

The Symbolism of the Cross in Ernst Toller's Drama Die Wandlung

By


Bonnie Russell
B.A., McGill University, 1967
M.Ed., University of British Columbia, 1981

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of


MASTER OF ARTS

In the Department of Germanic and Russian Studies

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard




Dr. W.E. Riedel, Supervisor (Department of Germanic and Russian Studies)



Dr. R.T.K. Symington, Departmental Member (Department of Germanic and Russian Studies)



Dr. E.M. Cobley, Outside Member (Department of English)



Dr. O. Schmidtke, External Examiner (Department of Political Science)

© Bonnie Russell, 2002
University of Victoria

All rights reserved. This thesis may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by photocopy or other means, without the permission of the author.

PT2642
065Z86

Supervisor: Dr. Walter E. Riedel

ABSTRACT

The symbolism of the cross in Ernst Toller's 1919 drama Die Wandlung is a pre-eminent representation of the Expressionist theme of "der neue Mensch." This thematic study underlines the relevance of cultural context to the themes associated with the cross symbolism in Die Wandlung, which occurs as Christian symbol of sacrifice and regeneration, the Iron Cross of war honour, and the Red Cross of healing. Association of the theme of Ahasver, the Jew exiled from a Christian world, with the symbolism of the cross offers Toller's new variation of the theme of "der neue Mensch." The recurrent imagery of the cross in Toller's later dramas of revolution, Masse Mensch (1919), Die Maschinenstürmer (1921), Hoppla, wir leben! (1927), and Feuer aus den Kesseln (1930), supports a cultural understanding of the cross symbolism in Die Wandlung.

Examiners:

Dr. W.E. Riedel, Supervisor (Department of Germanic and Russian Studies)

Dr. R.T.K. Symington, Departmental Member (Department of Germanic and Russian Studies)

Dr. E.M. Cobley, Outside Member (Department of English)

Dr. O. Schmidtke, External Examiner (Department of Political Science)

Table of Contents

Title Page	i
Abstract	ii
Table of Contents	iii
Acknowledgments	iv
Introduction	1
Chapter One: The Genesis of <u>Die Wandlung</u>	5
Chapter Two: The Symbolism of the Cross in <u>Die Wandlung</u>	18
Chapter Three: The Recurrence of Cross Symbolism in Toller's Dramas of Revolution	34
Conclusion	48
Works Cited	51

Acknowledgments

To Dr. Rodney Symington, Dr. Evelyn Cobley, and Dr. Oliver Schmidtke, my appreciation for their perspicacity, engagement, and generosity of time.

To Dr. Walter Riedel, my Supervisor, my deepest gratitude for the many years of impetus, inspiration, and unflagging support. I am privileged to consider him mentor and friend.

The Symbolism of the Cross in Ernst Toller's Drama Die Wandlung

Introduction

Ernst Toller was known as the writer of Die Wandlung before the play was published or performed. Shortly after his 1917 discharge from active military duty at the front in France, Toller became politically active in anti-war student groups in Heidelberg and Munich. He was writing Die Wandlung at the time and read scenes from it to small groups of students, intellectuals, and workers active in the burgeoning anti-war movement (Dove 43-4). Toller's continuing involvement in social activism culminated in a leadership role in the short-lived Bavarian Revolution in the spring of 1919. The government of Bavaria charged Toller with high treason for his revolutionary activity. Capturing and trying the twenty-five-year-old Ernst Toller made him a figure of world renown in the summer of 1919. The testimonies of many eminent witnesses were quoted in the international press. The well-known writer Thomas Mann had read Die Wandlung and, appreciative of its literary promise, testified eloquently on Toller's behalf at the trial. Such support may have spared Toller the death sentence: instead, he received the minimum five-year prison sentence (Dove 92-3).

Six weeks after Toller had begun serving his time in prison, the première of Die Wandlung opened on stage in Berlin under the direction of Karlheinz Martin. The attention the production received was intense: it inaugurated a new theatre, the Tribüne, and critics reviewed the production favourably (Kuhns 191). Toller served in full the five years of his sentence, rejecting the early release offered him in the wake of Die Wandlung's success, and, by the time of his release in 1924, the play no longer enjoyed the popularity it had in 1919 and 1920.

Critics have consistently recognized Die Wandlung as representative of Expressionist drama (Dove 49). Dramatists such as August Strindberg, Georg Kaiser and Walter Hasenclever had provided models of a new experimental direction in theatre. Initial themes of rebellion and uprising against individual forces of oppression, as in Hasenclever's Der Sohn (1914), were soon overshadowed by the cataclysm of war, and gave way to the theme of revolt on a larger scale. Meanwhile, the artists of "Die Brücke" in Dresden (ca. 1905-1910) under the direction of Ludwig Kirchner had provided the impetus for a movement of revival in the arts. It was a movement characterized by a "desire to transform the existing order [and] an individuality that privileged the creative impulse," which often found expression in forms religious and symbolic (Lionel 17). In Munich, innovative artists, including Franz Marc and August Macke, joined under Vassily Kandinsky's leadership to form the group known as "Der Blaue Reiter." They exhibited their works in 1911 and 1912; the next year Kandinsky published his seminal treatise Über das Geistige in der Kunst. This vibrant inspiration was manifest also in the works of early Expressionist dramatists, who envisioned, proclaimed and embraced the concept of "der neue Mensch," a renewed and dedicated humanity, with artist and poet showing the way: "Um diese Vision zu verwirklichen, wird der Dichter zum Verkünder und das Theater zur Rednertribüne. Er tritt selbst als Heilbringer vor die Menschheit und ruft sie zur Umkehr auf" (W. Riedel 4).

Artists in the vanguard included Ernst Barlach, Emil Nolde, Max Beckmann and Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, who gave bold new expression to religious symbolism such as that of the cross. In 1918 Barlach sculpted the figure of a crucified Christ for a war memorial, a work commissioned by the Prussian Ministry of Culture but rejected as

unacceptably modern (Carls 118). Similar objections to Nolde's painted altarpiece series Das Leben Christi (Life of Christ) had resulted in its removal from exhibition in the Brussels 1912 World Fair (C. Riedel 22). Beckmann's 1917 painting Kreuzabnahme (Descent from the Cross) and Schmidt-Rottluff's 1918 woodcut Ist euch nicht Kristus erschienen? (Has not Christ Appeared to You?) were the artists' direct responses to the war (Dube 109, 113). In 1919 the critic Julius Meier-Gräfe recorded his impression of Beckmann's Kreuzabnahme as follows: "Die Bilder sind alles andere als dekorativ. Die Einstellung ist viel gewaltsamer. Eine nahezu mystische Verbitterung treibt zu solchen Formen: Wollust des Schmerzes. . . . Ein entfleischter Grünewald, entfleischt, nicht entseelt" (qtd. in Schulz-Hoffmann and Weiss 202). The artists' imagery of the cross assumed new form and meaning in the fresh context of the war era.

The symbol of the cross is also a focal image of early Expressionist drama: this is no more so than in Die Wandlung. The Expressionist choice of the cross as leitmotiv betokens the changing cultural landscape of the era for a generation, steeped in the Christian heritage of its forebears and institutions, and responding to Nietzschean challenges and explosive social, economic and political conditions. It resonated with the particular experiences of the young, born to war and revolution and to a confused identity. In the German literature of the immediate pre- and post-war period, especially drama, the cross symbol heralds the pre-eminent theme of "der neue Mensch." Expressionist dramatists, such as Georg Kaiser, had adduced the cross of the Crucifixion as symbolic referent for "der neue Mensch."

In Die Wandlung, the symbolism of the cross occurs in several forms: as the Iron Cross of war valour, as the Red Cross of succour and healing, and as the Christian cross

of Christ's death and resurrection; it also sets in relief the theme of the protagonist as Ahasver, the Jew exiled from a Christian world. In this study I will suggest that the symbolism of the cross highlights a complex of related themes in Die Wandlung and, thus, offers an alternative interpretation of the play's development and dénouement. In keeping with the important role of symbolism in Expressionist literature, I will take a thematic approach to the instances of cross imagery in Die Wandlung. However, I will also privilege the cultural and psychological background of Toller's particular experience and, accordingly, explore the cultural and historical context the symbolism of the cross reflects. In Chapter One, I will set the background leading up to Die Wandlung, with particular emphasis on the relevant contextual experiences reflected in Ernst Toller's life and works. In Chapter Two, I will examine the respective representations of the cross symbolism in Die Wandlung and its effect in interpreting the themes of Die Wandlung. In Chapter Three, I will point briefly to the recurrent imagery of the cross in Toller's subsequent dramas as indicative of its significance in the thematic associations of Die Wandlung.

Chapter One

The Genesis of Die Wandlung

Ernst Toller recognized the representational aspect of his own life, by naming his 1933 autobiography Eine Jugend in Deutschland (Gesammelte Werke 4). Born in 1893, he was unavoidably touched by the experiences that marked the age. In a historical account of the life of Ernst Toller, Richard Dove (1990) describes Toller as “representative of that generation born in the 1890’s and brought up in the values of Imperial Germany, which entered the First World War with the highest ideals of patriotism, was radicalized by its experience at the front, and supported the revolution which followed the war” (1). Toller’s autobiography focuses on his childhood awareness of his isolation as a Jew and on his participation in the war and the Bavarian Revolution. In this chapter, I will briefly describe the context of these defining experiences that form the background to Die Wandlung.

In the first half of Die Wandlung, the Jewish outcast figure is a constant presence as Ahasver, companion alter ego to Friedrich. The parallels in Toller’s life to the exclusion Ahasver represents can be readily drawn. More than fifteen years after writing Die Wandlung, in his fortieth year, Toller first wrote autobiographically of his perceptions of that experience. With perspicacious sensitivity and insight, he reflects in Eine Jugend in Deutschland on childhood wounds, those both cruelly dealt and painfully absorbed, as child of a Jewish family in Prussian Samotschin on the border with Poland. Toller writes of himself as a child incipiently aware of the layered complexities of that milieu. Though maligned as Jewish, he belonged to a middle class patriotic German family and was, hence, superior to his best friend, Stanislaus, member of the resented and

forcibly disadvantaged Polish community. Toller's love and betrayal of Stanislaus remains a poignant early memory. In the following recounted exchange with Stanislaus, he encapsulates the cruel confusion of their complex vulnerabilities:

Auf der Straße schreien die Kinder: "Jude, hep, hep!" Ich habe es früher nie gehört. Nur Stanislaus schreit nicht, ich frage Stanislaus, warum die anderen so schreien?
 -- Die Juden haben in Konitz einen Christenjungen geschlachtet und das Blut in die Mazzen gebacken.
 -- Das ist nicht wahr!
 -- Daß wir schmutzig und Flöhe haben, das ist wohl wahr, wie? (GW 4: 20)

At the same time, Toller's own longing for inclusion centres on Stanislaus's religion of the dominantly valued Christian cultural heritage: "Wenn ich bei Stanislaus bin und niemand aufpaßt, gehe ich zum Heiland und bete. -- Bitte, lieber Heiland, verzeih mir, daß die Juden Dich totgeschlagen haben" (21). The ritual is, however, to no avail, as the inviting Christ of Stanislaus's home ("Lasset die Kindlein zu mir kommen") becomes the instrument of rejection in a teacher's hands. Toller evokes his boyhood self with an economy of bitter irony:

Ich bin selig, ich bin kein Jude mehr, ich werde ein Weihnachtsgedicht aufsagen, keiner darf mehr "Jude, hep, hep!" nachrufen. Ich nehme meine Trompete und blase wie er die Posaune, dann spreche ich mit lauter, feierlicher Stimme das Weihnachtsgedicht. Am andern Tag sagt mir der Herr Vorleser, es täte ihm leid, aber dem Herrn Heiland sei es angenehmer, wenn Franz das Gedicht aufsahe. (21)

Toller's studies offered him escape from the anti-Semitism of Samotschin: at the age of 12, he began studying in Bromberg (now Bydgoszcz) and, in February 1914, when he was 20, he went to Grenoble to begin university studies (Frühwald and Spalek 12).

