

I .Introduction

When examining any series of works as complex as those of Guenther Eich it is important to narrow one's subject matter down to a manageable size. Having started out in an ambitious manner, my original goal was to do an extensive study of the elements of danger in Eich's post-war radio plays. As anyone familiar with the author's post-war work can attest, this particular task is more suitable for a master's thesis than an undergraduate essay. I was, thus, forced to scale down my line of inquiry, resulting in a work that could be viewed as a sample of my original goal. More specifically, in this essay I will explore the depiction of the internal as well as the external enemy as they appear in Eich's "Traeume" (1950)¹. As I will show, for Eich, a strict dichotomy of these two areas is not possible: too often the external enemy stands as a symbol for some type of internal danger. By examining each dream separately, I will demonstrate that this is indeed the case.

II The *Feindbild* in Eich's "Traeume"

There have been some questions pertaining to the degree to which Eich's post-war radio plays should be interpreted along historical lines. As we will see in the subsequent analysis of "Traeume" it would be a mistake to put too much of a German historical spin to any interpretations of his works; one would do an injustice to the author if one were to view his works only in the light of the Nazi years. By placing all of the action in "Traeume" in (for German eyes) exotic places, such as Australia, China, or America, for example, Eich indicates that his texts go beyond a specifically German context and, instead, are to be interpreted along more universal lines.

Any discussion of the *Feindbild* as it appears in "Traeume" must, subsequently, surpass a purely German reading and be given a more universal

¹ The text used in this essay has been taken from Guenter Eich, Fuenfzehn Hoerspiele (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch, 1973). Page numbers in brackets will refer to this version of the text.

context. To do this with the work under discussion is not a difficult task, for Eich clearly incorporates a post war, post-Nazi depiction of danger. As we will see, the enemy that is portrayed in the five dreams has no link with a specific place or a specific moment in time. Instead, Eich shows us the danger that is inherent wherever humans congregate and interrelate. It is societies that create both internal as well as external enemies which in turn can cause their own downfall.

a) Der erste Traum

In the first of the five dreams the external enemy is only hinted at. Although the story in some ways reminds us of events that took place in the third Reich, one should not, for reasons already stated, make that all-to-easy comparison. Whoever was responsible for imprisoning the protagonists of this dream in the box car no longer has any relevance, for as the story unfolds it becomes clear that the real enemy is the self-imprisoning outlook of the occupants themselves. While the old ones maintain that a world outside the freight car does indeed exist, the younger generation refuses to acknowledge any such possibility:

Enkel: ... Das hier ist unsere Welt, in der leben wir. Sie besteht aus vier Wänden und Dunkelheit und rollt irgendwo hin. Ich bin sicher, dass draussen nichts anderes ist als die gleichen dunklen Räume, die sich durch die Finsternis bewegen. (57)

There is an obvious lack of flexibility in the conceptual framework of the speaker: any reality other than the one he experiences cannot even be envisioned. This inflexibility, then, is one of the internal enemies that Eich highlights in the first dream.

The second internal *Feindbild* emerges towards the end of the story, when an opening in the freight car allows for a beam of sunlight to enter the dark world of the occupants. Confronted with the existence of a new reality the occupants react with fear: while members of the younger generations more or less refuse to even look out of

the newly discovered opening, the older ones are afraid of what they see: (Uralte) "Es[die Menschen] sind Riesen, sie sind so gross wie Baeume. Ich habe Angst" (59). Finally they decide that it is better to cover up the hole and thereby return to the status quo: (Frau) " Gott sei Dank, dass es wieder ist wie vorher" (59). Ironically, soon after they deny the existence of a new reality, the world they live in is about to self-destruct.. The inflexibility described previously has, in the later stages of the dream, turned into a paralyzing fear. Eich, thus, seems to point to a basic dichotomy found in any society: those who can adapt to new situations, and thereby take control, and those who, through their inflexibility, will have their fate dictated to them. Further, the dream illustrates that this balance of power is purely artificial, relying on a mental concept of the self rather than on any physical reality. With this in mind we should read his warning in the epilogue of the dream:

