The Self-cancellation of Injustice in Heinrich Mann's Der Unterton

MARK W. ROCHE

I

The Unterton can be characterized above all by his 'Verehrung der Macht' (161, 358). He asks not what is reasonable or just but rather what will enhance his power. The maxim 'Macht geht vor Recht!' guides his life (244). Diederich Heidl, the hero of Heinrich Mann's Der Unterton, blindly submits to the various figures of authority and institutions of power he encounters: his father, the school master, the Neureutons, the military, nobility, and of course the Emperor. Meanwhile he strives to move upward in the hierarchy so that he may do more than just worship power; he desires to exercise it as well.

The Unterton's relationship to power is two-fold: while aiming his strength over the forces below him, he bends to the powers above. In his analysis of the Unterton mentality in chapter four Wolfgang Buck speaks of 'eine ressourzantische Prestation vor einem Herrn, den seiner Unterton von seiner Macht das Nötige leihen soli, um die noch Kleineren niederzubehalten' (181). The Unterton is both master and slave, a sub-masochistic character. Though he punishes those below him, his power depends on his receiving punishment from above, i.e., it derives from his position within the hierarchy. Love of punishment is a sign of one's adoration of the system in which one is granted a position of power. Thus, the young Diederich Heidl embraces

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punishment: ‘Denn recht gehorcht und seiner Schafe gewiß führts er sich nun, wenn er selbst die Prügel bekam’ (89). He is content to exert his power over animals, even inanimate objects: ‘Er hatte, den Mischharen nachzuhauen, keinen Menschen nötig; ihm genügten Tiere, sogar Dinge’ (8). The number of those below in relation to those above Diederich changes of course as he becomes progressively more powerful, yet the static principle on which the hierarchy is based remains, and with it Diederich's belief that the more powerful are also more just.

Diederich achieves power less through ingenuity than assimilation. According to Wolfgang Buck the Unterton is a creature of environment and opportunity (180). The young Diederich has no ideas of his own. Rather than analyzing issues, he agrees with the ruling opinion: 'Hier Göppel bekann sich als freimünder Gegen Biirmersck. Diederich bestätigte alles, was Göppel wollte; er hatte über den Kanüller, die Freiheit, den jungen Kaiser keinerlei Meinung' (12). As Diederich eventually assimilates himself to the power structure, he embraces whatever opinions support it. He later says to Göppel: 'Was die Herren da oben ... zu glauben für richtig halten, das glaube ich auch ... unbehebt' (57). We see Diederich pass through several institutions - school, fraternity life, the military - with which he identifies. He finds his self in an impersonal whole, even if only as a suffering part: 'ihn begleitete, daß die Macht, die kalte Macht, an der er selbst, wenn auch mir leidend, teilhatte, sein Stolz war' (8).

Diederich's masochistic and masochistic tendencies can be understood in the context of his desire to belong. The Unterton would fuse his self with the power structure. Through this process of submergence he acquires the strength he cherishes: first, he gains victorious power by identifying with the whole; second, he gains ever more power over others. His advancement, however, presupposes his submission. When he is older, Diederich continues to recognize the validity of this concept as a justification for his own suffering: 'Wer treten wollte, müßte sich treten lassen, das war das echte Gesetz der Macht' (306). Diederich's desire to relinquish his own self in order to participate in a collective and powerful whole explains not only his willing submission and love of punishment, but also his frequent intoxication with like-minded men, his masochistic ideal of self-sacrifice, even his references to the ways of destiny. Diederich reaffirms his veneration of power by showing

1 In this paper I refrain from translating the word 'Unterton.' Renderings such as 'subject', 'slave', or 'slave' fail to capture the term's nuances. Nonetheless, the idea of the Unterton is not unique to Germany; with some variations Thrasymachus and Glottus might be seen as his close counterparts, Sergeant Waters of Norman Jewison's A Soldier's Story its most recent.

2 Page references are to the convenient yet reliable DTU edition.

3 Adding some hue to the list of powers to which Diederich was subjected, the narrator also notes the ghost of the castle, the police, and the chimney sweep. (71)

4 The dualism of Diederich's character as both master and slave is emphasized in a humorous reversal where Cott, a woman normally Diederich's Unterton, teaches up and suggests 'Ich bin die Herrin, die bist der Unterton' (340).

5 Several interpreters have already discussed Mann's perception anticipation of what these characters have defined as the authoritarian character. The point need not be elaborated here. See Feuereis 46-50; Sack 189-91; and Vogt.

6 Ironically, the Unterton is also dependent on those below him, for his own feeling of power is rooted in the fact that he is master over someone. Power, unlike justice, is not autonomous.

7 See esp. the passages on the following pages from chapter one, originally having been grouped together with chapter two under the heading 'Die Macht,' 10, 22-23, 28, 30, 37, 38, 47. See Kuehn/Scheidt 131.

