.cit.*, p.65.

3) *op.cit.*, p.65f.

in some ill-defined way, or as just another land to travel in and write reports about. Something in his experience has been profoundly disturbing and forces him to cut across political taboos and regulations for procedure and reference.<sup>1</sup> The disturbance he causes is the more significant when one remembers his efforts before the trip to secure a quiet existence.<sup>2</sup> Something indefinable prevents him from functioning as the simple 'Augenzeuge' of earlier days.<sup>3</sup> The subject of East Germany becomes an obsession with him, perhaps because his mind is clouded by ill-health, but nevertheless he is able to detect some glaring inconsistencies, even hypocrisies in Western attitudes which indicate an almost superstitious hatred of the East:

'Je mehr Kenntnisse in der Staatstheorie er zusammenbrachte, desto deutlicher wurde in jeder Versuchsanordnung, dass Ostdeutschland die klassischen Kennzeichen eines Staates aufwies wie Westdeutschland auch, was ein Staat so braucht in den Augen der Wissenschaft...; fast wurde ihm die Stirn unerfindlich, mit der die regierende Politik die Wissenschaft hinterging; mit einem Mal verblüffte ihn, wie bisher ein an aussenpolitische Weisungen gebundenes Land...eben solcher Eigenschaften wegen einem anderen die Existenz absprach...'.<sup>4</sup>

Karsch loses much of West German pride during his investigations and makes considerable advances in objective judgement; and yet it is strongly underlined here that his insight is still the result of chance, not of a true will to discover truth. With reference to his 'report' on the trip we read:

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1) Karsch und andere Prosa, p.67ff.

2) op.cit., p.29.

3) op.cit., p.69.

4) op.cit., p.71.

'Überdies hielt er sich vor, gedankenlos einen Plan angefangen zu haben, der allemal beliebig war, da ein Herr Karsch vor der Reise die Wiedervereinigung kaum für das dringlichste Problem deutscher Politik angesehen hatte...'.<sup>1</sup>

This point is borne out by the opening of the narrative, with its emphasis on the very personal nature of Karsch's journey. What he has gained by this chance and what others lack, is an awareness of the East which goes beyond factual recognition of its existence. For him it is a 'lebendes Land'<sup>2</sup>, for others it is an exciting because controversial, and emotionally entangled, problem - which brings for Karsch a tiresome notoriety value. Perhaps again because of weariness rather than urgent desire for truth, Karsch dispenses with all the careful diplomacy which surrounds the subject and asks:

'...warum, aus welchen Gründen, mit welchem Recht, wozu die Damen und Herren sich vereinigen wollten mit den Fremden, Brüdern, Schwestern, die seit dem Krieg in ungebrochener Haltung entbehrt werden können...'.<sup>3</sup>

There is nothing heroic about his outspokenness, but having fled from something he only half understood, he is saddened to find utter incomprehension at home. Perhaps his retirement to Italy is a useless gesture; certainly he lacks the defiant opposition of youth and to some extent compromises with his conscience, so that he can write unpolitical reports in peace. But at least, it is implied, he lacks hypocrisy; he may have avoided the issue, but at least he has avoided dramatizing it into self-righteous martyrdom. This, it is implied, is what the average German tends

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1) Karsch und andere Prosa, p.72f.

2) op.cit., p.74.

3) op.cit., p.76.

to do when he talks of the 'Not der deutschen Teilung', emphasizing the suffering not only of the others, but of himself and his fellow Westerners also.<sup>1</sup> The final words of the narrative take the reader right back into the general political situation, into the 'Not, mit der wir so leben', the implication being at once that we live with it too easily, have lived with it too long, and that to have to live with it at all is monstrous.<sup>2</sup>

This is, then, primarily a story about Western attitudes. It concentrates on Karsch the man, his initial lack of political consciousness and his gradual development. It is thus a work complementary to Das dritte Buch über Achim. We have seen that in the novel the centre of interest is the possible destructive effect of Communism on the natural development of human personality; the Westerner finds this hard to appreciate, because none of his standards is applicable to a personality who wants to be one-sided, programmatic. Johnson brings out the mistaken notions of a typical Westerner by making the questioner's queries and comments sufficiently inappropriate to the situation being presented, thus preventing us from making equally summary comments on the situation since we detect the discrepancy as a warning.<sup>3</sup> But the Western questioner enters only sporadically, as a repeated jolt to our attention. Clearly a major political debate is not feasible in a novel: one aspect must be selected for detailed examination and demonstration. It is in Eine Reise wegwohin, 1960 that the other side is presented more clearly - the Western prejudice

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1) Karsch und andere Prosa, p.81, my underlining.

2) loc.cit.

3) Cf. above, p. 318f.

and hypocrisy which are also to blame for lack of understanding between the two Germanys, while all too frequently the East alone bears the blame.

A comparison of the two works shows, therefore, that the Karsch-Achim material interested Johnson for its political content and potentialities, whether one rejects the portrayal of West German embarrassment as does Reich-Ranicki<sup>1</sup>, or accepts it as does Blöcker.<sup>2</sup> In writing the novel Johnson had to sacrifice something of the balance between the two sides in order to preserve the story-value of the work, just as he introduced a 'dramatic' concealment of truth in order to shake the reader out of any lethargy produced by the ultimately far more significant rejections of small details of the past: the maintenance of interest is more of a problem in a longer work. The short story creates the balance which is schematically present in the novel, and does reinforce the interpretation of the latter as a novel about Communism rather than about the problems of biography as such, for the two works are thematically very closely linked.

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1) Marcel Reich-Ranicki, Literatur der kleinen Schritte, Munich, 1967, p.53.

2) Günther Blöcker, Literatur als Teilhabe, p.31f.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### ZWEI ANSICHTEN

The reader of this novel is immediately struck by its relatively straightforward and traditional form in contrast to that of Johnson's previous novels; there can be no question here of the author attempting to attract attention by ingenuity alone. Instead of presenting instances of contact between East and West with the resultant difficulties in understanding - such as we find in Das dritte Buch über Achim - or with the ensuing intensification of isolation, the theme of Mutmassungen über Jakob, Johnson has dealt in this third novel with problems of entire separation. The change in subject matter is to be explained primarily by the worsening of the political situation and the appearance of the ultimate symbol of division: the Berlin Wall. Does the value of the novel then lie simply in its relevance to contemporary conditions? Or has Johnson found another means of portraying the theme of human isolation? If the latter, then Zwei Ansichten is an improvement on Mutmassungen über Jakob, for it certainly lacks the obscurities which detract from that novel's appeal; if the former, is it sufficiently interesting to hold the attention of readers who lack first-hand experience of the situation? Das dritte Buch über Achim, although its effectiveness must depend to some extent on the reader's willingness to see the basic problem of division and difference as serious, does enable one to share in the bewilderment and shock felt by Karsch, which is conveyed by the form as well as by direct statement.

Form

In commenting on the form of this novel, Johnson has suggested that the psychology of his separated characters interested him most:

'Hier...sind es lediglich "zwei Ansichten", in der Hauptsache nur zwei Personen, deren Aufenthaltsorte, Handlungen, Auffassungen und Entschlüsse streng auseinandergehalten sind. Es ist eben eine einfachere Geschichte, grossenteils sogar geeignet für das traditionelle Verfahren, die Entwicklung von Gefühlsregungen zu beschreiben.'<sup>1</sup>

This statement suggests an interest in human behaviour as such, as does at first the obvious parallel to the Romeo and Juliet story, which has become an almost archetypal framework for studies of forbidden devotion. But when Johnson acknowledges this parallel, he stresses the cause of the separation:

'...die Familienfehde, die der Verbindung der Kinder widersteht, ist heutzutage ersetzt durch die Fehde der Staaten, die ihre Bürger für sich behalten wollen;...und die absolute Trennung, durch den Tod, gibt sich zumindest als Risiko so zeitgemäss wie vor vier oder vierzehn Jahrhunderten.'<sup>2</sup>

Although he goes on to enumerate his alterations to the love story, this description of the circumstances emphasises its particularity. It is unclear which element - the universal or the specific - Johnson has considered the most important, and therefore necessary to enquire which emerges most strongly from the novel, or whether the two are made to coexist successfully.

The major problem involved in the adaptation of a traditional form is the avoidance of banality. The basic situation - the separation and death of two young lovers - is hackneyed, 'ein schwerbelastetes, ein heikles

1) Uwe Johnson, 'Auskünfte und Abreden zu "Zwei Ansichten"', p.8.

2) *op.cit.*, p.5.

Motiv...dem man heute eher in einem Illustriertenroman begegnen dürfte'.<sup>1</sup>

But is it also true, as the same critic claims, that Johnson 'hat alles getan, um diese Anklänge zu verwischen'<sup>2</sup>? Certainly in Johnson's version the lovers do not die but overcome separation. This of course robs the story of its tragic value, and to replace this Johnson appears to have turned to a study of the effects of isolation on two characters.

Presentation of the characters: Der junge Herr B.

Each figure has a short opening chapter, and they are presented alternately. To take first 'der junge Herr B.': the first chapter established clearly his basic characteristics. He is a very ordinary, rather weak figure: his ordinariness lies in his vague awareness of moral values but lack of determination and conviction. In terms of his particular occupation, this means a convenient neglect of pictures which would seriously embarrass the local welfare authorities and so end B.'s career locally.<sup>3</sup> In addition, B. exhibits a liking for showiness which hides a lack of real self-confidence, and he seeks always to gain acceptance and recognition by 'making an impression'. An excellent detail is the adding of his account number to his visiting card.<sup>4</sup> It shows his desire to be well thought of by others, but specifically in a material sense with no relation to character. It is so obvious an action that we also see at once that there is no question here of problematic personality, as there was in Das dritte Buch über Achim.

