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THEME AND STRUCTURE IN
FRIEDRICH DÜRRENMAtt'S NOVEL, DAS VERSPRECHEN

BY

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ABSTRACT

Theme and Structure in
Friedrich Dürrenmatt's Novel, Das Versprechen

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The purpose of this analysis of the novel, Das Versprechen, is to determine its central concept (theme), and to show how this theme manifests itself in the relationships of the elements to each other. This relationship among elements is termed "structure." An element is defined as any narrative detail which has especial significance for the understanding of the novel.

It is attempted to show that the theme of this novel is that chance and the nonrational must be accepted as an integral part of reality. This theme is exhibited in such elements of the structure as the relation of characters to each other, the relation of events and ideas to each other as shown through style, symbol, motif, and the point of view complex.
The purpose of this study is to investigate the theme and structure of the novel, *Das Versprechen*. The term "theme" is used to designate that central concept which defines the meaning and unity of the novel. In the midst of all the detail which is part of any novel, certain details or specifics are more significant than others to the central concept of the novel. An "element" is defined as any narrative detail which has especial significance for the understanding of the novel's central thought, its unifying principle.

Just as words alone do not constitute a literary work, neither do elements in isolation express the theme completely. It is not the words themselves but rather the words in relationship to each other which give them their full significance. Similarly, the relationships among the elements must be examined to ascertain their full significance. The system of relationships among the elements will be termed "structure". A structural element is a significant narrative detail which illuminates the theme. It is called a structural element rather than a thematic element because only the element within a connected system of relationships to other elements embodies the theme adequately.

Theme and structure are mutually dependant since they are two sides of the same experience of reading. The theme is discovered only after studying the system of relationships (structure) among the elements. A discussion of structure is
only a demonstration that the relationship between elements which leads one to his discovery of the theme are ordered by the same principle. That is, the discussion of structure is a demonstration that the elements were so featured and related that they point out the central concept (theme) of the novel. The structure is then the embodiment or manifestation of the theme in a system of elements. Conversely, it is a truism to say but informative to note that once the theme is understood it is seen that this theme was the principle upon which the system of relationships was built.

An integral part of the structure is the degree and manner in which the reader is allowed to experience the work, whether he is to experience it from the viewpoint of a character, from that of a narrator, or to "see" the action as though he were present, or any combination of these methods. This author-reader relationship is a part of the structure because it has the power to emphasize or obscure any of the other elements and relate them to each other. It is a tool for giving a perspective to the reader which the author wants him to have.

It will be the purpose of this paper to investigate the organizing theme, to demonstrate that it is the principle which directs the events and elements of the novel, and also to investigate the point of view complex as a method of interpreting the work.
The novel, Das Versprechen, is structured in terms of a single theme: the theme that chance, accident, the nonrational are a part of reality which cannot be disregarded; it must be taken into account in any concept of reality. Matthäi's concept of order, justice, and duty have a limited validity in reality because he fails to recognize or admit that chance is an aspect of reality which cannot be ignored. "Er wollte, dass seine Rechnung auch in der Wirklichkeit aufgehe. Er musste daher die Wirklichkeit verleugnen und im Leeren münden." ¹ Matthäi's experience of an act of senselessness or absurdity leads him to test his concepts, and his inability to justify or rectify this experience in his own terms leads to his end.

The structure is based fundamentally on the relationship between the two main characters, Dr. H. and Matthäi. During the course of the novel there occurs a change in Matthäi's character which sets him opposite the views of Dr. H. This change is brought about by his devoting himself to his obsession for justice and later to trying to prove his concepts of reality to be true. By contrasting him with Dr. H., a relationship in the form of a conflict in concepts is achieved. It is Dr. H.'s attitude toward Matthäi's beliefs which creates.

¹ Friedrich Dürrenmatt, Das Versprechen (Zürich, 1958), p. 212. All future page numbers refer to this edition.
the structure; it draws the boundaries within which the novel limits itself. Their two attitudes toward reality form the poles around which the structure is developed. This is the basic relationship in the novel.

In order to understand the change that comes over Matthäi, it is necessary to examine what kind of person he was before his change. We begin to learn of him through Dr. H.'s description: "Sein Verstand war überragend, doch...gefühllos geworden. Er war ein Mann der Organisation, der den Polizei-Apparat wie einen Rechenschieber handhabte...Er hatte nichts im Kopf als seinen Beruf, den er...doch ohne Leidenschaft ausübte" (p.22). Through his defense of the peddler against the lynch mob we learn further of his cool manner and of the reason for his assurance: "Ihr seht, eurem Gericht steht wenig und uns ein Riesenapparat zur Verfügung, die Wahrheit zu ermitteln. Entscheidet jetzt, was nun geschehen soll" (p.57). By using such logic and taking a risk with the peddler's life he convinces the mob, but in so doing he receives the ironic warning: "Hoffentlich geben Sie nie ein Versprechen, das Sie einhalten müssen..." (p. 58). This is the crux of the problem, for later he does give a promise which he cannot keep. Here we see an aspect of the theme being represented by an element of the novel, the promise. Matthäi seemed to win control of the mob. He gave them rational reasons, and they accepted. He strengthened his reasons by the promise to turn the peddler
over to them. He had no reason to suspect that his rationality and that of the people would fail him. This promise was made on a firm belief in rationality. He does not realize that circumstances over which he has no control could keep him from executing a promise even though that promise is made from a rational basis. To show this characteristic of Matthäi is the structural function of this promise to the mob. This is his attitude as he prepares to leave for Jordan.

