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**The Press Reception of Austrian
Works of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung***

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2006

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- 7 AUG 2007

Catriona Firth

Master of Arts by Research:

The Press Reception of Austrian Works of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*

Submitted September 2006

This thesis explores the relationship between literature and historical memory in Austria through five case studies of literary press reception, examining the validity of common conceptions of Austrian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. The introduction provides an overview and explanation of the historico-political context of the thesis, considering cultural narratives on *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, the position of the Austrian press and its relationship with contemporary, socially critical literature. Chapters One and Two compare the press reception of Hans Lebert's *Die Wolfshaut* and Gerhard Fritsch's *Fasching* to the widely held view of a failed *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in 1960s Austria. Chapter Three considers the reception of Elfriede Jelinek's *Die Ausgesperrten* in the context of the *Sozialpartnerschaft* and the politics of memory associated with this period of forced political harmony. Chapter Four deals with the most extreme case, Thomas Bernhard's *Heldenplatz*, questioning the common assumption that the late 1980s marked a turning point in Austria's troubled relationship with its past. This is developed in Chapter Five, which examines the reception of Robert Schindel's *Gebürtig* and considers the extent to which Austrian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* can be viewed as a completed process. In the Conclusion the findings of the previous five chapters are brought together and compared with the grand cultural narrative on Austrian historical memory in a consideration of the validity of a linear conceptualisation of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.

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Appendix I: Overview of Publications Analysed

Introduction

Recent research has revealed Austria's most read newspaper, the *Kronen Zeitung*, to have attained one of the highest readership percentages in the world, surpassing many internationally renowned publications and thus confirming further media analyses which accorded the Austrian press with the highest circulation figures in Europe.¹ The unique status of the press in Austrian public consciousness suggested by these findings renders possible an analysis of public attitudes towards *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* through a consideration of the press reception of Austro-critical literary works, providing an alternative to the established cultural narratives of Austrian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.

Used to describe the process in Germany and Austria of coming to terms with their role in the Nazi atrocities, *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* has been subjected to lengthy examination in both countries. For the purposes of this thesis we will concentrate on Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich's analysis of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*,² which argues that failure to work through the past responsibly inevitably results in a "Wiederholungszwang",³ which can only be broken "wo historische Ereignisse eine Bewußtseinsveränderung hervorrufen".⁴ This introduction will provide an overview of the cultural narrative of Austrian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and an examination of the political and historical factors which shaped the Austrian press landscape, finally outlining the methodological means by which the two will be combined.

Austrian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*

The specificity of Austrian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and the differences between Austrian and German attitudes to their role in National Socialism are commonly attributed to Austria's self-created identity as the first victim of Nazi aggression, as an occupied land with no real affiliation with National Socialism. The foundation of this "victim thesis" can be traced back to the Moscow Treaty of 1943, whereby the Allies officially recognised Austria as "das erste freie Land, das der Hitlerschen Aggression zum Opfer gefallen ist".⁵ Whilst the Treaty qualified this status with the recognition

¹ For more information on circulation figures and readership see Appendix I.

² Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern: Grundlagen kollektiven Verhaltens* (Munich: Piper, 1967).

³ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Quoted in Josef Haslinger, *Politik der Gefühle* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1995), p. 60.



that Austria must still accept responsibility for her role in the war, the Moscow Declaration was regarded by post-war Austrian politicians as an absolution of guilt and was later incorporated into the *Staatsvertrag* when Austria gained her independence in 1955. Thus the Second Austrian Republic is seen to be based on a series of “historische Notlügen”,⁶ as “for the founding fathers of the Second Republic, the official view of the Nazi era was less a matter of revealing historical truth than of following the dictates of political reason and accepting the status of victim”.⁷ The widespread incorporation of the victim myth into Austria’s post-war historical identity can be seen to have two concrete consequences for Austrian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*: the widespread failure of the denazification process in Austria and the externalisation of guilt.

Due to the widely propagated victim-thesis and Austria’s subsequent rejection of guilt, the process of denazification in Austria appeared doomed from the outset. After initial efforts by the Allies to “cleanse” Austria of its Nazis and to bring Nazi perpetrators to justice, a series of legislation separating “belastete” Nazis from the “Minderbelastete” resulted in a situation where almost nobody was “belastet”,⁸ leading Haslinger to describe Austrian denazification as a “Mini-Säuberung”.⁹ Thus denazification in Austria took on a new meaning, “er bedeutet nun: Reinigung der Nationalsozialisten von jedem Schuldvorwurf”,¹⁰ with the result that by 1951 only 54 of the 13,000 Austrians convicted of war crimes were still incarcerated, with this figure dropping to fourteen by 1955.¹¹ This failed denazification and the efforts made to reintegrate former Nazis into society evidently demonstrate an unwillingness of the post-war Austrian State to deal responsibly with the Nazi era, as political pragmatism triumphed over attempts at *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.

The second consequence of the “staatstragende Selbstinfantilisierung”¹² corresponds directly to the Mitscherlichs’ theory on *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, which suggests that identification with the victim in place of an acceptance of guilt

⁶ Menasse, *Das Land ohne Eigenschaften* (Vienna: Sonderzahl, 1992), p. 17.

⁷ Heidemarie Uhl, ‘Politics of Memory’, in *Austrian Historical Memory and National Identity*, ed. by Günther Bischof and Anton Pelinka (New Jersey: Transaction, 1997), pp. 64-94 (p. 67).

⁸ For a chronology of the mutations of these definitions and a succinct portrayal of the process of denazification in Austria see Sebastien Meissl, Klaus-Dieter Mulley, and Oliver Ratholb (eds), *Verdrängte Schuld, verfehlte Sühne* (Vienna: Verlag für Geschichte und Politik, 1986).

⁹ Haslinger, p. 64.

¹⁰ Haslinger, p. 69.

¹¹ Walter Manoschek, ‘Verschmähte Erbschaft’, in *Österreich 1945-1995*, ed. by Reinhard Sieder, Heinz Steinert, and Emmerich Tàlos (Vienna: Verlag für Gesellschaftskritik, 1995), pp. 94-106 (p. 102).

¹² Manoschek, p. 96.

renders possible the process of externalisation of guilt.¹³ This process of externalisation functioned differently in Austria than in Germany, where guilt was not transferred onto compatriots but was placed entirely on Germany. Thus the externalisation of guilt took place in Austria not only on an individual basis but was equally an institutionalised projection of guilt, as the State itself rejected responsibility, drawing upon the fact that Austria itself did not exist as an autonomous state under the Third Reich. A standard school textbook in the 1970s still claimed that “[t]he Second World War belongs to world history, but not to Austrian history. It was not an Austrian war. Austria did not participate in it”,¹⁴ perpetuating the externalisation of guilt and presenting the next generation with Austria’s self-crafted historical identity. This example of institutionalised manipulation of history as an avoidance tactic can thus be seen to legitimise Meinrad Ziegler’s claim that a denial of the past in Austria was coupled with a new “reality”, as “eine andere Wirklichkeit wird bis in die 70er Jahre in den Vordergrund geschoben”¹⁵ and countering Parkinson’s suggestion that a “gradual emergence in Austria of a critical in the place of the former conformist historiography” was observable “since the mid-1960s”.¹⁶

Following this extended period of failed *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and political “double-speak”,¹⁷ the 1980s are portrayed in the common cultural narrative as an “awakening” and the beginning of a more historically accurate appraisal of Austria’s Nazi past. This conjectured turning point in Austrian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* is seen to have been triggered by the 1986 presidential elections and the so-called “Waldheim Affair”. This political crisis centred upon the ÖVP’s presidential candidate, Kurt Waldheim, a former diplomat and UN Secretary-General. In the course of the campaign it was revealed that Waldheim had not only spent most of his time in the *Wehrmacht* in an area of mass deportation (40,000 Jews were deported from Saloniki) and at the site of a massacre in West Bosnia¹⁸ but was

¹³ Mitscherlich, p. 60.

¹⁴ Ernst Görlich and Feliz Romanik, *Geschichte Österreichs*, (Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 1970), p. 551. Quoted in Uhl, p. 73.

¹⁵ Meinrad Ziegler and Waltraud Kannonier-Finster, *Österreichisches Gedächtnis: Über Erinnern und Vergessen der NS-Vergangenheit* (Vienna: Böhlau, 1993), pp. 70-71.

¹⁶ F. Parkinson, ‘Epilogue’, in *Conquering the Past: Austrian Nazism Yesterday and Today*, ed. by F. Parkinson (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), pp. 313-334 (p. 328)

¹⁷ This term is employed by Anton Pelinka to describe the ambiguous relationship in Austrian politics with the past, where the lip-service paid to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* contrasted with domestic policy which reinforced the victim thesis. Anton Pelinka, ‘Taboos and Self-Deception’ in Bischof/Pelinka, pp. 95-102 (p. 97).

¹⁸ Waldheim denied all knowledge of the crimes against civilians, claiming to have been on leave when these occurred.

furthermore a member of a National Socialist student organisation and an officer in the SA-Cavalry corps. More shocking than these revelations themselves was Waldheim's response that "he, like thousands of his fellow Austrians, had only done his duty", which provoked outrage from Austria's intellectuals and caused international outcry.

Despite the international discredit which accompanied the Waldheim affair,¹⁹ common consensus amongst Austrian intellectuals is that "Waldheim war gut für das Land".²⁰ The Waldheim affair is considered to have signalled a "waking up from a long hibernation of forgetfulness and seeming mastery over the past",²¹ thus provoking a more critical assessment of Austria's past. In their work on Austrian historical memory Anton Pelinka and Günther Bischof emphasise the emergence of new brand of historiography generated by the Waldheim affair,²² presented as being "clearly a generational matter".²³ These alleged changes in Austria's collective consciousness are further regarded by Menasse as "ein Indiz dafür, daß ein gesellschaftliches Bedürfnis nach Selbstreflexion wuchs",²⁴ implying not only a change in critical historiography but also a significant development in public attitudes towards the past.

The Austrian Press

Determining for the course of the Austrian press in the Second Republic was the role of the Allied forces in the immediate post-war period and their influence on the structure of the Austrian media. Indeed it has been claimed that "die Politik der vier Besatzungsmächte auf dem Gebiet des Pressewesens war so einschneidend, daß anhand der Struktur des österreichischen Zeitungswesens selbst heute noch die Grenze der einstigen Besatzungszonen deutlich abzulesen sind".²⁵ This assertion makes reference to the differing media politics of the four Allies, as British and Russian forces in Eastern and Southern Austria allowed only party-political publications of the three main parties, the ÖVP, SPÖ and the KPÖ, whilst independent publications

¹⁹ Waldheim was set on the American watch-list and made almost no state visits during his presidential term.

²⁰ Haslinger, p. 15.

²¹ Günther Bischof, 'Founding Myths and Compartmentalised Past', in Pelinka/Bischof, pp. 302-341 (p. 304)

²² See Pelinka, p. 100 and Bischof, p. 304.

²³ Bischof, p. 304.

²⁴ Menasse, *Land ohne Eigenschaften*, p. 14.

²⁵ Fritz Csoklich, 'Massenmedien', in *Das Neue Österreich: Geschichte der Zweiten Republik*, ed. by Erika Weinzierl and Kurt Skalník (Vienna/Graz: Styria, 1975), pp. 259-76 (p. 260)

dominated the French and American zones in Western and Northern Austria, explaining the continuing prevalence of the party-political press in the East into the 1960s.

The main debate surrounding the press landscape of the post-war period and its continuing influence on the Austrian press is the question of the existence of a widespread 'Stunde Null' against the argument of considerable continuity. Superficially, statistics would appear to confirm a widespread rupture within the press, as only six of the thirty two publications of the First Republic were still in existence post-1945, Nazi censorship having eradicated the majority of the Austrian press and persecuted or forced into exile many of its former journalists. Despite this break with tradition it is obvious that there were "dennoch problematische Kontinuitäten im Journalismus",²⁶ arising principally from a widespread continuity in personnel. The much neglected subject of the denazification of the Austrian press, described by Hausjell as "große weiße Flecken auf der Landkarte der Medienforschung",²⁷ provides an interesting insight into the problematic relationship of the Austrian press with *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.

Claims that the denazification of the press was an overall failure cannot be legitimised, as an extensive programme was developed as early as 1946 by the *Journalistengewerkschaft*, whose members were subjected to intense scrutiny prior to being accepted.²⁸ These measures were combined with an attempt to create a *Berufsliste*, whereby only those members of the denazified *Journalistengewerkschaft* could follow their profession. This practical action in conjunction with the commendable mission statement of the *Journalistengewerkschaft* that "zu den Pflichten, zu denen sich die österreichischen Journalisten bekennen, gehören insbesondere der entschlossene Kampf gegen nationalsozialistische, großdeutsche und militärische Ideologien und Doktrinen in alle ihre Formen"²⁹ are evidence of a considerable willingness to denazify the Austrian press and break all ties with the Nazi past.

²⁶ Fritz Hausjell, 'Die mangelnde Bewältigung des Vergangenen', in *Die vierte Macht: Zur Geschichte und Kultur des Journalismus in Österreich seit 1945*, ed. by Hans-Heinz Fabris and Fritz Hausjell (Vienna: Verlag für Gesellschaftskritik, 1991), pp. 29-49 (p. 36).

²⁷ Hausjell, *Die vierte Macht* p. 29.

²⁸ In this process approximately one third of applicants were subjected to examination and around on in ten of those examined were rejected on the ground of participation in the National Socialist regime. Hausjell, *Die vierte Macht*, p. 35.

²⁹ Letter from the *Journalistengewerkschaft* to the Austrian Government, 6th March 1946. Quoted in Hausjell, *Die vierte Macht*, p. 30.

Yet it would be idealistic to view these good intentions as proof of an entirely successful denazification, as 37.1% of journalists active in the post-war years had worked at some point during the Third Reich and exploited the many loopholes in the examination process to escape closer scrutiny.³⁰ It is also important to note that the denazification measures mentioned above restricted themselves to Vienna, Lower Austria and Burgenland, whilst the process in the remaining provinces was far less successful and indeed “die gewerkschaftliche Entnazifizierung der Presse in den Bundesländern [war] schon in der Zielsetzung wesentlich bescheidener”, as certain NS-party members and all *Minderbelastete* were accepted from the outset. This largely unsuccessful, although certainly well-intentioned, denazification of the press leads inevitably to the question “[w]ie sollten österreichische Nachkriegsjournalisten geeignet (gewesen) sein, jüngste Vergangenheit den historischen Ereignissen gerecht aufzuarbeiten und über Medien zu transportieren, wenn ein großer Teil derselben selbst darin verstrickt war?”³¹ It is therefore evident that the relationship between the Austrian press and Austria’s *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* is a complex and problematic issue with evident consequences for newspapers’ treatment of socially-critical literature.

No less problematic is the relationship between the Austrian press and contemporary Austrian literature, especially regarding works which exert explicit social and political criticism. It has often been noted that contemporary literature is accorded very little attention in the Austrian press and that “die wenigen Rezensionen [...] müssen mit weniger als ein Dutzend knapper Sätze auskommen”.³² In the course of his doctoral thesis Friedrich Bernhard Panzer carried out an empirical examination of the role and status of literature in the press, basing his findings on a one month analysis of the daily press in March 1985.³³ Despite the short duration of this study, the conclusions which Panzer draws from the statistics gathered can be regarded as highly representative of the press as a whole, not only describing the situation in the 1980s but equally reflecting an overall trend in the reception of contemporary Austrian literature.

³⁰ Hausjell, *Die vierte Macht*, pp. 34-6.

³¹ Fritz Hausjell, ‘Verdränger als Aufarbeiter’, *politische Bildung*, 4 (1988), pp. 227-31 (p. 227).

³² Klaus Zeyringer, *Österreichische Literatur seit 1945: Überblicke, Einschnitte, Wegmarken* (Innsbruck: Haymann, 2001), p. 84.

³³ Friedrich Bernhard Panzer, *Gegenwartsliteratur und Journalismus in Österreich* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Salzburg, 1985).

Perhaps the most striking outcome to emerge from his study is the seemingly high representation of literature within the press, and especially within the tabloids. Within his period of analysis 29 articles pertaining to modern Austrian literature appeared in the tabloid press, corresponding to an average of 9.7 articles per paper (excluding the *Neue Kronen Zeitung* this average rises to 14.5 articles), whilst the remaining independent press i.e. the broadsheets produced an average of 5.7 articles per paper. The party political press equally lagged behind with an average of 7.9 articles.³⁴ This surprising distribution of articles and the fact that there was on average one article pertaining to literature to be found every second day in the press would seem to suggest that pre-conceptions of the inadequacy of the Austrian press in dealing with literature must be revised.

However, these figures demonstrating the apparently high status of modern Austrian literature in the press do not tell the whole story. A closer examination of the nature of these articles and the literature they deal with as well as their treatment of socially critical literature paints a far less rosy picture. In order to analyse these aspects Panzer divides articles into three categories: texts by Austrian authors, reviews of Austrian works and reports on surrounding aspects e.g. on the author himself/herself, on “events” such as theatre premieres or book readings and on literary “scandals” such as the Thomas Bernhard *Holzfällen* affair. Panzer’s studies reveal thus that of the 132 articles on contemporary Austrian literature only 16.7% were primary source texts from authors, reviews constituting only 25.8% of all articles, whilst reports dominated the treatment of literature, making up 57.5% of all articles. This sidelining of the texts themselves in favour of peripheral elements consequently undermines the superficially positive image created by the first set of statistics, demonstrating what Panzer considers to be a central characteristic of Austrian literary journalism, namely the “Personalisierung” of literature in the press. In an interview with Panzer, Gerd Jonke effectively sums up the attitude towards literature in the press and furthermore in Austria as a whole: “Österreicher lesen eher das Drumherum als die Bücher selbst” with the typical comment that “Ich habe zwar das Buch von X nicht gelesen aber X kauft bei meiner Schwägerin die Semmeln ein”.³⁵

³⁴ Of these figures the ÖVP press reached an average of 9.7 articles, the KPÖ press published 9 articles and the SPÖ only 6.3 articles.

³⁵ Gerd Jonke, quoted in Panzer, p. 311.

Coupled with this phenomenon of “Personalisierung” is the “Entpolitisierung der Gegenwartsliteratur”³⁶ in the Austrian press, which further reduces the impact of socially critical works. In order to demonstrate the trivialisation of literature in the press Panzer provides an empirical assessment of the political relevance of the reviews, texts and reports published in his period of research, rating the articles from A (of high current political relevance) to D (of no direct or indirect political relevance). According to his criteria only one article could be judged to be of direct current political relevance,³⁷ whilst the overwhelming majority (90.2%) fell into categories C & D,³⁸ displaying little to no aspects of socio-political criticism. Panzer is, however, keen to emphasise the distorting role of the press in this lack of political criticism, claiming that “die österreichische Gegenwartsliteratur [wird] öfter unpolitischer dargestellt, als sie es tatsächlich ist”.³⁹ This tendency suggests that not only is literature itself widely ignored in favour of more sensationalist personal reports but that the press furthermore provides a portrayal of contemporary Austrian literature which ignores or censors its socio-political relevance. This troubled relationship between the Austrian press and socially critical literature can be viewed as an extension of its problematic stance towards *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, whose roots were considered in the previous section.

Methodology

In their analysis of institutionalised and private memory in Austria, Meinrad Ziegler and Waltraud Kannonier-Finster describe the position of the press as an indication of an unofficial form of collective memory, which demonstrates “in welchen Bahnen der gesellschaftliche Diskurs verläuft, was also öffentlich erinnert werden darf und worüber ‘man’ eher nicht spricht”⁴⁰ and presents a more indicative method of judging the development of Austrian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* than the official history books. With a considerably higher readership than history works, the daily press enjoys a more representative status as a barometer of public opinions, reflecting (and to a certain extent forming) the attitudes of a wider public spectrum than the intellectual readership of critical historical works. This function of the press as a

³⁶ Panzer, p. 309.

³⁷ This article, however, dealt with the issue of environmental conservation which, although evidently of importance, is of no relevance to literary treatment of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.

³⁸ Panzer, p.106.

³⁹ Panzer, p. 313.

⁴⁰ Ziegler and Kannonier-Finster, p. 45.

reflection of collective *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* forms the theoretical basis for this thesis, where five case studies of the press reception of socially critical works will allow a more nuanced counter-narrative of Austrian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.

Beginning in 1960 the thesis will examine the reception of socially critical *Vergangenheitsbewältigungsliteratur*, comparing the attitudes revealed in the reviews with established conceptions of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in that period. Thus the works of Hans Lebert and Gerhard Fritsch will be considered under the aspect of a highly critical narrative of an entirely unsuccessful *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in 1960s Austria, whilst the validity of the suggestion of a turning point in public consciousness in the 1980s will be examined through the press reception of Elfriede Jelinek's *Die Ausgesperrten* and Thomas Bernhard's (now infamous) *Heldenplatz*. Finally an analysis of Robert Schindel's novel *Gebürtig* will enable a critical assessment of the rather optimistic portrayal of a more enlightened Austrian society in the 1990s.

In order to judge the adequacy of the reviews in dealing with the texts' aspects of social criticism, each case study will commence with an analysis of the work, using secondary literature and personal interpretation to highlight the significant aspects of the texts, providing a set of criteria according to which the sufficiency of the articles can be assessed, and subsequently enabling a consideration of the reviewers' attitudes towards the problematic issue of Austrian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. This combination of literary, media and historical studies will allow an exploration of the possibility of a counter-narrative of Austrian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, challenging established assumptions.

Hans Lebert: *Die Wolfshaut*

Regarded by many contemporary critics as one of Austria's most important post-war literary works, Hans Lebert's *Die Wolfshaut* takes a highly critical look at rural Austrian society of the 1950s, exposing underlying affinities to National Socialism and highlighting the disastrous effects arising from the repression of war-time events. The brutal honesty with which Lebert confronts the prospering post-war society and his treatment of the highly topical, yet frequently suppressed, theme of Austrian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* represent two of the most significant factors in explaining the novel's relatively poor reception both in the press and by the public in general.

The Novel

Die Wolfshaut provides an account of a series of mysterious events which occur in the fictional village of Schweigen,¹ whose characteristically Austrian landscape and almost caricatured characters provide a model of rural Austrian life. During the winter 1952/53 this isolated and insular village is struck by a series of unexplained events, including the mysterious deaths of two inhabitants and the murder of a further villager. These deaths are eventually revealed to be linked to the war crimes committed by the six members of Schweigen's *Ortswacht*, responsible for the execution of six *Fremdarbeiter* in the last months of the war. The main protagonist and quasi-hero of the novel, Johann Unfreund, a native of Schweigen who returns to the village after 30 years at sea, falls into the role of detective, seeking answers to the current deaths and an explanation for his father's suicide.² During the course of the novel Unfreund literally digs up the past, exhuming the corpses of the murdered *Fremdarbeiter*, and confronts the village *Stammtisch* (a collective of the village's most influential inhabitants) with its repressed past. This revelation is, however, of no real significance within village life, which continues as normal, and the novel concludes with the bitter irony that the main perpetrator, Alois Habergeier, remains entirely unscathed, protected from prosecution by his political immunity as *Landtagsabgeordneter*. This continuation of "normality" is, however, the product of considerable violence, corresponding rather to an active suppression of the past rather than an unconscious repression in the Freudian sense.

¹ The place name is particularly symbolic as it literally translates as the conscious act of remaining silent, thus highlighting the village's active repression.

² Unfreund's father was an unwilling participant in these executions, drawn into this crime in order to ensure his silence.

Continuity and Fascism

The insular village of Schweigen presents the reader with a microcosm of post-war Austria, where an active repression of the past has enabled the vast majority of the population to live peacefully, enjoying the ever increasing economic prosperity, as the novel's narrator comments that "wir hatten allerdings auch keine Ursache, ungut zu schlafen. Den Krieg und seine verschiedenen Folgen glaubten wir überstanden zu haben; im ganzen Lande ging es wieder aufwärts, sogar eine Konjunktur bahnte sich an" (p. 8). This repression forms the core of Schweigen's identity, reinforced through Lebert's portrayal of the surrounding landscape, whose stagnant, swamp-like nature underlines the lack of progression in the village that cannot separate itself from the "parteibraune Landschaft" invested with so much political memory. The importance accorded to the complicity of the landscape and weather in this atmosphere of repression allows this novel to be viewed as a prototype for the *Anti-Heimatroman*,³ as Lebert reverses the clichés of an idealised rural Austria, presenting us rather with an "antiidyillisches Dorfmodell".⁴ Equal importance is, nevertheless, accorded to the villager's active suppression of the past, who seek literally to paint over their less than aesthetic past in order to profit from increasing tourism. These attempts in the "Lande der Anstreichermeister" (p. 515) to disguise underlying political sympathies prove ultimately unsuccessful, as the new colours symbolically merge into a "schauerliches braun" (p. 516), demonstrating the artificiality of these purely superficial changes.

This continuing adherence to Nazi ideology and behaviour becomes explicit in the conversations of the *Stammtisch*, whose overt affiliation to National Socialism is quietly accepted by the village community. Thus phrases such as "wir bleiben die alten" (p. 31), the singing of *Wehrmacht* songs and even the Nazi greeting (p. 214) are commonplace occurrences, which the narrator admits may appear "dunkel" to outsiders but which meet in the village only with "einem trüben Meere der Gleichgültigkeit" (p. 31). Again and again the villagers expose themselves through both words and actions as unrepentant adherents of Nazism, failed *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* manifesting itself persistently in the repetition of Nazi behaviour. Thus, in accordance with Freud's theory of repression, the repressed past

³ Andrea Kunne views *Anti-Heimatliteratur* as the "kritisch-kreative Um-Schreibung" of traditional *Heimatliteratur* and identifies certain constants within both genres which are present in *Die Wolfshaut*: "der geschlossene Raum [...] der oppositionelle Raum der Gegenspieler [...] die Aktanten, die dem bäuerlichen (zumindest aber ländlich-dörflichen) Bereich entstammen", Andrea Kunne, *Heimat im Roman: Last oder Lust?* (Amsterdam/Atlanta: Rodopi, 1991), p. 103.

⁴ Hans Wolfschütz, 'Hans Lebert', in *Kritisches Lexikon zur deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur*, ed. by Heinz Ludwig Arnold (Munich: edition text & kritik, 1994), p. 5.

finds a violent and harmful outlet in the brutal suppression of the truth, as the manager of the village sawmill, Schreckenschlager, is murdered in order to preserve the silence, and Unfreund is the victim of attempted murder. This repetition finds its climax in the manhunt of an escaped convict, where a continuation of the practice of scapegoating and externalising guilt can be observed. The initial dehumanisation of the victim, referred to only as the *Zebra* (p. 308-20) or later the *Kugel* (p. 337) reflects a continuation of the Nazi mentality which allowed chosen scapegoats to be hunted and destroyed like animals or inanimate objects. The widespread jubilation at this example of *Volksjustiz*, the institutionalised violence, the villagers' blatant disregard for justice and the silence following the murder all serve to expose a replication of wartime events and a continuation of the Nazi mentality, supporting Maletta's claim that "sie [die Menschheit] hat nichts verstanden! Nichts gelernt!" (p. 389). Thus, the silence with which Unfreund's revelation is met (p. 562), although shocking, is not entirely surprising, as the village is sworn together in a conspiracy of silence, preventing any form of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.

Lebert makes us equally aware that this repression and repetition is not exclusive to Schweigen but is rather reflective of an institutionalised mode of (dis)remembering, illustrated by the police, who refuse to take action against the main perpetrator, and the *Landtag*, which ensures his political immunity. The response of police officer Habicht to Unfreund's revelation can be seen to present the reader with all possible models of failed *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, as he (i) denies any personal responsibility, (ii) represses the possibility that the events could have occurred, (iii) refuses to accept any collective responsibility, (iv) externalises the guilt onto an anonymous third party and finally (v) attempts to suppress the truth by threatening Unfreund (pp. 565-66). Habicht here demonstrates forms of both subconscious repression and active denial, the latter being a conscious refusal to confront the issues raised by the murders. The use of a representative of institutional power to illustrate these possible modes of repression allows Lebert to exercise a more general criticism on Austrian institutions and society, thus extending the novel's social and political relevance whilst maintaining an evident Austro-specificity.

In contrast to the widespread atmosphere of repression, Lebert presents us with a positive model of remembering in the form of Johann Unfreund. The strong characterisation of Unfreund, the only character to have "[ein] richtige[s]

Seelenleben”,⁵ and his isolated position within the novel present the reader with a concrete alternative to the pack mentality of the village, placing the emphasis on the actions of the individual and the importance of free will. Thus Unfreund rejects Maletta’s insistence on duty and oath as validation for his participation in the massacre of an entire village during the war, instead emphasising human free will: “Man ›muß‹ einen Schmarm. Man muß nämlich nicht einmal leben!” (p. 388). This rejection of the villagers’ common beliefs is further evident in his lack of unquestioning belief in authority, as Unfreund presents the only opposition to the police, ironically in the attempt to *uphold* justice. Whilst selected representatives of the community attempt to force Habicht to arrest Unfreund, they are easily intimidated by this symbol of institutional power and their inherent trust in authority leads them to abandon their quest (pp. 256-8). The danger posed by this unquestioning faith is later demonstrated in the arrest, torture and murder of the *Zebra*, whose guilt is accepted without demur by the villagers. Once again Unfreund presents the only alternative to this mentality, firstly refusing to take part in the manhunt and subsequently threatening to reveal the gross miscarriage of justice which has taken place. Thus Unfreund’s explicit rejection of the villager’s silence: “Ich sage, was es zu sagen gibt! Und da halte ich nicht den Mund zu, als ob ich niesen müßte” (p. 61), provides a counter-balance to the injustice and Nazism upheld by the village community.

Through the character of Unfreund, Lebert reveals the possibility of an ethically responsible mode of remembering and explores this theme in conjunction with the concept of inherited or transferred guilt. The impossibility of Unfreund’s direct involvement in the National Socialist dictatorship is manifest from the outset, as the geographical distance resulting from his marine career clearly dissociates him from the events in Austria. Thus it is evident that any responsibility assumed by Unfreund must be of an indirect nature, supporting the belief in the existence of an inherited guilt. This transferred guilt is portrayed within the novel through a network of ethereal messages or a “chiffrierte Nachricht” (p. 66), as Unfreund is elected by ghostly voices as spokesman and avenger of the murdered victims. J.J. Long views this supernatural communication as the manifestation of the phenomenon of ‘transgenerational haunting’ – a theory proposed by Nicolas Abraham whereby the subject is haunted by the conscience of another, especially that of a deceased parent.

⁵ Thomas Mießgang, *Sex, Mythos, Masquerade* (Vienna: VWGÖ, 1988), p. 96. Mießgang views the individualisation of Nazi opponents as an important narrative strategy within Lebert’s work, highlighting the difficulty of their opposition against a faceless mass of perpetrators. Mießgang, p. 163.

Long claims that “Unfreund’s experience corresponds in almost all particulars to Abraham’s phantom, working like a ventriloquist within the subject’s own mental topography and causing imaginings that issue from the presence of a stranger”⁶ and suggests that these supernatural elements are to be understood as a metaphor for the psychological phenomenon of ‘transgenerational haunting’. Whilst it is not entirely clear if Lebert intended this aspect of the novel to fulfil a solely metaphorical function, the significance of Unfreund’s willing acceptance of this task is indisputable. His assertion that “[d]ieser Saustall geht jeden was an, also auch mich” (p. 554) clearly supports the notion that post-war Austria and the next generation cannot escape the legacy of the past, highlighting the continued necessity of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in following generations. The portrayal of Unfreund thus represents a paradigmatic illustration of a responsible model of remembering essential to the healthy progress and development of Austria, whose absence in the post-war period is of terrible consequence for Schweigen and in turn Austria as a whole.

The Mythological

Perhaps the most controversial and heavily criticised aspect of *Die Wolfshaut* is Lebert’s use of mythological elements and the intervention of transcendental powers in everyday human life. This aspect of the novel has provoked a considerable amount of criticism, accusing Lebert of mythologising Nazism and losing the novel’s element of *Zeitkritik*. Konstanze Fliedl and Karl Wagner claim that “das Thema von NS-Verbrechen und dessen Aufdeckung und Vergeltung [verlieren sich] verschiedentlich in einer so magisch wie vagen Atmosphäre finsterner Vergeltungsmächte”,⁷ evidently ignoring Lebert’s highly realistic portrayal of rural Austrian life and the prospering Austrian economy, and overlooking the highly complex nature of the mythological in the novel which fulfils a function far deeper than the superficial suspense it creates. Whilst *Die Wolfshaut* combines several mythological traditions from Wagner’s Germanic myths to Judo-Christian motifs,⁸ the mythological aspect of the novel can be reduced to two key areas: (i) the ghostly apparitions whose words provide the

⁶ J.J. Long, ‘Casual Brutalities: Hans Lebert’s *Die Wolfshaut*, Gerhard Fritsch’s *Fasching* and Austrian Collective Memory’, *Austrian Studies*, 11 (2003), 85-101 (p. 94).

⁷ Konstanze Fliedl and Karl Wagner, ‘Tote Zeit: Zum Problem der Darstellung von Geschichtserfahrung in den Romanen Erich Frieds und Hans Leberts’ in *Literatur der Nachkriegszeit und der fünfziger Jahre in Österreich*, ed. by Friedbert Aspetsberger, Norbert Frei and Hubert Lengauer (Vienna: Österreichischer Bundesverlag, 1984), pp. 303-19 (p. 313).

⁸ Analysis of the Wagnerite myth in *Die Wolfshaut* can be found in Claudia Aigner, ‘Hans Leberts Romane: Wie man Wagner als Nazijäger einspannt’, in *Dossier 12*, ed. by Gerhard Fuchs and Günther A. Höfler (Vienna and Graz: Droschl, 1997), pp. 143-71.

impetus for Unfreund's actions and (ii) the mythological figure of the wolf/werewolf in connection with the mysterious deaths and the figure of Maletta.

Key to the understanding of the role of mythology in *Die Wolfshaut* is an awareness of the "polyphonic" composition of the novel⁹ and the role of the various narrative agents, which continues to divide critics, owing to the difficulty in distinguishing and separating the two main narrative voices. Certain critics believe that the novel is initially narrated by an anonymous first-person "wir" narrator, a representative of the community of Schweigen, who is later replaced by an *Ich-Erzähler*¹⁰ or by an omniscient narrative voice. It is, however, possible to identify a co-existence of this unreliable first-person narrator and the second, omniscient, narrative agent, whom we should assume to be reliable. With very few exceptions, this third person narrator is present in the episodes concerning Unfreund's confrontations with phantoms of the past and with the *Kapitän*, considered to be a symbol for a Christian god, - (pp. 66, 75, 87-88, 130-4, 289-90, 500-501). Thus, it is possible to conclude that these episodes are intended to reveal the presence of transcendental forces, whose appearance plays a key role in exposing the village's secret and executing revenge against those perpetrators who are troubled by their conscience. As such, this mythological aspect of the novel could not be considered to exculpate the perpetrators by rendering the transcendental powers solely responsible for the bizarre events, as has been claimed by certain critics.¹¹ The presence of the transcendental as seen through the eyes of an omniscient narrator rather exposes the crimes of the villagers and their subsequent repression as the catalyst for this divine intervention.

Conversely, the use of the first-person narrator in the episodes relating to Maletta and his lycanthropic transformation serve to expose the misappropriation of mythology and the unreliability of certain mythological beliefs. Here, the polyphonic composition renders impossible a straightforward interpretation of the myth, necessitating a closer examination of the process of myth-formation. As Long indicates, the notion of Maletta being a portal and carrier-body for evil, a "Leck in der Schiffshaut der Welt, durch welche das ›Entsetzliche‹ [...] einzusickern anhub" (p. 83) is first introduced as the speculation of the first-person narrator, whose conjectures appear to have no factual base. However, as the novel progresses the narrator ceases to differentiate between reality and speculation, allowing the demonising of Maletta to

⁹ This is Lebert's own term referring to the various narrative voices and perspectives in *Die Wolfshaut*.

¹⁰ Fliedl/Wagner, p. 309.

¹¹ See Fliedl/Wagner, p. 313.

appear as concrete fact, culminating in Maletta's "realisation" that he is responsible for the mysterious deaths (pp. 522-4). This does not, however, mark the disappearance of the first-person narrator nor represent Maletta's internalisation of his lycanthropic role, but rather "dramatises a process of myth formation".¹²

The mythological can in this respect be seen to fulfil two functions. Firstly the portrayal of Maletta as the cause of the mysterious events presents us with a further form of externalisation, allowing the "wir" narrator, as a representative of the community of Schweigen, to render Maletta responsible for the mysterious deaths, simultaneously exculpating the true perpetrators and denying the catalytic role played by the repressed past. This process of externalisation through the appropriation of mythology is further supported by the narrator's conscious endeavours to create a supernatural atmosphere, as disproportional importance is accorded to banal events, such as Ukrotnik's confrontation with the "*geheime Kräfte des Hasses*" (p. 14) which is nothing other than a harmless black cat. Secondly, since Maletta provides the strongest images of Wagnerite mythology in the novel,¹³ this aspect of the text's mythology can be regarded as specific criticism of the appropriation of Wagner by the Nazis for propaganda, as Lebert attempts "den Faschismusteufel mit dem Wagnerpathos-Beelzebub [auszutreiben]".¹⁴ This would appear to be supported by Lebert's biography, as he was active not only as an opera singer but also as a member of the Austrian resistance, thus allowing the novel to be viewed as a combination of both these passions. Moreover, a more contemporary interpretation would suggest that Lebert also seeks to criticise Austria's new self-image, based entirely on the myth of her victim status.¹⁵ Lebert's employment of the very evidently fictional werewolf figure further stresses the fallacy of post-war Austrian national identity, which is based on a foundation of sheer fiction.

¹² Long, p. 92.

¹³ Consider the comparison to Siegfried (p. 398), the connection to the ominous crows (p. 27) and the very obvious link to the Wagner quotation at the beginning of the novel: "Doch ward ich vom Vater/versprengt/seine Spur verlor ich/je länger ich forschte. /Eines Wolfes Fell nur/traf ich im Forst; /leer/lag das vor mir:/Den Vater fand ich nicht", Richard Wagner, *Walküre*, in Prologue to *Die Wolfshaut*.