In the summer of 1914, Toller was studying and travelling in France. On August 1, in Lyons, he heard the news that Germany was about to declare war on Russia and left immediately for Geneva, managing to escape before the French closed the border (Dove 17-18). He was eager to enlist and, one week later in Munich, joined a Bavarian

regiment. At his request in August 1915, Toller was transferred to Bois-le-Prêtre, where he was part of the brutal trench fighting. The images of “Leichen im Priesterwald,” published in 1924 in Vormorgen, are those of Bois-le-Prêtre:

Ein Düngerhaufen faulender Menschenleiber:
 Verglaste Augen, blutgeronnen,
 Zerspellte Hirne, ausgespiene Eingeweide,
 Die Luft verpestet vom Kadaverstank,
 Ein einzig grauenvoller Wahnsinnschrei!

O Frauen Frankreichs,
 Frauen Deutschlands,
 Seht Ihr Eure Männer!
 Sie tasten mit zerfetzten Händen
 Nach den verquollnen Leibern ihrer Feinde,
 Gebärde, leichenstarr, ward brüderlicher Hauch,
 Ja, sie umarmen sich.
 O schauerlich Umarmen! (Kaufmann 279)

Toller reprises the theme in Eine Jugend in Deutschland (1933):

Und plötzlich, als teilte sich die Finsternis vom Licht, das Wort vom Sinn, erfasse
 ich die einfache Wahrheit Mensch, die ich vergessen hatte, die vergraben und
 verschüttet lag, die Gemeinsamkeit, das Eine und Einende.
 Ein toter Mensch.
 Nicht: ein toter Franzose.
 Nicht: ein toter Deutscher.
 Ein toter Mensch. (GW 4: 70)

Allusion to the divine acts of creation (light parting from darkness) and Christ’s coming (the word made flesh) suggests the irony of the lost sense of humanity.

Promoted to corporal and posted to the vicinity of Verdun, Toller served but a few more months until May 1916. Richard Dove describes this period as one in which “only his sense of duty sustained him” (24). In May 1916, he was hospitalized for physical and emotional exhaustion, a collapse later encapsulated by Stefan Großmann in these words: “Herz und Nerven sträuben sich gegen das Kriegserlebnis” (312). In January 1917, Toller was discharged because of his unfitness for war, officially noted as “kriegsuntauglich,

aber dauernd arbeitsverwendungsfähig” (Frühwald and Spalek 12). Later accounts of Toller’s service as a soldier praised his serious, heartfelt spirit of self-sacrifice in war. Journalist Stefan Großmann’s summarizes the testimony presented on Toller’s behalf at trial in July 1919:

Er steht in Frankreich als Fußartillerist, aber das genügt seinem Opfertrieb noch nicht, Infanterie hat es noch schwerer; er meldet sich zur Infanterie, und auch dies ist seinem Tatendrang noch nicht genug: der Infanterist Toller bittet, einer Maschinengewehrabteilung zugewiesen zu werden. Er nimmt Teil an den blutigsten Kämpfen im Priesterwald. Nicht nur Kameraden haben den Soldaten Toller gerühmt, es liegt auch der freudig anerkennende Brief seines Leutnants vor, der später auch als Reichswehroffizier sein Gedächtnisbild nicht verdunkelte. Regimentsbrüder rühmen ihn als hilfsbereiten Nebenmenschen und als “unerschrockenen, aufopferungsbereiten Kameraden.” (312)

Like others, Großmann found Toller’s youthful enthusiasm compelling: “Eine Jüngernatur, so nennt ihn Weber. Aber wem kann er Jünger sein?” (312). This admiration for Toller the honourable soldier is believed to have influenced the Munich court to spare him the death penalty for his part in the 1919 Revolution in Bavaria (Dove 91-3).

In the winter of 1916-1917, Toller was studying and living in Munich. He began attending weekly literary “Gasthaus” readings by prominent writers, Frank Wedekind and Thomas Mann among them. It was during this period that Toller began to write Die Wandlung. In the fall of 1917, he met leading academic Max Weber, Professor of Sociology at Heidelberg, at a meeting of intellectuals and artists in Lauenstein, Thüringen. It was a singular honour for the young Toller to have been invited to attend, suggesting to Richard Dove “that he had already made some impression on established literary circles in Munich” (31). Toller next moved to Heidelberg to study, continued writing Die Wandlung, and became involved in an anti-war student group. In January, 1918, in Berlin, Toller came under the influence of Kurt Eisner, idealistic journalist,

writer and activist, leader of the Munich representatives in the newly formed anti-war party, the USPD (Die Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands). Toller went to Munich at the end of January and spoke at numerous gatherings of workers, in support of a planned General Strike. For these activities, the military leadership incarcerated him for three months in the summer of 1918 (Frühwald and Spalek 13). While in military prison, Toller completed Die Wandlung (Dove 49).

Though the events of the Bavarian Revolution spanned but a brief period, from November 1918 until April 1919, its effects on Toller's life and works were lasting. Kurt Eisner, writer, journalist and activist, proclaimed the "Bayerische Räterepublik" in Munich on November 7. He successfully enlisted the support of soldiers and workers who were agitating for an end to the war, and set up councils ("Räte") to govern. Toller was very active in the work of the councils of the provisional government, and, after Eisner was assassinated in February, assumed an even greater leadership role. In March, Toller negotiated a tenuous unified socialist front with the Communist Party leaders in Munich, Max Levien and Eugen Leviné. In April, the elected Hoffmann SPD (Die Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands) government, from its Bamberg operating position, initiated an offensive to reclaim Munich. For a few days, Toller led Red Army troops in defence of Dachau. By May 2, the Hoffmann government, aided by Prussian troops, had taken control in Munich, and on May 12, charged Toller with high treason and offered an award of 10,000 marks for his capture. On the day Toller was captured, June 4, Eugen Leviné was sentenced to death. The following day, Leviné was hanged and Toller was placed in Leviné's cell to await trial (Dove 89).

Toller's participation in the Revolution is well documented. He promoted and supported Kurt Eisner's vision of a peaceful revolution in Bavaria, serving first as a member of the "Zentralarbeitsrat" and then of the "Rätekongreß" (Dove 61). He believed the revolution could be accomplished without violence. He had agreed reluctantly to the proclamation of the Soviet Republic, a coalition of Socialist and Communists hastily formed in April and fashioned after the recently declared Soviet Republic in Hungary. Toller advocated that the Soviet Republic negotiate a ceasefire with the advancing representatives of the Hoffmann government. When the ceasefire was sabotaged, Toller managed to peacefully defend Dachau, refused an order to shoot the prisoners, and attempted to breach the tide of killings; in Munich he saved the lives of a group of hostages that included Eisner's assassin, Count Anton von Arco-Valley (Dove 62; 82-4). He then went into hiding himself on April 30 and avoided arrest until June 4 (Dove 86).

The decisions and actions Toller took in the weeks of the spring of 1919 figure prominently in his own later account in Eine Jugend in Deutschland (1933), in which he portrays himself as caught up in a current of events he could neither stem nor direct. This image is consistent with that reflected in the defense of Toller at his trial as a principled, promising young writer, heralded by an elite panoply of intellectuals and writers, including Thomas Mann and Carl Hauptmann (Großmann 323). Court records reflect the impassioned and eloquent testimonies of witnesses impressed by Toller's integrity:

Die weitere Beweisführung der Verhandlung ist dazu angetan, festzustellen, daß der Angeklagte ruchloser od. niedriger Gesinnung nicht für fähig erachtet werden darf, und operiert die Verteidigung zur Begründung mit der Vernehmung der Literaten: Geheimrat Martersteig, Dr. Max Halbe, Björn Björnson, Prof. Max Weber, die sich bis auf den letzten dahin einig waren, Dichtungen Tollers als Kulturwerte von großer Bedeutung anzusprechen ("Die Wandlung", "Die

Erhebung”), um zum Schlusse darauf zurückzukommen, daß ein Mensch mit so ausgeprägten moralischen Gefühlen niedriger Denkungsart nicht fähig sein kann. Prof. Max Weber bezeichnet Toller als politisch ganz und gar unreifen Menschen während der Jahre 1916/1917, “den Gott in seinem Zorne zum Politiker auserwählte.” (qtd. in Frühwald and Spalek 80-1)

Richard Dove assesses Toller’s involvement in the brief Bavarian Revolution as “his most formative experience, shaping his political development and helping to create the literary legend, which surrounded him for the rest of his life” (60). Contemporary published accounts of his arrest and trial attest to the attention brought to bear on Toller, as both political activist and writer. The five-year sentence for treason also ushered in a concentrated period of writing, resulting in the publication of four plays (Masse Mensch, 1919; Die Maschinenstürmer, 1921; Hinkemann, 1922; and Der entfesselte Wotan, 1923), two volumes of poetry (Gedichte der Gefangenen, 1921; and Das Schwalbenbuch, 1924) and a few other works, such as those classified as “Sprechchöre” and “Massenspiele” (Dove 105). The dramas, in particular, grapple with intellectual and social issues pertinent to the immediate context of the revolutionary struggle in which Toller had participated. The revolutionary theme is also the focus of two dramas Toller wrote after his imprisonment, Hoppla, wir leben! (1927), which confronts the issues of individual choice and commitment in a sobering intellectual analysis of the revolutionary social context, and Feuer aus den Kesseln (1930), based on events of protest in the German navy in 1917 and 1918.

In his account of the trial, Stefan Großmann writes of Toller’s moderation as reluctant revolutionary leader and of the maturity of his efforts to prevent violence: “In Dachau verhindert er vor allem Artilleriekämpfe. (Wenn je ein Ehrenbürgerrecht verdient

war, so Tollers um Dachau.)” (317). He empathizes with the disappointment of Toller’s revolutionary experience and the assault to his ideal of “der neue Mensch”:

Er muß in dieser tragischen Stunde gefühlt haben, wieviel Maschinengewehrglaube noch in dieser Revolution steckte, wie tief die fixe Idee des militärischen Systems sich in den Nerven dieser Revolutionäre eingenistet hatte. War mit solchen Genossen schon das neue Reich aufzurichten? Konnte er von diesen verstörten Gesichtern, aus diesen noch heiseren Stimmen seinen Ruf vom neu entdeckten Menschen hören?” (326)

The image Großmann retains is that of Toller, in the face of despair and disillusionment, nevertheless persisting in his commitment:

Toller hat diese Stunde des Entsetzens an dem Abend erlebt, an welchem er vor die Leichen der erschossenen Geiseln geführt wurde. “Ich möchte mir eine Kugel durch meinen Kopf schießen,” sagte er und – ging ans Werk, um die letzten eingesperrten Geiseln durch ein Kellerfenster ans Licht zu ziehen. (327)

Großmann points to the profound influence of Kurt Eisner on Toller, especially in his emphasis on the participatory leadership role of the writer and artist in society. He quotes from a speech Eisner had given before the Provisional National Council on January 3, 1919, with Toller present: “Der große Künstler ist besessen, er ist der Märtyrer seiner Kunst” (313). Eisner’s vision also included a new responsibility for the writer and artist, to lead by a life of example, embodying total commitment and hope for the future.

Großmann recounts more of Eisner’s speech and of its effect on Toller:

“In der heutigen Zeit scheint es mir, als ob diese Flucht in das Reich des Schönen nicht mehr notwendig sein sollte, daß die Kunst nicht mehr ein Asyl für Verzweifelte am Leben sein soll, sondern daß das Leben selbst ein Kunstwerk sein müßte, und der Staat das höchste Kunstwerk.” Das war Musik für Ernst Toller. Das Chaos in seinem Jünglingsherzen klärte sich bei Eisners Worten: “Ich habe neulich in einer Versammlung von Künstlern gesagt: Der Künstler muß als Künstler Anarchist sein, und als soziales Mitglied, als ein auf die Befriedigung der Lebensnotdurft angewiesener Bürger Sozialist.” (313)

A willing and apt disciple was Toller, and Großmann holds him to account for his beliefs as being able to sustain him during imprisonment: “Keine Trauer über den

Festungsspruch! Ist Toller der, als welcher er sich in seiner Dichtung ankündigt, dann wird seine Festungseinsamkeit nur eine äußere sein” (327).