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1) Rudolf Hartung, 'Zwei Ansichten', Die Neue Rundschau, 76 Jg., 1965, p.685.

2) Hartung, loc.cit.

3) Zwei Ansichten, Frankfurt, 1965, p.7.

4) loc.cit.

B's most vulnerable point is his dependence upon material things for his confidence: 'Er führte den Wagen mit sich wie andere Leute die Uhr, er kam ohne ihn nicht aus.'<sup>1</sup> The loss of his car is therefore the loss of his self-respect as a 'man of the world': the man whose status depends on artificial creation only falls the lower when the symbol is lost, hence B's inflated language of defeat: 'Niederlage'<sup>2</sup> presupposes the existence of some hostile force, an assumption at the root of all ostentatious self-assertion.

In the third chapter we begin to see the intensification of basic characteristics wrought in him by the challenge of life in a big city. The desire to appear self-confident is uppermost:

'Auf der Fahrt zum Hotel fragte er den Taxichauffeur nach nichts, weil er sich nicht zu erkennen geben mochte als Besuch aus einer unwissenden Provinz.'<sup>3</sup>

He feels desperately the need to 'belong' but underestimates the difficulties with the lack of thought which characterized his purchase of the sportscar for example. Of his first visit to the 'Kneipe' we read:

'Da dachte B. es schon gefunden zu haben. Er war hier, um unter dem hellen Licht in Ruhe nachzudenken, da sollte mal einer kommen.'<sup>4</sup>

The feeling is vague, touched with defiance which is weakness: we have already seen that B. cannot be self-reliant and needs constant help, even to the point of hoping for a word of sympathy from an unknown customer in the chemist's shop where he has worked.<sup>5</sup> In unfamiliar circumstances this

1) Zwei Ansichten, p.9.

2) op.cit., p.89.

3) op.cit., p.19.

4) op.cit., p.34.

5) op.cit., p.28.

leads to a ridiculous exhibitionism, for example, his angry words about officialdom at the airport, whereby he alienates the sympathy and regard which he needs.<sup>1</sup> Clearly this tendency will be exaggerated in Berlin: but the loss of his car disorients him and leads to a series of senseless actions, culminating in his return to Hamburg without any clear reason or purpose.<sup>2</sup> His attitude to Nurse D. is equally vague and unconsidered:

'Angesichts der hilflosen Lage, in die ihre Staatsmacht sie versetzt hatte, war ihm bange vor einer undeutlichen Verpflichtung, die er eingegangen war, bevor sie ihm klargemacht wurde.'<sup>3</sup>

This refers to the letter declaring his 'love', a term which he uses glibly with little thought but to impress; but it also shows his peculiar attitude to responsibility. He will assume it as part of the image of a young man of consequence, and yet also try to shift it to others as soon as it begins to weigh upon him. The words 'bevor sie ihm klargemacht wurde' suggest that he expects others to think for him and explain life as soon as it becomes difficult, that he will say in a crisis: 'I didn't understand, I didn't know.' The one thing he cannot or will not do is think seriously about what his aims are; his very difficulties and fears are evidence that he is a real person: 'Er fühlte sich wohl, schwer, unglücklich.'<sup>4</sup> The paradox of 'wohl' and 'unglücklich' shows the artificiality of his sentiments: he is not content until he has some 'distinctive' emotion which gives him a role to play.

In Chapter Five he further loses his grip upon his own actions. He no

1) Zwei Ansichten, p.21.

2) op.cit., p.20f.

3) op.cit., p.26.

4) op.cit., p.37.

longer takes any interest in the events of his home area, but accepts a commission to return to Berlin simply because it allows him to act the part of a man of sophistication and experience, and also because he wants to cancel out the memory of his own naivety in that city. There is a pathetic discrepancy between his self-importance and the lengths to which he will go in order to gain confirmation of his image. We read for example: 'B. stand nicht an, all seine Ungeschicklichkeiten für richtige Auskünfte über Berlin zu nehmen.'<sup>1</sup> But the image is distinctly shaky:

'...er war geltungssüchtig genug, dem Mädchen die Höflichkeit zu erweisen, mit der man Schwächeren den Koffer ins Gepäcknetz legt.'<sup>2</sup>

There is no spontaneity in B; he cannot forget himself for a moment, and constantly measures himself against events and people. It is above all the confused nature of his thought which Berlin magnifies; he creates a kind of challenge which exists only in his imagination and is miserable because he feels he cannot fulfil what is indistinctly 'asked' of him. He appears to have no understanding of his own capabilities or character, hence his sense of 'Versagen'.<sup>3</sup>

Chapter Seven reveals a further increase of muddled thought and weakness of purpose as the time element in his relationship with D. begins to gain in importance. He creates a vague ideal of faithfulness to her, fancies this image of integrity but cannot sustain it, and is involved in feelings of uncalled-for guilt, which only distort the relationship further, by

1) Zwei Ansichten, p.73.

2) op.cit., p.80.

3) op.cit., p.69.

suggesting to him that she might accuse him of desertion.<sup>1</sup> His life is a constant vicious circle: B. becomes caught up in the whirl of unusual events which make his life appear to have the intensity of a film<sup>2</sup>, and submits willingly to this, afraid to wake up, to test his initiation into the life of the city; but the longer he gives himself up to this tenuous professional acceptance<sup>3</sup>, which blinds him to the fact that he is still very much a small-time photographer, the less chance he stands of gaining any genuine acceptance on a purely personal level and of acquiring a stable sense of values and of proportion, which would free him from the need to 'prove' his worth constantly. This emerges from his association with the 'Wirtin': '...er war dieser jungen, schnodderigen Person..nicht überlegen.'<sup>4</sup> She sees that he is only acting, not creating an existence for himself by genuine effort and self-reliance, that he is being borne along rather by the strangely stimulating events which just happen to be occurring at that time.

His attitude to D. is ambivalent because of his relationship with the city of Berlin. She is an added weight in the city's imagined indictment of him for incompetence:

'Seit er neuerlich in Westberlin war, hatte die D. in seinem Bewusstsein sich ausgewachsen zu einer Gegenwärtigkeit, die ihm unausweislich und lästig zusetzte mit Erinnerungen, mit Vorstellungen.'<sup>5</sup>

But she can also be used as a weapon against the insecurity instilled in B. by Berlin, for she is a status symbol of the utmost modernity:

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- 1) Zwei Ansichten, p.31f.
  - 2) op.cit., p.142f.
  - 3) op.cit., p.145f.
  - 4) op.cit., p.148.
  - 5) op.cit., p.151.

'...er fühlte sich angesehen, seitwärts beobachtet von einem anderen Herrn B...von jenem Herrn B, der er sein wollte, trauermissig dunkel gekleidete Gestalt, schwermütige Miene, achtenswert verunglückt an einer Liebe...'.<sup>1</sup>

'Achtenswert' is the keyword here. Like Achim, he wants no private life, although for different reasons; Achim's life is his identification with the State, while B.- though leading a life of pure self-indulgence and assenting to an ideal of freedom, free enterprise - opts out of its implications for the individual: the possibility of privacy and self-determination. Nothing is valid for B. unless it has some measure of public approval, not even his own emotions, because the competitive atmosphere of the capitalist system demands a will power and purposefulness in isolation which he is too weak to sustain. He has not the courage to assume real responsibility, nor the sense to dismiss it entirely as impossible. It is all too easy to blame 'them', the undefined 'officials'<sup>2</sup> for the separation between himself and D, for this allows righteous anger and obviates the need for clear analysis of the situation and for recognition of his own insignificance and weakness. And so B.drifts into the procedure of helping D.to escape, all started by a letter written to her in an emotional, intoxicated state produced by his sense of inadequacy and of self-pity in Berlin. He uses the easy, ready-made terminology of love simply to show that he is a normal man with distinct feelings, but without any real awareness of whom he is writing to. D. is functional, a means to further B.'s self-awareness, and so not truly human in B.'s imagination: he has no appreciation of personality in others. For example, we read:

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1) Zwei Ansichten, p.153.

2) op.cit., p.156.

'...er scheute davor zurück, den vollständigen Herrn B. vorzustellen, wie die Illustrierten Blätter hielt er das innere Leben einer Person für ihr eigentliches.'<sup>1</sup>

His notions of individuality are those propagated by popular journalism; B. is not interested in character as such, but only in a private life jealously guarded as an image of superiority and difference, part of the equipment of public figures.

A similar tone is present in the words 'andere hatten es geschafft, er war nicht freizusprechen'.<sup>2</sup> The wording is exaggerated and journalistic; B. has adopted a vocabulary and mode of thought which is not his own, but is considered 'modern' because popularly accepted; and it is dangerous because he does not use it with consciousness of its exaggeration, and is so trapped by its inflationary concepts. Hence his hurried departure to collect a car<sup>3</sup> is evidence partly of his continuing showiness and desire to impress without effort, but also of fear at the point where the responsibility for D, which he has assumed solely to boost his own self-satisfaction, is about to become fact, compromising and uncomfortable fact. The bus is a welcome escape.<sup>4</sup>

Nothing about B. is spectacular or grand: his relationship to D. becomes important not because he cannot live without her, but because, by her position, she is drawn into the conflict between B.'s weakness and his desire to impress. He is incapable of deep emotion or original, independent thought. Small, repetitive details capture vividly just how little he is

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1) Zwei Ansichten, p.152.

