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# THE PORTRAYAL OF SWITZERLAND AND THE ROLE OF THE SWISS DETECTIVE IN THE MODERN SWISS CRIME NOVEL

Bryan J. Schultz  
Department of German Studies  
McGill University  
Montréal, Québec, Canada  
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## Abstract

The primary objective of this M.A. thesis is to examine the portrayal of Switzerland and the role of the Swiss detective in the modern Swiss crime novel, with special focus on the works of three modern Swiss authors of different social status: Friedrich Glauser, Friedrich Dürrenmatt and Hansjörg Schneider. While the crime novel is generally considered trivial entertainment for mass audiences within the realm of German literature, the case is somewhat different in Switzerland, a country with a small state mentality. The forthcoming analysis will demonstrate how these authors employ the crime novel as an educational device to convey a very important message to their fellow countrymen about the society in which they live. In their portrayal of Switzerland, the authors cover a wide range of circumstances relevant to their respective time periods, often dealing with controversial issues. Consequently, the Swiss detective plays a major role, as he must often solve difficult cases while faced with tremendous pressure from society. By focusing exclusively on Switzerland, this analysis will ultimately prove that the modern Swiss crime novel contains not only an entertainment aspect, but also important political, sociological and historical elements that distinguish the phenomenon from its international counterparts.

## Sommaire

Le présent mémoire vise principalement à examiner la représentation de la Suisse et le rôle du détective dans le roman policier moderne suisse. Nous nous concentrerons sur l'œuvre de trois auteurs modernes de différente classe sociale: Friedrich Glauser, Friedrich Dürrenmatt et Hansjörg Schneider. Au sein de la littérature nationale allemande, le roman policier est généralement considéré comme un simple divertissement pour grand public. Cette analyse démontrera que en Suisse, un pays de mentalité provinciale, les auteurs emploient le roman policier plutôt comme outil pédagogique pour communiquer à leurs compatriotes un message très important à propos de la société dans laquelle ils vivent. Dans leur représentation de la Suisse, les auteurs présentent une grande variété de circonstances propres à leur époque respective et traitent fréquemment de sujets controversés. Par conséquent, le détective suisse joue un rôle important, car il doit souvent mener des enquêtes difficiles tout en étant sous l'énorme pression de la société. Concentrée exclusivement sur la Suisse, cette analyse prouvera que le roman policier moderne suisse contient non seulement un aspect récréatif, mais aussi des éléments politiques, sociologiques et historiques qui le distinguent des autres romans policiers internationaux.

## Abriß

Das Hauptziel dieser M.A.-Arbeit ist es, mit besonderem Blick auf die Werke von drei Schweizer Autoren aus unterschiedlichen sozialen Schichten – Friedrich Glauser, Friedrich Dürrenmatt und Hansjörg Schneider – die Rolle des Detektivs und Darstellung der Schweiz im modernen Schweizer Kriminalroman zu untersuchen. Während der Kriminalroman im Bereich der deutschen Literatur meist als Trivialunterhaltung des breiten Publikums betrachtet wird, verhält es sich im Fall der Schweiz, einem sehr eigenständigen Kleinstaat, etwas anders. Diese Arbeit stellt dar, wie die oben genannten Autoren den Kriminalroman als Lehrmittel benutzen, um ihren Landesleuten ein kritisches Bild ihrer Gesellschaft zu übermitteln. Die Autoren behandeln in ihrer Darstellung der Schweiz ein breites Spektrum zeitgenössischer Umstände und Probleme und schrecken dabei auch nicht von umstrittenen Themen zurück. Dabei spielt auch der Schweizer Detektiv eine wichtige Rolle, denn er hat oft schwierige Fälle zu lösen und steht unter dem Druck der Gesellschaft. Diese Analyse zeigt, indem sie sich ausschließlich auf die Schweiz konzentriert, wie der moderne Schweizer Kriminalroman nicht nur der Unterhaltung dient, sondern auch wichtige politische, soziologische und historische Aussagen macht, wodurch sich das Genre des Schweizer Kriminalromans von dem anderer Nationen unterscheidet.

## Explanatory Translator's Note

Due to the nature of this particular analysis, several problems ensue with respect to language. Since this thesis deals solely with German texts, nearly all of the academic secondary literature, as outlined in the bibliography, is in German. Instead of translating verbatim from German to English, I provide an explanation of such citations using footnotes. However, when citing from the primary works, I do provide a verbatim translation, also in footnote-form. To date, only Dürrenmatt's crime novels have been translated from German to English. Regardless, all translations from the main texts are my own. It is also imperative to note that because Schneider's detective novels are relatively recent, with the first of such having been published in 1993, there is currently no academic secondary literature with respect to these works. In this way, I have striven for a uniformity in referencing that will enable the reader to follow the forthcoming analysis in an orderly, academic fashion.

## Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank my parents, Frederick and Christine Schultz, whose love and support made this experience possible.

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To my parents

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## INTRODUCTION & THESIS OVERVIEW

Traditionally, the crime novel has not been a highly regarded genre in the German-speaking countries. That accounts for the fact that there are not many modern authors of mystery and detective fiction writing in German, in spite of some promising beginnings in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. By international comparison, German crime literature is a latecomer, probably due to the long tradition of authoritarian states and totalitarian social conditions. In fact, it was not until the 1960s that the phenomenon of the German crime novel emerged on an international scale. Today, the crime novel is considered trivial entertainment for mass audiences. In Switzerland, however, where a majority of the population claims German as its mother tongue, the case is somewhat different.

Situated in the heart of Europe, Switzerland is one of the continent's most unique and dynamic nations. Throughout the centuries, Switzerland has built quite a reputation for itself as a model of efficiency, perfection and moral rectitude, culminating with its remaining neutral during both World Wars. As a result, such esteemed international organizations as the United Nations and International Olympic Committee have chosen to establish their headquarters within its boundaries. However, there is more to Switzerland than the Alps, Heidi, banks, watches, and fine chocolates and cheeses, among other things. According to Josef Schmidt, the "long held view of Swiss people that their small state is a unique refuge and haven from the evils of the outside world"<sup>1</sup> is bogus; that

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<sup>1</sup> J. Schmidt, "Uneasy Feeling About the Small Country: The Works of Swiss Writer and Cabaret Artist Franz Hohler," p. 235. Although Schmidt's essay deals primarily with the works of Franz Hohler, this

Switzerland, indeed, is subject to the trials and tribulations of its European neighbors. This sentiment on behalf of the Swiss can be attributed to the arrant fact that Switzerland is a land with a small state mentality. Thus, the notion of a safe, self-contained republic imposes a limitation upon the population that can lead to a feeling of oppression. On the other hand, there has been a traditional tendency on behalf of Switzerland to exhibit complacency and to “play hedgehog” when confronted with controversial issues or uncertain prospects. In order to address this problem, three modern Swiss authors of different social stature – Friedrich Glauser in the 1930s, Friedrich Dürrenmatt in the 1950s, and Hansjörg Schneider in the 1990s and early 21<sup>st</sup> century – have turned to literature, more accurately the crime novel, in the hope of conveying a very important message to their fellow countrymen about the society in which they live.

One of the primary objectives of this thesis is to demonstrate how the modern Swiss crime novel distinguishes itself from its international, moreover European counterparts. As the forthcoming analysis will prove, the Swiss crime novel serves a much greater purpose than its label of “trivial entertainment” suggests. According to Ira Tschimmel, “[ist es] die Funktion des Schriftstellers, den Staat zu beobachten und zu kritisieren,”<sup>2</sup> which in all likelihood applies to the crime novel more than any other genre. By employing a fictional means to deliver non-fictional insight into Swiss life, the three aforementioned authors transform the crime novel from a genre considered trivial literature into a device used to serve the following purposes. The first of such is to

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citation is also applicable to the works of the three aforementioned authors because it reflects a collective myth about Swiss society.

educate the Swiss on the horrors that can lurk at any given time in any given place, even in the tiniest and most remote village. Second, the authors employ the crime novel as a means of criticizing authority, namely political bureaucracy, for both its oft corrupt activities and its failure to hold criminals accountable for their crimes on the basis of wealth and/or social standing. Third, the authors make it their goal to address Switzerland's position with respect to controversial issues. For example, in Glauser's accurate, albeit disturbing tale of psychiatry, Dürrenmatt's bold suggestion that Switzerland accept partial blame for the Holocaust, and Schneider's vivid portrayal of both the legal and illegal drug trade, one will be able to observe how the Swiss crime novel has undergone an evolutionary process insofar as each of these issues had been or, as is the case with Schneider, *is* considered a controversial subject relevant to its respective time period. Finally, the Swiss crime novel serves the simple purpose of forcing the population to think about the reality of the situation in their homeland.

The forthcoming analysis will also demonstrate how the modern Swiss crime novel falls into the literary category of "Heimatroman," or regional novel. Due to their remarkable first-hand knowledge of their native land as well as their diverse personal experiences, each of the writers is able to provide the reader with extensively accurate information about Switzerland, including vivid portrayals of history, topographically precise descriptions of the countryside and cities, and thorough presentations of the cases in question. Likewise, the Swiss detective will prove to be a unique literary figure, but instead of addressing this topic at the beginning of the thesis, it is better to do so at the

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<sup>2</sup> I. Tschimmel, *Kriminalroman und Gesellschaftsdarstellung: Eine vergleichende Untersuchung zu Werken von Christie, Simenon, Dürrenmatt und Capote*, p. 137. Tschimmel remarks that the author's primary

conclusion, where comparisons will be drawn among the protagonists with regard to personal characteristics, methods of detection and sense of justice. Prior to delving into the heart of this analysis, however, it is imperative to examine both the nature of Swiss society and its perception of crime, as well as the most influential predecessor to each of the aforementioned authors, Georges Simenon, along with his greatest contribution to crime fiction, Commissaire Jules Maigret. This will provide the evaluator with the necessary background to fully comprehend the true nature of each of the nine crime novels that will be analyzed. On a final note, the terms “crime novel” and “detective novel” will be used interchangeably throughout the thesis so as to avoid redundancy. Each conveys the same connotation within the scope of literary studies; that is, one is not to be confused with the other.

## 1. NATURE OF SWISS SOCIETY AND PERCEPTION OF CRIME

In order to gain a better understanding of the authors' backgrounds, it is imperative to examine in greater detail the nature of Swiss society as well as its perception of crime. Beginning with society as a whole, it is fairly safe to assert that Switzerland is a nation with a great sense of pride. For the most part, the population is rather proud of what Switzerland has managed to accomplish throughout the centuries and especially proud of not only the international respect, but particularly the wealth with which its wall of neutrality has provided. Since its European neighbors generally regard Switzerland as a model of efficiency, there exists an urgent need on behalf of the population, namely those with authority, to maintain order and to root out all evil, no matter what the cost. Thus, it is evident that Swiss society is of a hierarchical nature whose aim is to limit any potential side effects that could pose a threat to the status quo. Due to the fact that Switzerland's distinct hierarchical structure is directly linked to the make-up of its infrastructure, this is an area that demands a closer look.

With a population of over seven million, Switzerland is a democratic federal state comprised of twenty-six individual states called cantons, a vast majority of which are primarily German-speaking. Remarkably, each of the cantons is autonomous within the limits set by the Federal Constitution and thus responsible for the organization and maintenance of their own government by means of a cantonal constitution. Among the many results due to both the considerable and extensive sovereignty enjoyed by the cantons is that state authorities tend to differ from canton to canton both in name and

structure. Throughout Swiss history, the powerful central theme has been a quest for unity of the nearly autonomous cantons, an effort that has proven to be vastly complicated due to the great diversity in language, culture and religion among them. Over the years, such substantial disparity has gone so far as to spawn tensions and rivalries between the cantons, mostly political in nature. Incidentally, this theme will prove to be one of the focal points in Schneider's *Tod einer Ärztin*. One example of such tensions was a fairly recent measure on behalf of Canton Zurich, Switzerland's most populous region, to designate English as the canton's second language, a proposal that infuriated its neighbors, particularly the French-speaking cantons, who regarded this as nothing short of an insult. While the great diversity among the cantons has, in some cases, generated animosity and created rivalries, there is no denying that as a whole, each of the twenty-six cantons is proud to be a part of Switzerland and everything that the nation represents in the international community.

Previously, it had been mentioned that one of the primary aims of the hierarchical nature of Swiss society is to reduce any potential detrimental side effects. The most obvious example of such is crime. Due to its unique infrastructure, Switzerland is a concrete example of how some of the most unpleasant side effects of crime can be substantially reduced, those of fear and insecurity. However, it is imperative to recall here that Switzerland is a land with a small state mentality. Thus, there exists among the Swiss a tendency to believe that they are not vulnerable to the evils of the outside world, a theme addressed by all three authors. Subsequently, one must pose the question of whether or not crime is a problem in Swiss society. In the last thirty years, there have been two major studies concerning this. The first study, conducted prior to and during

1973 by the American criminologist Marshall Clinard, concluded that given Switzerland's level of prosperity and degree of industrialization, it was remarkable, but true, that criminality in the nation was low and did not follow the rising trends found elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> Fifteen years later, a study conducted prior to and during 1988 by the Danish criminologist Flemming Balvig upheld Clinard's findings to the extent that Swiss society could not provide patent answers or guidelines with respect to the diminishing level of crime.<sup>4</sup> In other words, Balvig's research yielded proof that it is possible to live with crime in a way that is both different and less dramatic than in other prosperous Western nations.

The fact that both of these studies have concluded, for the most part, that crime is not a major problem in Switzerland can be linked to the nation's pressing need to maintain order and to root out all evil. However, just because Switzerland possesses a low rate of delinquency by international comparison does not mean that crimes committed at all levels of the social ladder do not exist. Because Switzerland is a rather wealthy state, there tends to be a certain degree of perceived corruption, particularly in the upper political echelons which, in most cases, is the result of pure greed. This is a topic best addressed in Dürrenmatt's *Der Richter und sein Henker*. In addition, when a serious crime such as murder occurs that has a direct impact on the well being of society, there tends to be an immense sense of urgency to catch the perpetrator, thereby ridding society of his evil ways and restoring order. Consequently, the longer an investigation lasts, the more scandalous it becomes, and there is nothing more frowned upon in Swiss society than a public scandal, which is not only considered an embarrassment for law

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<sup>3</sup> M. Clinard, *Cities With Little Crime: The Case of Switzerland*, 1978.

<sup>4</sup> F. Balvig, *The Snow-White Image: The Hidden Reality of Crime in Switzerland*, 1988.

enforcement, but also for society as a whole. As a result, it is not rare for innocent bystanders to be falsely accused, once again a theme that all three authors address. It is clear that in spite of its seemingly low level of criminality, Swiss society takes crime very seriously and perceives it in all of its forms as a threat to the status quo. When dealing with crime, Switzerland is not afraid to exercise all measures, no matter how extreme in nature, in order to remove the evil from society and restore stability, from which residents of all social strata ultimately benefit.

## 2. INFLUENCE OF GEORGES SIMENON

The predecessor to each of the Swiss authors whose works will be analyzed in this thesis is Georges Simenon. Born in 1903 in Liège, Belgium, Simenon's career as a writer of detective fiction spanned more than four decades, during which he published over seventy crime novels. Thanks to the creation of Commissaire Jules Maigret, Simenon is highly regarded as one of the most acclaimed and successful detective novelists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, Glauser, in particular, had been so influenced by Simenon that he later earned the nickname the "Simenon der Schweiz," or the "Swiss Simenon," due to the popularity of his Studer-novels.

In order to establish how Simenon is the worthiest predecessor to Glauser, Dürrenmatt and Schneider, it is necessary to examine both the principal characteristics of the detective and the nature of the plot structure in the novels. Maigret is the chief inspector of the French Police Judiciaire and the protagonist in each of Simenon's crime novels. His approach to solving cases is to penetrate the particular world of each event and to immerse himself completely in the milieu of the crime. By doing so, Maigret is able to acquaint himself with the causative factors and interrelationships among those involved to the point where he succeeds in thinking as they do, allowing the truth to emerge. In other words, Maigret's methods of detection are highly intuitive, and he openly conducts his work outside the realm of modern criminology. Due to the unique nature of these methods, however, the detective often feels a strong bond with the criminals and desires to bring about healing more than to deliver the guilty to justice. Moreover, Maigret often finds himself fighting the system as well as the criminals

because of the bureaucratic restraints of the time. As a result, it is not uncommon for him to be dissatisfied with the outcome of a particular investigation, demonstrating how his personal desires do not always merge with his professional obligations.

In addition to the creation of this unique literary figure, Simenon's true genius can be found in the plot structure of his crime novels. His masterful combination of French realism and the traditional detective story produces the effect that the detective-story understanding of justice is modified to an ideal that is appropriate for life in the real world. Above all, plot is a function of character for Simenon, and the success or failure of such hinges on the adequate development and the believable motivation of the figures involved. In stark contrast to the detective novels of the hard-boiled school, justice in the Maigret-stories is neither a negative, fatalistic force nor the inexorable working out of divine retribution in which evil is purged and the innocent are left ready to begin new lives. Rather, Simenon's world is a complex and ambiguous place where good and evil are closely related and cannot always be separated. However, the opportunity for purgation and rededication does exist and is usually supplied by the intuitive research of that archetypal father figure, Maigret.