Toller’s involvement in political activism coincided with the inception of his career as playwright. Die Wandlung was completed shortly before the events of the Bavarian Revolution. It closes with Friedrich’s speech to an assembled mass, eager to hear his words. The speech is an appeal to fundamental renewal: “ ‘Oh, wenn ihr Menschen wäret – unbedingte, freie Menschen.’” (123). The call to “Revolution” is left vague, as the culmination of intense emotion, rather than as a plan of action: “ ‘Nun, ihr Brüder, rufe ich euch zu: Marschier! Marschier am lichten Tag!’” (123). The appeal is in imagery, traditional in Old Testament terms, yet applicable to the contemporary context of war veterans returning to be workers: “ ‘Geht hin zu den Soldaten, sie sollen ihre Schwerter zu Pflugscharen schmieden’” (123). In his own subsequent political engagement, Toller demonstrated his receptiveness to the message, his willingness to put his hand to the ploughshare.

Testimony to the enduring nature of Toller’s social commitment appears in recently published excerpts from the journals of Christiane Grautoff (Fuld and Ostermaier), who was married to Toller from 1934 to 1938. Her observations affirm that his most deeply held and motivating principle was a longing to alleviate suffering: “er hat immer an die Millionen gedacht, die hungern, leiden, verkommen, kämpfen, schufteten für Nichts. Er hat immer die Unmenschlichkeiten der Menschen vor Augen gehabt und versucht, das Leid zu vermindern und die Situation zu verbessern” (75). His passion for the plight of humanity she experienced as paradoxically genuine, and yet impeding: “Er wollte die Menschheit glücklich machen. Nicht einzelne, noch weniger einen. . . . Es war

diese Liebe, diese echte Liebe für die Menschheit, die ihn von anderen trennte und auch von mir” (57). Grautoff stressed that Toller’s commitment knew no personal limit – and no political affiliation:

[Er] machte immer einen großen Unterschied zwischen einem Deutschen und einem Nazi, genauso, wie er den Russen von den Kommunisten unterschied, obwohl nur als Kommunist bekannt war und noch heute als Kommunist gilt. Er war es gar nicht. . . . [Er] war ein linker Pazifist und träumte von Menschenleben, die er vielleicht noch retten könnte, und davon, daß er seinen Zuhörern Respekt vor dem Leben anderer Menschen einflößen könnte. Doch seine eigenen Kräfte versagten, er selbst versagte. (107)

Later in his life, Toller remained sensitive to the criticisms that his dramas too narrowly reflected his life. In a wide-ranging retrospective apologia (“Arbeiten”), included in Quer Durch. Reisebilder und Reden, published in 1930, he defends his works as artistically and morally responsible (GW 1: 135-49). Die Wandlung, product of his youth, he upholds as more poetically than dramatically viable: “Jeder Autor will in sein erstes Werk alles, was er weiß, alles, was er je erlebt hat, hineindrängen. Das tat auch ich. Und so ist es nicht verwunderlich, daß das Private, das Lyrische, sich stärker hervordrängt, als dramatische Architektonik es zulassen darf” (138-9). He also counters the judgment, levelled against Die Wandlung, that it was hampered by its Expressionist style:

Heute lächeln viele über den Expressionismus, damals war er eine notwendige künstlerische Form. Er wandte sich gegen jene Kunstrichtung, der es genügte, Eindrücke nebeneinander zu reihen, ohne die Frage nach dem Wesen, nach der Verantwortung, nach der Idee zu stellen. Der Expressionist wollte mehr als Bilder photographieren, aus der Erkenntnis, daß die Umwelt gleichsam in den Künstler hineinsinkt, in seinem seelischen Spiegel facettiert wird, wollte er diese Umwelt vom Wesen her neu gestalten. Denn auf diese Umwelt einzuwirken, war die Absicht des Expressionismus, sie wollte er ändern, ihr ein gerechteres, helleres Gesicht geben. Die Realität sollte vom Strahl der Idee erfaßt werden. (137)

His defense of the Expressionist writer's motivations and objectives is spirited and thorough, yet encompasses some of the limitations inherent to the argument. To define the desired outcome of a creative work as social and political is to risk that it will only secondarily be seen as art. The argument is, however, germane to the principles underlying Toller's approach to his work and to the responsibility he felt: "Wir wissen, daß uns nicht so sehr die Schönheit bewegt als die Not. Wir wissen, daß es unsere Aufgabe ist, diese Not im Kunstwerk zu gestalten und uns in der Wirklichkeit von ihr zu lösen" (140). For Toller, the imperative was unequivocally one of social action. The previously expressed conflict between artistic and social aims he here resolves, by defining his works as artistically sound, not in spite of, but in conjunction with, their social relevance. Earlier times had required different forms:

Wir wissen, daß wir keine klassische Kunst schaffen. Klassik ist der Ausdruck in sich kreisender, überlegener Ruhe. Wir aber wollen nicht ruhig sein, wir wollen keine Elfenbeintürmchen bauen, in die wir uns zurückziehen, wir wollen teilnehmen an den Kämpfen unserer Epoche, und wir fürchten uns nicht vor dem Vorwurf, daß unser Werk ebenso zerklüftet ist wie das Leben draußen. Unsere Kunst will keine bloße Mitleidskunst sein, sie ist geboren aus Mitkämpferschaft. (147-8)

In defending the relevance of his work in its historical context, Toller adduces a long and noble literary tradition: "Ob wir Sophokles, Aristophanes, Dante, Shakespeare, Kleist, Büchner, Schiller betrachten, es waren 'aktuelle' Probleme, denen jene Dichter künstlerisch 'ewige' Deutung zu geben versuchten, sie waren Sprachrohr der aus der Zeit wirkenden Idee, der in der Zeit kämpfenden Gemeinschaft" (136). Toller reaffirms his belief in the power of words as art and recommits himself to the practice of his credo, convinced of the possibility of attaining his consistently sought ideals: "Kunst gehört zu jenen seltenen geistigen Mitteln, verschüttete Instinkte zu erhellen, tapfere Haltungen zu

schulen, spontanes Gefühl für Menschlichkeit, Freiheit und Schönheit zu vertiefen” (148). The commitment is to a role independent from political influence, in order to preserve the integrity and influence of the work and writer. This he nevertheless tempers with the caution, borne of experience: “aber ich weiß, daß wieder Entscheidungen fallen können, in denen persönlicher Einsatz wichtiger ist als Kunst” (148-9).

On the eve before sentence was to be passed on Toller, Stefan Großmann read Die Wandlung aloud to a few friends in a Munich hotel room. A few days later, he recorded his impressions of what remained with him as a momentous occasion. He found himself, to his surprise, responding to the work itself:

Bald war es feierlich still in unserem Hotelzimmer. Ich hatte gefürchtet: Zuviel Gesinnung und zuwenig Gestaltung. Hier aber fand ich ein symphonisch aufgebautes Werk, von innerstem Ernst getragen und doch nie monoton, eine große Auseinandersetzung mit sich selbst und doch nie steriler Monolog, sondern eine wiedergeborene, leuchtende und wieder verfinsterte Welt.” (323)

From the impact of this reading, intensified in the heightened drama of the moment, Großmann draws the measure of both the artist and the man: “Nichts Subjektiv-Zufälliges ist in diesem Werk, nichts Kleinlich-Naturalistisches, diesem Dichter ist die Lust an der großen Linie gegeben, er hat die angeborene Kraft, diese Epochen, der er sich ohne klägliche Künstlervorsicht hingeben, aus seinem Kopfe wieder auferstehen lassen”

(323). The reading reminds Großmann of Thomas Mann’s testimony about Toller’s Wandlung, “ ‘Dies ist eine Art Gebet, dieser Dichter ist auf seine Weise fromm.’ ” (323).

Großmann finds Die Wandlung to so eloquently bespeak Toller, the man, that he would have the trial judge hear it as testimony: “Solchen Richtern fehlte natürlich der Drang, in die Dichtung Tollers einzudringen. Und doch hätten sie dort das klarste Bild auch des Politikers Toller empfangen können!” (326). It was two months before the first public

staging of Die Wandlung, yet the identification of Toller, the political and social activist, with Toller, the writer, was already well established.

As we have seen, Toller viewed Expressionism as “eine künstlerische Form” (GW 1: 137), an appropriate and inevitable response to the times: “wir fürchten uns nicht vor dem Vorwurf, daß unser Werk ebenso zerklüftet ist wie das Leben draußen” (148). Toller’s adoption of Expressionist symbolism of the cross ranges beyond its habitual identification with the call to a spiritually social regeneration. In Die Wandlung, centred on the symbolism of the cross, Toller builds on the Expressionist theme of “der neue Mensch” and extends its reference to apply also to the lived experiences of his youth, of Jewish exclusion, of war, and of revolution. In the next chapter, I will examine the specific representations and thematic associations of the symbolism of the cross in Die Wandlung and clarify both the context and relevance of Toller’s unique expression of a salient motif of Expressionism.

Chapter Two

The Symbolism of the Cross in Die Wandlung

Predominant in Die Wandlung is the visual and textual image of the cross. Associated with Expressionist representations of “der neue Mensch,” the symbolism of the cross in Die Wandlung announces the appeal to become a new humanity. However, the cross pervades the drama, enhancing the significance of a number of other culturally related themes as well. Early in the drama, it is introduced to represent the established forces of Church and State, conspiring together to engineer war as a “Kriegsmaschine.” The cross also shadows the lives sacrificed to the atrocity of war. Finally, it figures as a foil to the Jewish protagonist, cruelly excluded, yet ultimately a model of “der neue Mensch,” transformed to lead. In this chapter, I will examine these thematic associations of the cross symbolism in Die Wandlung and their relevance to Toller’s portrayal of “der neue Mensch” in cultural context.

The cross is an example of what Northrop Frye has characterized as “a learned cultural archetype” (102), with shared and clearly understood associations. In an interview in 1926, Toller spoke of the Christian elements present in European literature as a natural and inherent manifestation of its historical and cultural roots: “Denn die europäische Kultur entstand in Berührung mit christlichen Normen, und da jeder Europäer in Schule und Literatur, in Umgebung und Landschaft Christliches aufnahm, wird jedes europäische Kunstwerk, ob es gleich sich antichristlich nennt, als Spur des Lebens christliche Elemente enthalten” (GW 1: 116). He leaves to understand that this cultural legacy would emerge naturally and inevitably as “Spur des Lebens” in the creative tensions of his own work. This is particularly evident in Die Wandlung.

While writing Die Wandlung, Toller also found impetus in the Crucifixion image of the famous Isenheim Altar of Mathis Neithart (known as Grünewald). Painted in 1515 for the hospital of the Antonite order in Isenheim in the Rhine Valley, the altarpiece panels were on display in the Alte Pinakothek art museum in Munich when Toller saw them in 1917. According to art historian Larry Silver, the exaggerated representation of Christ's suffering was intended to provide "solace" to sufferers of a skin disease called St. Anthony's fire (143): "this Christ crucified offers the ultimate extreme of torment and mortal frailty, as He hangs limply, limbs distorted, extremities racked with pain. Palpable pigment of the richest of reds makes His bleeding wounds a physical reality before the contemplative viewer" (144). Toller referred to the Isenheim Altar image in a political address before the provisional National Council of the "Bayerische Räterepublik" in 1919 (Großmann 315). Many years later in Eine Jugend in Deutschland (1933), he recalls the profound impact he felt upon first seeing the Isenheim Altar in Munich in the spring of 1917, when he had been trying to obliterate memories of war. For him the Crucifixion image of Grünewald was no pious comfort, but rather the horrifying recall of the slaughter he had witnessed at Bois-le-Prêtre (Priesterwald):

Ich wandere durch den Vorfrühling des Englischen Gartens, Schneeglöckchen blühen, Krokus, die ersten Veilchen, . . . Kinder singen, Musik spielt, froh sind die Menschen. Ich atme den Frieden und die Sonne, ich will den Krieg vergessen. Aber ich kann ihn nicht vergessen. . . . ich begegne ihm überall, vor dem Altar des Matthias Grünewald sehe ich durch das Bild den Hexenkessel im Priesterwald, die zerschossenen, zerfetzten Kameraden, Krüppel begegnen mir auf meinen Wegen, schwarzverschleierte, vergräunte Frauen. Ach, die Flucht war vergeblich. (GW 4: 76)

Many critics have dismissed Toller's use of the images of the Crucifixion as excessive and immature. Stefan Großmann, for example, categorizes his comparison of contemporary human suffering to the Isenheim Passion as "banale Rhetorik" (316). Herbert Ihering, in an otherwise enthusiastic review of the 1919 première production of Die Wandlung, identifies the

cross symbolism as a weakness, to be generously forgiven by virtue of Toller's youth (qtd. in Rühle: 158). While Die Wandlung was the first work of a young playwright, its excesses of symbolism were consistent with the expression of the theme of regeneration in Expressionist drama. In a recent study, Richard Murphy conceptualizes Expressionist drama as a necessary and appropriate response to a cultural phase of crisis and change, which "[made] visible those meanings and values which [remained] repressed and unarticulable by the socially legitimized discourses and by conventional modes of representation such as realism" (144). In this framework, symbols were exaggerated and charged with possible allusions, challenging the audience to engage in "the continuing search for alternative meanings" (173). He also argues that the excesses of Expressionist dramas like Die Wandlung served the function of reaching "beyond the pragmatic goal of attempting to change the existing power-relations in society" (166). In his analysis, the revolutionary outpourings of the Expressionist stage resorted, of necessity, to extremes of melodrama as a way of confronting an entrenched ideology, not accessible to conventional forms (166).

