

## Der Verdacht

*F.Dürrenmatt*

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It is billed as a detective story, but this is very misleading because for that the plot is far too inane, and too many resorts to 'deus ex machina'. Instead one should see it as a moral fable in the spirit of a Dostoevsky exploration. In short the plot consists in the confusion of a double identity. In a magazine (The American 'Life' by the way) a photo appears of a certain German doctor Nehle, whose face is partly obscured by his surgical mask, appears operating on a patient without anesthesia in the concentration camp Stutthof. The protagonist of the story Bärlach, recently retired from the police force in Bern and suffering from a cancer sure to kill him within a year, shows it to his friend his doctor, who gets upset by the picture as it reminds him very much of an old mentor Emmenberger, but it surely could not be him, as he spent the war years in Chile publishing medical articles. This provokes the suspicion of Bärlach who cannot get it off his mind, highly unlikely as it may be that there could be any confusion. In fact it turns out to be. As it will transpire Emmenberger has discovered Nehle and been struck by the similarity in appearance and during an operation on him made a similar scare on the eyebrow as he had himself, as well as a burn on his arm (likewise appearing on his own), then sent him to Chile to operate under the name of Emmenberger and assuming his name and identity working in the camp. After the war Nehle returned to Germany and Emmenberger saw to it that he was killed by swallowing a cyanide tablet making it appear a classical Nazi suicide. Emmenberger resumed his old name and opened a clinic in Zrich where he treated, at a comfortable profit, rich and terminally ill patients.

Bärlach has no proof of his suspicions only his intuition. This is surely what marks the outstanding detective who goes beyond mere logical reasoning. What is this intuition based on? Maybe a deep understanding of human thinking, as Collingwood emphasizes while explaining that in all forensic investigations (including those of the historical) it is essential to understand the human thoughts behind, after all motivation is the key aspect of any criminal mystery, What to do but to confront the doctor himself, and for that purpose he enlists his friend the doctor to have him transferred to the Emmenberger clinic under an assumed name of Kremer. Of course it misfires, as he now gets into the power of Emmenberger. Emmenberger and his female assistant confirms his suspicions and gives further explanations, sure that he will die before he has a chance of revealing anything. As it turns out, Emmenberger will not take any chances, he will kill Bärlachs doctor friend, just as he has recently killed a down-and-out writer, whom Bärlach paid to publish in his own words an article pointing the finger at Emmenberger. This is all rather contrived. The assistant turns out to be a morphinist who was interned in Stutthof as a communist, but saved her life by becoming the lover of Emmenberger, a role she is still playing, giving up her former political convictions. She and Bärlach have a conversation in which she exhibits her cynicism, there is no law no justice just power. Those with power decides what is true, there is no extra-human authorities. To believe otherwise is to be a mathematician. This

scandalizes Bärlach, used as he is to pursue criminals, uphold the law, and bring injustice to justice. In a later conversation with Emmenberger, meant to be the climax of the story, one is reminded of the Grand Inquisitor in Dostoevsky's 'The Brothers Karamazov'. The setting is in a terminal room at the clinic where Emmenberger will ostensibly perform an operation on Bärlach but really just to kill him. He gives him about eight hours of reprieve. He explains what he believes in, and it turns out to be external material reality and himself. He is given a brief existence in a cold meaningless universe, but he has his free will, the freedom to do whatever he wants, as long as he can get away with it. There are no transcendental moral authorities, you make your own law. Like the case of solipsism it is logically impossible to refute it. Dostoevsky was aghast at the possibility, but if there is no God everything is permissible.

What does Bärlach believe in? Emmenberger prompts him to explain, but Bärlach refuses. In the end the doctor leaves him, and Bärlach is left alone with the clock on the wall, on which he can watch how his time is inexorably running out. He is of course too weak to be able to run out himself. And then the doctor appears, or so it seems, until he recognizes the big Jew Gulliver, who a week or so earlier had visited him at night bringing schnapps and explaining how 'Nehle' had operated on him without anesthesia at the camp an operation to which he had volunteered in the desperate hope to be set if not free at least transferred to a less strict camp. Gulliver has just killed the doctor Emmenberger, by forcing him to chew a cyanide tablet, and will now rescue him and have him brought back to Bern with his friend the doctor.

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