That Matthäi became involved at all with the Gritli murder case is significant, for he was leaving the police force and became involved only by accident. It was by mere coincidence that he decided to go on this last assignment, a fact which exemplifies an important aspect of the theme. As Matthäi becomes involved with the case, his sense of justice comes into danger. The senseless murder of a child could not be accepted by Matthäi because, unlike his assistant who chose to disregard it, Matthäi saw the act for what it was, absurd and irrational. It could not be ignored by Matthäi; he had to come to terms with the event in order to maintain his concept of a logical reality. Here begins the motif of not looking away. This element of Matthäi's character, in part, explains his decision to stay with the case. "Er war der einzige, der den Blick wagte. Niemand sagte ein Wort" (p.35). By taking the responsibility of informing the parents of the child, a job to which no one else would commit himself, the
author exposes a main element of Matthäi's character: his belief that the worst things must be faced. They must be faced because Matthäi's concept of a reality which could be understood by man demanded that all such actions be understood. This later develops into an extreme devotion to duty. He came to believe that it was his duty to rectify such acts because they could be rectified. The fact that perhaps any rectification lay beyond his powers is given no consideration by him. Here is the thought which eventually causes him to succumb to his passion for duty and belief in order.

Before he was forced to push his beliefs to their limits in search of the killer, Matthäi had to deal with the question of the guilt of the peddler. The differing opinions concerning his guilt define the difference in attitude of the two main characters. Matthäi is set opposite Dr. H. in regard to the question of guilt, since Matthäi believes him not guilty, while Dr. H., on the basis of the evidence at hand, believes him guilty. Dr. H. could be at peace with himself since to all apparent intents and purposes justice had been carried out, but it was necessary for Matthäi to search deeper for the truth. He does not fly to Jordan, he stays to solve the case.

The motivations behind the two related elements, the question of the peddler's guilt and Matthäi's decision to stay, form the basic relationship of the novel when contrasted
with Dr. H.'s position. While explaining to Dr. H. his reasons for not departing, the fundamental structural relationship is clearly stated. Matthäi explains, "...ist es Pflicht der Polizei, die Kinder zu schützen und ein neues Verbrechen zu verhüten" (p.104). From this point on, Matthäi will attempt to carry out what he considers his duty in the face of impossible odds. Dr. H. defines his position by saying, "Wir mussten unsere Pflicht tun, da habe Matthäi recht, aber unsere erste Pflicht sei es, in unseren Grenzen zu bleiben..." (p.107). With this opposition the basic structural relationship has been given form. This is the structural function of the peddler's guilt and Matthäi's decision to stay. At this point definite structural relationships are established. This relationship points out a major tenet of the theme: we must realize our limitations in trying to deal with reality. Matthäi's duty, his passion for order, cannot be absolutely effective or valid; it is limited and the limitation must simply be accepted. At this point Matthäi has made his decision to prove his concepts at his own risk. Matthäi is now separated officially from the police department and from ordinary police procedure.

Such an important aspect of the novel as the decision to stay is reinforced and illuminated by other elements. The reader is allowed to experience the decision from three viewpoints: the objective viewpoint, the viewpoint of Dr. H.,
and from Matthäi’s own viewpoint.

The objective viewpoint is the reader’s first indication that Matthäi will stay. He prepares to leave and we "see" him at the airport. "Doch als er auf die Flugpiste trat,... bemerkte er, dass die Terrasse des Gebäudes voll Kinder war" (p. 99). In this view we are allowed to experience only the outward actions of Matthäi. The point of view used during the decision is an objective, camera-like one. We see only his actions, not what he thinks. This element is then set off from the preceding and succeeding elements since these are narrated by Dr. H. At the point of entering the plane the stewardess "...hielt die Hand hin, um Matthäis Karte in Empfang zu nehmen, doch der Kommissär wandte sich aufs neue um. Er schaute auf die Kinderschar, die glücklich und neidisch zu der startbereiten Maschine hinüberwinkte. 'Fräulein,' sagte er, 'ich fliege nicht' und kehrte ins Flughafengebäude zurück, schritt unter der Terrasse mit der unermesslichen Schar der Kinder hindurch dem Ausgang zu" (p. 99f).

In this view given by an objective narrator the reader sees an unexpected event which at first is puzzling because the motivations are not explained. In this respect this view of the decision to stay is a concession to the detective mystery style whereby the reader is not given sufficient knowledge of all actions.

Immediately following this objective view of Matthäi's
decision, Dr. H. becomes the narrator again and describes his view of it. Matthäi tells his decision and we are given Dr. H.'s attitude toward the decision. By stating his objection to Matthäi's action the relationship between their two attitudes was given form. Dr. H.'s attitude has already been stated to illustrate this relation. "Wir müssten unsere Pflicht tun, da habe Matthäi recht, aber unsere erste Pflicht sei es, in unseren Grenzen zu bleiben..." (p.107). This statement, made by the normal narrator, Dr. H., is the most concise statement of the basic relationship of the novel. This second view of the decision is, however, a subjective attitude. The motivations of the action remain to be stated.

The third view of Matthäi's decision is given as Matthäi's own thoughts, as the inward motivations of the action. This last view of the decision is given within the context of Matthäi's change of character or outlook. Since an understanding of these motivations is of great importance to understanding the meaning of the novel, this element is emphasized and isolated from the rest of the novel by a change in narrator, style and mood. After this last view of the decision is stated, the context in which it was given will be discussed.

Receiving a concentrated explanation of his motives, we can very clearly follow the change in his character which had been previously stated by other, more objective methods. "Ich wurde wieder die Unpersönlichkeit, die ich vorher war...
Ich kniff wieder aus in die Ruhe, in die Überlegenheit, in die Form, in die Unmenschlichkeit, bis ich auf dem Flugplatz die Kinder sah... Und nun bin ich hier. Weil ich nicht an die Schuld des Hausierers glaube und nun mein Versprechen halten muss" (p.130). This third view is the most comprehensive view since it relates Matthäi's change of character, which Dr. H. discusses, to his belief in the peddler's innocence and to his decision to stay. The conflict over the peddler's guilt puts Matthäi and Dr. H. in opposition. Matthäi's decision to stay causes Dr. H. to articulate his view of Matthäi's fault, which states the relationship between the two. Matthäi feels obligated to protect children from the murderer. His determination to keep this promise is related to the earlier promise to the lynch mob. The earlier promise demonstrated a certain blindness in Matthäi to the significance of the nonrational. The purpose of the promise to find the murder, which is mentioned in the above quote, is to show that that blindness associated with the first promise, is still present after his decision to reopen the case.

