



PAPA HAMLET

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PAPA HAMLET

PREVIEW

CONTENTS

ARNO HOLZ & JOHANNES SCHLAF

PAPA HAMLET	7
Papa Hamlet	9
A Death	59
'Translator's Introduction' to Papa Hamlet	79
New Foreword to Papa Hamlet	85
The Paper Passion	93

JOHANNES SCHLAF

A Garret Idyll	131
Afterword	155

PAPA HAMLET

I

What? Was that Niels Thienwiebel? Niels Thienwiebel, the great, unsurpassed Hamlet from Trondheim? I eat the air, and am promise-crammed? You cannot better feed capons so? ...

‘Hey! Horatio!’

‘Just a moment! Just a moment, Nielsie! Where’s the fire? Should I bring the playing cards?’

‘N ... no! I mean ...’

-- ‘Damn it to hell! That, that’s a, a – bathtub!’

Poor little Ole Nissen was almost about to trip over it. He had just come from the kitchen and was now on all fours looking for his blue pince-nez, which had fallen off his nose again in the rush.

‘Huh? What? What did you say?!’

‘What is it, Nielsie? What?’

‘Numbskull!’

‘But Thiiienwiebel!’

‘Amalie?! I ...’

‘Ach! Well would you look at that! So that’s it!’

‘Huh?! What?! Great rogue! My rogue! My rogue.’

Amalie! Heh! What?’

Amalie smiled. A little drawn.

‘A capital fellow!’

‘A little demon! My little demon! My little demon! Heh! What, Amalie? My little demon!’

Amalie nodded. A little tired.

‘Yes, Herr Thienwiebel! Yes indeed!’

But Frau Wachtel struggled in vain. Herr Thienwiebel, the great, unsurpassed Hamlet from Trondheim, did not wish to let go of his little demon.

‘Huh, old boy? Huh?’

‘Indeed, Nielsie! Indeed, a ... a ... magnificent specimen! A magnificent specimen!’

‘Hoo, hoo, hoo, hop!! Hoo, hoo, hoo, hop!! Boom!!!’

The great Thienwiebel was wallowing in delight. He was even standing on one leg now. The wadding was flapping from the back of his checked dressing gown.

‘But Thiiienwiebel!’

II

‘To be or not to be, that is the question:
Whether ’tis nobler in the mind, the slings and
arrows
of outrageous fortune, or ...

or? ... Atrocious!

The great Thienwiebel paused again.

‘This, this is intolerable! This is intolerable!!’

The five small yellow rags behind the stove, which were hung up there to dry on a washing line, had completely thrown his concentration again.

‘Disgusting!’

Now he was standing bitterly at the window with his hands in his dressing gown pockets.

The sky was deep blue above the roofs; the sparrows were already squabbling in the wet gutters from which the last of the snow was dripping; it was wonderful weather for going out.

‘Poor Yorick!’

A shade more gloomy yet, the great Thienwiebel had thrown himself backwards over the small, low sofa covered in blue calico and was now staring mournfully over the tips of his green, well-worn slippers at Amalie.

Her thin, clay-coloured hair had not yet been fixed, her nightshirt seemed even dirtier than usual today and of course it was open again in the front; crouched on her footstool, she was carelessly using a rubber tube to feed the cherry-red little customer, who suddenly looked as ugly as a little frog.

‘Poor Yorick!’

Herr Thienwiebel had risen again with a sigh and now resumed his prior pacing.

‘... or? or ...’

To take arms against a sea of troubles,

And by opposing end them. – To die – to sleep –

No more! –’

Once at the window he couldn't deny himself another short break.

The sun was just setting outside. The roofs looked ginger red. But one look down at his old, worn dressing gown made him pull himself together again and resume his monologue from the start.

‘To be or not to be, that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in mind ...

Ach, rubbish!!’

With a start the Shakespeare, which he had just now torn from his dressing gown pocket, was flung onto the table, where it found itself in the company of an ethanol cooker, an earthen brown milk pot without a handle, an old, sooty towel, a glass lamp and a photograph of the great Thienwiebel in a mora wood frame.

‘Hey! Horatio! Horatio!! ... No one home! No one home ...’

Quite ruined, he had hurled himself back on the sofa and was now absorbed by the tragic tableau of a child's dirty pinafore which lay on the floor before him next to a broken box of Swedish matches.

