

Representing the Holocaust. On Paul Celan, Ilse Aichinger, Albert Drach and Heimrad Bäcker, with an Appeal for Critical Reflection on the Cultural and Political Field in Which Holocaust Literature Is Inscribed

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Representing the Holocaust. On Paul Celan, Ilse Aichinger, Albert Drach and Heimrad Bäcker, With an Appeal for Critical Reflection on the Cultural and Political Field in which Holocaust Literature Is Inscribed.

Edited and introduced by Bernhard Fetz

Each of the four following contributions deals with a different form of Holocaust representation in literature. Despite the different approaches of the books analyzed, they all have one thing in common: they were written by eye-witnesses and survivors, making them part of that canon of books and authors — from Italo Calvino through Jorge Semprun and Imre Kertész to Louis Begley and Ruth Klüger — which have molded the life-altering first-hand experience of persecution into a communicable, detached literary form. This has repercussions for the entire genre of autobiography and for the very concept of the “autobiographical novel.” In the case of Holocaust literature the question of reception has a particular importance because the line between autobiography and fiction is problematized: how and with what literary strategies is it possible to “represent” the Holocaust? In her memoir, Ruth Klüger tackled this central problem. From the start, the certainty of survival is there, if only for the reader, because the author is only in a position to describe the horror having lived through it: “So, although the report was originally intended to bear testimony to an inescapable and appalling fate, in the hands of the author it inevitably and despite itself mutates into an ‘escape story.’” “The successful escape of one individual” is

metonymically read as “general survival, the triumph of good.” How is it then possible to counteract this “emotional algebra?”¹ Discussed below, the texts of that “first generation” to have dealt with the Holocaust in literary form tackle the survival paradox in quite different ways. However, the questions always remain the same: How does the process of mimesis work here, what does it protect us from, if it has a protective function, and what does it repress, if indeed it has a repressive function? And what does the act of narration do to the subject matter being iterated?

For the Jewish and half-Jewish children in Ilse Aichinger’s novel *Die größere Hoffnung* (*The Greater Hope*) survival is child’s play intermingled with the deadly seriousness of immediate danger. For Albert Drach’s autobiographical alter ego survival provokingly involves a good measure of knavery. All differences aside, both Aichinger and Drach extricate the victims from the control of a terrorizing power by linguistic side-stepping, using a language that is ironic, magical, and that undermines the discourse of power. A central question is that of the status of the historical document and its relationship to fiction. This becomes the subject of texts such as Heimrad Bäcker’s *nachschrift* (*Postscript*) project in which experimental methods are used to expose the euphemistic character of the language of terror. Bäcker’s texts distrust communicable stories of the Holocaust, thereby attempting to sever the Gordian knot of clichéd expressions of the unutterable. A problem that even Paul Celan’s poetry must confront, despite all the obvious differences between lyrical language and the other discourses analyzed here: if his late poems, in reaction to the reception of his “*Todesfuge*” (“Death Fugue”), aim for skeletal erasion and economy of expression, they actually do not become more hermetic as a result, but are rather, ironically, even more precise in their “depictions.”

The various aesthetic approaches analyzed in the following articles both demarcate and open an endless plane of aesthetic renderings of the Holocaust experience. Reading the books of a “second generation” of authors writing about the Holocaust in the context of those of the previous “first” generation generates a depth of insight into the problematic. Indeed, according to Imre Kertész, who received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2002 for his Holocaust book *Roman eines Schicksallosen* (*Fateless*), one can only ‘come to terms’ with Auschwitz by viewing

1. Ruth Klüger, *Weiter leben. Eine Jugend* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1992) 139.

this locus as *the* negative myth of the 20th century.² Every declared end to the debate is itself nothing more than a dead end. In order for the experience to become part of collective memory, it was and still remains necessary to (re-)fictionalize it.³ But here the real question is not whether it is legitimate to thematize the recent past of Germany and Austria over and over again; rather it is important to ask to what extent fictional ‘repossession’ of the Holocaust by a ‘second generation’ of authors (including, amongst others, Josef Haslinger, Robert Menasse, Christoph Ransmayr, Robert Schindel, Doron Rabinovici, Elisabeth Reichart, Norbert Gstrein) is aesthetically viable. To what extent do these works manage to avoid that kitschy and clichéd talk of “acrid clouds of ash from beyond” (see Daniela Strigl’s article) that Paul Celan ironizes?

It is certainly possible to argue that a novel such as Josef Haslinger’s *Das Vaterspiel* [*Father Game*] is a failure, an instance of cheap sensationalism, using stale metaphors to aestheticize the pogroms of Baltic Jews.⁴ One may also debate whether the combination and collateralization of a postwar Austrian story and the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in Robert Menasse’s historical novel *Die Vertreibung aus der Hölle* [*The Expulsion from Hell*] is entirely successful. More controversial are debates on the fictional position and the metaphors of Christoph Ransmayr’s novel *Morbus Kitahara* which, taking a National Socialist work camp as its point of departure, proceeds to situate the narrative on a vague temporal plane.

In discussions of this literature it is important to consider the general function of the Holocaust complex within the field of Austrian literature in terms of Pierre Bourdieu’s analysis.⁵ The expulsion and eradication of the Jewish population combined with the denial of and secrecy surrounding Austria’s involvement in the National Socialists’ Final Solution provides one of the richest thematic seams for post-1945 Austrian literature. One need only think of “Silence,” the revealing name that Hans Lebert gives to the Alpine village in his work *Die Wolfshaut*

2. The central theses of Imre Kertész can be found in various articles of the collection of essays *Die exilierte Sprache. Essays und Reden* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2003) 88 ff.

3. Kertész 54.

4. On a panel discussing this topic, the authors of the following articles all agreed on this point. We cannot however go into that discussion in any detail here. So certain key terms must suffice.

5. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1996).

[The Wolf's Skin], the big mythological novel of the postwar period about guilt and redemption. The reasons for the predominance of this theme can be sought in the role assumed by Austrian literature in re-assimilation of the repressed. It was Austrian literature that catalyzed, provoked, even forced a confrontation with the past when politics and society had failed or were reluctant to do so. Thomas Bernhard's literary diatribes against Austria, against its foreclosure of the past, and its ignorant representatives became synonymous with this literary treatment of Austria's unmentioned involvement. This movement again and again referred to the work of authors of the "first generation." Hence Elfriede Jelinek cites Albert Drach and Hans Lebert, two Austrian authors, who were effectively excluded from the Federal Republic of Germany's canonical and canonized *Gruppe 47* with its particular brand of literary *remémoration* [*Bewältigungsliteratur*], as the main proponents of a radical aesthetic treatment of mass hysteria and persecution.⁶

By now, of course, we have a positive deluge of books on the subject, just as there are numerous and competing Centers of Exile Studies. Politicians from across the political spectrum try to outdo one another's assurances of how important the cultural and scientific legacy of emigrants is to them. The genre of literary *reminiscence*, memoirs written by Jewish emigrants, has swelled to immense proportions. Of course, this genre is vitally important not only because it concretizes the experience both for the victims themselves as well as for others, giving later generations, for example, proximate access to past events, but also because these works provide important historical evidence. However, moral considerations should not entirely displace aesthetic issues. Many autobiographical texts tread a very fine line between nostalgic apotheosizing of 'old Austria' and sober(-ing) accounts of first-hand experiences. It is important to bear in mind that a memoir, novel or poem is not automatically good simply by virtue of the fact that it deals with the Holocaust.

6. The Lacanian term *remémoration* (generally translated as recollection) as opposed to *reminiscence*, possibly brings us closest to the essence of the German postwar cultural concept of *Bewältigung*. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, *remémoration* is where the analysand reconstructs (in a sense, makes good) his past, in effect rewriting it. In the case of the *Gruppe 47*, such rewriting is by no means palimpsestic erasure, but rather an attempt at therapeutic reinscription. While *reminiscence* involves re-living the past without any assimilation of events (in other words, it is traumatic), *remémoration* is more redemptive. Hence I have used the former term to describe works such as memoirs that are more intended (overtly, at any rate) to transmit/repeat the 'facts' of the matter than to transmute them.

This is particularly important in light of the fact that the perception of contemporary German-language literature in America, both in academic circles and among the more general readership, is still heavily influenced by a Holocaust paradigm. This has given and continues to give rise to a whole host of assumptions that can only just be touched upon here. These attitudes have implications far beyond the relatively narrow field of literature and are ideologically determined. The ever-changing transatlantic relationship combined with the peculiarities of Austro-German relations “naturally,” to use that pet word of Thomas Bernhard’s, has an effect on this. The reception of cultural products is heavily influenced by hardened preconceptions, prejudices and entrenched value systems, which are renewed and — in a lengthy process — transformed by the course of events.

