

The role of weaponry  
used to demonstrate  
the theme of  
corruption in the visit



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

In Friedrich Durrenmatt's play, *The Visit*, the notions of corruption begin with the arrival of billionaire, Claire Zachanassian to the poverty stricken town of Gullen, where she is originally from. Claire arrives with the intention of seeking revenge on a former lover who had abandoned her in her youth.

Durrenmatt emphasizes the development of conflict through the foreshadowing of the downfall of Alfred Ill, the town's most beloved citizen, as well as the oppression and increase of corruption within their society due to the arrival of Claire Zachanassian. The use of weaponry, specifically that of the rifle and gun – found in the Acts Two and Three is significant among the characters in order to convey the idea of corruption and betrayal in Gullen towards Ill. Through the use of symbolism of weaponry, Durrenmatt explores how betrayal and corruption consume the town of Gullen in *The Visit*, as Claire pushes further for the murder of Ill in hopes of seeking revenge and justice on what had occurred to her in her youth.

Durrenmatt establishes the theme of corruption through the use of weaponry to foreshadow how Ill is ordered to be put to death after the arrival of Claire Zachanassian. Claire, who was also spurned by Ill when she was younger and had become pregnant because of him, offers a copious amount of wealth to the citizens of Gullen if they killed Ill. Weaponry is used to represent corruption in the society of Gullen. Ill is viewed as a target due to the corruptive forces of Claire's promise to the citizens as they grow increasingly selfish as the play progresses. This is initially seen in Act II, when Ill visits the Policeman and demands the arrest of Claire for "...inciting the people of the town to kill [him]..." (Durrenmatt 45). Here, the Policeman claims that Ill's declaration to arrest Claire was "...peculiar..." (45) and not sufficient enough

for the authorities to take such an action as he states that no one is it trying to harm or threaten him as he says, “.... You can’t be threaten by a proposal, only by the carrying out of a proposal. Show me one genuine attempt the carry out this proposal, for instance a man point a gun at you, and I’ll be there faster than the blink of an eye” (46). There, the Policeman asserts that he believes that Ill will not be killed and this ultimately reveals a sense of corruption as Ill does in fact get killed by the end of the play. The progression of the increasing corruptive forces of the Policeman from going from an individual who had greatly admired Ill to someone who now sees Ill as a barrier to Gullen’s advancement by taking part in such fraudulent conduct under Claire’s power, through her bribes. It is also ironic that the Policeman assures Ill that no harm will be done to him if someone were to point a gun at him, as he shortly waves a gun around Ill as “ he stands up and takes a rifle from the back of the chair” (48). This is a means of provoking corruption in Gullen as the Policeman, who is seen as an authoritative figure in society, who is meant to protect all citizens, is viewed as someone who is corrupt and selfish in nature, as he loads the gun in front of Ill. The use of weaponry of the rifle conveys the idea of Durrenmatt utilizing weaponry as a means of conveying corruption in Gullen.

Throughout Acts Two and Three, the use of weaponry becomes even more evident to the force of corruption in Gullen as the play progresses. The citizens of Gullen gradually become increasingly corrupt due to the forces of Claire’s power, in turn, leading to the betrayal of Ill. They are willing to sacrifice an individual for their personal gain. This idea of corruption and betrayal in Guellen is seen prominently through the use of weaponry with the

gun that was used to kill the black panther in Act Two, whom Claire had brought along with her to Gullen. The killing of the black panther is symbolic to the progression of corruption, as it acts as an allusion that foreshadowed the killing of Ill. In Act One, it was mentioned that Claire's nickname for Ill, in their youth, was the Black Panther. The killing of the black panther foreshadows of Ill's death. The teacher says, " We have been rescued from a great danger. The black panther was balefully prowling our streets," (60). Here, the Teacher implies that Ill is similar to the black panther. The gun used to the kill the black panther further reinforces that idea of corruption in Gullen as it foreshadows the killing of Ill, and how Gullen eventually turns against him due to their selfish and immoral nature, towards Ill. He even mentions that the killing of the panther is an allusion to him when he hears the Teacher conducting a song for to mourn the death of the panther as he says, " It's for my death you're practicing this song for, my death!" (60). Consequently, Ill comes to the conclusion that the black panther is a reference to his own death the will be conducted in the near future. The killing of the black panther is used to further reinforce the notion of corruption in Gullen and further alludes to the foreshadowing of the Ill's death. Durrenmatt demonstrates the structural progression of corruption in Gullen through the Mayor's use of the gun, contrasting to that of the one used to kill the black panther in Act Two.

In Act Three, as a final attempt before Ill is murdered, the Mayor approaches Ill claiming that he has brought him a loaded gun. Ill quickly refuses to take the gun. He says, " I brought you a gun. [...] It's loaded" (87). Ill quickly refuses to take the gun. The gun is an indication from Mayor and the citizens

of Gullen, who believe that it would be much easier for Ill to kill himself with that gun, before the citizens kill him. If Ill were to shoot himself, the conspiracy of his murder would not be held accountable by the townspeople. By forcing them to physically kill him, Ill cements his place in Gullen's collective conscience. If he committed suicide, the corruption of the town would not be as evident; they did not perform the murderous act, therefore, the town cannot be held accountable. The use of weapons also reveals the ending of Ill, as he understands he must sacrifice himself in order for Gullen to receive their riches. This, in turn, allows him to see the viewpoint of his corrupt society as he understands the wealth the town will gain if he were to be sacrificed. It is also an immoral and selfish matter that is particularly surprising from the Mayor who should have been an authoritative leader of the community, and is meant to promote and provide for the greater good of Gullen; however he is contrasted to someone who is willing to sacrifice someone for their own benefit. Ill soon realizes that his society is corrupted by this idea, as he begins to accept the fact that he is guilty man as he and the other citizens seem to arrive at the same conclusion. Due to this corruption, he sees himself as someone who has brought misery to the town and as someone who is holding back the advancement of Gullen. Thus, he accepts the fact that he must sacrifice himself. In Friedrich Durrenmatt's *The Visit*, weapons are used to reveal the corruption that has enveloped the town of Gullen, as the citizens become increasingly motivated in their intention to kill Ill in exchange for a billion dollars. Durrenmatt exemplifies that the weapons themselves reveal the progression of corruption in Gullen as the play advances.

The consequences behind the weapons become progressively burdened on Ill, as they become progressively oppressive throughout the play. The transition of weapons is used as a means of safety and protection for all. As the play progresses, a singular lethal murder weapon is presented and is seen prominently when the Policeman points the rifle at Ill. Moreover, the shooting of the panther is used to signify that the end is near for Ill. It is finally seen that when the Mayor gives the gun to Ill, he is implying that Ill must kill himself in order to satisfy the people of Gullen. This, in turn, leads to the inevitable murder and end of Ill. Furthermore, the use of the symbolism of weaponry in Friedrich Durrenmatt's play, *The Visit* represents corruption and betrayal of Alfred Ill after the arrival of Claire Zachanassian, leading into his ultimate death under the circumstances of the selfishness of the town.