¹⁴ Aigner, p. 145.

¹⁵ For a critical analysis of Austria's self-image see Robert Menasse, *Das Land ohne Eigenschaften* (Vienna: Sonderzahl, 1992), in particular pp. 13-28 and Josef Haslinger, *Politik der Gefühle* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1995), p. 123.

Press Reception

Whilst generally viewed today as one of the most significant literary contributions to Austrian literary *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, *Die Wolfshaut* received a distinctly mixed reception in the contemporary Austrian press, whose ostensible criticism of Lebert's literary techniques and imagery functions merely to disguise their inability to accept the highly topical themes dealt with in the novel. Although negative reviews of the novel appear to be in the minority, it would be false to claim as Eva Reichmann does,¹⁶ that Lebert's novel met with favourable criticism in the press. Indeed the positive evaluations of Lebert's work are in certain respects more problematic than the more critical reviews, equally displaying underlying ulterior motives and interests. In this first case study it is possible already to distinguish certain tendencies in literary journalism which correspond to Panzer's theory of a continued trivialisation and depoliticisation of socially critical literature in the Austrian press.

Negative Press

Typical of the depoliticisation of *Die Wolfshaut*, Eva H.'s article in *Die Frau*¹⁷ combines an unwillingness to accept Lebert's brutal criticism with a latent trivialisation of the novel, subsequently signifying a rejection of *Die Wolfshaut*'s political relevance. At first glance, this review could be considered the least negative of the critical press reception, appearing to praise the novel's thematic base and Lebert's literary talents. Upon closer reading, however, the paradoxical and hypocritical nature of this article becomes apparent, revealing a tendency representative of a more general attitude towards Austria's repressed past. With the exception of the introductory sentence (to which I will return later), the first two paragraphs of the article appear to praise *Die Wolfshaut*, equally acknowledging the relevance and topicality of the novel's "erschütterndes, leider sehr aktuelles Thema".¹⁸ In contrast to many other reviews, Eva H.'s plot summary concentrates on the series of murders, their relationship to the murdered *Fremdarbeiter* and the rehabilitation of former Nazi perpetrators, thus apparently demonstrating a satisfactory comprehension and appreciation of the novel's themes. This impression is borne out by the identification of Unfreund as the "einzigster Mensch unter 'Wilden', die sich mit

¹⁶ Eva Reichmann, 'Dampfende Dunghaufen legend versinken die Dörfer im Schmutz: Hans Leberts Österreichbild-eine parteibraune Landschaft', *Modern Austrian Literature*, 30 (1997), 130-43 (p.141).

¹⁷ Eva H., "'Die Wolfshaut'", *Die Frau*, 11 November 1961; p. 13.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Motorrädern, Neonlicht und Musikbox den Anstrich der Zivilisation geben”,¹⁹ further adding an aspect of the reviewer’s own social criticism to the article.

The change of tone and critical stance within the article, however, is announced by the somewhat ironic statement “So weit, so gut. Hans Lebert kann ohne Zweifel schreiben”,²⁰ whose sparse praise of Lebert’s literary technique rather implies the opposite. Indeed, the review proceeds to criticise Lebert’s style, condemning his characters as one-dimensional and colourless. As previously demonstrated, this deliberate lack of clear characterisation of the village population has a key function within the novel, which it fulfils only through the contrast with the strong characterisation of Unfreund. Thus this criticism, whilst accurately identifying one of Lebert’s narrative techniques, denies the socially-critical aspect of this strategy, dismissing it rather as a failure on Lebert’s part.

The main focus of Eva H.’s criticism concentrates on Lebert’s very vivid portrayal of the “penetranten Schweiß-, Blut- und Abortgeruch”,²¹ which it is claimed prevents the novel’s message having any great impact on the repulsed reader. The article’s criticism centres around the view expressed in the first sentence, that *Die Wolfshaut* is “das unappetitlichste Buch”²² that the reviewer has ever read. This entirely subjective disparagement of the novel can in no way be viewed as valid criticism, as it is precisely through these revolting images that Lebert’s novel acquires its power to shock and force reaction from the reader. This judgement exposes rather the character of *Die Frau* and its readers, who, it can be presumed, prefer a more aesthetically pleasing novel with less challenging imagery and thematics. The rejection of Lebert’s hard-hitting criticism is further representative of one of the many Austrian attitudes concerning *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, as Eva H. acknowledges the existence and relevance of the theme yet prefers not to be brutally confronted with the truth.

This refusal of uncomfortable social criticism is furthermore combined with a distinct trivialisation of the novel achieved through the newspaper’s layout, which juxtaposes the literary reviews with an article on “der Nylon-Morgenrock mit Dralonfüllung”.²³ The triviality of this article provides a clear indication of the importance accorded to literature in *Die Frau* and, whilst impossible to prove, seems

¹⁹ *Die Frau*.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

also to suggest that its readership takes an equally superficial view. The trivialisation of the novel through the manifestly banal context in which the review is situated and the consequent depoliticisation of the text reveal an underlying rejection of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Thus, taken within the context of the entire article, it is almost impossible to accord any credibility to Eva H.'s praise of *Die Wolfshaut*'s thematic base, which appears to be a prime example of the 'double-speak' and hypocrisy of post-war Austrian society, ostensibly accepting and praising contributions to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* whilst refusing direct involvement.

This trivialisation of *Die Wolfshaut* is equally evident in the anonymous review in the literary section of the *Südost-Tagespost*, a regional mutation of the official ÖVP publication *Das Volksblatt*, whose rejection of Lebert's criticism manifests itself in the absence of any direct references to the novel's plot or themes. This review combines a highly critical stance towards Lebert's novel, including criticism of various structural, stylistic and factual aspects, with a manifest avoidance of the novel's themes and social-criticism. The first twelve lines of the article, which make up almost a third of the review, are devoted to the relationship between the meteorological and physical landscape and the events narrated in the novel. This nexus is not, however, submitted to further analysis nor considered as a contributing factor to the overall sense of repression and latent Nazi affiliation in *Die Wolfshaut*, as is the case in most modern critical analyses of the novel.²⁴ Instead the review refers only vaguely to the "Geschehen" that are "umwoben und durchwirkt [...] vom Elementarischen",²⁵ and whilst Lebert's "respektablen Sprachbemeisterung"²⁶ is mentioned fleetingly, this aspect of the novel is presented as a rather arbitrary "Orgie der Wetterfühligkeit".²⁷ The disproportionate emphasis placed on this imagery confirms Robert Menasse's ironic comment on the fixation of the Austrian press with the weather: "[e]s müssen schon Krieg in der unmittelbaren Nachbarschaft ausbrechen, um das Wetter aus den österreichischen Schlagzeilen zu verdrängen".²⁸ Menasse further suggests that the Austrian press makes use of the weather in order to avoid covering the more controversial topics, an argument borne out in this review, where the weather functions as a trivialisation mechanism, obscuring the true issues with banal meteorological comments.

²⁴ For example Reichmann, pp. 130-43.

²⁵ v., 'Labyrinthischer Dorfroman', *Südost-Tagespost*, 8 April 1961, p. 13.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Robert Menasse, *Erklär mir Österreich* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2000), p. 24.

The criticism of the novel following this overblown commentary on the weather and landscape is of equal irrelevance, once again exposing the inadequacy of this analysis. Thus, for example, the final scenes of *Die Wolfshaut* are criticised for their lack of real “revelation”, as “der Leser weiß ohnehin schon Bescheid”.²⁹ This criticism of the novel’s (allegedly inadequate) dénouement pigeonholes *Die Wolfshaut* into the stock *Krimi* genre and fails to recognise that the true significance of this chapter is not to be found in the revelation itself but rather in the villagers’ (lack of) reaction to it. The attempt to impose the generic limitations of the *Krimi* onto Lebert’s novel and to use the norms of the crime novel as criteria by which to judge *Die Wolfshaut* demonstrates an evident desire to limit the novel’s impact, reducing its significance to that of a trivial crime novel.

Further criticism of the novel remains on the level of the trivial, as the novel’s humour is dismissed as “bläßlich und nebenbei”³⁰ and the structure is judged to be labyrinthine, implying that a complex structure is not fitting for a mere *Krimi*. This criticism, however, slides into the derisory with the claim that *Die Wolfshaut* is factually inaccurate, as the author questions “Kann ein Förster in Österreich ‘Landrat’ werden? Eher Landesrat!”.³¹ This petty and irrelevant criticism provides an extreme example of the article’s failure to deal with the novel in a responsible manner, as the main themes are neglected and criticism is projected onto the stylistic and factual level. The few references made to the *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* theme are brief and cryptic, referring only to an “unbewältigte Vergangenheit”³² that is in some unexplained way connected to the series of mysterious events. This disregard of the novel’s central thematics reflects once again a more general trend in 1960s Austria, which simply repressed the recent past and ignored the possibility of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.

Undoubtedly the most overtly critical article is to be found in the *Oberösterreichischen Nachrichten*, whose review of *Die Wolfshaut* discredits the significance of both the novel and its author, dismissing the former as an exciting read without further worth. The praise expressed within the first paragraph of the review, describing Lebert as “einer der begabtesten und verheißungsvollsten jüngeren

²⁹ *Südost-Tagespost*.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

österreichischen Schriftsteller”³³ sets the sarcastic tone which typifies the article, as the next paragraph begins “Soweit die Vorstellung des Claassenverlages”,³⁴ presenting the initial image of Lebert as inaccurate marketing without real basis. It is further claimed that, whilst *Die Wolfshaut* provides an exciting read, a more meaningful interpretation of the novel is either to be attributed to the oversensitivity and overactive imagination of the reader who “hört [...] das Gras wachsen”³⁵ or to ulterior financial motives (presumably of the author or publisher). Thus Lebert’s criticism of Austrian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, whilst never mentioned explicitly, is dismissed as non-existent or a profit-making ploy, discrediting not only Lebert’s treatment of the issue but furthermore denying the necessity of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in Austria. In contrast to the previous two articles, however, this review makes no attempt to disguise its trivialisation of the novel, instead rejecting outright the relevance of Lebert’s social criticism.

The second critical judgement passed on *Die Wolfshaut* is the purported universality of Schweigen, which the reviewer claims is an “Allerweltsdorf” populated by “Allerweltsmenschen”³⁶ bearing no recognisably Austrian traits. R.W.L. goes on to define the duty of an Austrian author, namely “das Österreichische [...] mit jedem Satz, mit jeder Zeile darzustellen”.³⁷ This argument can be seen to falter on many grounds. Firstly, Lebert’s portrayal of Schweigen with its realistic descriptions of the landscape, characters and mentality is undoubtedly typical of Austrian village life, even allowing Schweigen to be concretely located in Styria. Secondly, this criticism disregards entirely the significance of the universality created by the intervention of the transcendent, which widens the relevance of the novel to the rest of the world, yet simultaneously maintains an Austro-specific aspect through the use of a concrete criminal act committed in the Third Reich. The claim that the duty of an Austrian author lies in the accurate description of his country is equally problematic, as it limits severely the literary scope in Austria without providing suitable validation. This restrictive view of literature corresponds largely to the overall trend in literary reception in the 1950s and early 1960s, which was marked by a “Konsensbedürfnis”³⁸

³³ R.W.L., ‘Spannung ist eigentlich schon genug: Zu Hans Leberts erstem Roman *Die Wolfshaut*’, *Oberösterreichischen Nachrichten*, 21 February 1961, p. 13.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Klaus Zeyringer, *Österreichische Literatur seit 1945: Überblicke, Einschnitte, Wegmarken* (Innsbruck: Haymann, 2001), p. 112.

and a return to pre-war Austrian tradition, which “verlangte ein positives Welt-und Staatsverständnis” and “könnte freilich experimentelle Literatur nicht (ge)brauchen”.³⁹ Lebert’s transgression of this literary consensus is thus condemned here as a failure to fulfil his patriotic duty (!), highlighting the problematic relationship between socially-critical literature and literary journalism in the post-war period. Thus this review, considered in the context of the previous two examples, forms the apex of the criticism surrounding *Die Wolfshaut*. Once again the theme of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* is by and large ignored, as no summary of the plot is offered. Moreover, this review actively denies and dismisses Lebert’s criticism, reflecting the repression exerted by the majority of the contemporary Austrian population. This repression is furthermore accompanied by a false sense of patriotism, which promotes an exalting of all that is Austrian, to a large extent reflecting the post-war Austrian sense of identity, based on a repression of the past and the creation and promotion of a new self-image.

Through these highly critical reviews it is possible to discern three main trends within literary journalism at this time, which can further be extended to reflect general attitudes towards *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in the early 1960s. The de-politicisation of *Die Wolfshaut*, emanating from the various modes of trivialisation, can be viewed as attempts to defuse the novel’s social criticism. This latent refusal of Lebert’s *Gesellschaftskritik* is further coupled with an outright rejection of the novel’s more “unsavoury” aspects, exposing a reluctance to directly confront the uncomfortable truth. In the case of Eva H.’s review, this criticism of Lebert’s “coarse” language is combined with a seemingly honest evaluation of the novel’s plot and themes, providing a paradigmatic example of Austrian ‘double-speak’, where the superficiality of the lip-service paid to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* is unwittingly exposed. The zenith of the inadequate treatment of Lebert’s novel is, however, to be found in the absence of references to the plot and its themes, as the war crimes are referred to in nebulous terms and are more or less ignored. This suppression of the uncomfortable elements of the novel clearly reflects the Austrian desire for an edited past, where unfavourable memories have been censored.

³⁹ Zeyringer, p. 68.

Positive Press

As with the negative reviews above, it is evident that Lebert's more positive critics are also deeply influenced by the socio-political beliefs of the newspaper, thus necessitating a more critical reading. Indeed it could be claimed that the positive reception of the novel is more problematic than its negative counterpart, as its treatment of the *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* theme is often obscured by an ostensibly positive response. Thus, the articles in the *Salzburger Nachrichten* and *Neues Österreich* equally demonstrate a tendency to depoliticise Lebert's work through the sidelining of its themes in favour of more peripheral elements. Particularly interesting in this respect is the similarity of these trivialising strategies in the two reviews, both of which place emphasis on the publishing mechanisms in Austria and Germany. The comparative review found in the *Salzburger Nachrichten* analyses *Die Wolfshaut* in conjunction with *Ein Soldat und ein Mädchen* by Erich Fried, both of which, although by Austrian authors, were published in 1960 in Hamburg. This comparison of the two "Verlagsdeutsche Österreicher"⁴⁰ forms the focus of the review, although direct comparative assessment is sparse. Whilst undoubtedly presenting a positive interpretation of the novel, this article is highly problematical, as it fails to mention, even fleetingly, the *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* theme, thus overlooking or avoiding the novel's key significance. This sidelining of the novels' thematics is apparent from the outset, as the review begins not with a summary of the plots but rather with a description of the personal background of the authors. In the case of Lebert this introduction restricts itself to the fact that he was "längere Zeit Opernsänger, ehe er sich entschloß, zur Literatur zu wechseln",⁴¹ completely ignoring Lebert's refusal to join the *Wehrmacht*, his subsequent incarceration by the Nazis and his active participation in the Austrian *Widerstand*, all of which are of direct relevance to his novel. This omission of any reference to Lebert's anti-fascist past is not only representative of this review's depoliticising tendency but is equally reflective of a more widespread attitude in post-war Austria towards former *Widerstandskämpfer*, who were largely excluded from war memorials and ceremonies of commemoration.⁴²

Following a rather critical assessment of Fried's novel, the section concerning Lebert begins with the assertion that "Lebert ist dagegen der weitaus bessere

⁴⁰ e. h. (Edwin Hartl), 'Verlagsdeutsche Österreicher', *Salzburger Nachrichten*, 3 December 1960, p. 21.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Heidemarie Uhl, 'The Politics of Memory', in *Austrian Historical Memory and National Identity*, ed. by Günther Bischof and Anton Pelinka (New Jersey: Transaction, 1997), pp. 64-94 (p. 75).

Erzähler”⁴³ and continues by praising the novel’s *Krimi* structure of gradual revelation within this “recht mystisch anlaufende Nachkriegsgeschichte”.⁴⁴ Lebert’s style is described here as typical of the contemporary literary trend (!), which favours a structure of closely intertwined parallel narratives, which Lebert manages skilfully, ensuring “daß niemals ein Knoten entsteht”.⁴⁵ It is further claimed that this narrative skill renders certain vividly depicted scenes in *Die Wolfshaut* “weniger oder gar nicht schockierend”⁴⁶ in contrast to Fried’s novel. From the articles analysed in the previous section, it is evident that this claim is unfounded or at least highly subjective. Equally problematic is the implication that the potential of a novel to shock is not a positive quality and should thus be avoided. In the instance of *Die Wolfshaut* it is undoubtedly this ability to shock which renders the novel so vividly disturbing and thus contributes to the conveying of its theme. This supposed praise thus reveals itself to be a means of defusing the shocking elements of *Die Wolfshaut* by trivialising or even denying their significance, and subsequently can be understood as a rejection of the social criticism which lies behind these aspects of the novel.

The central problematics of the review are, however, to be found in the omission of any explicit reference to the novel’s theme or plot. In contrast to the treatment of Fried’s novel, the analysis of *Die Wolfshaut* provides no plot summary, referring only vaguely to mysterious happenings in the fictional village of Schweigen. In a similar fashion, the novel’s *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* theme, found in the villagers’ past crimes and the silence surrounding them, is presented in a highly cryptic manner as “das Geheimnisvolle, irgendwie schuldhaft Verschwiegene”,⁴⁷ where “irgendwie” creates the impression of a vague secret of little significance. Combined with the emphasis placed on (irrelevant) personal details at the beginning of the article, this suppression of the novel’s social criticism can be seen to complete the depoliticisation of *Die Wolfshaut*.

A similar case can be found in the review in *Neues Österreich*, which again places disproportionate emphasis on the novel’s publisher to the detriment of its plot and themes. Whilst this article deals more directly with the *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* theme, briefly describing the plot and the theme of repression and guilt, the reader is distracted from a true analysis of the novel by the

⁴³ *Salzburger Nachrichten*.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

emphasis placed on the publishing mechanisms that prevented *Die Wolfshaut* from finding a publisher in Austria, and the unwanted dominance of Germany in the Austrian publishing process. Despite ostensible criticism of Austrian publishers' rejection of socially critical literature, as they have "weder den Mut noch den Riecher"⁴⁸ to publish Lebert's work, the print space dedicated to this consideration of the Austrian publishing system can be regarded as equally detrimental to the political relevance of *Die Wolfshaut*.

In addition to this sidelining of the novel's thematics through the overemphasis of its publisher, the review in *Neues Österreich* can be further seen to externalise Lebert's criticism, failing to consider this repression and silence as typical of Austria. In a manner similar to R.W.L.'s review in the *Oberösterreichische Nachrichten*, the universality of the novel is highlighted and Schweigen is depicted as representative, not of Austrian repression but of a more international mal, as "das Gefängnis Dorf weitet sich hier unversehens zum Gefängnis Welt".⁴⁹ This externalisation of guilt is continued in the claim that "die Angst der in Blutschuld verstrickten Dörfler ist nichts anders als die Weltangst des im Chaos des Lebens ausgesetzten Denkwesens Mensch",⁵⁰ clearly denying the Austro-specificity of Lebert's criticism. The nature of this universalising appears here to dismiss any concrete link to modern-day Austria, promoting instead a metaphorical or even allegorical reading of the text, thus depoliticising *Die Wolfshaut* and denying its contemporary political relevance.

This standpoint which seeks to deny the specificity of the novel corresponds with the highly patriotic stance taken by *Neues Österreich*, the first Austrian newspaper after the war, which was founded and controlled by the three main political parties (SPÖ, ÖVP and KPÖ). Menasse views *Neues Österreich* as a decisive vehicle in the creation of a new Austrian identity, as "schon im Leitartikel der ersten Ausgabe [...] wird der Basismythos der Zweiten Republik formuliert".⁵¹ The externalisation of guilt central to post-war Austrian identity is thus evident in this review of *Die Wolfshaut*, which seeks to reject the concept of a specifically Austrian responsibility for Nazi war-crimes. The newspaper's patriotic stance is equally manifest in its criticism of Germany's dominance in the Austrian literary landscape, where *Neues Österreich* seeks to differentiate and distance Austria from Germany, further

⁴⁸ O.B., 'Ein Dorf namens Schweigen', *Neues Österreich*, 27 November 1960, p. 21.

⁴⁹ *Neues Österreich*.

⁵⁰ *Neues Österreich*.

⁵¹ Robert Menasse, *Das war Österreich* (Frankfurt: suhrkamp, 2005), p. 19.

reinforcing the notion of Austria as a victim of German aggression. Thus the “first newspaper” of the Second Republic demonstrates a highly dubious attitude towards Austrian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, (mis)using Lebert’s novel to sustain the first victim thesis and continue Austria’s projection of guilt onto Germany.

This combination of the trivialisation of *Die Wolfshaut*’s socially critical function and the externalisation of guilt through overemphasis of the novel’s universality is equally manifest in Rudolf Weishappel’s review in Austria’s second most-read newspaper, the *Kurier*.⁵² Weishappel’s article, however, goes further than the previous reviews in his trivialisation of the novel, not only focusing heavily on Lebert’s German publisher but furthermore commenting that “wir wollen hoffen, das er das nicht nur deshalb tat [selected *Die Wolfshaut* for publication], weil das von Hans Lebert behandelte Thema heute gerade in Westdeutschland en vogue ist”.⁵³ The clear trivialisation of Lebert’s treatment of Austrian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, which is reduced to a mere literary trend, reflects to a certain extent the accusation in the *Oberösterreichische Nachrichten* that Lebert and his publisher exploited (allegedly overblown) social criticism in an attempt to boost profits. The differentiation here between Austria and Germany can further be viewed as an attempt to excuse the comparative lack of political criticism in Austrian literature in the post-war period, dismissing German *Vergangenheitsbewältigungsliteratur* as a passing literary fashion. Despite the acknowledgement that “dieses Thema ist hochaktuell”,⁵⁴ and a profession of “unser Unbehagen an unserer Demokratie”,⁵⁵ this article clearly seeks to undermine the Austro-specific criticism contained in the novel. In a fashion similar to the review in *Neues Österreich*, Weishappel attempts to externalise the events portrayed by Lebert, claiming that “je tiefer wir in dieses Nest eindringen, desto weiter verschieben sich dessen Grenzen, umschließen unser Land, Europa, die ganze Welt”.⁵⁶ Thus, the review’s direct description of the novel’s plot and themes is relativised by a denial of their relevance to Austria, therefore depoliticising Lebert’s work in an Austrian context.

⁵² Rudolf Weishappel, ‘Die Hölle ist ein Dorf’, *Kurier*, 3 December 1960, p. 11

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Die Volksstimme

Demonstrative of the manipulation of Lebert's novel for political purposes is Ernst Fischer's review in the *Volksstimme*. The official publication of the Austrian Communist Party (KPÖ) dedicates almost two pages to their review of *Die Wolfshaut*, demonstrating recognition of the significance of the novel, a view also expressed explicitly in the article, which talks of "der erste bedeutende österreichische Roman".⁵⁷ This review is mainly structured around quotations from *Die Wolfshaut* and its author, which are subjected to a highly accurate analysis, giving the impression of a deep understanding of, and empathy with the novel's theme. The theme of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* is dealt with here in an open and honest manner and no attempts are made to conceal the novel's content. This review even goes as far as to include a comparison to real-life events, citing a similar instance of Nazi brutality and the subsequent repression in a small Austrian village and naming Lebert as the "Sprecher dieser ungesühnten Toten (und hunderttausender gleich ihnen)".⁵⁸ It would thus appear that this review represents a positive and comprehensive analysis of *Die Wolfshaut*, which deals not only with the novel's stylistic aspects but also tackles directly the difficult issues raised by the text and recognises their relevance in contemporary Austrian society. This open evaluation of the novel was perhaps facilitated by the financial independence of *Die Volksstimme* which, unlike all other contemporary publications, did not rely on advertisements as its main source of finance, funding itself through KPÖ support and distribution through volunteers. This independence from the mass of Austrian society allowed for a more controversial standpoint such as the direct confrontation with Austria's past. This article is also in keeping with the self-created image of post-war Austrian Communism which legitimised itself through its anti-fascist position during the Third Reich.⁵⁹

This article is not, however, entirely unproblematic in its treatment of the novel, as it is evident that this literary review is intended to promote the political beliefs of this Communist newspaper, focusing on the novel's criticism of economic prosperity, tourism and the political system. Whilst undoubtedly providing a broad analysis of the novel's treatment of Nazi crimes and repression, this article also places

⁵⁷ Ernst Fischer, "Die Wolfshaut", *Volksstimme*, 26 January 1963, pp. 11-12.

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 11.

⁵⁹ It is also interesting to note that *Die Wolfshaut* found great popularity in East Germany and the Communist Eastern European countries, as Lebert was even invited on a literary tour in the USSR by the Austro-Soviet Society. (Franz Zeder, 'Hans Lebert: eine biographische Skizze', in *Dossier 12* (see Fuchs/Höfler, above), pp. 301-352 (p. 335).

disproportionate importance on Lebert's criticism of the *Wirtschaftswunder* society of the 1950s, emphasising this aspect of the novel at every turn. This criticism is seen as closely linked to the theme of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, as the economy is claimed to be the "Gras der Konjunktur" that grows over the buried corpses.⁶⁰ The placing of this concept in the introductory paragraph presents this topic as a key theme in *Die Wolfshaut*, which, although to a certain extent true, represents a clear exaggeration of Lebert's intentions. Repression is once again linked to Austria's economic growth, as war crimes and the silence surrounding them are presented as proof of Austria's opportunism and capitalist pursuits "denn Recht muß Recht bleiben und Geschäft Geschäft. Und schlachtete man schwarz nicht nur das Vieh, bleibt man dennoch weiß wie ein unbeschriebenes Blatt".⁶¹ This suppression of justice is further linked to capitalist interests through the example of Habicht, who would serve any regime in order to achieve a higher salary and pension. Whilst these two examples are accompanied by supporting quotes, it is nevertheless apparent that the emphasis placed on this aspect of *Die Wolfshaut* is disproportionate to the role it plays in the overall significance of the novel. This article, although providing a positive judgement and comprehensive analysis of the text, reveals to a certain extent a selective reading of the novel, ironically presenting a somewhat over-politicised reading of *Die Wolfshaut*.

Breaking the Trend

In contrast to the articles examined above, there are also a considerable number of reviews of *Die Wolfshaut* which display a far more adequate and responsible approach to the novel and its treatment of Austrian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. These reviews provide a clear description of the novel's plot, examine its themes and stress their relevance in contemporary Austria. Thus, the review in the *Wiener Zeitung* summarises the background to *Die Wolfshaut* as "verscharrt und vergessen, verjährt und verblaßt sind allmählich die angst- und grauenerfüllten Erinnerungen an die Geschehnisse der letzten Kriegstage",⁶² further making clear that these memories relate to the "ungesühnte Blutschuld" of the villagers and consequently represent a repression of Austrian war-crimes. This explicit portrayal of the novel's plot is further combined with an observation of the relevance of Lebert's fiction in contemporary

⁶⁰ *Volksstimme*, p. 11.

⁶¹ *Volksstimme*, p. 11.

⁶² Helene Ehmman, "Die Wolfshaut", *Wiener Zeitung*, 15 January 1961, p. 7.

Austrian society, describing his style as “die Gradlinigkeit einer unerbittlich realen ärztlichen Diagnose”.⁶³ The restriction of biographical information and speculation on the novel’s publisher to one sentence highlights the possibility of a responsible and proportionate treatment of the peripheral elements in literature which in no way detracts from the review’s emphasis on Lebert’s social criticism:

Ein deutscher Verlag bringt den Erstlingsroman des österreichischen Autors heraus, der selbst zweimal vom österreichischen Unterrichtsministerium mit einem Förderungspreis für Literatur ausgezeichnet wurde.⁶⁴

Lena Dur’s review in the *Abend Presse* further demonstrates that personalisation within a literary review does not necessarily result in a trivialisation of the novel’s political relevance, provided that this personal information is demonstrated to be of relevance to the text and its themes. Dur’s article, combining an analysis of the novel with extracts from an interview with Lebert, explores the novel’s significance within Austrian society and politics, drawing heavily on the opinions expressed by Lebert. In this context the short biography provided, which stresses Lebert’s participation in the Austrian Resistance and depicts this as a possible motivation for writing, is of irrefutable relevance, as it serves to highlight the author’s critical stance towards Austria’s role in National Socialism. Once again we are presented with a concise yet comprehensive summary of the plot with direct reference to the “willkürliche Erschießung von Fremdarbeitern”⁶⁵ and a highly critical description of Schweigen as “ein Sumpf an Dumpfheit und Niedrigkeit”,⁶⁶ demonstrating a willingness to expose the socially critical aspects of *Die Wolfshaut*. Incorporating quotes from Lebert into the body of the review Dur renders explicit the aspects of social and political criticism present in the novel: “Es geht ihm, betont er, dabei gar nicht um den Nationalsozialismus, sondern um die Leute, die ihn gedankenlos unterstützt haben, um die Stumpfheit, um die Mangel an Zivilcourage, um die abgründige Schäbigkeit, die sich hinter dem gemütlichen österreichischen Charakter verbergen kann”,⁶⁷ providing a brutally honest account of the novel’s themes. Reviews such as these, whilst scarce, render evident the possibility for responsible treatment of the *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* theme in literary journalism.

⁶³ *Wiener Zeitung*.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Lena Dur, ‘Ein Buch bricht das Schweigen’, *Abend Presse*, 11 November 1960, p. 5.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

Conclusion

The press reception of *Die Wolfshaut* thus presents us with an ambiguous image of Austrian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in the early 1960s. On the one hand the negative criticism of the novel and the sidelining of Lebert's social criticism in both the positive and the negative reviews exemplify the inability of post-war Austrian society to confront its problematic past, thus corresponding with common perception of a the post-war period and the early 1960s as a time when "a spirit of historical forgetfulness, as unhealthy as it was uncanny, pervaded the country".⁶⁸ However, the final two reviews in this case study reveal a further aspect of 1960s remembering incongruous with the common cultural narrative on *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, revealing the possibility of a self-critical approach to Austria's role in the atrocities. The existence of a more responsible mode of remembering as demonstrated in these reviews highlights the necessity of a more nuanced approach to this period, which cannot be dismissed as a time of universal repression.

⁶⁸ F. Parkinson, 'Epilogue', in *Conquering the Past: Austrian Nazism Yesterday and Today*, ed. by F. Parkinson (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1989), pp. 313-334 (p. 328).

Gerhard Fritsch: *Fasching*

The public reception of *Fasching* by Gerhard Fritsch follows a similar pattern to that of *Die Wolfshaut*, characterised by poor contemporary sales figures and a belated recognition of the novel. Unlike Lebert, however, Fritsch had firmly established himself by the 1960s as “eine Art Literaturpapst Österreichs”,¹ as an author and the editor of literary reviews such as *Wort in der Zeit* and *Literatur und Kritik*. As with Lebert’s *Das Schiff im Gebirge*, Fritsch’s first novel *Moos auf den Steinen* was warmly received in Austria by public and critics alike. His popularity was, however, neither universal nor unending, as his unremitting promotion of young experimental authors found disfavour amongst the more conservative literary institutions.² This rejection of his move towards experimental literature is equally reflected in the poor public response to *Fasching*, which sold few copies and was quickly taken out of circulation. After Fritsch’s suicide in 1969, all remaining copies of the novel were returned to his widow and *Fasching* remained practically unobtainable until its re-launch in 1995 by Suhrkamp. The almost unanimous praise with which the second print was met leads to the question of how it was possible that the work of such a well-established literary figure could be such a flop.

The Novel

Fasching provides us with a first hand account of the experiences of Felix Golub, a young soldier whose vague anti-fascist beliefs lead him to desert the *Wehrmacht* and find refuge with Vittoria Pisani, the widow of a prominent Habsburg general. Disguised in women’s clothing, Golub spends the latter war months as Vittoria’s housemaid and sex-slave and experiences first hand the sadistic Nazi beliefs and practices which reign in this small Styrian town. With the ever increasing advancement of Russian troops, Golub seizes the opportunity presented by the over-ambitious garrison commander Lois Lubits to force an unconditional surrender from the town and thus saves it from devastation. The villagers subsequently display their gratitude by falsely denouncing Golub to the Russian forces, gaining him a twelve year imprisonment in Russia. These events are narrated as flashbacks integrated into the account of the narrative present in 1957. Having returned to the town with his

¹ Karl Schimpl, *Weiterführung und Problematisierung: Untersuchungen zur künstlerischen Entwicklung von Gerhard Fritsch* (Stuttgart: Hans-Dieter-Heinz, 1982), p. 7.

² Walter Weiss, ‘Literatur’, in *Das Neue Österreich*, ed. by Erika Weinzierl and Kurt Skalnik (Vienna/Graz: Styria, 1975), pp. 277-311 (p. 297).

fiancée, Golub is confronted with open hostility by the townsfolk, who continue to regard him as a coward and traitor (pp. 97, 234). From their aggression it is evident that they still adhere to Nazi values and beliefs and, as the final brutalities demonstrate, to the Nazi practice of *Volksjustiz*. Under attack from the fully rehabilitated Nazis who form the town's population, Golub is only able to escape lynching by crawling into the same hole in which he hid after his desertion. Golub's final incoherent monologue forms the zenith of the novel's pessimism, displaying his total spiritual destruction by the townsfolk and suggesting a grim fate.

Continuity and Repetition

Like Lebert, Fritsch presents us with a rural society where National Socialist ideology is still prevalent, as "collective memory manifests itself in repetition of the unassimilated past".³ This repetition manifests itself in the episodes of *Volksjustiz* carried out by the townsfolk against those who do not conform to their beliefs, which occur on both timescales and are characterised by the presence of violence, humiliation and sexuality. Thus the punishment for insulting the "Ehre der deutschen Frau" (p. 120) meted out to Fela and Golub during the war, where they are beaten, shorn and placed in a shop window to be mocked and confronted with sexual threats (pp. 118-123), finds its counterpart in the aggression displayed towards Golub at the end of the novel. In both instances the mob attempts to rob humiliate Golub on a sexual level, robbing him firstly of his supposed femininity (!), then of his masculinity, as he is crowned *Faschingsbraut* (pp. 229-31). The legitimisation of both acts of aggression is sought in the evocation of mob rule, which is firstly presented as "das gesunde Volksempfinden" (p. 120), then masquerades in the post-war period under the disguise of "democracy", as Golub's election is put to the vote, thus highlighting the superficiality of post-war Austrian society where democratic values disguise only scantily the continuation of fascist aggression.

Characteristic of the continuation in Nazi values is the *Kameradschaftskränzchen* (an annual ball in honour of *Wehrmacht* veterans), where the open aggression towards Golub, who is spat upon and denounced as a deserter (p. 97), exemplifies the upholding of Nazi values of "Treue", "Pflichterfüllung" and "Kameradschaft". These beliefs are consolidated in Lubits' speech, where democratic values are dismissed in favour of loyalty and fulfilment of duty: "Demokratie [...] ist

³ J.J. Long, 'Casual Brutalities', *Austrian Studies*, 11 (2003), 85-101 (p. 95).

richtig, wenn sie den unverrückbaren Werten die Treue hält" (p. 99), which is coupled with an overt denial of any collective guilt implied by "einer gewissen Presse" or "einzelnen Außenseitern" (p.99). This continuation is equally evident in the latent anti-Semitic views, which are exposed throughout the novel, emerging either through an excess of alcohol: "es gibt keine anständigen Juden" (p.101), or during a fit of rage: "Du bist ein berechnender Jud [...] ein bolschewikischer Jud" (p. 166), where the term "Jew" functions purely as an insult. Fritsch reveals these fascist views to be by no means an isolated phenomenon exclusive to the town, as is revealed by the figure of Golub's aunt, who denounces her nephew as a cowardly deserter, claiming "das Undeutsche an dir ist meine Schande" (p. 189).

The motif of continuation is sustained on a stylistic level, with the novel's cyclic structure and complex chronology reflecting an inevitable circle of violence and brutality. Thus Golub begins and ends the novel, both on the level of the *Histoire* and *Récit*,⁴ in the same hole, as he finds himself unable to break out of this cycle, literally trapped in "ein Kreisel schwindlig im Kreis, eine Spirale hinab ins Loch" (p. 9). The novel's complex chronology equally reinforces the sense of continuity, as the three timescales are intertwined, often without any indication of chronological shift. This lack of chronological clarity has an eternalising effect on events, which indicate more than a simple continuation of Nazi beliefs into the Second Austrian Republic, implying instead that this mentality is somehow inherent to Austria and belongs to a broader historical span. This is further suggested by the claim "alle hatten ihren Mann gestellt für Franz Joseph Karl Hitler" (p. 96), where the lack of distinction between historical periods highlights an historical continuity or repetition. Schimpl equally draws attention to the fact that all timescales can be linked by the acrostic from the beginning of each chapter "Da war er noch immer gefangen, ohne es zu wissen, rechtskräftig verurteilt als größte Gefahr für die Bewahrung aller echten Werte", which could refer to any one of the novel's timescales, further creating a sense of simultaneity and continuity.⁵

Absence of a Hero

The most frequent criticism levelled against *Fasching* is the absence of a positive protagonist who could provide an indication of correct behaviour and thus a sense of

⁴ These terms distinguish between the sequence in which events actually occur (*histoire*) and the order in which they appear within the narrative (*récit*).