In Expressionist drama, crucifixion imagery is significantly associated with the post-Nietzschean concept of the ideal of "der neue Mensch." George Kaiser's Von morgens bis mitternachts and Die Bürger von Calais, both of which premiered on the stage in 1917 (Benson 112, 125), modelled the dramatic juxtaposition of the cross and a type of regenerated humanity. In the climactic scene the Cashier dies in a crucified pose, whispering what sounds like "Ecce Homo" (517), words that ironically evoke both Christ's Crucifixion and Nietzsche's borrowing. The didactic intention of the pronouncement, according to David Kuhns, is most effectively captured in Karlheinz Martin's direction of a filmed staging of the play in 1920 (179-83). In this very early film record of Von morgens bis mitternachts, a cross serves as backdrop for the

intensely exaggerated and abstract portrayal of the Crucifixion. For Kuhns, “the ‘idea’ in Von morgens bis mitternachts . . . is not a polemical one . . . ; rather, it is essentially emblematic, visually and aurally. Kaiser has no specific argument to offer about human beings with longings and frustrations such as those of the Cashier. He simply wants us to behold the idea of such a man” (183).

In Die Bürger von Calais, however, the final scene climaxes in unmistakably messianic imagery. The corpse of Eustache St-Pierre is borne before the stunned crowds; the grieving, blind, ninety-year-old father announces the self-sacrifice of his son’s suicide and anoints him as “der neue Mensch”: “Das Licht flutet auf dem Giebelfeld über der Tür: in seinem unteren Teil stellt sich eine Niederlegung dar; . . . – Der obere Teil zeigt die Erhebung des Getöteten: er steht frei und beschwerdelos in der Luft” (579). While the symbolism of the dénouement can be seen as fulfilling the anticipation of the Last Supper scene, it may also echo the death of Socrates, as Renate Benson suggests: “Eustache may also be compared with Socrates whose wisdom enlightens his fellow humans and whose death is freely accepted and offered as an example. His death is not only described in Christian imagery, but is also compared to the soul’s crossing of the river Styx in Greek mythology” (121). The symbolism is, in any event, visionary in its associations and forms the backdrop to the regeneration theme, voiced in Eustache’s challenge to the other six who have offered their lives to spare their city: “Seid ihr die neuen Täter?” (562). The conception of “neue Menschen” is framed in radiant Christian symbolism of Christ’s Ascension, glorifying the dawning of hope for all of humanity (579).

Die Wandlung also classically portrays the Expressionist ideal of “der neue Mensch.” However, the protagonist, Friedrich, is a more complete prototype of “der neue Mensch” than either the Cashier or Eustache, because he undergoes a process of inner transformation and

assumes the mantle of a messianic leader. Toller adduces the image of the cross to mark the transformation in both its inner and outer form. In the dream sequence of the pivotal scene, the prisoner in Friedrich's image rises from his crucified pose of death on the floor of the jail, representing the enslaving factory environment and the conditions of the suffering worker class. His regeneration is that of a re-interpreted Crucifixion, whereby Christ would have been the instrument of his own death, in an even more idealized form of sacrifice: "Nicht Römer schlugen ihn ans Kreuz / Er kreuzigte sich selbst" (109). The model is that of a hero who is agent, rather than victim, of his own sacrifice to death.

The transformed Friedrich subsequently frees himself of all earth-bound shackles of love and friendship to fulfill his solitary messianic role. He experiences conversion and gloriously embraces his mission:

Sonne umwogt mich,
 Freiheit durchströmt mich,
 Meine Augen schauen den Weg.
 Ich will ihn wandern, Schwester,
 Allein, und doch mit dir,
 Allein, und doch mit allen,
 Wissend um den Menschen. (104)

When he ultimately returns to deliver his conversion message to the crowd, his rhetoric is biblical, his message that of a Crucifixion infused with new meaning for those courageous enough to follow the path of self-sacrifice: "Ihr pflanzt Haß in eure Kinder, denn ihr wißt nicht mehr um die Liebe. Ihr habt Jesus Christus in Holz geschnitzt und auf ein hölzernes Kreuz genagelt, weil ihr selbst den Kreuzweg nicht gehen wolltet, der ihn zur Erlösung führte" (122).

In his initial staging of Die Wandlung, Karl-Heinz Martin transposed the scene of Friedrich's inner transformation to follow that of his exhortation to the assembled, and thus to conclude the play with a focus on a child, embodying a vague hope for the future: "Ein sanftes

Tönen schwingt . . . / Die Gefangenen treten aus ihren Zellen – bilden einen Halbkreis um die Frau, von Sonnenlicht umleuchtet” (111). In this way, the drama would end in the surreal passive adoration of mother and child, rather than with the impassioned response to Friedrich’s call to engage in the revolutionary struggle: “Die Gefangenen schauen voll Ehrfurcht auf die Frau, die das Kind ihnen entgegenhält. Mit schmerzverzerrtem Gesicht, umspielt von frohen Lichtern. Die Decke wölbt sich zum unendlichen Himmel” (111). Displacing this scene, however, deprives the Crucifixion imagery of some of its original “Wandlung” import of inspiring personal and societal renewal.

Toller’s Friedrich is transformed into a politically engaged activist, who preaches social renewal originating with those imbued with “Geist,” a concept derived from Gustav Landauer, whose philosophy had profoundly influenced Toller: “It was ‘Geist’ which would inspire people and unite them in pursuit of a common ideal” (Dove 38). Embracing this ideal, Friedrich is a more worthy representative of “der neue Mensch” than the Cashier of Von morgens bis mitternachts, for he both lives and imparts his message. His mission culminates in the delivery of a conversion appeal: “Ihr seid alle keine Menschen mehr, seid Zerrbilder eurer selbst. / Und ihr könntet doch Menschen sein, wenn ihr den Glauben an euch und den Menschen hättet, wenn ihr Erfüllte wäret im Geist. / Aufrecht schrittet ihr durch die Straßen und heute kriecht ihr gebückt” (122). Silvio Vietta and Hans-Georg Kemper, however, identify one of the difficulties implicit in this leap from the individual to humanity at large:

[Die] Vermittlung zwischen Protagonisten und Kollektiv ist aber in dem von seiner Struktur her monologischen Protagonistendrama, das weder dramatische Handlung, noch Dialog im eigentlichen Sinne kennt, nur als ein pathetischer Rausch vollziehbar. . . . Das rauschhafte Pathos soll Ersatzbrücken schlagen, wo die reale Vermittlung, ausgetragen in Handlung und Dialog, fehlt. (202)

As a “Verkündigungsdrama” proclaiming the urgent need for spiritual regeneration, Die Wandlung remains abstract and remote. The imagery of the cross, in conveying the theme of “der neue Mensch,” is here more emblematic than intrinsically relevant to the play. This conforms also to the play’s reception in its initial Berlin staging in 1919. David Kuhns’s account of the Karlheinz Martin production is that “[it] was generally heralded for its revolutionary staging techniques depicting Friedrich’s personal odyssey through the horror of war, rather than for its revolutionary content, proclaiming the spiritual regeneration of all mankind” (187).

In Die Wandlung, however, the cross is not an isolated symbol exclusive to the motif of “der neue Mensch,” but rather a thread reprised in other significant themes and thus more inherently relevant to the drama. Following the examples of early Expressionist dramatists, Toller designed Die Wandlung as a “Stationendrama” evoking the symbolism of Christ’s Passion and the Way of the Cross. From “Station” to “Station,” the thematic representation of the cross, linked to both Church and State, builds to an explosive dénouement. The cross emerges as a focal image from the beginning of the drama. In the initial scene, “Die Totenkaserne,” it is suggestive both of the complicity of the Church in the “Kriegsmaschine” and of the victims of the war. The macabre dance-parade of the skeletal war-dead introduces the metaphorical context of a “Kriegstod” figure seeming to triumph over its “Friedenstod” rival. The metaphor immediately narrows to its symbolic visual representation in the opening vista of a field of graveyard crosses: “Jede Compagnie hat gleiche, einfache, graue, eiserne Grabkreuze” (79). However, the familiar representation of a sanctified death suddenly metamorphoses, as the crosses of death become the instruments of marshalled war: “Die Offiziere handhaben ihre Kreuze wie Degen” (80). As the ceremony proceeds, the cruel irony of the scene bursts forth in the hollow laughter of the “Friedenstod” spectre:

Sie spielen sich als Sieger auf
 Und sind geschlagen –
 Der Krieg hat Sie geschlagen, lieber Herr.
 Und Sie gezwungen,
 Sein System hier fortzuführen,
 Mit Chargen, Rang und Vorurteilen.
 Gleichsam Kaserne zu verwalten.
 Feldwebel wurden Sie!
 Ein Tod, der sich der deutschen Kriegsmaschine unterwirft
 Wer hätt' das je gedacht! (81-82)

The association of the war crosses with the swords of war intimates the devastation wrought by the “Kriegsmaschine.” It is a context specific to the recent war and, hence, of particular emotional resonance at the time of its early productions.

In the early war scenes (“Stationen”), images of the cross of historical Christianity intertwine with two of its most prominent adaptations for war, the Iron Cross of the German army and the Red Cross of the international society, founded to aid those wounded on the battlefield. King Frederick William III of Prussia had instituted the Iron Cross of military honour in 1813. Designed by the eminent architectural designer Karl Friedrich Schinkel, it was first awarded for bravery in the “iron time” of Napoleon, to soldiers of all ranks (Abenheim 4; “Eisernes Kreuz”). Donald Abenheim stresses that the Iron Cross emblemized the “democratization” (4) of the army under Prussian military reform. It attained the epitome of its military significance in the war against France in 1870; during World War I, millions received the decoration for courage in front-line fighting (3). The International Red Cross Society also had its origins in the nineteenth century, formed at the Geneva Conference of 1863. According to John F. Hutchinson, the reasons for the choice of cross as emblem for the society remain unclear. However, it was immediately accepted as “an appropriate emblem for those engaged in tending the wounded” (35). In the prelude to the published documentation of the Geneva Conference, the work of the society was described as “a crusade on behalf of the unfortunate wounded” (qtd. in Hutchinson: 362).

As the complex of cross symbolism becomes apparent in Die Wandlung, so too does the paradox of a nation of purported Christian values exploiting them for war. In the third “Station,” the wounded heroic Friedrich lies feverish in a field hospital bed, a crucifix over the bed and the Red Cross of the nurse’s uniform bending over him. He learns of his miraculous escape, bound to a tree, as if to a cross. For his heroism in war, the sole survivor of a desert skirmish, he has merited the Iron Cross, supreme symbol of service to the Fatherland, and hence, of entitlement to consider himself beloved of his country. Yet at this very moment, the bitter irony of disillusionment crashes in on him:

OFFIZIER. . . . Sie gehören zu den Siegern.

