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STEFAN ZWEIG'S HIDDEN SELF BEHIND HIS FREE VERSION OF *VOLPONE*[*]

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1. Introduction

The aim of this article is to uncover the authorial self hidden behind Stefan Zweig's free adaptation of *Volpone*, as a means of accounting for the play's puzzling character construction, atmosphere and dramatic structure. Comparison with similar characters and situations in other fictional works by the same author help draw a behavioural pattern that closely resembles that of the playwright, novelist and essayist himself. Substantial evidence from letters written by and addressed to Stefan Zweig further support our hypothesis, which is confirmed by the accounts given by his first wife and some of his closest friends on Zweig's unbalanced personality, his acute awareness of xenophobia and his lifelong dread of violence, which made him constantly look for an outlet both in exile and death.

Awareness of these marked traits of Zweig's personality casts light on the oppressive atmosphere of his free version of *Volpone*, on the inconsistencies of the title role, who moves between the extremes of euphoria and depression, and on his final exile into that foreign land where he belongs but where he cannot find that emotional balance which not even his wife and children can afford him. Volpone looks as emotionally impaired as so many of Zweig's characters who are totally indifferent to their own families and whose intense fear of their irrational world freezes their souls. Zweig's painful awareness of his Jewish otherness, moreover, similarly finds its way into his *lieblose Komödie*, where Venetian Volpone is turned into a foreign Levantine, and where several characters speak disparagingly of the Jews. Although written in 1926, the play

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anticipates dreadful xenophobic practices which, like those Zweig depicts in *Im Schnee*, he would sadly witness during his lifetime.

Attention to Zweig's *Der Kampf mit dem Dämon*, *Angst*, *Vierundzwanzig Stunden aus dem Leben einer Frau*, *Der Amokläufer, Sachnovelle* and *Die Welt von Gestern*, together with the information provided by Jules Romains, Ernst Feder, Richard Strauss, Friderike Zweig, Rosi Cohen, or Thomas Haenel, help understand the most significant and puzzling features of Zweig's *lieblose Komödie* in the light of its author's unavowed but recurrent presence in his works.

2. ZWEIG'S FREE VERSION OF *VOLPONE*

Stefan Zweig's free version of Ben Jonson's *Volpone*, which was first performed in Vienna in 1926, was of paramount importance for the European recovery of this Jacobean comedy, because it was this version – and not Jonson's original play – that would be translated into a good number of European languages and staged all over the world soon afterwards. Zweig's adaptation met with an unprecedented success everywhere, but its subject matter and tone were not always rigorously analysed. It is our intention to shed new light on its features, by drawing attention to the striking similarities that are discernible between the play's title role and numerous characters of Zweig's works, who often reflect their author's anguished worldview and mental instability. Although critics often point at the play's amiable tone[1], as well as the triumph of Mosca's generosity over his master's avarice[2], the truth is that a close reading of Zweig's *Volpone: eine lieblose Komödie* can only admit

[1] This kind of interpretation may well have been prompted by Zweig's own assessment of his theatrical adaptation, which, in a letter addressed to R. Rolland on 26.9.1925, he described as "a farce amüsant sur l'argent". A careful reading of his version, however, soon reveals that its tone is far from amusing and that its central subject matter is not money, although it, no doubt, plays an important part in the play. This is not the only time when the author's own words on his work are difficult to share, since D. Turner (1988: 304) said the following on Zweig's assessment of *Der Zwang* (1926): "writers are notoriously unreliable in their assessments of their own work". This remark was prompted by Zweig's insistence that the work was a "Revolte gegen Krieggeist" [strongly opposed militarism] (Unless otherwise stated, all translations are mine). But, in spite of the fact that *Volpone* is far from amusing, critics such as Forsyth (1981: 624) and Daviau (1983: 193) point to its "lightness of touch, spirit and comic sensibility", which would truly come as a surprise in an adaptation by Zweig, whose work – like his life – was invariably permeated by thoughts of fear and death.

[2] This is the opinion that both B. (7.11.1926) and Marcus Fontana (7.11.1926) expressed in their reviews of the play's performance in Vienna's Burgtheater. Both of them were persuaded of Mosca's generosity, which they set in contrast to Volpone's avarice, so that B. thought that Volpone's parasite was an unpractical philosopher who, in the end, gave his former master's money away: "Er wird dieses Gold […] mit vollen Händen ausgeben. Er ist ein Philosoph, dieser nichtsnutzige Mosca" [he gives [...] all his money away. He is a philosopher, this worthless Mosca] whereas Marcus Fontana, when taking at face value Mosca's words: "ich schenke dich an alle" [I share you with everyone], highlighted his generosity.

a completely different interpretation, since Mosca proves more interested in money than Volpone, and, specially, since most characters exhibit a degree of cruelty that is nowhere to be found in Ben Jonson's *Volpone*. The play, moreover, does not end in a valiant uncasing of the fox at the law court, but in a cowardly flight of the title role from Venice, which is the logical culmination of the increasing feeling of fear that he has experienced throughout the play. What both reader and spectator come across at the end of the play is not a generous, but a selfish servant, who has taken advantage of both his master's imaginary fears and the greed of the birds of prey, whose avarice leads them to accept the crumbs that fall from Mosca's table as Volpone's universal heir[3].