2) op.cit., p.164.

3) op.cit., p.235f.

4) op.cit., p.239.

able to forget others and their opinions. Like Stiller, though to a lesser extent, he tries constantly to dictate to others how they should view him, but he succeeds only in being ridiculous, or inappropriate. For example:

'Auf der Fahrt zum Flughafen war er so verlegen um einen Grund für die Reise, er trieb den Taxichauffeur zur Eile an.'<sup>1</sup>

His apparent purposefulness is entirely out of place, as is his sense of civic dutifulness which holds him back initially from aiding D's escape:

'Was er sich wünschte, wäre ein Amt gewesen, eine staatliche Behörde, die ihren Bürgern dazu verhilft, ihre abgetrennten Leute wiederzusehen.'<sup>2</sup>

In both cases he is refusing to see his own indecisiveness. He will even go so far as to cause himself discomfort in order to maintain the image of near cosmopolitanism: he dislikes flying but submits to it because 'im Grunde hielt er Fliegen nicht so sehr für eine teure, mehr für eine vornehme Art des Reisens'.<sup>3</sup> With a rare touch of humour, he is soon afterwards depicted making ignominiously for the toilet! Hartung picks upon flying, curiously enough, to illustrate his otherwise valid view that B. is 'ein bisschen farblos':

'Dass er im übrigen nicht gern fliegt, ist so interessant nicht, der Autor schenkt dem etwas zu viel Aufmerksamkeit.'<sup>4</sup>

This is one of the very few details which provokes any reaction other than boredom in the reader.

1) Zwei Ansichten, p.31.

2) op.cit., p.161.

3) op.cit., p.68.

4) Rudolf Hartung, "'Zwei Ansichten'", Die Neue Rundschau, 1965, p.687.

There is then nothing in B. to surprise us, just a constant lack of enterprise and decision, a confused sense of values intrinsically harmless but unfortunately involved in a situation requiring all the qualities he lacks, since somebody else's whole existence is in the balance. The failure to realize this, the entire lack of thought on how D. will adjust herself even if she does come, these are the ultimate proof of B.'s self-centredness.

### Die Schwester D.

In the opening section on Schwester D. we learn at once of the independence and desire to retain absolute privacy.<sup>1</sup> She is more exemplary a character than B. - her little dishonesties are patent, but she is aware of what she is. Her independence is not entirely voluntary: she is isolated by the State's refusal to let her study and nursing is an occupation, not a vocation. This explains to some extent the seemingly odd combination of jealously preserved privacy and a tendency to let things happen rather than to determine them by positive action: D. resents the incursion of the State into her life, but has been deprived thereby of her sense of purpose. The interference has certainly promoted clarity of mind in her; she is not taken in by appearances. The words given to her thoughts on B.'s letter - 'Er...wiederholte...den ulkigen Satz mit seiner Liebe'<sup>2</sup> - show that she has a healthy sense of proportion and distrust of cheap emotion. Her difficulty in finding a word to describe her relationship with B. is also an indication that she realises its tenuity, realises that it is not a deep attachment

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1) Zwei Ansichten, p.11.

2) op.cit., p.13.

involving self-commitment<sup>1</sup>, but rather a trial of her own power of attraction.

In Chapter Four these basic points are further developed; her isolation is emphasized by the small picture of her in her room:

'Sie wartete eine halbe Stunde bei angelehnter Tür auf Schritte an der Treppe, alle gingen vorbei, keiner fasste nach der Drehklingel.'<sup>2</sup>

There is no emotional disturbance, just the very natural sense of loneliness into which independence can merge momentarily, and which she does not attempt to gloss over as B. does his sense of inferiority. Her particular kind of 'laziness' also differs from B.'s drifting in that it is not so much weakness as common sense. She has given up trying to overcome barriers and assert her personality, in favour of conformity<sup>3</sup>, because the State is strong and resistance is pointless. But she maintains an inner, private independence, evident in the detail of her association with B: she feels resentment that her world is treated by him as somehow less real than his own.<sup>4</sup> She may conform within her State, but she will not accept his ready-made image of it. Like B. however, she feels cheated by the situation, by the sudden destruction of the theoretical possibility of choice between the two systems; and this is the beginning of a change of emphasis in her character. The passive side of her attitude to life grows stronger; she accepts events as inevitable because of her long training in the effectiveness of authority:

'Mit wievielen natürlichen Einzelheiten auch in Gesprächen vorher sie sich ereifert hatte, die Stadt sei nicht zu trennen vor der anderen Hälfte, die erste Nachricht hatte ihr die Einschliessung unzweifelhaft gemacht.'<sup>5</sup>

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1) Zwei Ansichten, p.13.

2) op.cit., p.51.

3) op.cit., p.39f.

4) op.cit., p.40.

5) op.cit., p.50.

Events of this magnitude lay hold of the will and dull decision unless resistance is immediate; D. refuses a friend's offer of help with somewhat indeterminate reasons<sup>1</sup>, and at once lays herself open to a growth of apathy as those things which made her life a little more varied and interesting are removed from reach.

It is above all her increasing apathy which Chapter Six reveals. Driven back upon herself more than ever, she goes for walks, bus rides to fill the emptiness and hide her aimlessness. For the first time she really begins to feel that unadulterated Communism is incompatible with her character and emotional needs, yet because she is convinced of its invulnerability she avoids anything which will make her isolation too painfully obvious:

'So wich sie jetzt aus vor Einfällen, von denen sie nicht hätte zurücktreten können, auf der Hut, der Flucht vor einem Entschluss...'.<sup>2</sup>

She fears to test her position because she is aware of her own cowardice, a very 'ordinary' reaction. But in smaller matters she maintains her honesty and integrity, in refusing for instance to give way to momentary malice and tell her friends that they should return to East Germany.<sup>3</sup> Yet a little heroism is immediately followed by a feeling that the burden of loneliness is too great:

'Sie war damals, ohne dass sie es hätte anfangen merken, mehr und mehr Gefühlen ausgeliefert, wo früher Gewöhnung und Kenntnisse sie bewahrt hatten vor Mitleid.'<sup>4</sup>

The more she is forced to be independent, the more vulnerable she becomes

1) Zwei Ansichten, p.63.

2) op.cit., p.108.

3) op.cit., p.105.

4) op.cit., p.117.

emotionally, and this perhaps explains the long section on the sick actress<sup>1</sup>: deprived of the interest of trips to the West, D. becomes introspective and more generally aware of emotional difficulty. But it is important to see that her critical faculties are never entirely dulled: she is aware of her 'eigene Rührseligkeit'<sup>2</sup> and so more honest than her brother with his West German comforts and East German education for the child.<sup>3</sup>

In Chapter Eight the indifference and tiredness increase further. D. cannot summon up the indignation felt by her fellow nurses because she has never lived quite so superficially as they; she had trusted the Communists, unlike many of the girls who had given political issues no personal thought, and so she finds a kind of failure of judgement in herself which is a constituent of her apathy. She can neither indulge in self-righteous annoyance nor in pettiness and superficiality as though nothing had changed. It is an uncomfortable situation which, naturally enough, she tries to avoid thinking about:

'...sie polierte den Fussboden mit dem schweren Bohnerbesen, die gleichförmigen Bewegungen drängten das Denken so wohltätig zurück.'<sup>4</sup>

It is at this point that the relationship with B. regains some importance. This is indicated by one phrase: the letter written by B. in the bar contains, it is said, a 'sonderbarer Satz'.<sup>5</sup> Previously she had found his phraseology 'ulkig'<sup>6</sup>; but 'sonderbar' suggests a less flippant attitude. D. begins to consider whether B.'s words have after all some serious intent as her control

1) Zwei Ansichten, p.118ff.

2) op.cit., p.125.

3) op.cit., p.124.

4) op.cit., p.182.

5) op.cit., p.187.

6) op.cit., p.13.

of her critical faculties is weakened by the strain of solitude. The composition of her answer shows this clearly: she is quite aware that he can be 'kinomässig'<sup>1</sup> and yet she feels an irrational desire to see him as somebody dependable with an interest in her. There is of course a danger that the relationship could become distorted in her view as it does in B's. She can say inwardly to B: 'Du machst dir Flausen vor, es wird nicht reichen für ein ganzes Leben'<sup>2</sup>, but he has performed the function of giving her a goal at last, even if it involves doubt and fear, so that once the process of escape has started she becomes dangerously dependent on him. For instance, when she asks for a message from R, she is told 'Sie sollen sich auf ihn verlassen, hat er gesagt'<sup>3</sup>, words spoken a little too hastily to be convincing, but 'sie zögerte nicht, ihm zu glauben'. Just how much she is staking on his support is suggested by the length of the section on the actual escape<sup>4</sup>: we go through the waiting, the fear and hesitation and climax of loneliness with R although this episode occupies a relatively small piece of the whole time-span of the novel. One feels that the intensity of the experience marks a change in D. more radical and complete than anyone outside, and especially B, could hope to understand: the hours of waiting and escape cancel out a whole existence.

It is perhaps this fact which enables D. to recover in West Berlin her power of decision and willed activity, which emerges almost triumphantly at the end and is underlined by the adjective applied to B. in hospital. He is

1) Zwei Ansichten, p.194f.

2) op.cit., p.196.

3) op.cit., p.215.

4) op.cit., pp.216-234.

'komisch'<sup>1</sup>, a word which shows that D. has fully recovered her sense of proportion and found herself again in the dangerous hours which destroyed her apathy. However hesitatingly, she rejected a life she knew to be unsatisfactory and can now start on the creation of a new and freer one.