8 In a passage bittersweet with nostalgic irony Diederich recounts his willingness to mention his own life for the power of the highest authority: 'Das Volk zieht die Macht fühlen. Das Gefühl der königlichen Macht ist mit einem Menschenleben nicht zu teuer bezahlt!' 'Wenn es nur nicht Ihres ist,' sagte Hopterfel. Und Diederich, die Hand auf der Brust: 'Wenn es auch meins wäre!' (109).
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contempt for the powerless: Jews, women, later Old Buck.18 Diefendorf’s bullying a Jew is evidence of not only his sadism and his desire to belong to the ruling structure but also his role-playing, his performing.

Aus Krittum, die zum Zeichen dienen, erhebe er auf dem Kathedrall ein Kreuz und drückte den Juden davor in die Knie. Er hielt ihn fest, trotz allem Widerstand; er war stark! Was Diefendorf stark machte, war der Beifall der Menge, die, um die Schmerzen der beiden, die überwältigende Mehrheit des Kabinetts und das Volk ... Wie wohl man sich fühle bei geteilter Verantwortlichkeit und einem Schuldbewusstsein, das kollektiv war! (10)

Diefendorf’s intoxication with collectivism reaches its first peak during his service in the military: Diefendorf fühlte wohl, daß alles hier, die Behandlung, die gelungene Ausdrücke, die ganze militärische Tätigkeit vor allem darauf hinzielte, die persönliche Würde auf ein Mindestmaß herabzumüden. Und das impunierte ihn (316). After Diefendorf beholds the Emperor’s strength, the first chapter concludes with a pasquin to power and a résumé of the spheres in which Diefendorf feels its presence.

Auf dem Pferd dort ... ritt die Macht! Die Macht, die über uns hingehört und deren Hufe wir kennen! Die über Hunger, Trotz und Hohn hingehört! Gegen die wir nichts können, weil wir alle sie lieben! Die wir im Blut haben, weil wir die Unterwerfung darin haben! Ein Atom sind wir von ihr, ein verschwindendes Molekül von etwas, das sie ausgesucht hat! Jeder einzelne ein Nichts, wir treten in das gegliederte Mann als Neutronenstern, als Macht, Beamtenkästen, Kirche und Wissenschaft, als Wirtschaftsorganismen und Machtverbande kegelförmig hinun, bis dort oben, wo sie selbst steht, sterrnand berstend! Leben in Ihr, haben teil an Ihr, unerhörlich gegen die, die ihr fern, sind, und triumphierend, noch wenn sie uns verzeichneten: denn so rechtfertigt sie unsere Liebe! (47)

The theme of loss of self in the Unterart is reviewed at the end of each chapter, where Diefendorf identifies with the Emperor.19 His submission to the Emperor and resulting dissolution of self are presented each time with increasing force. An adherent of power positivism need not be a powerful figure himself. Even the young Diefendorf, before he gains power of his own, idolizes

18 Entwurfung on the role of women in the novel is Ebermayer 66-69.
19 Numerous is Diefendorf’s forceful power over a stranger after Diefendorf decides that he hasn’t impounding shoulders: ‘Es fühle mir, daß er hier, zum Trotz der Korn, die gute Sache zu vertreten habe gegen feindliche Begleitungen. Trotz dieser Auftragung, um sich nach der Schleife des Menschen aus, sei es nicht bestimmt. Auch käufert die Umgebung sich mitbildend. Da ging Diefendorf vor. Mit meinem Bande durchtränkte er den Gend und ging auf den Kästen für!’ (46).

4 For this much discussed topic see esp. Ebermayer 88-91; Niggle 32-34; and Weisstum (1962) 118-22 and (1973) 142-46.

Wolfgang Buch, the professional actor in Der Vonunft, is characterized by his ‘Überzeugungslösigkeit’ (159), but other characters, non-actors who nonetheless play roles, lack convictions as well. Mayor Schiefelweiss’ flexibility involves an interesting mix of comedy and immorality. Buch alludes to the mayor’s favorite phrase — ‘einerseits ... anderenseits’ (93, 97, 174, 217, 349) — when he states: ‘Hedlung ist ein vorsichtiger Politiker, er hört nicht gern mit, daß der Bürgermeister zwar einerseits ein guter Ehemann ist, aber andererseits auch seiner Schwiegermutter nichts abschlagen kann’ (213). Diefendorf is a complex figure to the extent that he is honestly convinced of his position as well as an opportunist, like the mayor, who simply plays various roles. Wolfgang Buch says to Diefendorf: ‘Ihre Rolle vor Gericht hat mich mehr interessiert als meine eigene. Später, zu Hause vor meinem Spiegel, habe ich sie ihm nachgespielt’ (240). Diefendorf responds: ‘Meine Rolle! Soll wollen weiß sagen, meine Überzeugung’ (240). Diefendorf is, on the one hand, sincere; he is willing to die to preserve the Emperor’s power. On the other hand, he is an opportunist who assumes roles vis-à-vis Buck, Lauer, Judasohn, Könner, Züllich, Waickow, and just about everyone else in order to gain more power. The seeming contradiction between Diefendorf’s convictions and his role-playing is resolved as we soon recognize that the position of which Diefendorf is convinced, absolute domination of power, necessitates the playing and shifting of roles. Consistency is unattainable for a figure who embraces power as a criterion of justice. Diefendorf’s shifting of positions, his playing out roles, is indeed a form of acting. The principle of power-positivism, with its resulting opportunism or role-playing, forbids Diefendorf from having a solid center to his personality. Moreover, this role-playing is not mere illusion; it is false. Wolfgang Buch is thus justified in asking the judges to choose between comedy and truth (158).