In America, interest in German-language Holocaust literature seems to go hand in hand with dwindling academic and, particularly, public interest in German literature as such. Summarizing the situation, and from a New York point of view to boot, some time ago the Germanist Mark W. Anderson described the academic reception of German-language literature in America in the following terms: “Of course, since the publication in 1985 of Sander Gilman’s seminal study *Jewish Self-hatred in German Culture*, seminars on the German-Jewish relationship and on the subject of the Holocaust have been the only growth sectors in the otherwise languishing discipline of German Studies in America.”⁷ In discussions about the increasing publication of contemporary American literature by German publishers, it is often noted that, despite the proliferation of translations of English language books into German, a comparatively small number of books make the transition in the other direction. The arguments most frequently used to explain this imbalance deploy a stereotype whereby on the one hand German literature is characterized as reflective, nuanced, subtle, or (in less positive terms) sterile, “experimental” and incapable of direct reference to or depiction of anything remotely resembling reality, while American literature, on the other hand, is characterized as crowd-pleasing, sentimental, simple or (in more positive terms) thrilling, rejecting reflection in favor of good storylines. It is not difficult to recognize traces of political arguments in this stereotype: on the one hand we have Rambo, on the other the dove of peace; on the one hand, robust pragmatism, on

7. Marc M. Anderson, “Atlantisches Zerrbild” *Die Zeit* 9 Oct. 2001: 46 ff.

the other, feeble hesitation; on the one hand we have tough Democracy, on the other (particularly in Germany and Austria) we have latent Communism, an inherently unstable political atmosphere which increases susceptibility to racism and anti-Semitism. It is by no means easy to counteract this stereotype.⁸ In the last decade undifferentiated analogies have frequently been drawn between reception of Austrian literature and current affairs, sometimes giving rise to a positively distorted picture of political reality, as though the jokingly called “Alpine Republic of Austria” were still in a semi-free state of post-fascism. This short-circuit can be witnessed time and again when the contents of literary texts are regurgitated in academic lectures dealing critically and polemically with Austria. Sometimes fiction and social reality, and the immediate post-war period and the present are blurred to the point of indistinguishability. Rumors of concerns in America after the 1999/2000 general elections in Austria, when a right-wing party won a share of seats in parliament (a party, which, incidentally, subsequently lost two-thirds of its voters) about the taking of political prisoners, have, one hopes, long since been relegated to the realm of anecdote.

All of this has, however, a knock-on effect. There is increasing unease amongst many younger writers, academics and intellectuals, whose cultural socialization is, to say the least, as North American as it is European, particularly in the field of literature. They see themselves as part of a culture in which the globalization of texts and images is a *fait accompli*. It seems to be difficult for Americans to accept that writers and intellectuals from Germany or Austria are not prepared to submit unquestioningly to an existing Holocaust paradigm; that they insist upon examining critically, euphorically, polemically, indeed in every possible way, their own cultural production (including treatments of the Holocaust) in the context of a Western media culture that is overwhelmingly determined by the US. Just as it is incorrect to dismiss out of hand any

8. A “nice” example of the aggressive mood and ill will of early 2003 was provided by the American Germanist Russell A. Berman writing on Bertolt Brecht for the journal *Merkur* — the “German journal for European Thought” as this flagship of intellectual journals styles itself in its subtitle. Entitled “Democratic war, repressive peace?” Berman’s “anti-European” article on German-American relations comes to the pop psychology conclusion that European anti-Americanism compensates for the subsumption of local identity by an evil, centralized pan-European bureaucracy. The mass demonstrations against the war in Iraq were nothing more than a “ritual enactment of loss of identity,” an expression of jealousy in the face of the national strength and adaptability of American society. In *Merkur* 7 (July 2003): 570–582, here 581.

criticism of American policy on the basis of a Nazi past, it is equally incorrect to judge contemporary German language literature first and foremost in terms of the Holocaust paradigm. Without wanting to deny for one moment the necessity for fictional treatments of recent Austrian and German history, this history and fiction should not be instrumentalized in contemporary political debates.⁹

It is hardly surprising then that Bernhard Schlink's novel *Der Vorleser* [*The Reader*], in which German *remémoration* takes the form of a bizarre love story, became the first German book to make it onto the American bestseller list. A debate originating in England in spring 2002, at the center of which was the Germanist Jeremy Adler, accused the novel of having an aesthetically and morally dubious attitude to German history; in other words it was accused of being "cultural pornography."¹⁰ This accusation is part of a wider debate on the popularization of the Holocaust, into which various other arguments feed, such as the problem of contemporary American literature's greater appeal in comparison to its German equivalent because of the former's putative capacity to deal with even the most difficult subject matter in an exciting and appealing fashion, and the not unrelated problem of trivialization of the Holocaust. The suggestion would seem to be that the success of Schlink's novel in America was due in large measure to its 'trashiness', or to formulate it more positively, was due to Schlink's capacity to package a difficult subject matter excitingly or appealingly. (This is not, of course, an attempt to represent all the arguments involved in this debate, but rather an attempt to identify a certain strain of reception.)

Literature has its very own "Schindler's list" phenomenon. Spielberg's pseudo-realistic feature film in which humanity survives intact and untainted has nothing whatsoever to do with the reality of Auschwitz. Nor do literary portrayals of the Holocaust that rely on the cathartic effect of "realistically" represented and particularly "poignant" or "inhuman" scenes bear any relation to that reality.¹¹ According to

9. As, for example, Berman does, when he depicts Brecht's rejection of "the Stalinist anti-war stance" around 1940, and draws direct parallels between this and the present, as though the situation in 1940 were at all comparable with that in 2003. Berman 575.

10. Jeremy Adler, "Die Kunst, Mitleid mit den Mördern zu erzwingen. Einspruch gegen ein Erfolgsbuch: Bernhard Schlinks *Der Vorleser* betreibt sentimentale Geschichtsfälschung" *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 20 April, 2002: 18.

11. The novel *Das Handwerk des Tötens* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 2003) by the Austrian writer Norbert Gstrein explores distrust of sentimental, comforting stories and cheap gestures of sympathy in the context of the war in Yugoslavia.

Imre Kertész, survivors cannot have a monopoly on representations of Auschwitz. Moreover, a somewhat suspect common sense attitude to the Holocaust often serves to obstruct new artistic insights: "A certain Holocaust conformism developed, a Holocaust sentimentality, a Holocaust canon, and a Holocaust taboo system with concomitantly ceremonialized linguistic practices." Roberto Begnini's film *Life is Beautiful* manages to avoid falling into this trap: here a father makes his son believe that the concentration camp is just an exciting game, in order to protect the child from the overwhelming horror of the situation. (One is reminded here of Ilse Aichinger's novel *Die größere Hoffnung*.) In this film, good does not triumph, but rather that message of such pivotal importance to Kertész is conveyed: In the extermination camps a radical and irrevocable revalorization of all human values took place, including that of the game, and: the more these events recede into the past, the more the Auschwitz "myth" becomes only imaginable in terms of fiction that goes beyond those reassuring certainties of "realistic" representation. The rejection of a clear message in the film *Life is Beautiful* by no means signifies a rejection of "humanity," but rather allows an intensification and re-evaluation of the Holocaust "myth." The fixation on the Holocaust, on 'Jewish' subject matters and on specific authors only serves to narrow our field of vision, making differentiated political, moral and aesthetic judgments more difficult.

It is important to take this pre-history of assumptions into account, assumptions which lead to the uncritical and sweeping application of epithets such as "critical *Heimatroman*" to contemporary Austrian literature.¹² One of the achievements of Norbert Gstreins novel *Die englischen Jahre* [*The English Years*] about a supposed Austrian Jewish emigrant in England is that it takes into account and puts into ironic perspective the history and instrumentalization of exile studies.

Critical analysis of the modes and the construction of our view of the Holocaust must continue. In other words we should never stop

12. It is difficult to do justice to the term *Heimatroman* in English. The concept *Heimat* has complex and subtle connotations that are so localized and nebulous that they cannot be rendered by the English words 'home' or 'regional.' At best one can explain that the term is pejorative, indicating that the work in question is sentimental and insular, idealizing a regional (often rural) setting and a specific set of values associated with that location. A critical *Heimatroman* would, presumably take issue with this provincial tendency in German and Austrian culture, but would, therefore and ironically, perhaps fall prey to insularity itself, since the concepts criticized are peculiarly regional in the first place.

questioning the processes which inform or create our perspective, no more than we should cease to think about the Holocaust itself. In this sense, the history of morals is also the history of aesthetics, and it is in this spirit that the following articles should be read.

