

Oskar Panizza, *The Council of Love* (1895)

Abstract

Oskar Panizza (1854–1921) was jailed for writing the play *The Council of Love* (1895), a scathing critique of the Catholic Church, which was first performed only at the end of his lifetime. Panizza was a Bavarian; his father was a Catholic of Italian extraction and his mother was a converted Pietist. His main targets were Catholic clerical authority and traditionalism, both of which had reemerged in the Catholic areas of Germany as part of the so-called Catholic Revival. After a year in jail, Panizza fled to Switzerland only to return a few years later to Bavaria, where he remained a literary failure and *persona non grata*.

Source

In Memory of [Ulrich von] Hutten

“It has been pleasing to God in our days to send upon us diseases (it can, indeed, be noted) that were unknown to our ancestors. And in this, those who hold to the Holy Scriptures have said that smallpox has come from God’s wrath, and that God in this way punishes and torments our evil deeds.”

– Ulrich von Hutten, *German knight*

“*About the French or Smallpox*” 1519

“Dic Dea, quae causae nobis post saecula tanta insolitam peperere luem? . . . ”

– Fracastoro

“*Syphilis sive de morbo Gallico*” 1509

Characters in the Play

God the Father

Jesus Christ

Maria

The Devil

The Woman

A Cherub

First Angel

Second Angel

Third Angel

Figures from the Realm of the Dead

Helena

Phryne

Héloise

Agrippina

Salome

Rodrigo Borgia, Alexander VI, Pope

Children of the Pope

Girolama Borgia, married to Cesarini

Isabella Borgia, married to Matuzzi (mother unknown)

Pier Luigi Borgia, Duke of Gandia
Don Giovanni Borgia, Count of Celano
Cesare Borgia, Duke of Romagna
Don Gioffre Borgia, Count of Cariati
Donna Lucrezia Borgia, Dutchess of Bisaglie (of the Vanozza)

Act I, Scene I

Heaven, a throne room; three angels in swan-white, quilt-like suits with tight-fitting knee-breeches similar to spats, knee-length stockings, short cupid wings, hair powdered white and cut short, satin shoes; they have feather-dusters in their hands for dusting.

First Angel: Today HE is getting up late again.

Second Angel: Be happy! This coughing, these watery blue eyes, this stream of mucus, swearing, spitting the whole day – one hardly has a healthy moment.

Third Angel: Yes, it is strange up here!

First Angel: By the way, has the throne been fastened down?

Second Angel: Yes, for heaven's sake! Has the throne been fastened down? It was wobbling yesterday.

Third Angel: Who was wobbling yesterday?

First Angel: The throne, dumb little goose!

Third Angel: *surprised*: The throne? – Why does the throne wobble?

First Angel: In the end, it just wobbles.

Third Angel: What? Is there really something up here that actually wobbles?

First and Second Angels: *laughing loudly*: Ha, ha, ha, ha! –

Third Angel: *ever more serious and amazed*: Yes, why does the holy throne wobble?

First Angel: *energetically*: dumb little goose! Because everything up here is coming unglued and getting shaky anyway: gods, furniture, carpets, wallpaper.

Third Angel: *inwardly quaking*: God, if my mother ever found out about this.

Second Angel: *with furrowed brow and sarcasm*: Your mother? What does your mother have to do with this, you rascal?

Third Angel: Well, today she had the sixtieth mass read for my soul.

First and Second Angels: *with growing astonishment*: For you?! *both laughing out loud* By the way, how old are you anyway?

Third Angel: *collecting her thoughts and then quoting with great passion*: “Before God a thousand years are like a day, and a day like a thousand years!” –

First and Second Angels: *waving her aside and attempting to bring her to reason; very ironically*: Yeah, yeah, yeah, – whatever you say; we know this already! – But how old were you down there?

Third Angel: *like a child*: Barely fourteen years!

First Angel: *laughing*: And for that you need to have masses read for your soul?

Third Angel: *hesitantly*: Oh, you just don't understand, I died down there.

First and Second Angels: *laughing even louder*: Ha, ha, ha! Hee, hee! – Well, of course, otherwise you wouldn't be here at all! –

Third Angel: *with unwavering seriousness*: Oh, you just don't understand, I died in sin!

First and Second Angels: *laughing again*: And that on top of everything else! – You poor devil, so what did you do? –

Third Angel: *loses her voice, stares at her comrades with wide eyes and folds her hands*.

