

# Transcodification in Dürrenmatt. The example of *Die Panne*

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## Summary

The Swiss dramatist Friedrich Dürrenmatt re-used material of his short story *Die Panne* (1956) for the homonymous drama (1979). A 'core fable' was thus transposed from the narrative code into the drama code system. This transcodification results in a change of order of message units and turns the narrative parataxis into a multiple dramatic hypotaxis. The distance of 25 years in writing time calls for the substitution of numerous signifiers, semantically 'transparent' in 1956, but opaque in 1979. The change from metaliterary discourse to intrafictional discourse is one of the main acts of transcodification.

## Opsomming

Die Switserse dramaturg Friedrich Dürrenmatt het weer materiaal van sy kortverhaal *Die Panne* vir sy gelyknamige drama (1979) gebruik. 'n 'Kernfabel' is op hierdie wyse van die vertelkode na die dramakodesistiem oorgeplaas. Hierdie transkodering bring 'n verandering in die volgorde van boodskapseenhede mee en verander die vertellende parataksis na 'n veelvoudige dramatiese hipotaksis. Die verskil van 25 jaar in die skryftyd beteken die vervanging van talryke betekenisdraers, wat in 1956 semanties 'deursigtig' was, maar wat in 1979 ondeursigtig geword het. Die oorgang van metaliterêre diskoers na intrafiksionele diskoers is 'n belangrike aspek van hierdie transkodering.

Transcodification is the act of transposing a message from one code into another. Within the world of literature, or fiction, the best known act of transcodification is the staging of a play, where theatre people transcode a written text governed by the literary code into oral, gestural, kinesic and proxemic code elements. The transposition of a fable from the narrative genre into the dramatic genre confronts us with the problematics of genre as relevant semiological unit. Italian semiologists have stressed the semiological relevance of genre. According to Maria Corti and Cesare Segre (Mincu, 1982: 37–40; 53), genre is bound up with the question of literary communication, since it creates a certain *Erwartungshorizont*. Genre is the framework within which the relationship between literature and society becomes manifest, the framework, where a work enters a complex network of relations with other works already known to belong to the genre in question. Genre is a complex of rules and restrictions which govern the production of texts. Can genre be called a code?

Every code consists of a certain number of semantic constituents and of a syntax. The semantic aspect of code is not to be located in the thematic contents – or fable – used, but rather is the basic enunciating situation: narrative mediation through a narrator, formerly seen as a simple formal aspect, is a semantic structure. Form is already meaning. The famous 'absence of the author' from the drama text as well as the fact that a personage is believed to 'invent' his speeches at the very moment of enunciation, are both

semantic constituents of the dramatic code. As regards the code syntax, Genette's narrative *anisochronies* on the one hand, and the complex relationship between scenic time (stage time) and historic time (fable time) in drama on the other hand, are clearly visible constituents of the respective code syntax. The concept of *ellipsis*, vital for both the narrative and the dramatic genre, is borrowed from the general terminology of syntax. As a network of rules and restrictions, as an ensemble of semantic components and a syntax, as a framework wherein socio-cultural expectations are fulfilled or denied, genre deserves to be called a code. The transposition of a fable from the narrative genre into the dramatic genre is therefore a transcodification. As such, it has to build into its product, the drama text, still in linguistic terms, the essential code elements by means of which the final artefact, the performance, can be decoded by the final receiver.

The transcodification of narrative sign systems into drama sign systems proceeds from two sources: (a) from sources external to the transcodifier, as for Shakespeare, when he makes use of the *Chronicles* and Italian Renaissance short stories, and for almost all film scriptwriters: (b) from sources internal to the transcodifier, as for Pirandello and Dürrenmatt and his *Die Panne*. In an exemplary article, Ulrich Leo has examined three of Pirandello's transcodifications (Leo, 1965:133 ff.). Only one of them he found to be valuable and dramatically efficient. Texts obtained by transcodification cannot strive to preserve slavishly the message of the source text; the codes governing the target text often impose severe restrictions. The solitary act of reading is quite different from the social act of attending a theatrical performance. Dürrenmatt himself (Dürrenmatt, 1980:64) has pondered what he calls 'die Transposition eines Stoffes in ein anderes Medium' (the transposition of a fable into another medium). He sees the act of transcodifying as less of a problem of imagination than one of thinking provoked by the target code. He continues: 'Transponieren ist oft schwieriger als Erfinden. War die Novelle nur Sprache und die Assoziationen, die sie heraufbeschwört(...), so ist Transposition auf das Theater Sprache plus Schauspieler plus Bühne – das Inkommensurable nimmt zu'. Dürrenmatt the theatre man sees the main problem better than Ulrich Leo the literary critic: he speaks of 'transposition onto stage' and not 'into drama'. The drama version of his own short story is entirely performance-orientated, as we hope to show.