Zweig's adaptation, moreover, fails to fulfil the requirements of poetic justice, because, unlike in its source play, no character gets what he deserves: neither are the greedy birds of prey punished nor is Leone's (Jonson's Bonario) honesty duly rewarded. What is more, Colomba's (Jonson's Celia) saviour is sent to the pillory instead of being greeted as a hero, which openly reveals that Zweig has little interest in building up a moral play, but rather in showing to what extent irrational forces and indiscriminating cruelty steer the world[4]. This world portrayal is far from restricted to this theatrical version, but is a constant feature of Zweig's work and, as the testimony of his friends and relatives repeatedly reveals, was the outcome of his anguished life experience, which made him constantly look for an outlet, first in exile, and, finally, in self-inflicted death (Cohen, 1983; Haenel, 1981). So, Volpone's flight from Venice for Smyrna at the end of the play, to avoid being tortured and killed, mirrors his own life, where fear of torture and death made him seek refuge, first in Switzerland, then in England, and, finally, in Brazil. Zweig's anguished perception of his own world probably led him to change Volpone's lot at the end of the play. So, instead of confining him for life in an unhealthy prison, he gave him the chance of escaping and joining his own family in the comfortable house which he owned in Smyrna.

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[3] Luckily enough, some perceptive critics such as Stoesst (1926: 28) were able to unravel the reason that lay behind Mosca's apparent generosity. So, he realized that he had offered everyone money in the hope that nobody would question his right to the legacy: "Da Mosca über dies alle Geschädigten reichen Anteil verspricht, erheben sie gegen seinen Erbantritt keinen Entspruch" [Since Mosca promises the aggrieved party a substantial share in his fortune, nobody questions his right to the legacy].

[4] Zweig was so deeply persuaded of the evil nature of human beings that those who, like Jules Romains, knew him well, were convinced that nothing could have changed his worldview: "S'il était encore vivant, il pensarait sans doute que le mal permanent et profound a plus d'importance que les formes perissables en lesquelles il s'incarne" (1955: 23).

3. VOLPONE'S EMOTIONAL DETACHMENT: A RECURRENT TRAIT OF ZWEIG'S WORKS

The fact that Zweig mentions Volpone's wife and children in his version of the play, and, particularly, the distant tone which he adopts when alluding to them, is also characteristic of his own personal situation, which is often reflected in his works. As a matter of fact, Zweig himself was often absent from home on his conference tours as well as on holiday, and the tone of the letters which he exchanged with his first wife, Friderike, points to the coldness of their relationship (Teller, 1954: 579). This, again, is a constant feature of his novels and short stories, where husbands and wives live in worlds apart from each other, and where no sign of warmth or real communication between them is found[5].

Zweig's characters, moreover, usually inhabit comfortable houses and, when forced to go somewhere else, always make arrangements that ensure the continuity of their pleasurable life. This, which was a constant trait of Zweig's own life, is also reflected in *Volpone*, where the hero – unlike in Jonson – has both a house in Smyrna and a ship full of merchandise in Genoa that can make his life easy after his flight from Venice:

> Mosca, komm' … raff mir Geld zusammen, da, Juwelen, Perlen, die Diamanten ... eine Gondel her, eine verschlossene … In Genua hab' ich noch ein Schiff voll mit Waren, fahr' heim nach Smyrna zu meiner Frau, zu meinen Kindern, hab' dort mein Haus, will dort still leben (52)[6].

4. VOLPONE'S UNBALANCED PERSONALITY IN THE CONTEXT OF ZWEIG'S LIFE AND WORKS

But, although Volpone could have enjoyed life in Smyrna, the reader is left with the feeling that his inner impulses will not allow him a moment of peace. This is exactly what happened to Zweig himself when in exile, both in England and in Brazil[7], and this is what occurs to most of the characters in his

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[5] Superb depictions of this situation can be found in Zweig's *Die spät bezahlte Schuld*, *Vierundzwanzig Stunden aus dem Leben einer Frau* and *Angst*.

[6] [Mosca, come [...] get together my money, there, those jewels, pearls, diamonds [...] Get a gondola, a closed one [...] I have a ship lying at dock in Genoa with a full cargo; I'll sail home to Smyrna to my wife and children. I have a house there where I can live quietly] I am using Langner's translation of Zweig's version for most passages. I have only made some minor changes in those few instances where she departs significantly from her source.

[7] As Friderike Maria Zweig reveals, her husband was aware that exile could aggravate his mental instability. That is why in June 1933 he wrote to Alfredo Cahn that he would remain at home as long as possible because "exile might bear a threat to his inner nature" (1946: 198).

novels, who can never free themselves from their own mental instability[8]. This is precisely Zweig's focus of attention in his free version of the play. As in his novels, the psychology of his characters is of prime importance here[9], and, as in them, he offers a realistic portrayal of the hero's unbalanced personality that ranges between the extremes of euphoria and paralysing fear[10], those contrasting attitudes which correspond to the two cycles of bipolar disorder mixed (*DSM-IV*: 321-8) which seem to affect most of Zweig's characters, including Volpone.