As in B's case, we are constantly shown D's ordinariness. Her resentment of intellectuals, for example shows her 'average' position.<sup>2</sup> There is evident care to avoid all melodramatic presentation of her position; twice the words 'es war nicht unerträglich'<sup>3</sup> appear, in deliberate contrast to the self-dramatization of B. in a situation which warrants no such exaggeration, while D.'s might. Her period of waiting is neither heroic nor exciting, but nerve-racking in a much more acceptable sense: she is divided within herself, knowing what faces her but afraid to acknowledge it or ask too many questions about the future. Neither is the 'Neue Welt' seen in rosy terms as a paradise of freedom: it too has its restrictions and annoyances.<sup>4</sup> One wonders whether the term 'Neue Welt' is meant to signify B's interpretation of D's reaction: he is of course, with his 'kinomässig' sensibility, entirely wrong, but D. has enough resolution to start afresh, beginning significantly with the search for a private room, her small ideal of privacy and freedom. She is not rejecting Communism for Capitalism so much as lack of privacy for the possibility of regaining it: and ironically enough it is in the attempt to create a grandiose 'public' image for himself that B. enables her to reassert her private individuality.

1) Zwei Ansichten, p.242.

2) op.cit., p.100.

3) op.cit., pp.190 & 202.

4) op.cit., p.240f.

'Tragedy' and the novel

It is perhaps a very sad fact that two ordinary people find their relationship distorted and changed through enforced separation: but in view of B's overriding desire for approval and D's basic good sense, one cannot feel that even in better circumstances the friendship would have survived and prospered. There is then no real tragedy in this situation. What we do have is a portrayal of two types of isolation and loneliness: B's is caused by the challenge of a fiercely competitive society to the man who has not the strength of character to recognise his limitations. The temptations of materialism ensnare him. In D's case the isolation is also largely the product of circumstances: the Communist State betrays her trust and forces her into apathetic acceptance, kills her ability to share the enthusiasms of others of her own age. There is a clear contrast between the two, but is it enough to sustain our interest? Certainly D is the more interesting of the two figures, for her situation is unfamiliar and she passes through a certain degree of development. B is just infuriatingly mediocre, weak and self-indulgent. Critics have tended to overlook this difference in situation in claiming that D is portrayed more vividly than B.<sup>1</sup> Only Herbert Werner rightly adds:

'Tauschen wir uns nicht! Am Ende kommt sie uns nur deshalb soviel lebendiger vor, weil sie uns soviel sympathischer ist.'<sup>2</sup>

The novel really comes alive only when the escape is imminent, but this is

- 1) e.g. Walter Jens, 'Privatroman statt Lagebericht', Die Zeit, 8 October, 1965.
- 2) Herbert Werner, 'Die Mauer, oder geben "hüben und drüben" noch ein Ganzes?', Kirche in der Zeit, 21 Jg., Heft 2, Feb. 1966, p.74.

interesting in its topicality, its adventure value, not as the crisis point in a relationship between separated lovers.

### Lack of interest in the novel

Critics who have found the novel unsatisfactory have suggested, for example, that the failure lies in Johnson's attempt to produce an entirely 'balanced' picture:

'...dieser symmetrischen "gerechten" Anordnung, die sich bis in die Kapitelfolge nachweisen lässt, brachte Johnson ein grosses Opfer. Er gab es auf, seinen Gegenstand, das Individuum in einem totalitären Staat, den Bürger in der "DDR", rein und unverfälscht durch Beschreibung darzustellen. Indem er diesem als Spiegelbild den Bundesbürger gegenüberstellt, verfällt er dem verhängnisvollen Mechanismus der selbsterwählten Antithetik.'<sup>1</sup>

In this view over-simplification results from the parallelism: but this need not have been so. It is not the contrast itself which is at fault, but failure to treat it with a clear and constant purpose, either political or psychological. This is a conclusion suggested by Baumgart when he decides that Johnson is really 'ein Erzähler von Zuständen der Trennung, der Fremdheit schlechthin' despite the obvious suggestions that both E. and D. are representative of two different political systems: but Baumgart does not seem to realize that he has uncovered a possible major flaw in the novel.<sup>2</sup> Johnson seems in fact to have fallen prey to a danger he avoids in Das dritte Buch über Achim, where it also exists potentially. As Blöcker points out<sup>3</sup>,

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- 1) Thomas Beckermann, 'Uwe Johnsons missglückter Versuch', Deutsche Studien, 4 Jg., Heft 15, Spt. 1966, p.388.
  - 2) Reinhard Baumgart, 'Nicht Romeo, nicht Julia', Der Spiegel, 19 Jg., No. 39, 22 Sept., 1965, p.128.
  - 3) Günther Blöcker, Kritisches Lesebuch, p.197.

it is only when Achim makes a categorical denial of fact that a strong reaction is aroused in the reader; if the book were a straightforward account of Karsch's visit, we would be bored long before the stage of the denial were reached. But it is written at a point after Karsch's return and so the frustration which grew gradually to reach a climax over the photograph affair characterizes the whole work, is evident in the question and answer form and so puzzles and intrigues the reader until, to prevent interest falling off, that climax is reached. In Zwei Ansichten there is little to hold our attention in any similar way. It is easy to see why Johnson has insisted on the ordinariness of the figures, and he himself explains it openly:

'Ich bin überzeugt, dass die "einfachen Leute" das erheblichere Beispiel abgeben für Lebensverhältnisse in unserer Zeit, nicht allein wegen ihrer Überzahl, auch nicht nur weil sie in der Verteilung des Nationaleinkommens jenseits allen gerechten Verhältnisses benachteiligt sind; insbesondere weil sie jede Verschlimmerung der Lage unerbittlich ausbaden müssen, ihre Schwierigkeiten mit dem schärfsten Risiko überwinden müssen, ohne dass Geldreserven sie auffangen und Privilegien sie schützen, ohne dass sie in der Schule und später an die höheren Tricks herangekommen wären, meist auch ohne Hilfe.'<sup>1</sup>

The ordinariness of the figures and the extraordinariness of the events in which they are involved is a stringent comment upon the state of the modern world; but since the larger part of the book is devoted to character study rather than depiction of character in interesting action, the reader's attention needs to be gained through his sympathy. Mutmassungen über Jakob deals with equally ordinary figures, but Jakob is nevertheless extremely engaging a personality in as far as we are allowed to see him: his vitality

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1) Uwe Johnson, 'Auskünfte und Abreden zu "Zwei Ansichten"', p.8f.

is so very infectious, his integrity so undemonstratively evident. Similarly, Frisch's Stiller and Walter Faber gain our interest not by their exceptional qualities but by the spectacle of human weakness and pride closely observed in a crisis. Ordinariness can therefore be made interesting if it has just a touch of the unusual - as with Jakob's profound integrity in every detail of everyday life - and if it is very closely observed, as in Frisch and authors such as Virginia Woolf, who has protested vociferously against the need for a 'plot' in the accepted sense of intriguing events and has delved into the subtlety of the 'ordinary' mind as a worthwhile subject for study:

'Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives myriad impressions - trivial, fantastic, evanescent, or engraved with the sharpness of steel...Life...is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit...?'<sup>1</sup>

In fact the minds chosen by Virginia Woolf, for example Mrs Dalloway, are not entirely ordinary but of above average sensitivity in many cases; but it is only in the great detail used that this emerges clearly. Johnson seems however to have fallen between two stools. He minimizes the melodrama and sheer adventure quality which could have been distilled from the events he uses; but his characters are not sympathetic in the way that Jakob is, nor are they shown in the detail which might make us understand more fully their psychology and follow the vagaries of their weaknesses with attention. Critics have felt something lacking in the novel and have expressed it in rejection of B. as unsuited to be a representative of West Germany<sup>2</sup>, which

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1) Quoted in Miriam Allott, Novelists on the Novel, p.77.

2) e.g. Horst Krüger, 'Das verletzte Rechtsbewusstsein', Die Zeit, 1 October, 1965.

may be a valid social comment, but the real structural weakness lies in the insufficiently deep psychological portrayal, extension of which might have made B. more understandable, less objectionable - as Stiller is rendered interesting despite his selfishness by our ability to see just how he 'works'.

Johnson instead chooses a method of stressing the ordinariness of his figures other than showing it in great detail. He employs a narrator who states the thoughts or feelings, and so creates the impression that their inner lives are not worthy of direct representation, just as in Das dritte Buch über Achim the use of a narrator suggests that for some reason it is not possible to portray Achim 'directly'. In a section dealing with B.'s conversation with a girl he hardly remembers, we read for instance: 'Dennoch Schuldbewusstsein bei beiden frass am Auskommen, zerhackte das Gespräch...'.<sup>1</sup> We are told that B. felt guilt, with no indication of intensity or precise nature, as though the awareness is not worthy of illumination. The vocabulary used - 'frass', 'zerhackte' - shows in fact an attempt to inflate the banal feelings in question by 'dramatic' style in order to give them at least some interest. Jens Hoffmann appears to be the only critic sensitive to this tendency in the novel:

'Was ist für die Vorstellung von Berlin gewonnen, wenn Autobusse "wie Elefanten" im vierbahnigen Verkehr "trotten"? Das sind, wie die syntaktischen Inversionen, nicht Ausnahmen, sondern Merkmale eines Stils, der auf Bedeutsamkeit angelegt ist, auf Überhöhung. Die Gefahr dieser Sprechweise ist hohles Pathos. Johnson ist ihr in seinem jüngsten Buch nicht immer entgangen.'<sup>2</sup>

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1) Zwei Ansichten, p.18.