⁵ Schimpl, p. 71.

optimism.⁶ It is evident throughout the novel that Golub in no way fulfils the criteria of an heroic figure, as his resistance against Nazism appears almost accidental and he increasingly expresses the wish to conform with this fascist society. Far from assuming an heroic role of resistance, Golub strives for acceptance into the community “Ich möchte ja Kleinbürger werden, Fotograf, sonst nichts” (p. 146) and openly admits to opportunism (p. 104), stating that he would even apply for membership to the *Kameradschaftsverein* in order to be accepted in the community (p. 147). Golub’s problematic narratorial position within the novel further underlines his inadequacies as an heroic protagonist. Accorded the role of independent observer by his outsider status in the town, a position cemented by his role as town photographer, it could be expected of Golub that he expose the town’s continuing Nazi beliefs from an objective and distanced standpoint. However, Golub repeatedly fails to fulfil this role in an adequate and responsible manner, lacking sovereignty as both protagonist and narrator. The inadequacy of his narration is revealed through the process of *Sprachreproduktion*,⁷ as Golub is unable, even in his inner monologues, to separate himself from the village collective. This is most evident in the passage describing the execution of Kravogl, where the confusion of the narrative agents exposes Golub’s inability to distance himself from the villagers:

Vorgestern haben wir die Auferstehung gefeiert. O unser bequemer Jesus, wir haben dich zum Hampelmann zwischen Krippe und Kreuz gemacht, du tust, was wir wollen, du gibst uns Kravogl heraus, du läßt uns die Juden verheizen [...] Herr Jesus, warum läßt du mich vor Vittoria knien und ich werde es wieder tun. (pp. 114-15)

Moreover, we are also made aware of Golub’s inability to control the narrative itself, as he is presented as the victim of the narrative and not one of its agents, as he is “blind mit geschlossenen und offenen Augen” (p. 186) and is condemned to watch over and over his own downfall, without the possibility of intervention “ich kann sie wiederholen, ändern kann ich sie nicht” (p.9). Golub is thus ironically trapped in the same

Golub’s role as town photographer further contributes to his problematic status, as Elisabeth Kaltenböck suggests that the role of photographer signifies an

⁶ For examples of such criticism see Robert Menasse, ‘Auf diesem Fasching tanzen wir noch immer’, in *Fasching* (Frankfurt: suhrkamp taschenbuch, 1995), pp. 246-7.

⁷ Schimpl defines *Sprachreproduktion* as the “Häufung von charakteristischen Wörtern und Wortverbindungen, die [...] bewußt gemacht und entlarvt werden sollen”. Schimpl, p. 69

implicit acceptance of the events photographed, rendering Wazurak and Golub *Mittäter*.⁸ This finds its climax in Golub's willingness to participate "als Fotograf an der nationalsozialistischen Geschichtsverfälschung",⁹ as he accepts the role of official museum photographer. Through this implicit acceptance, Golub renders himself accomplice, not only to the falsification of history in favour of a glorification of ex-Nazis, but equally participates in his own destruction, as the museum's version of the town's history erases him entirely (p. 155). The motif of photographic observation thus reveals once again Golub's inadequacy as an heroic figure, as his observation has no effect of resistance on the restoration society, which remains free to continue its Nazi practices and beliefs.

The terrible implications of such passive observation are rendered evident in the inhumane treatment of Fiala, who is humiliated and physically abused for the entertainment of the crowd, under the pretence of another act of *Volksjustiz* (pp. 107-8). This scene places Golub firmly in the role of the passive observer (also to be seen in the execution of Kravogl (pp. 116-7) and the honouring of Lubits (pp. 53-7)) who questions only briefly and quietly this humiliation, thus placing the reader in the uncomfortable position of the observer, and as Robert Menasse points out "nun habe ich aber soeben festgestellt, daß keiner [positiver Held] da ist, weil auf mich kein Verlaß ist".¹⁰ Menasse views the lack of positive hero as a challenge to the reader to pose himself the question of how he would have reacted instead of being absolved from this responsibility by a positive hero in the novel. The lack of positive hero can thus be regarded not only as criticism of the post-war society of *Mitläufer* but equally as a challenge to future generations, forcing the reader to play an active part in the novel.

Carnival and Transvestism

Highly significant within the novel is the setting of carnival, which lends itself to a variety of interpretations and has incited both praise and criticism. In order to evaluate the implications of the carnival setting for *Fasching's* thematics it would be useful to look at the carnival theory of Mikhail Bakhtin and Wolfgang Kayser and to consider to what extent their concepts can be applied to Fritsch's novel. Bakhtin and Kayser

⁸ Elisabeth Kaltenböck, *Fotografie und Fotografenfiguren in der österreichischen Gegenwartsliteratur* (unpublished Masters thesis, University of Salzburg, 1996), p. 71

⁹ Kaltenböck, p. 71. One of the objects Golub is obliged to photograph is a painting of the town's history, where his role in saving the town from Russian destruction has been omitted.

¹⁰ Menasse, *Fasching*, p. 248.

vary greatly in their understanding of carnival, the former concentrating principally on the regenerating and positive power of this festival whilst the latter repeatedly stresses the sinister and threatening aspect of the grotesque. Whereas Bakhtin views the reversal of normal order in carnival as a sign of liberation from oppressive social structures and a possibility for a “neuen Modus der Beziehung von Mensch zu Mensch [...], der sich den allmächtigen sozialhierarchischen Beziehungen des gewöhnlichen Lebens entgegensetzt”¹¹, Kayser places emphasis on the element of alienation and estrangement which characterises the topsy-turvy world of carnival, which is “something ominous and sinister in the face of a world totally different from the familiar one”¹². Fritsch’s employment of the carnival setting as the backdrop for scenes of aggression carried over from the fascist era and the exploitation of its associated rituals as legitimisation for this violence would clearly appear to rule out Bakhtin’s optimistic interpretation of carnival. Considering particularly the coronation ceremony at the end of the novel, where Golub’s election to *Faschingsbraut* descends into mob violence, it is evident that Fritsch’s use of carnival and its rituals deviates greatly from Bakhtin’s concept of medieval carnival. Far from being an ambivalent process whereby “alle Symbolelemente des Zeremoniells erstrecken sich auch auf eine zweite Ebene, die positiv ist”¹³ symbolising regeneration and change, this ritual in the novel evidently functions to prevent any danger of change to the social hierarchy and fascist ideology in the town collective.

Central to studies of carnival theory is the role played by laughter in the grotesque and its function within the social order of carnival. In the context of the novel’s brutality, this laughter assumes a threatening and brutal aspect, taking on almost demonic qualities and highlighting the spiritual destruction of Golub under the guise of “Spaß”. This is especially evident in the first chapter, as the novel begins “Ich habe gelacht und sie hat gelacht, ich höre uns noch lachen [...] ich sehe sie noch lachen [...] lachend habe ich mich in der Grube zurechtgesetzt [...]. Wenn ich jetzt lache, lacht das Echo mit” (p. 7), where the repetitive insistence on laughter combined with the murky setting of Golub’s prison pit reveals the menacing aspect of this laughter. The reflection of this in Golub’s disjointed monologue, with which the novel concludes, renders manifest the full extent of this menace, as Golub is driven to

¹¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Literatur und Karneval*, (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1969), p. 48.

¹² Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grottesque in Art and Literature*, trans. by Ulrich Weisstein (USA: Indiana University Press, 1963), p. 21.

¹³ Bakhtin, p. 51.

insanity by the haunting laughter: “sie lachen ... und ich lache mit ... die Tante marschiert ... und ich ... marschiere mit [...] warum nicht ... warum erst jetzt ... warum denn nicht gleich so?” (p. 238). This threatening and aggressive function of laughter within *Fasching* provides a clear contrast to the traditional role of laughter in Bakhtin’s carnival theory. Closely connected to the liberating effect of carnival, Bakhtin equates laughter to a notion of freedom, which counteracts, albeit temporarily, the normal social hierarchy: “Das Lachen verfügt keine Verbote und Einschränkungen. Macht, Gewalt, Autorität sprechen niemals die Sprache des Lachens”.¹⁴ Laughter is further viewed as a counterbalance to violence, traditionally representing a break with the brutality of everyday life, as “man begriff, daß sich hinter dem Lachen niemals Gewalt verbirgt, daß das Lachen keine Scheiterhaufen aufrichtet”.¹⁵ The evident contrast between the laughter in *Fasching*, which is concomitant with the violence inflicted upon Golub, and the traditional liberating function of laughter serves to highlight Fritsch’s rejection of the positive aspects of carnival tradition in his novel, subsequently underlining the villagers’ abuse of this festival and highlighting the aspect of continuity, as carnival and laughter are merely a mutation of everyday aggression.

The similarities between Fritsch’s laughter motif and Kayser’s more negative interpretation of carnival¹⁶ are continued in the aspects of the grotesque in *Fasching*, which display all the characteristics of Kayser’s sinister and frightening carnival world. Kayser provides us with numerous definitions of the “grotesque”, placing emphasis on the perversion of reality, the element of satire and the mixing of mechanism and organism.¹⁷ The latter is of particular relevance to *Fasching*, as we can observe both the personification of inanimate objects, such as the “plappernde Dachrinnen” that spit out dirty water onto Golub (p. 21) and the dehumanisation of certain characters, often through animal imagery, such as “der scharfgesichtige Raubvogel Radegund” (p. 88), all of which contribute to the atmosphere of menace and threat of which Golub is victim. This transformation of familiar objects and people underlines Kayser’s assertion that “the grotesque world is – and is not – our world”¹⁸, where emphasis in this case must be placed on the element of continuation

¹⁴ Bakhtin, p. 34.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 41.

¹⁶ Kayser refers to a “mocking, cynical, and ultimately satanic laughter”. Kayser, p. 187.

¹⁷ Kayser, p. 183.

¹⁸ Kayser, p. 184.

in this statement, as the everyday world with its protagonists remains a constant and merely appears in a different mutation of its same self.

This continuity within the setting of carnival is key to understanding Fritsch's use of its imagery and rituals. Traditionally this festival is a time of disguise which marks a temporary suspension of normal identity in favour of a grotesque alter-ego. However, in the context of the novel, carnival essentially serves to reveal the true character of the town, exposing the superficiality of the "flinken Kleidungswechsel"¹⁹ undertaken by post-war Austrian society, as Nazi uniforms were exchanged for a superficial democratic appearance. This notion of the emergence of true identity in the Fasching period is explicitly underlined within the novel by the call of the *Faschingsprinz* "sind wir im Fasching wie sonst" (pp. 223-4), which reveals the falsity of the festival's apparent exceptionality. Thus the violence to which Golub is exposed does not represent the town's exploitation of Fasching for their brutal purposes, but provides rather an extreme example of the town's latent aggression and fascist tendencies, which are present yet concealed during the rest of the year. Carnival is therefore merely a continuation of the social norms within the town and does not represent an exceptional, temporary episode as Thomas Mießgang claims in his criticism of *Fasching*. Mießgang regards Fritsch's use of the carnival motif as highly problematic, arguing that this setting presents the fascist phenomenon as a singular event and "damit wird vom historischen und ökonomischen Kontext, in dem der Nationalsozialismus gedeihen konnte, abstrahiert".²⁰ This criticism evidently fails to take into account the motif of continuation and repetition, which prevents the town's fascist behaviour from being viewed as a unique and exceptional case. Fritsch's portrayal of carnival can much rather be explained by Jan Assmann's assessment of the role of festivals within cultural memory:

Es [gibt] nicht zwei Ordnungen, die Ordnung des Festes und die Ordnung des Alltags. Es gibt vielmehr ursprünglich nur eine einzige Ordnung [...]. Die ursprüngliche Funktion der Feste besteht darin, die Zeit überhaupt zu gliedern, nicht etwa eine der "Alltagszeit" entgegengesetzte andere, "Heilige Zeit" zu stiften. Indem die Feste den Zeitfluß strukturieren und rhythmisieren, stiften

¹⁹ Menasse, *Fasching*, p.241.

²⁰ Thomas Mießgang, *Sex, Mythos, Masquerade* (Wien: VWGÖ, 1988) p. 207.

sie die allgemeine Zeitordnung, in der auch der Alltag erst seinen Platz bekommt.²¹

An application of Assmann's theory that carnival and everyday-life are two modals of one secular time to the carnival setting of Fritsch's novel thus implies a connection between the period of National Socialism and post-war Austria, reinforcing the notion that Nazism in Austria was not an anomaly but rather one manifestation of an already existing fascist order.

Closely linked to carnival is the motif of transvestism which appears throughout the novel in various forms,²² the most predominant of which is evidently the transformation of Golub into Charlotte Weber, which occurs on both timescales. Whilst related to the theme of disguise, a major difference is apparent in Golub's forced transvestism, as this disguise is in no way voluntary, representing rather a ritualistic humiliation seen to be fitting of deserters, which is anchored in the town's tradition and is exercised primarily by Vittoria Pisani, who "[folgt] einem alten Gesetz wehrhafter Völker: der Feigling wird in Frauenkleider gesteckt" (p. 45). The ritualistic aspect of this imposed disguise is highlighted once again in the novel's final scene, as Golub is elected *Faschingsbraut*, providing the townsfolk with an opportunity to release their pent-up brutality. Transvestism thus becomes a "Katalysator eines kollektiven Terrors",²³ which seeks to suppress the individual in order to protect their Nazi attitudes from the unwelcome resistance of outsiders.

Fasching in Context

Taking into consideration these various aspects of the novel, it becomes evident that *Fasching* did not conform to typical Austrian literature of this period, in the radicalism of both its thematics and style and in its unequivocally critical assessment of post-war Austria. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Austrian literature in the 1950s was characterised by a return to pre-war Austrian tradition both in style and content and it has further been noted that "auch in den 60er Jahren blieben Kontinuität, Stabilität, Bindung an die österreichische Tradition weiterhin wirksame Motive der österreichischen Literatur".²⁴ Austria's "fehlende Fixierung auf die Stunde Null" and

²¹ Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1992), p. 58

²² For a comprehensive list of instances of transvestism see Schimpl p. 85.

²³ Susanne Zobl, 'Transvestismus und Deformation: Über ein Motiv bei Gerhard Fritsch', *Literatur und Kritik*, 29 (1994), 67-74 (p. 68).

²⁴ Weiss, p. 294.

the resultant lack of social criticism was further accompanied by a widespread absence of stylistic experimentation, as “die Moderne, also die sich auf das Experiment einließ oder radikal mit der literarischen Praxis der vorgegangenen Epoche brechen sollte [...] hatte kein Forum” and was either rejected or ignored by press and public.²⁵ Fritsch’s break with literary tradition, combined with a frank portrayal of failed Austrian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, thus rendered *Fasching* unacceptable to its contemporary audience, who rejected outright this criticism of Austrian society.

Press Reception

As with Lebert we can observe a gulf between the image of *Fasching*’s press reception put forward by critics, who insist on an unfavourable press response, and the reality of the novel’s reception. Of the six articles revealed by my research, however, one article presents a clearly negative response to the text, the rest being unequivocally positive. The true phenomenon in this case is the absence of reviews, which suggests that *Fasching* suffered not from over-critical reviews but from under-exposure in the media. Here it is also important to note that two of the six reviews were carried out by colleagues and friends of Fritsch: Otto Breicha with whom he wrote *Aufforderung zum Mißtrauen* and Paul Kruntorad, co-founder of *Literatur und Kritik*.

Legitimation and Abstraction

Strikingly characteristic of the novel’s press response is the exaggerated emphasis placed upon Fritsch’s biographical details and the success of *Moos auf den Steinen*, which in several articles occupies up to 50% of the entire review, leaving little scope for a comprehensive analysis of *Fasching* itself. The most extreme example of this disproportionate biographical information is to be found in Otto Breicha’s review in *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, which employs a rather bizarre rhetorical technique in order to convey this information. Assuming the ignorance of his readers, Breicha attempts to establish a knowledge of Fritsch’s life as a prerequisite for an understanding of the novel, presenting each fact as a key towards fuller comprehension of the text:

“Vorausgesetzt man weiß, wer Gerhard Fritsch ist (nämlich als Redakteur,

²⁵ Wendelin Schmidt-Dengler, ‘Die unheiligen Experimente: Zur Anpassung der Konvention an die Moderne’, in *Literatur der Nachkriegszeit und der fünfziger Jahre in Österreich*, ed. by Friedbert Aspetsberger, Norbert Frei and Hubert Lengauer (Vienna: Österreichischer Bundesverlag, 1984), pp. 337-350 (p. 341).

Herausgeber usw. österreichischer Literatur federführend) [...] kann man etwa ermessen, was sein neuer Roman [...] für Fritsch bedeutet”.²⁶ Here, Fritsch is presented as an award-winning author, one-time lyricist and all-round literary guru in a manner which appears to view this knowledge as a necessary legitimisation of a review of his work. Whilst somewhat understandable in this case considering the friendship between Breicha and Fritsch, the emphasis placed on his literary success is continued in the portrayal of the novel’s international significance, stressed also in *Kurier* and *Volksstimme*,²⁷ who all mention the reputability of Rowohlt publishers and the possibility of further publishing agreements in New York and France. This, once again, suggests a need to legitimise the writing of a review of *Fasching*, basing this less on the novel’s stylistic and thematic merits than on the national and international literary significance of its author.

This process of legitimising is further accomplished through lengthy comparisons between *Fasching* and *Moos auf den Steinen* which are to be found towards the beginning of almost every article. This comparison can be seen to fulfil two rather contradictory functions. Firstly, the emphasis placed on the alleged thematic similarities between *Fasching* and *Moos auf den Steinen*, which both “beschäftigen sich mit der österreichischen Tradition”²⁸ appeal to the popularity of *Moos auf den Steinen* thus promoting by association a positive response for *Fasching*. This is, however, negated, as attention is equally drawn to the eleven-year span between Fritsch’s two novels, which is presented as a demonstration of “einen Neubeginn, eine Umkehr (auch stilistisch und der Sprache nach)”,²⁹ implying a marked development in his writing. This contradictory praise of both the differences and similarities between the two novels highlights the critics’ uncertainty regarding the thematics and experimental style of *Fasching* and it is once again evident that merit is found in *Fasching* not within the novel itself but rather in its connection with *Moos auf den Steinen*.

In order to fully comprehend the implications of this foregrounding of Fritsch’s first novel, it is essential to consider briefly the thematics and stylistics of *Moos auf den Steinen* and the position of the novel in the post-war literary landscape.

²⁶ Otto Breicha, ‘Ein Mann erlebt seinen Fasching’, *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, 12 November 1967, p. 2.

²⁷ Paul Kruntorad, ‘Restauration im Fasching’, *Kurier*, 25 September 1967, p. 7 and Ernst Wimmer, ‘Endlich ein „böses“ Buch’, *Volksstimme*, 22 September 1967, p. 3.

²⁸ *Arbeiter-Zeitung*.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

Whilst more critical analyses of the novel have recently been offered,³⁰ *Moos auf den Steinen* was long considered to be a traditionally narrated account of Austrian culture, a “geglückte Synthese zwischen Tradition und neuer Zeit”, which represented a “Kultbuch einer Generation [...], die süchtig war nach Versöhnung, Synthese und Harmonie”.³¹ The evident contrast between this piece of consensus literature and the radicality of *Fasching* renders highly problematic the comparisons drawn in the reviews above, which attempt to diffuse its radicalism through these parallels, exposing once again the “Konsensbedürfnis” in post-war Austrian literature, which led to the rejection of socially-critical novels and experimental literature in favour of a continuation of the great Austrian *Erzähltradition*. Their reluctance to accept Fritsch’s transformation “vom Österreich-Elegiker und Erben der österreichischen Romantradition zum Österreich-Kritiker und formalen Neuerer”³² can thus be viewed as a literary manifestation of the unwillingness of the Austrian public to be confronted with the brutal truth about their Nazi past, as refuge was sought in more favourable aspects of Austrian tradition and history.

Characteristic of these articles is also the disproportionate emphasis placed on background information to the novel and general observations on both post-war Austria and its literature, which becomes almost the focus of the reviews to the detriment of the text itself. This trend of situating *Fasching* within its contemporary literary landscape is particularly manifest in the reviews from *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, *Die Presse* and *Volksstimme*, which seek not only to relate the novel to other contemporary literature but also to literary theory in a more general sense. The review from the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* can be seen, however, to remain within the boundaries of normal literary criticism, restricting itself to the final paragraph, where the “wickedness” of *Fasching* is hailed as a potential saviour of Austrian literature, which has “nichts zu verlieren, als ihre Harmlosigkeit”,³³ thus allowing the focus of the article to remain the novel itself. This is less the case in *Die Presse*, where the first two paragraphs of the review are dedicated to a more general approach to literature, as the author contemplates the question of the critical reception of second novels, asking “Ob das zweite Buch [...] notwendig schlechter sei als sein erstes?”.³⁴ The focus of the article is thus deflected from *Fasching* itself onto its relationship with *Moos auf*

³⁰ See for example Weiss, pp. 289-297.

³¹ Menasse, *Fasching*, p. 245.

³² Weiss, p. 298.

³³ *Arbeiter-Zeitung*.

³⁴ Anon, ‘An Gerechtigkeit wurde gedacht’, *Die Presse*, 21 October 1967, p. 4.

den Steinen and the critical reception of the two. This approach, whilst problematic in its treatment of *Fasching*, becomes understandable in the context of the entire article, which is a comparative analysis of three second works.³⁵ The thematic diversity of these works, however, renders somewhat superfluous the thematics of *Fasching* to this article, contributing further to this sidelining effect.

The most acute example of this marginalising tendency within *Fasching*'s press reception is undoubtedly Ernst Wimmer's article in *Volksstimme*, where the text itself is evidently a mere pretext for a reflection upon the state of Austrian and West-German literature. This review begins with the statement that "Eine gute Literatur braucht „böse“ Bücher"³⁶ and hails Fritsch's novel as a prime example of such "nasty" books, thus establishing the paradigmatic role of *Fasching* within this article. The article's introductory paragraph barely mentions *Fasching*, concentrating instead on a comparison of Austrian and West-German literature, of which the latter is presented as greatly superior due to the critical role assumed by German writers, who reject "die ihnen zugeordnete Rolle von Repräsentations- und Dekorationsstücken".³⁷ Whilst this recognition of the necessity of a critical literature is evidently relevant with regards to *Fasching*, the object of this criticism remains a vague concept of the "Wohlstandsgesellschaft",³⁸ presenting literature as a Communist instrument against the upper classes and ignoring its function as a method of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Wimmer further criticises the development of Austrian literature since 1945, claiming that it fails in the "Erfüllung nationaler Funktionen",³⁹ without providing a more specific definition of these "nationalist functions". Thus critical literature, and evidently *Fasching* itself, become abstract terms, related only to vague notions of what "gute Literatur"⁴⁰ should consist of.

This vague concept of the role of literature in post-war society is coupled with an equally nebulous description of this society, whose problems here are defined as the contradiction "zwischen dem, was man 1945 von einem neuen Österreich erwarten konnte und was mittlerweile daraus geworden ist",⁴¹ a definition which leaves itself open to any variety of interpretations. Wimmer's description of the "[falsche]

³⁵ Gerhard Fritsch, *Fasching* (Hamburg: Rowohlt 1967), Peter Marginter, *Der tote Onkel* (Munich, Vienna: Langen, Müller, 1967), and Peter von Tramin, *Die Tür im Fenster* (Munich: Nymphenburger, 1967).

³⁶ *Volksstimme*.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

Restauration”⁴² equally fails to provide an accurate portrayal of Austrian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* as any specific mention of National Socialism is avoided. Thus, the problematics of post-war Austrian society also take on an abstract quality, as both the issue of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and the necessity for this topic to be dealt with within Austrian literature are merely implied, robbing this article, and by association *Fasching*, of a clear socio-political message.

The abstraction of Fritsch’s *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* theme provides a constant within the press reception of *Fasching*, which concentrates chiefly on a highly generalised reflection on post-war Austria. Whilst these articles appear on the surface to deal frankly with the novel’s themes, frequently focussing almost exclusively on the thematics of *Fasching* to the detriment of other aspects of the novel, this journalistic contribution to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* is illusory. The absence of any concrete connection to post-war Austria and its relationship to National Socialism renders futile these many references to “Tradition” and “Restauration”, which only pay lip-service to the novel’s themes. Whilst these reviews state explicitly the relevance of *Fasching* to post-war Austria, viewing the novel as a “Zeitdokument”⁴³ and an “ehrliches Buch”,⁴⁴ the reasons for the novel’s accuracy are never adequately explained, remaining concealed behind nebulous references to Austria’s “Vergangenheit”.

Particularly revealing in this context is the manner in which each article describes the historic period of the Third Reich. In two of the reviews (*Die Presse* and *Volksstimme*) this period is never mentioned explicitly, as their treatment of the novel is restricted to the post-war period. Kruntorad’s article in *Kurier* refers cryptically to the situation “seit 1933”,⁴⁵ thus disregarding the novel’s Austro-specificity, as 1933 implies a more general treatment of Nazism in both Germany and Austria, National Socialism existing officially in the latter only after 1938. Although the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* refers to Golub’s struggle against the “Hitlerei”,⁴⁶ a term whose trivialising effect cannot be overlooked, the only articles to deal directly with National Socialism are the *Salzburger Nachrichten*, which makes one reference to “Nazismus” and the

⁴² *Volksstimme*.

⁴³ Oskar Maurus Fontana, ‘Tanz der Kleinstadt-Lemuren’, *Salzburger Nachrichten: SN Bücherzeitung* 1967, 18 November 1967, p. 8.

⁴⁴ *Presse*.

⁴⁵ Paul Kruntorad, ‘Restauration im Fasching’, *Kurier*, 25 September 1967, p. 7.

⁴⁶ *Arbeiter-Zeitung*.

Oberösterreichische Nachrichten,⁴⁷ which mentions both the SS and “[N]ationalsozialisten”. These fleeting references cannot, however, be regarded as a substitute for an in-depth reflection on the novel’s themes, which are dealt with in a far more abstract manner. The common definition of *Fasching*’s thematics is “eine Auseinandersetzung mit den negativen Seiten der Tradition”⁴⁸ or the “Schattenseiten der Tradition”,⁴⁹ where any reference to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* is restricted to an allusion to “die österreichische Gewohnheit, die eigene Geschichte mythisch zu verklären”,⁵⁰ whose vagueness ironically reproduces this tendency to euphemise or conceal Austria’s Nazi past. The indistinctness with which *Fasching*’s *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* theme is treated is coupled in *Die Presse* with a tendency towards self-pity, as the post-war period is viewed as “ein Abschnitt, in dem Hoffnungen ebenso kühn geweckt wurden wie schnöde unerfüllt bleiben”,⁵¹ encouraging pity for the post-war Austrian society rather than a critical evaluation of its (lack of) attempts at *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. This ostensibly frank treatment of the novel’s thematics and their relevance to post-war Austria can thus ironically be regarded as a reproduction of the “double-speak” criticised by Fritsch in his novel, as the press pay lip-service to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in an, albeit less extreme, variation on Lubits’ praise of democracy.⁵²

The positive press response to *Fasching* must thus be viewed in a more critical light, which exposes the vast shortcomings of these articles in both their treatment of the novel and its thematics. As literary reviews of *Fasching* they are evidently deeply inadequate, constantly sidelining the novel itself in favour of a more general analysis of the post-war situation in Austria. This evaluation of post-war literature and society, however, fails equally to provide the reader with a comprehensive overview, as the notion of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* is concealed by abstract references to Austria’s past, denying the possibility of any concrete *Zeitkritik*.

⁴⁷ Peter Kraft, ‘Statt Menschen sieht man nur mehr Karikaturen’, *Oberösterreichische Nachrichten*, 21 September 1967, p. 8.

⁴⁸ *Volksstimme*.

⁴⁹ *Presse*.

⁵⁰ *Kurier*.

⁵¹ *Presse*.

⁵² *Fasching*, p. 99

Negative Press

In contrast to the remainder of *Fasching*'s press reception, the only negative review,⁵³ which also distinguishes itself through its sheer length, concentrates almost solely on the novel itself, omitting the background information which saturates the remaining articles. The review's structure further reflects this more detailed approach to the *Fasching*, as plot, theme and style are dealt with systematically, placing equal emphasis on the novel's form and content. The review begins with a brief outline of what the reviewer, Dr. Peter Kraft, considers to be the main themes, characters and issues of *Fasching*. This moves into a detailed, albeit partially inaccurate⁵⁴ summary of the novel's plot, before going on to examine in closer detail the novel's characters, composition and setting along with Fritsch's experimental style. The depth in which these aspects of the novel are analysed contrasts greatly with fleeting overview provided by certain other reviews, making clear that the focus of this article is the novel itself. This guiding focus is underlined by the restriction of Fritsch's biographical details to a single isolated paragraph in parentheses, included at the end of the review, which limits itself to an extremely sparse overview of Fritsch's editorial and literary work. This article would thus appear to present us with the only comprehensive review of *Fasching* which is not hindered or obscured by an exaggerated preoccupation with the novel's literary and historio-political backdrop. However, despite its detailed approach, this article demonstrates a clear misunderstanding or misevaluation of many of the novel's fundamental issues.

Kraft's chief criticism of *Fasching* is threefold, centring on Fritsch's portrayal of sexuality, his characterisation (or lack thereof) and the novel's allegedly over-emphasised political message. These three arguments are intertwined in a complicated manner, which results in confusion and self-contradiction. From the outset this article places disproportionate emphasis on the role of the sexual in *Fasching*, claiming that "die Sachverhalte dieses neuen Romans [...] sind zunächst einmal, rings um einen politischen Kern, rein geschlechtlich",⁵⁵ thereby implying that the novel's political message is related to and yet simultaneously overshadowed by the sexual. This obsession with the novel's sexuality reveals itself not only through the position this argument occupies at the beginning of the article, but is equally evident in its constant

⁵³ Peter Kraft, 'Statt Menschen sieht man nur mehr Karikaturen', *Oberösterreichische Nachrichten*, 21 September 1967, p. 8.

⁵⁴ For example, Golub's period internment in Siberia is referred to here as five years, instead of twelve.

⁵⁵ *Oberösterreichische Nachrichten*.

presence throughout the review and in the heavy irony with which the novel's characters are depicted. This portrayal of the main protagonists as "eine alte Nymphomanin"⁵⁶ and "einen alten Homosexuellen",⁵⁷ reduces the characters to their sexual behaviour and ignores all other characteristics such as Pisani's influential role within the community or indeed Raimund's submissive acceptance of his complicity in the town's brutality, thus denying them any further significance within the novel. Kraft also fails to find a connection between the notion of sexual perversion, chiefly demonstrated by Nazi hero Lubits's fetish for virgins,⁵⁸ and the perversion of morality during the Third Reich. This motif, although now widely regarded as being somewhat clichéd, was common in antifascist literature of this period, where "die sexuelle Perversion scheint [...] geradezu als Eckpfeiler des faschistischen Charakters verankert zu sein"⁵⁹ and it is thus surprising that this critical function of sexuality within the novel should not only be ignored but furthermore implicitly placed under doubt, as Kraft questions whether the novel's explicit sexual details result in an "erzählerischer Humus – oder [...] eine Moral",⁶⁰ in his eyes the only instance in which such details can be justified.

As is implied by the review's title, "Statt Menschen sieht man nur mehr Karikaturen",⁶¹ this criticism forms the focus of Kraft's article, which relies upon self-supporting evidence through the one-sided portrayal of the characters touched upon above. Looking closely at Kraft's description of the characters, it is evident that he attempts to impose a universality or interchangeability upon them in order to underline his argument. This is characterised by an excessive use of the indefinite article and in the omission of names, which are replaced with one-dimensional, overly-simplified descriptions: "die k.k.-Generalswitwe" (Vittoria Pisani), "ein blutjunger Deserteur" (Felix Golub), "ein selbstherrlich erlogener Ritterkreuzträger" (Lois Lubits).⁶² Whilst it could be claimed that Kraft is merely attempting to reproduce the novel's lack of characterisation, this is evidently not the case with regard to the character of Golub, whose observations and reflections in the novel render him anything but caricatured. Indeed Kraft himself views Golub and Pisani as the only two exceptions to his criticism: "Was freilich außerhalb der Hauptfigur und ihrer großen und mächtigen

⁵⁶ *Oberösterreichische Nachrichten*.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ For further examples of sexual perversion within the novel, see *Mießgang*, pp. 153-155.

⁵⁹ *Mießgang*, p. 154.

⁶⁰ *Oberösterreichische Nachrichten*.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

Verführerin [...] lebendig sein soll als Persönlichkeit, bleibt literarische Machinerie”.⁶³ The lack of in-depth analysis of Golub’s character in this article cannot, therefore, be regarded as reflective of the novel and thus must either be regarded as a desire to manipulate our interpretation of the text or as one of the many instances of self-contradiction in this review.

Kraft furthermore connects this lack of individual characterisation with Fritsch’s political intentions, although this argument is presented in a highly confusing and contradictory manner. It is claimed here that “es gibt für Fritsch keine Menschen, die [...] ganz unvermeidlich von einem politischen System geprägt sind”,⁶⁴ implying that each of Fritsch’s characters have independently chosen their political persuasions. According to Kraft the portrayal of individual characters in the novel runs in indirect proportion to the conveyance of a political message, leading to the further criticism that “am Ende ist es ein Pamphlet und kein Roman”,⁶⁵ as it is claimed that Fritsch’s use of caricatures renders “umsonst”⁶⁶ all other efforts in composition and language experimentation. Aside from the clearly problematic confusion of political and aesthetic judgement here, this argument demonstrates further inadequacy in its lack of subsequent exploration of the link between the use of caricatures and the novel’s “message”, Kraft refusing to recognise any stylistic or thematic merit in this technique. This negative evaluation of Fritsch’s caricatured figures demonstrates a failure to recognise several key elements of the novel’s characterisation. Firstly, this lack of individuality or depth of character can be seen to function in a similar fashion to the portrayal of the villagers within *Die Wolfshaut*, as a lack of differentiation presents fascism as “ein dumpfer Massenwahn”⁶⁷ against which the novel’s hero, or anti-hero, has no chance of resistance. Schimpl furthermore views this caricatured portrayal as a contributing factor to the novel’s “grotesque” aspect, linked evidently to the carnival setting. Looking specifically at the wedding photos taken by Raimund and Golub, which thematise “die groteske Karikatur”,⁶⁸ Schimpl draws attention to the aggressive reaction they provoke, which contrasts with the humorous reaction normally associated with caricatures. This scene can thus be seen to underline the

⁶³ *Oberösterreichische Nachrichten*.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Mießgang*, p. 163.

⁶⁸ *Schimpl*, p. 75.

function of caricatured protagonists in the novel, which serve to highlight the grotesque and threatening atmosphere created by the fascist elements within the town.

The article's criticism of *Fasching* is not, however, the only problematical element within the review. As with the positive evaluations of *Die Wolfshaut*, the praise expressed by Kraft presents us with an equally inadequate assessment of Fritsch's novel, necessitating a more critical approach to this apparent praise. Here the novel's composition and its ability to convey a sense of oppression are described as "makellos",⁶⁹ and Kraft appears to display an understanding of the relationship between the chronological structure and the content of the novel, viewing the absorption of the flashbacks into Golub's reflective narrative as a contributing factor to the "ganze deprimierende Ernte"⁷⁰ of the novel. This recognition of the interdependency of form and content is, however, short-lived, as Kraft's praise for Fritsch's experiments with language fails to explore the consequences this may have for the novel and its message. This is in clear contrast to those articles from *Die Presse* and *Kurier*, both of which stress the importance of this relationship, even going as far as to state that "in einer Kritik kann man tatsächlich Form und Inhalt nicht trennen",⁷¹ a view supported by many critics.⁷²

Kraft's problematical approach to the novel and its themes is further apparent in his analysis of the museum scene, in which Golub is subjected to humiliation and torture in order to force his complicity in the town's falsification of its history. Whilst Kraft correctly identifies and praises this scene's relevance to Austrian tradition, his formulation of this praise reveals an inability to view a concrete link to post-war Austria, referring instead to the nerve it touches in the "faulen und verwesenden Fleisch der Vergangenheit".⁷³ This vague reference to the "Vergangenheit" robs the novel of its specific criticism of post-war Austrian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, and furthermore contributes to the view that such scenes belong to the past and are of no relevance to modern Austria. This abstracting effect is further underlined by the highly bizarre interpretation of the museum's tableau, which he first (accurately) compares to the carnival tableaux of the Middle Ages before going on to stress the similarities to the Passion of Christ. Whilst this comparison could be viewed as

⁶⁹ *Oberösterreichische Nachrichten*.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Kurier*.

⁷² The most evident link between form and content is to be found in Schimpl's analysis of *Sprachreproduktion in Fasching*, which considers the relationship between the novel's language and structure and its themes. Schimpl, pp. 60-72.

⁷³ *Oberösterreichische Nachrichten*.

relevant (Schimpl in particular stresses the parallels that can be drawn between Golub's fate and the Passion),⁷⁴ his subsequent comparison to the "[namenlose] Opfer in den Vernichtungslagern"⁷⁵ appears to have no real foundation and Kraft's argument appears as lip-service to the novel's *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* theme, which itself only touches upon the concentration camps.

Thus this article, whilst superficially the most comprehensive review of *Fasching*, ultimately provides a highly inadequate evaluation of the novel, which overlooks or misunderstands many of its key elements. Although it would be false to claim that Kraft's description of the figures as caricatured is incorrect, his critical attitude towards this aspect of the novel and his failure to view it as a valid method of conveying an antifascist message render invalid this judgement. The contradictory nature of this article equally suggests a deep misunderstanding of the text, as it is first claimed that Fritsch favours the portrayal of the sexual to the detriment of the novel's political message, an argument which is later negated by Kraft's condemnation of the novel as an over-politicised pamphlet.

Conclusion

In contrast to the more heterogeneous reception of *Die Wolfshaut*, which only partially bears out the common assumption of failed or absent *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in 1960s Austria, the press response to Fritsch's novel clearly corresponds to predominant cultural narrative, demonstrating a lack of tolerance for socially critical literature containing explicit criticism of Austrian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. The repeated foregrounding of *Moos auf den Steinen* highlights the anticipated lack of public acceptance of Fritsch's radical criticism and perpetuates the promotion of a harmonised Austrian literary landscape, thus underlining the "Mißverhältnis zwischen dem Wagemut, dem Pioniergeist österreichischer Autoren und der Öffentlichkeit in Österreich".⁷⁶ The reviewers' avoidance of direct references to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* further validates the cultural narrative of Austrian memory in the 1960s, where "it was less a matter of what could be publicly pronounced than what was covered by the official cloak of silence".⁷⁷ Thus we find

⁷⁴ Schimpl, p. 79.

⁷⁵ *Oberösterreichische Nachrichten*.

⁷⁶ Weiss, p. 282.

⁷⁷ Uhl, 'Politics of Memory', p. 73.

paralleled in the press the same institutionalised silence surrounding the past that dominates narratives of 1960s *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.