Three texts have been published under the title *Die Panne*, viz. the short story of 1956 (henceforth called N), the radio play written concurrently or immediately after N (henceforth called R) and the 'Komödie' – 'black comedy' would be a more suitable term – of 1979 (henceforth called D).<sup>1</sup> This series of internal transcodifications shows a gap of almost a quarter century between N and D. This considerable difference in writing time called for a number of referential changes. In many respects R looks like an exercise and, as a radio play, has to jettison fundamental narrative segments without being able to compensate that loss with equally powerful theatrical signifiers.<sup>2</sup> For these reasons this contribution limits itself to a comparison of N and D. N was hailed, soon after its publication, as a masterpiece.<sup>3</sup> It comprises two parts, the first (5 pages) being devoted to reflections by the author on ways and

means of telling a story in the modern world. Can one still narrate personal experiences in a world marked by oversights, senseless accidents and disasters? The short story *Die Panne* is proposed as one of the 'still possible stories' and covers 100 pages in a coarse typography, well matched by expressive woodcuts. D comprises 117 pages, all in 'dialogue', and any authorial intervention (such as the first part of N) are discarded. Inevitably, transcodification causes changes of fable, of speech acts – the latter again being changes of fable structure, since, in drama, the action amounts to the sum total of the speech acts uttered by the personages. For a transcodification of this nature, one has to speak of the *core fable*. Our core fable runs as follows: A commercial traveller in textiles has a breakdown, a 'Panne', in a small country town. All hotels being fully booked, he finds accommodation in a private house. Four very old men are ready for dinner. They invite the traveller to take part in their game, which consists in discovering secret guilt not punished by ordinary courts. The four men ask innocuous questions which their dazzled guest is happy to answer, unaware of the many traps they lay for him. At the end of a luxurious meal, the traveller is condemned to death. All laugh, sing and drink merrily. In the morning, the traveller is found dead in his room.

The most important syntactic – and therefore semantic – difference between N and D lies in the rupture of factual linearity. D places the ending of the core fable, i.e. the death of the traveller, right at the beginning of its discourse and so does away with 'factual' suspense. Similarly to what happens in Greek tragedy, with its fable known beforehand, D, by means of its anticipated epilogue, promotes banal utterances and innocuous gestures to the rank of semantic redundancies which echo the initial message units. As far as the linguistic procedures of transcodification are concerned, they are well-known: direct speech is carried over without change – one is tempted to speak of 'zero transcodification' – indirect speech is transformed into direct speech. Then comes what one would call 'de-narrativization' of narrative segments,<sup>4</sup> i.e. their shifting onto the level of mimesis, be it as actual speech events or as didascalical segments<sup>5</sup> asking for physical events. To give but one example of denarrativized segments (from now on, all quotations from N and D are followed by numbers referring to the pages of the respective version):

(N29) Der Textilreisende erkundigte sich neugierig nach dem Verbrechen, das ihm nun zugemutet würde.

D (62) denarrativizes the narrative segment by turning the denomination *Textilreisender* into a didascalical segment, i.e. the personage's name, renders the speech act mentioned in mimetic form and hides the adverb *neugierig* in the interrogative:

TRAPS Was soll ich denn für ein Verbrechen begangen haben?

Furthermore, physical action told becomes physical action asked for – didascalical segments ('stage directions') are eminently conative – and descriptions are turned into didascalical segments prescribing the décor required. Some narrative segments, however, are refractory to transcodification; they cannot

or may not figure in the drama text because of their strong narrator-oriented or even authorial nature:

(N40) 'Nur die Primarschule durfte ich besuchen, nur die Primarschule', stellte er fest, Tränen in den Augen, erbittert und gerührt zugleich über seine karge Vergangenheit.