### 3. FRIEDRICH GLAUSER

#### 3.1 Biography

Friedrich Glauser was born in 1896 in Vienna to an Austrian mother and a Swiss father. After the death of his mother in 1900, and because Glauser was unable to conform to the Viennese social norms, his father insisted that his son be brought up in Switzerland, where he eventually matriculated as a chemistry student. However, it was not long before Glauser began to lead the rather chaotic life of a social outcast. He became addicted to morphine and ended up spending considerable time in reformatories, psychiatric clinics and even jails. In addition, Glauser spent considerable time abroad in Belgium, France, Germany, Italy and North Africa, through which he was able to acquire a multicultural experience, and even served two years in the French Foreign Legion at the insistence of his father. Yet in spite of Glauser's troubles, he possessed an ardent passion for the detective novel, having been deeply influenced by Georges Simenon and his Commissaire Maigret-series. Prior to having published his first crime novel, however, Glauser had written numerous novels, narratives and short stories, nearly all of which are autobiographical in content. In 1934, Glauser began a brief career as a crime fiction writer and, thanks to his creation of Wachtmeister Studer, became arguably Switzerland's most famous detective novelist. Each of his crime novels contains a distinct autobiographical component and depicts the life of the petite bourgeoisie in post World War I Switzerland, covering a wide array of circumstances. Due to the success of his Studer-novels, Glauser became a model for the future writings of Swiss authors, namely Dürrenmatt and Schneider. In 1938, at the early age of 42 and only two years after

having published his first detective novel, Glauser died in Nervi, Italy and was later buried in Zurich.

### 3.2 *Wachtmeister Studer*

Published in 1936, *Wachtmeister Studer* marked the beginning of Glauser's brief career as a detective novelist. The setting is Gerzenstein, the quintessential Swiss village, located in Canton Bern. The body of Wendelin Witschi, a local peddler and victim of a single gunshot wound to the back of the head, is found in the woods near a tree nursery whose owner is known for hiring ex-convicts. The victim's widow, Anastasia, informs the police that her husband was supposed to collect three hundred francs on the day of the murder, and since Wendelin's pockets are found to be empty, the police assume that robbery was the motive. The next day, a laborer at the tree nursery by the name of Erwin Schlumpf changes a hundred-franc note at a local bar, thereby arousing suspicion among the patrons, one of whom anonymously reports the incident to the authorities. Wachtmeister Jakob Studer of the Bern Cantonal Police is sent to Gerzenstein to pick up Schlumpf for questioning and finds him in possession of nearly three hundred francs. The suspect is promptly arrested but insists that he is innocent. Upon their arrival in Thun, Schlumpf is placed in a holding cell where he fails in an attempt to hang himself. Coupled with the suspect's prior criminal record, this incident leads the police to believe that Schlumpf is guilty of the murder. However, Studer is reluctant to accept such a simple solution to the case, taking into account the suspect's claim that he had nothing to do with the murder, and urges Schlumpf not to undertake any further suicide attempts while he gathers additional information.

Studer's first step is to convince the examining magistrate to allow him to lead the investigation. Such permission is granted, and Studer is sent to Gerzenstein to begin his work. Throughout the course of the investigation, Studer gains valuable insight into the relationships among Witschi's family as well as the village community. Of particular significance to the detective is the behavior of the surviving family members. While the victim's daughter, Sonja, who happens to be engaged to Schlumpf, appears quite shaken by her father's murder, both the victim's wife and son, Armin, do not exhibit any grief over their loss and continue to go about their daily routine as if nothing had ever happened. Studer then learns that Wendelin had been nearly fifteen thousand francs in debt, an enormous sum for that time, and had taken out both an accident and a life insurance policy. The initial plan, devised by both the wife and the son, was to have Wendelin shoot himself in the leg, make it look like a robbery, and collect an insurance settlement of five thousand francs in order to alleviate the family's financial troubles. However, the plan goes awry when Aeschbacher, the mayor of Gerzenstein and a close relative of Anastasia, becomes involved. As it turns out, Wendelin had been ten thousand francs in debt to Aeschbacher and, in general, did not have a good relationship with him. In order to make good on the more "profitable" insurance policy, the mayor, who had been aware of the initial plan through Anastasia, shoots Wendelin dead in the belief that no one would be able to implicate a man of his position in such a heinous act.

Through a careful and an exhaustive examination of the facts, Studer is able to reconstruct the bizarre sequence of events of the case. Because Wendelin had been murdered rather than injured, the plan was to frame Schlumpf for the homicide. When Studer determines that Schlumpf could not have possibly committed the act, several

notable villagers attempt to convince the detective that Wendelin had committed suicide. When this fails, Aeschbacher arranges to have his automobile stolen and the thief picked up in Thun, where Schlumpf is being held. Thus, the thief is able to relay a false message to Schlumpf stating that his family is about to be arrested for insurance fraud, and if he did not confess to the Witschi murder, he would not be permitted to marry Sonja. Schlumpf confesses, and once again taking into account the suspect's prior criminal record, the authorities consider the case to be closed. Studer, on the other hand, views the confession as a sign of the real culprit becoming more and more nervous, and by summoning Sonja for an interrogation, he is able to pin the murder on the mayor. When the detective goes to arrest Aeschbacher, the mayor insists that he drive to Thun to be processed. On the way, he commits suicide by driving his automobile into a lake and drowning himself, but not before warning Studer, who is able to leap out of the car at the last moment.

Despite its reputation for being a small, albeit rather wealthy state, Switzerland was not immune to the economic crisis that plagued Europe in the aftermath of the First World War. The sequence of events in *Wachtmeister Studer* can be traced back to this depression, for prior to the outbreak of the war, the Witschi family had been financially secure thanks to an inheritance and the proprietorship of a grocery store. However, the Stock Market Crash of 1929 rendered the Witschi's shareholdings worthless, resulting in the family's economic and domestic plight, as Sonja explains to Studer in their first encounter: "Während dem Krieg sei es gut gegangen . . . Aber dann sei der große Bankkrach gekommen und die Eltern hätten alles verloren. Und dann sei es aus

gewesen.”<sup>5</sup> As a result, Wendelin was forced to borrow money from several of the village elite whose wealth had been unaffected by the harsh economic times. But as the years passed, the financial situation of the Witschis did not improve, rather worsened, which completely tore the family apart and led to their plan to commit insurance fraud in the hope that it would ease their domestic troubles.

The focal point of Glauser’s first crime novel is the portrayal of the village community or, more accurately, the circumstances surrounding it that facilitated the Witschi murder. By incurring debts with two of the most powerful and influential members of the village hierarchy, namely Aeschbacher, the mayor, and Schwomm, the village clerk, Wendelin placed himself in a precarious position. Due to the fact that it was impossible for him to repay the loans by conventional means, Wendelin reluctantly agrees to the plan devised by his own flesh and blood to shoot himself in the leg, make it look like a botched robbery and collect a rather large insurance settlement. But for Aeschbacher, who exhibits no sympathy for the unfortunate peddler, this plan will not suffice, for he is aware that Wendelin had also taken out a life insurance policy that promised an even larger settlement. Taking into account his status in the village community and the apparent immunity from prosecution that comes with being mayor, Aeschbacher is confident that he could escape punishment for the Witschi murder: “Kein Staatsanwalt würde gegen den Gemeindepräsidenten eine Anklage erheben. Erst wenn die Beweise so überzeugend waren, daß es wirklich nichts anderes gab . . . Man konnte Skandale nicht brauchen. Und was hatte Studer für Beweise? . . . Für ein Schwurgericht,

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<sup>5</sup> “Everything went well during the war . . . But then came the stock market crash and my parents had lost everything. And then it was over.” (69)

ein Schwurgericht, an dem die Geschworenen Bauern waren?"<sup>6</sup> But at the end of the novel, Studer convinces Aeschbacher that he can, in fact, prove that the mayor had murdered Wendelin in an attempt to defraud the insurance company, and rather than face prosecution and public scorn, Aeschbacher opts for suicide.

Although *Wachtmeister Studer* delivers the impression that anyone, in this case a mayor, is capable of murder, it is clear that Aeschbacher could not have carried out such an act without taking full advantage of his social status. In addition to being mayor, Aeschbacher is also the proprietor of Gerzenstein's only printery, which means that he has full control over the local press. Second, the mayor is aware of Schlumpf's criminal past as well as his engagement to Wendelin's daughter. Thus, he believes that he can frame Schlumpf for the murder and threaten to break up the engagement should the laborer fail to comply with his dubious plan. Third, there had actually been a witness to the murder by the name of Cottereau, also a laborer at the local tree nursery, but before he has the opportunity to speak with Studer, Aeschbacher sends a couple of thugs to beat him up, thereby ensuring that Cottereau will remain silent: "Geschlagen haben sie! Und dazu immer gesagt: 'So! . . . ein Fahnder von der Stadt will sich in unsere Angelegenheiten mischen! Das ist nur eine kleine Probe, Cottereau. Damit du 's Maul hältst. Verstanden? Wir haben unsern Landjäger. Wir brauchen keinen Tschucker von der Stadt!' . . . Und von mir erfährt niemand nichts. Verstanden, Fahnder? Ich bin still. Ich schweige."<sup>7</sup> As for a motive, it is safe to assume that Aeschbacher had murdered

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<sup>6</sup> "No public prosecutor would bring charges against a mayor. Only if the evidence was so convincing and there was no other way to go about it . . . There was no need for a scandal. And what proof did Studer have? . . . For a court whose jury would be comprised of peasants?" (168-9)

<sup>7</sup> "They beat me and told me, 'So, a detective from the city wants to meddle in our affairs! This is just a small sample, Cottereau, to make sure you keep your mouth shut. Understood? We have our own village police. We don't need a pig from the city.' And you won't find out anything from me. Understood, Inspector? I won't talk. I will remain silent." (56)

Wendelin out of pure greed, for it is obvious that given the mayor's financial status at the time, he was not in desperate need of the money, albeit a rather large sum, that he had loaned to the unfortunate peddler.

Due to the nature of the circumstances surrounding this particular case, Studer's task is not a simple one. When his first attempts to gather information prove fruitless, the detective recalls the words of a Parisian colleague regarding village cases: "Lieber zehn Mordfälle in der Stadt als einer auf dem Land. Auf dem Land, in einem Dorf, da hängen die Leute wie die Kletten aneinander, jeder hat etwas zu verbergen . . . Du erfährst nichts, gar nichts."<sup>8</sup> After spending a day or so in Gerzenstein, it becomes clear to Studer that he will have to distinguish between appearance and reality in order to solve the case, as Eveline Jacksch notes:

Gerzenstein könnte einem unkritischen Beobachter als bodenständiges bernisches Bauerndorf entsprechend den gängigen Klischeevorstellungen erscheinen. Der Reichtum der Bewohner präsentiert sich in 'Läden und Lautsprechern' in fast jedem Haus. Die Wohlständigkeit der Leute kommt zum Ausdruck in ihrer Sprache, die den Tonfall bekannter und beliebter Radiosprecher hat, welche zu einem guten Teil durch verschiedene heimatbezogene Sendungen das Bild vom biedern Schweizer prägen. Wohlhabenheit und Rechtschaffenheit scheinen also die kennzeichnenden Merkmale des Dorfes zu sein. Doch die Wirklichkeit entspricht nicht dem schönen Schein.<sup>9</sup>

Yet despite the villagers' valiant efforts to deceive the detective and to protect their omnipotent mayor, it is ultimately one of their own, Sonja, who provides Studer with the crucial information that he needs to pin the murder on Aeschbacher. Thus, the detective

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<sup>8</sup> "Better to have ten murder cases in a city than a single murder case in the country. In the country, or in a village, the people cling to one another like a limpet. Everyone has something to hide . . . You won't find out anything, nothing at all." (86)

<sup>9</sup> E. Jacksch, *Friedrich Glauser: Anwalt der Aussenseiter*, p. 46. Jacksch argues that Gerzenstein's appearance as a wealthy, prosperous and righteous village is deceiving to the unsuspecting observer. This deception will prove to be the greatest obstacle to Studer's investigation.

is able to expose the conspiracy on behalf of the village elite as well as the greed on behalf of Gerzenstein's most wealthy and powerful figure.

### 3.3 *Matto regiert*

*Matto regiert*, Glauser's second crime novel, appeared in 1936. The setting is a psychiatric hospital, located in the village of Randlingen near Bern. Ulrich Borstli, the director of the clinic, and Peter Pieterlen, a patient and convicted child-murderer, have simultaneously disappeared, and the acting director, Dr. Ernst Laduner, personally requests that Studer take up temporary residence in the hospital in order to conduct a thorough investigation. At first, it is not clear whether both disappearances are connected. However, when traces of a struggle are found in the director's office, it is assumed that an act of violence had taken place, leading Studer to believe that, given the nature of such a clinic, Pieterlen's escape could have something to do with Borstli's disappearance.

At the beginning of the investigation, Studer makes it his duty to familiarize himself with both the hospital grounds and its main personnel. Although the process of conducting an investigation in a psychiatric clinic is not a common practice of the cantonal police, Studer remains optimistic and even shows considerable interest in this particular setting: "Er ertappte sich bei dem Wunsch, die Untersuchung möge noch eine Zeitlang dauern, damit er sehen könne, wie solch ein Betrieb funktioniere. Er hatte Lust, eine Weile hier zu bleiben, in diesem Reiche, das beherrscht wurde von einem Geist, Matto geheissen, dem grosse Gewalt gegeben war."<sup>10</sup> After interrogating several of the

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<sup>10</sup> "He hoped that the investigation would last long enough so that he could observe how such a clinic functioned. He wanted to stay here a while, in this realm, where the powerful Matto was said to rule." (63)

employees, Studer concludes that a certain degree of animosity exists between management and staff, leading the detective to believe that a cover-up is in the making. Soon thereafter, Borstli's body is found in a heating duct, and a patient by the name of Herbert Caplaun confesses to the murder, a confession that will eventually prove to be false. As it turns out, Caplaun had confessed to the murder in order to protect Laduner, whose only reason for having requested that Studer lead the investigation is to gain time for his treatment of Caplaun, who had been suffering from anxiety neurosis. The real murderer is a doorman at the clinic by the name of Dreyer, a compulsive gambler whose attempt to steal a wallet containing a large sum of cash from the director's office on the night in question had been interrupted by Borstli himself, resulting in a struggle and the director's subsequent murder. By believing Caplaun's false confession, Studer is unable to prevent a second murder from taking place: Dreyer's murder of Caplaun by pushing him over a ledge into a river during a fight. The doorman is arrested, but on the way to the police station, his escape attempt is thwarted when he is run over by a truck, killing him instantly. As for Pieterlen, it turns out that he had intended to escape but instead decided to conceal himself in the hospital the entire time for fear that, given his open hatred for Borstli, one would attempt to implicate him in the murder.

The most interesting facet of *Matto regiert* is the setting. By choosing an "Irrenanstalt"<sup>11</sup> as the locale, Glauser "vermittelt (dem Leser) ein ostentatives Bild der Schweiz, freilich nicht der Schweiz, wie man sie uns in den Touristik-Prospekten

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It should be noted here that "matto" is the Italian word for "crazy," and that the title of this novel, *Matto regiert*, or *Matto's Realm*, refers to a ghost named Matto who, according to the staff as well as the patients, reigns over the clinic.

präsentiert.”<sup>12</sup> In addition, *Matto regiert* is, in many respects, an autobiographical work, for it is no secret that the author had spent considerable time in psychiatric clinics during his brief, albeit chaotic life. The actual murder case is a mere pretext for Glauser’s true intention, depicting the life inside a treatment center for the mentally ill. Therefore, one can question the legitimacy of the novel with respect to genre. Several literary scholars, among them Eveline Jacksch, have dubbed *Matto regiert* “de[n] schlechteste[n] ‘Kriminalroman,’ was die Forderungen des Genres betrifft,”<sup>13</sup> while others, such as Erhard Jöst, have called it Glauser’s “beste[n] Kriminalroman.”<sup>14</sup> In spite of the fact that both of these claims stem from the critics’ respective viewpoints in their analysis of *Matto regiert* as solely a crime novel, one can conclude that, given the author’s first-hand knowledge of the nature of such an institution as well as his passion for the detective novel, this novel is a clever combination of murder mystery and autobiography with respect to Glauser’s experience in psychiatric homes.

In addition to its rather unusual setting for a murder investigation, *Matto regiert* contains two important historical references with respect to Switzerland in the 1930s. The first such reference is political. Early in the decade, tensions arose between the “Sozialdemokratische Partei,” or Social Democratic Party, with whom all Swiss civil service personnel were associated, and the “Schweizerischer Gewerkschaftsbund,” or

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<sup>11</sup> Throughout the novel, the Rindlingen psychiatric clinic is often referred to as an “Irrenanstalt,” or lunatic asylum, as opposed to the more politically correct “Heil- und Pflegeanstalt,” or healing and treatment facility for the mentally ill.

<sup>12</sup> E. Jöst, “Seelen sind zerbrechlich: Friedrich Glausers Kriminalromane beleuchten Schweizer Schattenseiten,” p. 75. Jöst states that Glauser delivers the reader an image of Switzerland contrary to the popular tourist picture.

<sup>13</sup> E. Jacksch, p. 50. Jacksch argues that if one looks at *Matto regiert* as just a crime novel, then it is the worst example with respect to genre because it does not adhere to the rules and standards of the traditional crime novel.

<sup>14</sup> E. Jöst, p. 74. In his analysis, Jöst argues that despite its strong autobiographical content, *Matto regiert* is still Glauser’s best crime novel.