Elfriede Jelinek: *Die Ausgesperrten*

Set in 1950s Austria, a time of prosperity, economic growth and the *Wirtschaftswunder*, Elfriede Jelinek's novel *Die Ausgesperrten* looks critically at this (falsely) idealised period in Austrian history, scratching beneath the surface of Austrian society to reveal continuing fascist tendencies and the social structures which sustain them. The novel, originally created for radio and later adapted for film,¹ centres around a gang of youths whose frustration with their differing social positions finds expression in a series of violent attacks on innocent passers-by, although as one of the youths points out "keiner ist heutzutage unschuldig" (p. 239). The novel comes to its violent conclusion as the gang's self-appointed "Anführer", Rainer Witkowski, brutally murders his parents and sister in an attempt "seine nazistische Position [zu] retten" (p. 263). This aspect of the novel was based on a real-life crime in 1965 where seventeen year old Rainer Maria Udo Wachowsky murdered his mother, father and elder brother.

In no way solely an account of teenage rebellion, Jelinek's novel is rather an attempt to reveal the continuation of fascism in post-war Austrian society and expose the social factors responsible for the perpetuation of Nazi principles. Jelinek's portrayal of 1950s Austria depicts a country still marked by fascism, where Nazi perpetrators have been rehabilitated and "blicken voller Kriegsandenken von blumengeschmückten Fensterbänken aus freundlich ins Publikum, winken oder bekleiden hohe Ämter" (p. 7). Despite promises of a "new" Austria, shaped by economic prosperity, which were propagated by the media (pp.131-37) it is evident that this façade conceals disturbing fascist tendencies. This new form of fascism, described by Jelinek as "verwaschener und unspezifischer"² than that of National Socialism is characterised by a combination of patriarchy, opportunism and seemingly unmotivated violence. Through the novel's characters, "dehumanisiert[e] Prototyp[en] in einer Gesellschaft, die das Subjekt abschafft",³ and in particular through the social and familial constellations, Jelinek reveals an *Alltagsfaschismus* which manifests itself not only through the unaltered ideology of the war generation but further in the neo-fascist attitudes and actions of the next generation, who appear to be condemned to repeat the very system which oppresses them.

¹ The film of *Die Ausgesperrten* was released in 1982, directed by Franz Novotny.

² Riki Winter, 'Gespräch mit Elfriede Jelinek', in *Dossier: Elfriede Jelinek*, ed. by Roland Bartsch and Günther Höfler (Vienna/Graz: Droschl, 1991), pp. 9-21 (p. 18).

³ Paul Jandl, 'Mythen. Schmutz. Existentialismus. Film: Zu Elfriede Jelinek's "Die Ausgesperrten"', in *Landnahme*, January 1989, 17-30 (p. 20).

Family and Fascism

Jelinek's portrayal of post-war Austrian fascism reveals the family to be at the centre of continuing Nazi values, as fascist violence is internalised, transferring authoritarian aggression from the public sphere into the privacy of the family home. The emphasis placed on the role of the family in *Die Ausgesperrten* has frequently been linked by critics (see Janz pp. 42-4, Ratzinger pp. 12-20) to Wilhelm Reich's theories, Jelinek's novel being considered to present "in hohem Maße eine Inszenierung der Theoreme des frühen Wilhelm Reich".⁴ In his work Reich analyses the importance of the authoritarian family in the construction and continuation of fascist ideology, viewing the patriarchal family as "eine Struktur- und Ideologiefabrik"⁵ for the fascist state. Reich's theory offers a sociological interpretation of Freud's familial studies (Oedipus-complex, mother fixation etc.), viewing these not as the cause of sexual repression in childhood but rather as its result and stressing the importance of this socially inflicted sexual repression for the existence of fascism.⁶ In this context the parallels between Reich's theory and the familial relations of the Witkowskis become apparent, as this patriarchal family provides an illustration of the "autoritären Miniaturstaat"⁷ depicted by Reich as the breeding ground for fascism.

The Witkowskis, in particular the father Otto, can be viewed as the personification of Reich's theories,⁸ demonstrating the effects of patriarchal authority and enforced sexual repression on the individual family members and ultimately their role within society. Otto, a former SS officer whose wartime activities left him with only one leg "im Krieg war er mehr als heute, nämlich unversehrt, ein Zweibeiniger und bei der SS" (p. 15), provides a stereotypical image of the petty bourgeois who supported the rise of fascism and enabled the rise to power of the Nazis. Fulfilling Reich's representation of the petty bourgeois who "ernährt sich schlecht und ungenügend, aber [...] legt großen Wert auf »anständige Kleidung«",⁹ Otto constantly attempts to rise above the squalor in which he now lives through a recreation of his former social status as SS officer and "Frauenheld", according absurd importance to his appearance, evidently a substitute for his former status: "der Vater wie immer aus dem Schachterl – er kauft sich jede Woche eine neue Krawatte, und die Hemden sind

⁴ Marlies Janz, 'Mythendestruktion und »Wissen«', *Text und Kritik*, 117 (1993), 38-50 (p. 43).

⁵ Wilhelm Reich, *Massenpsychologie des Faschismus* (Cologne: Kiepenhauer und Witsch, 2003), p. 49.

⁶ Reich, p. 50.

⁷ Reich, p. 49.

⁸ Janz, p. 43.

⁹ Reich, p. 63.

messerscharf gebügelte Mordwerkzeuge” (p. 204). This obsession with appearance is, however, the most harmless of his traits, as his illustration of Reich’s theory continues in the physical and mental abuse of his wife Gretl and their two children, Anna and Rainer, where his imposition of patriarchal authority sustains fascist ideology within the family, simultaneously transferring certain fascist traits onto the next generation,¹⁰ thus also fulfilling the Mitscherlichs’ theory that failure to work through the Nazi past condemned German and Austrian society to repeat their fascist behaviour.

Thus Otto’s sexual relationship with Gretl represents a direct conversion of Nazi war crimes into a private form of fascism, as “die Prügelei begann angeblich auf den Tag genau, als der Weltkrieg verloren war, denn vorher prügelte der Vater fremde Menschen in wechselnder Gestalt und Form” (p. 32). Otto’s fascist violence can be seen in the various instances of unmotivated physical abuse such as the attempted rape of Gretl “worauf er plötzlich Lust hat” (p. 102). This action is portrayed as displaying “Entschlußfreudigkeit”, a characteristic not only with personal connotations for Otto, who associates this quality with SS officers, but which further complies with the much propagated “Führerprinzip” of the Third Reich, which accorded ultimate authority to Hitler, as “der Staat als besondere Ordnungsreihe [...] ist nur ein Organ des Führers der Bewegung”.¹¹ His attempted sexual abuse of Gretl thus repeats the notion of sexual abuse as substitute for military violence whilst ironically highlighting Otto’s impotence in post-war Austria, where his authority is by no means unchallenged. Otto’s violence towards his wife finds its main expression, however, in his post-war “hobby”, the production of pornographic photos, depicting Gretl in various demeaning poses all of which involve the subjugation of the female subject.¹² Through these photographs Otto re-enacts his former war-time glory, viewing his “künstlerische Fotografie” as a means of continuing the fascist cause: “Die kleinlichen Grenzen, die Deutschland heute gesetzt sind, überschreitet Rainers Vater jeden Tag aufs neue, wenn er künstlerisch fotografiert” (p. 15). Each episode depicting these photo sessions is intertwined with descriptions of Otto’s violent war-crimes (pp. 16-17, 98-99), with his own admission that this pornography is a poor substitute for the perverse pleasure he gained from the atrocities: “Wer einmal ein Leichenberge aus nackten Personen, auch Frauen, besichtigte, den reizt die heimische Hausfrau nur noch wenig” (p. 102).

¹⁰ See Reich, p. 67: “die autoritäre Stellung des Vaters gibt seine politische Rolle wieder und enthüllt die Beziehung der Familie zum autoritären Staat”.

¹¹ Karl Schmitt, *Über die drei Arten des rechtswissenschaftlichen Denkens* (Hamburg: Hanseatischer Verlag, 1934), p. 66.

¹² Gretl is required, amongst others, to play the role of battered housewife and raped housemaid.

This inter-dependency of genocide and sexual pleasure represents a hyperbolic translation of Reich's claim that fascism provided an alternative to sexual gratification in the form of sadism as "Ersatzbefreidigung",¹³ demonstrating the private consequences when the opportunity to exercise this sadism in the public sphere is removed. Over and above the obvious link between weapon, phallus and camera, the connection between military and sexual sadism is further mediated through Otto's language. In describing the female genitalia, Otto frequently employs the vulgar term "Fut", a derivation of "Futteral" (English: sheath), rendering evident the substitutional role of sex for war and exposing the photographs as "violent postscripts to his fascist war crimes".¹⁴

A constant element in Otto's relationship with Gretl is his attempt to repress her femininity and in particular her female sexuality, leading Sylvia Schmidt-Burgard to view the body as "the locus of aggression fuelled by repression".¹⁵ This oppression takes place in his photography where Gretl is forced to half-conceal her genitals (p. 98) and in Otto's violent reaction to her (albeit pitiful) attempts to look attractive, since "diese Dinge sind für den Vati da und sonst für keinen" (p. 36). This denial of the female difference is further transferred onto the next generation in Anna, who is forbidden "bei Todesstrafe [...], blutige Watteteile oder Binden für die breite Öffentlichkeit sichtbar herumliegen zu lassen" (p. 206). These attempts to deny the female sexuality, which have partial success in the case of Anna, whose eating disorder "extends her father's prohibition to all other bodily marks of femininity",¹⁶ illustrate Reich's theory that an almost asexual female being is necessary for the perpetuation of patriarchal structures, since "die Frau als Sexualwesen [...] würde den Zusammenbruch der gesamten autoritären Ideologie bedeuten".¹⁷ Otto's oppression of the female within the family, coupled with the acquiescence of Anna and Gretl, thus aids a perpetuation of private fascism, whose influence ultimately spreads into the public sphere through the violence of Anna and Rainer.

Through Rainer and his relationship to his father, Jelinek demonstrates the transference of fascist beliefs onto the next generation, as Rainer unwillingly assumes many of his father's characteristics, manifest in the many parallels in attitudes and

¹³ Reich, p. 50

¹⁴ Sylvia Schmitz-Burgard, 'Body Language as Expression of Repression: Lethal Reverberations of Fascism in "Die Ausgesperren"', in *Elfriede Jelinek: Framed by Language*, ed. by Katherine Arens and Jorun B. Johns (USA: Ariadne Press, 1994), pp. 194-228 (p. 203).

¹⁵ Schmitz-Burgard, p. 194.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

¹⁷ Reich, p. 109.

language. Considering once again the pornographic photographs taken by the father, we can determine several behavioural similarities, as Otto's superficial mutilation of Gretl's body by painting on wounds with watercolour (p. 37) is mirrored in Rainer's mutilation of female pin-up posters, where the body is cut off leaving only the face to take "Ehrenplatz" on his door (p. 156). This clear repetition of the desire firstly to mutilate the female body and secondly to deny the female sexuality through the removal or disguising of all sexual organs, renders manifest the continuation of patriarchal-authoritarian tendencies within the family. These are further highlighted in Rainer's sexual fantasies with Sophie, where sexual pleasure is not gained through the sexual act itself but rather through the process of humiliation and domination: "Soll man sie [Sophie] oben in den Mund pudern und ihr die Zunge zur Brei stoßen, damit sie keine achtlosen verletzenden Dinge mehr von sich geben kann" (p. 45).

Chronological parallels within the novel equally draw attention to the influence of familial violence not only on Rainer but also on Anna, as the descriptions of each robbery they commit precede an episode of violence between Otto and Gretl, exposing the reality that "they merely re-invent within the public sphere the violent events of their homelife"¹⁸ and thus rendering these acts of violence worthless as an act of rebellion. The ultimate parallel between the father's violence is evidently to be found in the murder of the family with which Jelinek concludes the novel. Whilst this can be viewed as an attempt by Rainer to rebel against his father and his father's violence, it is evident that this brutal act merely constitutes a continuation of his father's fascist crimes, as Rainer not only abuses his mother and sister in the same manner as Otto, but does so with his weapon, ultimately completing the threats frequently made by his father (pp. 143, 184). Thus Anna and Rainer appear to be condemned to "perpetually re-enact the traumas from which they hope to escape",¹⁹ rendering impossible a break from the fascist tradition of the Austrian petty bourgeois. This blurring of victim and perpetrator also corresponds with Jelinek's portrayal of post-war Austria as a whole where the boundaries between these two roles have been completely blurred. Jelinek ironises Austria's victim theory from the outset, highlighting Austria's failed denazification: "Das Opfer ist immer besser, weil es unschuldig ist. Zu dieser Zeit gibt es allerdings zahlreiche unschuldige Täter" (p. 7). The juxtaposition of this criticism of Austrian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* with the

¹⁸ Elizabeth Snyder Hook, *Family Secrets and the Contemporary German Novel* (Rochester: Camden House, 2001), p. 115.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

violence of the youths and the claim that “Anna ist eine Täterin” (p. 7) renders clear the connection between Austria’s falsified view of its past and the continuation of fascism into the second generation.

In some respects it could thus be claimed that Jelinek sets in fiction Reich’s theories of the role of the petty bourgeois family in perpetuating fascism. However, it is evident that Jelinek does not agree wholly with Reich’s portrayal of the social roots of fascism, as her depiction of the working class, in Reich’s view always the opponents of fascism, provides no positive alternative to the petty bourgeois family. Whilst Reich’s theory contrasts the “internationales Facharbeiterbewußtsein” of the working class with the “Mystik und Nationalismus”²⁰ of the petty bourgeois, claiming that the working class man identifies himself with his work rather than with the state, Jelinek’s depiction of the working class Hans Sepp portrays quite the opposite. Although Hans’s parents have dedicated themselves to the socialist cause, their son can in no way be seen to provide a contrast to the Witkowskis,²¹ as he rejects his mother’s socialist views in favour of the form of individualism promoted by Rainer:

Hans sagt, der Rainer sagt, es graust einem bei der Vorstellung, ein Teil von einem Ganzen zu sein. Weil man immer ein einzelner und vollständig allein, dabei aber unverwechselbar ist, was stärkt. (p. 229).

In *Die Ausgesperrten* the working class family is thus exposed to be the breeding ground for the most brutal manifestation of capitalism, a new form of fascism, which Hans views as a means of escaping his social class, as “der Mythos der »Einzelpersönlichkeit« dient hier zur Absegnung des faschistischen Massenmords”²² whereby Hans views his father’s death as the result of an exaggerated sense of social solidarity. That Hans’s “individualism” necessitates the rejection and ridicule of his father, an active opponent of fascism who died in Mauthausen, renders this decision all the more poignant, as Hans consciously sides with fascism, proudly declaring to his mother that Rainer, his new friend, is the son of an SS officer (p. 174). The brutal rejection of his father is further highlighted in the ironic narratorial comment that “[n]achdem der Vater von Hans durch die Arbeit frei gemacht worden war, starb er sehr schnell”, exposing the fascist origins of Hans’s new ideology, which require him to denounce his father and refuse to acknowledge his sacrifice. This grotesque parody of the Oedipus complex and its aftermath provides further evidence of Jelinek’s

²⁰ Reich, p. 76.

²¹ Janz, p. 41.

²² Janz, p. 41.

critical stance towards the theories of both Reich and Freud. Janz further perceives an act of fascist individualism in Hans's burning of the letters his mother writes to earn money, which Janz compares to "ein Krematorium in Miniatur",²³ exposing the underlying fascist motives in his rebellion against his mother and reversing the parent/child violence of the Witkowskis. Thus, in contrast to Reich, Jelinek provides no positive familial alternative to the continuing fascism of the petty bourgeois, suggesting instead that the working class family can equally provide a breeding ground for this new form of fascism.

Class Hierarchy

Social status and class hierarchy are central to the perpetuation of fascism in *Die Ausgesperrten*, as the four youths act as representatives of their own social milieu, illustrating the various mutations of fascism present within the different classes, with "the political reflections of the group members represent[ing] on a small scale the class struggle which exists [...] in society at large".²⁴ Rudolf Burger describes Jelinek's use of class-specific prototypes in biological terms, as characters only exist in "molekular" (the character is determined by its relationship to others) or "subatomar" (specific character traits provide motivation for the narrative, not characters as complete individuals) arrangements.²⁵ The result of this de-individualisation of the characters is that "die Menschen der Handlung sind im buchstäblichen Sinn dehumanisiert".²⁶ Jelinek's dehumanisation of her characters facilitates a sharper social criticism within the novel, as emphasis is deflected from the fate of the individual onto the social patterns and attitudes which (s)he represents.

Thus Sophie Pachofen functions as a demonstration of the continuing position of power occupied by those who collaborated financially with the National Socialist regime, as the Pachofens' high social standing is supported by their significant financial gains during the Third Reich. That these profits were achieved through the exploitation of *Fremdarbeiter* does nothing to detract from the family's social position in a society where appearance is everything:

²³ Janz, p. 41.

²⁴ Allyson Fiddler, *Rewriting Reality: An Introduction to Elfriede Jelinek* (Oxford, Providence: Berg, 1994), p. 95.

²⁵ Rudolf Burger, 'Der böse Blick der Elfriede Jelinek', in *Gegen den schönen Schein*, ed. by Christa Gürtler (Frankfurt: Neue Kritik, 1990), pp. 17-29 (pp. 21-2).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 22

Ihre [Sophie's mother's] hellblaue Silhouette ist keineswegs als Mahnmal gedacht für alle jene, die in der Nazizeit für ihre persönlichen Stahlwerke krepirt sind, sondern sie ist als schöner Anblick für den unvoreingenommenen Betrachter gedacht; auch wenn man Vorbehalte hat, muß man die Schönheit doch anerkennen (p. 124).

Here Jelinek renders evident the highly superficial foundation of post-war society, which “[lebt] seit ’45 nur mehr für den Schein und durch den Schein”²⁷ and where beauty and cleanliness have become status symbols and a substitute for moral hygiene.²⁸ The perversion of this connection between morality and cleanliness is rendered unequivocal by Jelinek’s description of Sophie for whom “Beschmutzung ist [...] vollständig wesensfremd, genau wie vor etlichen Jahren den Deutschen noch alles Undeutsche artfremd gewesen ist” (p. 44).

The success of the Pachofens in the post-war period stands in clear contrast to the fate of Frau Sepp, whose antifascist fight for justice has led only to social exclusion: “Es gibt aber immer noch Leute, bei denen gar nichts Einzug hält und schon gar nicht ein [Wirtschafts]Wunder [...] Zu diesen benachteiligten Menschen gehört Frau Sepp” (p. 28). Representative of Austrian antifascists both Frau and Herr Sepp have been abandoned by the Socialist cause: “seine [Hans’] Eltern waren bewußte Arbeiter, was ihnen nichts genützt hat, ist doch der eine tot und die andere auch schon fast” (p. 220). Within the group this inequality through differing social classes finds its expression in the sexual relationships between the youths, as Sophie, “das passive Zentrum der sehr aktiven Wünsche und Aggressionen ihrer ehrgeizigen Freunde”,²⁹ exerts her social power over Rainer and Hans, subjecting the latter to several acts of humiliation (pp. 66, 221-3), and further provides motivation for their perpetuation of violence through the robberies, as social rivalry between Hans and Rainer is coupled with the desire to better their financial situation. This fixation with material gain and the violent methods through which this should be achieved reveal the new form of fascism in the post-war period, which finds its roots in capitalism. Elizabeth Snyder-Hook views this “bourgeois capitalism” in *Die Ausgesperrten* as being “one step removed from the rigid monopolies of a dictatorship”,³⁰ as society’s

²⁷ Rudolf Burger, ‘Geist, Zeitgeist, Spiritus Austriae’, in *Neue Bärter für die Dichter? Studien zur österreichischen Gegenwartsliteratur*, ed. by Friedbert Aspetsberger (Vienna: Österreichischer Bundesverlag, 1993), pp. 26-37 (p. 34).

²⁸ Maria E. Brunner, *Die Mythenzertrümmerung der Elfriede Jelinek* (Neuried: ars una, 1997), p. 134.

²⁹ Hiltrud Gnug, ‘Zum Schaden den Spott’, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 21 August 1980.

³⁰ Snyder-Hook, p. 103.

consumerism excludes and condemns those who do not conform to the new *Wirtschaftswunder*-period.

“Jelinek’s writing leaves precious little space for positive alternatives, utopian moments or hopes”³¹

Whilst *Die Ausgesperrten* provides a clear criticism of post-war Austrian politics, economics and social structures, Jelinek offers no positive alternative to this oppressive social climate, as the novel systematically destroys the myths of capitalism, socialism and existentialism, exposing their superficiality and impotence in the face of everyday fascism. As previously demonstrated, capitalism, and in particular the great *Wirtschaftswunder*-myth, is not only exposed through the example of Frau Sepp as socially unjust and exclusive but is furthermore portrayed as a mutation of fascism, which merely serves to legitimise social violence under the ruling regime.³²

Despite this apparently Marxist criticism of society, an outlook which would conform to Jelinek’s political beliefs at this time,³³ it could in no way be claimed that *Die Ausgesperrten* conveys a positive socialist message, where a self-conscious working class can provide an alternative to petty bourgeois fascism. As demonstrated, the new generation of worker, embodied in the figure of Hans Sepp, no longer views his future in a collective struggle against fascistic capitalism, but rather seeks to collaborate with the ruling middle classes in order to escape from his class: “dieser Arbeiter ist schon keiner mehr [...] Er wird sich mehr dem wirtschaftlichen [...] Aufstieg zuwenden, die Wirtschaft liegt ihm mehr” (p. 224). Frau Sepp has gained nothing from her socialist struggle for social justice, as her extreme form of collective thinking can be seen to destroy her as an individual (she does not even appear to possess a first name) and her socialist beliefs are exposed as anachronistic and irrelevant in the post-war capitalist society. Juxtaposed with the attractive images propagated by the film industry (pp. 131-37), it is evident that Frau Sepp’s “Geschichtslektion” (pp. 137-8) is less than unappealing to youths, whose individualist outlook has no understanding for the altruistic sacrifices of the previous generation: “Er [Hans’ father] hat sich nicht geopfert, man hat ihn umgebracht. Sonst

³¹ Allyson Fiddler, ‘Reading Elfriede Jelinek’, in *Post-war Women’s Writing in German*, ed. by Chris Weedon (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1997), pp. 291-304 (p. 295).

³² Johann Stangel, *Das annullierte Individuum* (Frankfurt: P. Lang, 1988), p. 138.

³³ Jelinek was a member of the KPÖ from 1974 until 1991.

würde er noch leben. Was hat er also davon?" (p. 175). Indeed, even Frau Sepp's generation of socialists appear to have renounced their beliefs, as former "comrades" are exposed as collaborators of the capitalist regime, abandoning Marxist ideals and working class solidarity in favour of economic pragmatism:

Vor gar nicht so langer Zeit hat ein Grazer SP-Blatt zur Liquidierung von Streikführern aufgerufen und damit einen Wandel abgewürgt, jetzt rührt sich bald nur noch die Werbung, durch sie wandelt sich wenigstens das Straßenbild zu fröhlicher Buntheit (p. 133).³⁴

Thus socialism is excluded on several grounds as a possible alternative to fascism.

The failure of oppositional ideologies in the struggle against fascism finds its thematic continuation in Jelinek's treatment of existentialism. Once the ideology embraced by the French Résistance and anti-fascist philosophers such as Sartre and Camus, this ideology is revealed not only to be inadequate as a form of anti-fascism but is furthermore exposed in a manipulated form as a justification for fascistic violence. Through a complex form of "verdoppelte Intertextualität"³⁵ Jelinek destroys the myth of existentialism as an alternative to fascism, simultaneously revealing the possibility of manipulation and distortion of ideology for dubious means.

Intertextuality, an integral element of Jelinek's work, can be seen in *Die Ausgesperrten* to function on two different levels. Firstly and most conventionally, Jelinek integrates elements of existentialist theory and quotes from the works of Sartre and Camus into the text in order to expose the irrelevance of this philosophy in post-war Austria, for instance in Anna's claim that "[w]ir sind zur Freiheit verurteilt. Wenn ich dich anschau, Mama, so stimmt das. In der Freiheit verlassen, was auf dich zutrifft" (p. 41), where the notion that this philosophy is applicable to the average petty bourgeois woman is rendered absurd by her evident lack of freedom in her oppressive marriage. *Die Ausgesperrten* as a whole can be viewed as an inversion of existentialist principles, beginning with the title, which inverts the German title of Sartre's play *Die Eingesperrten* (in French *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*).³⁶ Marlies Janz views this reference to Sartre's work as a clear indication of Jelinek's stance towards existentialism and its attempts to deal with fascism, pointing to the parallels between the two works, as both deal with the effect of National Socialism on two generations,

³⁴ Here the use of "Liquidierung" renders evident the connection between new socialist attitudes and fascism.

³⁵ Janz, p. 38.

³⁶ Jean Paul Sartre, *Les Séquestrés d'Altona*, (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1960).

placing emphasis on familial relations. Unlike Sartre's work, however, Jelinek presents a far more pessimistic view, reversing the plot and structure of *Les Séquestrés d'Altona* in order to expose the false ideals of existentialism. Whereas the father and son figures in Sartre's work drive off a bridge in an act of joint suicide, suggesting atonement for the father's fascist collaboration, the parallel scene in *Die Ausgesperrten*, in which Rainer attempts to drive into a lake with his father as passenger, falters through Rainer's cowardice as he brakes at the last minute and is thus subjected to further violence and humiliation by Otto. As Janz also points out, the transposing of this scene from the end of Sartre's play to the middle of Jelinek's novel suggests that "anders als bei Sartre also wird bei Jelinek die Verstrickung in den Faschismus nicht »gesühnt«, sondern sie setzt sich fort".³⁷ Through the reversal of these parallels Jelinek exposes existentialism as an all-too-idealistic philosophy and thus an inadequate alternative to fascism. The irrelevance of existentialism in post-war capitalism is equally exposed through the clear class divides which remain rigid throughout *Die Ausgesperrten*, as society determines the fates of the characters,³⁸ rendering once again absurd the notion of individual freedom.

In addition to this basic level of intertextuality, Jelinek also employs intertextual references as motivational forces within the novel's plot, shaping the lives of the characters, in particular those of the Witkowski twins. Thus existentialist texts provide a legitimisation for the group's acts of violence (pp. 54, 196) and ultimately appear to be the motivation for Rainer's brutal deed at the end of the novel: "durch das Begehen des Sinnlosen will Rainer seine narzistische Position retten, etwas Außergewöhnliches begangen zu haben" (p. 263). The twins' inability to distinguish between fiction and reality is taken to absurd levels in Rainer's demand that Sophie drown a cat since "[i]n der Zeit der Reife von Jean-Paul Sartre will einer seine Katze ersäufen, und deshalb will man heute diese Katze ebenfalls ersäufen" (p. 92), where the lack of inverted commas to denote the novel's title implies the complete internalisation of this philosophical fiction into Rainer's reality.³⁹ This manipulation of existentialist philosophy in order to legitimise acts of violence demonstrates "die Gefahr individueller Trivialmythenbildung [und] die Verdrehbarkeit von

³⁷ Janz, p. 44.

³⁸ This is particularly manifest in the case of Anna who, despite evident academic talent, is denied a travel grant to America on the grounds that "man [muß] sich im Ausland ganz besonders zu benehmen wissen" (p.235). That this awareness of how to conduct oneself is automatically and yet unjustly associated with social class is made evident as Sophie's revelation that she was offered (and rejected) the grant is embedded in descriptions of her plans to bomb the school.

³⁹ Janz, p. 44.

philosophischer Analyse zu dogmatischem Herrschaftsanspruch".⁴⁰ Jelinek thus exposes existentialism not only to be an insufficient myth incapable of providing solution to fascism but also as an ideology as susceptible to manipulation as any other.

In light of these arguments it would indeed appear that "«Die Ausgesperrten» destruieren den existentialistischen Mythos vom freien »Selbstentwurf« des Einzelnen, [und] den marxistischen Mythos von der Arbeiterschaft als revolutionärem Subjekt",⁴¹ offering no positive alternative to the everyday fascism of post-war Austrian society.

Press Reception

At the time of publishing *Die Ausgesperrten* Elfriede Jelinek was not an unknown name in the Austrian literary community or wider Austrian society. Her film *Die Ramsau am Dachstein*, transmitted in 1976 in ORF, projected Jelinek into public renown, as its highly critical look at the exploitation of locals by the tourist industry earned Jelinek the much repeated title of "Nestbeschmutzerin".⁴² Jelinek also aroused a great deal of (negative) public interest through the scandals surrounding her two plays performed at the "steirischer Herbst": *Was geschah nachdem Nora ihren Mann verlassen hat* (first performed in 1979) and *Clara S.* (first performed in 1981), both of which were prominent events in the media, finding interest over a broad spectrum from the *Neue Kronen Zeitung* to *Die Presse*.⁴³ In comparison with the attention accorded to these plays, it could be said the *Die Ausgesperrten*, Jelinek's third published novel, was met with resounding silence in the Austrian media as a whole. Whilst it comes as no surprise that the novel received no reviews from the tabloid press, its absence in the literary columns of Austria's major broadsheets is astonishing, as even the self-styled "intellectual" newspaper, *Salzburger Nachrichten*, ignored the novel's publication. The main body of the novel's reception is to be found in Austria's left-wing press, for whom Jelinek was a well-known figure and frequent participant in the *Volksstimme*-Feste, book readings and cultural events organised by Austria's Communist Party. My analysis of the press reception of *Die Ausgesperrten* will limit itself to the reviews published 1979-1980 which deal with the novel only, an in-depth study of the film and its reception falling outside the scope of my thesis.

⁴⁰ Stangel, p. 136.

⁴¹ Janz, p. 48.

⁴² For more information of the reception of this film see Pia Janke, *Die Nestbeschmutzerin: Jelinek und Österreich* (Salzburg/Vienna: Jung und Jung, 2002), pp. 160-3.

⁴³ Information on the media reception of these plays can be found in Janke, pp. 168-70.

Excessive Brevity

In addition to the widespread absence of reviews the press reception of *Die Ausgesperrten* is equally characterised by an exceptional brevity within the few articles available. From these “reviews” it is extremely difficult to come to any great conclusion about the nature of this press reception, as the reviews themselves offer very little in the way of content and analysis of the novel, their significance for this study lying rather in their insignificance. This is most evidently to be seen in *Volkswille*, where Jelinek’s novel is barely mentioned. Although warned from the outset that “[u]nserer Zeitung fehlt [...] die personelle und raummäßige Kapazität, um dieser Bücherschwemme einer allseitigen Analyse und Kritik zu unterziehen”,⁴⁴ a state blamed on the mass production of novels in the publishing industry, the article which follows is nevertheless astonishing in its brevity, unwittingly mirroring the publishing industry’s tendency to favour quantity over quality. Whilst the remaining seven books “reviewed” in this article are at least briefly outlined and set in context (each novel is dedicated between fourteen and twenty-four lines), Jelinek’s novel is lumped together with Marie Thérèse Kerschbaumer’s *Der weibliche Namen des Widerstands*, the only connection between the two works being their Austrian origin. Even in this short paragraph it is evident that *Die Ausgesperrten* is marginalised, as Kerschbaumer’s novel is at least accorded a brief description as “sieben Porträts”, with the title of her work rendering further comment on its theme superfluous. The opaque title of *Die Ausgesperrten* on the other hand would render necessary a brief summary of the novel’s plot or themes, neither of which are mentioned, as the sole comment applied to Jelinek’s novel is that it is a “grandiose[r] Roman”. The impact of this praise is entirely negated by the lack of further description, as the reader has no means by which to judge the book. In this respect, the significance of this review lies not in its presentation of the novel but rather in its dismissal of Jelinek’s work.

Whilst the review in the *Wiener Zeitung* also follows this form of multiple reviews, it is evident from the text-space awarded to the novel’s description and its positioning at the beginning of the article that this review takes *Die Ausgesperrten* more seriously.⁴⁵ Although obviously not considered to merit a comprehensive analysis, such as those texts reviewed above the “Bunte Auswahl”,⁴⁶ Jelinek’s novel is nevertheless subjected to a brief analysis. Considering the spatial confines of such

⁴⁴ Lutz Holzinger, ‘Fortschrittliches auf dem Buchmarkt’, *Volkswille*, 4 June 1980, section *Kultur*, p. 3.

⁴⁵ Alfred Warnes, ‘Bunte Auswahl’, *Wiener Zeitung*, 27 June 1980, p. 11.

⁴⁶ Note the trivialising effect of this title.

multiple reviews, it is obvious that the novel's plot should take priority over themes and style, as such articles serve to provide the reader with a quick overview of the books on offer, some of which are more reliant on plot (e.g. Jeffrey Archer's *Attentat*, which follows *Die Ausgesperrten* in this review). Here, the plot is reduced to a description of the crimes of the four youths, with reference being made to the real-life "Kriminalfall" on which "der Zentralfigur [...] nachgebildet wurde", thus placing emphasis on the more sensationalist aspects of the novel. This attempt at a quick definition of the novel is equally to be found in the closing words of the review: "Leser, die aus einer Lektüre ein Stück Hoffnung oder den Anhauch von zwischenmenschlicher Wärme mitnehmen wollen, gehen leer aus",⁴⁷ where the reviewer ironically appears to address the kind of middle-class readership often attacked by Jelinek. Theme and style are dealt with in two brief comments, with the novel being viewed as an "Attacke gegen eine egozentristisch-sadistische Väterwelt",⁴⁸ despite there being no mention of the character of Otto Witkowski. Jelinek's style is equally dismissed in a sarcastic comment on her "attempt" to create "Wiener Lokalkolorit durch Namen von Straßen, Ausflugszielen und Schneiderfirmen und durch einzelne »facts« auch eine Zeitstimmigkeit [...] entstehen zu lassen",⁴⁹ implying not only that this attempt has failed but furthermore suggesting that this addition of "facts" is contrived and arbitrary. Not only is this criticism extremely condescending, it is furthermore inaccurate, as *Die Ausgesperrten* contains very few references to specific areas of Vienna, favouring instead general descriptions such as "der Wienerwald gliedert sich bekanntlich [...] in zahllose Hügel" (p. 93), whose vague nature can in no way be interpreted as an attempt to create "Lokalkolorität". Through these two articles it is possible to demonstrate how the key points of a work of literature can be lost in the press, as such fleeting reviews seek only to pigeon-hole novels and thus provide an over-simplified interpretation.

Sidelining

Amongst the more in-depth reviews of *Die Ausgesperrten* it is possible to identify several methods of avoidance employed by the newspapers in order to defuse the aspects of social and political criticism in Jelinek's novel, which each article circumvents in a variety of ways, focussing on a particular aspect of the text or its

⁴⁷ *Wiener Zeitung*.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

author to the detriment of the novel's themes. Thus we can witness an exaggerated analysis of the universal relevance of Jelinek's description of adolescent problems, an over-emphasis of the real-life basis of the novel and a lengthy digression on Jelinek's personal circumstances. Through the disproportionate significance accorded to each of these issues, which clearly demonstrate personalising and sensationalising tendencies, it is possible for the reviewers to evade the central issues of *Die Ausgesperrten*, which may for various reasons be unfavourable for the particular newspaper and its readership.

For obvious reasons the thematics of adolescent conflict form a central part of the reception of *Die Ausgesperrten*, as even the more brief articles highlight the importance of the "Problem[e] Jugendlicher und Heranwachsender"⁵⁰ within the text. In several articles, however, there is a tendency to emphasise the role of adolescence in the novel's plot to the detriment of the social factors which determine the characters' actions. The *Oberösterreichische Nachrichten*, which identifies the thematics of adolescence as a key element not only of *Die Ausgesperrten* but also within Jelinek's previous novels, summarises the novel as "einen weiteren Beitrag zu Fragen um Jugendliche und ihren Werdegang".⁵¹ This definition of the novel as an account of teenage angst fulfils an eclipsing function, as the specific socio-political background to the novel is obscured, along with Jelinek's criticism of post-war Austrian society. The universalising aspect of this interpretation is rendered evident from the outset by the article's title "Das Thema paßt immer", which refers to the reviewer's view that "das sind nicht Probleme des Jahres 1950 allein, es sind genauso oder noch stärker auch jene des Jahres 1980".⁵² Whilst the internal conflict of adolescents is evidently not a problem specific to the 1950s, Jelinek's novel clearly points to specific social reasons for the aggression of her four characters, who are affected not only by the continuing fascism and failed denazification in post-war society but equally by the social injustice brought about by aggressive capitalism. This attempt to avoid an analysis of the specific problems of 1950s Austria is equally evident in the *Wochenpresse*, which places the emphasis on the "Innenleben der Jugendlichen"⁵³ and refers frequently to the age of the characters, who are in the

⁵⁰ Reinhold Tauber, 'Das Thema paßt immer', *Oberösterreichische Nachrichten*, 7 July 1980, p. 8.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ th, 'Viererbande', in *Wochenpresse*, 30 April 1980, p. 61.

process of “Menschenwerdung” or are “an der Schwelle zum Erwachsenwerden”.⁵⁴ Unlike the *Oberösterreichische Nachrichten*, this article does attempt to offer an explanation for the youths’ problems, describing their acts as a violent reaction to the “betriebsame Welt der Wichtiguer” and a society that is “so ganz und gar auf Verderbnis aus”.⁵⁵ These vague descriptions of the society against which the youths rebel, however, offer little insight into the oppressive social mechanisms of post-war Austrian society, making reference to neither the continuing influence of National Socialism, the brutality of capitalism nor the political violence described by Frau Sepp. Thus *Die Ausgesperrten* is denied all aspects of social criticism, becoming instead a (banal) description of generational conflict.