Refractory are the segments 'erbittert und gerührt zugleich über seine karge Vergangenheit' (embittered and at the same time moved by his indigent past). Tears can be mimed, but the reasons given for these tears cannot be voiced without disobeying the target code's restrictions. All these basic procedures could be applied mechanically, as many stage 'adaptations' are content to do. A man of Dürrenmatt's stature cannot be satisfied so easily. Furthermore, the 23 years elapsed between N and D are a formidable obstacle to any mechanical dramatization. By comparing section after section of N with section after section of D, one can but wonder at the dynamic way in which Dürrenmatt 'transposes onto stage'. The material of the core fable is reshaped, expanded or reduced; 'surface material' significant in 1956 but meaningless in 1979 (because of a change on the referential level), is replaced or cut. Dürrenmatt gives new weight to direct speech segments by assigning them to new speakers in D, thus remodelling both fable and status of the speakers concerned. All these changes are linked to fundamental theatrical codes.

Now to our tables. They all provide firstly an extract of N and afterwards the corresponding extract of D. The numbers in italics refer to specific textual segments or message units. The lines of both extracts are numbered and referred to in the text by // and the numbers concerned. In Table A, purely from the point of view of textual volume D is an expansion: the 7 lines of N generate 24 lines in D. N comprises 9 message units which we can type as follows:<sup>6</sup>

[pond] – [to sense] – [stone bench] – [sit down] – [stars in the water] – [coolness] – [village] – [musical sounds] – [festivity].

The first five units are related to the action of the commercial traveller and his defence counsel, who stroll through the garden after the hors-d'oeuvre, copiously washed down with wine. Units 6 and 7 refer to nature and to the world outside the property. These units reappear in D; *Teich* (D line 1), combined with unit 2 *wittern* (as against *ahnen* in N), gives an opening for the dialogue mechanism one may call 'rectification': '(it is not a pond) *ein Swimming-pool*'. This rectification introduces into D a 1979 signifier – it had become fashionable in the 70's to own swimming-pools, a fashion which the slightly tipsy counsel comments upon sarcastically.<sup>7</sup>

Unit 3, *Gartenbank*, the rewriting of N's *Steinbank*, is a redundant signal, motivated by the rather thin décor: stage furniture and speech are called upon to create a garden space well distinguished from the 'court room'. Next, the defence counsel Kummer *orders* a garden bench. The personage utters a

Table A *Expansion* (N 53–54 > D 111–112)

Dann kam ein Teich, sie ahnten eine  
 Steinbank, setzten sich. Sterne spie-  
 gelten sich im Wasser. Kühle stieg  
 auf. Vom Dorfe her Handharmonika-  
 klänge und Gesang, auch ein Alp-  
 horn war jetzt zu hören, der Klein-  
 viehzüchterverband feierte.

TRAPS Vorsichtig. Hier wittere ich einen Teich.

KUMMER Ein Swimming-pool mit Umwäl-Umwäl- mit Umwälzpumpe.

Die Gartenbank. *Von rechts wird eine Gartenbank hereingeschoben.*

KUMMER Danke schön! Setzen wir uns. *Sie setzen sich auf die Bank.*

5 *Kummer bietet Traps eine Zigarre an. Havanna?*

TRAPS Habe die Ehre.

KUMMER Die gleiche raucht Fidel Castro. *Sie beissen die Zigarre an.*

TRAPS *bietet sein Feuerzeug an. Feuer?*

KUMMER Streichhölzer, mein Freund. Zigarren brennt man mit

10 Streichhölzern an. *Markiert Zigarrenanzünden, erhebt sich. Kühle steigt auf. Die hat man nötig in dieser Sommernacht. Zieht seine Jacke aus, gibt sie einem Bühnenarbeiter rechts aussen. Setzt sich wieder, schaut nach unten. Wega. Deneb. Atair.*

TRAPS Wie bitte?

15 KUMMER Die Sommersterne. Sie spiegeln sich im Wasser. *Lässt die Zigarre fallen, erhebt sich wieder, nimmt eine neue Zigarre aus der Tasche, markiert Anzündern.*

TRAPS Keine Ahnung von den Sternen.

KUMMER Wieder Mozart. [7] + [8]

20 TRAPS Verstehe nichts von klassischer Musik.

KUMMER Wieder Es-Dur. *Setzt sich auf die Bank.*

TRAPS Mir zu feierlich.

KUMMER Der Gemeindepräsident liegt im Sterben. [9]

TRAPS Ach so.

segment as conative as the author's stage indication would have been. The theatrical act of ordering a stage property transforms Kummer into a sort of 'mini-director'. In this unit, discourse shifts onto the metatheatrical level, i.e. it brings into view the working process of the stage.