Swiss Federation of Labor, which consisted solely of employees of the Protestant faith.<sup>15</sup> This political rift accounts for the animosity among the hospital's staff. The late director Borstli was a staunch conservative who ran the clinic in an authoritarian fashion. However, he felt threatened by his opposition, namely Laduner, who encouraged his fellow leftists, comprised of nearly all of the hospital's orderlies, to organize and to fight for better working conditions:

Organisiert euch, haltet zusammen, versucht miteinander auszukommen! Organisation ist doch der erste Schritt zu einem fruchtbaren Zusammenleben . . . Zuerst Interessengemeinschaft, dann Kameradschaft . . . Eins geht aus dem andern hervor – sollte wenigstens daraus hervorgehen . . . Freiwillig übernommene Verpflichtungen . . . Wenn man es nur nicht so oft auf Schützenfesten prostituiert hätte, das Wort: Einer für alle, alle für einen.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, Laduner not only embodies a new intellect with respect to psychiatry in Switzerland in the 1930s, but also one of a new political movement. Glauser sympathizes with Laduner's party, but instead of criticizing the right-wing opposition, he accounts for their political stance by illustrating both the public and private motives behind it. In doing so, Glauser is able to deliver the reader a legitimate glimpse of the Swiss political atmosphere of the 1930s while simultaneously depicting life inside a psychiatric hospital, quite unusual for a crime novel yet profoundly masterful in this particular context.

The second historical reference is an allusion to the Third Reich, namely Hitler's plan to conquer the world. During a conversation between Studer and Laduner in the

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<sup>15</sup> E. Jacksch, p. 55.

<sup>16</sup> "Organize yourselves, stick together, try to get along with one another! Organization is the first step towards a productive coexistence . . . First the sharing of interests, then comradeship . . . One follows the other or should at least emerge from the other . . . Voluntarily assumed obligations . . . If only one had not degraded the words 'one for all, all for one' so often during those shooting festivals." (190)

acting director's office about mental illness, a Hitler speech can be heard on the radio in the background:

Ein Militärmarsch verklang, und dann erfüllte eine fremde Stimme das Zimmer. Sie war eindringlich, aber von einer unangenehmen Eindringlichkeit. Sie sagte: "Zweihunderttausend Männer und Frauen sind versammelt und jubeln mir zu, hunderttausend Männer und Frauen lauschen meinen Worten, und mit ihnen lauscht das ganze Volk." Langsam stand Laduner auf, schritt zum sprechenden Kasten . . . Ein Knack . . . Die Stimme verstummte . . . "Wo hört Mattos Reich auf, Studer?", fragte der Arzt leise. "Am Staketenzaun der Anstalt Randlingen? Sie haben einmal von der Spinne gesprochen, die inmitten ihres Netzes hockt. Die Fäden reichen weiter. Sie reichen über die ganze Erde . . . Sie werden mich für einen dichterischen Psychiater halten . . . Das wäre nicht schlimm . . . Wir wollen doch nicht viel . . . Ein wenig Vernunft in die Welt bringen . . . Nicht die Vernunft der französischen Aufklärungszeit, eine andere Art Vernunft, die unserer Zeit . . . Die Vernunft, die fähig wäre, wie eine Blendlaterne in das dunkle Innere zu zünden und ein wenig Klarheit zu bringen . . . Ein wenig die Lüge zu verscheuchen . . . Die großen Worte beiseite zu schieben: Pflicht, Wahrheit, Rechtschaffenheit . . . Bescheidener zu machen . . . – Wir sind allesamt Mörder und Diebe und Einbrecher . . . Matto lauert im Dunkeln."<sup>17</sup>

After listening to this speech, Laduner associates Hitler with Matto, asking the detective where each of their respective realms ends, Hitler's in the sense of his plans and Matto's in the sense of mental illness. In the 1930s, psychiatry was frowned upon by the Swiss and considered a dark, highly secretive branch of medicine. Thus, there was a tendency

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<sup>17</sup> "A military march faded away, and then a strange, foreign voice filled the room. It was urgent but of an unpleasant urgency. It said: 'Two hundred thousand men and women have gathered together and are cheering me, a hundred thousand men and women are listening to my words, and the entire nation is listening with them.' Laduner got up slowly and walked over to the radio . . . A crackle . . . The voice fell silent . . . 'Where does Matto's realm end, Studer?' asked the doctor softly. 'At the picket fence surrounding the clinic? You once spoke of the spider that hangs around the center of its web. The threads stretch further out. They stretch out over the entire earth . . . You will think that I'm a poetic psychiatrist. That wouldn't be so bad . . . We don't ask for much . . . Just to bring a little reason into the world . . . Not the reason of the French Age of Enlightenment, a different type of reason, that of our time . . . Reason that would be capable of igniting the inner heart and bringing a little clarity, like a signaling lantern . . . To drive

on behalf of the population to exhibit complacency towards the mentally ill, very much similar to the manner in which the Swiss assumed a passive role with respect to Nazi Germany. By including the above passage in the novel which, incidentally, had been censored by the original publisher due to content and did not appear until 1985, Glauser criticizes the Swiss for their lack of understanding and sympathy towards psychiatry. His hope was that by boldly associating this field with the Third Reich, the Swiss would learn to use reason in their comprehension of the world, hence the doctor's frequent use of the word "Vernunft," and not shy away from areas that were considered evil and, therefore, worthy of complacency.

The setting of *Matto regiert* also has a direct impact on the manner in which Studer conducts his investigation. As a detective, he is given unlimited access to the clinic, its personnel and its patients. In fact, this is precisely what Glauser had intended, for the everyday operation of a healing and treatment center for the mentally ill to be understood from the perspective of the average layman. As it turns out in this particular case, Studer inadvertently allows his curiosity to get the better of him, preventing the detective from discerning the real murderer. He becomes so overwhelmed by the nature of his surroundings that his most valuable asset in solving crimes, his intuition, is rendered ineffective. In a conversation with Laduner near the conclusion of the novel, it is the acting director who makes Studer aware of this, accusing the inspector of exceeding his own competence by desiring to play the role of "Seelenarzt," or headshrinker, as opposed to that of detective. Thus, Glauser succeeds in allowing the protagonist to fail, a rare occurrence in the Studer-series. Yet at the same time, the author

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away the lies . . . To shove the big words to the side: duty, truth, uprightness . . . To make us more modest . . . – we are all murderers, thieves and burglars . . . Matto lurks in the dark.” (190-3)

is also successful in permitting Studer to intellectually gain from the investigation insofar as having experienced first-hand the nature of such an institution, an area to which, in the 1930s, the outside world had limited access and information.

### 3.4 *Die Fieberkurve*

Published in 1938, *Die Fieberkurve* contains elements of the traditional crime novel but is also considered an “Abenteuerroman,” or adventure story. The novel begins in a Parisian bistro where Studer and his colleagues encounter a mysterious figure by the name of Father Matthais. Claiming to be a native of Bern, the priest requests that the detective check up on his two sisters-in-law, one in Basel and the other in Bern, both of whom may be in danger. At first, Studer is reluctant to honor the priest’s plea, informing him that, “Die Schweizer Polizei beschäftigt sich nicht mit Familienangelegenheiten.”<sup>18</sup> However, Father Matthais manages to persuade the detective otherwise by telling him the strange story of a clairvoyant corporal in Morocco who had previously convinced the priest of his psychic ability and subsequently warned him that his family is in peril.

Upon his return to Switzerland, Studer discovers the body of Josepha Cleman-Hornuß in Basel as well as that of Sophie Hornuß in Bern. Oddly, both appear to have been the victims of gas poisoning, and it is not clear whether suicide or foul play had been the cause. The detective then meets with the daughter of the Basel victim, Marie, who informs him that both women had been married to a geologist by the name of Victor Cleman, alias Koller, who supposedly had died in Morocco fifteen years earlier. Furthermore, Studer learns that both Marie and Canton Bern were due to inherit property

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<sup>18</sup> “The Swiss police does not concern itself with family affairs.” (11)

in Morocco containing a rich oil reserve worth a fortune. However, the necessary documentation to finalize the testament cannot be located but is said to be buried somewhere in Morocco. As a result, Studer is entrusted with the case and is sent to Africa with the goal of retrieving the deed to the land.

The journey to Morocco marks the adventure phase of the novel. Unbeknown to Studer, the French government is greatly interested in the oil reserve and has secretly hired Father Matthais to secure the deed. Gradually, the case begins to resolve itself. It turns out that Victor Cleman had faked his death in order to conceal himself in the Foreign Legion, his true passion. Yet his intention all along was for both Marie and Canton Bern to inherit the property. The key to recovering the documentation turns out to be a medical chart containing a temperature curve that had accompanied the geologist's death certificate. Studer is in possession of this chart, and acting on intuition, his search eventually leads him to the Foreign Legion post of Gurama, where all of the novel's principal characters converge. It is here where the deed is unearthed, ensuring that the inheritance will proceed as planned. At the conclusion of the novel, the deaths of the two sisters-in-law are explained and Victor Cleman ends up strangling Father Matthais to death during a struggle after discovering the priest's true intentions.

Judging from the adventurous nature of the plot structure in *Die Fieberkurve*, it is clear that Glauser's intention is for Studer to escape the mundane side of everyday life in Switzerland and to fulfill a lifelong curiosity about the Foreign Legion. Moreover, the manner in which the detective embarks on his search for the "buried treasure" mirrors several of the chief elements inherent in the fairy tale. Interestingly, Studer is

accompanied by Marie, one of the benefactors of the geologist's testament, and a colleague of his by the name of Godofrey. Even more remarkable are the fairy-like qualities of the former as well as the dwarf-like characteristics of the latter, both of whom provide the detective with guidance and protection and shield him from the dangers of the outside world. Following the tradition of the fairy tale, the ultimate goal is not to locate the treasure, rather to realize the insignificance of human actions as well as that of earthly glory in the face of eternity. Therefore, as Erhard Ruoss notes, "*Die Fieberkurve* ist weniger die Geschichte von der Lösung eines kriminalistischen Rätsels, als vielmehr eine Parabel von der menschlichen Suche nach dem Sinn des eigenen Daseins, des Lebens."<sup>19</sup>

As is the case in *Matto regiert*, *Die Fieberkurve* contains autobiographical elements, with the focal point being the portrayal of the Foreign Legion. Glauser's motivation is the longing of the Swiss, who are accustomed to living in a well-ordered society and maintaining close personal relationships, for this mysterious, yet intriguing world. The aim of the plot is to ultimately acquaint Studer with the Foreign Legion, taking precedence over the actual case at hand. However, the world to which the detective is exposed is not one of misery and hopelessness, rather a world that is depicted in a completely positive fashion, as Eveline Jacksch notes:

Hier ist die Legion von einem romantischen Schein verklärt, und das nicht nur aus der Sicht des Daheimgebliebenen, sondern auch an Ort und Stelle. Studer, der Zeit seines Lebens von der Legion geträumt hat, sieht sich in seinen positiven Erwartungen nicht enttäuscht, als er die Fremdenlegion endlich kennenlernt. Er findet eine zwar etwas unordentliche, rauhe und abenteuerliche Welt vor,

<sup>19</sup> E. Ruoss, Friedrich Glauser: *Erzählen als Selbstbegegnung und Wahrheitssuche*, p. 118. In his analysis, Ruoss concludes that *Die Fieberkurve* is more of a parable about the human quest for the meaning of existence rather than a story about some crime mystery.

die sich aber wohltuend abhebt von den engen Verhältnissen in der Schweiz.<sup>20</sup>

There are numerous examples of this positive portrayal in the text, including the jolly demeanor of the commanding officers, a hearty meal enjoyed by the detective and the enchanting description of the evening mood at the post. It is also important to note here that *Die Fieberkurve* appeared thirteen years after Glauser's sojourn in the French Foreign Legion. Therefore, one can attribute the rosy depiction to the author's personal wanderlust and longing for the safety and comfort with which that experience had provided him.

Throughout the novel, the reader is able to gain valuable insight into both the detective's background and private life. Like Glauser, Studer had been forced to endure the label of "social outsider" early in life and had therefore considered enlisting in the Foreign Legion in an effort to escape his domestic troubles. But once the detective had established himself professionally, he had been forced to overcome a major setback in order to attain his present status, as the following passage illustrates:

Der Wachtmeister erinnerte sich, daß auch er sich einmal hatte engagieren wollen, zwanzig Jahre war er damals alt gewesen, wegen eines Streites mit seinem Vater . . . Aber dann war er – um die Mutter nicht zu betrüben – in der Schweiz geblieben, hatte Karriere gemacht und es bis zum Kommissär an der Berner Stadtpolizei gebracht. Später war jene Bankgeschichte passiert, die ihm das Genick gebrochen hatte. Und auch damals war wieder der Wunsch in ihm aufgestiegen, alles stehen und liegen zu lassen . . . Doch da war seine Frau, seine Tochter – und so gab er den Plan auf, fing wieder von vorne an, geduldig und bescheiden . . . Nur die Sehnsucht schlummerte weiter in

<sup>20</sup> E. Jacksch, p. 65. Jacksch points out that Studer's expectations of the Foreign Legion are fulfilled and that the world he encounters in Morocco is very much different from the one to which he has grown accustomed in his native Switzerland.

ihm: nach den Ebenen, nach der Wüste, nach den  
Kämpfen.<sup>21</sup>

Although Studer's chief task is to locate the deed to the oil reserve and hopefully learn the truth about the deaths of the priest's sisters-in-law, he is nevertheless able to exercise his lifelong curiosity about the Foreign Legion. On the other hand, Glauser does not ignore the detective's ingenuity, as evidenced by Studer's brilliant deciphering of the temperature curve. As for the administration of justice in this particular case, Studer allows Victor Cleman to go unpunished based not only on the fact that the geologist had suffered enough in his chaotic life, but also on the fact that he had devoted fifteen years of his life to a worthy cause.

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<sup>21</sup> "The inspector remembered that he had once desired to enlist, he had been twenty years old at the time, because of an argument with his father . . . But then he had remained in Switzerland, so as not to cause distress to his mother, had made a career for himself and had eventually become an inspector for the Bern police. Then came that bank affair, which had just about ruined him. And then came the desire to once again leave everything behind . . . But there was his wife, his daughter – and so he gave up the plan and made a fresh start, patiently and modestly . . . Only the longing lay dormant within him, for the plains, for the desert, for the fighting." (13-4)

## 4. FRIEDRICH DÜRRENMATT

### 4.1 Biography

Friedrich Dürrenmatt was born in 1921 in Konolfingen, Switzerland. Since his career as a writer was mainly that of a dramatist, Dürrenmatt is not regarded in the world of German literature as solely a crime fiction novelist. In fact, the only reason that Dürrenmatt had written his first two crime novels, *Der Richter und sein Henker* and *Der Verdacht*, both of which had originally been published in installments in the periodical *Der Schweizerische Beobachter*<sup>22</sup> before appearing in book form, is because his young family had been plagued by financial difficulties at the time and desperately needed the money. Nevertheless, Dürrenmatt was the only German-speaking author of stature of his time to write detective fiction. At the time of their release, his crime novels had a major impact on the public. Dürrenmatt's portrayal of Swiss life is ingenious, and he successfully employs the detective novel to express his basic concept of justice, of man's relationship to justice, and of man's duty to work for a better world. His language is economical, deceptively simple, yet philosophically profound, resulting in numerous academic studies the world over dealing with his works. Highly regarded as one of Switzerland's most influential modern writers, Dürrenmatt died in 1990 at the age of 69 in Neuchâtel.

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<sup>22</sup> It is imperative to note that *Der Schweizerische Beobachter*, or *The Swiss Observer*, is an independent, non-partisan, biweekly periodical that has traditionally taken a position against arrogant bureaucracy and is aimed at an open-minded audience.

#### 4.2 *Der Richter und sein Henker*

Dürrenmatt ventured into the world of detective fiction in 1952 with *Der Richter und sein Henker*. The setting is the Swiss countryside in November 1948, between Bern and Ligerz on Lake Bienne. The novel begins with the discovery of a promising Bern police officer's body in a blue Mercedes. Leading the investigation is Kommissär Hans Bärlach, chief inspector of the criminal investigations department of the Bern police, who has spent much of his life abroad and has made a name for himself as an expert in the detection of crime, first in Istanbul and later in Frankfurt. Bärlach's return to his native Bern in 1933 is driven not so much by his love for Switzerland, but a conflict with the new Nazi government. Because Bärlach is in the latter stage of his career, and more importantly, because he is suffering terminally from cancer, a younger policeman by the name of Tschanz is assigned to assist him.

As Bärlach and Tschanz begin their investigation, they discover a mysterious character by the name of Gastmann. Unbeknown to Tschanz, Bärlach has known Gastmann for nearly forty years from his time in Turkey, where Gastmann, a firm believer in the notion that evil is not the expression of a philosophy or an instinct, but of his freedom, once killed a man in broad daylight in front of Bärlach, only to prove that the detective would not be able to pin the crime on him. This murder had been the result of a blasphemous wager, that one day Bärlach would destroy Gastmann, and since Bärlach is aware that the murdered lieutenant had also been on Gastmann's trail in an illegal international arms deal, he sees a perfect opportunity to make good on his promise.

At the beginning of the investigation, Tschanz is for the realistic approach to solving the crime, but Bärlach restrains him due to what he already knows about

Gastmann. In a shrewd but ingenious move, Bärlach decides to use Tschanz to go after Gastmann, who is killed with his two servants during a shoot-out at Gastmann's compound. The gun that killed the lieutenant is found in the hand of one of the servants, but this is not the solution to the case. As it turns out, Tschanz is the real murderer, for it is he who placed the murder weapon at the scene of the shoot-out in an attempt to deceive Bärlach. But the detective is too clever for Tschanz and has known all along of his involvement in the crime, that Tschanz killed the lieutenant out of professional jealousy. By appointing himself the judge and Tschanz the executioner, Bärlach is successful in defeating his old nemesis. As for Tschanz's punishment, Bärlach does not bother to arrest him and instead decides to leave it to chance. Several days later, Tschanz is killed in a freak accident when a train hits his automobile.