Denke daran:

*Nirgendwo auf der Landkarte liedt Korea und Bikini,
aber in deinem Herzen.*

*Denke daran, dass du schuld bist an allem Entsetzlichen,
das sich fern von dir abspielt- (61).*

The enemy -- those with the power to destroy -- are not to be found in isolation. Instead, they are created by the society that surrounds them .

b) Der zweite Traum

In this truly horrendous story, the *Feindbild* no longer is hidden, for here it takes on the form of an old Chinese man whose need for the revitalizing blood of the young child is depicted in all its selfish brutality. Once more, it is important to note that Eich objectifies the situation by placing the action in a far away land. Hereby it becomes clear that the author is referring to a general universal tendency rather than a specific historical one.

But who is the enemy? Is he a universal or just a specific historical example?

Given the tendency of Eich to address larger subject matters, it is reasonable to assume that, in this case, the enemy, in the form of the old china man, stands as a symbol for greater, more universal conflict; specifically, the conflict of the younger versus the older generation. Although no definite proof exists that Eich does indeed depict this conflict, we can nevertheless speculate -- given Eich's war experience and the political situation in the 1950's -- that, here, we find a grotesque depiction of an old historical trend, namely the discrepancy of power between generations. Thus, within almost all societies power is usually concentrated in the older generation, while the military goals of these societies are accomplished by using the fighting power of the younger generation. And, since wars demand the sacrifice of lives, it can be stated in turn that parts of one generation historically had to be sacrificed in order to meet the demands made upon them by their elders. When the elders' demands become too self-serving, that is, they no longer are made for the benefit of society at large, they, much like the cannibalistic Chinese man in the second dream, have become the enemy of their successors.

A second, equally subtly *Feindbild* emerges when one looks at the economic imagery within the dream, for here we find a form of capitalism that has run amok. In a society where even one's children have a price on their head -- a state which has and to some degree does still exist today -- the 'enemy within' is the economic system that the society has chosen to adopt. Capitalism and its effect on the shaping of society was a subject matter of great importance to post-war Germans who in 1950 were at the start of what was going to be known as the *Wirtschaftswunder*. It is thus probable that the author from the epilogue to the first dream who reminds the reader of Bikini and Korea also attempts to warn of the danger of the American-style consumer society which worships the new and the young.

c) Der dritte Traum

In this third dream, the *Feindbild* is once more dichotomized: first, there exists

the enemy from outside, in this case depicted in a militaristic fashion; second, there is the enemy within the community, namely the cowardice and the fear of its inhabitants. Both add a new dimension to the theme under discussion.

As was the case in the first dream, it would be easy yet somewhat misleading to draw connections between the incarnation of the outside enemy and events in the third Reich. True, the steps at the door (69) and the searching knock would remind the post-war German listener of very similar events that happened under the Nazi regime; yet, it must be understood that Eich has not placed this dream within a German context. Instead the locale, once more, is a far off country, in this case Australia, reinforcing the position that Eich wants to universalize rather than localize this *Feindbild*.

Some characteristics of the outside enemy emerge from a reading of the dream. The father, for example, asks at the beginning, "der Feind -- wer kennt ihn schon?"(68). The enemy is, thus, an unknown factor, unrecognizable by the society that he terrorizes. Further on in the dream, once the enemy has been spotted we are given a number of physical descriptions along with their psychological implications:

Nachbarin: Ein kleiner Mann,gar nichts Besonderes.

...

Vater: Ich sehe sein Gesicht. Er hat Augen, als waere er blind.

...

Vater: Ich sehe, dass er blind ist, und dennoch machen mich seine Augen fuerchten

...