Seemingly opposed to Diefendorf’s idolization of power and comic, self-contradictory behavior is the few moments when Diefendorf questions his role-playing and adherence to power positivism. The novel seems to imply that at these moments Diefendorf gains insight into truth. Thoughts of Agnes’ love lead him to the first of these moments:

Er fühlte sich verwandelt, leichter, wie von Boden gehoben ... Er hatte die Gewißheit, daß er bis jetzt, bis zu dieser Minute alle Dinge falsch
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position. Unless philosophically grounded, even moments of right opinion will eventually succumb to power and illusion, falsehood and negativity. A further meaning of 'weich' manifests itself: yielding, impressionable, easily manipulated. The unreflective Diederich is no more beyond the influence of rhetoric than he was as a child, 'ein weicher Kind' (5). Second, the passages are ironized stylistically for their pathos and sentimentality. Consider, for example, Diederich's letter to Agnes along with the narrator's ironic portrayal of his sobbing (55-56) or the later passage where Diederich suddenly breaks into tears and unthinkingly promises eternal love; 'er [brach] in Tränen aus und sagte, daß er sie immer, immer lieben werde' (65). Another passage—sometimes cited as genuine (Emmerich 56; Schelte 216)—is full of clichés and must be seen in an ironic light.

Zum erstenmal fiel es ihm auf, daß die Dägel dahinstraup oder wie eine große Sehnsucht anzunehmen, und was als Sonne oder Regen vom Himmel fiel, waren Diederichs hehre Liebe und seine Tränen. Denn er weinte viel. (21)

Third, the alert reader will question not only the ephemeralness and sentimentality but the precise content of these passages. Diederich's emotional outbursts are perhaps best viewed not as an approximation to truth but as a negation of the earnestness that necessarily accompanies truth. Diederich's sentimentality is merely an extension of his self-complacency and self-pity. Rather than acting according to his apparent insight, Diederich identifies with the weaknesses of his own self. He is unwilling to be hard with himself. It is a clever psychological mechanism whereby Diederich can feel his self-importance and at the same time suppress excessive self-criticism. Rather than being an opening towards goodness, Diederich's sentimentality represents an adoration of the self and a veiled disregard for truth. 14

Diederich loves Agnes when she appears to look down on him from above (52-53) and when he can let her see (54) or, conversely, when he has power over her and he can look at her with a glance of possession (56).

14 Emmerich 33-37; Nägele 26-29, Schelte 215-20, and Schelte 27-28 are moments of truth in these passages. Only Niobe is unconscious irony, but he restricts it to the ephemeralness of Diederich's insight and does not consider the problematic aspects of the stance itself.

The structure is not unique to Diederich Höfing. In Joseph Roth's Radetzky March we again see the assistance of truth via self-play. Consider the following description of Tramitz from chapter 17: 'Tramitz trank. Das kleine Zimmer wurde hechtläutet... Als der Leutnant war der Mittelpunkt dieser urwüchsigen Welt. Für ihn konnte heute in jämmerlichen Schütteln die Erde, und auch die schweinzerfrechen Galgen weckenden für ihn. Seine Worte hörten sich in der Fiktion ausgetragen mit unter so genanntem, äußeren Willen, werden denken die Stimmung so unerhörlich hoch am Himmel, und ihm allein bliebe die Liebe so wahrhaftig erschienen. Das unendliche Schweigen der Welt gedachte willkommen zu dem, Emil Trott. Er litt in vollkommener Einsamkeit mit dem tödlichen Ab. Hierin der tieflauen Schule des Himmels sah Gott selbst auf ihn stürzend herüber... In [Tramitz]...
The novel considers power positivism not only in relation to Diederich's naive emotionalism and arrogant self-pity but also in the context of the values espoused respectively by Old Buck and by his son Wolfgang. In a world filled with anti-Semitic characters and gestures, Old Buck is married to a Jew. He is concerned with human values, not power. To Diederich he says, almost in vain: "Haben Sie immer Auftrag vor der Rechten Ihres Mitmenschen? Das gehört Ihnen Ihre eigene menschlichkeit!" (33). Buck is the founder of the "Volkskische" and the "Forsorge für die entlastenden Sträßlinge" (81) as well as a supporter of the "Säuglingeboden" (279). Though he opposes theatre as the guiding spirit of the age, he is not without aesthetic sentiment: he married an actress and is himself a poet. Unlike the Social Democrat Napoleon Fischer, Buck is free of blind self-interest and pride. It is no surprise that Buck, who tries to hold to his principles throughout, suffers financial ruin and loss of power. Diederich quickly learns the lesson: "Nichs Menschliches halt stand vor der Macht" (170). Buck, with his concern for justice has followed 'richtige Ziele, die fortführen von der Macht!' (363). Buck himself states: "Mein Leben gehört weit mehr als fünfzig Jahren ... einem Gedanken, den zu meiner Zeit mehrere hatten, der Gerechtigkeit und dem Wohl aller!" (326). Diederich responds to Buck's words by glaring the old man down and with him justice and the common welfare: "Er blieb den Alten, der vergebens flammte, einfach nieder, und diesmal endgültig, mitsamt der Gerechtigkeit und dem Wohl aller. Zuerst das eigene Wohl und gegen was die Sache, die Erfolg hatte!" (327). Buck is in part a tragic figure: he chooses the good while knowing he will suffer, and the novel ends with his death.