*Der Richter und sein Henker* is the first of a two-part series with Bärlach as the protagonist, the sequel being *Der Verdacht*. In addition to being the more conventional detective story of the two, Dürrenmatt's first crime novel has been widely acclaimed for its comical elements and is thus considered a satire on both Switzerland and Swiss political bureaucracy. Gastmann, an internationally notorious criminal, is himself the product of Switzerland and returns as an old man to his native Lamboing to establish the base of his illegal empire. Unlike Bärlach, whose nostalgia had played a role in his return to Switzerland, Gastmann's homecoming is driven by the fact that he knows the hills above Lake Bienne will provide him with the anonymity and privacy that he needs in order to continue his criminal practices. Several of Lamboing's residents are aware of Gastmann's return and what he represents, yet in their eyes, Gastmann is an overall good

man and even considered an asset to the community: “Er zahlen Steuern für das ganze Dorf Lamboing. Das genügt für uns, daß Gastmann ist der sympathischste Mensch im ganzen Kanton.”<sup>23</sup> The Swiss bureaucrats are also aware of Gastmann’s illegal activities, yet they do not dare meddle in his affairs or ask any questions for fear of humiliation. One such bureaucrat is Oskar von Schwendi, member of the “Nationalrat,” or National Assembly, and Gastmann’s private attorney. In spite of his high social standing, von Schwendi is a “selbstgefällig[e], intrigant[e], rücksichtslos[e] und einfältig[e]” figure who acts solely in his own interests and those of his chief client.<sup>24</sup> His decision to remain silent with respect to Gastmann’s wrongdoings is threefold. First, von Schwendi knows that the illicit deals are lucrative to his client and, in turn, to him. Second, the fact that Gastmann has established an illegal empire in his native village while both the local residents and government have assumed a complacent and passive attitude towards it is nothing out of the ordinary in Switzerland, where the right to privacy is so greatly revered. Finally, von Schwendi is aware of both the domestic and international repercussions of exposing Gastmann. At this point, doing so would embarrass not only the Swiss government, but also some very powerful foreign governments whose diplomats are exploiting their immunity to consummate the illegal activities. It is for these reasons that Gastmann has been able to avoid prosecution throughout the years, much to the chagrin of Bärlach, who must resolve to search for an alternative method in order to deliver his nemesis to justice.

<sup>23</sup> “He pays taxes for the entire village of Lamboing. That’s good enough for us. Gastmann is the kindest person in the entire canton.” (44) Note: The original quotation is not grammatically proper German, for the policeman who said it is a native French speaker which, given the setting of the novel, is completely understandable.

<sup>24</sup> W. Pasche, *Interpretationshilfen: Friedrich Dürrenmatts Kriminalromane*, p. 45. Pasche describes von Schwendi as a smug, inconsiderate and narrow-minded individual who exploits his government position for his own personal benefit.

Dürrenmatt's first crime novel is also a critique of the Swiss justice system and standard police procedure. Right from the very onset, one can observe that the system is flawed due to the mere fact that Gastmann has been allowed to continue his criminal enterprise in his native land, all the while having successfully evaded punishment. However, the manner in which Bärlach ultimately defeats his enemy also proves that the system has its flaws, as Roger A. Crockett notes: "The justice meted out to Gastmann is flawed because Bärlach has had to resort to extralegal means, to vigilante justice. His inability to win fairly proves the validity of Gastmann's claim and discredits his own fanatical belief in the justice system, the same belief that underlies traditional detective fiction."<sup>25</sup> It is important to recall here that Bärlach has known all along that Tschanz had murdered the lieutenant. Therefore, this novel is not about the murder introduced in the opening chapters, as the casual reader may observe, rather about Bärlach's personal quest to deliver Gastmann to justice. Aware that it is impossible to accomplish this by traditional means due to the political situation of the time, Bärlach ventures beyond standard police protocol and tricks one murderer, Tschanz, into eliminating another, Gastmann. At the end of the novel, Bärlach's decision to allow chance to determine Tschanz's punishment is further proof that the system is problematic and, to a lesser extent, outright absurd in certain cases. Nevertheless, it is evident that in this novel, Dürrenmatt successfully demonstrates how the Swiss justice system as well as standard police procedure will fail, regardless of the blatancy of the criminal act, if the proverbial powers that be, in this case political bureaucracy, have their say in the manner.

Let us now examine Bärlach and his role in *Der Richter und sein Henker* in greater detail. As stated before, Bärlach's return to Switzerland after having enjoyed a

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<sup>25</sup> R. Crockett, *Understanding Friedrich Dürrenmatt*, p. 38.

successful career abroad is driven by nostalgia as well as a personal conflict with Nazi Germany, a theme that Dürrenmatt addresses in the sequel. Despite his debilitating illness, Bärlach is a man of strong character who relies heavily on his own intuition. In addition, the detective is a staunch patriot who feels the need to root out all evil in his homeland and believes that the law must prevail no matter what the circumstances, as Wolfgang Pasche notes: "Bärlach setzt sich seinerseits für die strikte Einhaltung des Rechts ein: ohne Skrupel und jenseits aller gesetzlichen Normen fordert er die Respektierung naturrechtlicher Grundlagen; ein nicht bestraftes Verbrechen lässt ihn an der Gerechtigkeit der Welt überhaupt zweifeln."<sup>26</sup> As a result, Bärlach's pursuit of justice is relentless, and he is not afraid to exhaust all possible methods in his efforts to bring a criminal to justice, even if he must resort to unconventional means to accomplish so. This is due, in part, to the fact that Bärlach is a detective of the old school who lacks high regard for modern criminology. Therefore, it is not surprising to observe the manner in which Bärlach assumes the role of the judge and shrewdly pits one villain against another, with Gastmann's demise as the ultimate goal. Standard police procedure could not have facilitated such an outcome at the time, of which the detective is fully aware. One must then commend Bärlach for his dauntless intuitive efforts, his weak physical state notwithstanding. Yet given the unfair nature of the detective's tactics, the end appears to justify the means, for both murderers are ultimately brought to justice, albeit one at the hands of fate.

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<sup>26</sup> W. Pasche, p. 34. Pasche reinforces Bärlach's position with respect to the law and argues that unpunished criminals, such as Gastmann, lead the detective to question the validity of justice in the world.

### 4.3 *Der Verdacht*

The second of Dürrenmatt's Bärlach-novels, *Der Verdacht*, appeared in book form in 1953 and deals with the detective's refusal to abandon the pursuit of justice. After retiring from the Bern police department, Bärlach undergoes an operation for abdominal cancer and is not likely to recover. On his deathbed, Bärlach discovers an unpunished Nazi war criminal by the name of Fritz Emmenberger, a Swiss national, from a photograph in *Life* magazine. In order to deliver Emmenberger to justice, Bärlach has himself transferred to the sanitarium Sonnenstein in Zurich, where the former concentration camp doctor is the director and continues to carry out his evil practices.

Upon his admission to Sonnenstein, Bärlach assumes the name of a rich Swiss businessman, Blaise Kramer, in an effort to conceal his pursuit of justice. Prepared to test his theory that Emmenberger had made his fortune in Switzerland by using concentration camp methods to terrify his patients into leaving him their money, Bärlach daringly schedules an operation with the war criminal. However, when Emmenberger discovers a newspaper photograph in *Der Bund* showing Bärlach's retirement ceremony, he immediately realizes what the detective's intentions are and plans to operate on him without anesthetics, ensuring that his patient will suffer a slow, agonizing death.

Realizing that his opponent is onto him, Bärlach is prepared to accept defeat. But at the very last moment, fate intervenes and a former concentration camp victim, named Gulliver, comes to the detective's rescue. Gulliver's self-imposed task is to seek and destroy Nazi war criminals, and he forces Emmenberger to commit suicide a few minutes before the operation on Bärlach is due to begin.

In addition to serving as a sequel to *Der Richter und sein Henker*, *Der Verdacht* represents a pioneer work in many respects. Having appeared less than a decade after the end of the Second World War, *Der Verdacht* was one of the first European literary works of its time to mention the Holocaust, in spite of the fact that it was still considered a taboo subject. In this novel, Dürrenmatt's primary objective is to bring to the attention of his fellow countrymen human rights issues with respect to the atrocities committed by the Nazis in World War II, as Gerhard Knapp notes: "Er geht einen Schritt weiter und greift das Thema der Kriegsverbrechen – 'Medizin ohne Menschlichkeit' – auf, das zu dieser Zeit nicht nur auf ein ungebrochenes öffentliches Interesse, sondern auch auf einen gewissen Sensationswert hoffen konnte."<sup>27</sup> However, *Der Verdacht* is as much a critique of Switzerland as it is of the unpunished Nazi war criminals, such as Emmenberger, who exploited Switzerland's neutrality by taking secret refuge within its boundaries in order to continue their evil and unethical practices. As it turns out, Switzerland had adopted a policy of *laissez-faire* both during and after the Second World War, leading Dürrenmatt to criticize both Swiss complacency and self-righteousness: "Dürrenmatt kritisiert in diesem Roman die prekäre Haltung der Schweiz, aller Verwicklung in die nationalsozialistische Politik zum Trotz sich immer wieder selbst von Schuld freizusprechen."<sup>28</sup> Subsequently, one can argue that Dürrenmatt shrewdly employs the crime novel to attack the Swiss small state mentality and, in doing so, questions his

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<sup>27</sup> G. Knapp, *Friedrich Dürrenmatt*, p. 31. Knapp indicates that it is Dürrenmatt's intention to address the war crimes issue, particularly the inhumane medical practices, in the hope of making the Swiss aware of both the harsh realities and consequences of the Second World War.

<sup>28</sup> W. Pasche, p. 80. Pasche notes that Dürrenmatt is highly critical of his country's rather awkward position during World War II, whereby Switzerland maintained that it had vehemently objected to Nazi politics, thus clearing itself of any guilt with respect to the Holocaust. This would eventually prove to be false, as Switzerland, amidst allegations in the mid-1990s that its banks had profited from dealings with the Nazis and had retained funds belonging to Jewish depositors, was finally forced to admit to having ties with

Germany. It was not until fifty years after the liberation of Auschwitz that the Catholic Church, at a conference of German bishops, issued a formal apology for its role during the Holocaust as well as its failure to intervene by utilizing its moral influence. Interestingly, this confession had come nearly fifteen years after the United Lutheran Church had taken a landmark step by accepting historical responsibility for anti-Semitism and the subsequent Holocaust. Dürrenmatt's critique of religion, however, is not only limited to formal ecclesiastical denominations. With Kläri Glauber, a nurse at Sonnenstein and also a fanatical sectarian, the author exercises strong disapproval of religious fanaticism in Switzerland which, at the time, went hand in hand with economic prejudice and social oppression. Furthermore, Dürrenmatt makes a point to arrange it that Glauber comes from Emmental, incidentally his own native region, and that she is of a pigheaded, narrow-minded nature, which suits her fanatical beliefs: "Die Emmentaler sind immer die verfluchtesten Sektierer gewesen."<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, Wolfgang Pasche is quick to point out that, "Ihr Name ist deutlich auf den Schweizer Kriminalschriftsteller Friedrich Glauser zugeschnitten, der für Dürrenmatt zum Ärgernis wurde, weil er sich mit ihm stets vergleichen lassen musste."<sup>31</sup> All in all, Dürrenmatt's critique of religion in *Der Verdacht* aims to deliver the church a very important message while simultaneously bringing to the attention of the Swiss the church's role in the Holocaust as well as the troublesome, problematic nature of religious fanaticism.

In contrast to the Bärlach of *Der Richter und sein Henker*, who solved the case by a type of logical thinking, the Bärlach of *Der Verdacht* must resolve to following active

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<sup>29</sup> J. Knopf, *Friedrich Dürrenmatt*, p. 52. In Knopf's analysis, he criticizes both Swiss complacency and the Swiss economic structure which, at that time, had allowed practically anyone, including unpunished Nazi war criminals, to take residence within its boundaries in order to earn a decent living.

<sup>30</sup> "The people of Emmental have always been the most wretched, cursed sectarians." (228)

intuitive mental processes. This can be attributed to the detective's weak physical state, even though it is clear that Bärlach's pursuit of justice is unhampered by his terminal illness. In fact, when Bärlach schedules a seemingly unnecessary operation with the former concentration camp doctor Emmenberger, much to the dismay of his own doctor, who tells him, "Es hat keinen Sinn,"<sup>32</sup> the detective replies, "Die Gerechtigkeit hat immer Sinn,"<sup>33</sup> thus reaffirming the author's stance that Switzerland must not allow Nazi war criminals, particularly those who had taken secret refuge within its boundaries, to go unpunished. Furthermore, Bärlach upholds Dürrenmatt's assertion that Switzerland, in stark contrast to its small state mentality, is very much vulnerable to outside evils, such as those committed in World War II: "Was in Deutschland geschah, geschieht in jedem Land, wenn gewisse Bedingungen eintreten. Diese Bedingungen mögen verschieden sein. Kein Mensch, kein Volk ist eine Ausnahme."<sup>34</sup> Yet in spite of Bärlach's valiant intuitive efforts, posing as a rich Swiss businessman in order to trap his opponent, it is ultimately pure chance that saves the detective from a slow, painful death. This chance manifests itself in the form of Gulliver, the personification of the maltreatment of the Jews by the Nazis. By forcing Emmenberger to commit suicide, it is Gulliver, not Bärlach, who delivers the Nazi war criminal to justice. As to why he had come to Bärlach's aid, Gulliver tells the detective, "Wir können als einzelne die Welt nicht retten. [...] Wir können nur im einzelnen helfen, nicht im gesamten. [...] So sollen wir die Welt nicht zu retten suchen, sondern zu bestehen, das einzige wahrhaftige Abenteuer, das

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<sup>31</sup> W. Pasche, p. 101. Pasche notes that it is no coincidence that Glauber's name resembles that of Glauser, with whom Dürrenmatt, much to his chagrin, had always been compared.

<sup>32</sup> "That makes no sense." (177)

<sup>33</sup> "Justice always makes sense." (177)

<sup>34</sup> "What happened in Germany happens in every country if certain conditions are present. Naturally, these conditions can vary. But no person, no nation is an exception." (203)

uns in dieser späten Zeit noch bleibt.”<sup>35</sup> Thus, both *Bärlach* and *Gulliver* serve as an example to the Swiss of how they must band together to combat the ramifications of the Second World War, as opposed to assuming an ill-conceived, passive role which, unfortunately, had been the case in Switzerland throughout the 1940s and 1950s.

#### 4.4 *Das Versprechen*

Dürrenmatt's third crime novel, *Das Versprechen*, was published in 1958. In a change of literary style from his *Bärlach*-novels, Dürrenmatt employs the “Ich-Erzähler,” or first-person narrator, as well as the “Rahmenerzählung,” or framework story, to tell this tale of chance, determination and failure. The novel begins with Dürrenmatt parodying himself in the framework story by pretending that he had just given an unsuccessful lecture on how to write a crime novel in Chur, a little town in Graubünden in eastern Switzerland. It was unsuccessful partly because he had been in competition with his own *bête noire* from his student days in Zurich, Professor Emil Staiger, who had been lecturing on the later works of Goethe. Accepting a ride back to Zurich from a chance meeting with Dr. H., a former inspector of the Zurich police, Dürrenmatt is told the strange story of the former policeman, Dr. Matthäi, at whose service station they have just pulled in for gasoline, and it is at this point in the novel where the actual plot begins.

A peddler by the name of von Gunten reports the discovery of the body of a little girl, Gritli Moser, in the woods near the fictional Swiss village of Mägendorf. Because of the fact that Gritli had been murdered with a razor blade, one of the many items sold by von Gunten, it is automatically assumed that he is culpable. Von Gunten, a simple man,

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<sup>35</sup> “Individually, we cannot save the world. [...] We can only help as individuals, not as a whole. [...] Thus, we should not seek to change the world, rather deal with whatever comes our way, this being the

is eventually so bewildered by the constant police interrogations that he confesses to the murder and then hangs himself in his cell, thereby making his guilt seem obvious. Thus, for the police, the case is closed and “die Gerechtigkeit hatte gesiegt.”<sup>36</sup> Matthäi, however, is reluctant to believe in such a simple solution to the case. Prior to von Gunten’s suicide, Matthäi had “promised” the parents of the murdered child that he would find the killer, hence the title of this novel, *Das Versprechen*, and because he has never been convinced of the peddler’s guilt, Matthäi gives up a planned flight to take up a new post in Jordan to return to what his colleagues believe to be a useless investigation.

As Matthäi begins his unofficial inquiry into the case, he discovers that there had been two similar, fairly recent child murders in the area, one in Schwyz and one in Sankt Gallen. The detective also pays a visit to Gritli’s school and has a conversation with one of her former classmates, Ursula, who informs him that Gritli had recently made acquaintance with a “Riese” and that this giant had given her little chocolate truffles shaped like hedgehogs. This immediately leads Matthäi to believe that a child murderer is on the loose somewhere and intensifies his pursuit of justice to the point where he begins to smoke and to drink heavily. Convinced that the killer will strike again, Matthäi purchases a service station along the route from Chur to Zurich where, according to his calculations, the murderer is most likely to commit his next act. It is here where Matthäi sets up with a housekeeper by the name of Frau Heller, a former prostitute known to him from his early days, and her daughter, Annemarie, who resembles the murdered Gritli and who is to serve as the bait to lure the culprit.