In D, where the following two units are inverted – a minor change of syntax – Unit 6 [Kühle], generates the physical action of taking off the jacket, an action again combined with a theatrical exchange between stage and back stage, and, after this second metatheatrical glimpse, Unit 5 [Sterne] is entrusted to four speech acts. Sitting down, Kummer mutters three strange words (speech act 1), which, to Traps, can only be some unknown legal gibberish, whence his asking for information (speech act 2). The counsel supplies this information (speech act 3): 'the summer stars'. His explanation recalls *Sommernacht* (line 11) – D takes care to remind the receiver of the season in which the trial takes place, in summer, not in winter and under heavy snow, as one of the film versions of our fable decided to have it. Traps' reply (line 18), i.e. speech act 4, is polysemic: firstly, it concretizes the basic semantic trait [Lack of education], and secondly, because of the anticipated epilogue, the lexeme *Sterne* is understood as a metaphor for 'fate', the sign of the traveller's lacking insight into his imminent fate. Unit 5 is cleverly theatricalized: the final (or 'true') receiver of the discourse is not better informed of the meaning of the three strange words than Traps. This unit, together with the didascalical segments, establishes the momentary scenic space, i.e. the garden and the water at the personage's feet. The gesture – the look down – establishes the presence of water before the discourse speaks of it in terms of language. The theatrical signifier, i.e. the movement of the personage's head, takes precedence of the language signifier.

In line 19, D concentrates two different elements which replace the narrative units 7 and 8 – hence the square brackets in our table: the adverb *wieder* refers to the iterative event of hearing music coming from the village; *Mozart* replaces the village's musical patriotism alluded to in N and refers to a more solemn festivity. Both N and D motivate their respective 'music'; the small-bourgeois festivity of N is transformed into a funeral ceremony given to the mayor. Again, the unit [music by Mozart] concretizes the traveller's lack of cultural education. The latter's last speech (line 24) shows the man's indifference to the mayor's death – to any death, for that matter, including his own, an indifference of course semantically loaded by the information supplied by the anticipated epilogue. Whilst in N, the garden scene is a glimpse of nature, of the outside world, the garden scene of D, of which our extract gives only a part, is built on multiple semantic cross-references, on scenic and linguistic redundancies, through which past action is recalled or future action announced. The outside world, functioning, in N, as a comforting background to the verbose happenings in the house, is embedded into D's dramatic and theatrical texture. The representatives of nature (stars) and outside life (village music) each in turn form a new deictic orientation of the discourse.<sup>8</sup>

Into this series of semantic units taken over from N, D weaves a new semantic unit [Cigar]. On the one hand, this unit is motivated by a certain realism – what do men do after a drink and a meal? They smoke. On the other

hand, this unit is again subordinated to the major semantic trait [Lack of education]: the traveller has no social manners, knows nothing of the stars and is indifferent to classical music. N's garden scene is very clearly a *paratactic* organism in which all units are aligned in a linear way. Only the last sentence is tied to the previous one by an inexplicit cause-and-effect relationship. D's garden scene is a complex *hypotactic* organism, where gesture governs discourse and where discourse governs gesture, a texture furthermore subordinated to a metatheatrical stance.

Table B contrasts 18 lines of narrative text with 7 lines of drama text. As

**Table B** *Reduction and Change of Order within Zero Transcodification*  
(N88-89 > D133)

Betrachten wir den Verehrten, unseren liebsten Alfredo! Diesem Gangster von Chef war er also ausgeliefert und fuhr seinen Citroen durch die Gegend. Noch vor einem Jahr! Er hätte stolz darauf sein können, unser Freund, dieser Vater von vier Kinderchen, dieser Sohn eines Fabrikarbeiters. Und mit Recht. Noch im Kriege war er Hausierer gewesen, nicht einmal das, ohne Patent, ein Vagabund mit illegitimer Textilware, ein kleiner Schwarzhändler, mit der Bahn von Dorf zu Dorf oder zu Fuss über Feldwege, oft kilometer weit durch dunkle Wälder nach fernen Höfen, eine schmutzige Ledertasche umgehängt, oder gar einen Korb, einen halbgeborstenen Koffer in der Hand. Nun hatte er sich verbessert, in ein Geschäft eingeknistet, war Mitglied der liberalen Partei, im Gegensatz zu seinem Marxistentvater. Doch wer ruht auf dem Aste aus, der endlich erklettert ist, wenn über ihm, dem Gipfel zu, poetisch gesagt, sich weitere Aeste mit noch besseren Früchten zeigen? Zwar verdiente er gut, flitzte mit seinem Citroen von Textilgeschäft zu Textilgeschäft, die Maschine war nicht schlecht, doch unser Alfredo sah links und rechts neue Modelle auftauchen, vorbeisausen, ihm entgegenrasen und ihn überholen. Der Wohlstand stieg im Land, wer wollte da nicht mittun?