Buck's death is symbolic of the loss of his generation's values. Much like the paintings he describes at the Harmony Club, Buck belongs to the past. His values are not fully solid is shown in several respects. Buck is willing to make secret deals and compromises with Diederich (88, 99). The rumour of his affair, though never substantiated, does receive a smearing of circumstantial support: Guste's early birth, Buck's knowledge of the Cabinet of Love, and the unexplained inheritance. In consistantly mirroring Diederich, Old Buck exhibits a naive faith in goodness and an inability to cope with the negative (165, 229, 230). He never gets into a position where he can argue theoretical or political points with Diederich. In this respect he is no


III

The philosophical thrust of the self-cancellation of injustice or power positivism is clearly demonstrated in two of Plato's dialogues:22 Thaumaturgus in Republ. I and Callicles in Gorgias advance the Sophists' view of justice in the will of the more powerful directed towards his own interests. Here justice

22 Wolfgang Buck and Diederich are presented as 'Gegenspiele': they represent 'die vorgeschrittenen Tendenzen der modernen Ethik' (245). On Wolfgang Buck cf. esp. Schütz (1973) 16-22.

23 Cynicisit Wolfgang Buck's statement: 'Wenn ein so politisch akzeptiert, ist nicht, daß wir in der Welt wirklich viel verändern, sondern daß wir uns ein Leiden gefällig schaffen, als täten wir es' (354).

24 Besides considering Plato's dialogues, the interested reader will want to refer to Hölder's brilliant analysis, from which my discussion benefits greatly. See Hölder, Wahrheit und Geschichte, 220-59.
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is understood as a standard of action for the individual or state; thus, injustice or 'the sovereignty and advantage of the stronger' is offered as a standard of action. Injustice or power positionism is a negative philosophical position, and like all negative positions, is untenable, because, first, it presupposes the positive position that it attempts to deny and, second, when thought through on its own terms, it cancels itself. Equity is a simple example of one such self-cancelling position. The negative proposition, 'We cannot know the world,' still makes a claim to knowledge. To suggest that we cannot know the world but can know our capacity for knowledge— as negative— presupposes that matters stand differently with the world than with reason and that knowledge of reason does not imply knowledge of the world. Since, however, any reflection on the relationship between object and meta-levels must include both spheres, the implicit duality is dissolved; the presupposition assumes knowledge of both reason and the world. Even the metasupposition, 'We cannot know whether or not we know the world,' fails, for it leads to an infinite regress. In addition, the statement, 'We cannot know anything,' could never on its own terms be valid, i.e., presented as knowledgeable. Thus, it cannot compete with an opposing position and cancels itself.

Injustice functions in a structurally analogous way. First, injustice always presupposes justice. For any number of individuals to get the strength to be unjust they must act jointly by one another. Socrates asks Thrasymachus: 'Do you think that a city, an army, or bands, or thieves, or any group that attempted any action in common, could accomplish anything if they wronged one another?' (351e). The answer of course is no, for 'Factions . . . are the outcome of injustice, and hatreds and internecine conflicts, but justice brings oneness of mind and love' (351a). The thought is not new to literary critics familiar with the real or expected loyalty within the robber bands of Schiller's Die Räuber (Act I, Scene 2) or Brecht's Die Dreigroschenoper.12 or with the logistic niceties of Goethe's Mephistopheles (Faust 1410-17). Injustice requires justice. As Plato insists again and again, an evil person can befriend neither a good nor another evil person.13 Taken on its own terms, injustice becomes an enemy not only to justice but to itself. Even the individual who acts unjustly toward all other individuals and knows not a single partner in crime must act jointly toward himself. The many parts of the self couldn't function if they were wholly unjust toward one another. Injustice will 'in the first place make him incapable of accomplishing anything because of inner

12 Görres 4834. See also 4808-9 and Republic 379e-380a. Cf. Law 899a-90a.
13 See Hölder, Wahrheit und Geschichte, 272-274.
14 In Brecht's play the breakdown of ostensible loyalty illustrates the self-destruction of absolute injustice.
15 Lyon 214; Republic 349d-351; Görger 507c; Straton 309a.

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faction and lack of self-agreement, and then an enemy to himself and to the just’ (352a). Unless injustice includes justice as a moment, it dissolves itself.

If we ever say that any men who are unjust have vigorously combined to put something over, our statement is not altogether true, for they would not have kept their hands from one another if they had been thoroughly unjust, but it is obvious that there was in them some justice which prevented them from wronging at the same time one another too as well as those whom they attacked. (352b-c)

Injustice, dependent in this way on justice, is ontologically inferior, a deficient mode of justice.