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only true adventure that remains in this day and age.” (264)

<sup>36</sup> “Justice had prevailed.” (66)

As the days and the weeks pass, Matthäi becomes more and more restless. Finally, he appears to have caught a break when Annemarie tells him of an encounter with a “Zauberer,” or magician, who had given her chocolate. Convinced that this magician is Gritli’s murderer, Matthäi somehow manages to persuade his former colleagues that it would be worthwhile to wait in hiding in the woods in an attempt to trap the killer. But nothing happens, and eventually Matthäi, Dr. H. and the policemen begin to argue among themselves. Still convinced of the peddler’s guilt, the police believe this waiting to be a huge waste of time and decide, much to Matthäi’s displeasure, to end the operation. To make matters worse, Frau Heller learns of the detective’s plan to risk her very own daughter’s life in order to entice a potentially dangerous child murderer. She is completely outraged and immediately leaves her housekeeper job at the service station, taking Annemarie with her. At this moment, Matthäi becomes a victim of his own brilliant logical reason, and he ends up a dropout and a drunkard, marking the end of the novel’s actual plot.

Returning to the first-person narrator, Dr. H. proceeds to tell the reader how chance had thwarted Matthäi’s careful, albeit unorthodox planning. He had been summoned to visit a rich 89-year old woman by the name of Frau Schrott, now dying in a Zurich hospital, who told him the strange story of her second marriage at 55 to her 23-year old chauffeur, Albert. In a bizarre twist of fate, Frau Schrott revealed to Dr. H. that Albert had been responsible for the murders of each of the young girls and that he had set off to murder another, Annemarie, but had been killed in a car accident on the way. To protect her reputation and to avoid a scandal, Frau Schrott had chosen not to report her husband to the authorities, but now facing death, she felt obliged to inform them of what

she knew about the child murders. Thus, the old woman solves the crime and proves that Matthäi had been right all along with his belief. But the once-proud detective will never know of the existence of Frau Schrott, nor of her deranged husband, and is instead left a broken man at his service station.

In spite of a seven-year hiatus from detective fiction, it is evident in this novel that Dürrenmatt's objective is to once again mock the literary genre, albeit for the very last time, as evidenced by the subtitle "Requiem auf den Kriminalroman," or funeral of the crime novel. In the first part of *Das Versprechen*, the legitimacy of the detective novel as a literary genre is under debate. The failure of Dürrenmatt's lecture on the art of writing detective stories facilitates a discussion between the author and the fictional retired inspector Dr. H., who proceeds to correct Dürrenmatt, first with polemic, later with an example from genuine police work. According to Dr. H., the problem with the genre is that it is based solely on a false premise, logic: "Ihr baut eure Handlungen logisch auf; wie bei einem Schachspiel geht es zu, hier der Verbrecher, hier das Opfer, hier der Mitwisser, hier der Nutznießer; es genügt, daß der Detektiv die Regeln kennt und die Partie wiederholt, und schon hat er den Verbrecher gestellt, der Gerechtigkeit zum Siege verholfen. Diese Fiktion macht mich wütend."<sup>37</sup> In truth, chance plays a much larger role and has a much greater impact on the outcome of any given investigation than probability, thereby discounting the elements of the traditional crime novel. To further illustrate this point, Dr. H. also argues, "Unsere Gesetze fußen nur auf Wahrscheinlichkeit, auf Statistik, nicht auf Kausalität, treffen nur im allgemeinen zu,

nicht im besonderen. Der Einzelne steht außerhalb der Berechnung.”<sup>38</sup> Coincidentally, the proof to Dr. H.’s contention lies at the service station in the form of Matthäi, formerly one of the top inspectors of the Zurich Cantonal Police. Dr. H. then proceeds to tell Dürrenmatt the story of how chance and misfortune had impeded Matthäi’s personal crusade to fulfill the pledge made to the parents of the murdered child, thus demonstrating the invalidity and illogicality of the traditional detective story.

The success and popularity of *Das Versprechen* have spawned numerous academic studies not only with respect to genre, but also with respect to the message that the author attempts to convey. According to Kenneth S. Whitton, “*Das Versprechen* is much more than a ‘Krimi’, even than a ‘Requiem’ on a ‘Krimi’; it is a novel which uses the ‘thriller’-scheme to make important statements about the world and the way in which people live – and die. [...] For this reason *Das Versprechen*, the best of the three novels, is not only Dürrenmatt’s ‘Requiem auf den Kriminalroman’, but his rather ambitious requiem on human reason altogether.”<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, Ueli Niederer suggests that the novel is Dürrenmatt’s bid, “die Problematik von subjektiver und objektiver Wahrheit, von der einen Wahrheit und den vielen in einem höchst subjektiven Bericht zu fassen.”<sup>40</sup> As for chance, perhaps the most important “Urmotiv” in *Das Versprechen*, Jochen Richter argues, “Für Dürrenmatt wird die Wirklichkeit vom Zufall bestimmt, und der Mensch muß lernen, daß er sie nicht einfach mit Mitteln der Logik erklären oder

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<sup>37</sup> “You build your plots up logically, as in a game of chess; here the criminal, here the victim, here the accomplice, here the mastermind. The detective only needs to know the rules and to play the game over, and he has the criminal trapped, has won a victory for justice. This fiction enrages me.” (12)

<sup>38</sup> “Our rules are based solely on probability and statistics, not causality; they apply only in general and not in particular. The individual stands outside our calculations.” (13)

<sup>39</sup> K. Whitton, *Dürrenmatt: Reinterpretation in Retrospect*, p. 42-3.

<sup>40</sup> U. Niederer, “Grotesken zum wahren Ende: Neuerlicher Versuch über Dürrenmatts Kriminalromane,” p. 66. Niederer contends that *Das Versprechen* is Dürrenmatt’s bold attempt to address the problematic nature of both subjective and objective truth by formulating a highly subjective story line.

beschreiben kann.”<sup>41</sup> It is for this reason that the author allows Matthäi’s quest for the truth to end in failure, thus discrediting the writer of traditional detective fiction for not having taken into account such factors as chance. Moreover, reality is not something that can be calculated, another issue that is clearly addressed in the novel. At the same time, however, Edgar Marsch asserts that *Das Versprechen* “deutet die Möglichkeit des Kriminalromans an, in der modernen Welt weiterzuexistieren. Die Kritik an der Tradition und die Modifikation der überlieferten Form wird offen im modernen Kriminalroman zur Sprache gebracht. Dem konventionellen Schema wird widersprochen.”<sup>42</sup> While all the indications are that *Das Versprechen* is, indeed, a requiem on both detective fiction and reason, Dürrenmatt also employs the novel as a mechanism to criticize his homeland, adhering to the tradition of the Bärlach-series.

In addition to serving as a parody of the detective novel, *Das Versprechen* is also a critique of Swiss society, namely the conduct and mentality of the Mägendorf villagers in the aftermath of the peddler’s arrest. Due to the nature of von Gunten’s profession, he is automatically viewed as a social outsider. Moreover, circumstantial evidence suggests that von Gunten may be culpable, fueling public discrimination to the point of a social uproar. The entire police force, with the exception of Matthäi, shares the mentality of the common villager and believes that the peddler is the murderer, rendering Mägendorf’s highest ranking official powerless, as Wolfgang Pasche notes:

Der Gemeindepräsident erweist sich als unfähig, einen Verdächtigen zu schützen, weil er Angst vor einer auf-

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<sup>41</sup> J. Richter, “‘Um ehrlich zu sein, ich habe nie viel von Kriminalromanen gehalten.’ Über die Detektivromane von Friedrich Dürrenmatt,” p. 151. Richter states that the reality of chance is clearly defined in the novel. As a result, logical methods of detection are rendered useless and ineffective.

<sup>42</sup> E. Marsch, *Die Kriminalerzählung: Theorie, Geschichte, Analyse*, p. 281. In Marsch’s analysis, he argues that *Das Versprechen* suggests the possibility that the traditional crime novel will continue to exist in the modern world, in spite of the author’s critique of the conventional scheme and lack of regard for its classical elements.

gebrachten Meute hat und dieselben Vorurteile gegenüber dem gesellschaftlichen Außenseiter besitzt wie sie. Die Bauern und Arbeiter des Dorfes pflegen ihre traditionelle Abneigung gegen die Obrigkeit aus der Stadt, um ihre dumpfe Wut an dem Hausierer auszulassen. Sie sind bereit, zur Lynchjustiz zu greifen, da sie der staatlichen Jurisdiktion misstrauen.<sup>43</sup>

It is not long before public disdain drives the peddler to commit suicide, which both the villagers and the police consider to be a vindication of the gruesome homicide. Thus for them, the Gritli Moser case has been solved and justice has been served.

The fact that this conjecture will eventually prove to be false is, in turn, a critique on behalf of Dürrenmatt of the Swiss police. Instead of exhausting all possible resources and carrying out a thorough investigation, the police abandon their traditional, authoritative role by siding with the public in the instantaneous assumption that von Gunten is guilty. The reason for such is threefold. First, the sheer nature of the criminal act, sexual assault and murder of a young girl, demanded a swift solution to the case. Both the police and the public are aware that a potentially dangerous child-murderer lurking about would be detrimental to society. Therefore, the sooner the culprit is caught, the better it is for everyone. Second, the fact that circumstantial evidence appears to implicate the peddler in the murder is too great to overlook. His label as a social outsider and his subsequent suicide are taken as substantial proof that he is, indeed, the killer. Thus, the case is closed, the public is calmed and society can return to normal. Finally, in a land that so prides itself on its reputation for perfection, nothing is more condemned than a public scandal, which is exactly what would have occurred had the entire police

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<sup>43</sup> W. Pasche, p. 160. Pasche upholds the mayor's unwillingness to protect the peddler for fear of a public scandal and due to the fact that he is of the same mentality as the villagers with respect to discrimination. Furthermore, Pasche notes that the villagers are opposed to the intervention of the cantonal police, a theme

force shared Matthäi's belief that von Gunten is innocent. Society would undoubtedly have fallen into disarray, something that the authorities had to prevent at all costs. In this case, the unfortunate peddler had to serve as the fall guy in order to obliterate public indignation and restore peace. Such is Dürrenmatt's critique of the Swiss police; their succumbing to public opinion, their inability to overcome their narrow-mindedness and their ultimate failure to fulfill their work-related obligations, resulting in the needless death of the innocent peddler and the untimely downfall of the once-proud Matthäi.

Whereas Dürrenmatt's first detective, Bärlach, had persisted with the pursuit of justice well beyond his official duty, even physical capability, Matthäi, on the contrary, is at the apex of his career and on the verge of leaving his beloved Switzerland for a more prominent post in Amman, Jordan. Ironically, Matthäi possesses many of the same characteristics as his predecessors in the classical detective fiction:

Er war ein einsamer Mensch, stets sorgfältig gekleidet, unpersönlich, formell, beziehungslos, der weder rauchte noch trank, aber hart und unbarmherzig sein Metier beherrschte, ebenso verhaßt wie erfolgreich. [...] Er war ein Mann der Organisation, der den Polizei-Apparat wie einen Rechenschieber handhabte. Verheiratet war er nicht, sprach überhaupt nie von seinem Privatleben und hatte wohl auch keines. Er hatte nichts im Kopf als seinen Beruf, den er als ein Kriminalist von Format, doch ohne Leidenschaft ausübte. So hartnäckig und unermüdlich er auch vorging, seine Tätigkeit schien ihn zu langweilen, bis er eben in einen Fall verwickelt wurde, der ihn plötzlich leidenschaftlich werden ließ.<sup>44</sup>

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that was previously addressed in Glauser's *Wachtmeister Studer*, and are therefore ready to exercise lynch law due to their distrust of the state administration of justice.

<sup>44</sup> "He was a solitary man, always carefully dressed, impersonal, formal, devoid of relationships, who neither smoked nor drank, but strongly and mercilessly dominated his profession, just as hated as he was successful. [...] He was a man of organization who handled the police force like a slide rule. He was not married, never spoke of his private life and probably did not have one. He thought of nothing but his occupation, which he carried out like a criminologist of stature, yet without passion. Stubbornly and tirelessly he went about, his work seemed to bore him until he became involved in a case that suddenly invoked his dedication." (14-5)

Furthermore, Wolfgang Pasche maintains that Matthäi's investigative methods also mirror those of his predecessors: "Er geht von einem deduktiven Ansatz aus, ermittelt zunächst ohne Realitätsbezug, indem er Hypothesen aufstellt und deren Wahrscheinlichkeitsgrad untersucht. Erst anschließend bemüht er sich, in das psychosoziale Umfeld des Täters vorzudringen."<sup>45</sup> Yet in spite of Matthäi's flawless police work, his logic and his brilliant inspiration, Dürrenmatt ultimately chooses not to reward the detective's faith, perseverance and determination. In the end, Matthäi becomes a victim of his own reason, incapable of comprehending the world around him. His failure to acknowledge chance as a "wirksame Kraft,"<sup>46</sup> along with his refusal to accept human imperfection, drive him to insanity and leave the once-proud detective a dejected man. Near the conclusion of the novel, Dr. H. summarizes Matthäi's misfortune in the following monologue:

Das Schlimmste trifft *auch* manchmal zu. Wir sind Männer, haben damit zu rechnen, uns dagegen zu wappnen und uns vor allem klar darüber zu werden, daß wir am Absurden, welches sich notwendigerweise immer deutlicher und mächtiger zeigt, nur dann nicht scheitern und uns einigermaßen wohnlich auf dieser Erde einrichten werden, wenn wir es demütig in unser Denken einkalkulieren. Unser Verstand erhellt die Welt nur notdürftig. In der Zwielflichtzone seiner Grenze siedelt sich alles Paradoxe an. Hüten wir uns davor, diese Gespenster an sich zu nehmen, als ob sie außerhalb des menschlichen Geistes angesiedelt wären, oder, noch schlimmer: Begehen wir nicht den Irrtum, sie als einen vermeidbaren Fehler zu betrachten, der uns verführen könnte, die Welt in einer Art trotziger Moral hinzurichten, unternähmen wir den Versuch, ein fehlerloses Vernunftsgebilde durchzusetzen, denn gerade seine fehlerlose Vollkommenheit wäre seine

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<sup>45</sup> W. Pasche, p. 167. Pasche remarks that Matthäi is for the deductive reasoning approach to solving crimes. Yet by formulating hypotheses and examining their degree of probability, the detective is guilty of ignoring reality.

<sup>46</sup> I. Tschimmel, p. 118. Tschimmel labels chance an "effective force" capable of having a major impact on any given police investigation.

tödliche Lüge und ein Zeichen der schrecklichsten  
Blindheit.<sup>47</sup>

Thus, it is clear that in *Das Versprechen*, Dürrenmatt has successfully rendered Matthäi's masterful piece of detection and, on a broader scale, the traditional detective novel absurd due to interfering circumstances such as chance.

#### 4.4.1 *Es geschah am hellichten Tag*

In 1957, one year prior to the release of *Das Versprechen*, Dürrenmatt had been commissioned by the Swiss motion picture company Praesens Film to write a narrative for a film that was intended to address a national concern over the growing number of sexual crimes against children. Much to the author's chagrin, who had preferred the title "Dieu a dormi un après-midi,"<sup>48</sup> or "God Was Asleep One Afternoon," Praesens Film opted for *Es geschah am hellichten Tag*, or *It Happened in Broad Daylight*, in the belief that the latter would generate a broader public appeal and alert parents to the ever-increasing, aforementioned danger. Directed by Ladislao Vajda, a Hungarian, the film is set in the vicinity of Zurich in the 1950s and corresponds to the novel with the exception of the conclusion. After hearing Annemarie's account of having made acquaintance with a magician who had given her chocolate truffles shaped like hedgehogs, Matthäi's next move is to construct a child-sized doll in the woods and have the police lie in wait for the

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<sup>47</sup> "The worst *does* sometimes happen. We are men, we have to count on that possibility, to arm ourselves against it and, above all, to realize that since absurdities necessarily occur and present themselves more clearly and powerfully than ever, we can prevent ourselves from being destroyed by them and make ourselves comfortable upon this earth if we humbly include them in our thinking. Our reason illuminates the world only meagerly. Everything paradoxical settles in the twilight zone. Let us beware of taking these specters for what they are, as if they were situated outside the human mind, or, worse, let us not make the mistake of regarding them as an avoidable error that could tempt us into hanging the world in a kind of defiant moral. If we were to attempt to construct a perfect object of reason, then merely its perfection would be its deadly lie and a sign of the most dreadful blindness." (136-7)

<sup>48</sup> This preferred title was taken from a Dürrenmatt interview with the Geneva newspaper *Tribune de Genève* in May 1958. Additional bibliographical information is unavailable.

killer. In the meantime, both Annemarie and her mother are sent off to safety, unaware of the sting operation. Eventually, the magician arrives and a brief struggle ensues in which Matthäi is wounded but manages to shoot the assailant dead. It is at this moment where Annemarie and her mother unexpectedly arrive at the scene. Eager to meet with the magician, Annemarie runs away from her mother and must be intercepted by Matthäi, who distracts her from the gruesome scene with a hand puppet, marking the end of the film.