“no one summons our dust”
Paul Celan’s Strategies of Failure

Daniela Strigl

I

Paul Celan ends a letter to his Viennese friend Reinhard Federmann dated February 23, 1962 with the words: “Warmly/Your old friend and (not-only-)/plum preserve, or your preserved with his/plums Paul//‘Paul, son of Leo, Tselan/Russian poet in the territory of German infidels/‘tis but a Jew—”¹³

In order to understand this, one has to understand the Viennese term *Zwetschkenröster*: from a culinary point of view, it is a cross between plum jam and plum compote. In this case, however, the reference is to an idiomatic and humorous form of address “my dear friend and plum preserve” [*mein lieber Freund und Zwetschkenröster*], the exact origins of which are unknown. The drastic addition to this of “or your preserved with his plums Paul,” which lends itself so readily to an anatomical interpretation, can itself only properly be explained in light of the fact that the plagiarism scandal surrounding Celan’s work, instigated by Claire Goll, widow of the poet Iwan Goll, had reached its climax in 1962.

The letter’s closing formulation indicates a number of things: for one thing, Celan was quite at home in Austrian German. For another, the doleful author of “Death Fugue” clearly had a sense of humor, which

13. Paul Celan to Reinhard Federmann, 23 Feb. 1962, in *Die Pestsäule* 1 (1972): 18. All translations in this section, except for the poem “Psalm,” are by Rachel Magsham.

was be no means restricted to his correspondence. He loved to joke, drink, celebrate, and he loved private language games — *Czernowitzeln* —, which he played, amongst others, with his childhood friend from Czernowitz, Ilana Shmueli.¹⁴ However, also evident from this text is the fact that Celan's sense of humor has mutated into a brand of gallows humor. A certain feverish mood can be detected. He curiously chooses as his moniker the Russianized "Pawel Lwowitsch Tselan," whereby Lwowitsch is a patronymic (derived from his father's name, Leo Antschel). To this he adds the phrase "Russkij poet in partibus nemetskich infidelium" which is Russian Latin for "a Russian poet in the land of the infidel (or faithless) Germans."¹⁵

Celan described himself in all seriousness as an "Austrian poet," but, in ironic terms, he also described himself as "a posthumously born Kakanier," invoking Robert Musil's "vanished Kakania" of Austrian nationalist kitsch in *The Man without Qualities*.¹⁶

Celan's Kakania remark has not invoked much of a reaction amongst Austrian Germanists.¹⁷ This is all the more regrettable in light of the fact that the old Austrian roots of Celan's lyrical language — especially in his late work — is barely taken into account by German interpreters. "*Eines Knödels Trabanten, klug,/auf den Geister-Pawlatschen*" [The dumpling satellite, clever,/on the haunted balconies] is a line in point from the poem "*Schnellfeuer-Perihel*" [Quick Fire Peri-helion].¹⁸

14. Ilana Shmueli, *Sag, daß Jerusalem ist. Über Paul Celan: Oktober 1969 – April 1970* (Eggingen: Edition Isele, 2000) 24. The line "say that Jerusalem is" is a quote from Celan's poem "Die Pole."

15. Celan is referring here to a soul mate, Ossip Mandelstam, a Jew, persecuted, like him, involved in a plagiarism scandal. Celan translated him, and dedicated to him his volume *Die Niemandsrose* which appeared at this time. See *Paul Celan: Die Goll-Affäre. Dokumente zu einer "Infamie,"* ed. and intro. Barbara Wiedemann (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2000) 853.

16. Wiedemann 323. When the press furor surrounding the Büchner Prize winner in Germany had reached its frenzied apogee, Friedrich Torberg and Franz Theodor Csokor published a statement of solidarity on behalf of the Austrian PEN society in the journal *Forum*. Paul Celan to Reinhard Federmann, Paris, 3 March 1962, 19. On Celan's humor or Viennese "Schmäh" (anascerbic brand of wit native to the city), see Daniela Strigl, "Kunst- und Ruinenblumen: Kaffeehaus und literarische Geselligkeit im Nachkriegs-Wien," in *Displace: Paul Celan in Wien 1947/1948*, ed. Peter Goßens and Marcus M. Patka. (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2001) 89-98.

17. One recent exception being Martin Hainz, *Masken der Mehrdeutigkeit: Celan-Lektüren mit Adorno, Szondi und Derrida* (Vienna: Braumüller, 2001).

18. Paul Celan, *Gesammelte Werke in sieben Bänden* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2000) vol. II 410. (Henceforth GW)

Celan's style break is deliberate: The Greek word "peri-helion" (the point in its orbit when a planet or comet is nearest the sun) collides in the poem's linguistic cosmos not only with the standard German term "*Knödel*" [dumpling] but also with the colloquial term "*Pawlatsche*" (from the Czech "*pavla*" meaning balcony), which means both a wooden platform as well as the balcony-like, wooden structure of the type typically found in the courtyards of old Viennese houses. The use of Austrianisms and dialect in Celan's later works can be interpreted as a conscious return to the linguistic world of his childhood and youth, but can equally be seen as an emancipatory move away from traditional lyrical German. It is almost as though the ill poet was stubbornly insisting on using idiolect. In "*Lila Luft*"¹⁹ (1967) [Lilac Air] Celan uses the Austrian-Southern German expression "*Trumm*" (meaning a big part, the rare singular form of "*Trümmer*," meaning ruins or rubble) to describe the bombed-out shell of Anhalter Station in Berlin. A poem written on January 2, 1968 reads: "Das angebrochene Jahr/mit dem modernden Kanten/Wahnbrot.//Trink/aus meinem Mund." [The new year/with moldy crusts/of bread of delusions.//Drink/from my mouth.]²⁰ Celan himself translated the more dialectal than slang term "*Kanten*" for his wife Gisèle with "*croûton*."²¹ Jean Bollack, not recognizing the relationship between the "*Kanten*" and the piece of bread ["*Wahnbrot*"], resorts to interpreting these as "injurious corners," the mold on which refers to the moldering of the murdered.²²

II

Stereotypical Celan interpretation, a paradigm which has endured until quite recently, contends that the poet could not overcome the trauma of the Holocaust and the death of his parents. It concludes that his survival was simultaneously a death-sentence: smothered by spiritual despair, he gradually fell silent, and, finally and logically consistently, committed suicide as the ultimate form of silence. Accordingly,

19. Celan, *GW* II 335.

20. Celan, *GW* II 337.

21. See *Paul Celan – Gisèle Celan-Lestrange: Briefwechsel*, trans. Eugen Helmlé, ed. and intro. Bertrand Badiou, notes trans. Barbara Wiedemann, 2 vols. (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2001), vol. I, 521 ff. Celan enclosed the poems along with three others in a letter to his wife.

22. Jean Bollack, *Paul Celan: Poetik der Fremdheit*, trans. Werner Wögerbauer (Vienna: Zsolnay, 2000) 152.

Richard Exner claims in an article that Celan demonstrates that “speech and writing can literally be lethal.”²³ Also in John Felstiner’s biography of Celan (1997) he claims: “It is no coincidence, that Jean Améry and Primo Levy [sic] also committed suicide; nor is it surprising that Celan’s devoted young friend, the gifted literary analyst Peter Szondi, another survivor, drowned a year after Celan’s death.”²⁴ Despite some notable dissent,²⁵ this popular mythico-trivial image of Celan has taken root in the world of literature.

At a higher level, the interpretations of Heideggerians and Hermeneutists have compounded this, by seeing Celan’s allegedly “hermetic” late work primarily as a refusal to communicate, not however in the sense of a quasi strategic failure, but because of simple incompetence.²⁶

The continuity in this discontinuity can only be sketchily represented here — for once, however, not using the “Todesfuge,” which, as Celan’s most famous poem, threatens to overshadow the rest of his oeuvre and color our perception of it. The poem “Psalm” introduces the concept of “*Die Niemandrose*” used as the title of the volume (1963):

*Niemand knetet uns wieder aus Erde und Lehm,
niemand bespricht unsern Staub.
Niemand.*

*Gelobt seist du, Niemand.
Dir zulieb wollen
wir blühen.*

23. Richard Exner, “Celans Stimme und Celans Schweigen: Kritische und selbstkritische Bemerkungen.” in *Zeitgenossenschaft: Zur deutschsprachigen Literatur im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Peter Michael Lützeler (Frankfurt/Main: Äthenäum, 1987) 241-251, esp. 246.