Second Angel: *sarcastically*: Did you forget to do your homework? – Did you make a mess of your school notebook?

Third Angel: *still very anxious and tense*: Oh dear, I'm getting so nervous; – You won't tell anyone else, will you?! –

First and Second Angels: *laughing themselves silly*: What? Up here; and not tell anyone else?!

Third Angel: *astonished*: What? You already know?

First Angel: No! But just go ahead and tell us; we'll find out anyway!

Second Angel: Well, out with it! What was it?

Third Angel: Oh dear, a big man – crushed me!

First Angel: *stressing the word*: Crushed?

Third Angel: Or poisoned me!

Second Angel: *again stressing the word*: Poisoned?

Third Angel: *innocently*: I can't remember anymore what my mother said.

First Angel: *with growing astonishment*: Well, was your mother there when it happened?

Third Angel: *telling her story with gleaming eyes*: She was in the next room; – but the door was half open; – then a big, old man came in; – my mother had said I should let him do anything he wanted with me; this man was, she said, the principal of my school and was very strict; – and if I was obedient in all respects, then I would be at the top of my class; – and then the big, old man–

First and Second Angels: *pressing her*: Well, the big, old man . . . ?

Third Angel: *continuing*: . . . was very strong.

First and Second Angels: *looking at each other and imitating the younger one*: The big, old man was very strong!

Second Angel: That's just like it would sound in our Ollendorf grammar book.

First Angel: *shaking the younger one*: Well, what did the big, old man do?

Third Angel: *bursting forth*: He crushed me and poisoned me, and spit on me with his hot breath, and wanted to press himself into my body . . .

First and Second Angels: *clapping their hands together with concealed astonishment*: What? – And your mother didn't come in to save you?

Third Angel: She just stood at the partially open door and kept saying: "Just be a good girl, Lilli, just be a good girl!"

Second Angel: Well, and then what?

Third Angel: Then I lay there sobbing on the bed.

First Angel: And then?

Third Angel: *collecting her thoughts*: . . . then I heard my mother talking with the man . . .

Second Angel: What did they say?

Third Angel: *collecting her thoughts for a long time*: . . . I can't remember anymore; . . . they were already in the next room . . . I heard the number five hundred . . .

First Angel: And then?

Third Angel: *collecting her thoughts for an even longer time*: . . . my mother came in . . . she said now they had lots of money and could live happily and gay forever . . . *she runs out of thoughts*.

First Angel: *pressing her*: And then? –

Second Angel: *also pressing her*: And then? And then?

Third Angel: *almost transfigured*: And then – I died.

First and Second Angels: *moving away from each other, clapping their hands over their heads, making a drawn-out, girlish shriek, as if to release some inner excitement, they moved around, whistling like two spinning tops, making the widest possible circles in the hall; the third one still remained in a rigid, transfigured posture*.

First Angel: *after whirling around for quite some time, out of breath*: And so now your mother spends lots of money to have masses read for your soul?!

Third Angel: *tearfully anxious*: But then I died in sin!

Second Angel: *more insistently*: For these 500 marks, or dollars, or francs your mother now has masses read for your soul?!

Third Angel: *not understanding, innocently*: . . . for a portion of the money.

Two Older Angels: *come rushing in suddenly and shout*: HE is coming! – HE is coming! – Is everything ready? – *The three younger ones separate and take up their tasks*.

First Angel: For heaven's sake, make sure that the throne is firmly fastened down! *One of the angels starts working on the throne. Other angels arrive in the meantime, bringing blankets, pillows, cushions, and*

similar items.

Second Angel: *hops on the throne and tests it on all sides:* Tight as a drum!

First Angel: *speaking to the third one, who is still too shy to touch anything and who watches the whole production in astonishment:* Hey you, you must tell me more about this. But now get over here with us!