The only article successful in combining an analysis of the problems of the youths with a study of the socio-political situation of the 1950s is Lutz Holzinger’s review in *Volksstimme*, which offers a typically Communist interpretation of *Die Ausgesperrten*. On the one hand there is an evident emphasis placed on the “Lebensproblematik von Jugendlichen, die an der Schwelle zum Eintritt in eine Erwachsenenexistenz stehen”,⁵⁶ examining the “prinzipielle[s] Elend des pubertierenden Jugendlichen”⁵⁷ as a conflict between the personal search for individuality and the objectivising effect of society. Far from following the generalising comments of the previous two articles, however, Holzinger continues to situate these individual problems in the socio-economic context of 1950s Austria, concentrating on the “Phänomen, daß bei wachsendem materiellem Wohlstand in unserer Gesellschaft immer mehr Menschen kaputtgehen”⁵⁸ and looking critically at the “Wiederaufbau” of Austria, which resulted in an increased obsession with material possessions. In his evocation of the repercussions of this economic phenomenon Holzinger uses the individual characters as illustrations of his beliefs, providing not just a brief summary of their social class but instead considering in-depth their social background as explanation for their inner conflict. With respect to Anna and Rainer this centres on their home-life, characterised by “einer verdreckten, mit Gerümpel überhäuftten Altbauwohnung” and their violent father. It is important to note here that *Volksstimme*, in contrast to many other articles, highlights the Nazi past of the father

⁵⁴ *Wochenpresse*.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Lutz Holzinger, ‘Elfriede’s scharfe Schnitte’, in *Volksstimme* 23 May 1980, p. 15. Note the parallels in terminology to the *Wochenpresse*

⁵⁷ *Volksstimme*.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

in juxtaposition with the familial violence, suggesting that continued fascism plays a pivotal role in the twins' problems. Sophie is equally subjected to a character analysis based on her social standing, as Holzinger claims that her wealth cannot present "eine echte Alternative", citing as proof her "Berührungängste und Waschwänge sowie die neurotische Charakter ihrer steinreichen Mutter".⁵⁹

Within this character analysis special emphasis is placed on the working class Hans; in the words of Holzinger "Elfriede Jelineks realistisches Herangehen an den Stoff dieses 'Pubertätsdramas' kommt [...] am stärksten in der Figur des Jungarbeiters Hans zum Ausdruck".⁶⁰ This claim introduces a highly interesting aspect of this review, namely its response to Jelinek's portrayal of failed Marxism. Hans's move from the Marxism of his parents to the individualism offered by Rainer is presented in a surprisingly uncritical light, considering that the *Volksstimme* is the official publication of the Austrian Communist Party. His lack of "proletkulturistischen Illusionen" and identification with his proletarian origins is viewed not as proof of Jelinek's pessimism or cynicism but rather as her ability to describe "wie es wirklich ist".⁶¹ That Jelinek's criticism is not accompanied by positive alternatives is equally spared from criticism, as "die Sache der Autorin ist es nicht, positive Utopien auszumalen".⁶² This absence of criticism can be largely explained by Holzinger's rather idealistic reading of *Die Ausgesperrten*, according to which Jelinek is appealing to "jeder Leser, der noch ein Herz hat, zu fühlen, und einen Kopf, zu denken" and is calling for a change in world order, in which "Wärme und Geborgenheit" replace "der Totalbankrott dieses Zusammenlebens im Kapitalismus".⁶³ This undeniably idealistic reading of the text exposes Holzinger's endeavours to reconcile Jelinek's thoroughly pessimistic novel with Marxist literary theory, which views literature as "incompatible with pessimism, with scepticism, and with all the other forms of spiritual collapse. It is realistic, active, vitally collectivist, and filled with a limitless creative faith in the Future".⁶⁴ Unlike previous chapters, however, where this Communist outlook represents an excessively contrived manipulation of the text for political ends, Holzinger's interpretation of Jelinek's work is, although over-idealised, of much greater relevance, reflecting to a certain extent the Marxist influence in Jelinek's life

⁵⁹ *Volksstimme*.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Leon Trotsky, *Literature and Revolution*, mark up by David Walters
<<http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky.htm>> [accessed 16 February 2006].

and work. Indeed its politicising of the text demonstrates an adequate understanding of *Die Ausgesperrten*, whose social and political criticism, especially with regard to continuing fascism, is foregrounded in the review

Real-life Crime

As intimated in the introduction to this chapter, Jelinek based *Die Ausgesperrten* on a real-life criminal case from the 1960s, where a seventeen year old boy brutally murdered his family. The realistic foundation for the text is mentioned, as would be expected, in every review of the novel, providing vital background information to Jelinek's work, which it has been claimed was "um die Tat [...] geschrieben".⁶⁵ In the case of the *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, however, this real-life parallel becomes the focus of the article, at times taking precedence over the novel itself, as all aspects of the novel are viewed in connection with the real-life events.⁶⁶ This foregrounding of the real-life crime corresponds to the sensationalising tendencies of the press, contributing additionally to a depoliticisation of the text.

The importance of the 1960s crime for this review is evident at first glance, as the title page consists of a newspaper clipping from 1965, under which the subtitle reads "Elfriede Jelinek schrieb einen Roman über einen berühmten Kriminalfall der sechziger Jahre".⁶⁷ Indeed the entire article is accompanied by newspaper excerpts concerning the "real" crime, where the textual body of the review is visually constructed around the cuttings. These clippings serve to highlight the parallels between the case and Jelinek's novel, as passages are carefully selected from the novel to correspond with the real-life "facts". For instance the excerpt from *Die Ausgesperrten*, describing the pitiful state of the Witkowskis' flat is teamed with the description of the flat of the "real" murderer which was "ärmlich und ungepflegt", and mention is made of both fathers' pornographic photos of the mother. Whilst the parallels between the real-life case and Jelinek's novel are undisputed and well-documented in secondary literature, the disproportionate emphasis placed on this aspect of the novel succeeds in relegating the literary work itself to a position of secondary importance. As such every element of the novel is mentioned only in

⁶⁵ Sigrid Löffler, 'Weltdame, schön böse', *profil*, 27 May 1980, pp. 62-3 (p. 62).

⁶⁶ It is, however, interesting to note that this article has changed Wachowsky's name to Wunderer, without providing any explanation for this alteration.

⁶⁷ Heinz Sichrovsky, 'Die Ausgesperrten', *A-Z Journal*, 17 November 1979, pp. 7-10 (p. 7).

connection with its real-life parallel, denying the novel any significance in its own right.

This parallelising tendency is particularly manifest in Sichrovsky's description of Jelinek's characters, all of whom are connected in some way (however tenuous) to the real-life case. In the case of Rainer these parallels are self-evident, as behavioural similarities are highlighted "Rainer [...] schreibt wie sein lebendes Vorbild, Gedichte"⁶⁸ as well as analogous psychological traits "er reagiert ähnlich seinem lebenden Vorbild: durch immer grotesker übersteigerte "Phantasielügen".⁶⁹ These parallels take on an aspect of contrivance in relation to the other characters, as the brevity of the description of Hans, mentioning only the intertextuality of his name and his father's fate in Mauthausen, is qualified by the assertion that "Hans Sepp ist als einziger der vier Hauptpersonen völlig frei erfunden: Im Kreis der Familie Wunderer hätte ein Arbeiter nichts zu suchen gehabt",⁷⁰ apparently disqualifying Hans from analysis due to his lack of "real" basis. Conversely the character of Sophie, originally a purely fictional character, invented by Jelinek "da sie völlig sicher war, im Leben des geltungsbedürftigen Udo Wunderer müsse ein solcher Typ eine Rolle gespielt haben",⁷¹ appears only to gain significance within this review as it is revealed that a similar "Blüte aus dem Hietzinger Villenviertel"⁷² had existed in Wunderer's life. This consistent attempt to justify the existence of characters within the novel through their "authenticity" constitutes a method of containing the relevance of the novel, presenting *Die Ausgesperrten* not as a socially critical novel containing radical criticism of Austrian society and politics but restricting it to the category of "real-life crime novel". This limiting of the social relevance of Jelinek's novel is visually maintained in the layout of the review, as the newspaper clippings literally fence in the comments on the novel.

A further disadvantage of this continual parallelising is the confusion which ensues, as fictional characters and events become almost undistinguishable from their real-life counterparts. Thus comments such as "[s]ein Bedürfnis, andere zu erklären, ist zwanghaft"⁷³ becomes unattributable to either Rainer or his real-life counterpart,

⁶⁸ *A-Z Journal*, p. 9.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 10. Note especially the repetition of "wie sein lebendes Vorbild", a phrase which actively connects the two characters, suggesting a causal link between the two, almost as if Rainer had modelled himself on Wachowsky.

⁷⁰ *A-Z Journal*, p. 8.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 9.

⁷² *Ibid*, p. 9.

⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 9.

blurring the boundaries between fiction and reality. This becomes particularly problematic in the final paragraph describing the novel's conclusion, which is "knapp und streng den Gerichtsprotokollen folgend",⁷⁴ in which the aforementioned court records are outlined. Here it is impossible to distinguish between the real court case and the arrest of the fictional Rainer, as both are interspersed to the point of amalgamation. It is thus evident that Sichrovsky's endeavours to deal simultaneously with both the novel and the "real" crime lead only to a failure on both counts.

The inadequacy of the review in *A-Z Journal* is further continued in its treatment of the social and political aspects of the novel, which are to a large extent ignored or misunderstood. A reluctance to deal with the novel's *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* theme or the view that such an analysis is unnecessary are evident from the outset, where the incomplete quotation introducing the review circumvents this theme, as the lengthy excerpt describing the brutality of the robbery breaks off one sentence before the narrator's comment on Austria's failed denazification.

Der Mensch soll von Anna in Ruhe gelassen werden, weil sein Charakter besser ist als ihrer. Weil er ein Opfer ist. Anna ist eine Täterin. Das Opfer ist immer besser, weil es unschuldig ist. Zu dieser Zeit gibt es allerdings noch zahlreiche unschuldige Täter [...] Alles sollte endlich vergeben und vergessen sein, damit man ganz neu anfangen kann (p. 7)

This sentence is evidently key to understanding the attack described in the preceding passage, as it clearly links the violence of the group to a failed *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in 1950s Austria. The omission of Jelinek's criticism of Austria's denazification clearly places the sensationalism of their crime above the social criticism in this passage, thus depoliticising the violence of the youths.

This edited interpretation of the novel is equally manifest in the brevity of the description of Hans and the absence of his mother in Sichrovsky's analysis. With this absence disappears also Jelinek's criticism of Socialism and in particular the SPÖ, portrayed by Frau Sepp as violent, anti-Marxist traitors, a view clearly undesirable in the official publication of the SPÖ. It is omissions such as this which not only render Sichrovsky's review of *Die Ausgesperrten* inadequate but which equally lend it an air of manipulation, as the reading of the novel is tailored to suit the opinions of the newspaper. Thus the predominantly Socialist readership of the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* is

⁷⁴ *A-Z Journal*, p. 10.

spared Jelinek's criticism of the role of the SPÖ in sustaining fascist structures in post-war Austria and is allowed to enjoy *Die Ausgesperrten* as a trivial real-life crime novel with no further social relevance.

Personalisation

Typical of the reception of Jelinek's work as a whole is the obsession with the personal life of the author, analysing to the nth degree her childhood, political beliefs and what is often regarded as her paradoxical passion for designer clothes. This personalisation of the debate surrounding her works is also apparent in Sigrid Löffler's review in *profil* of *Die Ausgesperrten*,⁷⁵ where personal details of the author's life make up almost 50% of the article. The title of the review "Weltdame, schön böse", in itself a disparaging and trivialising description, renders evident not only the personal focus of the article, but equally highlights the almost clichéd ambivalence between Jelinek's attractive outward appearance and the brutality of her work, an aspect underlined by the photograph accompanying the article whose subtitle reads "Mit Haß getränkt wie mit Kieselsäure".⁷⁶ The novel itself is described in terms of Jelinek's personal struggle, as it is seen as her "ganz persönliche Auseinandersetzung mit dem Terrorismus",⁷⁷ without commenting on the nature or reasons for this terrorism or Jelinek's need to deal "personally" with this subject. Coupled with Löffler's claim of insight into Jelinek's personal motivation "das Blutbad in der verelendeten Wiener Kleinbürgerfamilie hat Elfriede Jelinek seit damals beschäftigt",⁷⁸ the introductory paragraphs of the article set this review firmly in the realm of the personal.

Löffler's analysis of the novel itself provides a highly perceptive interpretation, which recognises and explores the text's thematics whilst offering an insight into Jelinek's stylistic methods. Although the review begins in the same manner as Holzinger's article, mentioning Jelinek's real-life model for *Die Ausgesperrten*, Löffler recognises that the novel is not merely a "diagnostische Beschreibung mörderischen Familienlebens",⁷⁹ which concentrates on one isolated case, but is rather an exploration of the social factors responsible for such acts of brutality, as Jelinek demonstrates "wie und warum die Gesellschaft Gegengewalt

⁷⁵ Sigrid Löffler, 'Weltdame, schön böse', *profil*, 27 May 1980, pp. 62-3.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 62. This is a self-description by Jelinek.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

produziert”.⁸⁰ Löffler offers an equally insightful interpretation of Jelinek’s characters, recognising the importance of social class as motivation for the four youths and as a defining factor in their relationship with each other: “Sophie, die kühlen Villenfee, [...] eskaliert die Gewalt, weil sie ja nichts zu befürchten hat, und macht sich den Arbeiter Hans Sepp als Werkzeug gefügig”.⁸¹ This analysis of the role of social class within the novel is coupled with an identification of the representative function of Jelinek’s characters, who are “keine gefühlswabbernden Individuen, sondern bewußt verallgemeinerte, extreme Prototypen”,⁸² thus presenting us with an accurate interpretation of the characterological basis of *Die Ausgesperrten*. This clear comprehension of Jelinek’s intentions and methods is continued in Löffler’s stylistic examination of the novel, where the technique of “sarkastische Montage aus Floskeln, Klischees und Phrasen”⁸³ is identified as a method of “Mythenzertrümmerung”, such as described by Maria E. Brunner. This insightful analysis of the text, combined with appropriately selected quotations from *Die Ausgesperrten*, provides us with a comprehensive review of the novel which contrasts greatly with the previous reviews in this chapter.

The second section of the review presents us, however, with several problematic issues, as the focus of the article shifts onto Jelinek’s personal background. This section is introduced by a tenuous link to the review of the novel, where comments on Jelinek’s literary style are accompanied not only by personal comments from the author but also by an (irrelevant) description of Jelinek “die 34-jährige mit dem hennaroten Haar und der Vorliebe für Art-deco-Mode kann selber alle Vorwurfsvokabel herzsählen”.⁸⁴ The juxtaposition of this personal description with Jelinek’s response to her critics immediately personalises the debate surrounding her work, almost placing Jelinek in the victim role, possibly in an attempt to somehow excuse or explain the brutality of *Die Ausgesperrten*. This emotionalisation within the review is continued in the description of her unhappy childhood, interspersed with quotes from Jelinek and her “friends”. In addition to emotionalising this literary review, Löffler furthermore perpetuates the now clichéd image of Jelinek as an “extravagante Lady” who nevertheless “solidarisiert sich mit den KP-Frauen”.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ *profil*.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Elfriede Czurda quoted in *profil*, p. 63.

Indeed it is this portrayal of Jelinek with which Löffler chooses to conclude the article, leaving the reader with the impression that the most significant aspect of Jelinek's life is her fashion sense, which is tenuously linked to her literary work "dieser scheinbare Widerspruch zwischen KP und Saint-Laurent ist die fruchtbare Spannung ihrer Arbeit".⁸⁶ Throughout the description of Jelinek's personal life we are offered no explanation of the relevance of her childhood or fashion preferences to *Die Ausgesperrten*, ostensibly the subject of the article. This sense of irrelevance is increased by the positioning of this section at the end of the article, which excludes the possibility that this is background information intended to prepare the reader for the review to come. The emphasis placed on Jelinek's appearance also presents us with a highly problematic gender issue, since, as Allyson Fiddler points out, "only very rarely are male authors quizzed on the subject of their appearance".⁸⁷ Thus it is apparent that the novel and its theme are once again eclipsed by an over-exaggerated emphasis on one particular element, which is in this case one step further removed since not even an aspect of the novel itself but rather of its author.

Conclusion

From the variety of articles considered in this chapter it is possible to draw certain conclusions regarding the Austrian press at the beginning of the 1980s. Firstly it is important to highlight the absence of reviews of *Die Ausgesperrten* in Austria's mainstream press, a situation which would be unimaginable in contemporary reception of Jelinek's work. In light of the prominence of her two plays which preceded this novel, it could be concluded that Jelinek at this time had only sensationalist value, with the content and style of her work being of secondary importance, as is further evident in the emphasis placed on the novel's sensationalist elements (Sichrovsky) and the foregrounding of Jelinek's appearance and private life (Löffler). Even within the left-wing political press, which does to a certain extent deal with the *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* thematics, we can identify a tendency to ignore or sideline the critical elements of Jelinek's work which are unfavourable to each newspaper, highlighting in stead the more neutral aspects such as adolescence or the more sensationalist crime element.

⁸⁶ *profil*, p. 63.

⁸⁷ Fiddler, *Rewriting Reality*, p. 4.

Published in 1980, *Die Ausgesperrten* appeared at a time when Austria was still (unofficially) governed by the *Sozialpartnerschaft*, a group of representatives from the trade unions and the *Wirtschaftskammer* whose extra-parliamentary negotiations determined Austrian politics until the 1990s. According to the cultural narrative this period was dominated by a search for harmony at all costs, as the *Sozialpartnerschaft* “produzierte den Schein einer harmonischen Geschlossenheit, wobei die wirklichen gesellschaftlichen Interessensgegensätze und Konflikte ausgeblendet wurden”.⁸⁸ This avoidance of political conflict is equally manifest in the novel’s reception within the party-political press, where all elements of political criticism are trivialised or omitted. It must, however, be stressed that this depoliticisation of Jelinek’s text appears to primarily serve the interests of specific political parties, and the subsequent sidelining of the *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* thematics in these publications may purely be a by-product of this political pragmatism. However, the absence of reviews and the trivialisation of the novel in the mainstream press suggest that this *Harmoniebedürfnis* extends beyond the political parties, and that the concomitant rejection of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* is equally widespread, thus corresponding to Menasse’s concept of an “österreichischer Überbau”,⁸⁹ which glosses over uncomfortable issues.

⁸⁸ Robert Menasse, *Das war Österreich* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2005), p. 135.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

Thomas Bernhard: *Heldenplatz*

Without a doubt the most extreme case within this thesis, the press reception of Thomas Bernhard's *Heldenplatz* provides a superlative example of the problematic relationship between the Austrian press and socially critical literature, straddling the borders between sensationalist scandal-mongering, political intervention and, to a much lesser extent, literary criticism. The political and historical context in which this play was performed augment the significance of this case study in the examination of the grand cultural narrative, which places great emphasis on the Waldheim affair in 1986 and the commemoration year in 1988.

Historico-political Context

Following the international political scandal caused by the controversial election of Kurt Waldheim to the office of *Bundespräsident*, Austria's dubious relationship to her role in the fascist atrocities was pulled into the spotlight. This affair called into question Austria's victim myth, leading to passionate public debate between Waldheim supporters (of which the *Krone Zeitung* was a leading figure) and his liberal opponents, exposing latent anti-Semitic attitudes in Austria.¹ This ambivalent relationship to Austria's historical complicity became the focus of further debates in 1988 with the erection of Alfred Hrdlicka's anti-fascist monument on Vienna's Albertinaplatz. Various objections were raised in efforts to prevent the creation of this memorial, ranging from accusations of "Störung der Totenruhe"² to a rejection of the artist's political beliefs (Hrdlicka being branded an "aufgestiegener Stalin-Fan"³), all mere pretexts in an attempt to disguise a continuing difficulty with *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. As such, the Hrdlicka debate was a precursor to the scandal surrounding *Heldenplatz*, as essentially cultural discussions were transformed into "Stellvertreterkriege"⁴ for unresolved historical and political issues.

Closely connected to this "Kulturkampf" was the controversial figure of Claus Peymann, the director of the *Burgtheater*, whose avant-garde management of this vestige of Austrian traditional culture had come under severe criticism. Unpopular from the outset, mainly due to his German or "Piefke" origins, Peymann seemed to

¹ The *Krone Zeitung* called into question the validity of the criticism levied against Waldheim with the argument "daß die Juden traditionsgemäß mit der Wahrheit zwiespältig umgingen", Haslinger, p. 82.

² Many bodies of Austrian civilians killed during Allied bombings of 12th March 1945 are buried under Albertinaplatz.

³ Staberl, 'Für Freiheit des Publikums', *Krone*, 20 October 1988.

⁴ Sigrid Löffler, 'Über und unter der Budel', *profil*, 1 August 1988.

move from one scandal to another, whether it be his sharp criticism of Austria in the German press or his decision to stage Rolf Hochhuth's "Der Stellvertreter", which takes a critical look at the role of the Catholic Church in supporting fascism, to coincide with the Pope's visit to Vienna. Combined with the double historical "anniversaries" (Austria was commemorating the fifty year anniversary of the *Anschluß* and the *Burgtheater* was celebrating its centenary), this political and cultural background is key to understanding the scandal surrounding the premiere of *Heldenplatz*.

***Heldenplatz*: the text**

Heldenplatz deals with the fate of a Jewish emigrant family forced to flee Nazi Austria in 1938 and their impressions of Vienna fifty years on. The action takes place after the funeral of Professor Josef Schuster, the patriarchal head of the family, who committed suicide in his flat overlooking Heldenplatz, an area in Vienna inextricably bound in collective memory to the welcoming of Hitler in 1938. Through the statements of his family and domestics we are led to assume that his suicide was the result of continuing anti-Semitism and fascist tendencies in 1980s Austria, which proved unbearable for this "Geistesmensch" and his family. This is equally manifest in the auditory hallucinations of Hedwig Schuster, Josef's wife, who is plagued by the sound of the screaming masses who greeted Hitler fifty years before and whose death provides a dramatic conclusion to the play, as the sounds of the masses become intolerable for both Hedwig Schuster and the audience.

Heldenplatz begins with a lengthy scene in which Josef Schuster's two domestics, Frau Zittel and Herta, prepare the family's belongings for departure to their country residence in Neuhaus (plans to re-emigrate to England have been abandoned after the Professor's suicide). Despite his absence throughout the play the continuing dominance of Schuster's character is made evident from the outset, as the remaining characters repeatedly recite his views, thus facilitating a partial reconstruction of his personality and attitudes. Indeed the dominance of his opinions in Act I renders (almost) impossible a differentiation of his views from those of Frau Zittel, reducing both Zittel and Herta to mere "Sprachrohre" for his extreme beliefs. Josef Schuster's idiosyncrasies and foibles are mediated through a series of Zittel's monologues, and despite her evident admiration for the Professor "Der Professor war ein feiner Mensch/ der feinste Mensch/ den ich gekannt habe", we are confronted with a

predominantly negative image of Josef Schuster. Through Zittel's statements we are able to deduce that Schuster was not only a self-professed egotist (p. 35) and pedant (p. 27) but furthermore displayed clearly despotic tendencies, terrorising Frau Zittel (pp. 26-8) and abusing his family "der Professor hat nur alle mißbraucht/ mich [Frau Zittel] hat er mißbraucht/ die Frau Professor hat er mißbraucht/ seine Töchter hat er immer mißbraucht/ mich dich alle" (p. 35). Dirk Jürgens considers these negative characteristics to be evidence of parallels between Schuster and Hitler or a "Hitler Typus".⁵ Jürgens points to Schuster's tendency to monologue "er nannte sich ja selber einen Gesellschafts-/ und Gesellschaftenhasser" (p. 73), his Austrian origins and his vitriolic verbal attacks on certain sections of society, concluding that "[i]n *Heldenplatz* spielt Adolf Hitler, genauer, der von Hitler in besonderer Weise vertretene » Typus « des großenwahnsinnigen, sich als Mittelpunkt einer hermetisch von der Außenwelt abgeschlossenen Schein-Wirklichkeit begreifenden Kleinbürgers, Einzelgängers und Monomanen freilich eine zentrale Rolle".⁶ Whilst this comparison may appear rather extreme, the juxtaposition of Schuster's violent verbal attacks on Zittel and his description of the screams of the masses in 1938 are certainly not without significance. The parallel between the two acts of verbal aggression is further underlined by the linguistic structure of this passage, which provides an unmistakable link between the Professor's tyrannical tendencies and the hysterical welcome of Hitler and National Socialism, whose despotic tendencies require no further comment:

ich bin ja nur genau Frau Zittel aber nicht verrückt

ich bin ja nur genau Frau Zittel aber nicht verrückt

ein Genauigkeitsfanatiker bin ich Frau Zittel

ich bin nicht krank ich bin nicht krank schrie er

ich bin nur ein Genauigkeitsfanatiker

ich bin der berühmteste Genauigkeitsfanatiker

[...]

Frau Zittel Frau Zittel schrie er und lief ans Fenster

Sehen Sie den Heldenplatz schrie er sehen Sie den Heldenplatz

den ganzen Tag hört sie das Schreien vom Heldenplatz

den ganzen Tag fortwährend

fortwährend fortwährend Frau Zittel

⁵ Dirk Jürgens, *Das Theater Thomas Bernhards* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1999), p. 158.

⁶ Jürgens, pp. 158-9.

das ist zum Verrücktwerden zum Verrücktwerden ist das Frau Zittel
ich werde noch verrückt davon verrückt davon (p. 27)

Bernhard's use of chiasmus and the repetition of certain terms "verrückt [...] Heldenplatz [...] Genauigkeitsfanatiker" create an arbitrary link between these terms suggesting a causal relationship between Schuster's behaviour and his past experiences. Jürgens furthermore views this technique as an attack on "diese Verklärung der österreichischen Geschichte, indem [Bernhard] Figuren auf die Bühne stellt, die sich ebenfalls dagegen wenden, gleichzeitig aber genau diejenige Mentalität vertreten, die zu jenen Verbrechen wesentlich mit beigetragen hat".⁷ This is further apparent in Zittel's treatment of Herta, whom she subjects to analogous verbal aggression and pedantry of which she was previously a victim (p. 35). Zittel can be seen to reproduce Schuster's behaviour and attitudes, continuing to fold his shirts in the manner which he instructed her,⁸ and exercising her inherited power over Herta. This construct of quotation and its implications for the play's thematics attains a further dimension through the intermittent usage of Nazi jargon such as "Untermenschen" (p. 50) and profession of fascist attitudes: "Vor den Krüppeln/ müssen Sie sich in acht nehmen Frau Zittel/ hat er gesagt/ vor den Blinden vor allem" (p. 55). Here we can observe a perpetuation of the fascist ideology not only by Professor Schuster, a victim of National Socialism, but equally by Frau Zittel, who in turn repeats the words of her oppressor. Thus we can observe a continuing pattern of oppression and the perpetuation of a "Herr-Knecht" hierarchy, considered by Jürgens to be a major contributing factor to the rise of fascism (pp. 156-7). This character constellation, which corresponds to Dagmar Lorenz's theory that a "conflation of victim and victimizer is common throughout Bernhard's work",⁹ thus ironically reveals a further quasi-fascist element within the Schuster family, rendering once more problematic the role of the Jewish victim within *Heldenplatz*.

The vehemence and extensiveness of the criticism exercised by Josef's brother, Robert and Josef's two daughters Anna and Olga has often lead to Act II of *Heldenplatz* being viewed as the strongest section of the play, forming the zenith of Bernhard's criticism. Before the background of the *Volksgarten*, which connects

⁷ Jürgens, p. 160

⁸ For further examples of the symbolic function of clothing in Bernhard's works see Andrew Webber, 'Costume Drama' in *A Companion to the Works of Thomas Bernhard*, ed. by Matthias Konzett (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2002) pp. 149-65.

⁹ Dagmar Lorenz, 'The Established Outsider: Thomas Bernhard', in Konzett, pp. 29-50 (p. 41).

Heldenplatz to the presidential residence and political offices and to the *Burgtheater*,¹⁰ Robert and his two nieces provide a critical analysis of 1980s Austria, attacking all aspects of Austrian society from politics and the Church to culture and education. The hyperbolic nature of these attacks gained this act infamy within the Austria press and public, who gained access to certain passages through leaks to the press by an anonymous source. Detached from their literary context it is obvious why these quotes aroused such outrage, as no section of Austrian life is spared from criticism. Thus politicians from all political camps are denounced as “verbrecherisch” (p. 97), as specifically personal attacks on the *Bundespräsident*, “ein verschlagener verlogener Banause” (p. 102), coalesce with more general criticism “die Sozialisten heute sind im Grunde nichts anderes/ als katholische Nationalsozialisten” (p. 97), whereby in a typically Bernhardian fashion, the terms Catholic and National Socialist become interchangeable, suggesting an inherent link between the two. This is further apparent in Robert’s criticism of Austrian industry “die Industrie und die Kirche/ sind an dem österreichischen Unglück schuld/ die Kirche und die Industrie sind schon immer/ am österreichischen Unglück schuldig gewesen [...] Die Industrie und der Klerus sind die Drahtzieher/ des österreichischen Übels” (p. 88), where repetition serves once more to create a textual reality. Further striking is the resemblance between Robert’s attack on the Church and the branch of Nazi propaganda which criticised Jewish involvement in high finance, the arts and the film industry, thus creating a perverse inversion of fascist rhetoric and once again linking the victims of fascism to their aggressors.

Whilst these attacks are in themselves an obvious provocation, in the literary context of the play they assume a more subtle function, underlining the fragile emotional state of Robert Schuster, who appears to the sympathetic viewer/reader to be a tired and disillusioned old man. His self-professed “Lebensmüdigkeit” is coupled with a sense of helpless resignation demonstrated by his refusal to undertake any act of protest against plans to build a street through his property “ich protestiere nicht/ ich protestiere gegen nichts/ ich protestiere gegen nichts mehr/ alle Proteste verbieten sich am Lebensende” (p. 77). In this conflict Bernhard’s use of spatial symbolism is equally manifest, as Neuhaus becomes a symbol “für das Scheitern einstmals großer

¹⁰ The spatial symbolism which is to be found in *Heldenplatz* is particularly evident in this act, as Bernhard draws attention to the political and cultural significance of Heldenplatz and through the alternating stage directions “schaut auf das Parlament” (pp. 96, 111) and “schaut auf das Burgtheater” (pp. 101, 116) makes evident the connection between the cultural/political situation in Austria and the attitudes and critical stance of Robert Schuster.

Utopien und privater Hoffnungen”¹¹ or possibly even “für die alltägliche Vernichtung Österreichs”,¹² in the context of which Robert’s unwillingness to protest can be viewed as typical of a general Austrian “Stumpfsinnigkeit” which prevents any possibility of change in Austrian society.¹³

Taking into account Bernhard’s characterisation of Robert, the repetitiveness of his language must be viewed not only as a rhetorical technique intended to create a textual reality but furthermore as symptomatic of Robert’s desperation, whose feeling of impotence is reflected in the inability of language to express his thoughts,¹⁴ thus rendering language a “Symptom eines psychischen Mechanismus”.¹⁵ This inadequacy of language is furthermore symptomatic of a more widespread inability to communicate, as “es wird geredet aber es wird nicht verstanden” (p. 117), linking linguistic impotence to the failed process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in Austria. This problematic relationship to the past is ironically reproduced in the circuitous and monological language of the Schusters, which prevents any real discussion or argument, precluding any possibility of constructive debate, as “die Äußerungen der Handelnden stehen so beziehungslos nebeneinander wie die handelnden Personen selbst”.¹⁶ Through the critical statements of the characters it is further implied that neither politicians nor the press are in the position to effectuate the necessary discussions, as the *Bundeskanzler* “kann ja nicht einmal einen Satz korrekt zu Ende führen” (p. 120) and “die Zeitungen schreiben Unrat/ in den Zeitungen wird auch eine Sprache geschrieben/ die einem den Magen umdreht” (p. 121), thus presenting a highly pessimistic view of Austrian prospects for *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.

Generally considered to be one of Bernhard’s weakest works, *Heldenplatz* is nevertheless a highly passionate play, depicting the failed *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in Austria and its terrible consequences for modern society through the fate of one Jewish family. The evident tragedy of their situation, although combined with the comical aspects of Bernhard’s exaggerative language, not only represents the terrible

¹¹ Jürgens, p. 134.

¹² Ferdinand Van Ingen, *Thomas Bernhard: ‘Heldenplatz’* (Frankfurt: Diesterweg, 1996), p. 30.

¹³ For further symbolic interpretations of Neuhaus, as well as Graz, a “Nazinst” (HP, p. 35) and the Döblinger Friedhof “der einzige Ausweg” (HP, p. 149), see Van Ingen, pp. 29-31 and Jürgens, pp. 134-8.

¹⁴ Siegfried Steinmann, *Sprache, Handlung, Wirklichkeit im deutschen Gegenwartsdrama* (Frankfurt: P. Lang, 1985), p. 29.

¹⁵ Christian Klug, *Thomas Bernhards Theaterstücke* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1991), p. 173.

¹⁶ Eckhard Gropp, *Thomas Bernhards ‘Heldenplatz’ als politisches Theater* (Zurich: Hersacker, 1994), p. 50.

plight of the Jewish victims of Nazism, but equally highlights the tragic hopelessness of a contemporary Austria unable to break out of an historical circle of oppression and fascist tendencies. Nevertheless, the vehement public criticism of the play's controversial content is to a certain degree understandable, as many passages, taken out of their literary context, may appear nothing more than arbitrary attacks, intended to insult and provoke the Austrian public. It is entirely this aspect of *Heldenplatz* which was exploited and manipulated by the Austrian press in an aggressive anti-Bernhard campaign.

Press Reception

As previously indicated, *Heldenplatz* and its press reception provide a unique example within this thesis, differentiating themselves from the other case studies in several aspects. Besides the obviously exaggerated scale of the press attention (over 300 articles were devoted to this debate), *Heldenplatz* is equally exceptional in the sense that the majority of the criticism of this play was published before the publication of the final text or its premiere, generating the absurd situation where judgement is passed on an almost unknown text. The brand of journalism active in the *Heldenplatz* debate was also more than unconventional, as articles surrounding the controversial play were to be found, not in culture or literature sections but rather in the political and current affairs columns or in editorials, suggesting that the *Heldenplatz* debate did not fulfil a purely literary function but equally provided a pretext for a much wider debate. As will be illustrated in the following section this unconventional blurring of the journalistic genres results in the sidelining of the play itself, which is obscured in the hysteria of the media scandal.

Pre-premiere Debate

From the outset *Heldenplatz* was destined to attract a certain amount of press attention, not only due to the prominence and controversy surrounding its author and director, but further through the element of secrecy created by Peymann, who refused to release any excerpts and insisted on the utter discretion of all those involved. Despite this clandestinity, however, the production was already surrounded by scandal due to the departure of six of its actors and the resulting delay to the premiere, which had been intended to coincide with the Burgtheater's centenary celebrations on the 14th October. This postponement provided the press, and in particular the tabloids,

with the first opportunity for criticism, as the true reasons for the mass walk-out (mainly due to Peymann's somewhat tyrannical directional techniques) were seldom explicitly revealed, encouraging the assumption that this protest was directed at the content of the "Skandalstück".

The real scandal, however, was launched with the release of certain "leaked" passages from *Heldenplatz* in the *Neue Kronen Zeitung (Krone)* and *Wochenpresse* on 7th October,¹⁷ accompanied in both newspapers by the headline "Österreich, 6,5 Millionen Debile",¹⁸ an obvious attempt at provocation and an attempt to justify the "Skandalstück" label given to *Heldenplatz*, leading Oliver Bentz to conclude that "der Zweck, für den hier Journalismus betrieben wurde, die Mittel, mit denen er betrieben wurde, heiligte".¹⁹ Considering these two publications, it is evident from the outset that this blatant scandal-mongering was reliant upon a deliberate misinterpretation of the text, as the excerpts were printed with no indication of their literary context, a technique heavily criticised in the more liberal press. Removed from their literary context the quoted passages, stemming mainly from the play's second act, appear truly to be nothing more than "Schimpforgien"²⁰ of a "dumpfen Vor-sich-hin-Schimpfer".²¹ Thus the most heavily quoted excerpt:

Österreich ist nichts als eine Bühne
auf der alles verlottert und
vermodert und verkommen ist
eine in sich selber verhaßte Statisterie
von sechseinhalb Millionen Alleingelassenen
sechseinhalb Millionen Debile
und Tobsüchtige (HP p. 89)

loses its significance as a key component in play's theatre metaphoric, since preceding references to Austria's relationship to theatre "Was diesem armen unmündigen Volk geblieben ist/ ist nichts als das Theater" (HP p. 89) are edited from the quotes, moving the significance of this passage from the metaphorical to the

¹⁷ These passages had previously been published in *profil* (19/09/1988) almost one month earlier but had received almost no public reaction. Sigrid Löffler, 'Platz für Helden', *profil*, 19 September 1988.

¹⁸ Anon, '„Österreich 6,5 Millionen Debile!“ Bernhards Skandalstück "Heldenplatz": Die Krone veröffentlicht erstmals Teile des Textes, *Krone*, 7 October 1988 and Martin Schweighofer, 'Peymanns Provokation: Kasperltheater oder Trauerspiel, *Wochenpresse* 7 October 1988.

¹⁹ Oliver Bentz, *Dichtung als Skandal*, (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2000), p. 30.

²⁰ Norbert Tschulik, 'Grenzen des Zumutbaren', *Wiener Zeitung*, 8 October 1988.

²¹ Rau, '„Ollas Vabrecha!'", *Kurier*, 8 October 1988.

literal.²² This tendency to present all passages as representative of Bernhard's true opinions and not as elements of a wider literary scheme pervades the *Heldenplatz* debate, with journalists refusing to differentiate between the statements of fictional characters and the beliefs of the author, frequently producing statements such as "Das Duo Peymann/Bernhard verunglimpft [...] alle Österreicher als Debile und unverbesserliche Nazis".²³ In the initial publication of the leaked passages this is above all apparent in the quoting of Anna Schuster, whose claims that "es gibt mehr Nazis in Wien/ als achtunddreißig" (HP p. 63) are cited as evidence of *Bernhard's* exaggerated criticism of Austria, ignoring the fact that Anna, in an evidently fragile psychological state, is merely repeating Josef Schuster's views. It would therefore be entirely false to understand these extreme views as the real beliefs of a psychologically stable character, let alone to interpret these as being Bernhard's own opinions. The quoting of certain passages outside of their context within this literary work of fiction thus represents a sensationalising strategy, intended to increase the potential scandal surrounding *Heldenplatz* through the suggestion that the play is nothing but a vent for Bernhard's "ganz persönliche [...] manische Österreichattacke".²⁴ This personalisation of Bernhard's work further served to trivialise the debate surrounding *Heldenplatz*, dismissing its criticism as the tirades of one individual and thus denying their objective truth content.