But, what seems most striking in this case is the sustained gloominess of Volpone's behaviour that invariably entails real or imaginary violence which either stems from himself or is aimed at him. This portrayal of the title role closely resembles that of Heinrich von Kleist and his literary characters, as described by Zweig in his *Der Kampf mit dem Dämon*. Volpone's sadistic impulses, like theirs, seem to be fuelled by the devil, and his fears and apprehensions similarly fill him with anguish. Volpone, like Kleist, is aware of his dangerous nature and, like him and his heroes, finds himself unable to bridle his destructive passions, as he acknowledges in those moments when he fears the terrible consequences of his past behaviour. Thus, before being taken to the law court to be judged for trying to rape Colomba, he regrets his wicked actions which, he feels, have been prompted by the devil: "O ich Narr [...] statt mein Geld zu genießen [...] reitet mich der Teufel, diese Wanzen zu peinigen" (51)[11].

Mosca's final assessment of his master: "Eine schurkische Lust hatte er — wer kann es besser bezeugen als ich — hundsföttisch in andrer Haut zu beißen und Böses zu tun aus Freude, aus einer gallbittern Freude: hat sie wohl vom

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[8] Cfr. Crimmel (2000) on Zweig's *Amokläufer*.

[9] As a matter of fact, Zweig was so highly interested in psychology around this time that he told his friend Sigmund Freud in a letter written on September 8 1926: "Mir ist Psychologie ... heute eigentlich die Passion meines Lebens" [I have now developed a passion for Philosophy] (Holl, 2001: 12).

[10] It is probably no mere coincidence that Stefan Zweig's mood was particularly unstable at this time, as the letters that he wrote during the years which he spent in Salzburg prove (1919-1931). The appraisal which The *Salzburger Nachrichten* (31.1.2001) made of their tone parallels the portrayal that Zweig makes of Volpone: "Was Stefan Zweig in Salzburg erlebte […] woran er arbeitete, was er schrieb – ungeschminkt, selbstkritisch, *euphorisch* und *depressiv* – schildert der Schriftsteller in dem Band 'Briefe 1919-1931' " [What Stefan Zweig experienced in Salzburg [...] what he worked on, what he wrote about, it is all depicted in an unadorned and self-critical style – which includes both euphoria and depression – in his volume "Letters 1919-1931"].

[11] [Oh, what a fool I am [...] Instead of enjoying my money [...] I'm driven by some devil into tormenting this vermin].

Satan geerbt" (81)[12] similarly holds Satan responsible for Volpone's relish in evil-doing, which, in his own words, is such that: "Ich kann nicht lustig sein, ehe ich nicht einem Narren eins über den Pelz gebrannt, das wärmt mich besser als eine Frau und muntert mich stärker als Wein" (70)[13]. These words offer us a glimpse into his set of values as well as his view of the world where there is no place for romantic feelings. And he makes it clear that women only interest him as mere commodities which, like wine, may afford him physical pleasure. But, what he values above all is inflicting pain on others. This – as he tells Mosca – is precisely what had made him wish to seduce Colomba: "Was brauchte ich [...] dieses Kalb Colomba, hatte nicht Lust auf sie eine Handvoll ... nur Bosheit, nur Bosheit, nur Feuerzünden und Heißmachen" (51)[14]. This is probably one of the reasons why Zweig cut all those passages from his version where Jonson's Volpone had felt himself drawn towards Celia and had tried to conquer her. In this play, like in most of his novels, there is no room for romanticism, a fact that was perfectly explained by Zweig when he analysed Kleist's feelings and work. He then pointed out that he had deliberately stripped all love scenes of any possible romantic overtones, so as to lay man's crude nature bare.

Since the depiction that Zweig makes of Heinrich von Kleist often approaches that of a self-portrait, we can easily guess why he transformed Jonson's Lady Would-Be into Canina, the courtesan. The truth is that prostitutes appear in most of Zweig's works, and his central characters often allude in a natural way to sporadic contacts with them[15]. Zweig often stresses their noisy vitality, which often contrasts with the gloomy thoughts and apprehensions of his other characters[16]. Zweig's Canina is, similarly, full of energy and grants Volpone her favours. Her high spirits and practical nature, moreover, differ from Volpone's sudden changes of humour. It is these unmotivated changes that come to the fore in Zweig's version of *Volpone*. His depiction of the title role and the characters that surround him correspond to Freud's assessment

[12] [He took a scoundrelly pleasure –who can testify to that better than I– in sinking his teeth like a dog into other people and in doing evil for the joy of it, the gall-bitter joy he must have inherited from Satan.].

[13] [I can't be merry [...] before I've skinned one fool. That warms me more than a woman and makes me merrier than wine].

[14] [Why did I have to [...] take that moon-calf Colomba? I didn't have a grain of desire for her just malice, just malice, just lighting a fire under them].

[15] This feature, which is common to Zweig's single and married characters, could also be explained in terms of bipolar disorder mixed, which often causes impaired social functioning, so that patients who suffer from it seldom enjoy satisfactory and long lasting affective relationships.