‘Curse it! If we could at least go out, Amalie! But I fear ... I fear ... the world is not enlightened enough to let a Niels Thienwiebel in dressing gown and top hat go his way unmolested!’

But Amalie didn't even answer. The little lobster-red thing absorbed her full attention. His sucking

had now contracted the whole hose.

‘Yes! That’s how it is! That’s how it is, Amalie! But they still haven’t written to me! They have people there, people – people? Pah! Bunglers! O spurns that patient merit of the unworthy takes!’

Now Amalie, who was already familiar this refrain, looked up.

‘Yes ... in the end it might be good if you ...’

Her voice sounded hoarse, husky.

‘Yes, it will happen! Perhaps ... with my weakness and melancholy ...’

The little lobster was smacking his lips! His bottle was all but empty now.

‘I shall have to go there myself and accept whatever they dare offer me! Life is brutal, Amalie! Curse it! If only one had a coat to go out in!’

His tone was quite mad now, he had stretched himself over the sofa again.

A long pause ...

The roofs outside had gradually turned brown.

The sun on the big round chimney across the way had faded.

Over in her corner, Frau Thienwiebel now began to cough.

‘Good God, Niels! I have to inhale! Here, take the child!’

‘Naturally! Nanny now, too! O God, your only jig-maker! What should a man do but be merry? Quiet, lobster!!’

The little lobster was silent again. He had never been so stunned.

‘There! Take it! Chew it! Eat! Swallow it!’

The great Thienwiebel had now even managed to stuff the rubber teat into the mouth of his wayward offspring. One could not ask more of him than that!

In the meantime Amalie had opened the stove-pipe and taken out a small, green-glazed saucepan. From it arose a vapour with an odour of sage. Once she had put the little dish on a chair next to the stove and herself on the footstool before it, she opened her mouth and slowly inhaled the hot concoction.

The great Thienwiebel, who in the meantime had positioned himself on the edge of the table with his impertinent little lobster-red creature, watched her thoughtfully.

‘Hmmm! Do you know what, Amalie?’

‘Hmmm??’

‘Do you know what? Our method of feeding the child is completely wrong, Amalie!’

‘What!’

‘The method, I say! A *wrong-headed* method Amalie!’

‘But ...’

‘Take my word for it! It is unnatural, Amalie!’

‘Yes, dear God ...’

‘It’s unnatural ... we should not make the child drink from the bottle!’

‘No? Well, from what then?’

‘You should just feed him yourself!’

‘Me?’

‘Certainly, Amalie!’

‘Oh, dear God! Me! Myself!’

‘Well! Why not?’

‘Me?? Now, with my weak, sick chest?’

‘Nonsense! That’s in your mind, Amalie! I tell you, you are completely healthy. You are completely healthy, I say! ... What’s more, a child can only truly thrive if the mother nurses it herself.’

Herr Thienwiebel had now become most fervent. He seemed to have completely forgotten his boredom from earlier. He didn’t even seem to have noticed that the little wriggling grub on his knees had dropped the rubber teat again.

‘Take my word for it, Amalie! I tell you, the most natural method is always the best! Think about it: what else are the Negresses to do! They have no bottles! They simply feed their children themselves, you see ... and, and – well! And they thrive on it! Thrive! Well?’

‘Yes, Niels, but I’m not a Negress!’

The great Thienwiebel gave her a superior smile.

‘Well, don’t ... heehee! Don’t misunderstand me, Amalie! Heehee!’

Amalie had bent low over her sage pot again.

‘I merely wished to indicate to you through a ... a ... well! through an example, let’s say, that the most natural way is always the most prudent. I just don’t see why Negresses should have anything over us!’

‘But they are healthy!’

‘Come now! This illness, it’s all in your mind, Amalie!’

‘My mind?’

‘Certainly, Amalie! I maintain ...’

Amalie had now grown a little impatient.

‘Nonsense! It’s better to not let the child scream like that!’

‘And *that* is another of your preconceptions, Amalie! What harm does it do! I have read that there is nothing healthier! It dilates the lungs! But – er ... as I said! You should feed the child yourself! Certainly today’s culture, the culture of the European sphere ...’