24. John Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Eine Biographie*, trans. Holger Fliessbach (Munich: Verlag C. H. Beck, 1997) 365.

25. Ruth Klüger remarked in 2000 on the tendency to posthumous (negative) interpretation, saying “Certain specific parallels are referred to as though they represented the whole. [. . .] The statistically supported fact that most survivors went on after the war to lead useful and responsible lives, started families, and were a burden to no one, is blithely ignored.” Cited in Wolfgang Emmerich, “‘Ich bin der, den es nicht gibt.’ Der Plagiatswurf gegen Paul Celan und die Folgen,” in *Unverloren. Trotz allem: Paul Celan-Symposium, Wien 2000*, ed. Hubert Gaisbauer, Bernhard Hain and Erika Schuster (Vienna: Mandelbaum, 2000) 178-205, here 178. Regarding Celan, Emmerich too makes this point (loc. cit. 179): “no mono-causal, necessary path leads from the shock of his parents’ murder to his leap or dive into the Seine on that April day in 1970.” Bollack also makes a similar point. Bollack 148 ff.

26. Specifically against Hans-Georg Gadamer, see Bollack 37 ff. and 230 ff.

*Dir
entgegen.*

*Ein Nichts
waren wir, sind wir, werden
wir bleiben, blühend:
die Nichts-, die
Niemandrose.*

*Mit
dem Griffel seelenhell,
dem Staubfaden himmelswüst,
der Krone rot
vom Purpurwort, das wir sangen
über, o über
dem Dorn.²⁷*

[No one kneads us again out of earth and clay
no-One summons our dust.
No one.

Blessed art thou, No One.
In thy sight would
we bloom. In thy
spite.

A nothing
we were, are now, and ever
shall be, blooming:
the Nothing-, the
No-One's- Rose.

With
our pistil soul-bright,
our stamen heaven-waste,
our corona red
from the purpleword we sang
over, oh over
the thorn.^{28]}

The first image of molding “out of earth and clay,” of summoning the

27. Celan, *GW* 1 225.

28. John Felstiner, *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001) 156-7.

dust, of course evokes the legend of the Golem, whom the famous Rabbi Löw is once supposed to have synthetically created in that way. This precursory legend is negated in the poem, and very emphatically at that: No one will ever be able to reincarnate the millions of murdered Jews. The apostrophized no one is not a *deus absconditus* — an absent God is not being invoked, but rather a non-God. The praise is simultaneously scornful and serene: The dead and their memory are as much a nothing as their Creator, towards whom they flower as a “no one’s rose.” In what is officially Celan’s first work, *Mohn und Gedächtnis* [Poppy and Memory] (1952), the rose symbolized love’s fulfillment and the pain of memory (“*Stille!*” [Silence!]). The “pistil soul-bright” is of course not just to be read in botanical terms, but refers also to the writer’s pen. The “corona red” of the rose blossom suggests Christ’s crown of thorns, while the “purpleword” is redolent of the purple robes in which Jesus was dressed in order to shame him, as it is of his blood, of which, or so the Gospels claim, the Jews said “Let [it] be on us and our children!” However the image also provides a comforting definition of his own poetry as the living word triumphing “over the thorn,” over death’s sting, in the face of nothingness. The antithesis is hidden in the second meaning of the line “no-One summons (or mentions) our dust.” This means that in 1960 the recent past is hardly mentioned. But it also means that in this poem it is No One (in the sense that Odysseus uses the name “Nobody”) who is writing in this poem about the dust of those murdered; in short someone who survived the genocide but whose reputation is now being assassinated. The frequent use of “no one” and “nothing” in the *Niemandrose* volume also refers to the narrating instance.

A frontal assault on Christianity can already be found in *Der Sand aus den Urnen* [The Sand of the Urns] (1948), particularly in the poem “*Deukalion und Pyrrha*”: “Ihr mahnt uns: Ihr lästert!/Wir wissen es wohl,/es komme die Schuld über uns./[...] es komme, was niemals noch war!/Es komme ein Mensch aus dem Grabe.”²⁹ [You admonish us: You are blaspheming!/We know it,/Let the guilt be on us./Let happen what has never yet happened!//A man will rise from the grave.] What has never yet happened, according to the gospels, is the miracle that Jesus performed on the corpse of Lazarus. The “we” of the poem denies Christianity this miraculous power — and places it squarely on the shoulders of the poet: It is he who must now perform the impossible, the raising of the dead.

29. Celan, *GW* III 58 (later title “*Spät und Tief*” [“Late and Deep”]).

Time and again there have been attempts to play down the blasphemous element in Celan's poetry, and to re-interpret it as a critical reverence for the absolute.³⁰ However, in pieces such as "Tenebrae" (from *Sprachgitter* [Speech-Grille], 1959) Celan's language is not ambiguous at all. The Tenebrae, literally darkness, are part of the Catholic Good Friday liturgy: Celan binds the suffering of Christ inextricably to the passion of the murdered (Jews) and confronts the Lord with it: "Es war Blut, es war,/was du vergossen, Herr."³¹ (It was blood, it was,/what you shed, Lord.) This is not simply an expression of godforsakenness, but an outright indictment. In its calculated ambiguousness, it accuses God, or more precisely the Lamb of God, Jesus, of murder.

III

In 1959 Celan expressed his doubts regarding the efficacy of his linguistic tools in the ironic parable "Gespräch im Gebirg" [Conversation in the mountains]. While Adorno's Auschwitz dictum can be read between the lines, ostensible the topic is Büchner's story "Lenz" which begins with the words "*Den 20. Jänner ging Lenz durchs Gebirg.*" [On the 20th of January, Lenz was going through the mountains.] Celan keeps coming back to the 20th of January as a symbolic fateful date, even referring to it in his Büchner Prize acceptance speech, in which he says that every poem has its '20th of January.' Celan's 20th of January is that of the year 1942, the winter in which his mother died, and the day on which the notorious Wannsee Conference agreed to the "Final Solution of the Jewish Question."³²

"Eingejännert/in der bedornten/Balme"³³ [Januaried/into the thorn-covered/rock recess] — thus begins a poem from his literary estate, which uses January ["Jänner"] as a double cipher, representing both death and madness, while simultaneously paying homage to what is more of an Austro-Bavarian expression than the North German "*Januar.*"

It has been claimed that the satirical conversation between two talkative Jews imitates the (segmentation) of French syntax,³⁴ while overlooking the more obvious possibility that this is an imitation of Yiddish

30. See Bollack 195 ff., 237 ff.

31. Celan, *GW* I 163.

32. See Bollack 24 ff., 208 ff. The text refers to a missed meeting with Adorno in Sils-Maria. Celan, *GW* III 196. See also Hermann Burger, *Paul Celan: Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Sprache* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1989) 30 ff.

33. Celan, *GW* II 351.

34. See Burger 14 ff. Here Burger is referring to Renate Böschstein.

syntax. This imaginary dialogue between Stock and Stein also concerns the difference between talking and speaking: Stein “does not talk, he speaks, and he who speaks, well, heaven’s above, he talks to nobody, he speaks, because no one hears him, *no* one and I mean *No One*.”³⁵ Here the idea of speech at the outer limits of the possible is articulated. Celan always avoided using terms like Holocaust, Shoah or the Extermination of the Jews, referring only to “dem, was war” [that which was].³⁶ His poem “*Üppige Durchsage*” [Profuse Announcement] (*Fadensonnen* [Threadsuns], 1970) makes fun of kitschy remembrance. The dead say: “wir stehn hier/im Geruch/der Heiligkeit, ja./Brenzlige Jenseitschwaden/treten uns dick aus den Poren,/in jeder zweiten/Zahn-/karies erwacht/eine unverwüstliche Hymne.”³⁷ [Here we stand/in the odor/of sanctity, yes./Acrid clouds of smoke form beyond/pour thickly from our pores,/in every second/tooth/filling there awakes/an indestructible hymn.]