[16] This is the case, for example, with the young student in *Scharlach* or with Baron Friedrich Michael von R. in *Phantastische Nacht*. The interest that Zweig shows in prostitutes leads him to turn one of them, Lizzie, into the protagonist of his *Praterfrühling*.

of individuals and nations, as summarized by Zweig himself in an interview that took place in New York in 1939, where he recalled how powerful and dangerous – in Freud's view – our primitive instincts are:

> He [Freud] has for years again and again emphasized in his works how thin the veneer of so-called civilization in us humans really is, how powerful are our primitive instincts and that a slight vibration might suffice to bring to the surface the dangerous element in the life of the individual as also in the life of the nation (Curtis, 1939: 429).

Zweig also left behind testimonies of the deep revulsion which the selfishness and hypocrisy of his acquaintances could awaken in him. So, on 31st October 1918, after spending some time with the writer Leonhard Frank, he described him as the perfect embodiment of "Der Typus des Bösen: ganz aus Haßt gestaltet und gestaltend"[17]. He then pointed to his hypocrisy: "wie er Geld haß und sich selbst ein Haus kauft"[18], and vividly expressed what that attitude provoked in him: "Ich habe immer Magenschmerzen nach ihm" (Zweig, "Tagebücher", 1984: 333)[19]. The acuteness of Zweig's reaction at the hypocritical dissembling of his friends or colleagues is echoed by Volpone, who gives free vent to his anger when he states the degree of avarice, selfishness and wickedness that his self-avowed friends share. Thus, when recalling Corbaccio's longing for his death or Corvino's attempt to kill him with poison, he tells Mosca:

> Nein ... mir wird nicht wohl, ehe ich diesen Aasjägern noch eins ausgewischt habe. Ich war noch zu gut zu ihnen, zu sanft; nur gezwickt haben wir sie, nur gekitzelt, aber die muß man stäupen und brennen wie die Galeerensträflinge. Ich muß das Gerippe noch schütteln, das an mir gerochen hat, ob ich schon faule und dem andern für sein Schlafmittelchen paar Träume geben, die ihm ein Fegefeuer in den Nieren aufzünden! (23)[20].

And a thousand different gruesome possibilities immediately come to his mind: "Oh, ich werde euch noch Skorpione in die Stiefel stecken, die Zähne

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[17] [The typical evil-doer, inspired by hate, and hate-inspiring].

[18] [He pretends to hate money but buys himself a house].

[19] [I have always felt intense repulsion towards him].

[20] [No ... I shan't feel right till I have swinged these jackals well. I was too good to them, too kind: I only nipped them, tickled them; they must be scourged and branded like galley slaves. I must rattle that skeleton who snuffed me once more, if I rot for it, and give the other one a few dreams in exchange for his little sleeping-potion which will kindle a purgatorial fire in his kidneys].

werd' ich euch ausbrechen und die Zunge den Hunden zu fressen geben: Ihr sollt Volpone noch kennen lernen!" (22)[21]. His craving for vengeance makes him devise further ways of physical torture: "Diese Aasjäger, diese Leichenfledderer, diese verlogenen Hunde, wenn ich ihnen nur noch eins auf den Pelz brennen könnte, daß ihnen die Knochen knacken!" (23)[22]. And, later on, once the trial is over and he has escaped punishment, his misanthropy comes to the surface again. So, although the false testimony of the greedy birds of prey has helped declare him innocent, he cannot experience the slightest feeling of gratitude towards them, but only an urgent need to punish their greediness, so that, with Mosca's help, he devises a new way of tormenting his suitors. He conceives the idea of making each one of them believe that he is Volpone's universal heir, only to be able to witness their terrible disappointment. He tells Mosca:

> Jetzt ist das Folterinstrument bereit [...] Ich will sie erst grinsen sehen und Vergnügen glucksen über meiner Leiche, ich will sie zittern sehen und zappeln mit der Angel im Maul und ungeduldig werden nach dem Testament und dann erst, wie sie erschrecken, schauern, wüten, sich erbosen, sich erhitzen (71)[23].

At this point he feels wholly carried away by his sadistic impulses, which he expresses in terms of physical torture: "Dann brech' ich heraus mit der Peitsche und das Herz wird dir tanzen, wie ich ihnen die Beine peitschen werde" (71)[24]. The intensity of his hatred reaches its peak in a cannibalistic image which portrays him sinking his teeth into the birds of prey:

> Ich sag' dir's, laß sie nur lang, recht lang darren und rösten und braten, bis sie gar werden für mich! [...] Aber dann, aber dann, wenn sie recht heiß sind, recht wild tun, dann beiß' ich hinein mit den Zähnen: die Fetzen will ich euch aus dem Fleisch reißen und die Knochen knacken! (73)[25].

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[21] [Oh, I'll drop skorpions into your boots yet, I'll break out your teeth and fling your tongues to the dogs; you shall learn to know Volpone yet].

[22] [These jackals, these body-snatchers, these lying dogs, if I could only thwack them well until their bones snapped!].

[23] [Now the instument of torture is ready [...] I want to see them grinning first and floating round my corpse. I want to see them squirm and wriggle with the hook in their gullets and grow impatient for the will; only then must they be frightened, tremble, grow dangerous, and lose their heads].

[24] [Then I'll burst in with my whip, and your head and your heart will dance to see how I lash their legs].

[25] [I tell you: just let them sizzle and roast and bake till they are well-cooked for me! [...] but then, then, when they are nicely heated and frenzied, then I'll sink my teeth into them; I'll tear bits out of their flesh and crack their bones!].