Vater: Er antwortet nicht. Vielleicht ist er auch taub und stumm.(71)

These, then, are the only descriptions of the visible enemy. From them some observations can be made. First, the enemy is pretty well a non-descript phenomenon: he is "nichts Besonderes" (nothing special); a man who can be found everywhere and recognized nowhere. Second, the external enemy is blind, deaf, and dumb. Hence, by nature his victims are randomly selected. Eich, thus, makes a clear statement: enemies

to any society can exist anywhere and can target anyone. The reasons behind their animosity may vary; the segment of society that they single out are often random: yesterday the Jews, tomorrow the left wing students. Most importantly, then, is that the author seems to state that within any society there exist a certain, artificial norm, which by its nature creates an enemy image whose purpose it is to enforce the status quo.

What appears at first to be an outside enemy in the third dream is, therefore, only a manifestation of a collective wrong. Once again Eich has split the *Feindbild* in a subtle manner: the external enemy becomes the tool by which the inner enemy is made recognizable. Once the family is forced to flee their home they encounter the real evil, namely the betrayal and cowardice of their neighbours. When, for example, they seek the help of the mayor, formerly a good friend of theirs, they are shooed away with the words: "geht weiter, ihr gehoert nicht mehr zu uns"(72). Their utter isolation from the rest of the village is reiterated by the mother when she states:

Wir brauchenniemanden mehr zu fragen. Sie stehen alle hinter den Gardinen und sehen uns nach. Niemand ruft uns herein. Alle sind froh, wenn wir gehen. (73)

The theme of collective cowardice has been well covered in post-war German literature, most notably in Max Frisch's *Andorra* and Duerrenmatt's *Der Besuch der Alten Dame*. The protagonists in Eich's third dream can safely be classified among other literary victims of social cowardice. Yet, unlike Frisch and Duerrenmatt, Eich transposes this theme into a more universal context by making the external enemy less recognizable and, as mentioned, by placing the action in Australia, specifically in the fictional village of Freetown. Some importance must be attached to the name of the village in which this dream takes place, lest we underestimate the author's intentions. By using 'Freetown', Eich seems to emphasize that the enemy as portrayed in the dream is not to be found only in societies that are ruled by dictatorial or militaristic regimes. Instead, the author has recognized that such a danger is to be found in any society at any given time. The danger is heightened when there is an illusion of freedom: though

living in Freetown, its citizens are anything but free. As Rousseau had noted a century and a half earlier, freedom is relative, total freedom does not exist; societies create both internal and external *Feindbild*'s which in turn restrict the freedom of the individual.

d) Der vierte Traum

Although at first it appears to be rather obvious, the *Feindbild* in this dream is of a more obscure quality. At first glance, the form of the enemy seems to be easily defined, for we find two explorers who have been poisoned and abandoned by their native helpers. There also exists a clear dichotomy between the domain of the civilized, the tent, and that of the dangerous, forbidden, and savage, namely, the jungle with its strange eyes and sounds. Still, this domain of the savage alone cannot serve as the only definition of the enemy. Instead, the reader should view it as the symbol for the real danger. Once again, then, we encounter an outer force which seems to highlight an inner, dangerous, self-destructive tendency. What this tendency is, can only be speculated at here due to the complexity of the text at hand.

Two elements dominate the fourth dream: first, the drums; second, the loss of memory. Both are linked to the same realm, the world of the savages. Thus, the drums and the poisonous roots which rob the protagonists of their memories are tools manipulated by the same power. The two explorers' fate is thus determined by one source. The question that subsequently arises concerns the nature of this source. It is here that we can only speculate as to why Eich uses the symbolism that he does. The drum traditionally has been the symbol of the military, which in turn has historical ties to dictatorial forms of power. It is quite possible, then, that Eich in his fourth dream is referring to just such a power formation. For, when we subsequently look at the effect of the poisonous root, namely the loss of memory, we can make a further connection: any power structure that is based on a loss of freedom, must make its subjects forget the freedom that they had known. In other words, it must stop the subject from asking 'why'. Once these memories and questions have been erased, the subject no longer poses a

threat to the regime. Thus, the cook can state: "Wenn ihr am Leben bleibt, ist es gut, wenn nicht, ist es auch gut"(78); the individual no longer matters.