The context within which this last view is given is markedly different from any other in the novel, in point of view, mood and style. The shift from Dr. H. as narrator is accomplished by the transfer of Dr. H.'s thought about Matthäi's character to a series of episodes which delve into his character. Dr. H. says: "Der Mann war wie verändert, wie ausge-
wechselt, als hätte er über Nacht einen anderen Charakter bekommen, Ich [sic] dachte an eiene bevorstehenden Nerven zusammenbruch und rief einen Psychiater an..." (p.114). With Dr. H.'s mention of a psychiatrist the scene shifts immediately to Matthäi's visit to the psychiatrist, Dr. Locher. With this shift we are no longer restricted by Dr. H.'s narration, which is the normal narration of the novel. For the most part we had been limited to that which Dr. H. had experienced. Our experience of the action and characters was restricted to Dr. H.'s frame of reference. What he sees as a sudden change of character has hidden motivations which must be understood by the reader. In order to understand the full import of Matthäi's action we must learn what he thinks.

The otherwise unimportant trip to the clinic is given special significance by stylistic means. It does not make the plot progress nor fulfill any expected move on Matthäi's part, but it does restate Matthäi's character and beliefs in a new light. Its structural function is to enlighten the motivation of Matthäi's actions to the reader. It is an allegorical journey into Matthäi's mind. This is indicated by the abrupt change from the Ich-Erzähler to a third person narrator who relates Matthäi's thoughts. Gaining direct access to Matthäi's thoughts, we learn of the doubts that he feels. A very ephemeral, tenuous mood is set up. "Durch die Bäume und Büsche schimmerte ein kleiner See, doch war es vielleicht auch
nur ein Nebelstreifen. Totenstille" (p.116). Continuing his trip to the clinic he meets the yard man whose actions have a still more disconcerting effect on him. "Ein Bursche...führte seine Bewegungen langsam und gleichmässig aus. Matthäi blieb unschlüssig stehen. Er wusste nicht, wohin er sich wenden musste; eine neue Tafel sah er nicht mehr" (p.116). We find Matthäi questioning himself, wondering where to turn, for he does not know how to reckon with this situation. Matthäi says: "Können Sie mir sagen, wo sich die Direktion befindet?...Der Bursche erwiderte kein Wort. Er harkte weiter, gleichmässig, ruhig, wie eine Mäschine..." (p.116). These words could also have been used to describe Matthäi before his encounter with this case. The yard man ignores him and "...wurde der Kommissär von dem Gefühl beschlichen, es drohe ihm Gefahr...Er fühlte sich unsicher" (p.116). The mood of doubt and fear is heightened. The uneasiness is increased by references to fear, but for vague and not understood reasons. "Er ging zögernd weiter...Auch hier war niemand zu finden, nur von irgendwoher drang eine klagende Stimme, hoch und flehend, die immer ein Wort wiederholte, immer wieder, ohne Unterlass. Matthäi blieb aufs neue unschlüssig stehen. Eine unerklärliche Traurigkeit befiel ihn" (p.116f). Use of words such as unschlüssig and unerklärlich heighten the vague, uneasy mood which has been set up. This style forms a mood which approximates Matthäi's feelings. As he waits to see the doctor, "...war der Park
nicht mehr zu überblicken, der Nebel hatte sich verdichtet. Matthäi ahnte ein weites geschwungenes Gelände mit irgend-einem Monument oder Grabmal, und, drohend, schattenhaft, eine Silberpappel. Der Kommissär wurde ungeduldig" (p.118f).

The figure of Dr. Locher in the following scene has a twofold structural function. He serves as a device which draws out Matthäi's innermost feelings and thoughts, which are essential to an understanding to Matthäi's actions, both previous and following. He is also a parallel figure to Matthäi in that certain characteristics of Dr. Locher reinforce those of Matthäi. They are both in a similar situation: Matthäi "...hatte Zutrauen zu ihm, weil die andern Ärzte ihn gering schätzten, weil er als Sonderling galt und als Phantast" (p.125). These are two characteristics which are applicable also to Matthäi in his pursuit of the case.

The purpose of Matthäi's visit to the clinic becomes clear with the question: "Ist es Ihnen in Ihrem Beruf auch schon vorgekommen, dass Sie einen Fall nicht zu lösen vermochten?" (p.127). He is greatly troubled by his inability to solve the case, and order to solve it he must get a psychoanalytic interpretation of the drawing. To get this information Matthäi must give Locher his confidence, from which Matthäi's inner analysis comes. This analysis is of thematic importance because it clarifies and extends those concepts of duty and justice which are of central importance to his motiv-
ation. And it is these concepts which place him in contrast to Dr. H., thereby forming the basic structural relationship.

During the discussion several points come up which are of importance to the structure since they present aspects of the theme as elements in the story. The analysis of the drawing and other facts lead Locher to believe that the murder was not a sexual crime but a crime of revenge by a man with emotional defects. Locher explains, "...vielleicht war der Mann von einer Frau unterdrückt oder ausgebeutet. Vielleicht war seine Frau reich und er arm. Vielleicht nahm sie eine höhere soziale Stellung ein als er...Das Absurdeste ist möglicher zwischen Mann und Frau" (p.139). We finally see that there is no necessary correlation between the act and its reason; it is senseless, absurd. This thread is later taken up in the Frau Schrott scene. For the purpose of preparing the reader for the end and perfect accord with the theme, Dr. Locher gives the forboding warning: Dass Sie den Wahnsinn als Methode wählen, mag mutig sein...aber wenn diese Methode nicht zum Ziele führt, fürchte ich, dass Ihnen dann einmal nur noch der Wahnsinn bleibt" (p.143).