ZORN Betrachten wir unseren bewunderten, liebsten Freund Alfredo! Unseren Vater von vier Kinderchen. Diesem Gangster von Chef war er also ausgeliefert – zeigt auf Wucht. Fredi hatte sich zwar verbessert, er verdiente gut im Gegensatz zu seinem Marxistentvater. Aber der Wohlstand stieg im Lande. Wer wollte da nicht mittun? Wer ruht schon auf dem Aste aus, der endlich erklettert ist, wenn sich über ihm, dem Wipfel zu, weitere Aeste mit noch besseren Früchten zeigen? Hebt Pilets Melone in die Höhe.

far as textual volume is concerned, it is a reduction. Linguistically, it is a 'zero transcodification', since the narrative passage is given already as a direct quotation. N's prosecutor delivers a masterpiece of rhetorics, with its constant use of parallel segments (peddler-tramp-blackmarket rat/friend-father-son/ improve his lot-found a place-became a member), all of which form one hyperbolic expansion of the recurrent semantic trait [Traps' poor upbringing] over 6 lines, the metaphor of the fruit tree, the ironical antithesis *liberale Partei* vs. *Marxistenvater*, and finally with its powerful allusion to new cars which connects the end of the speech with its beginning (the traveller's old motor). All in all, this is a very handy piece of rhetoric, offering itself to be taken over by D without further ado. Instead, D processes the material in a drastic way. In order to purify its discourse from allusions referring to writing time, D cuts all references to the traveller's miserable past, his petty crimes and the speed of economic change and prepares the way to bring out the traveller's final guilt more convincingly. Then, D reduces the rhetorical parallelisms to single elements, as for instance in Unit 3, which is scaled down to one neutral sentence, *Fredi hatte sich verbessert*. The ironic antithesis liberal party vs. Marxist father' is replaced by the new antithesis [son earning well] vs. [Marxist father does not]. This amounts to the combination of N's units 4 and 6: the political opposition is reinforced by the economic one. Finally, D connects and inverts the two rhetorical questions (N units 8 'Wer wollte . . .' and Unit 5 'Doch wer ruht. . .'). In D, the watered-down metaphor of the fruit tree now forms the closure of the prosecutor's speech, in a more 'polished' form as well.<sup>9</sup> Besides pruning them, D organizes the semantic units of N in a new and more coherent syntax: they now appear in the order 2-1-3-6-4-7-8-5. This change of order and reduction would not exceed the limits of a simple textual rewriting, had not D exploited the presence, within the scenic space, of the prosecutor's intrafictional listeners. The 2 didascalic segments (lines 3 and 7) imply Wucht the judge and Pilet the hangman. By indicating Wucht, when he utters the syntagma *Gangster von Chef*, the prosecutor indicts the judge of having a similarly negative character. What looks rather playful at this stage, is to become an important side argument for the defence counsel, when he reminds his friends of their former not exactly corruption-free careers. The gesture asked for in D can therefore be considered as a *dramatic prolepsis* (anticipation of elements to come). The didascalic segment concerning the hangman's bowler hat is even more striking. The metaphor of the fruit tree is cleverly theatricalized. The new order of units emphasizes the lexeme *Früchte* and generates a word play and a stage action. German *Melone* means both 'melon' (thus a fruit) and 'bowler hat'. This homonymy is exploited by means of a syllogism: 'among the fruit, there are the melons, the *Melone* (= the hat) is thus a fruit which I am now going to pick'. In lifting the hat, the speaker abolishes for a moment the linguistic homonymy; his gesture aims solely at the 'fruit'. The consequences of the gesture are not of a linguistic, but of a dramatic, nature: the owner of the hat resents the loss – and misuse – of his hat, of his clown's attribute. Like Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*, the hangman is the clown of the play.<sup>10</sup> What seemed to be nothing but a playful gesture triggers off some bickering be-



tween the offended hangman and the prosecutor. The material taken from N is theatricalized in a convincing manner: two important units are turned into deictic orientations of dramatic discourse. Transcodification does not simply re-use direct speech, but places them into a 'I here/You there' situation. We conclude from this evidence that there is in fact no such thing as 'zero transcodification'.