Further, it is possible to modify the above interpretation somewhat, so as to give it an even broader meaning. The drums could theoretically be viewed as a symbol for any social structure that is able to exercise any degree of power. The rhythmic beating of the drums becomes an hypnotizing element upon which people rely and which people take for granted even when this element becomes a threat to that society. Thus, Wassilij can only be at peace when he once more hears the steady beat of the drums (79). Like Rousseau's invisible chains, Eich claims that there are many 'noises' to which we have become used and which undermine our essential freedoms. Thus he warns:

Wie viele solcher unhoerbaren Laute leben um uns? Eines Tages werden wir sie zu vernehmen sein und unser Ohr mit Entsetzen erfuellen... (80)

e) Der fuenfte Traum

Nowhere in the whole play is the *Feindbild* more obvious and more threatening than in the last dream. Eich's symbolism here has turned from the subtle to the grotesquely obvious. The outside enemy is literally within the society. The *Feindbild* -- the termites -- is painted in merciless language:

Es lebt sich nicht angenehm , wo es Termiten gibt. Die Insekten zernagen in unersaettlichem Hunger schlechthin alles, und der Mensch ist machtlos gegen sie. Ihre Fressmethode ist um so unangenehmer, als man fuer gewoehnlich erst dann etwas von ihrer zerstoerenden Taetigkeit bemerkt, wenn es zu spaet ist. Die Termiten haben die Gewohnheit, alle Gegenstaende von innen her auszuhoelen und eine duenne Aussenwand wie eine Haut stehen zu lassen, die freilich dann eines Tages wie Staub zerfaellt. Da kann es geschehen, dass man sich abends in seinem Haus zur Ruhe legt, und am Morgen erwacht man im Freihe, weil das Haus ueber Nacht zu Staub zerfallen ist. (83)

It would be futile to ask what is behind this *Feindbild*, for here Eich seems to indicate that it is less important to know why the enemy exists than to acknowledge that he does indeed exist at all: the mother's denial of danger ultimately leads to her death. Further, Eich no longer makes a distinction between the outside and the inside enemy: the termite is at once an external as well as an internal threat. The dichotomy, apparent within the previous dreams, has been lifted and replaced by an all encompassing danger. The enemy within is the same as the enemy from the outside. Ultimately, it is insidious and often unrecognizable; its appearance varies but it is as old as society itself. It is for this reason that Eich in the epilogue gives his listeners a final warning:

*Nein, schlaft nicht, waehrend die Ordner der Welt geschaeftig sind!
Seid misstrauisch gegen ihre Macht, die sie vorgeben fuer euch
erwerben zu muessen!
Wacht darueber, dass eure Herzen nicht leer sind, wenn mit der
Leere eurer Herzen gerechnet wird!
Tut das Unnuetze, singt die Lieder, die man aus euren Mund nicht
erwartet!
Seid unbequem, seid Sand, nicht das Oel im Getriebe der Welt!(88)*

III Conclusion

The theme of danger permeates the five dreams that make up Eich's radio play "Traeume". We have seen that much of this danger, though seemingly coming from an outside source, here labeled as the external *Feindbild*, is in actuality deeply rooted within the society that it threatens. Much of what takes place within the play, then, can be labeled as an act of collective self-destruction. Using "Traeume", Eich shows us some

the weaknesses found in the collective which contribute to this behaviour. Most importantly, he points inward whenever blame needs to be assigned: only the courage found within the individual can lead to a form of collective salvation. The 'enemy within' should thus be considered as the most important component of Eich's 'Feindbild'. Whether or not this thematic tendency holds true for his other post-war works remains to be explored.

Bibliography

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The *Feindbild* in Guenter Eich's "Traeume"

For: Prof. Jakobsch

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From: Frank Streicher

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