FRIEDRICH. Wie Jubel auf ihren Gesichtern tanzt. Zehntausend Tote!
 Durch zehntausend Tote gehöre ich zu ihnen. . . . Ist das die grosse Zeit?
 Sind das die grossen Menschen? . . . Nun gehöre ich zu ihnen. (93)

There follows directly the second scene of “Die Krüppel.” Though distanced by the shadows of a dream scene, the 1919 Berlin staging is nevertheless reported to have gripped the audience by its vivid post-war reality. In reviewing the opening night performance in the Berliner Börsen-Courier on October 1, 1919, Emil Faktor described the scene as follows:

Man sah ein Lazarettbild mit drei Krankenbetten, auf denen je zwei Opfer der Kriegsfurie lagen: siechendes, halb irres, verstümmeltes, gelähmtes, von schweren Körperqualen heimgesuchtes Menschentum. Jeder einzelne sprach von seinem Martyrium, alle schriegen sie nach Erlösung. . . . Als dann alle sechs Gemarterten sich erhoben und ihre vom Tod gezeichneten Physiognomien in einer Front entgegenstauen ließen, am erschreckendsten jener, dessen Gelenke dauernd zitterten, war die Erschütterung des Zuschauers groß. Die unfassbare Tragödie des Weltkrieges brannte sich in heißer Symbolik ins Bewußtsein.
 (qtd. in Rühle: 161-62)

When the chaplain appears, he bears a crucifix in outstretched arms and intones, “O kommt zu ihm, ihr tief Bedrückten, / Er gibt euch Heilung, gibt euch Liebe” (97), echoing in poignantly ironic phrases the words of Christ, “Kommt her zu mir, alle, die ihr mühselig und beladen seid; ich will euch erquicken” (Matthäus 11,28). The chaplain confronts the reality before his eyes,

hears the plea of the crippled ones, "Schau uns an" (97), and can but despair. He shatters the crucifix and joins in his humanity with those who suffer: "Wie könnt ich, selber trostbedürftig, den Trost euch spenden, / Nach dem mich brennender denn euch verlangt?" (98). In the following vignette Friedrich, resuming his ambitions to sculpt, moulds the form of a powerful gigantic figure to commemorate the victorious Fatherland. As he works on the stone taking human shape, he begins to question the values underlying the glory of the victors: "Wer bestimmt, daß ein anderer Feind sei?" (99). The values on which he has built his hopes and his life continue to crumble: he witnesses more of the detritus of war in the infirm couple, he, invalided in battle, she, violated by soldiers. Friedrich lays the responsibility squarely at the feet of colluding Church and State: "Ward der Staat Zuhälter und das Vaterland eine getretene Hure, die jeder brutalen Lust sich verkauft? Ausgestattet mit dem Segen der Kupplerin Kirche?" (103). He prepares to renounce his residual attachment to home and country: "Kann ein Vaterland, das das verlangt, göttlich sein? Wert, seine Seele dafür zu opfern? Nein, tausendmal nein" (103). With this agonizing realization, he will free himself: he smashes the statue, thus liberating himself to embrace his identity with Ahasver and to assume his messianic calling.

The cross also figures as ironic symbol of the suffering of the individual victims of war, represented principally by Friedrich. Toller highlights the theme of Die Wandlung on the frontispiece, describing it as "Das Ringen eines Menschen." The protagonist dons various roles and guises, and in the dream scenes appears even more remote, yet it is precisely the travails of the individual, Friedrich, which compel the interest and empathy of the audience. The appeal may also lie in the nature of the protagonist: from victim of the insurmountable forces of war and racial hatred, he undergoes a transformative development, emerging a humbly charismatic leader, stripped of emotional attachments and prepared to live his message of self-sacrifice. As

Andreas Lixl describes the protagonist of Die Wandlung, “Toller [portraitierte] die Willensäußerung des Einzelnen nicht länger als Ausdruck einer wie auch immer gearteten Kausalität, sondern vielmehr als Erlebnis eines bewußt und aktiv eingreifenden Subjekts” (44). Fritz Kortner, the actor who first played the role of Friedrich, was able to identify with Friedrich, the individual. As he later wrote: “Was ich damals spielte, war ich selber; ein junger deutscher Jude und Rebell, in Konflikt mit der Umwelt um sich herum” (qtd. in Rühle: 156). David Kuhns also considers Kortner’s performance to have been largely responsible for the play’s resounding success (187-89).

The vividly grotesque context of the physical, emotional and spiritual traumatization of war would have lent immediacy to the Crucifixion symbolism and intensified its impact on a contemporary audience. As recorded by Faktor following the Berlin première, the emotional response to the war hospital scenes was palpable (qtd. in Rühle: 161-62). From the opening scene, the image of the cross shadows the stages of the soldier’s experience: its form marks his grave (79), sanctifies his hospital bed (92), identifies his ministering nurse (93), and glorifies his military valour (93). The heroic wounded Friedrich marvels at his survival and at the nursing sister’s report of how he was discovered:

SCHWESTER. Man fand Sie an einen Baum gebunden. . . .

FRIEDRICH. Nicht an ein Kreuz. . . . (93)

To be inferred is the thematic association of the soldier as scapegoat, sacrificed to the slaughter. In an earlier scene of soldiers after a desert battle comforting one of their own in his delirium, one soldier alludes to the sacrificial power of their shed blood, in words hollowly echoing Old Testament prophecies: “Ich bin der Erlöser, juchhe! Jetzt gehe ich zum Roten Kreuz. Rot bedeutet, daß Blut abgewaschen werden soll” (89). The cloak of the sacrificial scapegoat is

attributed, by extension, to other victims of the war, most notably in the dream scene of skeletons dancing in barbed-wire enclosures. Though difficult to distinguish in her skeletal anonymity, the young girl, raped by many, is singled out for inclusion and empathy:

ERSTES SKELETT. . . . Auf eines Kalkbespritzten Ehre
 Doch heute sind wir alle gleich.
 Drum Fräulein in die Mitte
 Wenn ich bitten darf!
 Sie sind geschändet . . .
 Gott, wir sind es auch. (91-92)

In marking human suffering, the symbol of the cross, no longer limited to its institutional associations, has come to signal a unifying human bond.

Finally, the representation of the cross as cultural symbol of death and spiritual regeneration parallels the development of the theme of Ahasver's alienation and rejection. The autobiographical background is clear from Toller's own later sensitive exploration in Eine Jugend in Deutschland. Yet as Alfred Bodenheimer (185) has observed, Toller is not known to have described the experience of being Jewish until he wrote Eine Jugend in Deutschland, begun in the 1920's and published at the beginning of his exile in 1933. It reflects Toller's deeply felt understanding and awareness of the social injustices of the racial polarizations he experienced as a child, on the one hand, rejected as a Jew, while on the other, superior as a German to the Polish minority in his community. Strains of this influence are certainly heard in the Ahasver sub-theme of Die Wandlung and amplified by the more pervasive Crucifixion imagery. As isolated instances, the allusions to Ahasver the legendary Jewish outcast might seem tangential and vague. However it is the relationship between the Ahasver and Crucifixion motifs that seems to inform and enhance the protagonist's motivation to participate in the process of transformation.

As the literary critic Marcel Reich-Ranicki pointed out in an interview with literary scholar Peter von Matt, the theme of the wandering outcast Jew occurs in the tradition of German

literature as early as the poetry of the minnesinger Süßkind von Trimberg (98). Although Süßkind was not Jewish, a plate in the thirteenth-century illustrated manuscript known as the “Manessische Liederhandschrift” depicts him as such because of the analogy he drew between himself and the Jewish wanderer: “Er wurde von dem Graphiker, der die ‘Manessische Liederhandschrift’ illustriert hat, mit einem spitzen Judenhut gemalt, weil es in einem seiner Gedichte heißt: ‘Jetzt werd’ ich wie ein alter Jude auf die Wanderschaft gehen.’” (98). With the name Ahasver, Toller is also evoking the cross of Christ’s Crucifixion, integral to the legend of Ahasver believed to have originated in the thirteenth century (“Ewiger Jude”). According to the legend, Ahasver was a Jewish cobbler in Jerusalem whose path crossed with Christ’s as He struggled under the burden of the cross: “[Er soll] den kreuztragenden Jesus, als dieser sich ermattet an die Wand seines Hauses lehnte, weggewiesen [haben], worauf Jesus gesagt habe: ‘Ich will sterben und ruhn, Du aber sollst wandern.’ Seitdem wandere Ahasver . . .” (“Ewiger Jude”).

It is the quintessential image of a Christian Christmas that first serves as a dramatic foil for Friedrich as Ahasver, pointedly on the outside looking in, his racial identity marking him with shame: “Ausgestoßner taumle ich von einem Ufer zum andern. Denen drüben Fremder, den andern fern. Ekler Zwitter” (82). The symbolic link to Ahasver, condemned to roam, cold, hungry and alone, is made in the poignancy of Friedrich peering in at the idealized Christmas scene, in the reflection of the cross, as it were. He suffers a profound sense of isolation: “[Ich war] auf der Wanderschaft, Mutter. . . . Wie immer. . . . Wie Er, Ahasver, dessen Schatten zwischen geketteten Straßen kriecht, der sich in pestigen Kellerhöhlen verbirgt und nächtens draußen auf frierenden Feldern verfaulte Kartoffeln sammelt . . . Ja, ich suchte Ihn, meinen großen Bruder, Ihn, den ewigen Heimatlosen” (83). The intolerable experience of exclusion

motivates his entire existence and thrusts him headlong into proving himself worthy as a warrior. Yet he will be disillusioned: as a fellow soldier tells him, he will ever be the outsider, “Bleibst doch der Vaterlandslose” (88). By the third “Station,” however, he has merited the Iron Cross. Recovering against all odds from the suicide mission for which he volunteered, Friedrich regains consciousness in a field hospital. He is visited in his delirium by Ahasver, come to claim him. He cries out in terror, “wer bist du . . . Ahasver . . . Armseliger . . . schleich dich zurück . . . in albkeuchende Städte, hier findest du nicht Höhlen . . . ich wandre nicht mit dir . . . nein (schreit) nein (wacht auf). Durst!” (92) The bitter irony of receiving the Iron Cross, symbol of military valour, prepares him to renounce all that it represents.

In the following “Station,” as sculptor, Friedrich first shapes then destroys the figure of the victorious Fatherland. He muses aloud to his friend, voicing his ambivalence, while tentatively reclaiming his identity with Ahasver:

FREUND. Du zweifelst noch immer?

FRIEDRICH. Daß wir ein Vaterland haben, nein – nur . . . Ob nicht Höheres wächst. Und ich will's doch gar nicht wissen. Denn wüßte ich drum, ich würde mein Schicksal nicht mehr hemmen, ich würde Ahasver! (100)

Rejected on racial grounds by Gabriele, at her family's instigation, and moved by the suffering of the diseased couple victimized in war, he makes the final break from the bondage of the desire to belong: “Um des Vaterlandes willen . . . Gott . . . kann ein Vaterland das verlangen? . . . Lieber will ich wandern, ruhelos wandern mit dir, Ahasver! (Stürzt auf die Statue.) Ich zertrümmere dich, Sieg des Vaterlands. . . Nun muß ich wandern durch Wüsten, ruhelos und ewig” (103). Consciously acknowledging his identity with Ahasver, he responds to his sister's urging and follows the path of the Cross.