In Table C, narrative text and drama text are more or less equal in volume. The typically narrator-orientated structure (N lines 2–4) is of course omitted in D; the powerful description of the Counsel's monstrous face would prejudice, in a production, the choice of possible actors. The narrative extract gives the beginning of the counsel's plea, rendered, strangely enough, in indirect speech, whilst the prosecutor's arguments had been mostly direct quotations: the uniform direct speech which D is forced to entrust to both speakers destroys a highly characteristic difference between the two lawyer's speeches in N.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, D is compelled to discard another essential feature of N, i.e. the semiologically important square brackets (N lines 9–10). These brackets, an important textual signifier, isolate Traps' interjections from the 'main speech' and underline their inefficiency. This 'typographical' isolation is the *graphic metaphor* of the victim's helplessness at this moment of the action: his objections are utterly ignored by the four lawyers, who start toying with their guest. Here arises a transcodification problem: how is this isolation to be inscribed into D without authorial intervention, without didascalic give-away? D (line 20) assigns a line to Kummer, in which heavy emphasis is put on the pronoun *du*, reinforced by the apostrophe *Mein lieber Fredi*. This emphasis clearly separates 'dear Freddy' from the *we* referring to the other personages. The isolation is embodied in the dramatic discourse, and producers will take care to show the isolation by means of the proxemic code.

Back to the top of the extract. D is more good-humoured and less formal than N and indeed seems to emphasize the 'deadly game' (title of a film version of *Die Panne*) rather than the miming of legal procedure. Again, the iterative nature of those trial sessions is alluded to by the adverb *wie immer* (D line 4). D 'physically' brings onto stage two previous victims during the anticipated epilogue and disseminates iterative markers throughout its discourse. N's adjective *erfindungsreich* is kept and considerably expanded (D lines 4–6). This expansion, ironically devoted to the truth in poetry, links up with the garden scene (D111–112) where the defence counsel had elaborated on his poetic output. The efficient simile, *aus Nebelfetzen einen handfesten Rock zusammenweben* (to weave a solid frock from patches of fog) is the dramatically convincing proof of the counsel's poetic endeavour. He is pleased with himself and shows it, as the didascalic segment (D line 14) wants him to do. Our extract confronts us with an important facet of transcodification, i.e. that change from the word 'read' into the word 'spoken'. The grapheme *y* in the name *Gygax* is pronounced [i] in Switzerland, but [y] in Germany. This difference is irrelevant in N – every reader gives the grapheme in question his own sound representation – but it is pertinent in D. The drama exploits this difference and incorporates it into the conflict opposing prosecutor and counsel, the former pronouncing it the German way, the latter

Table C *Indirect to direct speech* (N106 > D142)

Er habe mit Vergnügen der erfindungsreichen Rede des Herrn Staatsanwaltes zugehört, führte Herr Kummer aus, den Zwicker vom roten aufgequollenen Fleischklumpen seines Gesichtes hebend und mit kleinen, zierlichen, geometrischen Gesten dozierend. Gewiss, der alte Gangster  
 5 Gygax sei tot, sein Klient habe schwer unter ihm zu leiden gehabt, sich auch in eine wahre Animosität gegen ihn hineingesteigert, ihn zu stürzen versucht, wer wolle dies bestreiten, wo komme dies nicht vor, phantastisch sei nur, diesen Tod eines herzkranken Geschäftsmannes als Mord hinzustellen. [*Aber ich habe doch gemordet*, protestierte Traps, wie aus  
 10 den Wolken gefallen.]\*

KUMMER Meine lieben Freunde, mein liebster Oberbösewicht Fredi. Ich hörte mit Vergnügen der erfindungsreichen Rede zu, die unser Staatsanwalt eben hielt. *Traps schneuzt sich.*

KUMMER *schüttelt den Kopf* Wie immer war sie eine artistische Gipfel-  
 5 leistung in der Kunst, ein Märchen zu erzählen. Dichte ich in meinen Mussestunden, dichtet er in seinem Beruf. Gewiss der alte Boss Gygax ist tot.

ZORN Gügax.