Not only does injustice presuppose justice, but the unjust individual cannot attempt to convince others of the validity of his position in dialogue form without falling into a contradiction between his theory of injustice and the theory of discourse (348a-c). For Plato the just man would deny the values of not the just but only the unjust individual (349c). The unjust man, however, claims to overreach and get the better of the just and the unjust, his unlike and his like (350b). The unjust man's erotic position thus conflicts— as Socrates elaborates— with the pursuit of knowledge and the investigation of truth, which call for fairness, consistency, and communicability (349c-50c; 495a). The theory of discourse suggests that one test arguments on their own terms and adjust conflicting claims impartially; this is possible only within a framework of justice. Thrasymachus and Callidius find themselves in the self-contradictory position of arguing for injustice while accepting the just conditions of discourse. Dialogue is possible only in a system of justice; it is therefore impossible to make a case for injustice without assuming the position one would deny. Insofar as Thrasymachus remains a partner in dialogue, the victory of justice is decided a priori. It is a victory we see in Gorgias as well, where Callidius denies any intent to 'deceive' Socrates or betray the good will of his 'friend,' in offering his arguments for the ruthless sovereignty of his own interests, the absolute and arbitrary validity of the more powerful (476e). To be consistent the unjust individual would have to be silent about his or her theory of injustice.

After denying the possibility of objective discourse to the unjust individual, one might think that he could try to persuade others rhetorically and irrationally of the virtue of injustice— avoiding any direct confrontation with the arguments or structures of justice, but here too he would only lose the power that forms the core of his injustice. Insofar as the unjust individual encourages belief in the validity of injustice, he justifies the violation of his rights by others. The unjust man, therefore, 'who attempts injustice rightly must be supposed to escape detection' (361a) and must support— at least theoretically— the idea of justice, under whose shield he can remain unjust only as long as he seems to be just. In short, to defend injustice is to place the
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unjust individual and the principle for which he stands in danger. The unjust individual not only presupposes that which he would deny, he cannot present a case for injustice without cancelling his own position.

IV

Heinrich Mann's Der Untertan presents this conceptual truth of the self-cancellation of injustice in artistic form: through inconsistencies in Diederich's behaviour and his demands for justice in the face of his own doctrine of injustice as well as through the aesthetic use of paradoxes, terms out of place, and extreme juxtapositions. The latter seeming contradictions mirror the self-contradictory nature of Diederich's doctrine of power positivism-authoritarianly; they also provide the novel with its humour. Der Untertan links the falsehood and inner contradictions of injustice with the comedy that arises from incongruities.

On the level of plot we note numerous inconsistencies in Diederich's behaviour and standards. Diederich's statement to Herr Göppel at the end of chapter two that he cannot marry a woman who is impure is undercut by course of the fact that it is he who has made her impure (75). Diederich has violated his own standards of action. Later in the novel Diederich reverses his position and plays Göppel's role vis-à-vis von Britzent. Diederich, the unjust individual, makes an appeal to a standard of justice that he had earlier denied. The comic effect is heightened through the repetition of details (pacing, the reference to seeing the one and shooting the other, etc.). Diederich is soon mollified, however, by the fact that he has lost to a more powerful figure in the hierarchy of society, a nobleman and an officer (306). Diederich contradicts his standards in another blatant set of episodes. He diminishes two workers for indecent conduct in the raffroom of his factory and then fools around with Gutee at the very same spot (85, 193). Numerous less striking shifts in standards could be added to the list, for example, the fact that after forbidding his sisters to see Käthein Zillich, Diederich procures her sexual favours (200, 343). Diederich's lack of commitment to his expressed ideals also surfaces when he tries to renge on his offer to appear as a witness against Lasse (129) and when he reverses his position on the Army Bill because of a change in mood (187, 305).

Diederich's contradictory behavior is nowhere clearer than in his repeated lies.27 Lying, very much an element of injustice, presupposes a subjectivity unwilling to recognize objective standards. When lying, Diederich is inwardly different from what he would appear; this incongruity often surfaces in a comic manner.28 Diederich's deception begins easily. He was 'zu Freund mit allen, leichte, wenn sie ihre Streiche ausplauderten... und dann in der Pause berichtete er' (10). Diederich's dishonesty is especially apparent during his various efforts to escape military service. Diederich asks Hennefeld to concoct a letter of excuse (33); he fakes tipping (36) and eventually escapes military duty with the aid of his fraternity connections (40). He then returns to his fraternity brothers and announces his sincere regret at having to leave the service (40). To list all of Diederich's lies would be to offer an almost complete summary of the novel.29 Three final examples will suffice. To make himself appear more powerful to Jadassohn, Diederich states that Wiebel was his fag (98), while the reverse was really the case (25). Diederich sternly asserts that he is finished with Hennefeld for the rest of his life in spite of his awareness that he must return later in the week to have his thumb painted (128). Finally, Diederich lies about the origins of the rumour concerning Old Buck and Frau Danielson (200) and then defends Buck (213) and Gutee (241) in the face of the rumour he himself helped to start (215). As if this were not enough, Diederich pretends to try to pay Napoleon Fischer not to spread the rumour which he lets slip in his very attempt to bribe him (205). He would have others do his dirty work and let him appear just. After hearing one lie after another, including even the comic reference to a lie Diederich thought of, but hadn't yet had the time to tell (93), the reader can only laugh as he thinks back to the hero's condemning Herr Göppel for not telling the truth (75).