There follows the scene depicting Friedrich's symbolic death and transformation by crucifixion. His regeneration is to that of a resurrected being, no longer fettered by concerns of

identity and acceptance. The visual image in the next scene of “Der Wanderer,” a solitary form in Friedrich’s likeness, barely visible ascending through the fog, is replete with allusions to the Resurrection of Christ. Thus the symbolic associations of a resurrected Messiah and the wandering Jew (“der Wanderer”) are joined in the figure of the regenerated Friedrich:

Aus den Straßengraben erhebt sich der Wanderer (Antlitz Friedrichs).
 DER WANDERER. Mir ist, als ob ich heut
 Zum erstenmal erwache,
 Als ob ich eine schwere Grabesplatte fortgewälzt
 Und auferstehe.
 Das erdgefesselte Gefäß zerbricht. (111)

He proceeds to embrace the solitary path, further confirming his joyful, fearless acceptance of his mission, though it cost him even his dearest friend. In the mountain-climbing scene which follows, he does not yield to his friend’s pleas to stay with him.

ZWEITER BERGSTEIGER. Hörst du noch meine Stimme?
 Denk an unsre Jugend!
 . . . Denk an dich –
 Ich habe Furcht um dich.
 ERSTER BERGSTEIGER. Weil ich mich nicht verlassen will
 (fast oben) Verlaß ich dich . . .
 Leb wohl! . . . (117)

This is not the former Friedrich, condemned to lonely exclusion, but rather one who knows himself to be both rejected and anointed, who accepts his identity and goes confidently forth on his own. In the final scene, Friedrich severs the remaining ties to family, friends and loved ones: “Ich bleibe hier und werde doch meinen Weg weiter wandern. Durch verpestete Straßen und über Mohnfelder, auf sonnigen, schneeigen Gipfeln und durch Wüsten, wissend, daß ich nicht Entwurzelter bin, wissend, daß ich wurzle in mir” (120-21).

The symbolic crucifixion of Friedrich, who arises to proclaim a message of social commitment, classically reflects the Expressionist transformation of “der neue Mensch.” However, Toller’s empathy, personal experience of war, and social conscience deepen the

traditional associations of the cross in a way that provides cultural immediacy to apparently disparate themes in Die Wandlung. The subtle interplay of the Ahasver theme with that of the cross offers the creative prospect of an inwardly regenerated hero, once rejected and now renewed to lead by the example of his own life, a true “neuer Mensch.” By focusing on the representations of the symbolism of the cross in war, as the Iron Cross, the Red Cross and the Christian cross of the Church, Friedrich has exposed the embedded complicity of the forces of society that perpetuate war. The cross has become wooden and meaningless: “Ihr habt Jesus Christus in Holz geschnitzt und auf ein hölzernes Kreuz genagelt, weil ihr selbst den Kreuzweg nicht gehen wolltet der ihn zur Erlösung führte.” (122). Transformed through his own struggles on the Way of the Cross, Friedrich represents the potential of a new type of “neuer Mensch,” who gives the cross symbolism added meaning, by fulfilling the challenge of the drama’s announced theme, “Ihr seid der Weg” (75). His closing cry heralds the way: “Flammender freudiger Ton! / Schreite durch unser freies Land / Revolution! Revolution!” (123).

The symbolism of the cross in Die Wandlung reflects its origins as topos of Expressionism, mediated by the cultural context Toller interprets. In the next chapter, I will argue that the recurrence of the crucifixion motif in Toller’s later dramas of revolution informs and substantiates its relevance to Die Wandlung.

Chapter Three

The Recurrence of Cross Symbolism in Toller's Dramas of Revolution

Following Die Wandlung, Ernst Toller wrote four more dramas centred on the revolutionary theme: Masse Mensch (1919) and Die Maschinentürmer (1921) were the product of his years in Niederschönenfeld prison; Hoppla, wir leben! (1927) and Feuer aus den Kesseln (1930), of his post-captivity reflections. Though no longer a focal feature of the dramas, the imagery of crucifixion recurs in each in newly shaded metaphorical allusions, thereby reinforcing its thematic relevance in the body of Toller's dramatic works.

Toller wrote Masse Mensch. Ein Stück aus der sozialen Revolution des 20. Jahrhunderts in a feverish three-day period in October 1919, as he described in a preface to the second edition (1922) of the play:

Das Drama "Masse-Mensch" ist eine visionäre Schau, die in zweieinhalb Tagen förmlich aus mir "brach." Die beiden Nächte, die ich durch den Zwang der Haft in dunkler Zelle im "Bett" verbringen mußte, waren Abgründe der Qual, ich war wie gepeitscht von Gesichtern, von dämonischen Gesichtern, von in grotesken Sprüngen sich überpurzelnden Gesichtern. (GW 2: 353)

In characteristic Expressionist style, the explosiveness of the revolutionary context is announced at the outset: "Weltrevolution. / Gebärerin des neuen Schwingens. / Gebärerin der neuen Völkerkreise. / Rot leuchtet das Jahrhundert / Blutige Schuldfanale. / Die Erde kreuzigt sich" (65). Dedicated to the Proletariat ("Den Proletariern" 65), the drama again alternates between dream scenes and those ostensibly more realistic, a distinction director Jürgen Fehling, however, minimized in his première staging of the 1921 Berlin production. In a letter to Fehling, published in a preface to all subsequent editions of

Masse Mensch, Toller defended Fehling's blurring of the distinction as consistent with his own conceptualization:

Es gibt Kritiker, die bemängeln, daß Sie, obschon die Traumbilder Traumantlitz trugen, den "realen Bildern" visionäres Antlitz gaben und so die Grenzen zwischen Realität und Traum milderten. Sie haben, ich möchte es Ihnen eigens sagen, in meinem Sinn gehandelt. Diese "realen Bilder" sind keine naturalistischen "Milieuszenen," die Gestalten sind (bis auf die Gestalt Sonjas) nicht individualbetont. *Was kann in einem Drama wie "Masse-Mensch" real sein? Nur der seelische, der geistige Atem.* (352, emphasis Toller's).

Sonja Irene L., the voluntary revolutionary, the "Mensch" of the title, is the voice of a quiet conscience, drowned out in the conflict between the revolting Proletariat, the "Masse" of the title, and the suppressing forces of the State. She cries for a cessation to the violence of revolution: "Hört mich . . . / Ich will nicht neues Morden" (85). Yet her voice cannot be heard against the forces of Moloch (83), a capitalist society indentured to serve and to worship at the altar of greed: "Die Börsen speien Bacchanalien, / Sekt überströmt errungene Siege, / Wollüstig Prickeln tanzt Geschehen / Um goldene Altäre" (83). These forces of evil have oppressed the people: "Der Moloch frißt das sechste Jahr die Leiber, / Auf Straßen brechen Schwangere zusammen, / Vor Hunger sind sie nicht mehr fähig, / Zu tragen Last der Ungeborenen" (83). Sonja pleads for a more reasoned form of protest, to strike rather than to take up arms: "Hört ihr den Ruf? / 'Die Reihe ist an euch! / Wir angekettet an Kanonenrohre, / Ohnmächtige wir, / Wir schrein euch zu: / Ihr! Seid uns Helfer! / *Ihr: seid die Brücke!!*' / Hört ihr! Ich rufe Streik! / Wer weiter Rüstungswerkstatt speist, / Verrät den Bruder. Was sage ich: verrät? / Er tötet eignen Bruder" (83). The opposing voice of "Der Namenlose" rises to silence her: "Schweigen Sie, Genossin! / Der Sache willen. / Was gilt der Einzelne, / Was sein Gefühl, / Was sein Gewissen? / Die Masse gilt! / Bedenken Sie: ein einziger blutiger Kampf / Und ewig

Frieden” (86). In lonely, muffled protest, she allows herself to be sacrificed, as one ordained to die for the sins of humanity:

DIE GEFESSELTE: Ich Mensch bin schuldig.
 DER WÄRTER: Masse ist schuld.
 DIE GEFESSELTE: So bin ich zwiefach / Schuldig.
 DER WÄRTER: Leben ist Schuld.
 DIE GEFESSELTE: So mußte ich
 Schuldig werden? (101-102)

This sacrifice of the one for the many, in allusion to the Crucifixion, is seen by “Der Namenlose” as ultimately compromised and cowardly, though of potentially redeeming value as atonement: “Dir fehlt der Mut, die Tat, die harte Tat / Auf dich zu nehmen. / Durch harte Tat erst wird das freie Volk. / Sühne durch den Tod. / Vielleicht dein Tod von Nutzen uns” (110).

According to Huimin Chen’s critical analysis of revolutionary ideals in Masse Mensch (45-66), “the moral ideal of [Sonja], the nonviolent fulfillment of a revolutionary human and social revival, is based on the political reasoning of Kurt Eisner and Gustav Landauer” (49). Sonja’s message is, however, faint, and her sacrifice ineffectual. David Kuhns describes Jürgen Fehling’s 1921 production of Masse Mensch as further softening Sonja’s voice in the conflict between the masses and the governing forces of society: “Her martyr’s death is but a flickering exemplary light within the pitched battle between the government monolith and the mass of oppressed humanity. This diminution of the central figure’s rhetorical power is reflected in the fact that the reviews of the première largely neglected the performance of this role and concentrated instead on the ensemble acting” (193). Toller had adduced the imagery of the Crucifixion in the play’s prologue as a measure of the futility of self-inflicted sacrifice on a grander scale than that of Sonja’s: “Die Erde kreuzigt sich” (GW 2: 65). While he has again drawn on the pervasive

Christian motif, its attendant message is no longer one of hope or inspiration, but rather of despair, albeit moderated by the example of Sonja's commitment to principles of peaceful protest.

The next drama Toller wrote in the Niederschönenfeld prison was Die Maschinenstürmer, which he drafted and revised in 1920-21 (Dove 112-13). The revolutionary theme he set this time in the historical context of the English Luddite movement and its protest against the knitting machinery introduced into Northern England in the early nineteenth century. In Die Maschinenstürmer, the uprising costs the life of its intellectual leader, Jimmy Cobbett. As he is set upon by the mob of striking workers, his death assumes the proportions of a life sacrificed for the greater good. It is, however, a sacrifice somewhat compromised by its attenuating circumstances. After years of itinerant wanderings, Cobbett had suddenly appeared on the scene to impart the wisdom of his analysis of the social and economic system. His brother evicts him as a traitor for jeopardizing his own position and prospects in the factory, which he now oversees for the owners. Cobbett is himself ultimately betrayed by an embittered worker, Teddy Wible. The drama concludes with the conversion of the young mill worker, Ned Lud, awakened by his awareness of the betrayals and deceptions, to feel remorse for his actions in the killing, to embrace Cobbett's philosophical interpretation of the economic system, and to articulate hope for the fruition of Cobbett's moderate revolutionary ideals.

Once again, a play of Ernst Toller's opened to a sensational response because of a coincidence of political events. Karlheinz Martin's première production took place before a massive audience of up to five thousand in Max Reinhardt's Großes Schauspielhaus on June 30, 1922, less than a week after a group of protesting students had killed the Weimar

politician, Foreign Minister Walther Rathenau. During the murder scene, cries of “Rathenau” were heard from the audience. In his review for the Prager Tageblatt, Alfred Döblin described what happened after the curtain fell: “Außerordentlicher Beifall. Stürmisches Rufen nach Toller zum Schluß. Ansprache von Martin: er danke im Namen des Dichters, der hinter Zuchthausmauern jetzt seine Gedanken hierher richte; werde Grüße des Publikums bestellen; spreche den Wunsch aus, daß der neue in Deutschland wehende Wind auch bald die Tore für Toller öffnen werde” (qtd. in Frühwald and Spalek 137-38). At the same time, however, the critic Stefan Großmann, who had so effusively championed Die Wandlung, was biting in his review for the Berlin paper, Das Tagebuch: “Offenbar leidet Toller in Niederschönenfeld an politischen Verstopfungen, hervorgerufen durch die Zurückhaltung von vielen politischen Reden. Das Drama ist ihm ein Umweg, diese Reden nun doch loszuwerden. Man gönnt ihm die Erleichterung von Herzen, aber . . . so entstand kein Drama, sondern: Gesammelte Reden von Ernst Toller” (qtd. in Frühwald and Spalek 136).