Considering especially the article in *Wochenpresse* it is likewise apparent that *Heldenplatz*, although the subject of the sensationalist headlines, did not form the real focus of the debate, as emphasis was repeatedly placed on ongoing problems within the Burgtheater, allegedly the result of Peymann's mismanagement. Despite *Wochenpresse's* profession that "es [wird] immer schwieriger, nicht für den Theatermacher Claus Peymann zu sein",²⁵ the first article concerning *Heldenplatz* succeeds in conveying the impression that Peymann alone was responsible for the "zahlreichen künstlerischen Pleiten der vergangenen Saison"²⁶ and "das für die Direktion wie Ensemble peinliche Scheitern der kurzfristig geplanten 100-Jahr-Feiern".²⁷ Indeed this supposed "Burg-Krach" forms the focal point of the article, as the play itself and its author are hardly mentioned, "Peymanns Provokation"

²² For further comment on theatre metaphoric in *Heldenplatz* see Van Ingen, pp.32-4, 48-50.

²³ Peter Gnam, 'Der Kanzler und die Kunst', *Krone*, 9 October 1988.

²⁴ Norbert Tschulik, 'Bernhard: Beitrag zu Antisemitismus?', *Wiener Zeitung*, 14 October 1988.

²⁵ Martin Schweighofer, 'Peymann's Provokation', *Wochenpresse*, 7 October 1988.

²⁶ *Ibid*

²⁷ *Ibid*.

dominating the debate with speculation over the significance of *Heldenplatz* for Peymann's future in the Burgtheater.

Thus a debate was launched that was to last almost a month up to the premiere of *Heldenplatz* on 4th November, characterised by an enormous variety of critical responses to the play, none of which, however, was based on an aesthetic or literary judgement. This scandal divided the press in an almost typical manner, with the more conservative and populist press (*Krone*, *Kurier*, *Wiener Zeitung*) taking a critical stance towards the play, whilst the more liberal press voices pleaded for freedom of the arts and demonstrated their solidarity for Bernhard and Peymann.²⁸ Whilst an obvious difference in register and tone can be distinguished between the "serious" newspapers and the tabloid press, it becomes evident that both ends of the spectrum represent essentially the same opinions and arguments and are equally guilty of judging *Heldenplatz* prematurely and sidelining the real issues of Bernhard's text in order to promote their own cultural-political agenda.

With the exception of a handful of personal attacks on Thomas Bernhard, as "der professionelle Todfeind Österreichs"²⁹ or simply "ein Grantnigl"³⁰ and superficial criticism of *Heldenplatz* as a collection of "pathologisch klingenden Schimpforgien"³¹ (profound reflection upon the play being evidently impossible in the absence of a final published version), the main press reception of *Heldenplatz* can be seen to shift the emphasis from the play and its author onto a number of peripheral issues, which were pushed into the foreground under the pretence of a specific cultural debate yet evidently functioned primarily as "ein Vehikel für populistische Äußerungen".³² The press treatment of the *Heldenplatz* debate thus provides an illustration of the manipulation of culture and literature in order to promote underlying political and cultural agendas, many of which displayed disconcerting fascist characteristics, such as censorship and xenophobia.

In this sense, the *Heldenplatz* debate became a "Stellvertreterkrieg"³³ not only for the press, for whom Bernhard's play was merely a further component of a much larger debate sparked off by the Waldheim-Affair, but equally for Austria's

²⁸ The exception to this divide is to be found in *Der Standard*, which was considered to have abandoned its traditionally liberal approach in its criticism of *Heldenplatz*.

²⁹ Staberl, 'Aber nicht auf unsere Kosten!', *Krone*, 13 October 1988.

³⁰ Kurt Kahl, 'Ein Grantnigl macht sich Luft', *Kurier*, 6 November 1988.

³¹ Norbert Tschulik, 'Grenzen des Zumutbaren', *Wiener Zeitung*, 8 October 1988.

³² Ilse Brandner-Radinger, 'Eher ein Waterloo', *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, 15 October 1988.

³³ Sigrid Löffler uses this term in reference to the series of cultural debates surrounding Hrdlicka, Peymann and Bernhard. Sigrid Löffler, 'Über und unter der Budel', *profil*, 1 August 1988.

politicians, who felt compelled to pass comment on this unpublished text. Only two days after the release of the provocative passages politicians from all camps were called to take a stance on Bernhard's controversial play, thus elevating the debate to a higher level. Whilst political comment restricted itself initially to superficial criticism of *Heldenplatz* itself,³⁴ the debate soon became a political issue, giving the conservative ÖVP and FPÖ the opportunity to display their patriotism whilst allowing the SPÖ and Green Party's self-depiction as the defenders of artistic freedom. This shift in emphasis within the debate was undoubtedly facilitated by the press, as Austria's newspapers refrained from any cultural analysis of *Heldenplatz*, instead presenting a daily summary of the political debate surrounding play. Indeed Bernhard was, to a large extent, excluded from the debate provoked by his own work, a tendency typified by his absence from the *Krone's* list of the "Hauptakteure",³⁵ which comprised solely of Alois Mock, Hilde Hawlicek, Bishop Kurt Krenn and Claus Peymann! Keeping in mind the depoliticising tendencies identified in previous chapters, it would be useful to consider the reasons for the evident politicisation of Bernhard's work. To a large extent this politicisation of the *Heldenplatz* debate can be regarded as one of the many techniques employed both by Austria's press in order to legitimise and underline their self-created scandal, as the involvement of political parties transformed what should essentially be a literary debate into a national crisis. The political machinations within the debate thus justified the endless discussion which filled all sections (with the notable exception of the culture section!) of Austrian newspapers for over a month, leading Paul Kruntorad to speculate that "Wenn es so weiter geht, wird man das Match Peymann gegen österreichische Volksseele auch noch im Sportteil verfolgen können".³⁶ On a more cynical note it could also be claimed that the *Heldenplatz* case represented the manipulation of culture for political gain, as Günther Sandner indicates: "'Kunstskandale' sind Medienereignisse [...] sie bieten Politikern und Personen des öffentlichen Lebens eine Tribüne, um ein Massenpublikum zu erreichen. Dieser Versuchung wird im Regelfall

³⁴ Vienna's Mayor Zilk referred to *Heldenplatz* as "die paranoische Darstellung eines Menschen, der sein Leben lang nicht mit sich selbst fertig geworden ist" (Dieter Kindermann, 'Das darf man sich gefallen lassen!', *Krone*, 10 October 1988) whilst Kurt Waldheim described it as "eine grobe Beleidigung des österreichischen Volkes" (Kittner, Kotanko, 'Waldheim: In der Burg kein Platz für "Heldenplatz"', *Kurier*, 11 October 1988).

³⁵ Kittner/Kotanko, 'VP-Mock will Bernhards "Heldenplatz" privatisieren', *Kurier* 12 October 1988.

³⁶ Paul Kruntorad, 'Vergiftete Atmosphäre', *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 28 October 1988.

nachgegeben".³⁷ This argument could further be extended to the press itself, which obviously stood to gain financially from increased readership figures.

In connection with the politicisation of the *Heldenplatz* debate, we can also observe a symbolicising of the discussion, as the play itself was accorded paradigmatic value within a wider ethical discussion on the boundaries of the freedom of the arts. "Die Freiheit der Kunst" with its protectors and opponents became central to the debate following the Hilde Hawlicek's declaration that any attempt to prevent the performance of Bernhard's work, whether on moral or financial grounds, ultimately signified a violation of the freedom of the arts guaranteed in Austria's constitution. Her claim that "Dieser Fall ist ein Prüfstein für jede Zensur"³⁸ clearly set *Heldenplatz* in the realm of the hypothetical, rendering its significance non-specific and theoretical. There are two main points to be drawn out of this ethical debate in the press. Firstly, the hypocrisy demonstrated by both Austria's politicians and press, many of whom presented themselves simultaneously as supporters of freedom of the arts, whilst calling for the prevention of the performance of *Heldenplatz*, reasoning that the play was a waste of "sauer verdientes Steuergeld"³⁹ and questioning whether "es sei 'Freiheit der Kunst', wenn wir, um unser eigenes Geld noch dazu, belehrt werden, daß unser Land doch 'eine Kloake' und der 'gemeingefährlichste aller Staaten' sei".⁴⁰ In a manner not dissimilar to Nazi criticism of "entartete Kunst", it was questioned whether *Heldenplatz* was in good taste,⁴¹ coming to the conclusion that a play in such bad taste i.e. one which is critical of Austria (!) justified state intervention as it represented a "Mißbrauch der Freiheit der Kunst" and the question was frequently raised "ist die Freiheit der Kunst grenzenlos".⁴² With specific regards to *Heldenplatz* this debate can be considered as contributing further to the sidelining of the play itself, as it loses any individual value, becoming a mere symbol for this wider ethical debate.

This indirect call for censorship constituted, however, only one aspect the quasi-fascist elements within this debate, viewed by Sandner as proof of an increase in "illiberale und intolerante Tendenzen"⁴³ in the Austrian press which he furthermore

³⁷ Günther Sandner, *Die Konflikte um Alfred Hrdlickas 'Mahnmal gegen Krieg und Faschismus' und Thomas Bernhards 'Heldenplatz'* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Salzburg, 1992), p. 65.

³⁸ Karlheinz Roschitz, 'Wird 1989 Jürgen Flimm neuer Burg-Chef?', *Krone*, 11 October 1988.

³⁹ Dieter Kindermann, 'Riesenwirbel um Österreich-Beschimpfung', *Krone* 9 October 1988.

⁴⁰ Staberl, '„Freiheit der Kunst!“, *Krone* 14 October 1988.

⁴¹ See for example t.c., 'Ganz falsche Töne', *Die Presse* 13 October 1988.

⁴² Franz Ferdinand Wolf, 'Das Theater um die Freiheit der Kunst', *Kurier*, 15 October 1988.

⁴³ Sandner, p. 122.

suspects to represent a “gesellschaftliche Entwicklung in diese Richtung”.⁴⁴ In a manner worryingly analogous to Nazi propaganda, the press and in particular the *Krone* employed a distinctly populist approach to the *Heldenplatz* scandal, appealing to the ‘ordinary man in the street’ through a variety of over-simplified argumentations. As previously illustrated, the *Krone*’s central argument in this supposedly cultural debate appeared to rest on the financial burden placed on the normal taxpayer, whose “sauer verdientes Steuergeld”⁴⁵ was being used to pay for this “Österreich-Besudelung”.⁴⁶ In this emotionalised portrayal of the average Austrian as the financial victim of Peymann/Bernhard we can observe certain parallels to the anti-Semitic propaganda of the Nazis which focussed heavily on their supposed financial exploitation of the hard-working German/Austrian. This attack on state finance was coupled with harsh criticism of the politicians themselves, in particular their hesitancy in criticising *Heldenplatz*, producing headlines such as “Noble Zurückhaltung bei Bernhards Österreich-Beschimpfung falsch”,⁴⁷ and categorising government ministers either as “notorisch hilflos”⁴⁸ or as accomplices to Bernhard seeking only to help their “Spießgesellen”.⁴⁹ Following this pattern, *Bundeskanzler* Franz Vranitzky was accused of being out of touch with the average Austrian and it was suggested that his liberal approach to *Heldenplatz* displayed a lack of contact to his party roots, which it was speculated would cause him many problems with the “kleinen Sozialisten, denen ihr Vaterland mehr noch als vielen anderen über alles geht”.⁵⁰ This argumentation further demonstrates a repetition of Nazi rhetoric, which frequently sought to portray those of opposing beliefs as corrupt, incompetent or out of touch with the common consensus, enabling the accusers to present themselves as the only authoritative representatives of the people. The *Krone* thus offers itself as the singular representative voice of the Austrian public, justifying its vehement attacks of *Heldenplatz* as direct reproductions of general public opinion. Indeed the virulence of their criticism constitutes a further component of the *Krone*’s populist rhetoric, as dramatic and sensationalist language is employed to stir up public emotions and motivate the masses against Bernhard and Peymann with demands such as

⁴⁴ Sandner, p. 122..

⁴⁵ Dieter Kindermann, ‘Riesenwirbel um Österreich-Beschimpfung’, *Krone* 9 October 1988.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Dieter Kindermann, ‘Das darf man sich nicht gefallen lassen’, *Krone*, 10 October 1988.

⁴⁸ Staberl, ‘„Provokation tolerieren!“’, *Krone*, 26 October 1988.

⁴⁹ Staberl, ‘„Freiheit der Kunst!“’, *Krone*, 14 October 1988.

⁵⁰ Peter Gnam, ‘Der Kanzler und die Kunst’, *Krone*, 9 October 1988.

“Verbieten! Ausweisen! Zusperrern!”⁵¹ which the *Krone* portrayed as the cries of the public when in fact these demands came from none other than the *Krone* itself.

Closely linked to this populism is the sense of patriotism spread by the tabloid press as a reaction to Bernhard's attacks on “das ganze Volk”.⁵² Borrowing phrases from the Nazi lexicon, the *Krone* implored its readers to demonstrate their love for the “Vaterland”,⁵³ claiming that “dieses Gefühl hat nämlich auch mit jener Art von Sittlichkeit etwas zu tun, die aus einem Staat ein funktionierendes Gemeinwesen und aus einem eher blinden Gefühl dumpfer Zuneigung ein waches Pflichtbewußtsein macht”.⁵⁴ A further, altogether more dubious patriotic element was introduced with the *Krone*'s suggestion of the “Untergang” of the “deutsche Nation”⁵⁵ brought about by Austro-critical art: “Wenn wir Österreicher uns diese unflätigen Beleidigungen von Peymann und Bernhard gefallen lassen, dann brauchen wir nicht mehr weiter diskutieren, ob wir der deutschen Nation zugehören oder eine eigene sind, denn dann haben wir uns selbst aufgegeben”.⁵⁶ Aside from the dubitable implication that Austria belongs to a “großdeutsche Nation”, this statement is equally problematic in its replication of Hitler's frequent apocalyptic predictions, which blamed Jews and other minorities, including critical artists and authors, for the demise of Germany. This call for patriotism in the form of intolerance against artists thus reproduces a certain fascist rhetoric, adding a deeply problematic element to the *Heldenplatz* debate.

This dubious patriotism manifested itself furthermore in the xenophobic attacks on critical voices in the international community, which presented the *Heldenplatz* scandal as a sign of “les difficultés qu'ont beaucoup d'Autrichiens à affronter leur passé nazi” (the difficulty that many Austrian have in facing up to their Nazi past)⁵⁷ or a case of an “Orgie von Zensurforderungen”.⁵⁸ The defensive reaction to international criticism of Austria's *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* represented a continuation of the Waldheim affair, as the international press once again debated the presence of underlying fascist tendencies in Austria. Indeed Bentz views this aspect of the *Heldenplatz* debate as a repetition of “jene Argumentationsstrategien [...], die sich

⁵¹ Humbert Fink, ‘Patriotismus’, *Krone*, 13 October 1988.

⁵² Staberl, ‘In der Welt von Gestern’, *Krone*, 19 October 1988.

⁵³ Humbert Fink, ‘Patriotismus’, *Krone*, 13 October 1988.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Cato (Hans Dichand), ‘Vor Sonnenuntergang’, *Krone*, 11 October 1988.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Joëlle Stolz, ‘L'Autriche de Waldheim mise en pièces’, *Libération*, 18 October 1988.

⁵⁸ Michael Frank, ‘Wie man eine Grotteske ohne Text inszeniert’, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 13 October 1988.

schon bei der Waldheim-Affäre bewährt hatten”,⁵⁹ drawing specific attention to the creation of a “Wirundunser-Gefühl”,⁶⁰ which portrayed the negative foreign voices as enemies of the good Austrian people embodied in the *Krone*’s readership. This latent animosity towards the critical international press is particularly manifest in the *Krone*’s reaction to SPÖ claims that Austria faced international disgrace,⁶¹ which were ironically exploited by the *Krone* as an opportunity to follow an argument which exposed its underlying xenophobic tendencies. In his column, Kurt Seinitz alleged that criticism of the *Heldenplatz* affair existed solely in “jene ausländischen (und inländischen) Kreise, die sich bis heute nicht schämen, daß sie mit gefälschten Dokumenten und Verleumdungen eine anti-Waldheim- und Anti-Österreich-Kampagne inszeniert haben und die bereits heute aus dem Peymann-Bernhard-Skandale eine “neue Waldheim-Affäre” konstruieren”,⁶² further claiming that the “Normalbürger im Ausland” actually had sympathy for the exploited taxpayers. This rhetoric clearly belongs to the “Wirundunser-Gefühl”, as the *Heldenplatz* scandal, incidentally the product of the *Krone*’s campaign against the play, was integrated into the *Krone*’s concept of a wider conspiracy, in which foreign forces joined with subversive Austrian elements to damage Austria’s public image.

A further branch of this defensive xenophobia is to be found in the campaign against Peymann, which permeates the entire *Heldenplatz* debate, often eclipsing any adequate debate of the play itself. Hiding behind ostensible examples of Peymann’s mismanagement of the Burgtheater, the press and politicians alike called for his resignation and replacement, with Jörg Haider even misquoting Karl Kraus’s demand “Hinaus aus Wien mit dem Schuft”. Thus *Heldenplatz* became a mere pretext for further attacks on Peymann, as his involvement in the production of *Heldenplatz* was viewed only as further “proof” of his incompetence as Burgtheater director. Considering the press and politicians’ exploitation of the *Heldenplatz* debate in order to pursue their own agendas, it is heavily ironic that these attacks on Peymann centred on the accusation that he exploited the scandal surrounding the controversial play merely in order to deflect attention from the *Burgtheater*’s financial problems caused

⁵⁹ Bentz, p. 35.

⁶⁰ Bentz, p. 35.

⁶¹ Vienna’s *Kulturstadträtin* Ursula Pasterek, a strong supporter of Bernhard and Peymann, warned of an “internationale Blamage” caused by “derlei Medienjustiz gegen Kunst und Künstler”, which was especially controversial in the 50th anniversary of the *Anschluß*, *profil*, 17. October 1988.

⁶² Kurt Seinitz, ‘„Das Ausland ist empört“’, *Krone*, 15 October 1988.

by “seine chaotische Planung und einen offensichtlich überforderten Manager”.⁶³

Unsurprisingly this criticism did not restrict itself to his cultural projects. In a similar fashion to the sidelining of *Heldenplatz* within the debate, Peymann’s role as director of the play was accorded equal insignificance, as the focus of press criticism was repeatedly placed on his German origins, Peymann thus adopting the unenviable role of the “seltsamer Ausländer”⁶⁴ or the “nordischer Vetter aus Dingsda”.⁶⁵

Consequently the anti-Peymann campaign took on the “Stil einer neo-nazistischen ‘Ausländer-Raus Bewegung’”⁶⁶ with frequent calls for him to “go home”, claiming that “die Österreicher würden sich freuen, wenn er [...] diesen stinkenden “Heldenplatz” verliesse, die “sechseinhalb Millionen Debile” würden es ihm wahrscheinlich danken”.⁶⁷ In a disconcertingly xenophobic rhetoric Peymann’s foreign roots were portrayed as presenting a threat to the purity of Austrian culture (reminiscent of Nazi criticism of the prominence of Jews in German cultural life), with one journalist even going as far as to compare his “occupation” of the Burgtheater to the Nazi invasion in 1938: “Da marschiert ein nordischer Vetter [...], von lokalen Kollaborateuren gerufen und bejubelt, mit einer disziplinierten Leibgarde aus eindrucksvollen Schauspielern und raffinierten Regisseuren in Wien ein und besetzt alle wichtigen Posten mit seinen Leuten, wie die Preußen anno 1938”.⁶⁸ This absurd parallelisation not only demonstrates a disturbing xenophobic element but further builds upon the “victim myth” of Austria as an occupied country, externalising the responsibility onto Germany. Thus we can observe a further instrumentalisation of the supposedly cultural debate, which serves only as disguise for an agenda combining quasi-fascist undertones with a replication of Austria’s failed *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in the form of externalisation.

Whilst the most extreme examples of the attitudes and opinions are undoubtedly to be found in the tabloid press, it is equally important to consider the reactions of Austria’s broadsheet press, which represent the more educated sectors of Austrian society. The reaction of Austria’s two most important broadsheets, the conservative *Presse* and the more liberal *Standard* was equally problematical, as both

⁶³ Franz Ferdinand Wolf, ‘Das Theater um die Freiheit der Kunst’, *Kurier*, 15 October 1988.

⁶⁴ Kurt Seinitz, ‘„Das Ausland ist empört“’, *Krone*, 15 October 1988.

⁶⁵ Jens Tschebull, ‘Burg-Theater’, *Kurier*, 24 October 1988.

⁶⁶ Declaration of Solidarity by IG Autoren in *Volksstimme*, 14 October 1988.

⁶⁷ Norbert Tschulik, ‘Grenzen des Zumutbaren’, *Wiener Zeitung*, 8 October 1988.

⁶⁸ Jens Tschebull, ‘Burg-Theater’, *Kurier*, 24 October 1988. This comment is not only worrying in its clearly xenophobic tones but equally in its perpetuation of the myth that Austria was invaded by the Nazis and was, as such, a victim.

abandoned their otherwise “seriöser” journalism in the fervour of the media frenzy. The rhetoric of *Die Presse* in particular displayed striking resemblances to the arguments of the *Krone*, placing emphasis on Peymann’s foreign origins “der längst zum Pötzleinsdorfer mutierte Bochumer Feuergeist”⁶⁹ and appealing to a sense of patriotism “man möge um Gottes Willen aufhören, alle jene, die sich bisweilen für das, was hier geboten wird, genieren, zu Verräter am guten Ruf des Landes zu stempeln”,⁷⁰ The stance adopted by *Die Presse* represents what Bentz refers to as the “Loden-Faktion”,⁷¹ the conservative middle-class, whose opinions in the *Heldenplatz* debate differentiated themselves only marginally from those of the *Krone* readership. This highly critical position is often regarded as a continuation of Hans Haider’s ongoing campaign against Thomas Bernhard, whose roots are to be found in the *Holzfällen* scandal in 1984,⁷² in which Haider played a catalytic role, informing former friends of Bernhard of the potentially slanderous content of the novel, leading to the temporary withdrawal of all copies.

Whilst articles and editorials themselves remained relatively restrained, *Die Presse* reached for another method of conveying their anti-Bernhard agenda: the *Leserbriefe*. Here, criticism of Bernhard/Peymann and, to a lesser extent, the play itself, was given free rein under the pretence of merely representing the common consensus of the newspaper’s readership, sparing *Die Presse* from accusations of “unseriöser” journalism. Particularly interesting in this respect is the layout of this section, where headings and sub-headings, along with clever use of font size were used to make clear the newspaper’s own beliefs. Under titles such as “In Wirklichkeit lautet die Frage: Darf sich Österreich Peymann leisten?”,⁷³ *Die Presse* ostensibly presented the opinion of its readers, the number of hostile letters by far outweighing the pro-*Heldenplatz* lobby, whose views are shunted towards the end of the page, accompanied by a subtitle in considerably smaller font.⁷⁴ Thus *Die Presse* was able to publish anti-democratic headlines (“Ein Publikums-Boykott ist leider nicht realisierbar”)⁷⁵ under the protection of its conservative readership. This use of the readers to convey the opinions of the newspaper takes on a certain irony in the light of

⁶⁹ Hans Werner Scheidl, “‘Heldenplatz’ und die Folgen”, *Die Presse*, 12 October 1988.

⁷⁰ t.c., ‘Ganz falsche Töne’, *Die Presse*, 13 October 1988.

⁷¹ Bentz, p. 41.

⁷² Thomas Bernhard, *Holzfällen*, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1984). This semi-autobiographical novel takes a highly critical satirical look at the Austrian cultural scene in the 1960s, providing thinly disguised references to real-life figures, whose portrayal in the novel is far from flattering.

⁷³ ‘Tribüne der Leser’, *Die Presse*, 15 October 1988.

⁷⁴ See for example ‘Tribüne der Leser’, *Die Presse*, 22 October 1988.

⁷⁵ ‘Tribüne der Leser’, *Die Presse*, 22 October 1988.

the accusations levelled against Bernhard that he hid behind an untouchable Jewish figure and that it is “Billig, Herr Bernhard, mit fremden Leid sich das letzte Wort zu arrogieren”.⁷⁶

Equally problematic in its reception of *Heldenplatz* is the supposedly liberal *Standard*, whose stance in this debate was highly ambiguous. Its initial approach to the scandal was in keeping with the newspaper’s liberal line, joining with the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* and *Volksstimme* in criticising the uninformed political and press (over)reaction.⁷⁷ In order to underline this criticism *Der Standard* refused to pass comment on *Heldenplatz* itself, concentrating solely on the political reactions and looking at the debate on a more theoretical level.⁷⁸ The liberal stance traditionally associated with *Der Standard* was, however, negated by one particularly problematical article by Peter Sichrovsky. Claiming authority since he had actually read *Heldenplatz*, Sichrovsky repeated the view put forward in many conservative publications that the play contains potentially anti-Semitic elements⁷⁹ and was thus “ein erschreckend schlechtes Stück”⁸⁰ which filled him with fear and indignation. This criticism of Bernhard’s use of Jewish characters is deeply problematic, demonstrating the anti-Semitic tendencies that it claims to criticise.⁸¹ Following this line of criticism, Bernhard’s Jewish characters were portrayed as “Fremde”,⁸² as a foreign element, thus ignoring the fact that the Schusters, more than being Jewish, are essentially Austrian characters, who are “sowohl Opfer des österreichischen Antisemitismus als auch ihrer eigenen ‘Austrizität’”.⁸³ This portrayal of Jews as “different” or “foreign” is an essential element of anti-Semitism, and as such renders problematic that an ostensibly liberal publication should publish phrases such as “Hier läßt ein Bochumer Theaterdirektor [...] einen Wiener Juden bellen wie einen deutschen Schäferhund”,⁸⁴ which not only placed emphasis on Peymann’s foreign roots but furthermore reduced the Jewish figure to a dehumanised state. More shocking, however, is Sichrovsky’s call for censorship, as readers were incited to aggressive demonstration “Stürmt den

⁷⁶ hai, ‘Zu billig, dieses letzte Wort’, *Die Presse*, 11 October 1988.

⁷⁷ *Der Standard*, 12 October 1988 and 14 October 1988.

⁷⁸ See for instance Peter Sichrovsky, ‘Die Krise des Scheins’, *Der Standard*, 19 October 1988, which explores the role of theatre in modern society.

⁷⁹ See for instance hai, ‘Zu billig, dieses letzte Wort’, *Die Presse*, 11 October 1988 or Norbert Tschulik, ‘Bernhard: Beitrag zu Antisemitismus’, *Wiener Zeitung*, 14 October 1988.

⁸⁰ Peter Sichrovsky, ‘Stürmt den Heldenplatz!’, *Der Standard*, 4 November 1988.

⁸¹ For further comment on the anti-Semitic elements of the *Heldenplatz* debate see Bentz, pp. 84-8.

⁸² Peter Sichrovsky, ‘Stürmt den Heldenplatz!’, *Der Standard*, 4 November 1988 and hai, ‘Zu billig, dieses letzte Wort’, *Die Presse*, 11 October 1988.

⁸³ Jürgens, p. 161.

⁸⁴ Peter Sichrovsky, ‘Stürmt den Heldenplatz!’, *Der Standard*, 4 November 1988.

Heldenplatz!”⁸⁵ in a reproduction of the storming of the stage at the premiere of Fassbinder’s *Die Stadt, der Müll und der Tod* in Frankfurt, an action which forced the cancellation of this controversial play. This evidently reactionary stance, which Sichrovsky attempts to disguise as a demonstration of democracy “Schön, was alles in einer Demokratie möglich ist”,⁸⁶ is further proof of the problematic stance adopted by *Der Standard*, which displayed a move from its traditionally more liberal attitudes. The stances adopted by the broadsheet press differentiated themselves therefore only slightly from their tabloid counterparts, merely disguising their reactionary and sometimes anti-democratic views behind a façade of intellectualism, which manifested itself solely in the hypocritical and supercilious criticism of the tabloid press and in their elevated language employed to conceal the populist undertones of their attitudes.

In the light of the uniformity of the press criticism of *Heldenplatz*, the pro-Bernhard/Peymann stance adopted by the *Arbeiter-Zeitung* and the *Volksstimme* sets these publications in a clearly oppositional role as a counterpoint to the aggressive criticism of Bernhard in the majority of the Austrian press. Both of these left-wing publications provided a critical response to the irresponsible journalism of the tabloid press, with *Volksstimme* even speculating on the possibility of legal action against the *Krone*, *Wochenpresse* and *Kurier*, as “sie alle zitierten hemmungslos, ohne sich um Vorabdruck und Urheberrechte zu kümmern”⁸⁷ and both attacked calls for censorship, claiming the public was intelligent enough to come to its own conclusions since “nicht jeder läßt sich seine Meinung vom “Boulevard”, einer Partei oder Wochenzeitung verkauen, bevor er sie ausspricht”.⁸⁸ Whilst the refusal of *Arbeiter-Zeitung* and *Volksstimme* to pass comment on *Heldenplatz* itself before the premiere provided a more responsible voice within the debate, the emotional language of their articles destroys any myth of unbiased journalism, as politicians were attacked as “geistige Gartenzwerge” and “unaufgeklärte Kinder”.⁸⁹ In this fashion both *Arbeiter-Zeitung* and *Volksstimme* inadvertently contributed to the inherent dynamism of the *Heldenplatz* scandal, ironically facilitating the continuation of the discussions they so vehemently criticise.

In analysing the plethora of articles which preceded the premiere of *Heldenplatz*, it is already possible to identify certain characteristics of this media

⁸⁵ Peter Sichrovsky, ‘Stürmt den Heldenplatz!’, *Der Standard*, 4 November 1988.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Gerald Grassl, ‘Bernhards “Heldenplatz” gibt es nicht!’, *Volksstimme*, 12 October 1988.

⁸⁸ Fritz Muliari, ‘Das Publikum soll über “Heldenplatz” urteilen’, *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, 21 October 1988.

⁸⁹ I.h., ‘Bernhard lesen!’, *Volksstimme*, 11 October 1988.

scandal. The first and most patent facet of the debate is the repeated sidelining of the text itself, making evident that *Heldenplatz* was merely a pretext for a wider political and cultural debate motivated by the ongoing discussion of Austrian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* sparked off by the Waldheim-Affair. This topic of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* was, however, equally sidelined by the press, as this aspect of Bernhard's work was generally ignored, his criticism of Austria being dismissed as inappropriate without any consideration of the truth-content of Schuster's statements. Secondly, we can observe a certain hypocrisy within the debate, not only in the discussion on the freedom of the arts, but furthermore in the respect that the majority of newspapers ironically criticised many aspects of Bernhard's work which are to be found in their own journalistic practices. The attacks on Bernhard's generalising statements, for example "wer aber auf alles schießt, trifft nichts",⁹⁰ were reflected in the newspapers' own generalisations, which based their criticism of *Heldenplatz* as a whole on a very limited selection of quotes and were not over-selective in their attacks on left-wing politicians and Bernhard-supporters. Frequent criticism of Bernhard's hyperbolic statements equally found its counterpart in the exaggerated response to *Heldenplatz*, which even went as far as to present the play as the possible cause of Austria's downfall.⁹¹

The Premiere

The overblown media circus surrounding *Heldenplatz* came to its climax on 4th November 1988 at the play's premiere. However, even on this occasion, the play itself faded into the background, as press attention focussed on the promised scandal *outside* the Burgtheater. Thus journalists abandoned their attacks on the content of Bernhard's play, replacing criticism of Peymann, Bernhard and *Heldenplatz* with sensationalist headlines such as "Burgtheater heute unter Polizeischutz!",⁹² with *Die Presse* proclaiming "Kein Platz für falsche Helden. Die Thomas Bernhard Uraufführung im Burgtheater findet unter Polizeischutz statt".⁹³ The parallels between the two articles, typical of the populist stance of both conservative publications, do not stop at the headline, as both went on to criticise the international media "die natürlich ihre

⁹⁰ Rau, "Ollas Vabrecha", *Kurier*, 8 October 1988.

⁹¹ Cato, 'Vor Sonnenuntergang', *Krone*, 11 October 1988.

⁹² Front page headline, *Krone*, 4 November 1988.

⁹³ Hans Haider, Manfred Kadi, Ernst Molden, 'Kein Platz für falsche Helden. Die Thomas Bernhard Uraufführung im Burgtheater findet unter Polizeischutz statt', *Die Presse*, 4 November 1988.

Sensation haben wollen”,⁹⁴ evidently ignoring the irony of this criticism, and speculated on the fairness of Peymann’s ticket allocation, suggesting that there was an attempt to edit the audience and complaining that “Noch nie wurde im Großen Haus der Burg ein Stück so oft und beinahe en suite gespielt – und übrigens ohne die Stammabonnenten”.⁹⁵ This suggestion of foul-play, in combination with the calls to readers to storm Heldenplatz, can further be viewed as the press’s final offensive in its attempt to create a scandal around *Heldenplatz*. In the light of this evident scandal-mongering the accusations that Peymann planned this scandal “weil man offensichtlich mit dem Stück selbst keine Bäume ausreißen kann”,⁹⁶ exemplify the hypocrisy within the press, which attempted to displace the responsibility for this “Riesenwirbel”⁹⁷ entirely onto Peymann and Bernhard.

It is equally interesting to note that it is at the climax of the *Heldenplatz* debate that the most shocking “article” of the entire affair is published, unsurprisingly in the *Krone*. This “article” took the form of a self-promoting advertisement in the *Krone* itself, depicting the Burgtheater in flames with the subtext: “Heute, 19.00 Uhr: Heldenplatz-Premiere. Was wird gespielt? Was wird verspielt? Die Krone läßt sich nichts vorspielen. Und sagt, was sich hinter den Kulissen abspielt. Natürgemäß! ... uns ist nichts zu heiß!”.⁹⁸ The obvious parallels to the images of *Kristallnacht* thus form the apex of the *Krone*’s latent quasi-fascistic stance, gaining unfortunate poignancy not only through its affirmation of the play’s claims of continuing anti-Semitism in Austria, but furthermore through the fifty year commemoration of the November pogroms. This highly dubious attitude towards the premiere was equally reflected in Hans Magenschab’s article “Die Denunziation” in *Wochenpresse*, where the importance of this *Gedenkjahr* was trivialised, with the claim that not 1938 but rather 1918 was “die wirkliche Tragödie der österreichischen Menschheit”,⁹⁹ remembering the 10,000 Austrian soldiers who never returned from the prisoner of war camps after the First World War. This evident perpetuation of Austria’s victim myth, albeit in the context of the First World War, and the refusal of a negative portrayal of the *Anschluss* is a clear sign of Austria’s inadequate *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, reflected and perpetuated by the press. The preliminary

⁹⁴ Peter Gnam, ‘Bei “Heldenplatz”-Premiere Polizeischutz für die Burg’, *Krone*, 4 November 1988.

⁹⁵ Hans Haider, Manfred Kadi, Ernst Molden, ‘Kein Platz für falsche Helden. Die Thomas Bernhard Uraufführung im Burgtheater findet unter Polizeischutz statt’, *Die Presse*, 4 November 1988.

⁹⁶ Peter Gnam, ‘Warten auf Peymann’, *Krone*, 4 November 1988.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Anon, ‘Das Theater um die Burg’, *Krone*, 4 November 1988.

⁹⁹ Hans Magenschab, ‘Die Denunziation’, *Wochenpresse*, 4 November 1988.

Heldenplatz debate thus finds its logical conclusion on 4th November, as final attempts to create a scandal coalesced with further attacks on Peymann and all new levels of xenophobic, anti-Semitic and populist views were revealed.

The Aftermath

Considering the extent and the vehemence of the debate surrounding *Heldenplatz*, it would be reasonable to expect that the sensationalist press would have revelled in their self-created scandal, as protestors did indeed gather outside and inside the premiere, causing certain disruption to the performance. This was, however, not the case. Instead the post-premiere debate was characterised by a deliberate attempt to play down the scandal, as almost all newspapers supported the belief that “die erwarteten massiven Protesten [...] blieben aus”.¹⁰⁰ It is surprisingly the reports in the *Krone* which contributed most to the belittlement of the protests, which are reduced to “ein kleiner Haufen Pferdemit”¹⁰¹ created by “eine mikroskopisch kleine Bürgerliste”.¹⁰² The startling contrast to the normally sensationalist journalism of the *Krone* can be explained as a delayed recognition that the press had merely supported Bernhard’s intents through their attempts to create and sustain a scandal. This recognition is evident in the post-premiere reports of many publications, who further attempted to deny their own role within the affair, placing instead the blame entirely on Peymann and Bernhard who were accused of playing “ein zynisches Spiel”,¹⁰³ whose goal was to demonstrate to the world “wie mies wir [die Österreicher] eigentlich sind und wie recht jeder dumpf-räsonierende Österreich-Beschimpfer hat”.¹⁰⁴ These accusations coalesced with a sentiment of self-pity, as the press attempted to present themselves and their readers as the victims of Bernhard’s dastardly plans, claiming “jetzt stehen wir alle ein wenig verloren auf dem Heldenplatz”,¹⁰⁵ and ignoring entirely the active role of the press in perpetuating this scandal, which would otherwise have aroused little public interest.¹⁰⁶ This hypocritical morality represents a further aspect of the biased press reception of *Heldenplatz*, which emotionalised the issues surrounding the play, creating the impression that their

¹⁰⁰ Peter Baldinger, “‘Heldenplatz’-Premiere verlief ohne Skandale”, *Krone*, 5 November 1988.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Werner Krause, ‘Im Heldendunst’, *Kleine Zeitung*, 6 November 1988.

¹⁰³ Franz Ferdinand Wolf, ‘Ein zynisches Theaterspiel’, *Kurier*, 5 November 1988.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ The *Volksstimme* goes as far as to describe the behaviour of the conservative press as creating “eine pogromartige Stimmung, um ihr Publikum aufzuheizen”. Lutz Holzinger, ‘Dieser Wahnsinn hat Methode’, *Volksstimme*, 5 November 1988.

readers have been personally attacked by Bernhard and Peymann. In a wider sense this self-victimisation also demonstrates a further facet of the Austrian victim myth, obscuring problematic issues in Austrian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* through a combination of self-pity and externalisation of responsibility.