Not only was *Es geschah am hellichten Tag* a huge success in Switzerland, but also throughout most of Europe, particularly in England, where it appeared under the slightly different title *Assault in Broad Daylight*. Dürrenmatt had given the television industry exactly what it had demanded, the chilling tale of a psychopathic child-murderer whose demise is the direct result of brilliant detective work. The sentimental conclusion to the film, along with the sympathetic characterization of Matthäi, drew rave reviews from numerous publications, including the German newspaper *Die Welt*:

Die Schweiz bringt einen in seiner logischen Ruhe, seiner fast behaglichen Spielart erstaunlichen Kriminalfilm. [...] Das will kein dichterischer Film sein. Es will auch kein Reißer üblichen Sinnes sein. [...] Dieser Film mit einem fast behaglichen Realismus und seiner durchgehend sauberen und redlichen Darstellung reißt gewiß keine Kinobäume aus. Aber er ist ehrlich. Er ist kompetent gemacht. Er hat ein wichtiges Thema und eine warnende Mission.<sup>49</sup>

Yet in spite of the film's both domestic and international acclaim, Dürrenmatt, admittedly, was dissatisfied with the ending. One year later, though, *Das Versprechen*

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<sup>49</sup> In this July 1958 review, *Die Welt* lauds Switzerland for having delivered an honest, competent, altogether exciting crime film. Of particular merit are the film's somewhat homely realism, its honest, accurate portrayal of everyday Swiss life, and its mission to warn people of a growing danger. Additional bibliographical information is unavailable.

would provide him with the proper forum to right the wrong, to teach a deeper lesson about reality, which is precisely what he had achieved in his “Requiem auf den Kriminalroman.”

#### 4.4.2 *The Pledge*

Nearly a half century later, in 2001, a second adaptation of *Das Versprechen*, entitled *The Pledge*, appeared in American theaters. Directed by Sean Penn and starring the famed Jack Nicholson as Inspector Jerry Black, the film is set in contemporary Reno, Nevada and its vicinity, and completely coincides with the novel plot, including the ending. There are, of course, three notable differences, yet by no means do they conflict with the message that the film attempts to convey. First, whereas Matthäi is at the pinnacle of his career, Black is on the verge of retirement, having enjoyed considerable success as a homicide detective, and looks forward to dedicating more time to his favorite pastime, fishing. Second, whereas the prime suspect in *Es geschah am hellichten Tag* is a peddler who eventually hangs himself in his cell, he is, in *The Pledge*, a mentally disturbed Native American by the name of Toby Jay Wadenah with a long police dossier who, after an exhaustive interrogation, manages to steal the gun of one of the police officers and shoot himself in the head. Interestingly though, both suspects, the peddler on the basis of his profession as a wandering salesman without a home, the Native American on the basis of race and mental state, have traditionally been the subject of public discrimination in their respective societies due to the label of “social outsider.” Finally, whereas the housekeeper at the service station, Frau Heller, had been a prostitute in her younger days, she is a simple, hard-bitten waitress in *The Pledge* by the name of Lori

who, after observing Black's love for her daughter, Chrissy, initiates a relationship with the former detective that ultimately comes to a tragic end when she learns of Black's plan to use her daughter as bait in an effort to trap a dangerous child-murderer. On the other hand, the similarities between the two films are quite lucid, with the most important one being the detective's personal quest to fulfill a promise and subsequent willingness to risk everything in order to accomplish so. The final two scenes of *The Pledge*, in stark contrast to the traditional happy ending of most detective films, respectively show the police passing by the scene of a horrific car wreck in which the would-be murderer was killed and the retired, once-proud detective sitting outside his service station, whiskey bottle in hand and mumbling to himself.

The lack of a happy ending in *The Pledge* generated much criticism of the film on behalf of numerous American film critics at the time of its release. Paul Clinton of *CNN* found the detective's motivation throughout the film to be rather unclear and called it a "muddled mess" with an "unsatisfying conclusion (that) winds down like a cheap watch."<sup>50</sup> Stephen Holden of *The New York Times* went a step further and wrote:

"The Pledge" is far from perfect. [...] It doesn't really know how to end, and the climactic scenes have the desperate clunky heaviness of a mundane police show on television. [...] The movie has the audacity to suggest that all that ritualized sublimation ultimately doesn't solve anything.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Clinton, Paul. *The ingredients are there, but ... 'The Pledge' uneven, confusing*. 21 January 2001. <<http://www.cnn.com/2001/showbiz/movies/01/19/review.pledge/index.html>>. Note: This is the first internet reference in this thesis, and due to the fact that specific information such as author and page number may not be available, all future internet references will be noted in this fashion so as to achieve uniformity.

<sup>51</sup> Holden, Stephen. *'The Pledge': Where's the Glory, Tough Guys?* 19 January 2001. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2001/01/19/arts/19pled.html>>.

Interestingly, the only reference to Dürrenmatt in either review is a brief mention of the fact that *The Pledge* is an adaptation of a novel by the late Swiss writer. Thus, it is evident that both critics are neither familiar with Dürrenmatt's work, nor its main purpose. On the other hand, both of the film's screenplay authors, Jerzy Kromolowski and Mary Olson-Kromolowski, were well aware of such and made it their goal to compose an adaptation of *Das Versprechen* intended strictly for an American audience. While neither scriptwriter has actually said so him-/herself, one can conclude that their message to American viewers is to not underestimate the power of chance and, more importantly, to not discriminate and jump to conclusions under similar circumstances which, unfortunately, happens to be a tendency on behalf of most Americans. For proof of such, one need only look at the vast number of convicted felons who have been exonerated of their crimes in this revolutionary age of forensic science. Nevertheless, *The Pledge* is, after all, just a film, a mere product of the Hollywood entertainment industry. It is for this reason that many American film critics, such as the aforementioned ones, have blatantly overlooked the movie's main message and instead focused solely on its entertainment appeal.

In Europe, however, *The Pledge* was received in a more positive fashion. This can be attributed to the fact that most critics had been acquainted with Dürrenmatt's text along with its underlying theme. Therefore, they were more accepting of the film's ending and were not at all disappointed with it. In most cases, the critics praised the screenplay writers for not having provided the audience with just another detective story, coupled with its traditional, above all predictable conclusion. One such critic is Miro Mandel of the popular Swiss film site *cineman.ch* who wrote: "Drehbuchautor Jerzy

Kromolowski beweist mit seinem nicht werktreuen, aber meistens stimmig in eine neue Umgebung verpflanzten Plot, daß er seinen Dürrenmatt verstanden hat, und er denkt mit diesem die berüchtigte schlimmstmögliche Wendung zu Ende.”<sup>52</sup> In conclusion, one can argue that the reason *The Pledge* was met with fundamentally disparate criticism is due to ideological differences between the European critics and their American counterparts.

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<sup>52</sup> Mandel, Miro. *Angler auf Mörderfang*. <<http://www.cineman.ch/movie/2001/thepledge>>. Mandel writes that the film's plot, regardless of the different setting, is proof that Kromolowski understood

## 5. HANSJÖRG SCHNEIDER

### 5.1 Biography

Hansjörg Schneider was born in 1938 in Aarau, Switzerland. Highly regarded as one of the more popular contemporary German-speaking dramatists, Schneider has published numerous literary works, with special focus on German emigration and post-war German theater. Having published his first crime novel, *Silberkiesel*, in 1993, and due to the fact that Schneider is not particularly recognized in the world of German literature as solely a writer of crime fiction, there is currently no academic secondary literature with respect to his four crime novels. However, as will be demonstrated in the forthcoming analyses, Schneider's Kommissär Hunkeler is without question a worthy successor to Glauser's Wachtmeister Studer as well as Dürrenmatt's Kommissär Bärlach. At present, Schneider resides in Basel, the city that he has chosen as the setting for each of his Hunkeler-novels.

### 5.2 Setting Basel

Basel, Switzerland's third-largest city next to Zurich and Geneva, respectively, is perched on the Rhine and located in the northwestern sector of the country, a proverbial stone's throw from France and Germany. Home to a large medieval quarter and one of the oldest universities in Switzerland, Basel is an internationally favored location for all knowledge-based industries, notably the pharmaceutical and chemical industries. Due to

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Dürrenmatt. In addition, he praises the scriptwriter for having maintained Dürrenmatt's central theme throughout the film, including the rather infamous conclusion.

its unique geographic location, Basel has taken a position on international borders that allows the city to recruit employees from abroad, thereby contributing to a diverse, multicultural population. Like every other major German-speaking city in Switzerland, Basel has its own distinct dialect: “Baseldeutsch,” or Basel German, and a “Basler” can immediately identify an “outsider” by his or her accent. Also worthy of mention is the fact that Basel’s economic region is Switzerland’s second in importance. This, coupled with the recent success of Basel’s soccer club, has ignited a newfound jealousy on behalf of Switzerland, particularly the German-speaking part, towards the city.

The fact that Schneider has chosen Basel as the setting for each of his crime novels is no coincidence. Having been raised in Aarau, a small city located in a primarily rural region to the southeast of Basel, Schneider fell in love with the city during his student years at the university and has more or less lived there ever since. Of particular value to Schneider are the amenities that Basel affords him, above all its urban culture and the right to privacy:

Ich wohne gern hier. Für mich ist es fast ein Stück Ausland. Ich werde hier in Ruhe gelassen. Wenn ich in einer Zürcher oder Berner Beiz das Heft aus der Tasche nehme und hinein schreibe, drehen die Leute die Köpfe. In Basel schaut niemand her, es ist wie in einem Pariser Bistro.<sup>53</sup>

In an earlier interview with Peter Knechtli and Ruedi Suter, Schneider also praised Basel for the freedom that its inhabitants enjoy, namely those, like him, who are not natives of the city:

Basel ist eine Stadt, die die Zuzüger nicht aufschluckt. Basel ist immun gegen Zuzüger. Das heißt, als Zuzüger in

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<sup>53</sup> Schneider, Hansjörg. *Ein Aargauer in Basel*. 18 October 2002. <<http://www.peterknechtli.ch/schneiderkolumne.htm>>. Schneider enjoys living in Basel and values the fact that the right to privacy is so greatly revered in the city.

Basel ist man vogelfrei. Man kann tun und lassen, was man will. Vielleicht ermöglicht das einen sehr genauen Blick auf Basel.<sup>54</sup>

But in spite of this seemingly Utopian image, Basel is equally as vulnerable to outside evils as any other major Swiss city. For example, Basel is home to a powerful international drug mafia who, incidentally, are in direct competition with Switzerland's liberal drug policy. This, along with the fact that Basel is home to a large immigrant population, thereby creating an atmosphere where all sorts of crimes are possible, is of great interest to Schneider and are just a few of the issues that he covers in his detective novels.

### 5.3 *Flattermann*

*Flattermann*, published in 1995, is actually the second of Schneider's crime novels. It takes place in Basel during a summer holiday period when many of the residents have gone away on vacation. Kommissär Peter Hunkeler of the Basel police elects to remain in town and spends his days bathing in the warm waters of the Rhine. One day, Hunkeler witnesses a man leap off the Johanniter Bridge in an apparent suicide attempt. He is so traumatized by this event that he cannot react quickly enough to try to save the man. Eventually, a Dutch seaman manages to pull the man out of the Rhine and bring him to shore where Hunkeler awaits them. Because the man is still alive, albeit in critical condition, the paramedics are summoned to transport him to a nearby hospital. In the meantime, Hunkeler's colleagues arrive to take a police report of the incident, and realizing that the detective has been shaken by what he had just witnessed, they urge him

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<sup>54</sup> Knechtli, Peter and Ruedi Suter. Interview with Hansjörg Schneider. 27 February 2001. <<http://www.onlinereports.ch/hunkelerschneider.htm>>. Schneider describes Basel as a rather welcoming

to enjoy the remainder of his vacation and not to concern himself with the impending investigation.

Still overwhelmed by the day's events, and hoping to put the past behind him, Hunkeler decides to go with his girlfriend to their vacation home in the Alsace. Unable to rid himself of his preoccupation with the suicide attempt, Hunkeler returns to Basel so that he can check up on the man. He is told at the hospital that the man has died and learns that the man's name was Freddy Lerch. Eager to find out more about the victim, Hunkeler goes to Freddy's apartment, breaks in and steals two notebooks that appear to be diaries. On his way home, the detective stops by police headquarters and is informed by a colleague that foul play may have been a factor in Freddy's suicide due to the fact that fifty thousand Swiss francs had been withdrawn from the victim's bank account just days before the incident. Hunkeler does not mention his visit to Freddy's residence, and once again, he is urged by his colleagues not to involve himself in the case.

Later that evening, Hunkeler begins reading Freddy's diaries. He is so moved by the entries that he starts weeping uncontrollably. Apparently Freddy had endured both a physically and an emotionally difficult childhood. Desperate for a new life and a change of scenery, Freddy took up a job on a cruise ship in the Caribbean where he worked happily for many years. In addition, Hunkeler learns that Freddy had a particularly insatiable passion for Paris. However, it was Freddy's longing for Switzerland that eventually brought him back to Basel where he would spend his final days.

In the meantime, the Basel police picks up Freddy's nephew, Silvan, on suspicion that he may have had something to do with his uncle's death. Yet before they have the opportunity to interrogate him, Silvan escapes without a trace. It is only now that

Hunkeler's colleagues ask for his assistance, but Hunkeler tells them, "das ist nicht mein Fall,"<sup>55</sup> even though he is curious to learn the truth about Silvan. When the detective pays a visit to Silvan's fiancée, she tells him that Silvan has assumed a new identity and cannot be found. Moreover, she informs Hunkeler that Freddy's diaries can prove that Silvan had nothing to do with his uncle's death, that Freddy merely wanted to help finance the life adventures of his nephew. Hunkeler is content with this information and realizes that he has exhausted all of his resources. Before officially closing the book on the case, however, the detective decides to follow in the footsteps of Freddy and take a trip to Paris. Coincidentally, it is here where he encounters Silvan, who is quite obviously living out the dream of his deceased uncle.

Although *Flattermann* is marketed as a crime novel due to the presence of Hunkeler as the protagonist, it is highly debatable whether or not the novel can be categorized as such. There is only one police investigation in the text, that of Freddy's nephew, to determine if he had played a role in his uncle's suicide. However, the fact that the Basel police, including Hunkeler, accept Freddy's death exactly as such renders the investigation of Silvan inconsequential. In truth, *Flattermann* is the story of Hunkeler's quest to ascertain why this simple man had taken his life on that sluggish summer day. Eventually, the detective's curiosity leads him to Freddy's apartment where he discovers the diary that completely alters his perspective on life.

As Hunkeler gradually immerses himself in Freddy's diary, he begins to notice how much Freddy's life, particularly the childhood days, mirrors his own. It turns out that Freddy's family had been impoverished, robbing him of experiencing a normal

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<sup>55</sup> "This is not my case." (96)

youth. To make matters worse, Freddy had also been the victim of abuse not only by his father, whose eventual passing forced him to help his mother with the housework just to make ends meet, but also by his schoolteacher. Interestingly though, the absence of his father's "führende Hand"<sup>56</sup> had caused Freddy to grow up like a "wildes Fohlen, das nicht zu bändigen ist."<sup>57</sup> Freddy then proceeds to recount the ordeal of his expulsion from school after having intervened in the teacher's physical abuse of one of the less talented pupils. This particular entry reminds Hunkeler of his very own school days, when a classmate of his had been subjected to similar beatings: "Wenn ich etwas bereue in meinem Leben, und ich bereue fast nichts, so ist es die Tatsache, daß ich damals nicht nach vorn gegangen bin und den weinenden Fernand an der Hand genommen habe."<sup>58</sup> Therefore, it is clear that in the opening chapters of the diary, a connection has been established between the detective and the deceased, forcing Hunkeler to revisit his past and prompting him to read further in order to determine what had driven Freddy to commit suicide.

Between the lines, Freddy's diary proves to be a critique of Switzerland in several respects. First, the tales of abuse by the schoolteachers indicates Freddy's direct disapproval of the Swiss tendency to hold everyone to high standards and expectations, even when an individual is intellectually incapable of living up to such. In turn, Freddy's decision to leave Switzerland to become a deck hand on a freighter happens to be his own way of criticizing his compatriots for being too apprehensive about their material

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<sup>56</sup> "iron hand" (81)

<sup>57</sup> "a wild horse that cannot be tamed" (81)

<sup>58</sup> "If there is something that I regret in my life, and I regret hardly anything, it is the fact that back then I did not walk to the front (of the classroom) and take Fernand, who had been crying, by the hand." (91)

possessions as well as for their unwillingness, even lack of courage, to leave everything behind and experience something new in life, as the following passage clearly illustrates:

Ich mache mir manchmal Gedanken über mein schönes Heimatland, die Schweiz. Dann komme ich zum Schluß, daß es den Menschen hier einfach zu gut geht, als daß sie sorglos und fröhlich leben könnten. Das tönt fast paradox, ist aber so. Alle haben Angst, daß sie das, was sie besitzen, verlieren könnten. Das macht sie so ängstlich, so griesgrämig. Besitz ist nicht nur ein Grund zur Freude. Er ist auch ein Grund zur Sorge. Das ist jetzt die Meinung eines alten Seebärs. Ich selber besitze so viel, daß ich gerade genug zum Leben habe. Das ist gut so.<sup>59</sup>

Considering that Freddy had endured a harsh childhood in which each day was a financial struggle, it is not surprising that he expresses reprehension over the fact that the Swiss tend to be overprotective of their wealth and worried that everything could one day disappear. Growing up, Freddy had hardly anything, yet he had never once taken the liberty of complaining about the social status of his destitute family. That is not to say, however, that Freddy is in complete and total disapproval of his native land. In fact, he often refers to Switzerland as his “schönes Heimatland,” or “beautiful homeland,” throughout the diary and even mentions the time when he was due to fulfill his military obligations against his personal desire: “Es rief das Vaterland. Ich wollte eigentlich keinen Militärdienst tun. Aber damals regierten in Deutschland die Nazis. [...] Die Armee muß sein, sonst kann uns jedes fremde Land befehlen.”<sup>60</sup> Finally, at the conclusion of the diary, Hunkeler discovers the reason for Freddy’s suicide. Having overcome poverty and having experienced the adventurous life for which he yearned,

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<sup>59</sup> “Sometimes I think about Switzerland, my beautiful homeland. Then I come to the conclusion that the people have things so well here that they could live carefree and happily. That almost sounds paradoxical, but that’s the way it is. Everyone is afraid that they could lose everything they own. That makes them so apprehensive, so grumpy. Property is only one reason for pleasure. It is also a reason for worry. Now this is just the opinion of an old seadog. I myself own just enough to get by. It’s good that way.” (145-6)

Freddy writes, “Es ist besser wegzugehen, wenn man noch gesund und kräftig ist, [...] als in der Heimatstadt zu verkommen.”<sup>61</sup> As for his nephew, Freddy had been aware of Silvan’s financial need along with his involvement in the drug scene, leading the uncle to provide his nephew with enough money to hopefully experience a similar independent lifestyle.