Richard Dove characterizes Jimmy Cobbett’s ideological stance as one that reflects Toller’s “attempt to integrate the idealist inheritance of Landauer and Eisner into a materialist framework of historical development: to follow in Eisner’s footsteps in seeking to reconcile Kant and Marx” (117). The import of Jimmy Cobbett’s message is in his impassioned rhetoric to the mill workers, in response to John Wible’s provocation, “Ist Elend unsere Schuld?” (GW 2: 142). To which Cobbett replies, “*Eure Schuld ist, daß ihr nicht kämpft, daß ihr euch nicht eintet zum Arbeitsbund! Daß ihr nicht Gemeinschaft lebt, daß ihr nicht baut am Hause der Gerechtigkeit!*” (142, emphases in text). Prior to delivery of this message, Toller had prepared a context of Old Testament

prophetic language and references to the Christian God, spoken by John Wible's senile father-in-law, called "Der alte Reaper." He wanders about, confronting passersby of every ilk with his plaintive quest for a sign of God, and despairing of an absent God: "Der Blinde hört ihn nicht . . . Der Taube sieht ihn nicht . . . Ich hab' zwei gute Augen und zwei gute Ohren . . . ich find' ihn nicht . . ." (150). Dismissed as mad, "der närrisch alte Mann" (157), he intones the miseries of a people abandoned by God in their poverty: "Wär' ich der droben, ich ließe Manna regnen . . . Doch der da droben regt sich nicht. Wann regt er sich? Wenn Posaunen Siegestriumph blasen und goldgeschmückte Orgeln ein Loblied jubeln den Königen und großen Herren. Aber die Armen haben keine Orgeln und Posaunen" (157).

Once Reaper has invoked the metaphorical context of a world lost to God, it is left for the quiet prophetic voice of the Beggar to hint at Jimmy Cobbett's sacrificial death as bearing resemblance to that of the Crucifixion. He warns Jimmy that those for whom he labours could turn on him and hang him: "Freundchen, liebes Freundchen . . . nimm dich in acht . . . glauben sie dir nicht mehr, hängen sie dich auf . . . fühlen sie, daß sie unrecht taten, hängen sie dich erst recht auf . . ." (176). After the killing, he accuses the workers of their guilty folly and betrayal in putting to death one who had forsaken home, family and holy privilege for their sakes: "Ihr Toren! Ihr Narren! Ihr blinden Säckel! Ihr habt einen erschlagen, der Mutter und Bruder verließ . . . Euretwillen! . . . Der Pfründe verschmähte . . . Euretwillen!" (188). The association is understood: one of the mill workers speaks up to call John Wible a traitor like Judas: "Paktiert gegen uns! Verrät die eigenen Brüder für dreißig Silberlinge!" (189). Ned Lud repents, expressing his remorse in words evoking Christ's dying prayer, "Vater, vergib ihnen, denn sie wissen nicht, was

sie tun!” (Lukas 23,34): “Wir wissen, was wir taten! / Und wollen sühnen, daß wir den erschlugen, / Andere werden kommen . . . / Wissender, gläubiger, mutiger, als wir”

(189). As the play ends, Reaper re-enters, continuing his forlorn quest for God, “Ist hier Gott?” (189). Beholding Cobbett’s body, he joyfully announces the imminent end to all suffering, ushered in by this death, of God’s Son: “Nicht brauchen mehr Angst zu haben die Kinder . . . alles Elend hat ein Ende . . . Ich habe Gottes Sohn erschossen . . .” (190). He bends over the body with a kiss, and in words reminiscent of Christ’s heralding the Holy Spirit, proclaims a future hope: “Und ich will den Vater bitten . . . Und er soll euch einen andern Tröster geben, den Geist der Wahrheit . . .” (190).

The crucifixion symbolism in Die Maschinenstürmer is but a muted echo of its prominence in Die Wandlung. The more complex shading of its inferences in Die Maschinenstürmer is in the attribution of the message to two peripheral characters, one, an old mad fool, the other, a beggar. The message of their marginalized voices lends itself to dismissal, scorn and ironical interpretation. Moreover, the message Cobbett bore was not a messianic one of dramatic regeneration and transformation, but rather, a more tempered one of commitment to a lengthy struggle of gradual change. Its import is, hence, more limited than that of Die Wandlung, for it depends on being patient, while dreaming and fighting for a future utopian world: “Der Kampf ist schwer und heischt Geduld, ihr Brüder. Der Kampf ist schwerer, als ihr heute ahnt. Aufnehmen müßt ihr Dienst an der Maschine. Die alte Bürde müßt ihr tragen manchen Tag . . . müßt sehen eure Weiber, eure Kinder hungern . . . und hungernd euch anklagen, euch verfluchen sehen” (144). Inherent in such a message, delivered to a suffering people, is the

possibility of a cynical response to an appeal for tolerance of the status quo and apparent collusion with the powers controlling the system.

After his years in prison, Toller wrote two further dramas of revolution, Hoppla, wir leben! (1929) and Feuer aus den Kesseln (1930), both of which, consistent with that topos of Toller's life works, culminate in sacrificial death. It must be noted that it was Erwin Piscator, producer and director of the play's Berlin première, who prevailed upon Toller to end Hoppla, wir leben! with Karl Thomas's suicide, rather than with the disillusionment Toller had originally intended (Dove 163, 168). Allusion to the Crucifixion in Karl Thomas's surrender nevertheless lends credence to the image's continued importance in Toller's development of the revolutionary theme in dramatic expression.

The drama of Hoppla, wir leben! follows the interactions of a young revolutionary, Karl Thomas, with his former cohorts, eight years after their unexpected release from a shared imprisonment and anticipated death for their failed revolt. Projected inter-act film sequences contextualize the immediacy of a German society in the urgency of social and political change in the Weimar Republic. Karl Thomas's visceral response to the abrupt experience of freedom is an explosion of delirious laughter. For his loss of control, he is admitted to hospital for psychiatric treatment and confined for a further eight years. Meanwhile, their common ideals thwarted, the other members of the original group disperse to divergent post-revolutionary paths of moral choice and action. The dramatic interest lies in Karl Thomas's attempt to reconcile naive revolutionary ideals with the current political activities of his former cell mates, which encompass the moderate political involvement of Albert Kroll, the apparently cowardly betrayal of

Wilhelm Kilman, now Minister of the Interior, and the organized protests of Eva Berg, factory worker and emerging feminist.

Hoppla, wir leben! is both dramatically and ideologically the most complex of Toller's works for the stage. Richard Dove attributes this to the relationship of dramatic form to dramatic conflict: "Toller's portrait of the Weimar Republic combines a considerable advance in dramatic technique with a much firmer grasp of political reality. This reality is revealed not so much through the eyes of Karl as in the clashes between him and his former comrades – that is, not subjectively but dialectically" (165). The ideological advancement, meanwhile, is represented in Toller's intricate and paradoxical satire of a social system that designates Karl Thomas as mad, while simultaneously legitimizing its own perverse actions against its members. It is a society that dismisses principles of justice and decency in the interests of questionably ironic efficiency and substitutes fear for force as the means of control. As the War Minister explains, "Die Zeiten des Losschlagens sind vorüber. Was wir für unser Vaterland erreichen wollen, können wir legal erreichen" (GW 3: 31). Both the absurd and the extreme have succumbed to the norm of banality. To Baron Friedrich's obsequious invocation of a Machiavellian model, Kilman takes injured offense:

BARON FRIEDRICH: Man meinte, Exzellenz zählten Machiavell zu Ihren Lieblingsautoren.

WILHELM KILMAN: Was brauchen wir Machiavell . . . Der gesunde Menschenverstand. (37)

In answer to Karl's wounded perplexity in a world of incomprehensible values, Kilman betrays his neurotic ethos of "courage," interpreted as opposing the interests of one's own people: "Es gehört mitunter Mut dazu, gegen das Volk zu regieren. Mehr als auf die Barrikaden zu gehn" (40). Toller builds the argument of a language now refracting upon

itself, subtly reconstructed to subvert and control the values, beliefs and thoughts of its speakers.

In one sense, the death of Karl Thomas suggests the prototypical sacrificial end of other Toller protagonists. In his distress and shock at the mundane political resistance he finds on his release from psychiatric confinement, Karl vows to commit the necessary decisive and desperate act. He erupts against the philosophy of his former activist colleague, Albert Kroll, now promoting political change by ballot and justifying his approach as more likely to succeed: “Wir wollen keine Seligkeit im Himmel. Man muß sehen lernen und sich dennoch nicht unterbekommen lassen” (65). The inadequacy of Albert’s attitude prompts from Karl the familiar formulaic expression of the necessary sacrifice of a self-appointed Saviour:

KARL THOMAS: Geschehen muß was. Einer muß ein Beispiel geben.

ALBERT KROLL: Einer? Alle. Jeden Tag.

KARL THOMAS: Ich mein es anders. Einer muß sich opfern. Dann werden die Lahmen rennen. Tage und Nächte habe ich die Fäuste gegen meinen Schädel getrommelt. Jetzt weiß ich, was ich zu tun habe. (66)

The dénouement of Karl’s suicide was nevertheless Piscator’s, rather than Toller’s, and an issue of bitter contention between them (Dove 165, 168). Toller’s original conception was that Karl’s sacrifice would entail a resignation to the designation of insanity, determined by a society that attributes madness to its dissenters and thereby eludes critical examination. The society Karl rejoins is one that has vested the authority to define madness in a Professor Lüdin, who self-importantly diagnoses the likes of Karl Thomas: “Daß Sie im Irrenhaus waren, braucht Sie nicht zu deprimieren. Eigentlich sind die meisten Menschen reif dafür. Würde ich tausend untersuchen, müßte ich neunhundertneunundneunzig hier behalten” (GW 3: 25). The weight of confusion and

propaganda eventually preys on Karl's mind and threatens his sanity, as Professor Lüdín redefines all that is unjust, corrupt, and fraudulent as "normal" (107-110): "Der Nebel zerriß. Vielleicht ist die Welt gar nicht verrückt. Vielleicht bin ich es . . . Vielleicht bin ich es . . . Vielleicht war alles nur ein wirrer Traum . . ." (110). It is inevitably Lüdín's lexicon of the normal that must pertain and substantiate his imprisonment of Karl as a laudable, moral act:

PROFESSOR LÜDIN: . . . Und da kommen in jedem Jahrhundert Psychopathen, versprechen der Herde das Paradies. Die Polizei sollte sie rechtzeitig uns Irrenärzten übergeben, statt zuzusehen, wie sie auf die Menschheit lostoben.

KARL THOMAS: Harmlos sind Sie nicht.

PROFESSOR LÜDIN: Es ist unsere Mission, die Gesellschaft vor gemeingefährlichen Verbrechern zu schützen. Sie sind der Erzfeind jeder Civilisation! Das Chaos! Sie muß man unschädlich machen, sterilisieren, ausmerzen! . . . Morgen werden Sie ins Gefängnis zurücktransportiert. (111-12)

It is the theme psychiatrist Thomas Szasz was later to expound in The Manufacture of Madness, a philosophical critique of the role of "Institutional Psychiatry" (xvii) in constraining those who pose a challenge to the autocratic control of society. Szasz compares the practice and function of psychiatry in the service of the state to that of the Church's persecution of witches in the Inquisition, following papal directives of 1484 and 1486 (7):

The social function of the Inquisition and of Institutional Psychiatry lies in the service each renders its society: both provide an intellectually meaningful, morally uplifting, and socially well-organized system for the ritualized affirmation of the benevolence, glory, and power of society's dominant ethic. From without, or to the critical observer, these institutions might appear harsh and oppressive; but from within, or to the true believer, they are beautiful and merciful, flattering at once the masses and their masters. This is the secret of their success. (58)

The thematic identification of Karl Thomas's death with sacrificial martyrdom is in many ways fainter than in Toller's other revolutionary dramas. While allusions to

associative Crucifixion imagery are present both in Karl's evolving motivation and in his emergent understanding of the scapegoat role of madness assigned him, ideological emphasis is, rather, on the sociopolitical paradigm it reflects.