2) Jens Hoffmann, 'Die prosaische Selbstverstümmelung', Christ und Welt, 18 Jg., No.42, 15 October, 1965, p.35. Cf. Zwei Ansichten, p.143.

Not all the examples of direct statement of feelings fall into this danger fortunately. Of D. we are told for example at one point:

'Sie glaubte sich im Stich gelassen, da sie zurückgeblieben war im Vertrauen auf solche Auskünfte...'.<sup>1</sup>

We do not know what her loneliness and sense of deprivation really felt like, as though they were so vague in nature as to be indefinable, too indistinct to be shared and sympathized with.

One could add to the many examples of this nature the indications that the narrator is in a superior position, looking down on the ordinariness, even pettiness of the characters. There is an occasional note of criticism, for example in the notation of B's first real success as a photographer:

'Leider war das Geschäft erst zustande gekommen, nachdem B. verzichtet hatte auf einige Bilder...'.<sup>2</sup> The word 'leider' does not speak for B. but against him, criticizing his weakness in allowing pictures of human suffering to be suppressed in order to obtain a good fee. Another comment indicates the shallowness of B's emotions and the degree of self-persuasion involved:

'...in der Eile, neben den Waschkleidern der Mädchen. in der raschen Fahrt verging ihm manchmal das schwere, ermüdende Gefühl, das er Einsamkeit nannte.'<sup>3</sup>

The implication is clearly that B. rather fancies the 'romantic' associations attached to the word 'Einsamkeit', and adopts a pose of loneliness as part of his image, thereby persuading himself that he is a man of deep sensibility.

Both characters are seen with a vision which embraces their whole situation, for example: 'Der junge Herr B. hätte aus der Sache raus sein

1) Zwei Ansichten, p.105.

2) op.cit., p.7.

3) op.cit., p.72.

können.'<sup>1</sup> Such a statement immediately suggests that the narrator has reflected about B's position and is ready to judge rather than simply narrate; we do not experience with B, but watch him from a distance. Similarly D is seen, although less critically, from 'above': 'Sie war, ohne es zu ahnen, in eine personalpolitische Intrige der Oberin geraten...'.<sup>2</sup> All these examples suggest that we have here simply a traditional narrator, who is allowed to know all about the characters before the novel starts. But then two instances change this possibility. When B. has his accident, we read: 'Ich habe ihn aufheben helfen und bin mit dem heulenden Krankenwagen zur Unfallstation gefahren.'<sup>3</sup> And then again this unidentified 'Ich' enters:

'Sie (D.) erzählte höflich, ein wenig befangen, von Ostberlin. Später nahm sie mir ein Versprechen ab. - Aber das müssen Sie alles erfinden, was Sie schreiben! sagte sie. Es ist erfunden.'<sup>4</sup>

At the last moment the narrator becomes a figure within the story; but although we can accept that D. was able to tell how she felt, surely B. would not have been able to - his inability to understand himself clearly is what emerges most forcibly from the analysis of his character, and in this lies much of his ordinariness. We are then to assume that this is, as the 'Ich' says, an imaginative recreation; but why then this complicated artifice? If it is simply to avoid the impression of a narrator who knows more than is possible for an ordinary human, to avoid an obviously literary tradition and create a sense of total reality, the point should have been made earlier.

1) Zwei Ansichten, p.94.

2) op.cit., p.180.

3) op.cit., p.239.

4) op.cit., p.242.

The sudden change from ordinary narrator with a far from unacceptable degree of knowledge to a figure who enters into the events of the book only serves to make the reader remember that this is fiction. Perhaps the sudden puzzle over the identity of the narrator is intended as a surprise element to counteract the rather monotonous effect of the statement technique described above, a result of the decision not to give very full psychological portrayal. It is however most likely that in the stress upon the word 'erfunden' Johnson is saying ironically: these events are fictional, and is then leaving the reader to measure them against his knowledge of contemporary reality, to identify the two and so see how 'unreal' in the sense of far from rationality the modern world now is. This is a valid purpose, but unnecessary since every reader will know from the start that the Berlin Wall exists and that this is a real world which is being commented on: the only result is irritation for the reader who has already accepted the fiction of the narrator, and the value of the latter as an indication that the figures are 'small' and ordinary is forfeited. It is difficult to see how this sudden entry of the narrator can justifiably be praised as 'Beglaubigung' of all that has gone before<sup>1</sup>: the modern reader is too sophisticated to accept such a purpose, which might have worked in the eighteenth century, when the less practised reader was asked to accept all sorts of extravagances as 'real' journeys, rediscovered 'genuine' documents and so on.

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1) Heinz Klunker, '"Brüder und Schwestern" - als literarisches Modell', Europäische Begegnung, 6 Jg., Heft 10, October 1966, pp.587-589.

Perhaps also the word 'erfunden' is meant to remind us of literary tradition and make us see that this novel is an ironic recreation of the Romeo and Juliet story.

The Romeo and Juliet story: its relationship to the novel

The Romeo and Juliet of legend who could not live without each other become in this tale of our day two young people separated physically and in their individual development by political systems. The two who longed to become one are here replaced by two who do not realize the extent of the gulf between them. For B, Berlin remains the big, glittering city, the ideal and touchstone of sophistication for the provincial man. It would not have mattered much what sort of person D. was; the attraction rests ultimately on the fact that she is an East Berliner who brought out B's spurious Western showiness before separation, and his desire for 'dramatic' importance after the building of the wall. The love here is not the conqueror of separation in death, but is provoked by separation alone in such a way that it becomes clear that 'love' is a misnomer. There is no transcendent passion, no losing of self in desire for the other, but two attitudes to a casual relationship which become intensified by circumstances and misunderstanding. B. quite definitely 'uses' D. to boost his image, and D. is never really convinced that she is fleeing to the West in order simply to rejoin B; he is a challenge to her apathetic acceptance of life in the East, a stimulant with which she soon dispenses.

This is indeed an interesting and provocative recreation of the traditional material; but if the value of the book lies here, it is a

time-bound value, for a 'modern' version stresses the particularity of the novel above all. The novel might have been an investigation of human isolation in a modern setting, but it is that only to a limited extent because the portrayal of the effects of isolation on the personality is limited. One could extract the point from it that we fail to know others because we are too preoccupied with ourselves, but this applies strictly only to B. who wants to slip into an image, while D. has a much healthier awareness of her own and others' weaknesses.

The limitation emerges more clearly if one compares the novel with Mutmassungen über Jakob. The isolation there portrayed does not result primarily from physical separation, but from the tendency of each different individual to become absorbed in the concerns of his immediate surroundings - whether academic, political or 'new' in the sense of different from the home background - to the exclusion of purely human understanding and appreciation of one's fellows and their 'milieus'. The variety of types of isolation allows one to find in the novel a general, universal relevance. Precisely this is lacking in Zwei Ansichten; it is also lacking in Das dritte Buch über Achim, but there the intention is obviously to write specifically about possible effects of the Communist attitude to personality. In the latest of the novels, however, the lack is not compensated for by any other clear intention; the characters are emphatically ordinary, but their specific setting is emphasized by the ironic parallel to the Romeo and Juliet tale, so that their universality is questionable. Even if one accepts that Johnson wanted to write simply about the modern situation and its effects, he can be criticized for losing sight of the fact that a story

must be worth the telling, especially if it is told at length: he concentrates on psychology but using figures who are not really interesting enough to hold our attention, and certainly not engaging enough to move us by their plight. Ordinariness does not have to be so dull, and it certainly vitiates here our perception of the disparity between what people are and what they are called upon to face, by failing to gain our attention from the start. Johnson has considerably greater success where he treats the overtly individual, even exceptional character as in the other novels. Jakob and Achim are clearly particular cases, but gain our sympathy or shock us sufficiently, so that we feel sadness or horror that such events can happen in even one case. We are moved far more by their more striking - though in Jakob's case certainly not exceptional - individuality than by the vague 'ordinariness' of Zwei Ansichten. Johnson has deliberately and advisedly avoided exploitation of events for their sheer adventure value, but without providing any compensatory stimulus to the reader's mind such as the 'mystery' of personality revealing itself in 'half-explained gestures'.<sup>1</sup> This is regrettable, since there is much to be commended in the novel, such as the entire absence of obscurity, and an appropriate, well managed form. The use of alternate chapters for each figure is hardly revolutionary, but suited to the balance and contrast of two separate figures each closely attached to two separate systems and attitudes to life. The chronology is interesting: the chapters do not balance in exact pairs; we are not shown a period in B's life and then the same period in D's life.

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1) E.M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel, p.84.

For instance, in Chapter Three we read of B.'s attempt to see D, and only in Chapter Six of her movements on the same afternoon.<sup>1</sup> The reason for this is clear if one considers what a series of exact parallels would achieve: it would be the perfect vehicle for a story of two people living constantly in consciousness of one another, in thoughts of what the other is doing. It is misleading to compare the novel's construction with that of Böll's Und sagte kein einziges Wort, for example.<sup>2</sup> The parallel chapters there reflect the separate lives of a married couple estranged by their experience of the war - a situation of genuine pathos, for what ought to be and once was a union has been broken. B. and D. do not belong together in this way, nor are they constantly aware of each other, and one cannot demand that they should have been: what is really lacking is a pair of characters of whom we could believe that the separation has distorted and destroyed a relationship which would otherwise have been of some value, and of some duration. Perhaps Hartung is partially right when he suggests that Johnson cannot depict normal humans in detail:

'Möglich..., dass der Autor... gewisse Schwierigkeiten mit der Darstellung von Menschen hat. Worauf er sich meisterhaft versteht, ist die eindringliche Schilderung von Situationen und Vorgängen: des Menschen in einer Umgebung, bei der Arbeit - des Menschen, wie ihn ein sehr genauer Beobachter von aussen sieht. Was die Menschen zum Handeln bringt, ihr Zentrum, aus dem sie leben, dem ihre Gefühle, ihre Stimmungen und Gedanken entspringen, vermag er nicht in gleicher Weise präsent zu machen.'<sup>3</sup>

However, this hypothesis can only be confirmed if Johnson at some future

1) Zwei Ansichten, p.126.