During the course of the conversation with Dr. Locher, references to the descending night accompany the progression of the conversation until at last Matthäi is convinced of his mission and simultaneously it becomes full night. Here we have a reinforcement of the inner development in Matthäi by
means of outward conditions. The night anticipates Matthäi's end and an attitude is structured into his decision. Upon meeting Dr. Locher, the progression of darkness, which had begun previously with the mist he saw as he approached the clinic, is developed further. The mist which at the beginning was only an apparition has now become real and grown much thicker. "Die beiden Männer schwiegen. Draussen stand der Nebel vor dem Fenster, stumpf, eine gesichtslose Dämmerung..." (p.122). As the interview proceeds so does the darkness motif. "Die Dämmerung und das Gerede des Arztes machten ihn ungeduldig. Er suchte tastend nach den Zigaretten" (p.125). The doctor continues to question and warn Matthäi. "Sonst stehen wir vor dem prachtvollsten seelischen und körperlichen Zusammenbruch. Den wollen wir doch vermeiden, nicht wahr?... Draussen vor dem Fenster war es nun beinahe finster, so dunkel war dieser Abend auf einmal" (p.126). After discussing his reasons for not leaving, and thereby reinforcing what we know of his motivations in relation to the main theme, he prepares to continue the search for the killer. The connection here between the motif of darkness and the thematic intention is unmistakable. "Matthäi nahm die Zeichnung, faltete sie zusammen und...starrte nach dem Fenster, in welchem nun die Nacht stand. "Wünschen Sie mir Glück, den Igelriesen zu finden, Locher," sagte er" (p.140f). The decision to continue the search is directly associated with the motif of the
night, giving a dark, gloomy connotation to his decision. Here we see how two elements, topic of conversation and night-motif, are bound up together in such a way that an attitude or mood is created. The unmistakable association of Matthäi's decision to continue his search with the final fall of night ended the progression quoted above. This intentional arrangement of these particular elements gives a dismal connotation to the event. It can be said then that here we have an attitude which was structured, arranged, or built, into the event by means of the night-motif.

After the investigation of Matthäi's mind, which serves to elucidate his motivations, the period of reflection is immediately obliterated by a flood of action which serves to further the plot by showing the steps which Matthäi takes to capture the killer. Several new characters are introduced. The texture is changed back to the original story texture, with a corresponding change from the omniscient narrator back to Dr. H. as the narrator.

A relationship is now set up among Matthäi, Dr. H. and Henzi which is a dramatization of the theme, that is to say, in the actions of the fictional characters we see a dynamic embodiment of the theme. This relationship must be considered as a major orienting structural element because of its effective position after Matthäi's decision to continue but before we learn the results of this decision. The element which sets
up the relationship among the three is the differing attitude of Dr. H. and Henzi toward Matthäi and his chances of being right in pursuing the case. Realizing all the unanswered questions about the peddler’s guilt which was brought to his attention by Matthäi’s conviction of his innocence, Dr. H. begins to change his mind. "Das gab mir aufs neue zu denken ...doch ich war beunruhigt" (p.144). Dr. H. was now admitting the possibility that Matthäi might be right. However, he is careful not to make a quick judgment. For him the question that the killer might still be at large was still undecided. For Matthäi it was, of course, as decided as it was for Henzi. Henzi says, "...mehr können wir wirklich nicht für den Fall tun. Entweder ist Matthäi verrückt oder wir. Wir müssen uns jetzt entscheiden" (p.145). So there exists this relationship among the three: Henzi and Matthäi do not waver from their positions, which are diametrically opposed, while Dr. H. is reserving his judgment. Here we see the closest embodiment of the theme by means of the characters. On the one hand there is Henzi, the one who looked away and who does not realize the import of the case. For him the case is settled. On the other hand there is Matthäi, who is convinced that he can rectify the murder by catching the killer. Dr. H. observes both sides and is closed to neither. From his superior position Dr. H. is enabled to see the situation in its best perspective. He says, "Ich bewunderte ihn auf einmal,wünschte
ihm Erfolg, wenn auch vielleicht nur, um den grässlichen Henzi zu demütigen; dennoch hielt ich sein Unternehmen für aussichtslos, das Risiko zu gross, die Gewinnchancen zu klein" (p.167). Of course, when direct evidence is offered to prove the existence of the killer, Henzi and Dr. H. are immediately convinced that Matthäi was right; it is impossible to doubt facts. When Matthäi discovers that Annemarie was given candy by the murderer, he tells Dr. H., who says, "Ich war auf der Stelle überzeugt. Ich liess Henzi, Feller und vier Polizeisoldaten kommen...und unterrichtete den Staatsanwalt" (p.183). Upon the failure to apprehend the killer, however, Henzi reverts back to his original position, but Dr. H. is no longer between the two; he has shifted his opinion to agree with Henzi on the basis of what he can see and understand. Dr. H. says to Matthäi: "'Hören Sie mir jetzt einmal zu!'; schrie ich, entschlossen, den Mann endlich zur Vernunft zu bringen, wütend, dass ich selbst den Unsinn unterstüzt und ermöglicht hatte, 'die Aktion ist gescheitert, das müssen wir zugeben...niemand ist gekommen...Das Kind kam hierher, um allein zu sein...Dass es auf jemand gewartet haben soll, ist eine Auslegung, die wir dem Vorfall gegeben haben' " (p.198f). Matthäi, however, is unchanged by the experience, he holds to his belief in spite of the strong probability that he is wrong. He replies to Dr. H.: "'Das ist ein Mordort', sagte er, 'das spürt man, ich werde weiterwarten'.
'Das ist doch Unsinn', antwortete ich... 'Er wird hierher kommen', sagte Matthäi. Ich schrie ihn an, ausser mir: 'Quatsch, Blödsinn, Idioterei!' " (p.200). Here we see the theme in action; the theme exhibits itself as the action proceeds. Dr. H. is willing to look at both sides of the case. After experiencing the failure to capture the murderer, Dr. H. and Matthäi take their stand. Their relation to each other is now finally that central relationship whose importance has already been stated: that Dr. H. feels that Matthäi is not taking reality into account. We have, thus, an element of the novel, a relationship between fictional characters, which acts out the theme thereby making this element a concrete manifestation of the theme, that is, making it a structural element.