Sacrificial death is also thematically implicit in Toller's choice of subject matter for his final play with a dominant revolutionary theme, Feuer aus den Kesseln (1930). Based on the suppressed uprising of sailors against conditions on board German navy ships in 1917, the play opens with a scene from the hearings held in 1926 by the Deutscher Reichstag into the downfall of the German military system in 1917-1918 (Dove 171). In Toller's dramatization, the first witness before the hearings identifies the 1917 execution of two protesting sailors, Reichpietsch and Köbis, as the event that unleashed a wider rebellion:

Dieser Tag ist für die Geschichte der Kriegsgerichte in Deutschland ein schwarzer Tag. Ich habe mir immer gesagt: wenn es noch Gerechtigkeit auf Erden gibt, muß diesen Leuten, die, soweit ich sie kenne, aus Vaterlandsliebe handelten, ihr Recht werden. Wir genossen die Früchte des Opfers. Das Essen wurde nach dem Prozeß merklich besser. Aber die Offiziere fühlten selbst: der Prozeß hat die Leute erst rebellisch gemacht. (GW 3: 123)

The retrospective witness account lends an aura of martyrdom to the deaths of Reichpietsch and Köbis and obviates the need for a metaphorical crucifixion in Feuer aus den Kesseln. It but remains for Toller to introduce the familiar motif of individual choice, in the sailors' willing acceptance of their deaths as a sacrifice to revolutionary ideals. In a discussion amongst the five awaiting the death knell of their sentence, Köbis invokes the image of sacrificial bloodshed and the attributive interpretation of its historical significance. Köbis dissuades the others from the easier pre-emptive option of suicide, clothing his argument in an appeal to martyrdom:

REICHPIETSCH: Warum noch warten? . . . Tun wir's gleich!

BECKERS: Alwin, was meinst Du?

KÖBIS (lacht): Wär ein Mordsspaß, den Henkern das Vergnügen zu vermässeln!
 . . . Nee, Jungens, Finger weg! Es ist bitter, von diesen Leuten noch an die
 Wand gestellt zu werden. Aber jede Sache verlangt Opfer. Unser Blut wird
 nicht umsonst fließen. (173)

The final scene reverts to the historical context of November, 1918, when the sailors mutinied in Kiel, refusing to carry out their orders to stoke the engine fires: “(Während die Bühne sich verdunkelt, schallt unaufhörlich der Ruf): Feuer aus den Kesseln!” (183).

The victorious outcome is, however, compromised by the ominous cautionary foreshadowing by one of the engine stokers: “Von heute ab gibt es *eine* Löhnung und *ein* Essen . . . Aus ist es mit sechs Gängen . . . Gleiche Löhnung, gleiches Essen – wär der Krieg schon längst vergessen . . .” (183). In Feuer aus den Kesseln, the concrete historical basis for the recurrence of Toller’s imagery of Christian sacrifice ennobles the victims by imputing a redemptive function to their deaths. Yet the sacrifice is an ambiguous one, the victory hollow in the echoing drumbeat of a warring, militaristic ethos.

In each of these revolutionary dramas, as in Die Wandlung, the traditional Christian connotation of nobility is inherent in the language of voluntary sacrifice. Each also introduces a variant of complexity and the possibility of ironical interpretation. In Masse Mensch, the apparent futility of Sonja’s actions compromises the ideal of self-sacrifice and brings the glint of cynicism to bear on her crushed idealism. In Die Maschinenstürmer, the peripheral relevance of the message-bearers challenges the nobility of association otherwise attendant to Cobbett’s death. The questionable aptness of Cobbett’s appeal for restraint, which would entail the prolongation of suffering, is a further ironical challenge to the attribution of sacrifice to his death. While the image of Christian sacrifice is a less prominent feature of Hoppla, wir leben!, the weight of

unknowing heroism is nevertheless borne by Karl Thomas in his role as scapegoat. As victim of the subtly pervasive ills of his contemporary society, he paradoxically draws attention to the mundane complicity of those who claim to represent the morality of society, while, at the same time, encoding the practice of perverted values. Finally, Feuer aus den Kesseln offers, on the one hand, a clearly noble interpretation to the deaths of sailors Reichpietsch and Köbis, and, on the other, the irony of their questionable sacrifice in a subsequent historical context.

Following Die Wandlung, Toller repeatedly accessed the metaphorical complex of the language of crucifixion for its applicability to the role and struggle of the individual in political revolution. The range of further associations in these later dramatic works also supports the possibility of a similarly more diversified and ironic function in Die Wandlung.

Conclusion

In featuring the symbolism of the cross in his first dramatic work, Ernst Toller was drawing on the depth of European religious and artistic tradition. He was also plumbing the fresh, young, inspirational ethos of the incipient Expressionist movement, evident in the works of contemporary dramatists such as Georg Kaiser.

In Die Wandlung, work of youth and work of war, the symbolism of the cross is principally identified with the impassioned hope of the Expressionist ideal of “der neue Mensch,” the mission, embraced by artists and poets, of the spiritual regeneration of social and political consciousness. The record of Toller’s personal activist commitment stands as a model of the practical implementation of this ideal. Meanwhile, the thematic predominance of the individual’s response and responsibility to social revolution in Toller’s dramatic works from 1919 to 1931 reflects its personal import. Although Toller argued for the autonomy of his work, the strength of his early commitment to participatory revolutionary idealism in the Bavarian Revolution and the publicity of his trial inevitably attached themselves to the body of his literary work. The prominence conjunctly accorded Toller’s life and works and the close identification of Toller, the person, with Toller, the famously imprisoned playwright, are understandably relevant to a psychosocial understanding of the crucifixion motif in Die Wandlung. The consistent recurrence of the complex of related imagery in the revolutionary dramas that followed Die Wandlung, Masse Mensch, Die Maschinenstürmer, Hoppla, wir leben!, and Feuer aus den Kesseln, attests to its significance in the body of Toller’s work.

The immediate context of war and revolution adds emotional resonance to the symbolism of the cross in the portrayal of the war machine in Die Wandlung, notably in

its most noble representations of military honour and healing, the Iron and Red Cross, respectively. While Ahasver's function in Die Wandlung may initially appear to be of minor thematic interest, in the shadow of the cross it assumes a more fundamental function in the drama. The autobiographical insights of Eine Jugend in Deutschland (GW 4) inform Toller's interest both in the outcast experience represented by Ahasver, anonymous but for his understood Jewish identity, and in the paradoxical relationship of Ahasver to that quintessential of Christian symbols, the cross. This perspective enhances a cultural understanding of Ahasver's relevance to Die Wandlung as conflicted ideal of "der neue Mensch." Toller's message, while in the Expressionist vein of an appeal to regeneration, is a more personalized variant, evincing both a psychological awareness and the experience of social activism.

By 1931, Toller had distanced himself considerably from the open passionate idealism of Die Wandlung, embodied in the Christian symbolism of the cross as motif of "der neue Mensch." However, in Masse-Mensch, Die Maschinenstürmer, Hoppla, wir leben!, and Feuer aus den Kesseln, he continued to explore the theme of individual revolutionary involvement and responsibility from a range of new perspectives, indicative of the intensity of an identifiable personal struggle. Pursuant to its close association with the ethos of "der neue Mensch" in Die Wandlung, the symbolism of the cross is initially suggestive of the heroically noble revolutionary, represented by Sonja Irene L. in Masse-Mensch, by Jimmy Cobbett in Die Maschinenstürmer, by Karl Thomas in Hoppla, wir leben!, and by Reichpietsch and Köbis in Feuer aus den Kesseln. Yet, in each, that impression yields to a tone of irony in the complexity of challenges to the interaction of individual motivation and social structure.

Though no longer the clear Expressionist message of “der neue Mensch” of Die Wandlung, the symbolism of the cross persists as important in the totality of Toller’s revolutionary dramas, as shown by this thematic study. The cultural context also points to the consistency of Toller’s hope, embodied in the symbolism of the cross in Die Wandlung, “Ihr seid der Weg” (GW 2: 8).

Works Cited

- Abenheim, Donald. Reforging the Iron Cross: The Search for Tradition in the West German Armed Forces. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1988.
- Bebendorf, Klaus. Tollers expressionistische Revolution. Frankfurt: Lang, 1990.
- Benson, Renate. German Expressionist Drama. London: Macmillan, 1984.
- Bodenheimer, Alfred. "Ernst Toller und sein Judentum." Deutsch-jüdische Exil- und Emigrationsliteratur im 20. Jahrhundert. Ed. Itta Shedletzky and Hans Otto Horch. Tübingen, 1993. 185-93.
- Carls, Carl Dietrich. Ernst Barlach. Trans. Frederick A. Präger. London: Pall Mall, 1969.
- Chen, Huimin. Inversion of Revolutionary Ideals: A Study of the Tragic Essence of Georg Büchner's *Dantons Tod*, Ernst Toller's *Masse Mensch*, Bertolt Brecht's *Die Massnahme*. Studies on Themes and Motifs in Literature. 33. New York: Lang, 1998.
- Dove, Richard. He was a German: A Biography of Ernst Toller. London: Libris, 1990.
- Dube, Wolf-Dieter. Expressionists and Expressionism. Trans. James Emmons. Geneva: Skira, 1983.
- "Eisernes Kreuz." Der Grosse Brockhaus. 1953 ed.
- "Ewiger Jude." Der Grosse Brockhaus. 1953 ed.
- Frühwald, Wolfgang, and John M. Spalek, eds. Der Fall Toller: Kommentar und Materialien. München: Hanser, 1979.
- Frye, Northrop. Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957.

- Fuld, Werner and Albert Ostermaier, eds. Die Göttin und ihr Sozialist: Christiane Grautoffs Autobiographie – ihr Leben mit Ernst Toller. Bonn: Weidle, 1996.
- Großmann, Stefan. “Der Hochverräter Ernst Toller: Die Geschichte eines Prozesses.” 1919. Ernst Toller: Prosa, Briefe, Dramen, Gedichte. Ed. Sidney Kaufmann. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1979.
- Hutchinson, John F. Champions of Charity: War and the Rise of the Red Cross. Boulder: Westview, 1996.
- Kaiser, Georg. Werke. Ed. Walther Huder. Vol. 1. Frankfurt: Propyläen, 1971.
- Kaufmann, Sidney, ed. Ernst Toller: Prosa, Briefe, Dramen, Gedichte. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1979.
- Kuhns, David F. German Expressionist Theatre. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997.
- Lixl, Andreas. Ernst Toller und die Weimarer Republik 1918-1933. Heidelberg: Winter, 1986.
- Murphy, Richard. Theorizing the Avant-Garde: Modernism, Expressionism, and the Problem of Postmodernity. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999.
- Reich-Ranicki, Marcel. Der doppelte Boden: Ein Gespräch mit Peter von Matt. Zürich: Ammann, 1991.
- Riedel, Caroline. “Emil Nolde’s Changing Reputation.” Thesis. U of Victoria, 1998.
- Riedel, Walter. Der neue Mensch: Mythos und Wirklichkeit. Bonn: Bouvier, 1970.
- Rühle, Günther. Theater für die Republik 1917-1933. Frankfurt: Fischer, 1967.
- Schulz-Hoffmann, Carla and Judith C. Weiss, eds. Max Beckmann Retrospektive. München: Prestel, 1984.
- Silver, Larry. Art in History. New York: Abbeville. 1993.

Toller, Ernst. Gesammelte Werke. Ed. Wolfgang Frühwald and John M. Spalek. 5 vols.

München: Hanser, 1978.

---. Die Wandlung. 1919. Ernst Toller: Prosa, Briefe, Dramen, Gedichte. Ed. Sidney

Kaufmann. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1979. 73-123.

Vietta, Silvio, and Hans-Georg Kemper. Expressionismus. München: Fink, 1975.

VITA

Surname: Russell

Given Name: Bonnie

Place of Birth: Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

Educational Institutions Attended:

McGill University 1963-1967

University of British Columbia 1977-1981

Degrees Awarded:

B.A. McGill University 1967

M.Ed. University of British Columbia 1981

PARTIAL COPYRIGHT LICENSE

I hereby grant the right to lend my thesis to users of the University of Victoria Library, and to make single copies only for such users or in response to a request from the Library of any other university, or similar institution, on its behalf or for one of its users. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis may be granted by me or a member of the University designated by me. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Title of Thesis: The Symbolism of the Cross in Ernst Toller's Drama Die Wandlung

Author



Bonnie Russell
April 7, 2002