Diederich's acts of deception are often intentional, as for example when he deliberately keeps Agnes waiting in his apartment (59-60). When his actions become self-deceptive, they are especially humorous. During his speech at the unveiling ceremony of the monument to William the Great, Diederich describes and condemns the Empire of Napoleon III, using the very terms we have learned to associate with Wilhelmien Germany and in particular with Diederich:

"Der inere Religionsitt versteckte kurze Materialismus hatte den unbedenklichen Geschäftsmann großzogen, Mäßigung des Grundes schlich ihn natürliches Bündnis mit niedriger Genesung... Im Äußern nur auf des Prestige gestellt, im Innern nur auf die Polizzi, ohne anders Glauben als die Gewalt, trachtete man nach nichts als nach Theaterwirkung, trieb unhörden Pump mit der vergangenen Hohenspecko... Von dem wissen wir nichts" ref Diederich. (357)

Comical as well are the repeated inconsistencies that seem not to disturb

27 For Kant, lying is second only to murder as an example of the self-contradictory nature of certain moral maxims. See Grundlegung der Metaphysik der Sitten (1785-1786). On Kantian elements in Mann's moral system see his limited knowledge of Kant see König, 214-64.
28 It can also be disturbing, as in the constant split between thought and statement when Diederich courted Agnes in chapter two.
29 For a selection of points mentioned here see 12, 40, 315, and 323.
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Diederich knows that Webel's cousin von Klappke is a charlatan, yet he still clicks his heels in recognition of his importance (26). Diederich's fourfold repetition of the phrase, 'Ich bin ein durchaus liberaler Mann' (87, 91, 94, 97), contrasts with his simultaneous assurance that 'der Liberalismus' is the beginning of 'Sozialdemokratie' and 'die rote Gefahr': 'es untergräbt die Ordnung' (95). Diederich praises family life to his future brother-in-law Kienzl (151) just after a disastrous Christmas at home (140) and before the family battles rage anew (160). He dictates an address for his induction into the veterans' club and then 'Tränen in der Stimme, bekam sich unwirrig, so viel Lob entgegenzunehmen' (187). Finally, through Napoleon Fisher, Diederich arranges to have Governor von Wulckow's maneuvers in Nietzsche exposed, whereupon Diederich seizes the occasion 'um zwischen sich und denen, die an dem Herrn Regierungspräsidenten hatten zweifeln können, glatt das Tischello zu zerschneiden' (351).

Despite the contradictions embodied in such unjust behaviour, Diederich, like all unjust individuals who want to succeed, continually appeals to the standards of morality and the scales of justice. Diederich considers certain actions of Lauer 'unsomoralis' (95). In diminishing Agnes he thinks of his own 'moralesches Empfinden' (75). Wolfgang Buck's 'Unmoral' outrages him (159). At one point Diederich becomes violent, thinking that family members are pocketing money that rightfully belongs to him (160). During the Dauer trial Diederich attempts to assert his morality in the face of the falsehood and decadence around him: 'Ich meinerseits... bekennen mich zu meinem Handlungen, denn sie sind der Ausfluß einer tadellosen Lebenswandel, der auch im eigenen Hause auf Ehre hält und welcher Lüge noch Sittenlichkeit kennt?' (176). After making one illegal deal with Napoleon Fischer after another, Diederich fears he is being double-crossed but fails to recognize the contradiction in his appeal to justice: 'Verrat überall, Intrag, feindlicher Verdacht – und nirgends schlichte deutsche Treue' (299). Particularly revealing of Diederich's double standards and humorism in his complexity is Diederich's reaction to Kienzl's solution to their argument over the new machine. After lying to Kienzl about the success and extent of his business, fudging with the machine, paying off his machinist, and trying to swindle Kienzl's company, Diederich responds to Kienzl's suggestion of self-righteous amazement: 'Aber hören Sie mal, das ist Wecker!' Diederich's Gerechtigkeitsinnern empörte sich laut (149). Diederich's perceived sense of justice becomes especially clear when his use of the concept implies power for himself not fairness to others. In an earlier passage the narrator writes of Diederich: 'Während er dies sagte, empfand er es als durchaus unberedigt, daß er irgendwie sollte gezogen werden können, die beiden [Diederich's sister] am Geschäft zu beteiligen' (123). This contradictory concept of justice already surfaces in the first pages of the novel when the narrator suggests that Diederich's 'Gerechtigkeitsinnern' manifests itself only to his own advantage (9). Indeed, when Diederich considers the rights of the other, in this case the young Wolfgang Buck, he does so only for fear of Buck's potential power.