Reviews of *Heldenplatz*

As reflected in the structure of my analysis, the actual reviews of the play itself form an insignificant fraction of the media attention, numbering only fifteen amongst the some three hundred articles dedicated to the scandal. In comparison to the variety of articles published and the different stances adopted by the Austrian press preliminary to the premiere of *Heldenplatz*, the uniformity of the reviews of the actual performance present a disappointing anti-climax to the otherwise passionate debate. Once again we are confronted with a series of articles ostensibly providing literary criticism of *Heldenplatz*, but whose focus evidently lies elsewhere. This continuation of the sidelining of the text is evident on two levels. Literary reporting of this play firstly demonstrated a tendency to regard *Heldenplatz* not as a play in its own right but rather as paradigmatic of Bernhard's "Österreich-Beschimpfung", with the effect that several articles presented a rather generalised approach to their criticism of *Heldenplatz*, considering Bernhard's style, previous works and their reception in a far wider context. This is characterised by sweeping generalisations, "Bernhard liebt die Pose des Geistesaristokraten",¹⁰⁷ whose relevance to the text itself are minor, and comparisons to the reception of previous works,¹⁰⁸ which do very little to aid our understanding of *Heldenplatz* itself. This fulfils the further function of underlining the press criticism of *Heldenplatz* that it was "nichts Neues",¹⁰⁹ presenting merely a composition of previous Bernhard texts. The self-referential and self-legitimising element of this argument equally constitutes a continuation of the tactics employed by the press in creating and sustaining the scandal.

The second facet of this sidelining reveals itself in the emphasis placed on the surrounding scandal and the reaction of the audience, the attention paid to which

¹⁰⁷ Hans Haider, 'Geistesadel – so banal wie geschwätzig', *Die Presse*, 7 November 1988.

¹⁰⁸ For example, H. Haider-Pregler compares the reception of *Heldenplatz* to that of *Der Theatermacher*. H. Haider-Pregler, 'Verstörung über eine Erregung', *Wiener Zeitung*, 7 November 1988.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

almost overshadows the criticism of the play itself.¹¹⁰ This emphasis on “das Theater draußen” confirms the suspicion already expressed that the debate surrounding *Heldenplatz* was less occupied with the play itself than with the issues of Austrian identity and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, as well as the promotion of a new sense of xenophobic patriotism. The focus of this sidelining was ironically employed by the press itself as a justification for further criticism on *Heldenplatz* that “Wir waren besser”¹¹¹ i.e. that the scandal outside was more interesting than the play itself, demonstrating anew the self-referential manner in which the media here exploited their own self-created scandal.

Within the criticism of *Heldenplatz* itself several unifying features can also be identified, which are to be found across the journalistic spectrum. The most frequent criticism raised against the performance was the length of the play, generally considered to be excessively long, creating an “ennuyierende Monotonie”.¹¹² Whilst this criticism is to be found without exception in every review, it was only Alfred Pfoser’s article in the *Salzburger Nachrichten*, whose reporting of the *Heldenplatz* scandal was remarkably distanced in comparison to the Vienna-based press, which considered the possibility that the lengthy first act may indeed be a further provocative technique. Pfoser suggests that the structure of the performance, which delayed the play’s infamous tirades was aimed at enraging “die armen Leute, die da von den Politikersprüchen und Zeitungen gelockt, ins Theater kamen”,¹¹³ who were merely interested in participating in the scandal. The absence of any reflection on this possibility in the remaining articles confirms Wolfgang Reiter’s view that “[e]in Teil des Publikums quittiert die erste Szene mit “Langweile”-Rufen. Das Feuilleton plappert diesen Vorwurf tags darauf nach”,¹¹⁴ ironically reversing the influence of the press in the scandal preceding the premiere. Attacks on the performance of *Heldenplatz* are equally uniform in their pedantry, as minor aspects of the play, such as the clumsiness of Annaliese Römer’s (Frau Zittel) attempts at ironing, were presented as grave directional errors deemed to have detracted significantly from the overall impact of the play. These petty claims that “simple Regiefehler stören nach

¹¹⁰ See for example Kurt Wimmer, ‘In Bernhard’s Falle’, *Kleine Zeitung*, 6 November 1988, which begins not with a quote from the text itself but rather from the audience “Als oben auf der Galerie der Ruf “Gott schütze Österreich!” ertönte [...]”, placing the emphasis on the reaction of the audience rather than the content of the play itself.

¹¹¹ Peter Huemer, ‘Wir waren besser’, *Der Standard*, 7 November 1988.

¹¹² Kurt Kahl, ‘Ein Grantnigl macht sich Luft’, *Kurier*, 6 November 1988.

¹¹³ Alfred Pfoser, ‘Der liebe Onkel schleudert Pamphlete’, *Salzburger Nachrichten*, 7 November 1988.

¹¹⁴ Wolfgang Reiter, ‘Experiment am Ring’, *Falter*, 11 November 1988.

wie vor gute Konzepte”¹¹⁵ reflect the lack of seriousness with which the play itself was treated, as preposterous reasons were sought to justify the overall negativity of their criticism.

The selection of the passages to come under closer analysis within the reviews is equally revealing. With very few exceptions the criticism of the play was based exclusively on those passages previously published in the *Krone*,¹¹⁶ suggesting not only that judgement had already been passed before the performance but also that “die selektive Rezeption macht taub, macht blind für die Charakter-Zeichnung der Figuren”.¹¹⁷ This view is confirmed by the absence of any comprehensive analysis of Bernhard’s characters or thematics, as focus was placed on the superficial content of the play, than on its deeper significance. One notable exception is to be found again in Pfoser’s article, where the character of Robert Schuster undergoes comprehensive analysis, considering the significance of his psychological state for the intended message of the play “er schleudert seine Pamphlete nicht als größenwahnsinniges Ungeheuer oder als völlig überschnappter Neurotiker, sondern er gibt den lieben, guten, melancholischen Onkel, den man gerne reden läßt”.¹¹⁸

Finally, the reviews are united by a tendency to separate the text from its performance, the latter receiving the praise which the former is denied. Thus a highly positive evaluation of the actors’ achievements (“Wolfgang Gasser [...] feiert als Bruder des Selbstmörders den größten Triumph seiner Karriere”)¹¹⁹ was coupled with the qualification that this was despite and not due to Bernhard’s text: “sie [Annaliese Römer] ist ein hinreißendes Bühnenwesen, das aus nichts viel macht”.¹²⁰ This is further evident in the unanimous praise accorded to Karl-Ernst Herrmann for his symbolic scenery, which “schafft exakt jene Überhöhung kultivierten Wiener Bürgertums, die dem Text nicht gelingt”,¹²¹ clearly ignoring the fact that this scenery represented the theatrical realisation of Bernhard’s meticulous *Raummetaphorik*. This tendency clearly represents an attempt to exclude Bernhard from the success of the *Heldenplatz* premiere, sidelining him in the same fashion as his play.

In considering the vituperative media attacks on Thomas Bernhard it is important to note that Bernhard himself cannot entirely be viewed as the victim as

¹¹⁵ Gerald Grassl, ‘Bühne Österreich’, *Volksstimme*, 6 October 1988.

¹¹⁶ See for example Irmgard Steiner, ‘Mensch, ärgere dich nicht!’, *Neues Volksblatt*, 7 November 1988.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Alfred Pfoser, ‘Der liebe Onkel schleudert Pamphlete’, *Salzburger Nachrichten*, 7 November 1988.

¹¹⁹ Heinz Sichrovsky, ‘Im Zaubergarten der Vorurteile’, *Krone*, 6 November 1988.

¹²⁰ Hans Haider, ‘Geistesadel – so banal wie geschwätzig’, *Die Presse*, 7 November 1988.

¹²¹ Peter Huemer, ‘Wir waren besser’, *Der Standard*, 7 November 1988.

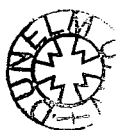
there is every reason to believe that Bernhard indeed profited from this increased media attention, incorporating the emotions aroused by it into the final version of *Heldenplatz*. In addition to the unproven speculation that Bernhard himself was responsible for the leaking of those controversial passages, there is also concrete evidence of his attempts to manipulate the press and exploit their need for sensation. In a spontaneous interview with *Kurier* and *Basta*, Bernhard deliberately provoked further criticism through his claims that “[d]ie Fassung, über die sich jetzt alle aufregen, war ja viel zu schwach! [...] Darum hab’ ich das Stück verschärft und noch viel Scheußlicheres gefunden”¹²² and his denial that his characters are purely fictional: “das ist alles autobiographisch”,¹²³ invalidating the theory often used in the liberal press in his defence. It has often been claimed that the reception of Bernhard’s works is an integral part of the work itself, as “die Publikumsreaktion wird [...] zu einem festen Bestandteil in der Konzeption des Dramas und seiner Inszenierung”.¹²⁴ However, this theory takes on literal value in the case of *Heldenplatz*, where the media scandal surrounding the play actually became part of the performance itself, as the scandal created by the press added new dimensions to the performance of the play. This topic is dealt with thoroughly in an article by Wolfgang Reiter in *Falter*, which analyses the effect of the preceding media attention on the audience and on the play itself, viewing the audience as part of the drama. Whilst Reiter attributes the active participation of the audience to Bernhard’s skills: “[d]as Publikum spielt seinen Part, als hätte ihm Bernhard die Worte in den Mund gelegt”,¹²⁵ the role of the press in preparing the audience for their role must equally be stressed, as only a prior knowledge of certain passages enabled this extent of audience participation. Reiter further views the audience’s interjections, almost exclusively to be heard during those passages quoted in *Krone*, as an enhancement of the play itself, for example in the final scene, where the cries of Robert Schuster combine not only with the auditory hallucinations of Hedwig Schuster but mix equally with the cries of the audience, underlining Bernhard’s theory of continuing fascism in 1988. It is thus evident that Bernhard, not unaccustomed to hostile press reception, exploited the sensationalism of the Austrian press in order to ensure an audience reaction which would support his opinions on Austria and its continuing fascism.

¹²² Thomas Bernhard in interview with Conny Bischofberger, ‘Herr Bernhard, was haben Sie gegen Österreich?’, *Kurier*, 14 October 1988.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Gropp, p. 56.

¹²⁵ Wolfgang Reiter, ‘Experiment am Ring’, *Falter*, 11 November 1988.



Conclusion

The press debate surrounding *Heldenplatz* in many ways corresponds to Panzer's theory of Austrian press reception and the status of socially-critical literature in the Austrian press. Here, we can observe a clear personalisation of the literary debate, which serves to dismiss Bernhard's criticism of Austrian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* as the tirades of a psychologically unstable individual. The sidelining of the play itself within the debate and the concentration on public and political reactions further proves Panzer's suggestion that the Austrian press is more interested in the sensational "Drumherum" than in the literary work itself and its social or political message. In contrast to Panzer's hypothesis, however, the reception of *Heldenplatz* is not characterised by a depoliticising of the debate. It would, however, be erroneous to confuse the (unnecessary) intervention of Austria's politicians in this debate with an in-depth self-reflective political consideration of Bernhard's criticism. Indeed, this *over-politicisation* of the *Heldenplatz* discussion was in fact detrimental to the play's social criticism, which was obfuscated by the political appropriation of Bernhard's work for an ostensibly ethical debate on the freedom of the arts.

The prominence of the *Heldenplatz* debate within the Austrian press, when compared with the media silence which characterised the reception of Lebert, Fritsch and Jelinek, would at first glance appear to confirm common consensus on the progression of Austrian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in the late 1980s. For the first time we are presented with an open discussion on *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in the mainstream Austrian press, which directly reproduces Austro-critical statements and does not restrict the treatment of socially critical literature to the culture section. Despite this direct confrontation with Austria's problematic past, it is evident that this debate cannot be equated to an ethically responsible mode of remembering or a more enlightened and honest attitude towards *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Firstly, the widespread emotionalising of the debate, the personalising of Bernhard's criticism and the continued sidelining of the play render manifest the inadequacy of the press treatment of *Heldenplatz*. Moreover, the discussion of the play's accusations does not represent an acceptance of the relevance of this criticism; on the contrary, the vehement condemnation of the play in the press clearly signifies an outright rejection of the necessity and importance of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. The aggressive manner in which this rejection is presented, combined with the underlying fascist tendencies in certain articles, thus contradicts the rather optimistic view of new phase

of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in post-Waldheim Austria. Indeed, this very public criticism of Austro-critical literature worryingly suggests that the silence surrounding the once taboo subject of Austrian complicity in National Socialism has been replaced by an outright rejection of responsibility, expressed in a highly defensive form of patriotism.

Robert Schindel: *Gebürtig*

Robert Schindel's debut novel *Gebürtig* distinguishes itself from the previous four texts in its predominantly Jewish perspective, as Schindel presents us not only with an account of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in the traditional sense of Austria coming to terms with its complicity in the Nazi atrocities but furthermore with an analysis of the various modes of Jewish *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. This different approach to the issue raises new questions in the consideration of the novel's reception and the press response to Austro-critical works. Schindel's consideration of Jewish *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, post-Shoah Jewish identity and self-perception is twofold, exploring the possibility of coming to terms with the Holocaust through the individual experiences of his characters and further considering the role of literature in this process, experimenting with various narrative strategies in order to assess their effectiveness.

Holocaust Survivors

Whilst *Gebürtig* focuses mainly on the *Nachgeborene*, the post-Shoah generation, Schindel equally considers the problems with which first-generation Holocaust survivors are confronted, the most prominent of which are Hermann Gebirtig and Ilse Jacobssohn-Singer. Despite similar experiences of Nazi persecution, each presents a very different approach to the past and their identity as Jewish survivors. On the one hand, Ilse Jacobssohn-Singer is characterised by a desire to verbalise her experiences and combat forgetting through open dialogue on the Holocaust in schools, corresponding to Cathy Caruth's trauma theory which suggests that "the inherent departure, within trauma, from the moment of its first occurrence, is also a means of passing out of the isolation imposed by the event: that the history of a trauma, in its inherent belatedness, can only take place through the listening of another".¹ Further, her frank description of her time in Theresienstadt represents a direct confrontation with her past and a very public process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* can, in the light of Caruth's theory, be seen to present a positive cultural exchange, as Caruth considers that "trauma itself may provide the very link between cultures".² The narrativising process, however, remains incomplete, as her sub-conscious has repressed all memories of Auschwitz: "Ich kann mich bloß noch ans Bad erinnern, daß

¹ Cathy Caruth, 'Trauma and Experience', in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Cathy Caruth (London, Maryland: John Hopkins Press, 1995), pp. 3-12 (pp. 10-11).

² *Ibid.*, p. 11.

uns die Haare geschoren wurden. Der nächste Erinnerungsfetzen war schon nach Auschwitz" (p. 295). Her inability to process or verbalise her experiences in the concentration camp correspond to the view frequently expressed in connection with literary works of this genre that the particular atrocities of the Holocaust, symbolised here by Auschwitz, remain incomprehensible and indescribable, a "Wunde, die man nicht berühren wollte, die man verdeckte und versteckte".³

Intertwined with Ilse Jacobssohn-Singer's narrative is the fictional account of Hermann Gebirtig's return to Vienna as witness in the trial against former concentration camp commander Anton Egger. Gebirtig, who emigrated to America after persecution by the Nazis and the loss of his family in the Holocaust, forms the counterpart to Ilse's open relationship with the past and her Jewish identity, representing an unwillingness to identify himself with his Jewish heritage: "Soll ich mich wieder die Lieder meines Cousins Mordechai anhören, statt mir die Ohren zu verstopfen" (p. 90). Gebirtig's personal *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* substitutes a direct confrontation with the past with a conscious suppression of his experiences, as he seeks refuge in writing:

Ich will, daß die Schweine lachen, wenn sie aus meinen Stücken kommen. Ich möchte selber lachen. Welcher Jude ist sich witzig vorgekommen, als er den Satz erfunden hat: der Weg der Erlösung heißt Erinnerung. Was soll denn da erlöst werden bei welcher Erinnerung (p. 147).

Indeed Gebirtig's awareness of his Jewish heritage appears to be reduced to his choice of sexual partner, "immer polnische Jüdinnen" (p. 89). Schindel's first-generation characters thus mediate a conflicting depiction of Jewish *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, intrinsically connected to their acceptance or rejection of their Jewish heritage.

Opferkinder

Robert Schindel, himself a child of Holocaust victims, summarises the problem of second-generation Jews thus:

Wir, die Generation nach Celan, wir haben nicht einmal am eigenen Leib diese beiden Leben [before and after the Holocaust]. Hinsichtlich der eigenen

³ Ruth Beckermann, *Ungehörig: Österreicher und Juden nach 1945* (Vienna: Löcker, 1989), p. 120.

Wurzeln haben wir es also schwer, aber andererseits müssen wir den Tod in uns nicht mit irgendwelchen Strategien real überleben.⁴

This fragmented relationship with the past and with their Jewish heritage characterises Jewish *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* within the novel, with each character struggling to come to terms with his/her identity in post-Holocaust Austria. As with the First Generation, the attitudes and perspectives of the *Nachgeborene* differ greatly, as the protagonists polarise themselves between the “Judeozentristen” (p. 142) and those “[denen] die Geschichte ein Scheißhaufen ist” (p. 264). Through both standpoints Schindel highlights the existential problems facing the Second Generation, obligated through their parentage to derive their identity from historical events in which they were not personally involved.

Denounced by Paul Hirschfeld as “Judeozentristen”, Hannah Löwenstein and Emanuel Katz represent an acute awareness of the defining role of their Jewish parentage in forming their identity. Whilst this conscious acceptance of their heritage would appear to provide a positive contrast to the uncertain identity of the remaining Jewish characters, Löwenstein and Katz’s relationship to the past and to their self-perception is not unproblematic. Central to these problematics is their propensity to define themselves through the application of anti-Semitic images, gaining pleasure from the uncomfortable reaction this provokes in non-Jewish characters: “Emanuel Katz spürte einen aberwitzigen Genuß, hier auf der Nordseeinsel gegenüber diesen fünf Deutschen sich den Judenstern anzuheften” (p. 114). This self-perception through identification with the role imposed by anti-Semites corresponds to a certain degree to the theory that post-Holocaust period produced “eine neue jüdische Identität [entsteht], negativ bestimmt, durch Hitler re-definiert”.⁵ Thus, Katz’s provocative demonstrations of Jewish identity (pp. 110-116) assume a problematic aspect, representing less an emancipated recognition of his heritage than an inability to separate himself from the experiences of his parents. Katz not only enables a definition of identity by anti-Semitic stereotypes but actively relies on these, thus for example finding inspiration for his “Gebirtig” novel through the anti-Semitism of Käthe’s brothers (p. 162).

⁴ Robert Schindel, *Gott schütze uns vor den guten Menschen. Jüdisches Gedächtnis: Auskunftsbüro der Angst* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1995), p. 31.

⁵ Isaac Deutscher, in John Bunzl, *Der lange Arm der Erinnerung* (Vienna/Cologne/Graz: Böhlau, 1987), p. 81.

The definition of oneself through the “other”⁶ is exaggerated to extreme proportions by the racial theories proposed by Hannah Löwenstein, which force a polarisation of the characters, partitioning them into race-defined categories. The extremity of her views is exposed in her drunken diatribes, whereby she declares “unauthentisch” the relationship between the north-German Käthe and the Chilean Armando (p. 30) and accuses Katz “daß er sich mit solchen Frauen selbst blondieren wollte” (p. 29). The unmistakable resonances of Nazi theory of *Rassentrennung* in Löwenstein’s discourse serve to further underline the inescapable influence of anti-Semitic ideology on her identity, as she herself reduces her personal identity to her racial origin “Jud ist Jud” (p. 142). Löwenstein and Katz thus represent a specific mode of self-perception which “erfolgt durchwegs in der Auseinandersetzung mit dem Bild, das die Antisemiten ‘vom Juden’ entworfen haben [...] der Versuch, es in das Selbstbild zu integrieren oder sich davon abzugrenzen”⁷, with evident emphasis on the former.

The omnipresence of anti-Semitism as a defining element of Jewish identity manifests itself conversely in Peter Adel and Paul Hirschfeld’s denial of their Jewish origins or their refusal to accept the formative role of these in their identity. Adel, a renowned theatre director, consistently seeks to conceal his Jewish parentage in a bizarre attempt to reinstate his father’s honour “denn da sein Vater als Jude das Land verlassen hatte, beschloß er, es als Deutscher wieder zu betreten” (p. 71). Particularly shocking here is Adel’s sub-conscious acceptance of anti-Semitic theory that Jewish and German are two incompatible terms and that the latter is undoubtedly superior to the former. Similarly, Paul Hirschfeld internalises Nazi ideology that the Jewish use of German represents a degradation of the language, thus exposing language as a central component of Jewish identity and assimilation. Hirschfeld’s indignation at Demant’s remark “Dein Verhältnis zur Sprache hat was Jüdisches” (p. 275) and his counter-assertion that “ich schreibe ein tadelloses Deutsch” (p. 275) demonstrate a desire for assimilation through language not far removed from the experiences of Schindel.⁸ The problematics of this acceptance of anti-Semitic ideology combined with a rejection of

⁶ Hildegard Kernmayer considers at length Schindel’s illustration of Hegel’s philosophy on identity formation, viewing this as a basis for Schindel’s characterisation. Hildegard Kernmayer, ‘Gebürtig. Ohneland. Robert Schindel: Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Identität’, *Modern Austrian Literature*, 27 (1994), 173-192

⁷ Kernmayer, p. 177.

⁸ Schindel writes: “Ich sprach breites Praterdeutsch und gehörte in der Volksschule dennoch nicht dazu. Das Praterdeutsch wurde umso breiter, je weniger ich dazugehörte, daneben wuchs, verborgen und kräftig aus vermutlich diesem kühlen Grund, mein Hochdeutsch”, Schindel, *Gott schütze uns*, p. 112.

Jewish identity lead us to Schindel's self-reflective question: "Werde ich so zum Vollender der Hitlerschen Judenvernichtung, indem ich mich auch noch lossage?";⁹ which exposes the problematics of Jewish assimilation in post-Holocaust Austria. Thus the legitimacy of Hirschfeld's justification "außerdem lass' ich mir nicht von Hitler vorschreiben, wer ich bin" (p. 264) becomes doubtful, as his rejection of his Jewish origins is less an act of resistance against Nazi stereotypes than an attempt to assimilate himself into German/Austrian society through the use of a "pure" language.

Täterkinder

Schindel renders evident from the outset, however, that *Gebürtig* is intended to consider all "Kinder des Doppeladlers" (p. 7), tackling equally the issue of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* of children of Nazi perpetrators. Central to these thematics is the figure of Konrad Sachs, whose inability to reconcile himself with the past introduces a further facet to the conception of problematic and fragmented identity. His father's participation in the Nazi atrocities in Poland assumes an increasingly dominant role in Sachs's life, as he is plagued by nightmarish visions of childhood memories of the concentration camps. This aspect of his past manifests itself in the form of the "Prinz von Polen", a childhood alter-ego of Sachs, who increasingly threatens to destroy his adult identity. After a nervous breakdown, Sachs seeks help from Jewish acquaintances and is recommended to narrativise his *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* through writing, as "Ihr Prinz von Polen [...] verträgt das Tageslicht nicht" (p. 332). This advice proves successful, as Sachs is able to separate himself entirely from the "Prinz", thus allowing him to return to his wife (p. 334) and continue to lead a normal life.

This aspect of Schindel's novel has come under frequent criticism, dismissed as "blaß"¹⁰ in comparison to the plight of his Jewish characters and denounced as inappropriately tragic.¹¹ Whilst these views may appear justified on a certain level, an appreciation of Schindel's "perpetuum ironicum"¹² enables a full comprehension of the function of this character within the novel. Far from according Sachs a more tragic

⁹ Schindel, *Gott schütze uns*, p. 28.

¹⁰ Klara Pranter-Eberharter, *Jüdische Selbstdarstellung im Roman Gebürtig von Robert Schindel* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Innsbruck, 1998), p. 54.

¹¹ Sibylle Cramer Rez, 'Büchermarkt: Aus dem literarischen Leben: Robert Schindel, *Gebürtig*', *Deutschlandfunk*, 19 April 1992. Quoted in Kernmayer, p. 188.

¹² Neva Šlibar, 'Anschreiben gegen das Schweigen: Robert Schindel, Ruth Klüger, die Postmoderne und Vergangenheitsbewältigung', in *Jenseits des Diskurses: Literatur und Sprache in der Postmoderne*, ed. by Albert Berger and Gerda Elisabeth Moser (Vienna: Passagen, 1994), pp. 337-56 (p. 349).

fate than his Jewish counterparts, Schindel employs this rather pathetic character as a means of ironising and criticising the self-pity created by the perpetrators' children, who sought often to place themselves in the role of the victim. That Sachs is not intended to be a tragic figure becomes at the latest apparent in his exaggerated monologues, where excessive self-pity obscures all reason:

Präzise teilte er mir mit, was für eine komplette Nazisau er geworden wäre, hätte er zwanzig Jahre früher gelebt, und als Beleg dienten ihm die Hände des Vaters, die Stimme, sein ganzer Habitus. (p. 330)

The utter ridiculousness of this self-created guilt complex is exposed in the absurd self-reproach that the car accident in which Demant was injured is evidence of his latent anti-Semitism: "Es ist soweit. Jetzt beginne ich damit, Juden zu verwunden. Das ist erst der Anfang" (p. 327). His "messianischer Größenwahn"¹³ further assumes an aspect of specific contemporary criticism through Sachs's method of exorcising the past, as his "unappetitliche Geschichte" (p. 339) represents an ironic side-swipe at the deluge of "Väterromane" in the 1980s.¹⁴ Equally problematic in Sachs's process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* is his persistent externalisation of his guilt, mediated through his presentation of this aspect of his identity as a separate persona "sie wissen doch, daß ich mich wegen des Prinzen von meiner Frau Else getrennt hatte" (p. 334), clearly demonstrating a sub-conscious denial of his own personal guilt. Both Kernmayer und Šlibar further regard Sachs's return to married bliss at the end of the novel and its contrast with the continuing inner conflict of the Jewish characters who "kehren in ihre Zersplitterung und Unbehaustheit, in ihr Exil zurück"¹⁵ as indication of Schindel's pessimistic view of the position of Jewish individuals in Austria. Thus it would be inadequate to dismiss the figure of Konrad Sachs as a shortcoming of the novel, since the contrast between his successful - because spurious - *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and the ongoing existential problems facing the novel's Jewish characters evinces a vital element of Jewish and non-Jewish relations in post-Holocaust Austria.

¹³ Šlibar, p. 343.

¹⁴ Reinhold Tauber refers to this literary trend as "der für heuer [1980] befohlene Leitlinie[...]den Vater durch die Mangel Schreibmaschine zu drehen", Reinhold Tauber, 'Das Thema paßt immer', *Oberösterreichische Nachrichten*, 7 July 1980.

¹⁵ Šlibar, p. 346.

Austrian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*

In addition to individual *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, Schindel further takes a critical look at institutionalised and political attitudes in Austria, which corroborate John Bunzl's remarks that Austrian politics are characterised by "Verdrängung, Irritation, Bagatellisierung, Aufrechnung und taktischen Ausflüchten".¹⁶ In *Gebürtig*, Austrian politicians at local and national level seek to trivialise and relativise Austria's role in the Holocaust, dismissing Gebirtig's criticism of Austria as "Übertreibungen, gelt? Die Deutschen sind auch nicht schlecht [as anti-Semites], oder?" (p. 208). The superficiality of the planned award ceremony for Gebirtig is exposed by David Lebensart (based on Simon Wiesenthal) who reveals Austrian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* to be mere lip-service to the international community with no real consequences: "Ich selber habe zum achtzigsten Geburtstag die Goldene bekommen, ich habe mich sehr gefreut. Hatte sich dadurch aber etwas geändert? [...] Hat man je irgend etwas zum Anlaß genommen, um die Emigranten zurückzurufen?" (p. 216). Through the sheer ignorance and insensitivity of the politicians involved in the organisation of the ceremony¹⁷ Schindel provides a satirical yet unfortunately symptomatic portrayal of the standpoint adopted by Austria politicians, setting in context the failed *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* of the novel's characters.

Writing and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*

Described as a self-reflective text,¹⁸ *Gebürtig* brings the act of writing to the forefront of the novel's thematics, considering writing in connection with identity and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. The multiplicity of narrative techniques within the novel, coupled with a transparent writing process, enables Schindel to explore the possibility of a literary *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, which narrativises the trauma of the First and Second Generation. On both a characterological and stylistic level Schindel investigates the role of writing and literature in the process of individual *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, combining his own attempts to narrativise his (inherited) trauma with those of his characters. Neva Šlibar's view that "*Gebürtig* liest sich als ein Versuch, einen Schreibmodus zu finden, der sich den Widersprüchen des noch immer heiklen und schon wieder höchst aktuellen Themas des deutsch/österreichisch-

¹⁶ Bunzl, p. 106.

¹⁷ For example: "»Wo hat denn – außer in Wien – der Gebirtig vorm Krieg gelebt?«, »Nirgends, das heißt, in Ebensee, im Lager«" (p. 210).

¹⁸ Lilian Papenberg, *Filmisches Schreiben* (unpublished master's thesis, University of Klagenfurt, 1998), p. 65.

jüdischen Sprechtabuisierung anzunähern vermag”¹⁹ is thus applicable to both the efforts of the characters to work through the past through writing and to Schindel’s own endeavours. Schindel’s struggle to find a suitable narrative strategy manifests itself in the vast variety of narrative techniques employed, encompassing split-narrators, fiction within the fiction, unconventional chronology, diary form and the integration of (auto)biographical details. The varying degrees of success of these strategies highlight the possibilities offered by literature as well as its restrictions, at the same time underlining the sheer immensity of the trauma to be dealt with.

Literatur: Auskunftsbüro der Angst – Schindel’s collection of essays and the subject of a series of lectures - explores the relationship between writing/literature and combating one’s personal fears. This notion of literature as a method of “Angstbannung”²⁰ forms a recurring motif within the novel, with several protagonists turning to writing in order to deal with the complex issues of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and personal identity. Striking in this trend is the use of *other people’s* stories to combat one’s own fears, as this distance allows them to “verarbeiten [...] die eigenen Ängste in der Darstellung der Ängste der Anderen”.²¹ Whilst Katz recognises the absurdity of his choice of fiction over personal memory, asking himself: “Warum kommt Mama nicht vor in meinem Manuskript? Warum schreibe ich über irgendeinen verbitterten Emigranten von East River statt über die vier überstandenen Selektionen bei Mengele in Birkenau?” (p. 180), it is evident that the distance created by Gebirtig’s fictionality is necessary for Katz’s own coming to terms with his family’s experiences in the Holocaust. The role of writing can also be linked to the concept of self-definition through the “other”, as Graffito’s noting of the events around him leads to a certain self-discovery: “ich hab’s merkwürdig getroffen, bekannt wie ich mir bin durch die fremden Geschichten” (p. 41). This statement functions on a further characterological level, as Demant discovers his own identity through the objectivising of the self, the creation of his alter-ego, Graffito, rendering him the “other”. The therapeutic nature of writing can also be extended to include the Arts in general, as the film director Esther Lichtblau “will ihre Melancholie mittels laufender Bilder verstärken und beenden zugleich” (p. 340) her work ultimately being “einen Film über ihr Vergessen und ihr Erinnern” (p. 350). A similar mode of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* can be found in Peter Adel’s directing of Peter Weiss’s

¹⁹ Šlibar, pp. 341-2.

²⁰ Schindel, *Gott schütze uns*, p. 114.

²¹ Pranter-Eberharter, p. 66.

Die Ermittlung, where his control over the events portrayed on stage compensate for his powerlessness in the struggle to come to terms with his Jewish heritage “ich hab’s ja leicht, weil ich die Tode und Todesängste inszenieren darf [...] mich retten die fremden Schicksale” (p.213).

Having identified literature as an essential component of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, Schindel further explores the means by which this method can be employed. Closely connected to the telling of others’ stories, the use of fiction to deal with the horrors of reality is considered. Schindel himself identifies fiction as the only possible way of approaching the Holocaust, commenting that “um dieses Gedächtnis auch ins Gehirn zu bekommen, also Formen der Identitätsstiftung zu entwickeln, muß dieser Zusammenschluß mit den verschwundenen Vorfahren auf phantastische Weise ausgebildet werden”.²² *Gebürtig* thus becomes not only a description of Katz’s and Sachs’s attempt to deal with the past through writing but can in some respects be viewed as Schindel’s personal act of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*:

Es war schon ein bißchen Kaddisch auf meine Familie [...]. Ich habe mir nicht wirklich was von der Seele geschrieben, sondern würde es eher eine »Angstbannung« nennen. In dem Moment, in dem ich die Angst in Worte fasse, geht sie in mir weg.²³

Schindel’s integration of “facts” and “reality” into the fiction of *Gebürtig* thus reveals the connection between literary and historical events, as the problems of the novel’s protagonists are related to those of their real-life models.²⁴ The apex of these parallels between fiction and reality is to be found in the autobiographical traits which Schindel accords to Demant. Like Schindel, Danny was born in France as the child of two *Widerstandskämpfer* and survived the war in a National Socialist children’s home. The parallels in heritage and indirect experience of the Holocaust (both Schindel and Demant’s fathers were murdered in Dachau), coupled with more banal similarities such as their love for football or their role as a film extra,²⁵ place Schindel in the same position as his other real-life models, whose identity and proximity to their fictional counterparts was often the subject of lengthy speculation. In the context of Schindel’s thematisation of writing, it is however, evident that these (auto)biographical details

²² Schindel, *Gott schütze uns*, pp. 32-33.

²³ Robert Schindel in interview with Clemens Berger, *wortlaut*, <<http://www.hainholz.de/wortlaut/schindel.htm>> [accessed on 9 January 2006].

²⁴ For detailed information on Schindel’s real-life models see Šlibar, p. 345.

²⁵ Schindel had a small role as an extra in Michael Haneke’s filmic adaptation of Ingeborg Bachmann’s *Malina*.

are not solely to be understood as a signal of Schindel's personal *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. These autobiographical elements function rather to underline the novel's pessimistic analysis of the possibility of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, as the widespread failure of all other characters in *Gebürtig*, including Demant/Graffito, to come to terms with the past implies that Schindel's attempts are equally doomed to (at least partial) failure. Thus, Schindel simultaneously identifies the importance of fiction as an *approach* to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* whilst conversely highlighting the limitations of literature in this process.

Central to the thematisation of the act of writing are the novel's two key narrators, Danny and Alexander (Graffito) Demant, who together narrate the majority of the novel's events. Through his fictional alter-ego Danny can observe from a distance the actions and emotions of others and equally gains access to his own "innere Geographie" (p. 57). Throughout the novel Demant and Graffito are set in opposition to each other, Demant representing the "handelndes Ich" and Graffito the "schreibendes Ich". Indeed it is Graffito's lack of involvement and in the narrated events along with his fictionality which allows him a privileged position as omniscient narrator.²⁶ In the course of the novel, however, the roles are reversed, as the "schreibendes Ich" no longer provides motivation for the "handelndes Ich" but rather develops a life of his own, temporarily disappearing from the novel during his relationship with Mascha. The split narrator in *Gebürtig* fulfils a double function within the novel's thematics of fragmented Jewish identity and the role of writing in the process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. The conflict between the two narrators and their very different approaches to life provide the most extreme example of identity crisis within the novel, as Demant can only cope with his relationships to Jewish and non-Jewish characters through his alter-ego. Demant's writing alter-ego thus becomes necessary for his ability to cope with his confrontations with the past, as Demant himself is unable to narrativise his fears in the same manner as Graffito:

»Wenn ich Angst hab, schreib ich's auf« sagt er [Graffito]. Dann ist die Angst im Wort und springt von dort die Leser an, und ich gehe entlang des Donaukanals, und vergnügt bin ich wieder geworden.« (p. 19).

²⁶ Prantner-Eberharter describes Graffito as an "objektiv-notierende Gestalt mit einem »Unlimited Point of View«, der nur durch seinen fiktive Gestalt möglich ist", Prantner-Eberharter, p. 79.

Graffito's motivational role in Demant's life goes beyond his repeated demands to Demant to "tu was, Danny, tu endlich was" (p. 236) to urge him to demonstrate a more profound awareness of his Jewish heritage: "Jetzt wird's Zeit, daß auch du anfängst, dich ins Getümmel zu schmeißen, um den österreichischen Gebürtigkeiten ein Liedl zu fiedeln" (p. 161), rendering Graffito an integral part of Demant's Jewish identity. The conflict between the two narrators, essentially Demant's inner struggle, is thus a paradigmatic example of the fragmented identity under which the novels' characters suffer, manifesting itself here on a narratological level.

Schindel's use of alternating narrators with varying degrees of omniscience furthermore connected to his thematisation of writing and his attempt to find the appropriate method for narrativising the past. As with previous narratological experiments, this aspect of the novel is equally exposed as inadequate in dealing with the trauma of the Holocaust, this inadequacy manifesting itself in the inconsistency of Graffito's narrative position, which mutates from the privileged position of omniscient narrator to a first-person account with limited field of vision. Thus, Graffito is forced to speculate on aspects of events which were previously accessible for him: "Ich versuche mir vorzustellen, welche Träume sie träumt" (p. 234). The simultaneity of his loss of omniscience and his relationship to Mascha, including his unsuccessful efforts to help her to work through her troubled relationship to the past, renders evident the connection between failed *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and the failure of this narrative strategy. Schindel thus reveals anew the inadequacy of literature when faced with the task of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, again failing to find a narrative method suited to dealing with the issues of the Holocaust and Jewish identity.

The formal structure of Schindel's novel plays an equally essential role in underlining *Gebürtig's* themes of fragmented identity and the continuing influence of the past. A striking feature of the novel's structure is its extreme fragmentation, as the seven chapters, prologue and epilogue are subdivided into as many as twenty smaller sections each with an average length of two pages. This radical dissection of the text is further highlighted by the frequent alternation of narrators, as several perspectives are offered in one chapter, often changing without indication. The connection of this structural fragmentation to individual characters through the chapters' subtitles (Enge, Kälte, Gebürtig, Egge, Achtung, Weite and Hitze) which

“verweisen auf die individuelle Wahrnehmungen einzelner Protagonisten”,²⁷ further underlines the interdependence of *Gebürtig*'s structure and thematics of identity.