KUMMER *wird unwillig* Gigax ist tot. Mein Klient hatte schwer unter  
 10 ihm zu leiden, steigerte sich auch in eine wahre Animosität gegen ihn hinein, versuchte ihn zu stürzen, zugegeben, wo kommt das nicht vor. Phantastisch nur, aufgrund dieser Tatsachen den Tod des herzkranken Textilgenies als Mord hinzustellen, als wolle einer aus Nebelfetzen einen handfesten Rock zusammenweben. *Klatscht in die Hände.*

15 TRAPS Aber ich habe doch gemordet.

KUMMER Glaubst du, mein lieber Fredi, glaubst du.

\*The square brackets are in the original text.

keeping to the Swiss pronunciation. The ensuing argument, perhaps inspired to Dürrenmatt during rehearsals, crops up whenever the prosecutor wants to weaken the counsels position.

Now to two acts of transcodification not covered by the tables. The name of the traveller's product, *Hephaiston*, invites the judge to dwell on the mythological anecdote of Aphrodite and Ares caught in Hephaistos' golden net (N44). At the corresponding action phase of D, the mythological joke dear to

the classically schooled lawyer is eliminated (D 105). Instead, the drama text enlarges the judge's mischievous remark into a cosmic finale, subordinating it to the central theme of guilt and innocence, so well expounded by critics (Holdheim, 1965:100). In a world of 'schuldlosen Schuldigen und der schuldigen Schuldlosen' (of the innocent guilty and of the guilty innocent, D 162), the gods are the true guilty ones and are to be executed. Reciting their poetic acts of accusation, the four lawyers fire their pistols at the five planets, the astrological representatives of divine power. N's mythological joke is re-wrought into an eminently theatrical instrument: aiming at the gods, the four men fire at the stage lights, which a careful director will switch off one after the other, as the shots ring through the theatre. In theatrical language, the darkening lights would stand for the death of the guilty gods, killed by the four old men, the timeless, god-like judges of the play.

The other transcodification is an extreme one, i.e. the creation of a personage non-existing in the narrative source text. Pirandello did this very thing in his *Così è (se vi pare)*.<sup>12</sup> D follows suit and introduces the female personage of Justine von Fuhr, the judge's granddaughter. 'Vordergründig' – at the surface, as the author mentions himself (Dürrenmatt, 1980:64), Justine is her grandfather's 'galante Mordwaffe' (amorous murder weapon); it is she who ensnares the visitors coming to the house by her daring appearance as well as by her alluring tales of her married and widowed life. This mysterious being is 'eine Ergänzung des Stoffes, den die Bühne nun einmal erzwingt' (an addition to the fable, required by the stage). Dürrenmatt might have thought that theatrical conventions ask for a strong female part to make the play come over. Yet, in actantial terms (according to the Greimas model), Justine is no more than an adjuvant to the lawyer's action. Where dit N sketch a female presence? The name *Justine* is significant: save for the last two phonemes, this name is identical with the term *Justiz* (justice). N(105) mentions that Traps is inebriated by the word *Justiz*. Justice has indeed been represented allegorically by a woman. Justine's allegorical origin is made visible by the red evening dress she is required to wear for the judgment scene (D 154). Recollections of the work by the Marquis de Sade – *Justine* is the title of one of the Marquis' books – might be accountable for Justine's promiscuous behaviour in D's anticipated epilogue. The addition of Justine is an important modification of the core fable.

To conclude this review of the major transcodification acts, the change of speakers deserves our attention. Most of them, however, remain well inside the framework of the core fable. One 'change of voice' is quite of another calibre. Part One of N, as mentioned before, contains authorial reflections on the art of story-telling in the modern world. The author states (N 10–11):

Das Schicksal hat die Bühne verlassen, auf der gespielt wird, um hinter den Kulissen zu lauern, ausserhalb der gültigen Dramaturgie(. . .) So droht kein Gott mehr, keine Gerechtigkeit, kein Fatum wie in der fünften Symphonie, sondern Verkehrsunfälle, Deichbrüche infolge Fehlkonstruktion, Explosion einer Atombombenfabrik, hervorgerufen durch einen zerstreuten Laboranten, falsch eingestellte Brutmaschinen. In diese Welt der Pannen führt unser Weg.

