

### Irony in *The Visit*

Irony is a literary device, which spins a web through Friedrich Dürrenmatts play, *The Visit*. Irony can be found throughout the aggregate of the tragic-comedy. Dürrenmatts first influential example of irony is the towns name. However, other examples such as the black panther, indications of Claire's power, as well as the communities qualities, or vices, are contemporary illustration of irony.

The towns name, Gullen, wasn't chosen at random. It is a translation from German, Dürrenmatt's mother tongue, meaning 'manure'. This is ironic, since it depicts a metaphor of the town's, for the first time physical state, and its subsequent state of morality. An ironic indication of the moral collapse of this town are the words coming out of the Mayor's mouth, "If they (factories) boom we'll all boom...(p.26)". The money will ransom them from the physical decay, will however lead them to an ethical disaster, instead of letting them rise as foreseen.

This, conversely, guides the denizens to more ironical engagements, such as that of the Mayor, "we would rather have poverty than blood on our hands (p.39)". This is nothing but an unfulfilled pledge, seeing that the town lets Ill down, finding excuses to justify their action of after all killing their fellow citizen and so called friend. Ill ironically believes that the town is on his side, which corresponds to the residents', who falsly believe that "you can't get anything you want with money (46)", utterances, yet contradicts the all in all truth. The town council supposes that it consists of honourable men, who claim to be only human and inspite of their principals, are yet in debt. By this time, they have sold their soul to Claire Zachanassian and are no longer moral nor respectable. They unconsciously agree to the millionaires's deal, which makes everything they say or do ironic since they do not carry out their loyal promises. They want to stick together, meaning that the 'together' excludes Ill, who in their eyes, should redeem himself to be a more or less decent human being. Ironically, they are the people who morally decay and take a step further away from being decent human beings by each and every one of their actions. Ill is the, at present, only decent character.

A black panther is part of the millionaires's luggage. The panther escapes and freely strolls around town. The Gülleners get armed. Ironically, Claire's nickname for Ill was 'Black Panther'. Hence the people are getting armed to kill an animal representing Ill. Ill, "They're hunting me as if I were a wild animal (p.56)". When, at the end of the play, Claire takes a look at the dead Ill she says, "Now he looks the way he was, a long while ago: the black panther.(p.98)," possibly suggesting that he looked like the dead panther in front of Ill's shop.

"We are up against a real economic enigma (p.13)," is a statement the Mayor makes. Ironically, Claire Zachanassian is this enigma, since she has bought all the factories in Gullen to promote the economic downfall of the town and to make everyone's life a useless waste. Claire claims that she has always wanted to come back to her hometown, for however different reasons than the citizens are touched by. "I shan't want to arrest anybody. But Gullen may need you soon (p.22)", is an ironic comment crossing Claire's lips. The Policeman is infect not needed to arrest anybody, he, along with the rest of the community, is needed to kill Ill and to morally destruct Gullen. This is also the real reason of Claire's visit, which she reveals when explaining her life story to the town.

Claire has an enormous amount of power. She is exceedingly dominant and can control others. This first becomes clear when she gets the train to stop in her own fashion, that is by pulling the emergency break. The ticket inspector almost 'kisses her feet' when he finds out who the lady standing in front of him is. This is ironic since this is the norm; it's the way she is always treated, ergo will be treated by the Gülleners. She is able to buy justice in Gullen, demonstrating her supremacy. This means that she "is spinning destiny's webs herself (p.26)" like suspected by the Schoolmaster. The Schoolmaster only came to this verdict because of the "gruesom vision", when he saw her coming off the train. However, ironically is absolutely right with his assertion since she spun destiny for Gullen. Claire is buying herself justice and the town foolishly believes that she cannot buy justice of them. Ironically, she has bought it the second the people are starting to buy more and more to raise their living standards again.

Ill believes that he is living in hell since Claire went away from him; ironically Claire has “grown into hell itself (p.29)”. Paradoxically, Ill condemns the blind pair to go to hell, forgetting that hell is all around them. The priest contradicts Claire’s claim that she is hell, saying that Ill is his own hell. This is an ironic statement, because it suggests that Ill is responsible for the hell surrounding him. It means that Claire nor the Gülleners are to blame for the hell that Ill finds himself in; he has caused the present.

In conclusion, Dürrenmatt uses the device of irony effectively to foreshadow events that find their resolution later in the play. Ironic indications become then apparent and obtain meaning. Claire’s love of justice is a great example of irony, since it is her own, bought justice she loves. The world had turned her into a whore, so she turned the world into a brothel. Town ‘manure’ was a great part of her brothel. She owned the people and exploited them until they came crawling, begging for money to the person who had caused the dilemma. This is irony in Dürrenmatt’s eyes.