2) Werner Welzig, Der deutsche Roman im 20. Jahrhundert, Stuttgart, 1967, p.276.

3) Rudolf Hartung, "'Zwei Ansichten'", Die Neue Rundschau, 1965, p.688.

date writes a work in which he clearly sets out to give a detailed psychological portrayal in depth and fails to make it convincing. In Zwei Ansichten it is primarily the choice of figures which is at fault. The choice of setting is so promising: one needs to know so little political background in order to appreciate it. As in the two preceding novels it is the characters ultimately which intrigue and engage us as much and more than the newness of the form, so here - conversely - it is the characters, and especially B, who dull our interest. As Kurz has put it:

'Die Wohlstandsnichtsnutz und ziellos Verplempern des Lebens - dort sozial-tätige Maid und kritische Zielstrebigkeit: das ist ein zu einfaches Gegensatzpaar, zumal wenn er mit zwei geistig unerwachsenen Menschen besetzt wird.'<sup>1</sup>

There is, as this critic and Reich-Ranicki also comment<sup>2</sup>, nothing wrong in limiting the view to two people only, but the more limited the view, the greater the need for careful choice of character and depth of penetration. Kurz's view is expressed in somewhat strong terms, but he has brought out the really serious weakness of the work, which there is nothing to counteract. Beckermann, also unsatisfied by the novel, comments:

'Vor uns liegt die erregende Darstellung einer Flucht, aber der Roman der "beiden Deutschland" steht noch immer aus.'<sup>3</sup>

He too singles out implicitly by this statement the lack of depth in the characters, feeling that the reader is left with an adventure story. In fact, the theme of flight has been treated more successfully by Johnson in

- 1) Paul Konrad Kurz, '"Zwei Ansichten"', Stimmen der Zeit, 90 Jg., Heft 14, November 1965, p.627.
- 2) Marcel Reich-Ranicki, 'Dichter der beiden Deutschland?', Die Zeit, 24 September, 1965.
- 3) Thomas Beckermann, 'Uwe Johnsons missglückter Versuch', Deutsche Studien, Sept. 1966, p.389.

Eine Kneipe geht verloren<sup>1</sup>, but this makes the criticism of the novel only more valid: no one aspect of its material satisfies. Zwei Ansichten seems to have suffered from a division of intention, or at least from an insufficiently clarified purpose. It contains neither problematic personalities, nor a satisfyingly detailed portrayal of the problems facing and faced by ordinary men and women.

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1) In Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Kursbuch I, Frankfurt, June 1965, pp.47-72.

THE RELATIONSHIP OF 'EINE KNEIPE GEHT VERLOREN' TO 'ZWEI ANSICHTEN'

The story Eine Kneipe geht verloren does much to illuminate the weaknesses of the novel published later in the same year. It seems to be a preliminary exploration of the same basic material, dealing primarily with the involvement of students in the organisation of escapes from East Germany, the main character being a girl who takes on the management of the 'Kneipe' of the title for elderly relatives, and who gradually becomes the centre of a whole network of arrangements.

What starts off as a game, a daring flouting of East German restrictions by lending Western documents and escorting the refugees concerned into safety, becomes increasingly dangerous and expensive as the restrictions and precautions multiply. But it is the fear which is shown, not heroics. The 'Wirtin' is no exemplary figure, but fearful and reluctant to become involved:

'...so entschieden sie sich drängte, sie fühlte sich gegen ihren Willen gedrängt, vielmehr gegen die geringfügige Verlangsamung des Blutpulses, die sanfte Ertaubung der Nerven in der Nähe des Magens, gegen die besserwisserische Angst...Sie wollte an die nächste Woche, den Herbst einstweilen nicht denken. Dabei kam sie sich kleinlich vor, feige, weil sie mit so wenig Beihilfe so lange gezögert hatte...'.<sup>1</sup>

The sensations minutely described here are in no way unusual and bring out the subject's ordinariness; but their cause is unusual, her fear is well grounded, unlike the self-torturings of 'der junge Herr B.' in the novel, for she really is involved in dangerous matters - which may not cost her her

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1) Kursbuch I, p.57f.

life, it is true, but do indeed cost her her livelihood eventually. One sees by the comparison what Johnson has lost by his particular choice of figures in the novel; instead of showing genuine ordinariness involved in genuine danger and exceptional circumstances, he has overstressed the former to the point of dullness by placing his figures, especially B, on the fringe of events for much of the novel, so that their fears appear exaggerated. Either he should have concentrated on a portrayal of everyday life in a divided city, or gone to the heart of such drama as existed in the situation, as he does in the short story.

The danger of the latter course would naturally be an over-dramatic picture of life in Berlin, but this is carefully avoided in Eine Kneipe geht verloren. The plotting of escapes is seen against a background of carefully observed, clearly evoked normality which presents the reader with something of the atmosphere of a big city, for example in the following passage describing a Sunday morning:

'Die Rundfahrdampfer lagen noch still, über der reinen Farbe des Wassers hing trockener Horizont aus unbewegtem Uferwald und weisslichem Himmel. Die Ampeln regierten noch unbefahrene Kreuzungen, leere Überwege, und auf dem Platz vor der Kneipe stand in sonntäglicher Unschuld die Herde der Autos, die in der Woche einander durch die Stadt remeplten. Sie sass ziemlich lange allein vor dem Frühstück, das sie sich auf der Fensterseite der Theke gerichtet hatte, und blickte hinaus auf den lärmlosen Platz. Gegenüber, in dem doppelgiebigen, mit Vorbauten und Balkonhöhlen krampfing gegliederten Bürgerbau, sog die Kühle Gardinen aus den offenen Fenstern, schwenkte sie zurück. Die winzige Kioskkate am Aufgang der Untergrundbahn war mit Holzläden verriegelt. Von fern heran waren Güterzüge auf dem Südring zu hören, Flugzeugmotoren im Landegang, mitunter bebte die Wand geringfügig über der Durchfahrt eines unterirdischen Zuges.'<sup>1</sup>

By such a picture, Johnson makes it plain that the central events of his

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1) Kursbuch I, p.51.

tale do not belong, for example, to the abnormal circumstances of total war; the horror is thus subtly increased, for the reader feels well accustomed to such scenes, only to have his categories confused by the intrusion of events which would seem to belong rather to adventurous fiction of a melodramatic order. In this tale, Johnson really has shown the intrusion of the exceptional into ordinary lives, and into the ordinary life of a city: a theme the final words of the novel suggest was attempted there too.<sup>1</sup>

Another way in which Johnson avoids any hint of melodrama in the short story, is by a purely factual approach to the methods of escape devised. This has the dual advantage of preventing the reader from reacting with only a desire to know what happens next, a desire for excitement, and of conveying something of the mentality of those who participated and planned without really knowing what their plans would mean in terms of individual human suffering, anxiety and courage. We read, for example:

'Das zweite Verfahren zielte darauf ab, dem jeweiligen Passagier aus dem Osten ein westdeutsches Vorleben anzutauschen bis zu dem Moment, da er den Kontrollbezirk eines Grenzübergangs betrat... Das dritte Verfahren war langwierig. Der Personenkreis, der die neue Art Ausweis hätte verleihen können, war zwar der Zahl nach grosser, im übrigen verringert durch die Abneigung, gerade Deutschen zu helfen.'<sup>2</sup>

The participants do not see themselves as 'Pimpernels', nor is the reader to do so. With characteristic honesty, Johnson also shows us the somewhat odd mentality of sponsors of the schemes; they are not paragons of virtue nor men of outstanding generosity. This is clear when they meet one of

1) Cf. above, p. 388f.

2) Kursbuch I, p.58ff.

those whom their money has helped:

'...die natürlichen Befangenheit der Wohltäter war unwillkürlich verstimmt, wenn so ein Passagier nicht die Kennzeichen von Hunger oder Not aufwies, die eine öffentliche Meinung von ihm erwartete, und nur zu wenigen Worten bereit war über die Person, derentwegen er auf seinen Staat verzichtet hatte.'<sup>1</sup>

A considerable degree of sentimentality is here exposed. The same honesty is evident in Zwei Ansichten, in the refusal to write about heroes, but it is taken to an extreme which contravenes the rules of story-telling which demand that a story be worth telling, or at least interestingly told. The whole novel is clearly directed against the popular tendency to dramatize the Berlin situation by cheap journalism, but in a work of art social or political considerations should not outweigh artistic requirements: we have seen, for example, that Johnson's interest in the Karsch-Achim material is political, but that he creates the balanced view needed for a political investigation of a subject by writing two works - the novel concentrating primarily on one side only with schematic representation of the other side, which is more fully presented in the shorter narrative. In Zwei Ansichten he has been too conscious of the failings of the popular press and has created a work removed as far as possible from its methods, with very uninteresting results.