The Two Older Angels: *who have been standing guard at the door, come now, as above, rushing back in, waving their arms in an exaggerated fashion, with the same shouts as before:* HE is coming! – HE is coming! – *Coming from outside one hears flapping and shuffling noises.*

Act I, Scene II

All characters from the previous scene; God the Father, an old man, very advanced in years, with silver-white hair, a beard of the same color, bright blue, watery saucer eyes, tear ducts filled with tears, head bent forward, hunchbacked, walks in wearing a long, robe-like, discolored white gown, supported by two cherubs on his left and right, coughing, clearing his chest, groping his way clumsily, bent forward, shuffling into the room; two angels are standing at the throne and hold him: the rest plunge to their knees, turn their heads downward, and stretch their arms out; behind God the Father is an endless entourage of angels, seraphims, door stewards, servants, all female or sexless, some with bored, everyday expressions, others with impertinent expressions, still others with anxiously concerned expressions; as well as several Merciful Sisters, clothed like nuns, medicine bottles, blankets, spittoons, and the like – they accompany God the Father cautiously to the throne, help him up over the two steps by taking hold of his legs and lifting them up, and then, at the top, they turn him around and lower him into the chair, which is decorated in the oldest Byzantine style with elaborate mosaic designs; two angels in front, two in back, and two on the sides, partially supporting him and at the same time receiving him; one last angel brings up the rear, carrying his crutches.

God the Father: *sinks into the throne with a despairing, weary, coarse, expiring sigh:* Oh dear! then stares, wide-eyed, in front of him, motionless and breathing hard.

All the angels, even those who had been kneeling until now, begin to rush back and forth abruptly.

Cherub: *whispering in an urgent, demanding tone:* The footstool!

An Angel: *hurriedly brings forth the desired object:* The footstool!

Cherub: *placing the footstool under the feet of God the Father, again whispering in an urgent, demanding tone:* The hot-water bottle!

An Angel: *brings it:* The hot-water bottle.

Cherub: *as above:* The foot-muff!

An Angel: *hurriedly:* The foot-muff.

Cherub: *as above:* The quilt!

An Angel: *hurriedly brings it:* The quilt.

Cherub: *in urgent, commanding tone:* The slumber cushion!

An Angel: *brings it:* The slumber cushion.

Cherub: *as above:* The back warmer!

An Angel: *brings a soft piece of flannel material that has been folded together six times*: The back warmer!

Cherub: *demanding more and more urgently*: The arm cushions!

An Angel: *brings two hollow pads for the arm rests*: The arm cushions.

Cherub: *as above*: The foulard!

An Angel: *brings a cherry-red silk scarf*: The foulard! While the cherub wraps the material around the neck of the old man, one hears

God the Father: *unarticulated, gravelly moaning and groaning*: Ah! – Ah! – Ah! – Ah! –

Several different Angels: What's the matter? – What is it? – Help! Help! – What's the matter?

God the Father: *with his head bent forward, continuing to groan*: Ah! – Ah! – Ah! – Ah! –

All the Angels: *gathering together in great consternation around the throne; some of them kneel down and look up anxiously, tensely to God the Father*: Help! – Help! – What's the matter? – What's the matter? –

Divine Majesty, what's the matter? – He's going to die on us! – Go get Maria! – Go get the man! – Help! – Help! –

God the Father: *continuing to moan and groan; his face draws together stiffly; from his tear ducts large tears roll down his cheeks, the result of his exertion*: Ah! – Ah! – Spi! – Spi! – Spi! –

An Angel: *jumps up, triumphantly, with clear, loud voice*: The spittoon!

All the Angels: *jumping up, in a resounding, cathartic soprano*: The spittoon!!

They rush to a table, on which medicine bottles, wine carafes, biscuit jars and the like are standing, and fetch a reddish-pink crystal vase.

God the Father: *clearing his throat, making a gobbling sound, struggling, he finally relieves himself.*

An angel retrieves the spittoon, and, accompanied by others, carries it ceremoniously towards the back of the stage; another angel wipes off the beard of the old man with a silk towel; then everyone present gathers closely around God the Father with great anticipation. – With a glassy, rigid stare, HE first looks all around him for a long while, then with shaking hands he suddenly grabs the crutches in his lap and, with unexpected force, thrusts them at the angels surrounding him with a hoarse, frightening, feigned roar: Wow! – Wow! The angels run away screeching, scattering in all directions and out the doors. – Only one cherub remains behind. Kneeling with his face buried in his hands, he throws himself down before HIM. – long pause. –

Source: Oskar Panizza, *Das Liebeskonzil. Eine Himmelstragödie in fünf Aufzügen* (1895). Frankfurt am Main: Luchterhand, 1982, pp. 8–19.

Translation: Richard Pettit

Recommended Citation: Oskar Panizza, The Council of Love (1895), published in: German History in Documents and Images,
<<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/wilhelmine-germany-and-the-first-world-war-1890-1918/ghdi:document-734>> [September 26, 2025].