In spite of its unco-ordinated, irrational nature, this world of mishaps still allows narrator and reader to meet in the intersubjectivity of *unser Weg* (our path). A private breakdown can still inspire a possible story, for it can acquire the status of an *exemplum*, show the power of law and justice and throw light on grace. These profound metaliterary thoughts are assigned in D to the judge, with quite a different orientation. The problem of telling stories becomes the difficulty of sentencing somebody in a world where everybody is innocent and where all are guilty. Without elaborating on Hondheim's (1965) very clear arguments, let us see how the judge motivates his verdict:

WUCHT In einer Welt der schuldigen Schuldlosen und der schuldlosen Schuldigen hat das Schicksal die Bühne verlassen, und an seine Stelle ist der Zufall getreten, die Panne. (*Kommt nach vorne zu Traps.*) Das Zeitalter der Notwendigkeit machte dem Zeitalter der Katastrophen Platz – undichte Virenkulturen, gigantische Fehlspekulationen, unermessliche Schiebungen, durchschmelzende Atomreaktoren, zerberstende Oeltanker, zusammenkrachende Jumbo-Jets, Stromausfälle in Riesenstädten, Hekatomben von Unfalltoten in zerquetschten Karrosserien. In dieses Universum bist du geraten, mein lieber Alfredo Traps.

As compared to N, the judge's speech reduces the theatrical imagery to the one worn-down metaphor *die Bühne verlassen* (leave the stage). The number of catastrophies is considerably increased. They reflect all the fears and apprehensions of our time (1979). They are not explained anymore as results of human error; they have become universal and autonomous. This universe of catastrophes excludes guilt – the judge acquits the traveller. His so-called 'crime' was nothing but a mishap. In the judge's speech, there is no meeting place for, and no bond between, speaker and addressee; Traps is to struggle alone in this cruel and dehumanized universe. Pushed to almost grotesque, nightmarish proportions, the author's reflections on story-telling are changed into an accusation thrown at the whole universe, and pronounced, *en situation*, before a distraught listener inside the dramatic fiction. From metaliterary discourse to intrafictional discourse – a more decided act of transcodification is difficult to find. More than a transcodification, Dürrenmatt's drama *Die Panne* is a very precise translation (in the sense of George Steiner's *After Babel*) of Dürrenmatt's preoccupations and visions, the recreation, through time but within the same language, of an already existing semantic whole.

## Notes

1. The texts can be found in the following editions: (N) *Die Panne. Eine noch mögliche Geschichte*, Zürich: Arche, 1956; (R and D) *Die Panne. Ein Hörspiel und eine Komödie*, Zürich: Arche, 1980, Werkausgabe, vol. 16.
2. Descriptive passages of N, for instance, are given to personages, who thereby assume a pseudo-auctorial status for the listener familiar with N.
3. Brock-Sulzer (1960:118).
4. We draw on Genette's term *discours narrativisé*. This is extreme diegesis, in which the speech event is freed from all mimetic traces (1972:191).

5. The 'didascalical segments' of drama text are all those textual segments not given in 'dialogue form', i.e. the segments traditionally called 'stage directions', the title of the drama, the list of characters, the indications of fable time and the organization into sequences or 'acts', etc. The drama text, therefore, is made up from two components, i.e. the 'text to be spoken' (in Roman) and the 'didascalical text' (in Italics or capitals).
6. Semantic traits and message units, understood as abstract entities and not as surface realizations, are given in square brackets.
7. Other signifiers changed as a result of the difference in writing time: if N needs, as the traveller's status symbol, the name of a luxurious motor car, a Studebaker had to do the job in 1956; in D, we hear of a red Jaguar. In N(59), the defence counsel tells his client about a German general sentenced to 20 years hard labour; in D(111), the same speaker mentions that the four men had passed judgement 'on a woman who advocated adultery'. The replacement of a war criminal by a staunch and dangerous feminist reflects the change of Dürrenmatt's preoccupations as well as a change from the serious to a more ironic mode. The frequent allusions to an oil catastrophe (D 70, 72, 73, 83) and the semantically related 'smashed oil tankers' in the judge's verdict (D 163) belong to D only.
8. See Serpieri (1977:90-135).
9. N's *gegen den Gipfel zu*, where *Gipfel* means concretely 'mountain top' and figuratively 'top', is 'corrected' in D with *Wipfel*, meaning 'tree top' only.
10. 'Pilet ist der Clown der Runde – darum trägt er auch eine Melone' (Dürrenmatt, 1980:62).
11. Holdheim (1969:89) finds it 'noteworthy that the counsel's plea is offered entirely in the de-dramatized indirect speech, while the direct quotation dominates in the prosecutor's speech' (our translation).
12. The personage non-existing in the play's source text, the short story entitled *La signora Frola ed il signor Ponza*, is Lamberto Laudisi, the 'raisonneur' of the play, the successful 'bundling' of various authorial text features so evident in the source text.

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