

# "Schlitteda Engiadinaisa"

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are used politically for mutual destruction or whether the individual sacrifices himself so that his inventions cannot become the instruments to destroy mankind. However much his comedies are flavoured by the idea of moral teaching, Duerrenmatt is far too much anchored in real life and a writer far too full of vitality for his dramas to remain merely illustrative of any given idea. What he uses from life as material for his dramas, however, is thoroughly Swiss. The picture of the last Roman Emperor who considers it wiser to breed hens and eat eggs than to interfere grandiosely in history which he thinks he wouldn't be able to alter in any case, portrays in genial fashion the pragmatism of the Swiss citizen in a world-historic situation. The two layers which form the inimitable comic ingredients of Duerrenmatt's tragic comedies, are shown, for instance in the name of the trouser manufacturer Caesar Rupf — the name of a producer of haberdashery and famous art collector in Berne. In the two names of the Old Lady, the worldliness and the petty bourgeois traits are also projected in one person: Claire Zachanassian is the returning multi-millionairess who had left the fictitious Swiss place of Gullen as poor Kläri Wäscher. Her hangers-on Toby, Roby, Koby and Loby carry the unmistakable Swiss diminutive suffix. All his later comedies, too, show this characteristic. In the "Meteor", Duerrenmatt allowed himself an additional joke with the name of the artistic painter: Hugo Nyffenschwander. To appreciate this fully, one has to know that there are two painters in Berne, Nyffenegger and Neuenchwander, who are thus caricatured in a composite name.

But the places, too, in which the comedies occur often have local character. Thus, in "The Visit", Duerrenmatt created a mythical Swiss place. Naturally, Gullen could be a small town anywhere in the world, but its significance which is inevitably confronted with Gottfried Keller's Seldwyla, can only be fully understood by one who knows that *Gülle* is a Swiss word for liquid manure and who will associate with it the corresponding smells, etc. This Gullen is full of exact details, a parody on the Swiss bourgeois town. In the radio play "Herkules und der Stall des Augias", which was made into a stage comedy in 1963, large parts are literally like a Council meeting of a small Swiss Commune. Even in a title this parodistic element appears once: in "Frank V", described as "Opera of a private bank". Likewise, Duerrenmatt's language which has a wide span from the sublime to the commonplace, denotes the dramatist's origin right down to grammar and syntax. As an example: "*Sie kosten mir nichts*" (of flowers) or "*Ich habe dem Blumen-Feuz schon angeläutet*". We need not dwell on the fact that Duerrenmatt's thriller, the tale "Die Panne" and the novel "Griechen sucht Griechin" take place entirely in Swiss environment. This touch which is so notable in all of Duerrenmatt's work, would not be significant if he did not have a sense of over-all structure. This sense lies on several levels at the same time. As regards topicality, Duerrenmatt, like Frisch, appears as critic of the narrow, the petty and the materialistic which he regards as the dangers to all things Swiss. He takes the part of Hercules in the stable of Augeas. In the poetical sense, the Swiss traits appear as concrete opposing principle to the idea, to the abstract. Only when combined, do they constitute Duerrenmatt's comedy. As regards language and style, the same is manifest: the touch of dialect brings the hymnal pathos often prevalent in his comedies, back to this earth. And as playwright, his inclination towards the concrete favours the comedy: The way the person possessed by the

idea stumbles over the concrete detail is an old stock-in-trade of the occidental comedy.

(To be concluded.)

### "SCHLITTEDA ENGIADINAISA"

Many of the ancient beloved local customs of the Engadine Valley have been doomed to extinction, partly because so many young people prefer life in the cities. However, one such custom has survived to this day — the famous "Schlitteda Engiadinaisa". This picturesque wintry sleigh-ride, a tradition going back many centuries, does not take place on a set date but on various Sundays in January and February in the larger settlements of the Engadine Valley. It is the Festival of the Unmarried. The young men ask the girls of marriageable age to go with them on a sleighride. A long row of horse-drawn sleighs, many of them heirlooms made by local artisans, enlivens the snowy scenery. Of course, on this day the couples don their traditional Engadine costumes — the girls fire-engine-red skirts and charming bonnets, the young men clothes dating back to the Biedermeier period of the early nineteenth century, consisting of black trousers, colourful waistcoats, woollen jacket and top hat. Toward evening, when the sleighride is over, the entire village takes part in a swinging dance. This gay sleighride often turns out to be a couple's first ride into their future and has always been the social highlight of the winter for the inhabitants of the Engadine Valley. There is a truly Latin *joie de vivre* in this festival. The fascination which emanates from the "Schlitteda" has been handed down from generation to generation.

[S.N.T.O.]

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