As demonstrated, the considerable influence of the past and the Holocaust in the present-day lives of the second generation is central to the question of identity, and is certainly a contributing factor to its problematic nature. Achieved to a great extent through the novel's fragmented structure and multiple narrative strands, *Gebürtig* provides us with a non-linear chronology, where events of the 1940s are integrated into the narrative present. This “Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen”²⁸ is mainly to be found in the integration of personal memory into the narrative present, in passages such as Ilse Jacobssohn-Singer's account of her experiences in Theresienstadt. In addition to this conventional intertwining of past and present through personal recollection, Schindel further employs a more abstract chronology, which simultaneously presents us with events in the 1940s and 1980s. In the two passages intertwining Demant's banal shopping trips with an account of his uncle's perilous Resistance activities (pp. 173-175, 239-242) we are confronted with several unmarked changes in focalisation between Danny and his uncle, further highlighting the connection between the two characters. The reliance of this relationship on their common Jewish heritage is underlined by the fact that Josef did not survive Auschwitz and could therefore have had little direct contact with Danny, emphasising once again the novel's insistence on the importance of “Gebürtigkeit”: Furthermore, this integration of past events into the narrative present plays a significant role in the novel's thematics, as “auch wenn der Roman, wie immer wieder betont wurde, von den Nachgeborenen einer Generation handelt, darf man nicht außer Acht lassen, daß er neben seinem Bezug zur Gegenwart ebenso stark an die Vergangenheit anknüpft, ja sie überhaupt erst zum **dem** Thema macht”.²⁹ Finally, Schindel's use of unconventional chronology can also be identified as a further facet in his search for an adequate narrative strategy, transgressing chronological conventions in an attempt to achieve literary *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.

The diversity and heterogeneity of Schindel's narratological techniques thus illustrate his thematisation of the role of writing and literature in Jewish *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Through this plethora of styles Schindel draws attention

²⁷ Renate Posthofen, ‘Erinnerte Geschichte(n): Robert Schindels Roman *Gebürtig*’, *Modern Austrian Literature*, 27 (1994), 193-211 (p. 194).

²⁸ Posthofen, p. 204.

²⁹ Posthofen, p. 194.

to the act of writing, rendering transparent his search for a suitable literary means of working through the past. Incongruities on a narratological level are thus to be understood as an indication of the inadequacy of literature when faced with the problems of post-war Jewish identity, as Schindel suggests a partial failure in attempts at literary *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.

Press Reception

The polarisation of the press reception of *Gebürtig*, particularly in the German press has frequently been commented upon in critical literature on Schindel's work, often forming the basis for further analysis of the novel.³⁰ The Austrian press, however, accorded Schindel's debut novel almost unanimous praise (the only exception being Klaus Kastberger article in *Falter*³¹), celebrating at length both the thematic and stylistic elements of the novel. Whilst the reception of *Gebürtig* distinguishes itself from the previous case studies through its overall perceptive and frank treatment of the novel's themes, it is still possible to identify an underlining desire amongst the reviewers to distance themselves from the Austrian attitudes criticised by Schindel, lending a more problematic aspect to their reviews.

Distancing

A more careful examination of the treatment of *Gebürtig* in the press renders evident that the apparent candidness with which the novel's *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* theme is treated cannot be equated to a responsible confrontation with Austria's past, as various mechanisms are employed in order to distance the reviewer's from any suggestion of collective responsibility. Thus Alfred Pfoser's article in *Salzburger Nachrichten* seeks to distance itself from the novel's themes from the outset, as its title 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung auf wienerisch'³² implies that the relevance of Schindel's novel is localised. The emphasis placed on the novel's treatment of "Wiener Juden" in the "Wiener Milieu", who meet in the "Wiener Kaffeehäusern" suggests that Schindel's "einschlägige rhetorische Übungen zum Thema *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*",³³ whilst interesting and brilliant, are of little or no relevance to the newspaper's readership in Salzburg. Thus Pfoser's criticism of

³⁰ See for example Kernmayer, pp. 186-188, Posthofen, pp. 193-4, 202.

³¹ Klaus Kastberger, 'Fürze zum Frühstück, nach ihrem Geschmack', *Falter*, 15-21 May 1992, p. 30.

³² Alfred Pfoser, 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung auf wienerisch', *Salzburger Nachrichten*, 21 March 1992, section *Freizeit*, p. 8.

³³ *Ibid.*

Austria's "glatt administrierten Wiedergutmachungs-Übungen von damals [1988]",³⁴ whilst on the surface demonstrating a critical stance towards Austria's insufficient *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, itself displays an aspect of superficiality, as this criticism is later specifically directed towards "das politische Funktionieren der Hauptstadt", once more restricting the novel's relevance to Vienna.

The discrepancy between the frank confrontation with the novel's criticism of Austria and the refusal to consider oneself included in the object of criticism is further evident in Sigrid Löffler's analysis of *Gebürtig*.³⁵ On the surface an excellent interpretation of Schindel's novel, Löffler's review seeks to compare *Gebürtig* with Alain Finkielkraut's *Der eingebildete Jude*, a work which deals frankly with the author's confused Jewish identity. Through this comparison Löffler highlights the ambivalence in identity experienced by second-generation Jews, quoting Finkielkraut's portrayal of the *Nachgeborene* as "Märtyrer durch Stellvertretung, Überlebende durch Vermittlung der Eltern" and paralleling this with Schindel's depiction of the way in which "die nichtjüdische Welt drängt ihnen dieses Erbe, die stellvertretende Opferrolle, geradezu auf".³⁶ Löffler's article presents us with a comprehensive analysis of the wide spectrum of the various modes of Jewish *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* portrayed in *Gebürtig*, identifying the ambivalence of Jewish identity "von radikaler Ablehnung bis zum Wunsch nach völliger Assimilierung"³⁷ and providing individual descriptions of the novel's key characters. The tone of Löffler's article furthermore conveys the irony and humour with which Schindel approaches these issues, as his language is mirrored in Löffler's explanation that "Mascha Singer versucht ein Verhältnis mit Sascha Demant – nur, um bei erster Gelegenheit zu ihrem steierischen Kerl, einem antisemitisch dunstenden Lackel aus Deutschlandsberg, zurückzukehren".³⁸

Despite Löffler's evidently perceptive interpretation of Schindel's thematics and her frank treatment of his portrayal of Austrian anti-Semitism, there is one, seemingly minor aspect of this review which renders problematic her approach to the novel, namely her use of the term "Gojim" (Yiddish: Gentile). The use of this term, which appears firstly in a quotation from the novel then in Löffler's own words, creates a certain distancing effect, as Löffler can be seen to ally herself, not with non-

³⁴ *Salzburger Nachrichten*.

³⁵ Sigrid Löffler, 'Der eingebildete Jude', *profil*, 16 March 1992, p. 88.

³⁶ Löffler, *profil*.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

Jewish Austrians whose failed *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* is highlighted in the novel, but rather with the Jewish victims of this anti-Semitism. Whilst this distancing effect is almost certainly unintentional and is not of great detriment to the overall insightfulness of the review, there remains a certain externalising aspect, which separates Löffler from the *belastete* Austrian majority.

Personalisation

Further attempts to limit the novel's critical relevance are to be found in the personalising tendencies displayed in a number of reviews, which disproportionately emphasise Schindel's use of autobiographical details. Whilst the biographical information on Schindel, provided in every article, is undoubtedly useful in aiding our comprehension of the novel and its thematics, it is questionable to what extent these background details should be allowed to become the focus of the article. The emphasis placed on Schindel's family and ethnic background can firstly be seen to render the author victim of exactly the kind of pigeon-holing against which he argues, as his identity is reduced to his ethnic roots, rendering him the "im Jahr '44 aus Bad Hall gebürtigen Sohn kommunistisch-jüdischer nach Dachau und Auschwitz deportierter Eltern".³⁹ This extreme summarising of Schindel's life and identity is rather ironically followed in Elisabeth's Grotz's review by Mascha's complaint that "Er drängt mir ein Erbe auf, das ich nicht angetreten habe",⁴⁰ further highlighting Grotz's miscomprehension of the novel's thematics. This treatment of Schindel's identity furthermore affects the interpretation of the novel itself, its wider function as a universal reflection on (Jewish) identity post-Holocaust being obscured by the personalisation of the text. Whilst Schindel himself has made numerous references to the essential role of literature in his own process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, the reduction of the novel's significance to a "persönliche Therapie des Autors"⁴¹ trivialises and limits the wider significance of Schindel's work, thus conforming to the journalistic tendencies previously identified in this thesis, which defuse and trivialise the work's aspects of social criticism through a personalisation of the text.

The exception to this problematical foregrounding of Schindel's Jewish heritage is Ruth Rybarski's article in *profil* which provides a more comprehensive

³⁹ Elisabeth Grotz, 'Ich hätt' noch gern ein Maul voll Schweigen', *Der Standard*, 6 March 1992, section *Album*, p. 8.

⁴⁰ *Gebürtig*, p. 15.

⁴¹ *Salzburger Nachrichten*.

portrait of the author. Although Rybarski inevitably mentions the fate of Schindel's parents and his own wartime experiences, these are mentioned in the wider context of an extensive biographical portrait, as Rybarski highlights his awareness of his Jewish roots as a gradual process: "Im Kampf gegen das Establishment war sein Judentum bedeutungslos, wenn nicht sogar hinderlich".⁴² Thus Schindel's Jewish parentage is presented as *one* aspect of his identity, alongside his political and literary involvement. This more comprehensive depiction of the author offers greater understanding of the themes of *Gebürtig*, as the complexity of one's identity through inherited and self-determined elements is exposed and prevents a mere pigeon-holing of the novel into the category of Jewish *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.

Miscomprehension

The praise for the novel's thematics and stylistics was not, however, unanimous, as can be seen in the reviews in *Die Presse* and *Falter*. Their criticism of the text focuses centrally on the "Vertracktheit" of the prologue, which Walter Vogl claims "[hat] mir dieser Boden unter den Füßen weggezogen",⁴³ and the novel's allegedly overly complicated composition, referred to by Kastberger as "weder glänzend noch professionell".⁴⁴ Kastberger further claims that the structural complexity of the novel and more specifically the complicated narrative strategy "läßt das prinzipielle Dilemma [...] beinahe wieder vergessen",⁴⁵ as the reader's uncertainty as to the identity of the narrative agent distracts him from the novel's key theme of fragmented Jewish identity. Kastberger's inability to identify this narrative strategy as a formal analogue of this fragmentation displays an evidently inadequate interpretation of the novel, which appears here to be judged not on stylistic or thematic grounds but purely on its readability, suggesting that a complicated narrative structure can only detract from the novel's literary value. Kastberger further demonstrates a distinctly old-fashioned approach to literary criticism, which relies on the notions of a stable narrator and characters as "realistic" psychological entities. Thus Kastberger criticises the "Allwissenheit, mit der sich der Erzähler wieder selbst ausstattet"⁴⁶ as standing in direct contradiction to the presentation of Demant and Graffito as "normal" characters directly involved in the novel's events. Kastberger's claim that "[i]n der Beziehung,

⁴² Ruth Rybarski, 'Die unterste Falte der Seele', *profil*, 18-28 April 1992, pp. 88-9.

⁴³ Walter Vogl, 'Mauthausen ist eine schöne Stadt', *Die Presse*, 16 May 1992, p. 14.

⁴⁴ *Falter*.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

die dieses Bruderpaar miteinander verbindet, stellt sich Schindel dem Problem der [...] Identität auf einer Ebene, auf der ihm das Erzählen von glatten Geschichten nicht mehr weiterhelfen kann”⁴⁷ would appear to demonstrate a comprehension and appreciation of Schindel’s thematisation of writing through the split narrator. In the context of the review’s wider criticism of *Gebürtig*’s narratology, however, the emphasis in this statement remains on Schindel’s supposed inability to deal with the problematics of Jewish identity. The irony of Kastberger’s criticism of Schindel’s novel, based entirely on out-dated narratological theory, can be found in his condemnation of Schindel’s conformity to literary fashion, as *Gebürtig* is accused of being “auf jene Bewertungskriterien hin maßgeschneidert, die das (bundes)deutsche Feuilleton gemeinhin anlegt”.⁴⁸ This contradictory evaluation of Schindel’s work, which is simultaneously denigrated because it does not conform to narratological norms and then rejected as too conformist, demonstrates Kastberger’s helplessness when faced with a novel whose complexity prevents a simplified reading and analysis.

The miscomprehension of Schindel’s unconventional narrative strategies and their relevance for the novel’s thematics is further evident in the reviewers’ treatment of Hermann Gebirtig. This figure assumes a particularly problematical role in *Gebürtig*’s reception, as the fictionality of this character within the novel remains uncommented or perhaps unidentified. The passages of the novel portraying Gebirtig’s experiences in Vienna are presented as belonging to the main narrative strain, thus assuming the same level of “reality” as those describing Demant or Sachs. This depiction of Gebirtig as “einer seiner [Schindel’s] Protagonisten”⁴⁹ and the following assumption that the aspects of Austria criticised in his narrative directly represent the views of Schindel “die so glatt administrierten Wiedergutmachungs-Übungen von damals finden Eingang in Schindels Roman, wenn er die Geschichte des in New York lebenden Schriftstellers Hermann Gebirtig erzählt”⁵⁰ have evident consequences for the reading of the novel on characterological and thematic levels. This inadequate treatment of Gebirtig can firstly be seen to annul the element of Schindel’s work which thematises the therapeutic value of writing, as Gebirtig becomes a character in his own right and not the reflection of Emanuel Katz’s inner conflict.. This further results in the underplaying of Schindel’s reflections on the

⁴⁷ Falter.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Standard.

⁵⁰ Salzburger Nachrichten.

portrayal of the Holocaust in literature, in particular the essential role of fiction within literary *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, as is highlighted by the double-fictionality of Gebirtig. The ignoring or miscomprehension of this vital aspect of Gebirtig's figure thus reduces his relevance in the novel to that of the narrated events in which he is involved, eliminating his further thematic function.

This miscomprehension of fictionality is repeated in the reviewers' treatment of the narrative agents, Demant and Graffito. Commonly accepted by critics to be the fictional alter-ego of Danny,⁵¹ Graffito represents "das schreibende-Ich" in contrast to the "real" self. Yet all reviews of *Gebürtig*, with the exception of Kastberger's article, present the narrators as two separate "real" figures, unquestioningly accepting Graffito and Danny's self-description of themselves as twins and ignoring Schindel's unobvious hints at the fictional nature of Graffito.⁵² Walter Vogl in the *Presse* refers to the "brothers" as being "komplementäre Figuren"⁵³ and proceeds to list the similarities between the two: "Beide sind alte 68er, stecken bis über die Ohren in permanenten Beziehungskrisen und werden hin- und hergeworfen zwischen panischer Flucht vor und wohligerem Aufgehen im katholischen österreichischen Umfeld".⁵⁴ This recognition of the exceptional similarities between the narrators renders all the more incomprehensible Vogl's inability to identify both characters as being two parts of the one person. Despite comments on Schindel's portrayal of the "innere Zerissenheit seiner Protagonisten"⁵⁵ and Schindel's thematisation of the "offen deklarierte Ambivalenz der Gefühle und Haltungen dieser Generation"⁵⁶ not one review of *Gebürtig* identifies adequately the function of the narrators in demonstrating the fragmentation of the self and the connection between split identity and writing. Indeed Grotz even claims that "[s]ein am Schrecken der Geschichte zersplittertes Selbst weiß der Autor auf die ihm offenbar sehr nahestehende Figur des Täterkindes Konrad Sachs zu übertragen",⁵⁷ demonstrating an unmistakable miscomprehension of Schindel's

⁵¹ Posthofen refers to Demant as the "alter ego des fiktiven Autors", Posthofen, p. 205 and Pranter-Eberharter views this fictionality as being essential to his role as narrator "er erscheint als objektiv-notierende Gestalt mit einem unlimited Point of View, der nur durch seine fiktive Gestalt möglich ist", Pranter-Eberharter, p. 79.

⁵² For example, Demant claims "An dir ist nichts echt, Sascha" to which Graffito replies "An mir ist nichts echt? Hoffentlich. [...] Das Echte kann mir gestohlen bleiben" (p. 17).

⁵³ *Presse*.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Standard*.

⁵⁶ Heinz Hartwig, 'Eine Spur für die Wortlosigkeiten', *Kleine Zeitung*, 4 July 1992, section *Kultur*, p. 2.

⁵⁷ *Standard*.

relationship to his protagonists and their intended function within the novel's thematics.

Connected to Schindel's thematisation of the process of writing is the transparent nature of the novel's composition, which repeatedly highlights the role of the author in the creation of the novel and its characters. Two reviews claim, however, that "er [Schindel] bemüht sich geradezu, nicht wissender als seine Figuren zu erscheinen [...] läßt aber generell seine Figuren ihr Eigenleben leben"⁵⁸ or, in the words of Grotz: "Schindel, der als Autor nicht klüger sein will als seine Figuren, läßt diese ganz aus sich heraussprechen".⁵⁹ The initial assertion in both statements that Schindel aims to avoid the position of the moralising author is validated by his refusal to present one single positive mode of Jewish identity and remembrance and the absence of solutions to the problematic relationships between Jewish and non-Jewish characters. The juxtaposition of this claim, however, with the theory that Schindel "läßt seine Figuren ihr Eigenleben leben"⁶⁰ and the implied interdependence of these two statements is evidently problematic. As illustrated in the previous section, a perceptive reading of *Gebürtig* and an understanding of the novel's stylistic and thematic basis demonstrate entirely the opposite, as Schindel repeatedly exposes the mechanisms of the act of writing, highlighting the careful construction of his characters. This transparency in character-construction is further underlined by the patent fictionality of several of the novel's characters, which serves as a constant reminder of the role of the author in constructing the text. This miscomprehension of Schindel's intentions disregards a vital aspect of the novel's thematics, as the novel's considerations of the possibility of literary *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* are invalidated by this analysis of Schindel's characters.

Tiroler Tageszeitung

In addition to the problematical elements common to the majority of *Gebürtig*'s press reception, one article's treatment not only of the novel itself but also of the topic of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and the Holocaust is of such extreme inappropriateness as to merit individual analysis. Werner Furst's review in the *Tiroler Tageszeitung* displays a latent anti-Semitism hidden behind the apparently tolerant façade of modern-day Austria. Here, the ostensible condemnation of Nazi atrocities and the

⁵⁸ *Kleine Zeitung*.

⁵⁹ *Standard*.

⁶⁰ *Kleine Zeitung*.

glowing praise for *Gebürtig* as a “großartige[r] und unvergleichliche[r] Erstlingsroman”⁶¹ are overshadowed by a series of latently anti-Semitic remarks and an evident trivialisation of the Holocaust. In his description of *Gebürtig* Furst attempts to dazzle the reader with clever insights into the novel’s stylistics: “Zeitlosigkeit stilisiert Schindel, indem er in die Handlungen im Heute immer wieder Geschichten aus der ‘Vergangenheit’ einfließen läßt”⁶² or his insightful diagnosis of the problems of the post-Holocaust generation:

Die Befangenheiten und Verstrickungen in Scham und Lüge, schlimmer noch, die nie ganz kraftlos gewordenen Vorurteile [...] resultieren aus dem schrecklichen Mißverhältnis von Millionen unschuldiger toter Opfer und den Millionen überlebender schuldiger Täter, deren Reue sich in Floskeln erschöpfte.⁶³

That Furst’s lip-service to Schindel’s thematics is as worthless as the “Floskeln” criticised above becomes patent through the context in which Furst places the novel and its themes.

The review begins with the seemingly irrelevant observation that “In diesen Tagen denkt die Christenheit an den Folttertod des Juden Jesus, der in seinen letzten Stunden noch die Kraft fand, seinen Mördern zu verzeihen”.⁶⁴ This reflection on the Easter story is subsequently revealed as an analogy to the Holocaust, as the slaughter of six million Jews is directly paralleled to the crucifixion of Jesus, with the reasoning that both were “ihres Glaubens wegen umgebracht”.⁶⁵ This comparison, problematic itself in its trivialising of the genocide of millions, is further surpassed by the accompanying comment that “diesmal jedoch wurde von einer Auferstehung nach drei Tagen nichts bekannt, auch nichts von Vergebung, denn ‘verzeihen können nur die Toten’”⁶⁶ where the implied criticism of the “intolerance” of the Jewish victims leaves us in no doubt of the reviewer’s underlying anti-Semitism. The relativising (and thus trivialising) effect of this comparison is continued in the article’s final paragraph where Furst denies the uniqueness of the Holocaust, comparing it to the conflict between “Serben und Kroaten, Türken und Kurden, [...] Evangelische, Katholische”⁶⁷ and very bizarrely to famine in Africa, comparisons which (perhaps inadvertently)

⁶¹ Werner Furst, ‘Denn sie wissen (nicht), was sie tun’, *Tiroler Tageszeitung*, 18-20 April 1992, p. 13.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

render the Jews partially responsible for the Holocaust, as they are presented as one side of a religious or racial struggle and not the victims of one-sided persecution.

The inadvertent irony of the article arises principally from Furst's continued efforts to appear tolerant, indeed philosemitic, through a series of platitudes on the Holocaust and Austrian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Thus commenting on the possible existence of latent anti-Semitism in Austria Furst claims that "offener Antisemitismus kommt nicht vor im Österreich der achtziger Jahre [...] doch der jüdische Lektor Danny Demant und sein Bruder Alexander wittern ihn unter der Oberfläche von Liberalismus und Aufklärung",⁶⁸ whilst simultaneously creating an aura of doubt around this, firstly through the use of "wittern"⁶⁹ and subsequently in the paragraph exploring the characters' uncertainty "[sie] fühlen sich überempfindlich, mimosenhaft".⁷⁰ Indeed Furst's comment on Schindel's style, "Schindel schreibt nie konkret, doch ist es immer wieder herauszulesen"⁷¹ could equally be applied to this article, whose bizarre comparisons and repeated trivialisation of the Holocaust, along with the *Verharmlosung* of one the children of the Nazi perpetrators as "ein kleiner Knirps", expose the (most probably sub-conscious) anti-Semitism scantily hidden behind anti-fascist platitudes.

Conclusion

The early 1990s represent a *Zwischenzeit* within the cultural narrative of Austrian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, often generalised as the "post-Waldheim" or "pre-Haider" era, with very little consideration for the specific development of public memory at this time. Indeed, many works on Austrian memory conclude with an analysis of the late 1980s, giving the impression that Austrian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* is a completed process. This uncertainty surrounding 1990s *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* is mirrored here in the ambiguity of the press response to *Gebürtig*, which provides a more frank discussion on *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, yet still seeks to relativise or externalise the novel's impact through the personalisation of Schindel's work or a (perhaps unconscious) distancing from his criticism. This case study sees the reinstatement of the author in the literary debate, as critical works by Jewish authors appear to represent a taboo in

⁶⁸ *Tiroler Tageszeitung*.

⁶⁹ The subjectivity implied by this verb, which can be translated as 'to sense', implies a lack of concrete evidence.

⁷⁰ *Tiroler Tageszeitung*.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

Austrian literary journalism, preventing an outright rejection of their work. The superficiality of this taboo, is however evident in Furst's review, whose ostensible praise for Schindel's analysis of Austrian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* is belied by the article's latent anti-Semitism. This sub-conscious exposure of a latent rejection of Schindel's Austro-criticism, which can be observed in several of *Gebürtig*'s reviews, provides clear evidence of the ongoing nature of the *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* process in Austria, suggesting the necessity of a reappraisal of this period in the cultural narrative.

“Die Medien sprechen eine eigene Sprache, haben eigene Codes entwickelt, schaffen eine ganz spezifische ‘Medien Realität’, die in besonderer Weise die in der Gesellschaft vor sich gehenden sozialen Prozessen reflektiert.”¹

The representative function of the press as a barometer of public attitudes formed the basis for this thesis, which set out to examine the validity of the predominant cultural narrative determining the common view of Austrian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. An identification of trends within Austrian literary journalism, allowing an insight into the status of socially critical literature in the press, revealed a highly problematic relationship between the Austrian press and *Vergangenheitsbewältigungsliteratur*, with further implications of an inadequate public response to the ethical and moral issues concerning Austrian complicity in National Socialism.

Most striking in all but one of the case studies is the absence of media attention incited by these works. With the exception of Bernhard’s *Heldenplatz*, none received more than ten press reviews, with many articles spanning less than ten lines of normal print (one column). Considering the size of the Austrian media landscape (ranging from 27 newspapers in 1961 to 17 in 1990),² the extent to which these works have been neglected in the press is evidently considerable. This absence of press attention demonstrates a clear reluctance on the part of the newspapers to present their readership with literature whose social criticism may be uncomfortable and challenging, anticipating perhaps the lack of public interest in works of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.

Personalisation, Sensationalism and Depoliticisation

Common to all five studies is a repeated sidelining of the texts’ *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* thematics, achieved through several journalistic strategies which contribute to the depoliticisation of these works, defusing, ignoring or openly rejecting their criticism of Austrian society and politics. Within the reception of Fritsch, Jelinek, Bernhard and Schindel it is possible to identify a clear personalisation of the literary debate to the detriment of the works’ social criticism. In the case of Fritsch this personalisation takes place on a more benign level, never actually detracting from his competence as a writer, although evidently still representing a

¹ Hans Heinz Fabris, *Angewandte Kommunikationswissenschaft* (Munich: Reinhard Fischer, 2002), p. 172.

² Heinz Pürer, *Presse in Österreich* (Vienna: Verband der Zeitungsherausgeber, 1990), p. 3.

hindrance to the conveyance of *Fasching*'s criticism. This personalisation becomes more problematic with regard to Bernhard and Jelinek. Thus, the emphasis placed on Jelinek's person reveals a clear discrepancy between the treatment of male and female authors in the Austrian press, as her appearance forms the principal focus of discussion. In the instance of Bernhard the personalisation manifests itself in vicious attacks on his person, questioning his sanity and condemning him at the basest level in an attempt to discredit the validity of his criticism. Whilst the personalising of the reception of *Gebürtig* can be partially justified by the work's semi-autobiographical traits, the attempts in the press to reduce Schindel's novel to a work of personal *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* evidently deny the wider social relevance of his novel for Austrian society. Despite their various different forms, these instances of personalisation all have in common a foregrounding of the author's person with a subsequent reduction of the texts' social and political impact.

A further trivialisation of the texts' social criticism is to be found in the repeated concentration on peripheral elements, either within the literary work itself or in the *Drumherum*, the contemporary context in which the work appears. The media circus surrounding Bernhard's *Heldenplatz* renders this case study the most manifestly sensationalist, as the play itself was very rarely the focus of the press attention. Here, detailed analysis of the work's political and aesthetic impact was lost amongst irrelevant sensationalist headlines, which sought only to maintain the (highly profitable) scandal. This foregrounding of the *Drumherum* is also evident, albeit to a lesser extent, in the remaining case studies, as a comprehensive consideration of Lebert's criticism is rejected in favour of a reflection on the publishing situation in Austria, whilst the foregrounding of *Moos auf den Steinen* equally disregards Fritsch's radically Austro-critical stance in his second novel. In the case of both Fritsch and Lebert this sidelining is further combined with a conspicuous neglect of the novels' *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* theme, which is mentioned only in highly nebulous terms and is often obfuscated by exaggerated consideration of the sexual, meteorological (!) and scatological, which transfers their rejection of the novel's thematic base onto a stylistic level, where criticism can be more freely expressed. Thus many of the works are criticised for their incorporation of what are deemed to be unsavoury elements (the scatological in Lebert, the sexual in Fritsch, and the description of bodily functions in

Schindel³), whilst the real cause of discomfort, their criticism of Austrian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, is either ostensibly praised or ignored. The tendency to place disproportionate emphasis on one aspect of the literary work is further manifest in the reception of *Die Ausgesperrten*, where repeated references to the real-life basis for the novel have a clearly sensationalising effect, emphasising the crime itself and not its social, political and economic reasons. Both these strategies of personalisation and sensationalising, combined with implicit or transferred criticism of the *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* thematics, expose an inability or reluctance in the Austrian press to confront directly the controversial issues embedded in these works.

Die Volksstimme

Providing a consistent counterbalance to the depoliticising and trivialising tendencies of Austria's mainstream press, the Communist *Volksstimme* distinguishes itself through its continued support of socially critical literature. Whilst evidently promoting a Communist agenda, which often led to the political appropriation and a certain manipulation of the texts, *Die Volksstimme* remains the only publication to have consistently confronted the works' treatment of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in an open and responsible manner. This repeated promotion of an ethically responsible mode of remembering corresponds greatly to the role of the Communist party in post-war Austria, providing an alternative to the consensus politics of the SPÖ and ÖVP, and representing a clear antifascist agenda, which can be traced back to their resistance role in the Third Reich. Thus, in the face of a press who offered "kaum einen Beitrag zur Aufarbeitung der Mitschuld von Österreichern an den NS-Verbrechen",⁴ the *Volksstimme* provided a welcome anomaly in the Austrian press landscape, whose closure in 1991 represents a great loss for socially responsible journalism in Austria.

Providing a Counter-narrative

The journalistic trends outlined above present us with an overview of the status of socially critical literature in the Austrian press without consideration of the specific historical period. In order, however, to achieve the second aim of this thesis it is necessary to compare the results of the individual case studies with the cultural narrative of Austrian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* at the time of publication.

³ Klaus Kastberger entitles his article 'Fürze zum Frühstück, nach Ihrem Geschmack', thus choosing to highlight an insignificant aspect of one episode in Schindel's novel.

⁴ Fritz Hausjell, 'Verdränger als Aufarbeiter', *politische Bildung*, 4 (1988), pp. 227-31 (p. 230).

Repression and Amnesia?

Due to the thematic similarities, the common provincial setting and their temporal proximity I will consider *Die Wolfshaut* and *Fasching* together. The press reception of both these novels reveals a highly alarming response to the subject of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, characterised by a rejection of the novels' thematics and an unwillingness to accept their Austro-specific criticism, manifest both implicitly in the ignoring and sidelining of controversial elements and explicitly in their open criticism of the novels. As such the press response can be seen to correspond essentially to the common cultural narrative of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in 1950s and '60s Austria, which presents this period as a time of widespread repression (and suppression) of Austria's involvement in the Third Reich. The suggestion in the *Oberösterreichischen Nachrichten* that Lebert's criticism is irrelevant and undesirable⁵ further supports the common portrayal of Austrian society's denial of complicity in Nazism, which draws its legitimacy from Austria's exploitation of the Moscow Treaty, the failure of denazification and the concomitant first victim theory. However, such a polarised view of Austrian society in this period is not supported completely by these case studies, as certain exceptions within their reception intimate the necessity of a partial revision of our views. Firstly, the zeal of *Die Volksstimme* in promoting a more comprehensive mode of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* must not be forgotten, as it functioned as an (albeit disproportionate) counter-balance to the forgetting encouraged in mainstream publications. Even more significant are the articles in the *Wiener Zeitung* and the *Abend Presse*, whose readership is more widespread than that of *Die Volksstimme*. Their excellent analyses of *Die Wolfshaut* along with their responsible and candid treatment of its themes encourage a rather more optimistic view of 1960s *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* than previously offered. Whilst in the minority, the existence of these three articles exposes the partial inaccuracy of the common cultural narrative, which insists on an omnipresent repression and opportunist amnesia, thus necessitating a more nuanced approach to this period.

This partial affirmation of the established narratives of Austrian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* continues in the press reception of Jelinek's *Die Ausgesperrten*, which, according to the common cultural narrative, appears at the peak of Austria's consensus politics in the form of the *Sozialpartnerschaft*. Thus, the depoliticisation of Jelinek's novel and the neutralisation of her political impact through

⁵ R.W.L., 'Spannung ist eigentlich schon genug: Zu Hans Leberts erstem Roman *Die Wolfshaut*', in *Oberösterreichischen Nachrichten*, 21 February 1961, p. 13.

the widespread absence in the mainstream press correspond to a contemporary *Harmoniebedürfnis*. Whilst the defusing of her criticism represented principally a depoliticisation on a specifically party-political level,⁶ the subsequent neglect of the novel's *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* thematics indicates that the *Sozialpartnerschaft*'s harmonising influence exceeded its economic context, impacting also on public attitudes towards *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, an aspect of this period which is often neglected in the cultural narrative.

A "New" Austria?

The real discrepancy between the grand cultural narrative and the findings of the thesis begins with the media debate surrounding *Heldenplatz*, which can be taken as indicative of the development of Austrian attitudes in post-Waldheim Austria. Whilst, at first glance, the mass media coverage appears to corroborate the view that Austria was moving into a period of more open and candid confrontation with its past, this openness reveals itself to be illusory. Here it is evident that this very public discussion of Austria's relationship to its past in no way represents an ethically responsible mode of remembering. Whilst it is true that the issue of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* forms the centre of the public debate, the highly critical stance adopted by the press and their ferocious attacks on Bernhard's opinions reveals a continued rejection of this theme. Indeed it appears that the only difference between the inadequate press response in the previous three case studies and the reception of *Heldenplatz* is the openness of the criticism, as rejection of the work's *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* theme is no longer veiled or implied. This vehement rejection of Bernhard's work combined with the multitude of xenophobic and neo-fascist attitudes exposed in the debate reveals the fallacy of the oft articulated view that Austria underwent a positive transformation in the wake of the Waldheim affair. In the light of this case study it is evident that a more critical approach to this period is needed, as the optimism of the common cultural narrative is definitely misplaced.

This premature optimism regarding *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in the late 1980s and 1990s is further exposed in the reception of *Gebürtig*. Whilst the existence of a more open confrontation with issues of Austria's failed remembering cannot be denied, there are also more problematic areas within this press response which indicate that responsible attitudes towards *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* are still in the process of

⁶ For example, the SPÖ publication, *Arbeiter-Zeitung*, omits all references to Jelinek's criticism of post-war Socialism.

development. Thus we can observe a tendency amongst the reviewers to distance themselves from Schindel's portrayal of failed Austrian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, suggesting that the acceptance of the necessity of a responsible mode of remembering has not been fully internalised and remains an incomplete process. Furthermore, the emphasis placed on the role of the author and Schindel's Jewish origins implies that this criticism of Austria can only be expressed by a Jewish author, as there exists a certain taboo surrounding the criticism of a work of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* by a Jewish writer and it could be speculated that a work with the same critical content by a non-Jewish author would not have been met with such enthusiasm. In the reception of Schindel's work we can then identify positive elements which correspond to the optimism of the grand cultural narrative of the 1990s. It must, however, be stressed that this correlation is merely partial, and a critical assessment of the development of public consciousness remains nevertheless indispensable.

The discrepancies uncovered between the grand cultural narratives that inform the common view of Austrian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and the attitudes revealed in the press indicate the necessity of a more nuanced and critical approach to the complex issue of public attitudes towards remembering in Austria. The counter-narrative provided by this analysis demonstrates the inadequacy of a linear narrative, which attempts to map a clear progression in Austrian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* from a period of absolute repression to an enlightened society, suggesting a complexity that has hitherto been neglected.

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Publication (Founded)	Place of Publication	Political and Economic Affiliations	Circulation (%)¹	Estimated Readership (%)
<i>Arbeiter-Zeitung</i> (1945) (from 1970, <i>A-Z</i>)	Vienna	Party political publication - SPÖ	138,119 (5.0%)	235,000 (3.7%)
<i>Falter</i> (1977)	Vienna	Independent - left-wing alternative	N/A	81,000 (1.2%)
<i>Die Frau</i> (1945-1987)	Vienna	Party political publication – SPÖ	N/A	N/A
<i>Kleine Zeitung</i> (1948)	Graz	Independent – close to Catholic Church	268,283 (9.8%)	659,000 (10.5%)
<i>Kurier</i> (1954)	Vienna	Independent – close to enterprise and <i>Wirtschaftskammer</i>	442,651 (16.1%)	941,000 (14.9%)
<i>Neue Kronen Zeitung</i> (1959)	Vienna	Independent – close to ÖGB (trade unions)	1,074,743 (39.1%)	2,681,000 (42.6%)
<i>Neues Österreich</i> (1945-1969)	Vienna	First post-war newspaper – KPÖ, ÖVP & SPÖ	N/A	N/A
<i>Oberösterreichische Nachrichten</i> (1945)	Linz	Independent – pro-American	114,830 (4.2%)	307,000 (4.9%)

¹ All circulation and readership statistics, with the exception of those marked (*), refer to the period 1989/1990 and are to be found in Heinz Pürer, *Presse in Österreich* (Vienna: Verband österreichischer Zeitungsherausgeber und Zeitungsverleger, 1990), pp. 24, 38.

Publication	Place of Publication	Political and Economic Affiliations	Circulation (%)	Estimated Readership (%)
<i>Die Presse</i> (1948)	Vienna	Independent – close to <i>Wirtschaftskammer</i> and Church	78,414 (2.9%)	210,000 (3.3%)
<i>profil</i> (1970-monthly, 1974-weekly)	Vienna	Independent – left of centre	N/A	491,000 (7.8%) ²
<i>Salzburger Nachrichten</i> (1945)	Salzburg	Independent	94,566 (3.4%)	217,000 (3.4%)
<i>Der Standard</i> (1988)	Vienna	Independent - <i>Süddeutsche Zeitung</i> owns 49 %	74,000 (2.7%)	242,000 (3.8%)
 <i>Südost-Tagespost</i> (1951-1987)	Graz	Party political publication - ÖVP	* 48,900 (1.5%) ³	N/A
<i>Tiroler Tageszeitung</i> (1945)	Innsbruck	Independent – Axel-Springer Verlag, right of centre	99,931 (3.6%)	262,000 (4.2%)
<i>Volksstimme</i> (1945-1991)	Vienna	Party political publication - KPÖ	46,747 (1.7%)	N/A
<i>Wahrheit</i> (1945)	Graz	Party political publication - KPÖ	* 11,200 (0.4%)	N/A
<i>Wiener Zeitung</i> (1945)	Vienna	Owned by Austrian State	26,860 (1.0%)	N/A
<i>Wochenpresse</i> (1955)	Vienna	Independent – connected to <i>Die Presse</i>	N/A	236,000 (3.7%) ⁴

² Percentage of magazine readership. Pürer, p. 56.

³ Period 1970/71.

⁴ Percentage of magazine readership. Pürer, p. 56.