Celan for his part was deeply hurt by the critical reception of his “*Todesfuge*” which accused him of aestheticizing horror.³⁸ Celan’s radical turn certainly must have had something to do with this reception. The new agenda can be seen *in nuce* in the poem “*Keine Sandkunst mehr*” [No More Sand Art] (*Atemwende* [Breathturn], 1967).³⁹ Celan bids farewell here to the resonant, cleverly thought out construction of the “*Todesfuge*,” from musical tone and soaring sonorous lines. What he has to say seems shattered, stunted — but also very condensed. “Keine Sandkunst mehr, kein Sandbuch, keine Meister” [No more sand art, no sand book, no masters] — here Celan distances himself from his own early works. “*Der Sand aus den Urnen*” also symbolizes the transience of masterworks, the hour-glass is ticking, so to speak. “No masters” has been interpreted as a rejection of Mallarmé’s absolute poetry, to which Celan refers in his Büchner Prize acceptance speech entitled “The Meridian.”⁴⁰ It is, of course, a self-reference, picking up the line from his “*Todesfuge*”: “*der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland*” [death is a master from Germany]⁴¹ which not only sarcastically celebrates the

35. Celan, *GW* III 171.

36. Shmueli 80.

37. Celan, *GW* II 192.

38. See e.g. Hans Egon Holthusen and Günter Blöcker (“contrapunctal exercises on note paper”). See Emmerich 184.

39. Celan, *GW* II 39.

40. See Otto Pöggeler, *Spur des Worts: Zur Lyrik Paul Celans* (Freiburg: Alber, 1986) 113 ff.

41. Celan, *GW* I 41 ff.

perfection of the death machinery, but also touches on the tradition of German art. Here Celan turns away from the unqualified, the ludic (“*Nichts erwürfelt*” [No Die Cast]) towards silence. “*Deine Frage — deine Antwort*” [Your question — your answer] unites question and answer. All that remains of the song of the poet is incomprehensible sounds. However the latter define, whereas the songs merely sounded: “*Tiefimmschnee*” [Deepinsnow] is the point of origin, the original point of murder and purity, of petrification and preservation. “Iefimnee,/I-i-e,” in these skeletal sounds we hear an echo of ‘*Niemehr*,’ nevermore, a reminder of the sand draining through the hour glass.

One element of Celan’s “failure” is that he never really escapes from that “masterful” aspect of art. His struggle against metaphor as obfuscation is an accepted trope (not least in the works of Ingeborg Bachmann) “Ein Dröhnen: es ist/die Wahrheit selbst/unter die Menschen/getreten,/mitten ins/Metapherngestöber.” [A droning: truth/itself has/come amongst/ us, right/into the middle of this/metaphor blizzard]⁴² By this he also means the battle of metaphors surrounding the question of copyright and accusations of plagiarism. However, Barbara Wiedemann’s argument that the “hundert-/züngige **Mein**-/gedicht” [the hundred-/tongued my-/poem] in “*Weggebeizt*” [Etched Away]⁴³ solely refers to Claire Goll’s perjurious [‘*meineidige*’] machinations,⁴⁴ does not seem entirely convincing: Celan’s setting and the possession-taking refer to the miracle of Pentecost and emphasize the individual, many-tongued virtuosity it celebrates.

Celan never accepted the accusation that his late works did not refer to reality: “I have never written a single line that did not have to do with my existence in some way; I am [...] a realist in my own way.”⁴⁵

While not always the case with his letters, Paul Celan retained absolute control over his lyrical output even during his psychiatric illness. The outbreak of the illness has been convincingly linked to the public questioning of his identity as poet in Germany. As a poet, Celan reacted with ever more radical paring back of his lyrics to the roots of the words, honing his works, encrypting them. He became increasingly lapidary, but was not entirely silenced.

42. Celan, *GW* II 89.

43. Celan, *GW* II 31.

44. See Wiedemann 778 ff.

45. Paul Celan to Erich Einhorn, cited in Bollack 184 ff.

Celan knew of the dangers and endangerment of this kind of expression, which is to be considered from the stand point of the “Great No One.” The poem asymptotically approaches silence, it “behauptet sich am Rande seiner selbst” [it “asserts itself at the limen to itself”].⁴⁶ Poetry, “this eternal speaking about mortality and in vain,”⁴⁷ is a paradoxical task for Celan, a labor of Sisyphus. It weighed heavily on him that his works were less and less understood. But, face to face with madness, he soberly defended his poetic abilities. Celan wrote to his publisher Siegfried Unseld regarding his volume “*Lichtzwang*” [Force of Light], claiming that his poems had not become increasingly ‘hermetic’. They were not ‘ciphers’ but rather “language [. . .], unsilenced and on the path to more.”⁴⁸

He wrote this in 1970, a few weeks before his suicide.

Survival: Child’s Play. Ilse Aichinger’s *Die größere Hoffnung*

Klaus Kastberger

Ilse Aichinger’s novel *Die größere Hoffnung* (1948) [Herod’s Children] has a characteristic that is somewhat unusual in canonical works. Even today, some criticism considers the book to be somehow incomplete. It is not considered to exist entirely in its own right, but rather requiring inclusion in some greater framework. The most often applied filter is the rest of the author’s oeuvre, against the backdrop of which *Die größere Hoffnung* seems the most opulent of her books. In terms of creative development, Aichinger can certainly be compared to Samuel Beckett, in the sense that the passage from early to late work is marked by a massive reductionism that leaves the late texts almost devoid of content. Erasure and omissions, the use of “second” or “third-rate” or,

46. Celan, *GW* III 197.

47. Celan, *GW* III 200.

48. Celan cited in Wiedemann 860.

as Aichinger puts it, “bad words”⁴⁹ form the picture we have of *Die größere Hoffnung*: The author never again wrote as she did in this book. Contemporary reception and elements within current literary criticism express a sense of dissatisfaction that supposedly stems from an apparent discrepancy between the aesthetic of the text and its intended message. The play of the children, that the author portrays in a variety of different ways, is clearly not considered by many readers, both past and present, to form an essential part of the novel’s realism, but is rather seen as a kind of gratuitous ornamentation that the author in hindsight tacked on to the “real” part of the novel.

Taking this critical paradigm as a starting point, I would like to examine more closely in the following the function of play in the novel, the part it plays in the “greater hope.” Aichinger once said that the children portrayed in the book are not at all extraordinary; they are simply seen from the point of view of “leave taking.”⁵⁰ The same might be said of the children’s games. There is nothing extraordinary about the games they play as such, but incorporated into them is what Aichinger calls “leave taking.”

The first thing to be said of the games in *Die größere Hoffnung* is that here, as in all games, a firm ludic self-presence is evident. The awareness of play is constantly foregrounded, carrying with it a concomitantly unrelenting degree of awareness that at any moment things could become deadly serious. The children of *Die größere Hoffnung* know very well, when and what they are playing. Indeed, they make this knowledge part of the game. In real terms, the Jewish children (and not only the children, but the surviving parents and grandparents) are excluded from all exchange processes: Realities have lost all equivalency and thus the entire value system is out of kilter. The fact that with the devaluation of their currency, human value instantly disappears is demonstrated in one key section of the book, which is enough to invalidate any accusation of escapism leveled at the novel. In the scene in question, Ellen jokingly dons a yellow Star of David, although as a half-Jew, she is not technically required to wear one. However, when she goes outside wearing the star, the game quickly turns serious: She wants to buy a cake, for which she has saved for a long time, but the

49. See Ilse Aichinger, “Schlechte Wörter,” *Schlechte Wörter* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1991) 11–14.

50. See Ilse Aichinger, “Die Vögel beginnen zu singen, bevor es noch finster ist,” in *Ilse Aichinger, Leben und Werk*, ed. Samuel Moser (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1990) 29 ff.

shopkeeper in the bakery refuses to accept her money. At first Ellen wonders at first if perhaps she has not got enough money, but gradually becomes aware of the hate-filled faces around her. Finally the shopkeeper grabs the girl by the collar and throws her out.

A reality-flouting game (a last residue of resistance) is played out in the chapter "The Big Game." The children in the apartment put on a Christmas and Nativity play. This is Ruth Klüger's "Continue Living" transposed by Aichinger's children into a "continue playing." "Continue," continue playing, the children whisper to one another, and then the text explicitly says: "Playing: it was the only choice left to them, equanimity in the face of the incomprehensible, grace in the face of the great undisclosed. This most secret of commandments: Stand in my presence and play."⁵¹

Slightly further on, the text makes explicit that there are actually two games going on. First the game that the children are playing, and then the game that is being played with them (146). That the two games can only become one through pain becomes clear in what is probably the most complex of the games played in *Die größere Hoffnung*, the hide-and-seek game played by the children in the graveyard in the chapter "The Holy Land". This game, more than anything else, most vividly defines the situation in which Ellen and the children find themselves. The children are no longer allowed to play in the municipal park, so they now play in the cemetery amongst the tombs of their ancestors. In the course of the game it becomes increasingly clear that the children and their forefathers have one and the same status. The ancestors have no so-called "certificate" (Aichinger does not have to point out explicitly that what is meant is the notorious Arian Pass or "Ariernachweis") and thus what they once were is uncertified, invalid, negated. The children have no documents, to validate what they might one day become. In this sense, both the living and the dead are absent presences. In the course of the game something happens that in Freudian terms is the very essence of the uncanny — the differences between the living and the dead gradually fade. Finally the dead and the living play hide-and-seek with one another. The bodies of the living are already partially covered in earth, while the bodies of the dead are coming forth from that earth once more.