This state of excitement is characteristic of manic episodes, which alternate with periods of depression in bipolar disorder mixed. It is not difficult to realize that Volpone shares most of the features that are usually present in this phase of manic depression, since his mood is expansive and irritable; his self-esteem, inflated, and there is a visible increase in goal-directed activity which is pleasurable, and, as is often the case in these mood disturbances, has a high potential for painful consequences.

Volpone has the opportunity of experiencing these painful consequences twice in the play, first during his trial for attempting to rape Colomba, and, in the end, when the whole truth about his deceitful ways is discovered by Venetian authorities. But, although this makes him suffer from fits of depression, he seems to be unable of controlling his inner agitation once he recovers from them. This feeling is perfectly exemplified by his excited words when he conceives his second plan to torture his enemies: "Mir brennt's schon durch alle Adern. Ah, was für ein herrlicher Spaß! Welch eine Orgie von Heiterkeit erwartet mich da!" (70)[26]. This sudden outburst of hatred is so violent that Mosca can only think of the devil as its prompter: "Reitet Euch schon wieder der Teufel in neue Teufelei?" (71)[27]. It is this same devilish impulse that Zweig holds responsible for the intensity of the opposite reaction, which affects most of the characters in his novels, and which is also visible in Volpone's depressed mood, when dominated by extreme fear. In *Angst*, for example, he mentions a demoniacal force when describing Irene's paralysing fear: "Seit Wochen schlief sie jetzt unruhig [...] dämonisch gejagt von ihrer inneren Angst" (321)[28]. This unbearable feeling is also experienced by Volpone when urged to answer for his past behaviour before the court of justice. Thus, when the official asks him to go there: "[*Oberster*] Vorwärts! Alle fort zum Tribunal!" (50)[29], he is taken aback by his dread of torture:

> [*Schaudernd vor Frost und Angst*] Ich gehe nicht, nein, ich gehe nicht ... sie werden mich foltern, unter die Bleidächer legen ...hinab in die Brunnen ... ich gehe nicht zum Tribunal ... mein Geld werden sie mir nehmen, mein Leben, mein Geld [...] Nein … ich gehe nicht zum Tribunal ... ich weiß, wie sie inquirieren ... die Folter ... der Strappado ... hab's einmal gesehen, wie sie die Winden aufgezogen, wie's da knackte und knirschte in den zerbrochenen Gelenken ... die Daumschrauben, die Zangen, die glühenden Zangen an den

[26] [It's burning through all my veins. Ah, what royal sport! What an orgy of merriment awaits me!].

[27] [Is the devil already driving you into new devilry?].

[28] [It was several weeks since she spent restless nights [...], devilish overcome with inner fear].

[29] [(*Captain)* Come along, all of you, to the tribunal!].

> Nägeln ... wie es pestete von verbranntem Fleisch, uh, uh ... nein, ich gehe nicht [...] ah ... ah, kein Gericht ... nur die Folter nicht, die Folter ... (51-52)[30].

Volpone's unfinished sentences, repetitions, stuttering and disjointed syntax reveal the extreme tension that his feeble nerves are under. This is a linguistic device that Zweig often resorts to when he shows the nervous breakdown which his depressive characters are prone to. One outstanding example is to be found in Zweig's *Sachnovelle*, which he sent to the press soon before his suicide, and which is the only place where he mentions the terrible methods that the Gestapo used to interrogate its victims[31]. Although Zweig does not specify there the diversity of physical tortures that the Nazis used to wring secrets from their victims, he nevertheless refers to them in a general way: "Sie holten mich [...] um mit ihren bewährten Methoden mir diese Geheimnisse abzuzwingen [...] statt von außen durch Prügel und Kälte, jener Druck von innen erzeugt werden, der uns schließlich die Lippen aufsprengte" (53-54)[32]. In this particular novel, however, Zweig is more interested in showing the psychological methods which the SS used to the same purpose, and, above all, the mental pain which they inflicted on their prisoners: "Im Vorzimmer des Untersuchungsrichters mußte ich warten [...] dieses Wartenlassen gehörte zur Technik [...] um den Körper müde und die Seele mürbe zu machen" (63)[33]. In the case of Dr. B., this led to an incurable mental illness. Thus, although he succeeded in escaping from the Gestapo on board a ship which was bound for America, he was never capable of overcoming his own mental instability.

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[30] [(*Shuddering with cold and fear*) I won't go, no, I won't go ... They'll put me on the rack, drip melted lead on me ... lower me into a well ... I won't go before the tribunal ... they'll take away my money, my life, my money [...] No ... I won't go to court ... I know there'll be an inquisition ... the rack ... the strappado ... I once heard the broken joints cracking and grinding as they tightened the ropes, the thumbscrews, the pincers, the red-hot pincers, pulling out the nails ... how it stunk of burning flesh! Ugh, ugh! ... no, I won't go [...] No, not to court ... only not the rack. Ugh, the rack ...].