As the above analysis demonstrates, *Flattermann* lacks the essential elements in order to be genuinely classified as a crime novel. However, one cannot deny the fact that the protagonist, to a certain extent, performs traditional detective work with respect to his goal of uncovering the truth about Freddy’s death. It is for this reason, perhaps, that publishers and bookstores alike continue to advertise the work as a detective novel. But regardless of the plot, *Flattermann* succeeds in delivering an accurate portrayal of the life of the average Swiss, as Gerda Wurzenberger remarks in a review of the novel for the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*: “Hansjörg Schneiders Anliegen ist es, dem Durchschnittlichen, sogenannt Gewöhnlichen eine Nische zu schaffen, den Alltag der einfachen Leute so genau unter die Lupe zu nehmen, daß das kleine Glück oder Unglück aus der Gleichförmigkeit des Lebens heraustritt.”<sup>62</sup> In conclusion, Hunkeler’s emotional state at the end of the novel, along with his decision not to arrest Silvan in Paris, prove that the detective is content with his findings, thereby fulfilling his curiosity about the simple man such as Freddy, whose life consisted of one obstacle, one adventure after the other and, in turn, whose ending is nothing short of bittersweet.

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<sup>60</sup> “The fatherland called. Actually, I did not want to do my military service. But back then the Nazis were in power. [...] The army is necessary to prevent any foreign land from ordering us around.” (82-3)

<sup>61</sup> “It is better to leave (this earth) when one is still healthy and strong rather than to rot away in one’s home town.” (146-7).

<sup>62</sup> G. Wurzenberger, “Tod im Sommer: Hansjörg Schneiders Kriminalroman *Flattermann*.” *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*. Additional bibliographical information is unavailable. Wurzenberger maintains that Schneider’s

## 5.4 *Das Paar im Kahn*

The third of Schneider's crime novels, *Das Paar im Kahn*, was published in 1999 and takes place primarily in the St. Johann district of Basel, an area known for its diverse immigrant population. A Turkish woman by the name of Aische Aydin is found beaten to death in her apartment on a cool, foggy November evening, her face having been severely disfigured. The prime suspect in the case is her husband, Ali, who cannot bring himself to talk to the police because he is apparently shaken by the gruesome murder of his wife. With the exception of Hunkeler, everyone in the Basel police department believes that Ali had killed his wife, most likely in a jealous rage, and when the suspect hangs himself in his jail cell just hours after the murder had taken place, the police take it as a confession and consider the case to be closed.

Incidentally, it is not Hunkeler who is in charge of the investigation, rather a colleague of his by the name of Mädorin. So far as Mädorin is concerned, the Aische Aydin case is closed, yet Hunkeler is hesitant to accept such a simple solution and believes that the real murderer is still roaming the streets of Basel. Much to the chagrin of his colleagues, Hunkeler undertakes an unofficial inquiry into the case, and throughout the course of the investigation, he encounters several mysterious characters who provide the detective with key insight: Theo Ruf, an alcoholic and a heroin addict who is convinced that the Turkish mafia is responsible for the murder; "der schmale Freddy," a petty drug dealer who, unbeknown to Hunkeler, had been hired by Mädorin to follow the detective around; Erika Frösch, a travel agent specializing in Turkey who had gone to

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intention is to create a niche for the ordinary citizen and to depict the everyday life of the simple man, including whatever happiness or misfortune he may experience.

Aische for weekly Turkish lessons and who provides Hunkeler with historical information about an amulet, “das Paar im Kahn,” which had been found at the scene of the crime; Fritz Strampfli, a travel writer and tour guide also specializing in Turkey who admits that he had given the amulet to Aische as a gift because he had fallen in love with her, thereby destroying her innocence, but insists that he had nothing to do with her homicide; Alice Odermatt, a ballet dancer and former acquaintance of Aische who is absolutely convinced that Ali is the murderer based on the assumption that Turkish men tend to treat women in a brutal manner; Beat Spälti, a cancer-stricken lawyer who had been hired by the victim to aid her in the process of retrieving her children from Turkey; and Jean Charles Geroni, a notorious international hit man who had allegedly been sent to Basel to murder Freddy over a drug dispute and who poisons himself as Hunkeler is about to arrest him at the Basel-Mulhouse airport.

As Hunkeler’s investigation progresses, he finds himself spending more and more time at a pub called the “Neue Brücke,” a dubious haunt for the alcoholics and pot-smokers of the St. Johann quarter. One night, the detective observes Freddy tossing a bag into a trash can at the pub, and when Hunkeler later retrieves this bag, he finds the alleged murder weapon, a knife, leading him to believe that Freddy is the murderer. However, when Freddy phones Hunkeler several days later begging for police protection because he is aware that Geroni is on his trail, the detective is forced to reconsider his suspicion and once again finds himself at an impasse in the investigation.

When Freddy is found dead shortly afterwards because the Basel police had not acted quickly enough to protect him, Hunkeler decides to leave the city for a few days and takes a trip to the Black Forest. In a bizarre twist of fate, the detective encounters

Pedro, a regular patron of the Neue Brücke, and several acquaintances of his at a restaurant in the remote town of Todtnau. The group has a large sum of cash on them, and knowing that an elderly woman had recently been attacked and robbed, Hunkeler immediately pins the crime on the gang. However, the detective's intention is not to arrest Pedro and his pals, rather to make a deal with them; to provide the gang with immunity in exchange for the truth about the Aische Aydin murder. The group concurs and informs Hunkeler that Beat Spälti is the killer. When the detective returns to Basel, he is summoned to the hospital where Spälti has just undergone an operation. Hunkeler's colleagues are present as well, and despite the fact that he is in critical condition, Spälti confesses to the murder, admitting that he had been in love with Aische but fruitless in his efforts to retrieve her children from Turkey. As he attempted to hug the victim after having informed her on this setback, she kicked him in the genital area, unleashing him in a wild fury in which he had beaten her to death with a whiskey bottle.

With Ali Aydin's suicide at the beginning of the novel and the subsequent belief on behalf of the Basel police, Hunkeler notwithstanding, that the case had resolved itself, it is clear that Schneider had been influenced by Dürrenmatt's *Das Versprechen*, where a similar scenario had transpired. It is not so much the simple solution that disturbs Hunkeler, rather the arrogance exhibited by his colleagues, who balk at the detective's request to thoroughly examine all of the facts before drawing any conclusions. Therefore, Hunkeler's only option is to undertake his own investigation in the hope that he will find the real murderer. Unfortunately for the detective, it is not long before his superiors learn of this unofficial inquiry, leading them to hire Freddy to keep an eye on

him. Soon thereafter, Hunkeler is reprimanded for his actions by Staatsanwalt Suter, the public prosecutor, who reminds the detective that the Basel police is, above all, a hierarchical institution, and that orders must be followed, regardless of the circumstances, as the following passage clearly illustrates:

Es ist unerträglich, daß Sie sich selbständig machen. Wir sind eine Hierarchie, wie das Militär. Wir sind eine Männerorganisation, weil Polizist ein gefährlicher Beruf ist, der Kraft und Durchhaltevermögen verlangt. [...] Wir sind kein Anarchistentrupp. Wir sind eine straff geführte, schlagkräftige Organisation. [...] Heute herrscht Krieg, in jedem Geschäft, in jeder Bank, auf jeder Straße. Wir vom Kriminalkommissariat müssen diesen Krieg gewinnen, wenn wir die Ordnung aufrechterhalten wollen. [...] Es ist unsere nobelste Aufgabe, Recht und Ordnung zu bewahren. [...] In diesem Krieg sind keine Alleingänge gestattet.<sup>63</sup>

Despite the vehemence of Suter's diatribe, Hunkeler's obstinate nature will not allow him to abandon his pursuit of justice, which has suddenly transformed itself into a personal crusade against arrogant police bureaucracy. Without complete access to police resources, however, the detective's task will prove to be arduous, yet at the same time, it is a challenge that Hunkeler is eager to accept.

Due to the fact that the husband of the murder victim allegedly had ties to the Turkish mafia in Basel, Hunkeler hypothesizes that they could have played a role in Aische's homicide and decides to immerse himself within this particular subculture. Since the detective has always possessed a strong curiosity for this powerful organization, he is uninhibited by the potential dangers around him and does not hesitate to meddle in their affairs with the goal of discerning the truth about the Aische Aydin

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<sup>63</sup> "It is unacceptable that you are setting off on your own. We are a hierarchy, like the military. We are an organization of men because being a policeman is a dangerous occupation that demands strength and endurance. [...] We are not a group of anarchists. We are a tightly run, powerful organization. [...] Today there is war, in every business, in every bank, on every street. We of the criminal investigations

case. However, Hunkeler's curiosity eventually lands him in the hospital after having been knocked unconscious one night by an unknown assailant near the Neue Brücke. But the stubborn detective will not allow this setback to undermine his efforts, much to the dismay of both his colleagues and his girlfriend. After recovering from this traumatic experience, Hunkeler soon finds himself patronizing the Neue Brücke once again, yet it is not long before his prime suspect, Freddy, proves to have not been involved in the homicide, forcing the detective to reconsider his position in this particular case.

The fact that Hunkeler encounters several regulars of the Neue Brücke in a remote town in the Black Forest is *no* coincidence, contrary to the text's assertion that, "Es (war) wirklich nichts anderes als ein blöder Zufall."<sup>64</sup> In fact, this episode clearly demonstrates that Schneider has once again been influenced by Dürrenmatt with respect to "Zufall," or chance. Whereas chance had thwarted Matthäi's relentless efforts to prove his colleagues wrong, resulting in the inspector's untimely downfall, it is ultimately chance that provides Hunkeler with the opportunity to fulfill his quest for the truth, this being the major difference between the respective conclusions of *Das Versprechen* and *Das Paar im Kahn*. Thus, Schneider succeeds in providing the reader with a certain degree of satisfaction by ultimately rewarding the protagonist for his incessant perseverance. In conclusion, *Das Paar im Kahn* is very much a conventional detective novel as opposed to *Flattermann* and in spite of the role of chance, and it does not fall short of providing the audience with suspense, all the while criticizing Swiss police bureaucracy for both its oft arrogant ways and its tendency to jump to conclusions without having considered all of the possibilities.

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department must win this war if we want to maintain order. [...] Our most noble task is to keep law and order. [...] Solo efforts are not permitted in this war." (57-8)

### 5.5 *Tod einer Ärztin*

*Tod einer Ärztin*, Schneider's fourth and most recent crime novel, appeared in 2001. Once again the setting is Basel, July 2000, in the midst of an unusually warm summer, although several important scenes take place in the vicinity, namely in the Alsace. A doctor by the name of Christa Erni is found murdered in her office, the victim of a fatal stab wound to the heart. Erni was a highly esteemed member of the community, having been an avid political activist and very much involved in Basel's culture scene. Upon inspection of the practice, it is learned that several opiates are missing from the drug cabinet. Therefore, the police assume that the drug addicts, whom Erni had provided with methadone and who hang around the abandoned bocce grounds located directly behind the building, could very well have committed the murder. But since the crime scene fails to yield any sign of a struggle, it is presumed that Erni had recognized the perpetrator, thus making it possible that anyone within the doctor's vast social as well as professional network could be culpable.

In spite of the fact that the Basel police insist that the investigation, above all, be a team effort, Hunkeler is appointed to lead the inquiry. His first measure is to have the drug addicts brought in for questioning. After denying any involvement in the murder, and due to a lack of evidence against them, the police are forced to release the drug addicts. Hunkeler must then begin to explore other possible motives. He soon discovers that Erni had been rather wealthy and due to bequeath five million francs. Among the heirs are Dr. Knecht, a colleague of the victim at the practice who was in desperate

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<sup>64</sup> "It was really nothing but a silly coincidence." (228)

financial need at the time, having recently purchased a yacht and under order to pay alimony and child support to his ex-wife; Ruth Zbinden, a laboratory assistant at the practice and close friend of Erni; Hans Graber, an artist with whom the doctor was having a secret love affair; and Hiob Heller, the victim's son. Furthermore, Hunkeler learns that Erni had scheduled an appointment the week of the murder with her notary public to alter the will after having discovered that her son had recently begun to deal drugs. After a thorough examination of each of these potential suspects, the detective determines that, based on circumstantial evidence, Graber is likely the murderer. As it turns out, a hair from a black cat had been found at the crime scene, and since Graber has a black cat, Hunkeler slyly attempts to use this piece of evidence as a means of forcing a confession from the artist. But Graber vehemently denies any wrongdoing, and the detective is left with no choice but to search elsewhere for the killer.

As pressure from the media mounts, there is likewise an increasingly strong sense of urgency on behalf of the Basel police to solve the case. Several of Hunkeler's colleagues theorize that the drug mafia could have been responsible, having murdered the doctor in protest of Basel's liberal drug policy. Eventually though, the police are forced to dismiss this possibility. Desperate for any new leads, Hunkeler decides to look into the recent deaths of several of Erni's patients. Among the deceased is Regula Hämmerli, a victim of brain cancer at the early age of 54. It turns out that Erni had failed to diagnose Hämmerli's illness until it was too late to undertake any life-saving measures. Theorizing that the murder could have been an act of revenge for not having discovered the cancer sooner, Hunkeler pays a visit to Karin Müller, the victim's surviving lover and also an employee at the practice. After a brief interrogation, the detective rules out the

notion that Müller could be culpable. Furthermore, he has believed all along that it could not have been possible for a woman to have committed such an act requiring considerable strength, that only a man would have been capable of accomplishing this.

After attending Erni's funeral, Hunkeler is approached by Heinrich Rüfenacht, who requests that the detective visit him at his home in the Alsace. Rüfenacht proves to be a strange figure. He lives the life of a hermit, admits to being an alcoholic and claims to be a writer. After noticing both a cleaver, the purported murder weapon, and a black cat at Rüfenacht's residence, Hunkeler decides to investigate the hermit's background. First, he learns that Rüfenacht is not a writer by trade, that it was Hämmerli, incidentally, who had supported him financially. Furthermore, the detective discovers that Hämmerli had been Rüfenacht's lover up until seven years ago, when Rüfenacht had undergone an operation for prostate cancer under the care of Erni. The end result was impotence which, in effect, destroyed his masculinity. At that very same moment in time, Hämmerli chose to leave Rüfenacht to become involved in a lesbian relationship with Müller. Oddly, Rüfenacht had been able to tolerate Hämmerli's leaving him and never ceased loving her. But in the days after Hämmerli's tragic death, Rüfenacht had begun to feel guilty about not being able to help her and eventually directed his anger towards Erni. That being said, Hunkeler is able to pin the crime on the hermit, but on the day after the initial visit, Rüfenacht commits suicide by hanging himself.

Due to Erni's prominent status in society as well as the sheer brutality of the murderous act, there is an immense sense of urgency on behalf of the Basel police to solve the crime. When Hunkeler is appointed to lead the investigation, he promptly

informs his colleagues, “Ich muß so arbeiten, wie ich es für richtig halte. Dies ist kein Fall für Spurensicherung und Informatik. Es ist ein Fall für menschliche Neugier.”<sup>65</sup>

When the drug addicts are eliminated from the field of potential suspects, the detective turns to his own intuition and begins to examine the private life of the victim. It is not long before Hunkeler discovers that Erni had led a highly secretive romantic life, leading him to hypothesize that love, jealousy and revenge could prove to be potential motives. As had been noted in the analysis of *Das Paar im Kahn*, this is an area in which Hunkeler possesses a very strong curiosity. Ultimately, the detective is able to learn the truth about the doctor’s murder by focusing exclusively on the aforementioned factors. However, there is a distinct ironic element to Hunkeler’s success in that the hair of a black cat, which had been discovered at the scene of the crime, had aided him in his search for the murderer. Contrary to Hunkeler’s assertion that this is a case for human curiosity, it is forensic science that provides him with a pivotal piece of evidence. By including this element of irony in the novel, Schneider demonstrates that human curiosity alone will not suffice with respect to criminal investigations, that with society the way it is today, one must rely on modern criminological techniques. That being said, it is not to be assumed that the hair of a black cat had been the sole reason that Hunkeler had been able to pin the crime on Rüfenacht, rather that it had simply abetted him in affirming his suspicion.