These genuine contradictions are mirrored by the novel's numerous aesthetic contrasts and odd juxtapositions, which add to the reader's sense of contradiction. While drinking beer with the Nationists, Diederich imagines himself as the head of a great postcard or toilet paper factory. 'Was man mit seiner Lebensarbeit schief, war in tausend Händen' (24). A later allusion to his genuine power is equally undercut by its banality. Under the trademark 'Vonmacht!' Diederich begins manufacturing toilet paper imprinted with 'moralische und staatspflichtende Maximen' (331). Diederich's statement that he has no doubts as to the future, for he has seen the Emperor's eyes flash, gives us yet another combination of the seemingly meaningful and the ludicrous (156). Especially comical are the many quotes from the Kaiser shoved inappropriately into the mouth of the little industrialists, for example the following lines from his inaugural address to his workers:


Other odd juxtapositions derive from Diederich's diction; Napoleon Fischer's supercilious and passive resistance upsets Diederich: 'Es heifß Diederich sich gebändert, dieser ruhiger war der andere. Diese Ruhe war Aufruhr!' (190). With purely aesthetic means Mann creates here the effect of inconsistency. Similar in effect to such odd juxtapositions are the outrageous analogies Diederich makes between himself and the state. Clearly incongruous, they add symbolic weight to our sense that Diederich's genuine self is disappearing in his subservience to power, specifically, to the power of the nation, as well as through his identification with social norms, his family, and his country.

80 These passages would seem to be deliberate echoes to Fließer's famous image at the conclusion of Die Zukunft: Ein Wunderwunderluden, especially when one considers them together with Wolfgang Buck's description of the future: 'Es wind кноп по Laffov' (173).
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as paradoxically to our understanding of Diederich's own sense of self as inflated. Towards the end of the novel Diederich falsely imagines his power to be analogous to that of a great statesman or nation. As Diederich notices that Emma is getting along with, and might even marry, Wolfgang Buck, whom Diederich has just conquered in the political sphere, he decides: "Warum nicht! Bismarck hat es auch so gemacht mit Österreich. Zuerst niedergezogen, dann ein Biindnis!!" (346). Equally insidious is the passage where Diederich hesitates as he enters Old Buck's abode: "Unser alter Kaiser hat sich wahrscheinlich mit zusammenzunehmen miserablen, als er nach Wilhelmshöhe zu dem gänzlich erfolglosen Napoleon ging" (362-63). Throughout our reading we find examples of terms, concepts, or reactions that are out of place. Diederich refers to Delitzsch's death at the beer table as 'Pud auf dem Felde der Ehre' (17). Diederich employs the terms "heroic" and "sublime" to describe the outright murder of a worker: "Für mich... hat der Vorgang etwas direkt Großartiges, sozusagen Majestätisches. Daß da einer, der fleiβig wird, einfach abgeschossen werden kann, ohne Urteil, auf offener Straße! Bedenken Sie: mitten in unserem bürgerlichen Stumpfhaus kommt so was - Herrschesse vor! Da sieht man doch, was Macht heißt." (109)

Diederich's nationalism is brought to the point of absurdity when he shouts that if a lunatic asylum is established in Nettzig, it must at least be a loyal one (194). When Jadasensoh, one of the novel's most eager power positives, explains that he must reduce his ears for political reasons, Diederich responds with admiration and respect (313). Diederich's appeal to the Emperor when arguing for a canal in Nettzig as an outrageous Heusenstiel suggests that it amounts to "eine Majestät" (249). Even more out of place is Diederich's solemn statement on the first night of his honeymoon: "Bevor wir zur Suche selbst schreiten", sagte er abgebacht, "gedenken wir Seiner Majestät unserer allergrößtesten Kaiser. Denn die Suche hat den bisherigen Zweck, daß wir Seiner Majestät Ehre machen und tüchtige Soldaten liefern." (276)

Diederich's occasional outbreaks of sentimentality also strike us as absurd, not only because of their overdone emotionalism but because of the various objects of his lament, as for example when he cries at his release from the

35 Diederich's firm assertion of power is undercut in another comic passage: "Diederich fällt den Huhlen auf seinem Kopf, er schlägt gegen den Bibel an seiner Seite und sagt: ‘Ich bin auch stark!’ Der Vorlektor hieß in für eine Rekonsolidation und zählte den dazuklaren Geld nochmal vor’ (120).
36 The alert reader will have noticed that Diederich's absurd statements and incongruous behaviour follow logically from his illogical position. On one level, Diederich's actions are incongruous, comic, and absurd; on another, they form a very close logic, for they are the consequences of his self-cancelling and self-position.
37 Heironich Mann’s Der Untertan

military (40). Still more striking are Diederich’s overinterpretations and misinterpretations. When Diederich runs into a few difficulties trying to win Agnes’ affection, he suddenly feels ‘als verstehe er jetzt das Schicksal’ (18). When Delitzsch’s beer glass is taken away from him, Diederich sees in its face ‘den ganzen, stürmisch bewegten Ernst des Daseins’ (23). Finally, when Diederich hears the seer’s shot in chapter three, he is sure that the revolution has started (105).