In Eine Kneipe geht verloren, Johnson's concern about public interest in Berlin emerges in a diatribe which mars the work as an evocation of life in the city, since it verges on direct expression of the author's own anger, and moves away from presentation of the problems through his characters:

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1) *op.cit.*, p.65.

'Die öffentliche Meinung behielt aber die äusseren Seiten der veränderten Grenze im Auge, vor allem wegen des Genusswerts, den scharfe Schäferhunde und spannende Fluchtversuche, wenn möglich von Häuserdächern herunter, auch der Antikommunismus darstellten, somit den Verkaufswerten sexueller, krimineller und amüsanter Natur ganz ebenbürtig. Diese öffentliche Meinung...war süchtig genug, Ereignisse eigens herzustellen, um die Nachfrage zu befriedigen...Die öffentliche Meinung, vorgeblich im Bemühen, die Trennung der beiden Volksteile zu überwinden, sah an ihr vorbei auf appetitlich servierte Details von der bedeutsamen Art, dass ein Tunnel durch Sandboden unter Häusern hindurch bergmännische Techniken erfordert, dass die Rohre der Abwasserkanalisation zu Gewölben gemauert sind und unterirdisch aussehen und ihr Methangas explosiv ist, oder dass einer aus Lichtenberg in einer Uniform aus dem Kostümverleih nach Schönberg gekommen ist, denken Sie mal.'<sup>1</sup>

There is considerable bitterness in these lines, especially in the mocking imitation of speech in the last words. But they do explain why Zwei Ansichten became over-full of restraint when the same material was used in novel form.

A similar movement towards restraint, treatment of the Berlin problem with studied simplicity, can be seen if one compares Berliner Stadtbahn<sup>2</sup> and Boykott der Berliner Stadtbahn<sup>3</sup>. In the former Johnson expounds at length the difficulties which face the writer who wants to find any one symbol for divided Germany, with its background of two separate developments, two separate sets of values: nothing seems an adequate expression of what division of one country really means. In the second article however, Johnson has restricted himself to showing the pointlessness of the West Berliners' boycott, which - he implies - contains a considerable degree of muddled thought and self-satisfaction. Instead of investing the Berlin

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1) Kursbuch I, p.66f.

2) Merkur, August 1961, pp.722-733.

3) Die Zeit, 10 January, 1964.

situation with a mysterious uniqueness he has tried to find a more practical, straightforward if negative approach. Zwei Ansichten seems likewise to be written in a deliberately lower key than previous works, as an indictment of the self-delusion the Berlin situation seems to foster - and yet it purports to be a novel, not just a political article, and should therefore appeal artistically, add something to our understanding which simple argument could not.

One critic has already stated that he prefers Eine Kneipe geht verloren to the novel.<sup>1</sup> He finds the characters in the latter too insignificant to bear the weight of typicalness which they would seem to have been intended to do; only the ending is satisfactory, where the normal progression of life in the city comes through and engulfs the individuals. Eine Kneipe geht verloren certainly shows a better balance between the particular interest - the difficulties of the 'Wirtin' - and the general background: the students, the habitués of the bar, the widespread reluctance to do anything illegal or compromising; and comparison of it with the novel brings out once again the deficiencies of the latter. The reader's attention is focussed on two characters who are not intrinsically interesting nor presented in sufficient detail to be intriguing as psychological subjects. That the latter is not attempted suggests that their ordinariness is to be seen as representative (although this would be better achieved with fuller portraits nevertheless). But representative of what? Of life in Berlin? For the presentation of such a complex phenomenon a far wider canvas would

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1) Peter Härtling, 'Der Rückzug auf B. und D.', Der Monat, 17 Jg., No. 205, October 1965, pp.60-63.

be appropriate: in Eine Kneipe geht verloren it is present in miniature, without any increase in melodrama. What drama exists for the reader is created in his mind, not in the consciousness of the characters; Johnson captures something of this sobriety in his portrayal of 'die Schwester D.' and her escape, but that constitutes only a small section of a rather dull novel.

CONCLUSIONS: JOHNSON'S PRESENTATION OF PERSONALITY

Johnson's three novels vary in merit as do those of Frisch: in each case the latest is the weakest. In Mutmassungen über Jakob we find a situation which could have been exploited in terms of garish contrasts. It does indeed contain a certain amount of 'adventure' and pure story interest, but differs radically from the ordinary adventure or mystery story in that ultimately it is the characters and not the events which matter. As the subsidiary short studies show, the characters live for Johnson as independent figures in his imagination, even though he may not know them fully. They are never puppets created for propagandist purposes. The figures here have considerable vitality and a kind of depth; this is not necessarily depth in the sense of psychological complexity - none of them is presented in such detail as Frisch's Stiller, for instance. Johnson's figures in this first novel do however have a strong, positive hold on life, as in the case of Jakob and even Cresspahl, both of whom live in the most immediate sense and do not turn life into abstractions.<sup>1</sup> Jonas and Gesine are in their different ways puzzled and disorientated: their 'depth' lies in the fundamental nature of their disturbance. Each has lost grip on life, can find no satisfactory purpose in their present existence, and this is far from just petty dissatisfaction with present conditions. Rohlf's too has depth in an intellectual sense; he is a man of intelligence and a considerable degree of perception, who has yet

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1) Cf. R. Hinton Thomas, The German Novel and the Affluent Society, p.130: '...he will often, as if to take reality by surprise, grasp at the elusive moments of revealing individuality in people and things...'

accepted a system alien to independence of thought, and the combination is fascinating. In all, the novel presents a fine range of figures, and in a manner which intrigues the reader and yet has intrinsic value upon examination, despite occasional excessive complexity. The form of the novel constantly draws attention to the individual, by making him think or reflect alone, or by separating him from others through making others talk about him rather than themselves. One could 'explain' the complex form with generalities on the 'complexity of existence', but such shallow views are based on the same superficial assumptions on the nature of 'modernity' which allow Frisch's Mein Name sei Gantenbein to appear profound by reason of its 'difficult' form. Johnson's first published novel can be interpreted with reference to values deeper than a simple belief in the complexity of modern life: it deals with human isolation, in a topical situation but with inferences of a considerably greater import, even if one does not go so far as to assume a metaphysical significance.

The reader knows from the beginning only that Jakob is dead; he is given no summarizing explanations of his 'character', but has to struggle to gain some picture of him, as do the other figures in the novel, in their isolation one from another. In other words, the author refuses to accept the position of omniscient narrator. Frisch as creator knows more, though not all - at least he allows more to be seen of his figures by investigation in detail of one figure in each case. This marked concentration upon investigation into one figure is not found in Mutmassungen über Jakob; although Jakob is the central figure of the work, the reason for its origin as it were, several other characters are given more or less

equal attention by the author. It seems from this that what matters to Johnson is not so much psychological penetration in depth as the recognition of personal value: that is, that each individual is quite different from others, that his past exists as personal experience, not political history. This is not to deny that Johnson may have set out to create an intriguing form, but in any case he has used it well here. In Lubbock's terminology, in all but a few points, 'the subject and the form coincide and are indistinguishable'.<sup>1</sup> The novel is a closely knit unit despite its appearance; it hangs together by theme, and by the overall enquiry into the facts of Jakob's death. The simple device of communicating this fact at the beginning provides a continuity of interest which, as Frisch's record shows, is of prime importance.

In Das dritte Buch über Achim, we again find an intriguing form very different from the conventional story progression. The work is held together by the question and answer framework, although within each section one perhaps loses sight of the question which stimulated it and finds no real difference from a conventional chapter; but the questions do provide a constant reorientation, a constant reminder that the 'story-telling' is reluctant, needs prompting. In Mutmassungen über Jakob the fact of Jakob's death performs a similar function; the reader who is confused has something concrete from which to direct his attempts to understand. The framework of the second novel - by indicating periodically through the inappropriateness of the questioner's queries and comments the Westerner's

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1) Percy Lubbock, The Craft of Fiction, p.40. Cf. above, p. 246f.

inability or unwillingness to alter his standards of judgement - helps the reader to check any similar tendency on his own part. In this novel the political systems are not judged simply in terms of black and white, of good and bad; Communism is seen as a far more subtle threat to freedom than political domination and restriction of personal liberty. Of course the Western reader will tend to evaluate what he sees in terms of good and bad, but the initial purpose is to show a phenomenon which is above all hard to understand, and so to make the reader think more deeply about the political differences than is possible or likely within the more usual terms of reference, the usual political clichés. The impression of primarily political significance is reinforced by the associated tale Eine Reise wegwohin, 1960. Das dritte Buch über Achim is more than a statement on the difficulty of knowing and writing about people in general. Mutmassungen über Jakob is more capable of bearing wider human significance beyond the immediate political relevance.

Das dritte Buch über Achim does not appeal so immediately to the non-German reader because of the specific nature of the problem it presents; the political situation does of course provide the initial interest of the earlier novel, but that has other aspects of value, notably the memorable figure of Jakob. The appeal of the second novel is more intellectual; it leaves the emotions relatively intact, except for a feeling of revulsion at Achim's concealment of fact, which is judiciously placed in order to make the reader feel strongly at a point which will affect his retrospective view of the novel. On the whole, however, it is a novel which demands a very thoughtful response, since although it is far from direct political

argument, it does attempt to show the possible effects of an actual system rather than to create figures who will live in the reader's memory by their intrinsic vitality alone.