[31] When talking about his novel, Zweig went as far as to establish a direct relationship between the fate of its chief character and what happened to those who were sent to concentration camps: "Die Leiden des Gestapohäftlings Dr. B. stehen […] stellvertretend für die Millionen Menschen, die in den Konzentrationslagern gefoltert und ermordet wurden" [The suffering of Dr.B. as a Gestapo prisoner [...] stands for those millions who were tortured and murdered in concentration camps] (Quoted by Siegfried Unseld (1979): *Nachwort*, 123).

[32] [They arrested me [...] in order to wring these secrets from me through their well-tried methods [...] Instead of beating or exposing us to the cold, they put inner pressure on us, so that our lips finally opened.].

[33] [I had to wait long for the police-interrogation [...] This long wait belonged to their methods. That is how they brought about physical and psychological exhaustion].

5. Zweig's Jewish otherness as reflected in his works

Die Sachnovelle contains a number of interesting autobiographical references that help understand some of the transformations which he introduced into the character of Volpone. One of them is the fact that Dr. B., like Stefan Zweig, is an Austrian Jew, and this fills him with long-lasting worries and fears which make him constantly look over his shoulder, so as not to be found guilty of having gone against German interests[34]. Friderike Zweig, his wife for over twenty-five years, also pointed out the anguish that his Jewish condition aroused in him because he constantly feared the revenge of those who could envy his success or that of his brothers (Politzer, 1947: 96). The situation became particularly complicated when the Nazis came into power, which forced him to take refuge elsewhere, long before the "Anschluß". Thus, he established himself in England in 1935, although the German occupation of Austria did not take place until 1938. Zweig, however, had the opportunity of stating how inflexible their anti-Semitic regulations were, since his plays were already banned from the German stage in 1933[35], and this also affected his version of *Volpone*.

Thus, Zweig, a person who, as Unseld revealed, was "ein furchtsamer Mensch, von Ängsten und Verfolgungen geplagt" (1979: 124)[36], never defied the Nazis[37], but took special care not to offend them, not even in his personal letters, in spite of which he had the opportunity of stating how effective the Secret Services of the Gestapo could become[38]. Thus, although he never wrote a word against their interests, an offensive statement discovered in a letter sent

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[34] Thus, the protagonist of his *Sachnovelle* reveals that he had already burnt all important documents when the Gestapo took him prisoner: "einen Tag, ehe Hitler in Wien einzog, ... ich bereits von SS-Leuten festgenommen war. Es war mir glücklicherweise noch gelungen, die allerwichtigsten Papiere zu verbrennen" [One day, before Hitler entered Vienna, ... I had already been arrested by the SS forces. I was lucky enough to have the most important documents destroyed by fire] (51).

[35] His name was included in along list of 130 authors whose works could neither be sold nor kept in German libraries.

[36] [That fellow was painfully shy, and was permanently seized with fears and worries].

[37] This attitude was emphasized by some critics, such as Nedeljkovič (1971: 296), who regretted that "Il n'ose élever contre le nazisme la solennelle protestation d'un juif".

[38] He made an indirect allusion to this fact in his *Sachnovelle*, where Dr. B. realized, to his dismay, that he had a spy inside his own office: "Selbst in unserer unscheinbaren Kanzlei hatten sie, wie ich leider erst zu spät erfuhr, ihren Mann" [As I regrettably discovered when it was too late, there was one of them even in our secret office] (49), who discovered the contents of their secret transactions, in spite of the care that he had taken to prevent it: "Die Post durfte er niemals öffnen, alle wichtigen Briefe schrieb ich, ohne Kopien zu hinterlegen, eigenhändig mit der Maschine, jedes wesentliche Dokument nahm ich selbst nach Hause" [He was never allowed to open the mail; I typed all important letters myself, leaving no copies behind, and took home each important document] (50).

to him by the German composer Richard Strauss had, as a result, the immediate banning of *Die schweigsame Frau* from stage. This opera had been composed by Strauss, and its libretto had been written by the non-Aryan Zweig. As Alfred Mathis (1944: 243) points out, "neither Zweig nor Strauss had the least notion that their correspondence was even at that time secretly watched by the Gestapo". He adds: "Nobody would have suspected that there could be any tampering with the letters of a councillor of state and the president of the Music Chamber". As Kenneth W. Birkin reveals after analysing a number of letters that were exchanged between Joseph Gregor and Stefan Zweig in 1935, Zweig predicted the tragic outcome of events, since he realized that very powerful opposition to the performance had built up: "As the first performance of *Die schweigsame Frau* draws near, the letters reflect with increasing intensity the doubts and fears which had long tormented Zweig […] To Zweig, the silence of the German Press was ominous. He sensed that a grave political struggle was taking place in official circles" (1975: 186-187).

Although Zweig's version of *Volpone* was completed seven years before the Nazis held complete control of the country, he nevertheless has Corvino make certain shocking commentaries on the Jews. So, when Mosca tells him that Volpone has recovered from his last fit thanks to the help of a Jewish doctor, he exclaims the following: "Sag' ich's nicht immer, *man soll sie brennen und austreiben*, *diese verdammten Juden*! Überall müsssen sie sich einmengen!" (30) [my italics][39], which uncovers Zweig's acute perception of anti-Semitic feelings in his homeland. Canina similarly voices racial prejudices when she tells Corbaccio that she can trust "*keinen Levantiner, keinen Griechen, keinen Juden, keinen von den Aasgeiern des Rialto*" but only "*einen ehrlichen christlichen Kaufmann*" like him (35) [my italics][40].