The novel also presents us with abrupt transitions that give us a sense of incongruity. Almost immediately after condemning von Büsten’s lack of moral dignity, Diederich abandons his epistemical principles and, when von Büsten’s car passes, bows before him (300). Another takes place when Diederich shifts from glaringcondescendingly at Heusenstiel to begging him plaintively to examine his throat (127). There are countless other examples of comedy in the novel. When Diederich projects the Neustronien on to the plot of Wagner’s Lohengrin (365-70), when he runs around Rome with the Emperor and arranges a would-be marriage carrying tooth powder (324), or when he finds himself at the unwelcoming ceremony ‘unter dem Rednerpult, im Wasser hockend’ (369). These absurd acts add aesthetic force to the global self-cancellation of Diederich’s position. They also place the reader in a detailed frame, from which to view with a sense of the comic the events of the novel and, in particular, the consistent inconsistencies of its hero. The narrator takes Diederich Helling’s veneration of power to the limits. Der Untertan, which awakens both laughter and reflection through its reducere ad absurdum, is a comic novel with a philosophical argument. By showing Diederich’s position in all its absurdity the novel offers an imminent refutation of arrogance. Diederich’s incongruous and comic position is essentially self-destructive and self-cancelling. Much as Plato argued that the unjust bring about their own destruction (Republic 375c), Heinrich Mann suggests that Diederich’s position carries its own seeds of destruction. His love of power and of subjection to power inspires him in his ‘selbstmörderische Begrüßung’ (76), Diederich admires ‘die Macht ... noch wenn sie uns zerschmettern’ (47).

38 Cf. similarly 243
39 Sidereich provides a list of comic moments in the novel, many of them comic. While drawing comparisons between contemporary cartoon characters and Der Untertan, Bruno Fuchs also notes several passages with comic import.
40 The two self-referential allusions to the incomplete nature of the novel as a genre contribute similarly to aesthetic distance (5, 271).
41 Plato suggests at the end of the Republic that the just individual has in the long run more success than the unjust—even though justice is independent of success (612b-16c). As a corollary to this in Der Untertan one might consider the above-mentioned references to Diederich’s suicidal character and Olj Buck’s reference to ‘die ewige Greueligkeit’ (229) together with the glimmer of hope Old Buck sketches in chapter six (346). Nonetheless, the novel specifically refrains from offering the traditional comic ending in which the character who represents extreme subjectivity and power invar
After sketching Dierich Holling's concept of justice as the advantage of the more powerful, I draw attention to inconsistencies in his behaviour and suggested that these arose, necessarily, from his philosophical position. Dierich's concept of injustice or power position in philosophically untenable. Mann portrays the self-cancellation of this position not only in the content of the novel but in its formal aspects as well. Odd juxtapositions, expressions out of place, paradoxes, abrupt transitions, and non sequiturs, aesthetic elements that give the novel much of its tension, function as the aesthetic corollary of Dierich's self-contradictory concept of injustice.

By the same degree to which content and form diverge for Thrasonides and Gregorius as they try to argue disinterestedly and objectively for justice, Heinrich Mann has unified content and form, showing the self-cancellation of injustice through aesthetic means. In so doing he has given a formal portrayal of a conceptual truth, what one philosopher has called the purpose of art. 64

Indem nun aber die Kunst die Aufgabe hat, die Idee für die unmöglichste Anschauung in tiefster Gestalt und nicht in Form des Denkens und der reinen Geisterhaft überhaupt darzustellen und diesen Darstellt seinen Wert und Würdigkeit in dem Entgegen und der Einheit beider Seiten der Idee und ihrer Geltung hat, so wird die Hände und Vorteilhaftigkeit der Kunst in der ihnen Gegenwärtigen Realiät von dem Grade der Innschau und Einigkeit abhängt, zu welcher Idee und Gestalt ineinandergearbeitet erscheinen.

Logical structures and their means of illustration are what make a work of art universal. Der Untertan not only unifies the peculiar view of German bourgeois society, it provides a universal problem. 65

goals either succeed or fail. We might today call Holling's portal access and Mann's tent with tradition Beckett. Not only does Mann portray comic inconsistencies, he offers no simple solution; instead, he portrays the reader who lives in a society where such subjectivity still prevails to work through these contradictions and understand their consequences.

64 Hegel, XIII, 103. For Hegel, being the mere negation of negativity, does not yet spell out the absolute and cannot be viewed as the consistent of art: aesthetics, Mann's coherent aesthetic portrayal of a philosophically truth does correspond to Hegel's view of the basic function of art. The idea that art may serve philosophical truth in a positive or educative-historic manner seems to have fallen into disrepute recently: Hegel's reading of the late Sophocles presents convincing arguments for the emergence of this idea as well as a clear demonstration of its integrative power.

Readers accustomed to studying philosophy and literature primarily or exclusively under the rubric of influence will be tempted to ask whether evidence exists for Mann's knowledge of the principles of the self-cancellation of injustice. In his political career, most especially the important essays from the time of "Europäische Politik" (Kaiserreich und Republik), Mann speaks at length of "Gerechtigkeit," inscribing it with truth and wisdom and constituting it to the realm of blood power, terror, anxiety, and lies. Along