The third novel, Zwei Ansichten, is of more dubious value. It appears in many respects to be an attempt to profit from the topicality of the situation and the success of the two earlier novels. Certainly the simplicity of form is explicable by reference to the particular aspect of the situation chosen for illumination, but it could also be a deliberate choice to create an impression of serious, restrained investigation into a situation already twice exploited. Paradoxically, Johnson's search for popularity leads him to a position far removed from Frisch's in his latest novel, with its appearance of complexity and profundity, but the two works are alike in their sacrifice of real psychological interest to popular taste: if Johnson had turned to fresh material he might have produced perhaps a third novel of the vigour of his first. It lacks the variety of Mutmassungen über Jakob, and the concentration upon one aim of Das dritte Buch über Achim, but replaces these virtues with no new strength. Certainly Zwei Ansichten is a unified novel, since the general similarity to the Romeo and Juliet tale gives it an overall 'shape', but unity has no value where it equals only dullness. Paradoxically, this, the simplest in terms of outward form of the three novels, is the one which upon examination seems most to lack clarity of purpose. It lacks psychological interest, exciting events, and sympathetic portrayal which might allow the reader to make some identification with the figures. Ultimately neither the situation - the division of Berlin - nor the characters dominate: there is

no real centre of interest. The study Eine Kneipe geht verloren is a much more vigorous work in its unashamed concentration upon an event worth the telling. The stress on ordinariness in Zwei Ansichten is understandable as an avoidance of the cheapest methods of gaining attention - that is melodrama and sheer excitement, but restraint need not be equivalent to unrelieved superficiality on all counts. There is not a spark of life in the whole novel.

Johnson's third novel lacks the warmth so noticeable in his first, perhaps because the political situation is no longer such that any aspect of it can be shown with warmth; but even if so, then the choice of material is still faulty. There is no warmth in Das dritte Buch über Achim, but it is not needed or expected, since the intellect is appealed to by the implied comparison between East and West in the form of the novel: the emotions are not involved, and the effect of the novel depends on our being puzzled by Achim's apparently simple exterior. In Zwei Ansichten, however, the choice of a boy-girl relationship immediately predisposes the reader to be emotionally moved, yet there is little to arouse sympathy and much to alienate it. The constant emphasis on the ordinariness of the characters also conditions the reader to make an unintellectual response, and when this is not elicited, the reader fails to find any compensatory interest. It is a pity that where Johnson's besetting fault of obscurity is overcome, his vitality is sadly deficient, especially when we compare the work with his earlier novel Mutmassungen über Jakob. Mutmassungen über Jakob with its variety of experience, unexceptional perhaps but deeply felt, upholds the importance of the individual through the view that 'the magnitude of

lives is not as to their external displacements, but as to their subjective experiences'.<sup>1</sup> This is a view which Das dritte Buch über Achim supports by its negative testimony; Achim's 'magnitude' consists solely of his public role, of his 'external displacements': he has no truly subjective experience to make him what we understand by an individual personality. The reader can detect in Achim only a peculiar, distressing emptiness. Johnson's latest novel seems however, by its dullness, to undermine precisely this emphasis on the importance of individuality, for it presents figures who would benefit from sterner external pressure! It is more than possible that the sheer publicity value of the Berlin situation has outweighed Johnson's literary judgement.

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1) Thomas Hardy, Tess of the d'Urbevilles, chapter XXV.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS FROM A STUDY OF THE NOVELS OF MAX FRISCH AND UWE JOHNSON

The novels of both Max Frisch and Uwe Johnson are concerned with the problem of knowing and understanding oneself and others, and knowledge, or its relativity, is the dominant preoccupation in twentieth century thought about the human personality. Scholes and Kellogg, for example, have demonstrated the importance in twentieth century literature of the belief that there are no such absolute values as 'truth', but only subjective, relative views of life and man.<sup>1</sup> Hence it is no longer possible, because of the wide dissemination of these ideas, to write omnisciently, authoritatively and still convincingly about people; anything resembling superior knowledge is immediately suspect.

Frisch and Johnson present highly individual solutions to this problem. Frisch, in his mature novels, adopts a diary-like form, but without presupposing that the reader will accept this simply as a convention. In his Stiller and Homo Faber, the fact that the central figures write as they do and indeed write at all is itself vitally significant. In these novels, and in Mein Name sei Gantenbein, he chooses one character primarily, in which to focus and demonstrate the limitations of knowledge and understanding and to show the difficulty of accepting a social role as one's 'life'. In both Stiller and Homo Faber we see these limitations through the contrast between what is written and the central figures' avowed intentions in writing. The limitations are not stated but implied, by the revelation of the discrepancy between intention and ability, between

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1) R. Scholes and R. Kellogg, The Nature of Narrative, O.U.P., 1966.

will and emotional reaction. In neither case is there any 'complete' picture against which each central figure's image of himself is measured; we see simply that each is mistaken in his assumptions to some extent. *Stiller* is weaker and yet more arrogant than he recognised, Walter Faber more sensitive. In Homo Faber this process of revelation is complicated somewhat by the mythological references, but as a disclosure of emotion the book is convincing and moving, as is Stiller as a record of pride and weakness in conflict. In both novels the fragmentary form has been used to great advantage, in that the subjective ordering of the material by the central figures gives away much of what they would hide or deny.

In Mein Name sei Gantenbein we are prevented from knowing a great deal, even to whom the mind at work in the book really belongs, and the nature of its emotional history. There is little to be gained from concealing this in confusion. A novel of the depth and subtlety of Rilke's Malte Laurids Brigge manages to convey considerably more detail; in Frisch's novel, however, the freedom of form has been abused, or perhaps not sufficiently carefully manipulated in order to give the reader at least some orientation. Robert Humphreys demonstrates convincingly the need for some guidance in his discussion of the methods used by novelists such as James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, who try to substitute some kind of pattern for the old 'linear' development:

'Art, the art of fiction, demands pattern, discipline, and clarity. The reader of fiction demands these things, and he must have them in order to have his own undisciplined consciousness focused and in order to be able to understand and interpret.'<sup>1</sup>

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1) Robert Humphrey, Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1965, p.86.

It is precisely these 'things' which are lacking in Mein Name sei Gantenbein, and the work is even more difficult to approve when one considers the development from Jürg Reinhart to Stiller, from a work of loose construction and fairly straightforward presentation of not particularly complex problems to a work which probes psychology in depth, both challenging and helping the reader to win insight and understanding.

Johnson achieves 'pattern' by other means: instead of one figure he employs several, whose limitations are revealed, in the case of Mutmassungen über Jakob, by comparison with one another in relation to a central theme - the nature and character of Jakob. In this way their isolation from one another is brought out. In Das dritte Buch über Achim the nature of the isolation is more particular, but the novel is also concerned with the concept of 'image-making' that is with inability and unwillingness to understand other people. Again the reader is shaken out of complacency, not this time by such extreme fragmentation of form as in the previous novel, but through the question and answer form which appears at first to be a return to the basic epic situation, but confounds our expectations by its irony, since the narrator does not stimulate questions and interest but has to be prompted constantly by the questioner. With neither of these novels could one assert that Johnson has adopted the only possible ways of using the material and that their complexity is therefore 'necessary'; but both are highly effective in their chosen form as novels which both intrigue the reader and give him ample food for thought. In Zwei Ansichten the theme of the difficulty of knowing others and oneself again emerges, but with conspicuously greater simplicity of presentation. Yet the very topicality

of the book is a danger. Scholes and Kellogg point out the danger of banality which arises when an author employs recognisable situations and very 'ordinary' characters.<sup>1</sup> While these appeal to the reader by their familiarity, devices such as symbolism and 'physical correlatives' - for example, the wedding bouquet in Flaubert's Madame Bovary - or really detailed, penetrating analysis are needed to counteract banality and prevent boredom in the reader. In Zwei Ansichten none of these is present. The novel is uninteresting, not just because its simple form lacks the intriguing ingenuity of the earlier novels, but because the characters chosen have nothing to stimulate the reader's interest and hold his attention, and the manner of presentation does nothing to counteract this effect.

The problem of how much we can understand of human personality in ourselves and others is, then, capable of great variety of presentation and illumination in works which have a distinctly popular appeal. Frisch employs a mystery element most successfully, as does Johnson also in some measure, using also a contemporary setting - both devices which gain the reader's attention for the more serious implications of the works. This is an aim which is not new in itself: the popularity of Keller's short stories, for instance, might be attributable to the fact that instead of portraying directly the stability and common sense he values, he implies their importance by portraying the vagaries of eccentrics which are much more immediately entertaining. Yet the desire to gain attention can all too easily lead to disadvantageous limitations. Even when, as in

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1) Scholes and Kellogg, op.cit., p.195.

Mein Name sei Gantenbein, the theme is that we are too swift in our judgement of others, excessive mystification of the reader is a self-defeating method of attack, for it forfeits the possible shock effect of surprising but still intelligible links between for example serious and apparently light-hearted episodes. Likewise, excessive simplification of events, such as that in Zwei Ansichten, far from guarantees that the reader will thus be made to appreciate fully the issues involved. If the novelist chooses the very substance of modern journalism and television reportage - political events - he must add something these media cannot: that is, depth of psychological portrayal, concern not just for the physical suffering which can be described and shown but for the complex mental and spiritual changes which can only be indicated. The reader who feels either ignored or patronized will neither react against nor acclaim the value of such works, but reject and forget them. Yet at its best, the modern novel with its fragmentary form can stimulate and goad the reader into a hard won but deep appreciation of how complex human personality is; as films force upon us the horrors of physical suffering in a world proud of its technical advances, so the novel can convey with equal power in an age of slogans how painful the process of understanding oneself and others can and must be, for it is a process which can end only when belief in the importance of the individual human personality is abandoned.

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