After reading his *Im Schnee*, which was published as early as 1901, there is little doubt left as to Zweig's inner conviction of the hatred that his race awakened. The realistic and moving description which he makes of the desperate flight of a group of Jews from their home town, so as to escape the bloody lash of their persecutors, who had killed thousands of Jews, prophetically anticipates the brutal extermination of Jews that the Nazis later undertook. It is, therefore, not surprising that Volpone's fears reach its highest point when he realizes that he is a foreign Levantine (Zweig's own addition), which means that the official authorities will show no mercy towards him: "Mosca, Mosca

[39] [Haven't I always said *they ought to burn up those damned Jews and drive them out?* They stick their noses into everything!].

[40] [*Not a Levantine, not a Greek, not a Jew, none of those carrion crows of the Rialto*, but *an honourable Christian merchant*]. Zweig seems to be playfully hinting at Shakespeare's ambiguous depiction of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*.

hilf mir, sie werden mich foltern, sie werden mich hängen, *ich bin fremd, bin Levantiner*, *da kennen sie keine Gnade* … hilf mir, Mosca, hilf mir!" (51) [my italics][41]. His fears seem to have been fully grounded, if one listens to the lawyer's stern sentence on Volpone's corpse, later in the play: "Aber noch sein Leib muß Buße tun für sein Verbrechen: am öffentlichen Platz lasse ich den Leichnam hängen und die Zunge annageln an den Galgen, daß man zur Warnung sehe, wie Betrug und Schändung gestraft wird in Venedig" (80)[42]. This terrible portrayal of the brutal practices which could be officially decreed again reflects Zweig's life-long dread of the authorities, which he expressed for the last time in a letter addressed to Robert Neumann only two days before his extreme depression led him to take his life. He said: "Nichts schmerzt mich mehr, als daß man jahrelang machtlos gegen die Dummheit der Politiker war und nun hilflos deren Folgen gegenübersteht" (Unseld, 1979: 124)[43]. As Feder's testimony reveals, Zweig was at that time experiencing deep fear about the possibility that his refuge in Brazil were not secure enough to keep him safe from the advance of war, which he felt to be approaching America. He says:

> I had been his summer neighbor for three months in the little mountains city [Petropolis] and I had spent many evenings with him, struggling in vain against his growing depression and melancholia, which he had made no attempt to conceal. The spectacle of the nations of Europe tearing each other to pieces with steadily increasing brutality, the knowledge that war was coming closer and closer to the American continent, were visibly weighing him down (Feder, 1943: 3).

6. Death as envisaged in Zweig's *Lieblose Komödie*

Zweig, in the end, decided to take refuge in death, that "angstlosen Schlaf" which Irene had envisaged in *Angst*; which Bertold Berger had finally reached in *Scharlach*; and which had also brought harmony to Kleist's tormented spirit in *Der Kampf mit dem Dämon,* as he followed Death's call accompanied by Henriette Vogel. Zweig's inner daemon was also expelled as he fulfilled his

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[41] [Mosca, Mosca, help me, they will stretch me on the rack, they will hang me, *I'm an alien, a Levantine, they'll have no mercy on me* ... Help me, Mosca, help me!].

[42] [But his body shall do penance for his crimes. I shall have the corpse hung in the public square and the tongue nailed to the gallows as a warning, a symbol of the manner in which deceit and profanation are punished in Venice.].

[43] [Nothing hurts me more deeply than having been helpless against the stupidity of politicians for years, and now having to take the consequences of their acts.].

most ardent wish in the company of his second wife, Lotte[44]. He then succeeded in healing those spiritual wounds which had plagued him since his early years, and which had made him long for suicide ever since, as his poem *Liebeslied* reveals (1966: 13):

> Nur durch den Tod, der jede Wunde stillt,
> Wird meiner Seele Wunschgebet erfüllt[45].

Although Volpone does not take his own life at the end of the play but seeks safety in flight, there is a surprisingly large number of allusions to death, which far exceed those of the source play, and which come as no surprise if we take into account who the theatrical adaptor of the play is. Stefan Zweig was, in fact, so strongly drawn towards death during his life that he even wrote a treatise on suicide, and the realistic descriptions of death that we find in his novels and short stories are so numerous that they can only come from someone who had been permanently concerned with it. That is why Corbaccio's detailed description of its symptoms is so impressive:

> Ich …, hehe, ich …, hehe…Seh' mir gern Sterbende an. Hab' schon so viele gesehen, seh's immer lieber. […] Hehe, dann kommt's bald … kenn ich … oft gesehn … jetzt wird's bald lustig … dann keine Luft, pumpt … pumpt … pumpt … kriegt's nicht mehr herauf … blau dann, blaβ … hehe, jetzt kommt's bald … dann starr, spürt nichts mehr … Ohren dumpf, Lider gelb … hehe, kenne das … ist bald soweit (19-20)[46].

And that is probably why Mosca so naturally anticipates the moment of Volpone's death, when the coffin's lid will not allow him to watch the anger of his disinherited friends: "Aber Messer Volpone, wie wollt Ihr's sehen: der Sargdeckel hat keine Löcher" (70)[47].

