

The socio-political  
issue of the visit  
through irony,  
symbolism, and  
brechtian st...



In *The Visit*, Friedrich Durrenmatt uses irony and theatrical devices to convey the corruption of the town through greed and power of money.

Durrenmatt uses irony to show how the want for instant wealth can lead to the corruption of the entire town, mainly by the degrading of the ethical standards of the citizens. The alienation effect proclaims these issues in a way so that the audience can reflect on the issues and physically know it is a play. The examples of Claire using money to basically control the whole town makes it easier for the audience to tell that's it's a play. The viewers are able to understand the real concerns of the play and the problems within the plot because of the Alienation effect. Durrenmatt uses Irony to express the corruption within the citizens and the corruptive power of money. In the play, the citizens thought the money would ransom them from the decay of the town, but what eventually happens is that the greed of the town leads them to an ethical disaster, instead of the town progressing by their own means. Justifying this claim the mayor says in his speech, " We would rather have poverty than blood on our hands" (Durrenmatt 39). This catastrophe is nothing but an unfulfilled pledge, seeing that the town lets Ill down, finding excuses to justify their action of after all killing their fellow citizen and so called friend.

Ill ironically believes that the town is on his side, which corresponds to the residents', who falsely believe that " you can't get anything you want with money (46)", utterances, yet contradicts the all in all truth. The town sold their soul to Claire and is no longer moral based on the decisions they make. The mayor is hypocritical in the sense that later on he wants Ill dead, but for the benefit of the town. The morality of the Mayor's secretive decision is

<https://assignbuster.com/the-socio-political-issue-of-the-visit-through-irony-symbolism-and-brechtian-staging/>

inhumane because he agreeing on killing Ill for the benefit of the town. The outrageous decision of the mayor is hidden within the town because everyone suddenly starts to buy expensive items, while nothing of the decision has gotten out. The morality is what Durrenmatt poses on the audience to implement on the reads own interpretation of the play. They unconsciously agree to the millionaire's deal, which makes everything they say or do ironic since they do not carry out their loyal promises. One example of Irony that presents itself in the very beginning of the play is the town's name.

The town's name, Guellen, was not chosen at random because the exact translation from German means manure. The name is ironic, since it depicts a metaphor of the town's, for the first time physical state, and its subsequent state of morality. The name, Guellen represents the forever corruption such as in the beginning where it was a matter of poverty and later when it was their unethical choices. Another indication of the moral collapse of the town is the words coming out of the Mayor's mouth, " If they boom we'll all boom..."(Durrenmatt 26). This quote indicates the mayor's consideration of the deal because he wants the factories to prosper and that could only happen with Claire's power and money. Due to the town's great economic depression, the townspeople believe that the money will ameliorate their conditions; however, it eventually leads to their own demise because they lose their own sense of morals and standards. Yet, this " thin veneer of morality is quickly stripped away in the face of"(Durrenmatt Handout 4) greed, which ultimately results in the destruction of the community. Claire's physical features were ironic to the amount of power she had.

Claire has a prosthetic leg and hand, which symbolizes that she, could never die. These physical features portray her shrewd but powerful ways of manipulating the town through the power of money and how she always gets what she wants. Durrenmatt presents the issues that arise from the corruptive power of money with the use of irony. The moment when Claire bent over the balcony that had an overview of Guellen is ironic because Claire has prosthetic parts yet she holds the symbol of hierarchy and power. In the play, Claire promotes her own sense of 'justice' with money, when she strikes a deal with the town of Guellen. She essentially weighs the value of one person, Ill, over a great sum of money that would go towards the town and its people. With the use of Brechtian staging, Durrenmatt causes the audience to reflect on the issues in the play. Durrenmatt also implements this alienation effect with the use of stock characters.

Rather than identifying characters by name, characters are known solely by their general profession, which includes the Mayor, Policeman, and Priest. Moreover, their actions in the play fit their expected role in society. Thus, this conformity allows us to see anomalies in behavior. The priest, for example, is pious and often uses religious vocabulary. However, when Ill approaches the priest for help, even the priest shows signs of corruption when he describes the new bell tolls as "rich and powerful" and says it is "affirming life"(Durrenmatt 58). By using stock characters, the audiences become less emotionally attached to them, and are able to focus more on how their general actions advance the theme. When the townspeople prevent Ill from leaving town by forming a barricade, which Ill could not pass and asking curious questions such as "Where are you off too?" (Durrenmatt

59), the unethical situation reveals itself. Durrenmatt purposely creates the effect of making the audience aware of the ridiculousness of the situation.

The corruption is further analyzed with symbols. As Ill talks to man two and man one, he notices they both are wearing “ new yellow shoes”. The repetition of yellow in the items the Guellens are buying are foreshadowing of what is to come of Ill. Further more, the yellow shoes also act as a symbol of the death to come in the future. The constant yellow items the Guelleners buy symbolize the eventual moral corruption that is eventually going to lead to the death of Ill. This event reflects in how the Mayor’s speech is at the “ Golden Apostle,” how everyone begins to buy “ New yellow shoes,” or how the police officer has a “ Gleaming new golden tooth.” This anxiousness from the Guelleners to have new possessions in yellow and gold whenever they have the opportunity to do so symbolizes a deep everlasting obsession for money that is capable of any type corruption. Moreover, archetype is what drives Claire because the reason for her return to Guellen is her quest for revenge against Ill.

Claire’s pursuit for revenge is exemplified when Claire says, “ You decrepit... now I want accounts between us settled. A moment ago, you wanted time turned back, in that wood so full of the past, where we spent our young years. Well I’m turning it back now, and I want justice. Justice for a million.” It’s clear throughout the play Claire wants to get back at Ill for all the suffering he caused her, but the fact she’s using money to achieve justice contributes towards the theme that, can justice be bought? Throughout the play Claire persistently tries to get the town to fall for the money to take out Ill, and soon enough the town clandestinely did. Claire’s will to kill someone <https://assignbuster.com/the-socio-political-issue-of-the-visit-through-irony-symbolism-and-brechtian-staging/>

is revenge, not justice, and the action of offering a million for Ill's death. The corruption in the society is a bond that gets stronger as the town spends money and as time passes on anxiously waiting for Ill's doom. With irony and Brechtian staging, Durrenmatt conveys the corruptive power of money in *The Visit*.

By addressing the theme through irony and allocating the consequences and issues that arise from it with the use of Brechtian staging effects, the audience is able to learn and reflect from these issues, and can, thus, create “ a real-world impact”(Brechtian Alienation Handout 3). Although money helps the with the progression of a society materially, *The Visit* warns how its corruptive power can ultimately cause the collapse of the moral principles by which a society is originally built and how in Claire's case that money could buy justice in a society.