In the above relationship we see Dr. H. as the observer and judge. This characteristic also underlines Dr. H.'s importance as the narrator and explains why he is the narrator. Dr. H.'s structural function is twofold. As a character his function is to demonstrate the theme as shown above. His structural function as narrator is to create or be the opposition to Matthäi's concepts while at the same time giving the reader his reasons for this opposition by showing those points in Matthäi with which he disagrees throughout the length of the novel. The narrator allows the reader to experience those actions of Matthäi which are then shown to be
wrong by the narrator. The narrator places Matthäi into a larger context within which we can judge him. This is not a function that a single character could do, but rather a job for the narrator. This is an extension throughout the novel of Dr. H.'s position as observer and judge. His position against Matthäi is thereby reinforced, making our judgment of the events which we see in the novel the same as Dr. H.'s interpretation. Dr. H. realizes that he must stay within the limits to which everyone is subject; however, Matthäi still does not realize his limitations.

With the failure of Matthäi to catch the killer, the reader experiences a change in the texture of the novel. The "story" which Dr. H. is narrating is interrupted by the conversation with the mystery writer. Since this conversation takes place years after the events which were being related, there is a definite break in the fictional time. This break is, however, only a digression to the frame-story, that is, to that fictional level which Dr. H. uses as a basis from which he tells the story of Matthäi, which is a second fictional level. In the frame-story Dr. H. is the narrator, in the Matthäi story he is a character. The two levels are connected through Dr. H. We experience the change back to the frame because of the special attention which Dr. H. and the mystery writer draw to themselves. "Dies die Geschichte, soweit mein armer Matthäi darin wesentlich vorkommt, fuhr der
ehemalige Kommandant der Kantonspolizei in seiner Erzählung fort" (p.203). However, Dr. H. is no longer the narrator, the mystery writer has taken his place. By regarding the actions of Matthäi as a story being told we revert back to the frame, but since the mystery writer becomes the narrator we revert still again to a seemingly realistic level of the novel in which the mystery writer treats all elements as objects of a fiction which must be arranged. "Hier ist nun wohl der Ort, einerseits zu erwähnen, dass dcr Alte und ich natürlich schon längst unsere Fahrt Chur-Zürich beendet hatten..." (p.203). The fiction of the frame is disrupted by pointing out that it, too, is a story being told. Further, the mystery writer says, "...dass ich die Erzählung des redewaltigen Alten natürlich nicht immer so wiedergegeben habe, wie sie mir berichtet wurde, wobei ich...denke...an jene Teile seiner Geschichte, die er nicht von seinem Standpunkte aus, von seinem Erlebnis her, sondern gleichsam objektiv als Handlung an sich erzählte...Bei solchen Stellen war einzugreifen, zu formen, neu zu formen...nach bestimmten Gesetzen der Schriftstellerei zu bearbeiten, druckfertig zu machen" (p.204). The purpose of the mystery writer as narrator and organizer of the story is to forcibly demonstrate the division between reality and fiction. This is the reason for the subtitle of the novel, "Requiem auf den Kriminalroman", for only in fiction can everything be logical. Here we see the point of
view used as an element to reiterate the theme. After this digression Dr. H. again becomes the narrator and the frame is reentered. He explains his theory of the detective novel, criticizes it, and explains why Matthäi's fate was such as it was. The reader learns of Matthäi's thoughts through Dr. H.; he tells the writer what Matthäi believed, compares it to his own beliefs and makes a judgment on it. This element also prepares the way for the end of the story by giving the ending its perspective within the structure; that is, this particular ending is the fulfillment in terms of concrete elements of the novel, of the intention of the structure. In other words, that Matthäi must fail is implicit in the theme; that he does fail is the concrete execution of the overriding theme.