The culture passed Amalie by. She abided only by the admonitions she had come to hear so often of late.

‘Oh yes! Oh yes! Yes indeed! Certainly! With our way of life! Living on coffee and buttered bread all day long! I should like to know how the poor grub is meant to thrive!’

‘Ha! To live in the rank sweat of an enseamed bed, stew’d in corruption, and making love over the nasty sty! Is that it? You mean to say that I am to blame for our situation, Amalie!’

‘Well! Am I?’

‘Woman!!!’

‘Morning!’

The door, at which someone had been knocking in vain for some time, was thrown wide open at that moment, and there, prancing in his ever-present have-lock which had probably once been field grey, a huge black slouch hat pressed low over his small, cheerful, pale face, was little Ole Nissen.

‘Morning! Don’t let me disturb you, friends! I beg you! No fuss, Nielsie! No fuss! I know! Trying a new scene! So, as I was saying ... damn it! That’s a hard beast!’

He had just flopped down in the middle of the little calico sofa and almost lost his Egyptian cigarette,

which was crookedly clamped between his teeth.

‘So, as I was saying! I’m walking down the embankment feeling utterly miserable. Huh? And who should I see there? The sewer inspector! Well, who else? The sewer inspector, of course! Fancy marriage, villa in Bratsberg, ha! and so on and so forth. You can imagine! So, of course, he drags me to Hiddersen’s at once and interrogates me ... Well, old chap? How are you? ... So naturally I say: rotten! Rotten! ... hmmm! You know what? You could actually do a portrait of my lady wife! ... hmmm! With pleasure, my friend! With pleasure! But – erm ... paints, you see – ah, canvas, frame and so on ... huh! What? Great turkey!’

Ole Nissen was now jingling the fine, fancy crowns in his pockets.

‘Frau Wachtel! Frau Wachtel!! Frau Wachtel!!!’

The house of Thienwiebel was bathing in delight once more. Its quarrels were deferred for a time once again.

‘Huh! And this? Is it butter? And this? Huh? Is it ham? Huh? And this? Huh? Bring the good silver! Silence!!’

Little Ole was over the moon again today ...

Once the ‘good silver’ had finally been cleared away and two-thirds of the punch bowl emptied, Frau Wachtel had even ‘scared up’ the playing cards. It was simply wonderful! The great Thienwiebel had his Turkish fez on, Ole Nissen even gallantly offered his Egyptian cigarettes to old Madame Wachtel, who, however, fled from them indignantly back to her kitchen; Amalie valiantly smoked with the men. She was transported

back to her old Ophelia years. ‘Oh, Thienwiebel! Niels!! Beloved!!!’

The great Thienwiebel stood there and wept.

‘Am I a coward? – Ha! Plucks off my beard, and blows it in my face! No, fair Ophelia! No! Do not weep! My fate cries out, and makes each petty artery in this body as hardy as the Nemean lion’s nerve! ... what, old Jephthah? ... Nay, do not think I flatter! For what advancement may I hope from thee that no revenue hast but thy good spirits, to feed and clothe thee?’

His voice broke off, the hand that he had placed on his shoulder trembled. –

Finally, when the old glass lamp was burning no more than a wan light and the magnificent Egyptian cigarettes had laid a fine silvery grey, finger-thick ring of fog around its green dome, little Ole Nissen was moved as well.

Little by little he had moved across to the fair Ophelia on the little blue calico-covered sofa and from that point would only address her as ‘Kitty’. Now he had finally got hold of her hands and covered them with his kisses.

The great Thienwiebel raised no objection. He had spread his hands over them in blessing and could only stammer out his heart.

‘This presence knows, and you must needs have heard, how I am punish’d with sore distraction!’

Meanwhile, back in its corner, the little lobster had been left to its distress. He had already cried himself to sleep several times. But now he had woken up again and could not for the life of him find his rubber teat. The

fair Ophelia did not hear him. She had long since fallen asleep in her corner of the sofa. He was screaming like a stuck pig now.

The great Thienwiebel naturally had no time for the rogue, particularly now. He had grabbed little Ole Nissen, who could hardly keep his small, watery blue eyes open now, by the front of his coat collar and merely declaimed again:

‘Tis a chough, Horatio! A chough! But, as I say, spacious in the possession of dirt!’

END OF PREVIEW

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