As later was also the case in the works of Hans Lebert ("*Die Wolfs-*

51. The edition cited is Ilse Aichinger, *Die größere Hoffnung* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1991) 134. Henceforth only appropriate page numbers will be given.

haut” [The Wolf’s Skin]) and Elfriede Jelinek (“*Die Kinder der Toten*” [The Children of the Dead]), for Ilse Aichinger the earth is neither home nor refuge. It vomits up its dead and swallows the living whole. The graveyard is a dystopic Utopia, a non-place that one cannot really enter, and once having entered, certainly cannot leave again. A place where the best Cicerone is no help. Not Augustin, Columbus, nor King David himself can do anything to change the fact that the coach into which the children clamber only moves in circles.

Die größere Hoffnung reveals that great hopes no longer exist. The games of the children are impelled by the greatest hopes of all, hopes that are really only plausible from the perspective of a child. These hopes are represented symbolically by the star that shines in the sky from the beginning of the narrative until its end. In the children’s games too there is a residue of Holy Scripture: the birth of a Saviour in the Nativity play. In the graveyard games it is the Day of Judgement that is the painfully absent subtext: not for these the resurrection of the dead, bringing with them final certainty, but rather the uncertainties of their actual situation.

In their games the children gain control of a place, which at the start of the novel was a place of increasing realization. Ellen gradually becomes aware that all the great and even greatest hopes now count for nothing. Almost dead in the center of the narrative, at the end of the chapter “The Big Game” we find the decisive sentence “Like an enormous dancing flame, their game engulfed them.” (155) In the remaining chapters play is mentioned less and less, as the narrative increasingly deals with the fate of Ellen’s parents. The rest of the book is one long funeral procession: The world is hemorrhaging (235), a well erupts (235), the evening star rises like a sliver of shrapnel (245), the man in the moon carries explosives on his back (210), flashes drown the landscape (247), soldiers take corpses from the sand pit (245), the hanged begin a dance macabre (279), hearts become battlefields (265).

The former rules of play are invalidated. That “behind me, before me, to my right and to my left, nothing counts” rings hollow. Now the sole guiding principle is: “A teapot is a teapot” as the text says, and “a cannon is a cannon” (265). Things cannot be made into images any more, much though Ellen’s parents would wish it otherwise. Now the only measure of reality or is the grenade which will finally tear the girl to shreds.

Long before, a so-called “*Scharführer*” had asked one of the children

for its former occupation, to which the child simply replied “playing.” This “Previous occupation: Playing” (162) marks the turning point in the novel. In the first part of the book the play of the children opens up a space which the second half of the book, with its factual account of Ellen’s fate right up to her death, firmly and totally shuts down. The movement of opening and closing, however, is of greater significance than we might imagine. It has a power that, even today, makes the novel more than “just” an early literary testimony to a gruesome and very recent past. This opening and closing, so reminiscent of inhaling and exhaling, gives the novel *Die größere Hoffnung* an important place within the discourse of remembering and forgetting. Or, in other, more forceful terms: This breath makes the book a still valid and essential element of Holocaust discourse.

The precise nature of the power wielded by this prose can be explained in terms of Geoffrey Hartman’s theory of reading.⁵² In his psychoanalytical and depth heremeutic approach, Hartman theorizes that wounds are not only described by words, but that the words themselves are part and parcel of the described wounds. So the redemption that we have come to expect from texts is not to be had at all, or, at any rate, not easily. There are overlaps between the eye that has seen, the language that describes suffering, and the ear that is committed to hear knowingly. Eye, language, and ear cannot be totally disembodied, dissevered from the subjects who have seen, written and heard (or will hear). Memory is not “clear cut,” because the cut itself would constitute a new wound. To speak of memory, and to see memory as a legible text only makes concrete sense, if there can be concrete memories and a concrete hearing of these memories. Memory cannot be a matter of injunction or decree: to identify a general surplus or lack of memory is simply authoritarian.

Thus, the most important lesson to be learned from *Die größere Hoffnung* is not the pat generalization that memory is always important and the principle “never forget” must endure for all times. Since that is an institutionalized kind of remembrance, the principle of “never forget” precisely cannot endure for all times. After all, institutions can be abolished, but not memories as they are inscribed in *Die größere Hoffnung*.

Whoever reads Ilse Aichinger will understand this point immediately:

52. On this point and what follows see Geoffrey Hartman, “Worte und Wunden,” in *Texte und Lektüren: Perspektiven in der Literaturwissenschaft*, ed. Aleida Assmann (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1996) 105-141.

what we have here is not the ideology of a cult of remembrance but memory's most childlike face.

Sex, Lies and Nazis: Albert Drach's Literary Vigilantism

Bernhard Fetz

When Albert Drach was awarded the Büchner Prize in 1988 and his books were re-published, a new generation of readers and critics discovered one of the most original and radical German-language authors of the postwar period. As early as 1968 the *Times Literary Supplement* had recognized Albert Drach and Elias Canetti as “the most talented avant-garde writers working in the German tongue.” But despite this positive reception, the novelist and dramatist remained something of an outsider in the field of German literature. One contributing factor was the author's biography: an Austrian Jew, forced to leave his home in 1938, traveling via Yugoslavia to France, where he lived in exile. But his writing style also played its part in his marginalization: unlike much of the German language literature of the fifties and sixties, written in a spirit of didactic enlightenment, Drach's descriptions of the fascist Austrian corporate state (1934-1938), of exile and the restorative postwar period are provokingly and energetically cynical and satirical. Indeed, Drach's unique distanced, laconic voice, which came to be known as “protocol style,” became the hallmark of the author. While legal protocol allegedly chronicles facts objectively, the literary protocol of the lawyer and Jew, Drach, is highly tendentious and denunciatory in nature: suspicions, calumny, denunciations, value judgments are presented as truth and fact in a pseudo-objective manner. Drach couches this in exaggerated legal jargon and the conjunctive mood of reported speech, while the naturally convoluted syntax of German accommodates this style perfectly. The physical and linguistic violence perpetrated by those in power is undermined by a subversive literary strategy, which seems to all

intents and purposes to adopt the bureaucratic inhuman language of power, only to explode it from inside. To this is added the theme of sexuality. Because the texts do not allow a separation of erotic effect and physical and psychological violence against women, the writing has variously been described as pornographic as well as enlightened. The objectifying tendency of the interlocking nominal clauses exists in tension with a multi-perspectivism. This perspective might be termed inquisitory, because even the most intimate details do not escape it; one could also call it pornographic, because it suggests a permanent state of sexual arousal; in metaphorical terms one could also call it the panoptical eye of the law turned on its victim. In the light of modern literary theory, all these aspects taken together might be termed synthetic writing, whereby all the elements are fused into an indissoluble "style." An additional element must be included in the formula of the Drachean text: its comedic and satiric bent positively invites laughter, even when it comes to denunciations and violence.

Albert Drach's autobiographic trilogy⁵³ undermines the image of the good victim and the evil perpetrator. Political correctness is mercilessly deconstructed, as is reason itself. While the killing in the concentration camps is carried out along rational lines, in accordance with systematic plans, being killed and escaping death has nothing to do with reason. If the only certainty for the deportees is death, then the only chance of survival lies in the negation of all purposeful development, of a reasonable dialectic. *Die Unsentimentale Reise* [The Unsentimental Journey] opens with a train heading to a reception camp. Drach's alter ego, Peter Cuckoo [Peter Kucku, Pierre Coucou], suffers the cruelty of the henchmen with total indifference. This accidental tourist acts as though he does not know where this journey will take him. Since there is no future for the deportees, the present is stretched to almost unimaginable limits: "I don't know what our destination is. I am not heading anywhere in particular, I'm even lying down. No one has asked me about our destination . . . I've probably been sleeping. But from what point on? I can find no point of access to my memories."⁵⁴

This is the key metaphor for the laws of motion that govern the

53. Albert Drach, "Z.Z." *das ist die Zwischenzeit: Ein Protokoll* (Munich, Vienna: Hanser, 1990). Henceforth ZZ. The work deals with the period 1935-38 in the Austrian corporate state; *Unsentimentale Reise. Ein Bericht* (Munich: dtv, 1990). Henceforth UR. This deals with the period of exile from 1940-45; *Das Beileid nach Teilen eines Tagebuchs* (Graz: Droschl, 1993) concerns the gradual return to postwar Austria between 1945-52.