Matthäi's failure is being prepared at this point. This is a central element in the novel because many elements are given their perspective by Dr. H. He says to the writer, "Doch werden Sie...spüren, dass ich noch das Ende der Geschichte zu erzählen habe...denn dass diese Geschichte eben leider noch eine Pointe aufweist, brauche ich Ihnen nicht zu verheimlichen, und dass dies eine reichlich schäbigke Pointe ist, werden Sie ahnen...Dabei ist ehrlicherweise zuzugeben, dass diese Pointe vorerst durchaus für Matthäi spricht...ihn zu einem Genie werden lässt, zu einem Menschen, der die uns verborgenen Faktoren der Wirklichkeit so weit erahnte, dass er die Hypothesen und Annahmen durchstieß, von denen wir umgestellt sind..."
welche die Welt in Schwung halten" (p. 210f). The point that Dr. H. is emphasizing is "das Zufällige". It was this point that Matthäi did not consider. "Nichts ist grausamer als ein Genius, das über etwas Idiotisches stolpert. Doch hängt bei einem solchen Vorkommnis alles davon ab, wie sich das Genius zu dem Lächerlichen stellt, über das es fiel, ob es dieses hinnehmen kann oder nicht. Matthäi konnte es nicht akzeptieren" (p. 211f). Here we find the focal point of the theme. That which is nonrational, inexplicable, accidental in reality Matthäi could not accept. "Er wollte, dass seine Rechnung auch in der Wirklichkeit aufgehe. Er musste daher die Wirklichkeit verleugnen und im Leeren münden" (p. 212). This statement Dr. H. makes as a narrator who was a character in these events. As narrator his view imposes a perspective or weight on these events, and his interpretation is of structural importance as already seen. He further explicates the structural elements in terms of the overriding theme. "Das Schlimmste trifft auch manchmal zu. Wir sind Männer, haben damit zu rechnen...und uns vor allem klar darüber zu werden, dass wir am Absurden, welches sich notwendigerweise immer deutlicher und mächtiger zeigt, nur dann nicht scheitern und uns einigermassen wohnlich auf dieser Erde einrichten werden, wenn wir es demütig in unser Denken einkalkulieren. Unser Verstand erheilt die Welt nur notdürftig" (p. 212). Matthäi's fault is emphasized in terms of universal validity: "...unter-
nämen wir den Versuch, ein fehlerloses Vernunftsgebilde durchzusetzen, denn gerade seine fehlerlose Vollkommenheit wäre seine tödliche Lüge und ein Zeichen der schrecklichsten Blindheit" (p.213). We have then Matthäi's situation as seen by Dr. H. and summed up in general terms. Dr. H. explains Matthäi's mistake which leads to his final situation, which was seen at the beginning of the novel. These thoughts of Dr. H. form the nucleus of the theme, and all aspects of the novel are to be understood in terms of these thoughts.

In this explanation we have the true end of the novel. That which follows is in full compliance with Dr. H.'s theme explanation, that is to say, that because of Matthäi's ignoring of the nonrational, the accidental, and because he cannot accept his limitations, he must "im Leeren münden".

Those facts and explanations brought to light by the Frau Schrott episode are structural elements which fulfill the intention of the theme. Her husband had been the killer before his accidental death on his way to kill Annemarie. Dr. H. came to know of this through the priest who contacted him, "...weil die Ewigkeit heranrücke, sei sie während ihrer Generalbeichte darauf zu reden gekommen, rein zufällig..." (p.217). It was accidental that she told the priest, at all, and the reason she had not sooner come to the police is just as irrational. "Ich war ganz verwirrt, dass er so krank war; das Mädchen tat mir leid, ich habe auch daran gedacht, den
Doktor Sichler anzurufen... aber dan dachte ich an meine Schwester, die hätte ja frohlockt, ihr schönster Tag wäre es geworden, und so bin ich eben ganz streng und entschlossen mit Albertchen selig gewesen und sagte ausdrücklich, das darf nie, nie, nie mehr vorkommen, und er sagte, ja, Mutti" (p. 229f). At this point we are reminded of the words of Dr. Locher who expressly said that which in the above quote is rendered by structural elements. "Das Absurdeste ist möglich zwischen Mann und Frau" (p. 139). Here we have drawn together two manifestations of one essential aspect of the theme: the most absurd is possible, it occurs and must be accepted. These examples show that constant strand which runs the length of the novel and by which the story is directed.

There occur many manifestations of this sort whose purpose it is to emphasize or to place in perspective certain elements so that the thing is carried out in the midst of all the detail that accompanies any novel. By adroit use of structural elements the author can direct the mood in which certain events occur and thereby give a structural attitude to what he relates. This attitude, of course, is related to the theme. Structural elements of this sort are many; some have already been mentioned, but a few more important ones remain to be discussed.

In this group fall those symbols which are deemed appropriate by the author to express the theme. One such symbol,
that of the growing darkness and resulting night during Matthäi's interview with Dr. Locher, has been mentioned. There are several other symbolic strands which recur throughout the novel. These symbols occur in certain situations and a symbolic value is acquired by the constant association of the symbol with the situation in which they occur. Conversely, after the symbol has taken its value or significance from its surrounding context, it is then used in its own right, recurring in a different situation, to indicate a structural relationship between the situations. This structural relationship among the symbols is seen in a major symbol of the story, that of the sun with its secondary symbol of heat.