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[44] They died from an overdose of Veronal on the 22 February 1942. As Friderike M. Zweig reveals, "he twice sought her companionship in death, a request she could not accede to" (1961: 124).

[45] [The deepest wish within my breast
Can only be fulfilled in death:
Then will my wounds at last be healed].

[46] [I ... he, he ... he, he ... I like to look at dying men. I've seen so many and I enjoy each one more [...] He, he, then it's coming soon. I know ... Seen it often ... it will soon be jolly ... No air, pumps ... pumps ... can't raise any more ... blue then, pale he, he ... coming soon now ... then stiff, no feeling ... ears dulled, lids yellow ... he, he ... I know ... 'twill soon come to that].

[47] [But, Messer Volpone, how can you see that? A coffin has no holes in it]. Volpone's periphrastic allusion to his own death, earlier in the play, already mentioned the coffin lid: "Ja du, mein Junge, ich weiβ, du wünscht mir auch nicht Würmer in den Leib und *den Sargdeckel über den Kopf*" [Yes, my boy, I know you do not wish to see worms in my body either, *the coffin-lid over my head*] (23).

Readers of Zweig's works often come across coffins. Thus, in *Amokläufer*, the coffin that contains the corpse of the woman who died from an abortion is sent to the bottom of the ocean, thanks to the weight of the Doctor's dead body, which falls on top of it from the ship where he commits suicide. The ocean then becomes the tomb which prevents public dishonour for a married woman who had an affair when away from her husband. The snow in *Im Schnee* similarly transforms itself into the dazzling coffin that covers the frozen bodies of the fleeing Jews whose carts have been trapped in the middle of a snow storm. Zweig describes its fascinating power as it magically brings about a solemn peace.

7. *VOLPONE*'S DENOUEMENT AS THE EPITOME OF ZWEIG'S INNER STRUGGLE

Stefan Zweig yearned during his whole life for the peace which he describes in *Im Schnee*, but, as his first wife Friderike Maria Zweig revealed, his unbalanced personality gave rise to sudden fits of temper (Politzer, 1947: 95). Friderike often spoke of his "black liver", saying that it was dangerous to be close to him[48]. But that "black liver" also made him suffer from long periods of anguished fear which were aggravated by his own experience of xenophobia, universal hatred and war[49]. As Ambrosi reveals in a series of letters addressed to H. Zohn in 1954, his friend Stefan Zweig lived in a permanent state of anxiety. He says: "Angst war sein wesentlichstes Element, Angst! Angst!" (Zohn,1983: 310)[50].

These traits of Zweig's personality, which, as pointed out, recurrently appear in his literary work, can also be traced in his free version of Jonson's *Volpone*, which he termed *Volpone, eine lieblose Komödie*, and where, as the title makes clear, there is no room for tender feelings. That is why Mosca at the end of the play recalls the bitterness of his master's gall: "Weiß nicht, ob Gott ihm die Galle größer wachsen ließ als den andern" (81)[51], although his remark implies that his bitterness, though greater, is not limited to him. Volpone

[48] Cfr. Harry Zohn's (1983: 310) translation of F.M. Zweig's *Antworten* as "The Final Tragedy" in "The Burning Secret of Stephen Branch, or A Cautionary Tale About a Physician who Could Not Heal Himself".

[49] Zweig's own testimony in *Die Welt von Gestern* (1992 [1941]: 8) casts light on his own perception of war: "Wider meinen Willen bin ich Zeuge geworden der furchtbarsten Niederlage der Vernunft und des wildesten Triumphes der Brutalität innerhalb der Chronik der Zeiten" [Against my own will have I lived through the most terrible overthrow of reason and the most savage triumph of violence that has ever been recorded].

[50] [He was in a permanent state of anxiety].

[51] [I don't know if the Lord gave him a larger gall than other people].

himself did his best to prompt the worse reactions from those who wished to become his heirs: "Ah, mich juckt's schon, das Gelbe in ihren Augen zu sehen und ihnen die Galle heraufzukitzeln" (24-25)[52]. Their fierce competition for his inheritance proves that he succeeded in doing so. Thus, the universal hatred that Zweig perceived in his own world is well exemplified in the unscrupulous behaviour of the different characters that inhabit this "loveless" comedy.

As we have seen, both in this play and in other works by Zweig, periods of abnormal elation intermix with depressive episodes during which his characters suffer the consequences of their previous actions and, frightened, look for an outlet. In *Volpone*, Mosca's menacing words make his master flee from Venice, and leave the parasite sole heir to Volpone's estate. But, although the genre of comedy asks for a happy ending, Mosca's final words when he opens Volpone's windows to let fresh air in still underline the play's gloomy mood: "Die Fenster auf, die Türen geöffnet, Luft und Licht und Menschen herein: es riecht noch nach Angst, es muffelt nach Geiz und Habsucht und bösen Reden" (88)[53]. The strong smell of evil and fear that Mosca is trying to dispel is still perceived as too oppressive. It is as oppressive as the anguish which Zweig only conquered when he took his life.

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[52] [Ah, I'm itching to see the yellow in their eyes and rouse their bile].

[53] [Open the doors, the windows –let in air and light and people. This place still smells of fear, it's close with grasping, greed and malicious words.].

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