54. Drach, UR 7 ff.

Drachean literary cosmos: a darkened train carriage with a traveler, who is moving “without moving.” Motionlessness, stasis, and retreat characterize the protagonists of the novels. Their aimless wandering towards death is accompanied by straying desires. The erotic obsession of the autobiographical heroes undermines all reasonable behaviour. And this is his salvation. For Drach, the sexual drive and the will to survive are locked together in an eternal embrace. Survival and the narrative of survival are also due to a seemingly never-ending series of misunderstandings. These misunderstandings or “misleadings” constantly misdirect the death march onto byways, and as a result neither Cuckoo’s journey through life nor the narrative itself reaches the expected destination.

Albert Drach lies left, right and centre. The apodictic thrust of his sentences suggests definite origins and ends. They assert facts and truths that simply cannot be true as stated. However, unlike in Thomas Bernhard’s “hyperbolic art,” these are not flagrant oppositions, facing each other like enemy ranks. Drach’s sentences are simply given, as though they were perfectly true. But this is truth in “as though” mode: the sentences behave *as though* there still existed instances that could vouch for their veracity, instances such as God, history, logic, reason, subjective integrity. But Drach’s linguistic style has made short work of these. The truth of these sentences inheres rather in deformation and disguise. The author relates in an interview that his half sister “was considered one of the most intelligent and beautiful women in the world”; and his father’s family, he claims, “goes back to biblical times”; as punishment for an anti-Semitic remark his grandfather knocked the heads of two farmers together so hard that “one of them . . . fractured his skull.”⁵⁵ Sentences such as these suggest an almost legal authority. But who or what is hiding behind this legal authority, and who or what legitimates it?

Sometimes it seems that this is the highest authority of all. The all-powerful authorial authority constantly sits in judgement over God and Devil alike in their various human personifications. Schmul Leib Zwetschkenbaum, hero of *Das Große Protokoll gegen Zwetschkenbaum* [The Deposition against Zwetschkenbaum],⁵⁶ which Drach, already a refugee, wrote in 1939 in only 5 months, is one such personification.

55. Gabriele Anderl, “Protokoll der Anfänge: In memoriam Albert Drach — Auszüge aus einem Interview” *Wiener Zeitung* 7 April 1995: 6 (supplement).

56. Albert Drach, *Das große Protokoll gegen Zwetschkenbaum* (Munich, Vienna: Hanser, 1989).

Zwetschkenbaum is the epitome of victimhood, the wandering Jew, who is forced to run the gauntlet of all the various institutions of power, from prisons to lunatic asylums. But he is simultaneously the prophet who has visions and on whose face a divine smile appears. In 'Z.Z.' *das ist die Zwischenzeit* [The Interim] we encounter a hawker or peddler with the "typical characteristic of an Ashkenazi Jew"⁵⁷ — the spiritual brother of Zwetschkenbaum. He was one who "came in order to be there."⁵⁸ This man "might have been God himself."⁵⁹ The peddler and the impoverished Talmud scholar Zwetschkenbaum are personifications of Jewish persecution, flight, emigration and an other-worldly certainty. Between the Galician holding camp and the "*Zwischenzeit*," the period before the gas chambers, Zwetschkenbaum and the peddler lose their speech. God no longer speaks through them. As empty signifiers they wander through the world.

The moral integrity of the victims seems less questionable than God or an omniscient narrator. However, the texts do their very utmost to undermine this expectation. Albert Drach drags his autobiographical intercourse with minors, multiple murder, including, worst of all, matricide. Temporal sequentiality is suspended. Just as there is no external logic governing the course of history, there is no logic governing personal history. The mother is murdered twice by her son, once before and once after her real death. In the former case, she is murdered because the son did not do enough to ensure her escape from Nazi Austria, instead pursuing an adulterous affair against his mother's wishes. The second matricide coincides with the son's survival. In order to demonstrate his non-Jewish origins, he denies his real mother; her place is usurped by the non-racially-impaired mother of his half-sister.⁶⁰

Peter Cuckoo saves his skin because he has mastered different language registers: he makes pleas on his own behalf and in other matters, and his casuistry disconcerts his interlocutor. In one case, this leads to his release from the reception camp Rives Altes. No less existentially crucial is his re-interpretation of the abbreviation "I.K.G." used on official papers of the municipality of Vienna (which stands for "Israelitische Kultusgemeinde" or Member of the Jewish Religious Community), claiming it stands for "Im Katholischen Glauben" or "In the Catholic

57. Drach, ZZ 137.

58. Drach, ZZ 139.

59. Drach, ZZ 141.

60. Drach, UR 73 ff.

Faith.” Here language saves him by inaccuracy, or rather by distortion.

Albert Drach’s literature deals with murder and destruction, denunciation and criminal despotism as reflected in a provoking sexual promiscuity; incest, rape, every aspect and occasion of betrayal belong to the inventory of horrors. And this is accompanied by a masterful deployment of rhetorical devices: hyperbole, periphrasis, euphemism form part of the arsenal. But these are the mere handmaidens of that key trope that most characterizes Drach’s style: irony. His style cloaks and reveals in equal measure. He cloaks violence in euphemistic expressions, but simultaneously the overriding principle of irony exposes it. The preferred medium of this linguistic disruption is sexuality.

The principle according to which the texts function is that of exchange or substitution; in place of words that describe things or facts, improper (or figurative) terms are used (homosexuality: “feeling,” penis: “natural tool,” anal sex: “to be gratified by the other side”). The Drachean linguistic economy puts in motion exchange processes that are essentially unstoppable, and the subjects are destroyed by the endless cycle of substitution. Humans are treated as things, feelings as facts.

Drachean irony too arises from the discrepancy between hypocritical conventions and an ungodly trinity of polymorphous perversion, murder and denunciation. This replaces the exonerating hypocrisy of morality: antebellum Austria of the “*Zwischenzeit*” [interim] is no better or worse than the Nazi collaboration of the Vichy regime.

According to Paul de Man, irony is an unending linguistic process that does not lead to any synthesis. Ironic consciousness does not know what it is heading towards. However, it does know what it wants to avoid at all costs: its end, which would be tantamount to an admission of its powerlessness. That end would be an unsatisfactory profession, a virtually unrealizable artistic vocation, a bourgeois existence in a post-fascist country amongst its subservient inhabitants. It would mean arriving at a destination at the end of an unsentimental journey, where the destination could only be death at the hand of another. These autobiographic texts rebel against these false identities: they progress without arriving anywhere. Albert Drach’s autobiographical disguises are incarnations that come into being through the ironic inscription of a life-story. That is both their tragedy and their freedom.

*Language Based on a Division of Labor? On the Representation of the Holocaust in Heimrad Bäcker's nachschrift*⁶¹

Thomas Eder

In his *nachschrift*⁶² project, the Austrian writer Heimrad Bäcker applies the techniques of concrete poetry to documentary literature. He uses documentary resources relating to the National Socialist period to explore “the possibilities of concretion.” He chooses the “stagnant linguistic material” of orally transmitted evidence, and its subsequent transcription, as well as of topographic documents, and imports it into his “*nachschrift* system.”⁶³ Bäcker’s book *nachschrift* consists solely of extant textual material; none of the texts is fictional, and the authenticity of each, the provenance and source, can be confirmed using the comprehensive references provided in the endnotes. Taking his material from the documentation systems of both perpetrators and victims, accusers and accused, in short from both sides implicated by National Socialism’s regime of terror, Bäcker foregrounds the fact that the seeds of horror are to be found in all linguistic practices and structures. The obfuscating periphrasis and bureaucratic pedantry with which murders were recorded is emphasized by Bäcker’s isolated presentation: “3. and, yet despite starvation rations, mortality did not progress quickly enough”⁶⁴ is the solitary quotation on

61. Translator’s note: to translate ‘Nachschrift’ into either transcript or postscript is to have to choose between two equally pertinent terms in this context. Also lost would be the connection between ‘Nachschrift’ and ‘Nationalsozialismus’ through their shared abbreviation, ‘NS’.