These symbols, when they are first introduced, occur after a certain mood has been achieved, primarily by images of a morbid nature. As Dr. H. and the writer are first visiting Matthäi at the beginning of the novel the mood is set. "Die Stadt war von Bergen eingekesselt, die jedoch nichts Majestätisches aufwiesen, sondern eher Erdaufschüttungen glichen, als wäre ein unermessliches Grab ausgehoben worden" (p.10). A morbid, forbidding tone is set up by use of such images. It is this tone which will be associated with the sun. Approaching the first encounter with Matthäi, the writer says: "Ich döste vor mich hin, bleiern und müde; schattenhaft schob sich in den tiefliegenden Wolken ein verschneites Tal an uns vorbei, starr vor Kälte...bis auf einmal alles in der Sonne lag, in
einem so mächtigen und blendenden Licht, dass die Schnee-
flächen zu tauen anfingen" (p.11). The immediate change from
cold and dark to sun and light recurs throughout the novel.
After this introduction of the sun symbol a further image
occurs with its mysterious and forboding quality. "Es ging
wie in einem bösen Traume zu, wie verhext, als sollte ich
dieses Land, diese Berge nie kennenlernen" (p.11). The sun
symbol becomes more and more prominent after this tone has
been set up; the sun is repeatedly associated with the conno-
tation of such words as böse, verhext, nichts Majestätisches,
and unermessliches Grab. The pair arrive at Matthäi's gas
station; "...alles machte einen verkommenen Eindruck, trotz
der Sonne, die jetzt beinahe stechend, bösartig schien" (p.13).
This marks the first direct juxtaposition of Matthäi with the
sun symbol. And a definitely unpleasant connotation is given
to the sun; it shines bösartig. However, as soon as they
leave his station, "...die Strasse war aufs neue vereist, und
unter uns lag der Walensee, gleissend, kalt, abweisend...
(p.17). When Matthäi is left behind, so is the sun; Matthäi
is being increasingly associated with the sun symbol. As the
story of Matthäi's gradual involvement in the case proceeds,
Matthäi receives the call to investigate the case, "...doch
wich die unangenehme, bösartige Wärme nicht, welche die Men-
schen kaum atmen liess" (p.25). Here the warmth is viewed is
viewed in a negative attitude. As Matthäi begins the inves-
tigation of the case and goes to pick up the peddler who is waiting in the inn, "Alles war dumpf und still, doch drohend. In den Fensterscheiben wurde es heller, der Regen liess nach, und plötzlich war die Sonne wieder da" (p.30). Again we have the presence of Matthäi connected with the immediate appearance of the sun. "Der Dorfplatz lag in der grellen Sonne" (p.31). We see three things connected with the sun symbol. It is introduced after a certain, negative mood has been set up, it becomes associated with this mood and it is associated with Matthäi. From this central association of the sun symbol with Matthäi and this negative mood, we can work toward relationships among other elements which also have the sun symbol. This symbol is present, as already mentioned, when Matthäi is first introduced as a character, and again when he first investigates the case. It is present at the funeral of the murdered child. "Alles war stumm in der nachmittäglichen Sonne, auch bei den Zuschauern regte sich nichts..." (p.98). The subsidiary symbol to the sun, the heat symbol, is obvious in the lynching scene. "Die unnatürliche, schwere Wärme machte die Menschen böse, reizbar, ungeduldig" (p.43). And when Dr. H. realizes the purpose for which Matthäi intends to use Annemarie, he says: "'Und jetzt weiss ich auch, wem es gleicht,' stellte ich fest. 'Dem ermordeten Gritli Moser. Wir schwiegen beide aufs neue. Draussen war es warmer geworden...' " (p.164). In many of these events, which occur
throughout the novel, we find that same connotation of böse, a negative quality expressed, and in all of the events the sun and heat symbols, by virtue of their constant association with unfortunate and terrible events such as the funeral, the lynching, using the girl as bait for the killer, acquire a connotation of evil. The sun symbol is used later in its own right to reproduce the connotation of these earlier elements. Its structural function is, then, that it brings various elements together under the same negative heading, that is, it shows relationships among the elements. The symbols direct attention from those earlier events to the final scene, the Frau Schrott scene. She tells of her husband, "...wie im Sonnenschein draussen Albertchen selig so treu seine Pflicht tut..." (p. 231). Here is the direct image of the murderer doing his duty in the sunshine. This is the same symbol, that of the sun, which followed Matthäi like a shadow in his attempt to do his duty. This is a direct connection of Matthäi and the murderer, connected through the sun symbol. It is not contradictory to connect two seemingly opposite types as the criminal and detective in view of the so obviously deliberate use of the sun symbol. The structural function of the sun symbol was to point out the relation between the two men. They both had to follow their own wills which led them beyond any compatibility with reality. Both of them, the criminal and the detective, took the same step
which separated them from the rest of the world. The non-rational, the accidental defeated the purposes of both. Albertchen's accidental death negated Matthäi's attempts. Albertchen was separated from reality, having heard voices from Heaven. Matthäi neglected reality in his particular concept of duty. He was not wrong because it resulted in his death, but because it was futile. Dr. H. admired him, called him a genius but saw his flaw. It led to his destruction not because he understood too well, but because he understood the word too narrowly. He did not take the nonrational, the accidental into account. This is the statement that this structural relationship shows, which is the major tenet of the theme.

We find reinforcement of this interpretation of the two elements, the sun symbol and the relationship of detective and criminal, in the other detective novels by Dürrenmatt, Der Richter und sein Henker and Der Verdacht. The concept of chance in the novel, Das Versprechen, is a major aspect of the theme. This aspect was extended in the earlier novels to exhibit the relation of criminal and detective in a clearer manner.

In the novel, Der Richter, the preeminence of chance and human arbitrariness is underlined. The question of good and evil goes beyond the question of justice, for here justice is achieved through the murder of a criminal and the murderer is
then allowed to go free. The theme is presented most clearly in the conversation between the policeman, Bärlach, and his lifelong enemy, Gastmann, who says: "Deine These war, dass die menschliche Unvollkommenheit, die Tatsache, dass wir die Handlungsweise anderer nie mit Sicherheit vorauszusagen und dass wir ferner den Zufall, der in alles hineinspielt, nicht in unsere Überlegung einzubauen vermögen, der Grund sei, der die meisten Verbrechen zwangsläufig zutage fördern müsse" (Ed., William Gillis and John J. Neumaier [Cambridge, Mass.: the Riverside Press, 1964], p.65). This is seen in the structure of the novel to be true, for Gastmann's crime was discovered and punished by Tschanz's (chance) accidental intervention. Bärlach says to Gastmann, "Es ist mir nicht gelungen, dich der Verbrechen zu überführen, die du begangen hast, nun werde ich dich eben dessen überführen, das du nicht begangen hast" (Der Richter, p.97). However, Gastmann's contention is equally true. He says: "Ich dagegen stellte die These auf...dass gerade die Verworrenheit der menschlichen Beziehungen es möglich mache, Verbrechen zu begehen, die nicht erkannt werden könnten..." (Der Richter, p.65). This is equally true, since, although Tschanz did murder Schmied, he was allowed to commit the crime unpunished by law because of just this "Verworrenheit der menschlichen Beziehungen" that is present in the novel.