Schneider’s portrayal of Switzerland in *Tod einer Ärztin* is more or less limited to the pressure exerted by the local media, namely that of Canton Zurich, on the Basel police to solve the Erni case as swiftly as possible. As previously stated, the nature of the murder demanded an immediate solution, and the longer the investigation lasted, the

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<sup>65</sup> “I must work as I see fit. This is not a case for forensics and information technology. It is a case for human curiosity.” (32)

more scandalous it would become. The fact that most of the criticism stems from Zurich, a canton considered to be a rival of Basel, has to do with its disapproval of Basel's liberal drug policy. After discovering that this could have been a factor in the doctor's homicide, the following passage appears in *Das Schweizer Kreuz*, a notorious right-wing extremist newspaper:

Nicht genug, daß eine ehemalige Kommunistin und Umstürzlerin in der Humanistenstadt Basel ungestraft und auf Staatskosten harte Drogen abgegeben hat, nein, jetzt wird sie auch noch von hochoffizieller Seite als hochgeachtete Kulturexponentin gelobt. Und der Staatsanwalt entblödet sich nicht, von Ermittlungen in verschiedenen Richtungen zu reden. Das ist bewußte Irreführung des freien Bürgers. Die Richtung ist klar. Sie führt direkt in den illegalen Drogenpfehl, der von Basels Liberalidioten zu allem Elend noch gehätschelt wird. Schluß mit dem Drogenmißbrauch. Freier Basler, steh auf.<sup>66</sup>

Incidentally, the only member of the investigation team who believes that the drug mafia is responsible for the murder is Suter, the prosecuting attorney, who argues:

Das Basler Modell des legalen Verabreichens von Drogen drohe auch in anderen Ländern Schule zu machen. Damit aber würden der Drogenmafia die Grundlagen entzogen. Da liege der Schluß nahe, daß sie zurückschläge, und sei es mit Mord.<sup>67</sup>

In the meantime, pressure from the Zurich media continues to mount and begins to infuriate the Basel police:

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<sup>66</sup> "It's not enough that a former Communist and subversive handed out hard drugs with impunity at the public expense in the humanist city of Basel, no, now she is officially being heralded as a spokeswoman for culture. And the public prosecutor has the audacity to state that the police are investigating different leads. That is a deliberate misleading of the free citizen. The direction is clear. It leads right to the illegal drug mess, which is pampered by Basel's liberal idiots to the point of misery. Enough with this drug abuse. Stand up you free citizens of Basel." (75-6)

<sup>67</sup> "The Basel model of the legal administering of drugs threatens to serve as an example for other countries. The drug mafia would lose its territory. Nearing the end, they would strike back, and it would be with murder." (93-4)

Es sei eine Unverschämtheit, wie die Zürcher Boulevardpresse arbeite. Nicht nur, daß sie sich auf präpotenteste Art und Weise in Basler Angelegenheiten einmische [...], sie nehme sich auch noch die Frechheit heraus, selber unbewiesene Thesen in die Welt zu setzen. [...] So werde das Basler Kriko aus lüsterner Sensationsgier arbeitsunfähig gemacht. Hier am Rheinknie sei man gewohnt, sorgfältig zu arbeiten und zwischen Tatsachen und Vermutungen zu unterscheiden.<sup>68</sup>

To make matters worse, the Zurich press later receives an anonymous tip that Erni had been murdered with a meat cutter before the Basel police has the opportunity to determine this. When the investigation team demands that the Zurich media release the identity of the informant, they respond with an article entitled “Anschlag auf Pressefreiheit”<sup>69</sup> in which the Zurich press accuses the Basel police of keeping something secret from the public. In subsequent media attacks against Basel, Zurich maintains its assumption that a police conspiracy is in the making and questions both the competence of the criminal investigations department and the future of Basel’s liberal drug policy. In conclusion, Schneider’s depiction of the rivalry between the cantons is not only masterful, but very much genuine in that he is able to deliver the reader a real glimpse into contemporary Swiss society, where the autonomy enjoyed by the cantons has spawned animosity towards one another with respect to controversial issues such as drug policies.

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<sup>68</sup> “It’s outrageous how the Zurich popular press is operating. Not only are they arrogantly sticking their nose in Basel affairs [...], they also have the impudence to let the world know of their unproven hypotheses. [...] Thus, the Basel police appear incapable of doing their work. Here on the Rhine, we are used to working carefully and distinguishing between facts and assumptions.” (94)

## 6. PROFILE OF THE SWISS DETECTIVE

It is now imperative to examine in greater detail the role of the Swiss detective and to assess the features which identify this literary figure as unique within the scope of detective fiction. Let us begin with Glauser and the principal character in his novels, Wachtmeister Studer. It is no surprise that given Glauser's high regard for Simenon, Studer resembles Maigret greater than any of the other detectives portrayed in this analysis, combining fatherly warmth with a devoted determination in his efforts to arrive at the truth. His chief approach to solving cases is to engage himself completely in the domain of the criminal act and to attempt to penetrate the mind of the malefactor. Like Maigret, Studer's methods of detection are highly intuitive, demonstrating his apparent lack of regard for modern criminology. However, Studer differs from Maigret in the sense that he is often the bearer of the author's perceptions and views of the complicated outside world which, given the strong autobiographical content of the Studer-series, is also no surprise. Unaware of such at the time, Glauser had created a new literary figure that would not only serve as a model to his successors, but also aid in the development of a new literary phenomenon: the modern Swiss crime novel.

In Dürrenmatt's detective novels, there are two principal characters: Kommissär Bärlach and Dr. Matthäi. With perceived corruption in Switzerland as the motivation in the Bärlach-series, it is clear that Dürrenmatt had borrowed from the Simenon tradition of the detective being engaged not only in a fight against the criminal, but also against the system, namely arrogant bureaucracy. In addition, Bärlach mirrors both Maigret and

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<sup>69</sup> "Attack on Freedom of the Press?" (141)

Studer in that he relies almost exclusively on intuition and opposes modern criminological methods of detection. As for Matthäi, he also possesses many of the same characteristics as his precursors with one main exception, his egocentric nature, which ultimately leads to his tragic downfall. This trait is connected with Dürrenmatt's motivation for this particular novel, a theme that will be addressed in the conclusion of this analysis. Nevertheless, each of Dürrenmatt's detectives bears striking similarities to his predecessors, in spite of the author's objection to constantly being compared with both Simenon and Glauser, and strictly abides by his intention for the protagonist to both guide and control the world within his intellectual faculties.

The chief character in Schneider's crime novels, Kommissär Hunkeler, is the most modern of the four detectives depicted in this analysis. Blessed with a strong curiosity, Hunkeler's approach to solving cases follows in the tradition of Maigret and Studer and involves the attempt to understand the mind of the criminal. Since Basel is the setting for each of Schneider's novels, Hunkeler's interests strongly correlate to the locale, especially considering the detective's curiosity for both the city's liberal drug policy and its powerful international drug mafia. Furthermore, Hunkeler is generally not interested in crimes such as bank robberies or those of white-collar nature. His specialty is "menschliche Verbrechen," or human crimes, such as murder out of passion, betrayal and jealousy, demonstrating a reliance on intuition as well as an apparent lack of regard for modern criminology. Finally, as is the case with Maigret and Bärlach, Hunkeler often finds himself in a battle against bureaucracy and, in the most extreme cases, must resolve to setting off on his own in order to arrive at the truth.

After having individually assessed each of the four detectives' principal characteristics and qualities, it is now essential to draw comparisons among them with the goal of establishing why the Swiss detective is a unique literary figure. With the exception of Matthäi, who is at the pinnacle of his career, each of the remaining detectives is on the verge of retirement, usually in his 60s, after having enjoyed considerable on the job success. In addition, all four of the detectives more or less share the following traits. First, it is obvious that the detectives are extremely dedicated to their work and, in some cases, unafraid to put their reputation on the line in their quest for the truth, even if it means risking everything. Second, the detectives possess a relentless pursuit of justice and are unwilling to accept a simple solution to a particular case, which corresponds to Switzerland's reputation for perfection and the need to maintain order at all costs. Thus, one can argue that the Swiss detective is of an obstinate nature inherent in the plots of nearly all of the nine crime novels. Third, each of the detectives has a tendency to rely heavily on his own intuition and generally will not hesitate to act on a hunch. Therefore, it is evident that they do not particularly hold much of modern criminology nor its techniques. Fourth, it is not uncommon for the detective to be restrained by bureaucratic shackles in his pursuit of justice. Whenever this is the case, he is often fighting a war on two fronts, one against the criminal and the other against the system, and must do so without full police resources at his disposal, undoubtedly a daunting task. Finally, and rather humorous, each of the authors takes the liberty of allowing the protagonist to smoke and to drink on a regular basis, evidently as a means of coping with the enormous pressure of the oft complicated nature of the caseloads. Consequently, with the exception of Schneider, hardly anything is mentioned of the

## CONCLUSIONS

In the final part of this analysis, we will attempt to establish how the modern Swiss crime novel distinguishes itself from its international counterparts as a unique literary phenomenon. Due to the distinct nature of its society, Switzerland as a milieu clearly has much to offer the detective fiction novelist with a relevance far beyond its own borders. From the outside, Switzerland appears as a closed environment with a high expectation of its population and a tendency to overlook or forgive a dark and controversial past. However, the restraints imposed upon the Swiss by the nation's small state mentality has traditionally prevented its writers from addressing such issues by conventional means. Eager to break this tradition and to both educate and enlighten their fellow countrymen, the authors turned to crime, which possesses the uncanny ability to shed light on the nature of the relationship between a social structure and its inhabitants. Evidently, it was Glauser who, in the 1930s, came up with the idea to transform the crime novel from trivial literature into an educational device as well as a "vehicle for the purposes of moral enquiry and argument."<sup>70</sup> Needless to say, his ingenuity did not go overlooked, and it only took twenty years or so for Dürrenmatt to elevate the crime novel to a higher level. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Swiss crime novel continued to evolve, albeit slowly, but exploded on an international scale in the 1990s, culminating not only with Schneider's Hunkeler-series, but also with two other Swiss writers, namely Peter Zeindler and Alexander Heimann, being awarded the *Deutscher Krimipreis* for their efforts in 1992 and 1997, respectively. From a literary perspective, the manner in which

the Swiss crime novel has impacted not only the genre, but also the public, is nothing short of astonishing, and according to Christopher Jones, the future is even brighter: "Swiss crime fiction has the potential to a defining genre of Swiss literature not merely from a psychological point of view, but rather from the interrogation of social norms which it facilitates."<sup>71</sup> Thus, there is no denying that a phenomenon of the Swiss crime novel has existed since Glauser's Studer-series and continues to evolve to this day at an astounding rate.

Let us now focus on the authors' motivation for their work. Beginning with Glauser, whose novels are highly autobiographical in content, it is his intention to exploit the entertainment aspect of the genre in order to introduce social controversial issues. Moreover, Glauser desires to popularize rational ideas, focusing on the psychological aspects of crime and punishment. In short, his main interest is the portrayal of the average, everyday man in lieu of some diabolical, distraught villain. As for Dürrenmatt, his motivation differs substantially from that of his predecessor. Whereas Glauser more or less adheres to the standards of the classical crime novel, Dürrenmatt attempts to debunk the genre based on his firm belief that the world is chaotic and uncontrollable. *Das Versprechen*, for example, addresses Dürrenmatt's serious reservations about the reality distortion and the exaggerated logic inherent in the rules of traditional detective fiction. Focusing primarily on moral philosophical investigation, each of Dürrenmatt's crime novels shrewdly employs both irony and polemic to both attack and to criticize Swiss ways of thinking. Finally, Schneider's motivation is more or less the portrayal of

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<sup>70</sup> C. Jones, "Images of Switzerland in Swiss Crime Fiction," p. 86.

<sup>71</sup> C. Jones, p. 97.

urban crime, having been influenced by the hard-boiled school. Considering the author's love for Basel, it is no surprise that his motivation is such, for both he and his protagonist possess an ardent curiosity for the oft complicated nature of urban delinquency. In addition, his detective novels tend to follow the conventional schema with the exception of *Flattermann*, whose label as such continues to be an ongoing debate. While the authors' motivation tends to differ from one another, one aspect remains constant, the portrayal of Switzerland, and it is here where Glauser, Dürrenmatt and Schneider aim to teach their compatriots a very important lesson about the society in which they live.

Also worthy of mention are several additional similarities and patterns among the nine crime novels. The first of such is language. By reading these works, any German-speaker can immediately identify the language as definitively Swiss. The most obvious example is the use of the Swiss word "Kommissär" as opposed to the standard German "Kommissar." In addition, each of Glauser's novels contains an appendix consisting of standard German translations of Swiss German words and expressions employed throughout the given text. Moreover, Dürrenmatt's works often contain conversations in French in relation to the setting, and Schneider's novels include the sporadic use of not only Basel German, the local dialect, but also that of the neighboring Alsace. For each of the authors, it was extremely important not to deviate from their roots, and their use of Swiss German not only appeals to their fellow citizens, but also adds a distinct flavor to this unique literary phenomenon.

The next pattern has to do with the bizarre fact that not a single criminal in any of the nine novels is prosecuted for his wrongdoings. Even more peculiar is the fact that

none of the academic secondary literature addresses this topic. In an effort to account for these odd conclusions, it is imperative to examine each one individually. Let us begin with suicide. In *Wachtmeister Studer*, *Der Verdacht* and *Tod einer Ärztin*, spanning all three authors, the guilty choose to take their own life rather than to face prosecution and/or incarceration. One possible explanation is that they are ashamed of their criminal actions and cannot bear to suffer the consequences in the light of public scorn. Another possible explanation has to do with ethics; that it is only fitting that the criminals died, albeit at their own hand, after having committed murder, that their deaths are deserved. The next conclusion involves the role of chance. In *Matto regiert*, *Der Richter und sein Henker* and *Das Versprechen*, the guilty are killed in freak accidents. Since two of these freak accidents occur in Dürrenmatt's texts, one viable explanation would be to attribute them to an existentialist, irrational factor; that not everything is predetermined, based on the fact that Dürrenmatt had studied theology at the insistence of his father, who had been a pastor and theologian himself. The third conclusion is the decision on behalf on the detective to allow the guilty to go unpunished. This is precisely the case in *Die Fieberkurve* and, to a certain extent, *Flattermann*, although the latter remains open to debate. In Glauser's text, however, one can attribute Studer's decision to the Maigret tradition of sympathizing with the criminal and desiring to bring about healing more than accountability. Finally, the guilty in *Das Paar im Kahn* is a terminally ill cancer patient who has no chance of recovery. Thus, the reason why he is not brought to justice is self-explanatory. While the fact that not a single criminal in any of the nine texts is brought to justice which, in some cases, robs the reader of the satisfaction enjoyed at the conclusion of the traditional detective novel, it nevertheless remains a factor that aids the

modern Swiss crime novel in distinguishing itself from its international counterparts and cannot be overlooked.

The final similarity has to do with content. As had been mentioned in the introduction, each of the three authors employs the crime novel as a means of addressing controversial issues in Switzerland relevant to their respective time period. Furthermore, the previous individual analyses of the nine texts have clearly demonstrated the manner in which the modern Swiss crime novel has undergone an evolutionary process. It is also important to recall here the treatment of history as well as the influence of the past in each of the novels, for these were primary concerns for each of the authors. Historical references such as Glauser's portrayal of the Swiss vulnerability to economic crises in *Wachtmeister Studer* and Dürrenmatt's bold illustration of universal human vulnerability to evil by bringing a miniature death camp to Switzerland's largest metropolitan area in *Der Verdacht* were extremely important for the authors because without them, they would not have been able to have had the same impact on the population. Coupled with the authors' goals of educating the public on the lurking dangers in society as well as forcing the people to think about the reality of the situation in their native land, it is evident that the modern Swiss crime novel differs from its classical counterparts with respect to the central message it attempts to convey.

As this overall analysis has demonstrated, the modern Swiss crime novel is much more than its traditional label of trivial entertainment for mass audiences suggests. Over the course of the past seven decades, Glauser, Dürrenmatt and Schneider have successfully elevated this phenomenon to a level yet to be achieved by international

comparison. Their portrayal of Switzerland and Swiss society is remarkably accurate, and their shrewd use of the detective novel as a means of introducing political, sociological, historical and, above all, controversial issues to the public is nothing short of ingenious. In turn, the authors have succeeded in creating a distinct literary figure, the Swiss detective, who is uninhibited by the bureaucratic obstacles around him and fully committed to arriving at the truth in the interest of his homeland. Naturally, the Swiss crime novel does contain a strong entertainment appeal, but between the lines it is simply much more than just trivial literature. Due to the major impact that the modern Swiss crime novel has had on the public throughout the years, the sky is the limit regarding the future of this unique literary phenomenon.

## APPENDIX A

### ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF THE GERMAN PRIMARY TEXTS

#### FRIEDRICH GLAUSER

Wachtmeister Studer – Inspector Studer

Matto regiert – Matto's Realm

Die Fieberkurve – The Temperature Curve

#### FRIEDRICH DÜRRENMATT

*Der Richter und sein Henker – The Judge and His Hangman*

*Der Verdacht – The Quarry*

*Das Versprechen - The Pledge*

#### HANSJÖRG SCHNEIDER

Flattermann – The Jumper

Das Paar im Kahn – The Amulet

Tod einer Ärztin – Dr. Christa Erni's Murder

\*\*\* Note: The translations for the Dürrenmatt texts are in *italics* because they are the accepted English translations of his three principal crime novels. Thus, they are not my own.

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\*\*\* Note: Dates in brackets indicate date of first publication.

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