62. Of Heimrad Bäcker’s treatments of the Holocaust the following are available: Heimrad Bäcker, *SEESTÜCK* (Linz: neue texte 32, 1985); *nachschrift*, ed. and intro. Friedrich Achleitner (Linz, Vienna: edition neue texte, 1986); *EPITAPH* (Linz: Galerie MAERZ, 1989); *Gehen wir wirklich in den Tod? Radio Play* (Graz, Vienna: Drosch, 1995); *nachschrift 2*, ed. Friedrich Achleitner (Vienna: edition neue texte/Droschl, 1997).

63. Heimrad Bäcker, “über meine arbeit,” in *visuelle poesie:anthologie*, ed. Eugen Gomringer (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1996) 14 ff., 15.

64. Bäcker, *nachschrift 2* 168.

an otherwise blank page, as is: “should the block recorder mistakenly mark a number as *deceased*, the mistake can always subsequently be corrected simply by executing the relevant number-bearer.”⁶⁵

In his book *Dialektik der Ordnung: Die Moderne und der Holocaust* [*Modernity and the Holocaust*]⁶⁶, which suggests a paradigm change for the sociological study of the Holocaust, referring to historical investigations (such as, most centrally, those of Raul Hilberg and Hannah Arendt), Zygmunt Bauman casts doubt on the view that the Holocaust is unique and monstrous, an animalistic, pre-social incursion of evil and amorality into the otherwise intact order of Western civilization. Bauman propounds the theory that it was the very norms and institutions of modernity that provided the conditions necessary for the Holocaust, and that the genocide perpetrated by the National Socialists should be seen as the hallmark of civilization’s progress.

There are two diametrically opposed interpretations of the Holocaust: The one sees the horror of the genocide as proof positive of the fragility of our civilization, the other sees it as a demonstration of its dreadful potential. For the former, when criminals are in power, civilized behavioral paradigms are suspended, and the animal crouching just beneath the surface in all of us breaks loose because of insufficient social conditioning. For the latter, the advanced level of development in modern civilization in terms of technological and scientific theory makes possible what nature forbids.⁶⁷

It is my thesis that most literature that deals with the Holocaust is based on latent theoretical (sociological) assumptions, which are compatible only with the first of the two explanatory models described here by Bauman. The fate of individual victims or the crimes of individual perpetrators are represented in the narrative as exemplary, presumably with the implicit hope that a representation of the specific will somehow manage to signify the whole. If one takes seriously the claim that knowledge is attained in and through literature, the same accusation that Bauman levels at the orthodox treatment of the Holocaust in sociology can be leveled at this brand of writing: “Our knowledge of the factors and mechanisms which facilitated the Holocaust has hardly increased at

65. Bäcker, *nachschrift* 2 124.

66. Zygmunt Bauman, *Dialektik der Ordnung: Die Moderne und der Holocaust* (Hamburg: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1994).

67. Bauman 110.

all.”⁶⁸ One might even say that most of the literature that thematizes this phenomenon does not display the slightest interest in pursuing this kind of knowledge.

So what differentiates Heimrad Bäcker’s *nachschrift* from a literature that simply thematizes the Holocaust? And in what way does his literature perform the same categorical break as Zygmunt Bauman’s sociological writings? Underlying Bäcker’s treatment of the Holocaust is a radically different representational attitude to extra-literary reality, and this is the source of the compelling explanatory power of this literary method. As concrete documentary poetry the *nachschrift* is a *cum grano salis* direct representation of the language of the Holocaust within the literary system. In Bäcker’s words:

The banality of evil is reflected in the banal formulations used to describe death. These are recorded in orders, statistics, timetables, in journal entries, letters, reports confirming the execution of orders etc. which matter-of-factly chronicle the banal execution of deeds that are considered normal. Quotation: “It was incumbent on me to carry out the killing.” This does not need artificial (accusatory or condemnatory) reinforcement; it needs no elements that are not already present in the documents themselves. What happened speaks through what was recorded *as* it was recorded.⁶⁹

The language of and about the Holocaust takes on sharper contours in the surrounding isolation provided by Bäcker. This clarificatory process uses a number of devices that are part of the organon of the concrete method. The individual texts isolate and create a montage of words and phrases. One example is a text that consists of a collage of timetables, orders from head office for the ‘*Ostbahn*’ (special transports for so-called relocation to the East). The horrific reality of the extermination camp at Treblinka emerges from the monotonous monodirectionality of the passenger transports thus displayed:

9228 from sedziszow to treblinka
 9229 empty return transport
 9230 from szydlowiec to treblinka
 9231 empty train
 9232 from szydlowiec to treblinka

68. Bauman 100.

69. Heimrad Bäcker, “Widerspiegelung,” in *Die Rampe: Hefte für Literatur* 3 (1994): 59-63, here 60.

9233 empty return transport
 9234 from kosienice to treblinka
 9235 empty return transport⁷⁰

The enormous achievement of Bäcker's oeuvre lies in the isolated exhibition of these passages of text within the system of representation of *nachschrift*, because it uses literary devices to grant insight into the genesis and structure of the Holocaust. Bäcker's *nachschrift* allows us to experience what Zygmunt Bauman identified for sociology as the building blocks of the Holocaust.

This similarity can be seen most clearly in an area of central importance to both sociology and literature despite their different approaches: namely their treatment of the phenomenon of bureaucracy in modern Western society. The essence of bureaucratic efficiency and efficacy is, according to Bauman, its division of labor, which shifts the focus of the actors and actions from the purposes to the means. The ensuing distance from the whole allows a moral distance when carrying out individual tasks. In Bauman's words: "each specialized and specific task allows no analogy to be drawn to the overall mission of the apparatus (and thus the individual task cannot be construed as a miniature version or icon of the system as a whole)."⁷¹

Just as Bauman sees this bureaucratic process as part of the continuum of modern societies that are based on the division of labor, Bäcker's *nachschrift* shows that the linguistic practices of the Holocaust are not exclusively deviant, existing in a 'natural' (motivated) correspondence to the deviant nature of the facts — and thereby more likely to be exposed as (having been) euphemistic and metaleptic than the language of the Holocaust is.

But what does "language based on the division of labor" actually mean? It is my thesis that in the *nachschrift* the difference between various linguistic representations becomes particularly clear. I would even contend that the insightfulness of the *nachschrift* lies in its recognition of divergence in linguistic reference: its demonstration of the difference between grammatical and lexical meaning, or, put slightly differently, its presentation of the tension between (semantic) meaning and (pragmatic) referents. Thus this epistemologically and aesthetically important tension, which is metaphorically described here as a "division of

70. Bäcker, *nachschrift* 2 56.

71. Bauman 114.

labor” because it favors the part over the whole, belongs to the field of differentiation between what words and sentences (as in a dictionary) refer to, and what real referents they have (as determined by a lexicon). In this sense my thesis differs from that of Jürgen Nieraad, who sees the salient tension of the *nachschrift* as arising from the contradiction between signifier and signified.

Language as self-referential semiotic signifying material, and language as heteronomous referential instrument, its signifying and signified aspects, are confronted with one another in an extremely radical way, deconstructing one another, thereby preventing any harmonizing, totalizing reading.⁷²

I, on the other hand, do not see the *nachschrift* as the discovery of a *misuse* of language resulting from an aberrant deviation of signifier from signified. On the contrary, it seems to me that Heimrad Bäcker’s *nachschrift* reveals that the norm of linguistic practice inheres in the structural difference between meaning and referent.

To what extent this “language of radical substitution” (Bäcker), which is one of the pillars of modern representation, can be equated with the bureaucracy that it serves so well, and to what extent it contributed to the genesis of the Holocaust are matters for future investigation; as is the question whether language is comparable to bureaucracy in the sense that, to quote Bauman again:

Bureaucracy, despite what is commonly believed, [...] is by no means simply an obedient instrument that today may be used to serve horrific, morally reprehensible purposes, and tomorrow may serve humanitarian goals. Even if bureaucracy may seem to be susceptible to the caprices of chance, its behavior is more analogous to that of a weighted die, because, due to its immanent logic and particular dynamic, it is much more likely to lead to certain solutions than to others.⁷³

Translated by Rachel Magsham

72. Jürgen Nieraad, “Shoah-Literatur: Weder Fiktion noch Dokument — Alexander Kluges *Liebesversuch* und Heimrad Bäckers *nachschrift*,” in *In der Sprache der Täter: Neue Lektüren deutschsprachiger Nachkriegs- und Gegenwartsliteratur*, ed. Stephan Braese (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1998) 137-148, here 146.

73. Bauman 119.