So we see again that chance is the center of these two
theses, each one viewing it differently. Chance lies behind justice, just as it lies behind good and evil. In fact justice or injustice seems to be a preponderance of good or of evil with chance playing the decisive role. This is one aspect of the theme of Das Versprechen. Gastmann says, "...ich dagegen bald im Dunkeln, im Dickicht verlorenten Grossstädt, bald im Lichte glänzender Positionen, ordenübersät, aus Übermut das Gute übend, wenn ich Lust dazu hatte, und wieder aus einer anderen Laune heraus das Schlechte liebend. Welch ein abenteuerlicher Spass!" (Der Richter, p.68). Further, the fictional writer in the story who knows Gastmann says of him: "Er wird nie das Böse tun, um etwas zu erreichen, wie andere ihre Verbrechen begehen...er wird es tun, wenn es sinnlos ist, vielleicht, denn bei ihm sind immer zwei Dinge möglich, das Schlechte und das Gute, und der Zufall entscheidet" (Der Richter, p.79f).

The symbol of the sun which was used to point out a structural relationship in Das Versprechen is used in both Der Richter and Der Verdacht. In Der Richter as in Das Versprechen the sun is associated with the presence of evil. "Als die aufgehend Sonne durch den Nebel brach und den Toten beschien, war ihm [the policeman] das unangenehm" (Der Richter, p.4). In Der Verdacht the clinic, the place of torture, is named Sonnenstein; in this novel the sun symbol is also extended to take on a more permanent, enduring quality by
constant reference to the relation between the sun and the earth. Bärlich thinks to himself: "'Krepieren', dachte er, 'dies ist das Wort: krepieren — und die Erde wird sich immer noch um die Sonne drehen, in der immer gleichen unmerklich schwankenden Bahn... immer zu, immer zu" (Ed., William Gillis [Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1954], p.65). Another example of this connotation is seen when Dr. Marlok, the torturer's assistant, says: "Ich war überzeugt, dass man dieses traurige Ding da aus Stein und Lehm, das sich um die Sonne dreht, unsere Erde, lieben müsse..." (Der Verdacht, p.86). The sun, the presence of evil, is given a permanent quality. An example of this meaning of the sun symbol is given as Bärlich awaits his death, watching the clock: "...die Uhr, immer wieder die Uhr, eine verbrannte Sonne in einem blaulichen verwesenden Weltgebäude..." (Der Verdacht, p.123). The permanence of the sun symbolizes the permanence of evil.

It is interesting to note that in all three novels there is a parallel symbol to the sun, the animal symbol. When Bärlich, sick with cancer, meets Gastmann who gets away from him, Bärlich is described as the following: "Dann kam der Schmerz, der ungeheure, wütende, stechende Schmerz, eine Sonne, die in ihm aufging, ihn aufs Lagerwarf, zusammenkrümmte... Der Alte kroch auf Händen und Füssen herum wie ein Tier, warf sich zu Boden... 'Was ist der Mensch?' stöhnte er leise, 'was ist der Mensch?' " (Der Richter, p.69). Here we have a
connection of two symbols: sun and animal. Failing in his attempt to stop Gastmann, the evil against which he has been fighting for half of his life (sun symbol), he conducts himself on hands and feet like an animal. This same symbol is clearly stated in *Das Versprechen* when the policemen, tired of waiting for the killer, conduct themselves in the following manner. Dr. H. tells how the public prosecutor cries:

"'Du dummes Ding', schrie er und packte das Kind am Arm, rüttelte es... Und wir schrien mit, sinnlos, weil wir einfach die Nerven verloren hatten, rüttelten das Mädchen ebenfalls, begannen auf das Kind einzuschlagen, verprügelten den kleinen Leib...'Wir sind Tiere, wir sind Tiere', keuchte ich" (p.194f). Also while attempting to do their duty the policemen were surrounded by those who wanted to lynch the peddler. "Die Polizeiwagen lagen wie grosse dunkle Tiere inmitten der Menschenbrandung. Sie versuchten immer wieder loszukommen, die Motoren heulten auf und wurden mutlos wieder abgedrosselt. Sinnlos" (p.49). Again we have the attempt to check evil associated with the animal symbol. Added to the meaning of the sun as used in Dürrenmatt's novels is the complementary meaning of animals symbolizing the fight against evil. This can also be seen in the conversation between Bärlach and Tschanz where Bärlach says of Schmied: "Ich hatte ihn auf den Teufel in Menschengestalt gehetzt, ein edles Tier auf eine wilde Bestie" (*Der Richter*, p.113). We see thus that all
three detective novels are concerned with aspects of the same theme, and all make use of the same symbols.

As we have seen, then, the theme exhibits itself in structural elements. We find that the irrational does occur in the novel; the crime itself was senseless, and it could have been prevented had Frau Schrott not feared the absurd ridicule of her sister. We find that plans to reckon with reality cannot hope to encompass all of reality; there will inevitably be too much left to chance. For this point we have the example of Matthäi defeated by the automobile accident. That we must take these facts into account is shown by Dr. H.'s position as narrator and as a central character. He shows both sides to the reader and makes him realize by example and interpretation that we must simply accept our limitations.

I have attempted to show how the events, characters, point of view and style are arranged following the same overriding principle that we must accept our limited understanding of reality. With this intention Dürrenmatt has written what he calls a "Requiem auf den Kriminalroman". He does so because there is no necessary correlation in reality to the logical perfection of fiction. "Lasst die Vollkommenheit fahren, wollt ihr weiterkommen, zu den Dingen, zu der Wirklichkeit, wie es sich für Männer schickt, sonst bleibt ihr sitzen, mit nutzlosen Stilübungen beschäftigt" (p.20). The
fictional perfection of detective novels is false. "Der Wirklichkeit ist mit Logik nur zum Teil beizukommen" (p.19).
A Selected Bibliography


